



A LINGUISTIC VIEW OF THE TERM “CONCEPT” AND ITS ROLE IN MODERN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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Annotation: *This thesis deals with one of the most popular terms in modern linguistics: concept. A concept is a linguo-philosophical unit that was introduced thanks to an anthropocentric approach in linguistics. A concept defines and groups almost every possible meaning of any given word and their development. The thesis focuses on various functions of a concept linking it with modern linguistics approaches and analyzes its main role in it.*

Аннотация: *Этот тезис рассматривает один из самых популярных терминов в современной лингвистике: концепт. Концепт – это лингвофилософская единица, появившаяся благодаря антропоцентрическому подходу в языкознании. Понятие определяет и группирует почти все возможные значения любого данного слова и их развития. В диссертации рассматриваются различные функции концепта, связывающие его с подходами современной лингвистики, и анализируется его главная роль в нем.*

Key words: *categories, prototypical, cognition, functional, to signify, a notional system, a cognitive unit, to correspond a representation, semiotic triangle, a common assumption*

Ключевые слова: *категории, прототипический, познание, функциональный, означать, понятийная система, когнитивная единица, соответствовать представлению, семиотический треугольник, общее допущение.*

Cognitive linguistics tries in a new way to solve the problem of language as a form of thinking. According to the American linguist Noam Chomsky, “to know the language ... means to be in a certain mental state”. The scientist puts forward “as the main tasks of theoretical linguistics, the description of language representations in the human brain, that is, those structures. This view is that general cognitive abilities, like our kinesthetic abilities, our visual or sensor motor skills, and above all, our typically human categorization strategies, especially our tendency to construct categories on the basis of prototypical basic-level subcategories or exemplars jointly account, together with cultural, contextual and functional parameters, for the main design features of languages and for our ability to learn and use them. The so-called “language faculty” is, thus, claimed to be a product, or rather a specialization, of general cognitive abilities. A keyword in cognitive linguistics is embodiment. Mental and linguistic categories cannot be abstract, disembodied or human-



independent. Quite the opposite: we construct and understand our categories on the basis of experience, under the constraints imposed by our bodies. Human conceptual categories, the meanings of words and sentences, of linguistic structures at any level, are not just a combination of a set of universal abstract features, of uninterrupted symbols. A very large number of these meanings and structures are more or less directly motivated by experience, in many cases, by bodily experience. A cognitive linguistic methodology would take a very different path. One of the basic general cognitive abilities reflected in the structure and use of languages is prototype categorisation: human categories are normally characterized by having one typical member of a category (the prototype), to which other members are related in a motivated way, these less central members departing from the prototype in varying degrees and along various dimensions (see all the references above to the work by Rosch and others). A cognitive methodology would then identify the prototypical use of eye as that referring to a body-part, and would treat the other uses of this lexeme as motivated nonprototypical senses, related in a systematic way to the prototypical sense. In *The eye of the needle* and in *He has a good eye for beauty* the link is metaphorical. The study of polysemy and of the sense networks in polysemous lexical items thus becomes central in a cognitive approach. Of course this interest in sense networks or meaning chains is not incompatible with acknowledging the role of abstraction in the mental construction of prototypical senses. Therefore, to cognitive linguistics, concepts, including linguistic concepts, are ultimately grounded in experience (bodily / physical experience, or social / cultural experience). This is thus apparently in conflict with an axiom in twentieth century linguistics: that of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign.

This insistence on embodiment and motivation explains the important role accorded to linguistic iconicity by cognitive linguists. Cognitive linguistics brings the concepts of linguistic conceptualization and categorization of the world to the center of attention of modern linguistics. These processes differ: the first allows you to single out the minimum units of human experience (concepts), and the second - to combine the units, characterized as identical, into larger categories. Consideration of these processes as the most important processes of human cognitive activity, consisting in the understanding and classification of information coming to him and leading to the formation of concepts, categories, as well as conceptual structures, necessitates the study of this process as a multi-level process of knowledge formation. This becomes possible within the framework of the integrative analysis of the subject of knowledge (that is, the subject of thought). Understanding integration, following NN Boldyrev, "the fusion of simple unities into more complex structural unities", it is advisable to consider the subject of cognition as a multidimensional starting point for the process of conceptualization. It is a complex coordinate system within which the formation of various knowledge takes place. The need for their unification is due to the need to form an integral conceptual system and, therefore, presupposes the integration of all coordinates of the functional representation of the subject of cognition. Therefore, the goal of cognitive linguistics is to understand how the processes of perception, categorization, classification and understanding of the world are carried out, how knowledge is accumulated, which systems provide various types of



information activities. It is language that provides the most natural access to consciousness and thought processes, and not at all because many of the results of mental activity are verbalized, but because "we know about the structures of consciousness only thanks to the language that allows us to report on these structures and describe them in any natural language". The turning point in the consciousness of many modern linguists came with the emergence of a number of new disciplines that showed the inadequacy of the approach to the language system, ignoring the activity nature of language and its involvement in the processes of human and social life. Psycholinguistics, ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, and linguoculturology were among these disciplines that emerged at the intersection with linguistics. As a result of such cognitive activity, according to A. L. Sharandin, an integrative unity is created. Integrative unity is a unity created by the interaction of two types of concepts: firstly, associated with knowledge obtained as a result of the reflection of reality, and, secondly, associated with the knowledge of the language system used as a means of cognizing this reality, and with knowledge of the language as an object of reality.

The increasing demand of the unit gave the emergence to a number of competing nominative units. However, this unit has neither one generalized definition, nor a single term, at least in some countries. In the Russian science, for instance, the term "concept" is not monosemantic and the competition of the terms, such as "concept" (Likhachev, Stepanov, Lyapin, Neroznak, etc.) "linguoculturema" (Vorobiev), "mythologema" (Lyahteenmyaki, Bazylev), "logoepisteme" (Vereshchagin, Kostomarov, Burvikova) continues since the early 90's. However, during the recent years it becomes apparent that the term "concept" according to its frequency of use is much ahead of all other coinages. The notion of "concept" has been borrowed by linguists from mathematical logic. The meaning of "concept" is explored in cognitive science, metaphysics, and philosophy of mind. The term "concept" is traced back to Aristotle's "The classical theory of concepts" definition of terms. The next scholar worth mentioning is a language philosopher Gottlob Frege. In 1892 he defined distinction between the concept and object in the language philosophy. According to Frege, any sentence that expresses a singular thought consists of an expression that signifies an Object (it can be a proper name or a general term with the definite article) together with a predicate that signifies a Concept. This term is employed actively by the cognitive linguistics in its categorical apparatus as a missing cognitive "link" in the content of which the associative-figurative evaluations and understandings are included in addition to that notion. Thus "concept" in linguistics is both an old and a new term. The word *conceptus* is a Latin medieval formation, derived from the verb "concupere - concapere" which means "conceive". In classical Latin the word *conceptus* had the meaning "pond", "inflammation", "impregnation" and "germ". The word "concept" together with its derivatives entered all the Romanic and Germanic languages (French *concept - concevoir*, Italian *concetto - concepire*, Spanish *concepto - concebir*, Portuguese *conceito - conceber*, English *concept - conceive*). Like most new scientific notions, "concept" was introduced with a certain degree of pathos and sometimes through a cognitive metaphor: it was called "a multi-dimensional cluster of sense", "a semantic slice of life", "a gene of



culture”, “a certain potency of meaning”, “a unit of memory”, “a quantum of knowledge”, “a germ of mental operations” and even “a misty something”. Today, the term “concept” is widely used in various fields of linguistics. It has entered into the notional system of cognitive, semantic, and cultural linguistics. The study of the concept in modern linguistics is of the paramount importance. However, any attempt to comprehend the nature of the concept is associated with a number of the most diverse points of view. The intensive research of it in the field of cognitive linguistics has demonstrated a great disparity in the understanding of the term “concept”. Discrepancies cause ambiguity and terminological confusion. Thus the term “concept” is an umbrella term for several scientific directions: first of all for cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics, dealing with thinking and cognition, storing and transforming information, as well as for cultural linguistics, which is still defining and refining the boundaries of the theory formed by the postulates and basic categories. We can assume that as in mathematics, the concept in cognitive science is the basic axiomatic category which is undetectable, intuitively understanding; the hyperonym of the notion, ideas, frame, script, gestalt etc. According to the Russian scientist J. Stepanov, “concepts are just phrases, fragments of conversation, but they are subtle phrases that force our minds create such content, as if it has been familiar for us for a long time”. Concept can be understood as bunch of culture in the consciousness of people; it is something in the form of which the culture enters the mental world. And, moreover, people through the concept enter the culture and affect it. Concepts are not only contemplated, they are experienced. They are the subject of emotions, likes and dislikes, and sometimes collisions. The concept is also a discrete unit of the collective consciousness, which is stored in the national memory of native speakers in verbally determinate form. As a cognitive unit of meaning, a concept is an abstract idea or a mental symbol sometimes defined as a “unit of knowledge”, built from other units which act as a concept’s characteristic. A concept is typically associated with a corresponding representation in a language such as a single meaning of a term. In linguistics, the concept, in contrast to a word, has a more complicated structure. The content of the concept is divided into linguistic meaning and cultural sense. That is why it is often called a unit of knowledge, an abstract idea or a mental symbol.

There is a direct relation between signs and concepts, between concepts and entities of the external world, and there is an indirect relation between signs and entities of the external world being mediated by concepts. These relations have been represented by the well known semiotic triangle.

In spite of the difference between the two kinds of semantics there are some common assumptions concerning the relation between linguistic expressions and concepts: First of all, it is a common assumption that there are linguistic expressions which don’t encode any concept at all, as for instance pronouns, interjections, the single words of an idiom or a formula like good bye or hello. A further common assumption is that some concepts have no corresponding word, and can be encoded only by a phrase.

Being a part of the world picture, the concept reflects the orientation of values of both the individual person and the entire linguistic community. It implies that the concept may



include the generally valid features as well as the individual characteristics of native speakers. Many definitions of language have been proposed. Henry Sweet, an English phonetician and language scholar, stated: “Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts.”

Concepts make up language thoughts. They are everywhere where a human mind focuses on the idea. They assist us in making the world, to see it in various images.

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