Abstract Concepts Through the Lens of Linguistic and Extra-Linguistic Knowledge[1]

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Abstract

The paper deals with the rigorous methods used in the research of concepts representing abstract notions like "friendship", "love", "hatred", "conscience", and "envy". Concepts of that kind have no visible physical support in the material world except for the sound forms of the words representing them, thus causing additional difficulties in classification, research and analysis as well as stipulating the use of both linguistic and extra-linguistic methods in the process. The language provides access to a concept nominating only its certain part, which may not be the most significant. The study points out the importance of subjective cognition and empiric experience of a person in the process of verbalisation of abstract entities. The cognitive approach, in which certain phenomena are found, allows us to include in the framework of study essential as well as complex linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge about it, despite the degree to which they are presented in the language. It's essential to set out the necessity to take into account the social and cultural background of an individual. The authors pay particular attention to the ambiguity and inevitable subjectivity in the study of abstract concepts, due to their formation scheme complexity and vagueness. The combination of linguistic and extra-linguistic procedures allows us to give the fullest and deepest analysis of the investigated event, because in the structure of abstract concepts and in the simultaneous presence of an invariant core there are a huge range of personal associations.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics; Extra-Linguistic Knowledge; Abstract Concept; Mental Process; Denotation; Conceptualisation; Categorisation.

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1. Introduction

One of the most challenging issues in modern linguistics is the relationship between mental processes and language. The strategies of understanding and uttering speech are in the minds of scientists in the interdisciplinary study. That is why such abstract ethical concepts as "friendship", "love", "hatred", "conscience", and "envy" have become the subject of intensive research in the field of cognitive linguistics over the last decades. Such great attention to similar concepts is explained by their ethnic-linguistic nature, as their content is defined by the morals and manners of the social community, they represent the knowledge of the inner world of the individual (Babushkin, 1996).

Abstract notions, however, cannot be observed directly, as they are devoid of the subject and sense image and can only be felt or represented in the language. In the material world something unseen and unobserved is presented 'vividly' only in the form of words. If the individual lacks the word connected with some fragment of reality, then the fragment itself is missing in his consciousness (Chernejko, 1997).

The language provides access to a concept nominating only its certain part, which may not be the most significant. A fragment of the concept, unutterable, is beyond linguistic capability. In this case, the knowledge of related sciences like philosophy, psychology, psycho-linguistics, and the study of culture, fill a related pool of knowledge which helps us to approach an understanding of a nebulous emotion such as "envy". Moreover, human knowledge and cognitive processes are too complicated to be described within the limits of individual scientific disciplines (Kubryakova, 2004).

Since the appearance of the cognitive discipline in linguistics, a special role is given to the interaction between the science of language and psychology. The significance of such cooperation is not only in working out a specific research program, but in the special position of the analysed entities (psychological architecture, consciousness, language) in the speech and intelligent activity of the person (Kubryakova, 2004).

2. Materials and Methods

The basic methods of analysis of abstract concepts are conceptualisation and a prototypical approach within the bounds of the principle of categorisation as one of the main cognitive processes.

The cognitive approach, in which certain phenomena are found, allows us to include in the framework of study essential as well as complex linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge about it, despite the degree to which they are presented in the language. It is important to highlight the fact that the study of abstract concepts is still

"personalized and instinctive to a significant extent" (Vlasova, 2003). Consequently, the mechanism for modeling abstract concepts is impossible without considering human relationship aspect and personal understanding of the phenomenon under study.

We can trace a number of consistent patterns in the research methodology of abstract names. Regarding the object of our study, it should be noted that the idea of "envy" is a universal, multinational and culture-universal idea. When considering such complex notions, it is necessary to use a prototypical approach within the framework of the categorization principle. At the core of the study are the developments in the field of conceptual analysis, as well as definitional and component analysis. In cognitive linguistics special emphasis is laid on functional components of meaning. The meaning itself is the trigger for the conceptualization of reality as an exceptional way of summarizing human experience, delivering and presenting it through the means of language.

3. Results and Discussion

Abstract concepts are defined as 'kaleidoscopic' and, in many respects; the analysis of such concepts is subjective in character. However, such abstract emotions as friendship, love, hatred, consciousness, and envy, cannot be observed directly on account of their lacking substance and sense image. Nevertheless, the best access to the nature of the concept is provided by the language itself, especially if it is an abstract concept (Schwarz, 1996).

The abstract noun is the highest form of a human's mental activity. It unites those sides of reality that are connected together only by a thought. Abstract nouns are artifacts: they are objects of intellectual culture (Brusenskaya, 2004). Cognitive models that are behind abstract nouns don't have any certain type of concept. Such concepts are considered to be kaleidoscopic: from certain sensory images to gestalts.

Evaluation of an abstract noun as immaterial substance is not the only correct strategy (Gureev, 2000). As Cherneiko stresses, concrete nouns collocating with abstract nouns make them substantiate and intelligible. They are so called "material connotations". Assimilation of an abstract noun into a concrete noun as a rule takes place in a metaphor (Chernejko, 1997). Through a metaphor a human's experience of handling material objects creates principles of a perception of events, activities, emotions, and thoughts as material entities (Lakoff, 1987).

The most vivid cognitive metaphors are cases, when an object is interpreted as a human being. Thus we are able to conceptualize our experience of engagement with nonliving materials in terms of human motivation, characteristics and human activities. Personification is not a single standardized process. Each example of

personification differs from others by those human qualities that are being chosen in the process of metaphorization (Lakoff, 1987). To prove this several examples are given:

1. The boys were all eaten up with envy (The British National Corpus, 2005).
2. Boys of his own size pretended not to know he had been away at all; but they were consuming with envy, nevertheless (The British National Corpus, 2005).
3. Envy grows from insignificant differences between people (The British National Corpus, 2005).
4. She was exhilarated by the envy and jealousy that she had provoked (The British National Corpus, 2005).
5. [Your letters] serve like gleams of light, to cheer a dreary scene where envy, malice, revenge, and all the worse passions of men are marshaled (Pilcher, 1995).
6. Envy awakens at the sound of a distant laugh (The British National Corpus, 2005).
7. Envy grieves (The British National Corpus, 2005).
8. Envy has blackened every page of his history (The British National Corpus, 2005).

Recited examples show that abstract nouns get "material connotations" by means of predicate. The abstract noun "envy" could be an active subject of an act (agent), regardless paradigmatical aspect (Active ↔ Passive Voice), as subject in the Passive Voice doesn't coincide with a semantic subject (Ivanova et al., 1981). In other words, agent in sentences (1), (2), (4) is expressed by prepositional object.

According to Cherneiko (1997), things seen (concrete names) and things unseen or unobserved (abstract substances) becomes perceptible and understood only when they are named.

Nomination Theory is a bona fide linguistic theory, which must explain how the notions for different fragments of the world around us and ideas about this world during the process of cognition are formed in the language, and it also should help us to find out which language means and forms are used or created for this purpose (Kubryakova, 1984). The analysis and classification of language signs accomplishing a nominative (or representative) function are linked to the meaning of units in any case.

The tendency to reflect the true cognitive moments in nominative activity was clearly defined by Kolshanskiy (1976). In his opinion the subject matter of the nomination lies not in the idea that the sound of language sounds a thing or somehow

corresponds with a thing, but in its representation of some abstraction as the result of the human cognitive activity, abstraction as the display of real subjects and phenomena in consciousness (Kolshanskij, 1976). In the word and its verbal definition, the results of the cognitive efforts of the human intelligence are fixed. The ideal essence of the concept is caught by a word and is duplicated in its definition. The definition is established and is thought of as a set of semes, forming the sememe (Babushkin, 1996).

In this way a special role is acknowledged for the nominative potential of the word. The word, having simultaneously onomasiologic and semantic structures, is capable of representing and replacing, in the human consciousness, a certain fragment of the reality understood by them. The creates active knowledge that is connected to it, both linguistically and non-linguistically, and as a result operates with the given word as with a materialised fragment of the reality in verbal and cogitative activity (Kubryakova, 2004; Aziz & Abdolghader, 2018).

This approach to the word as carrier of a securely fixed and precisely limited meaning was replaced in modern linguistics with the idea that it is necessary to attribute uncertainty, vagueness, and mobility to the number of basic features of the word meaning. As a result, in linguistics there is the idea of the prototype meaning in the frameworks of the cognitive approach (Kovalyova, 2000; Eisvandi et al., 2015). The Prototype Theory stems from the famous psycholinguistic research of E. Rosh. The essence of prototype meaning in linguistics involves the idea that the multiple meaning of linguistic unit represents the radial structure, in which there is a steady and important centre for the carrier and less essential peripheral meaning or meanings. Nevertheless, all the meanings of the same linguistic unit appear to be linked to a uniform network, which is, in fact, the tool demonstrating the connexity of separate sub-meanings (Rosh, 2015; Kashisaz & Mobarak, 2018).

The given interpretation is reflected in the semasiological approach to the research of linguistic units. The prototype meaning in the semasiological approach has the opposite perspective, namely, from the contents to expression. In other words, a certain concept is allocated and a set of linguistic units of the semantic and/or syntactic level is defined, which can express, transfer and designate the given concept (Jackendoff & Jackendoff, 2002; Eslami & Ahmadi, 2019).

The term 'concept' is used instead of the term 'notion' within the bounds of the cognitive approach, because the leading native cognitive scientists determine the given term as a global apprehensive unit which is the quantum of the structured knowledge. In contrast to notion and meaning of the word the concept includes extra-linguistic factors (including national or ethnic, socio-cultural, associative-subjective), which may allow us to deal with the problem of interaction and interdependence of

mind and language. Words help to access concepts because they are necessary for communication, and the discussion of concepts is one of the sources of concept formation in human consciousness (Jackendoff, 2007; Kheirabadi & Mirzaei, 2019).

The interdisciplinary approach contributes to the working out of more or less unitary set of tools in the research of abstract units as complicated mental formations. Therefore, the combination of linguistic and extra-linguistic procedures allows us to give the fullest and deepest analysis of the investigated event, because in the structure of abstract concepts and in the simultaneous presence of an invariant core there are a huge range of personal associations. It explains the fact that up to now the abstract concepts analysis has relied on an individual's intuitive character to a certain degree (Zhatkin, 2018; Khan et al., 2017).

4. Conclusions

The mechanism of the modelling of abstract concepts involves the cognitive experience of mankind on the whole and of the individual in particular.

As a result, the research of abstract concepts has an interdisciplinary character which contributes to the exposure and substantiation of different implicit signs of investigated concept, having no direct expression in vocabulary definitions of representative lexemes. At the present level of linguistic development, study of the units of language does not seem to be possible, regardless of human factors such as the psychological state and the behaviour of an individual, the socio-cultural heritage and the relations between people, among other things.

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