

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND DIRECTIONS OF RESEARCH CONCEPTS IN LANGUAGE

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Summary

This article is devoted to theoretical principles and directions of concepts research in linguistics, which is the key notion of cognitive linguistics. The multifaceted variable understanding of the term “linguistic picture of the world” is analyzed. The cognitive picture of the world and the linguistic picture of the world are interconnected as primary and secondary, as the content of a concept and a means of the researcher’s access to this concept. This article examines the notion of “concept” in research of various scientists. It is indicated that there is still no clear interpretation of the term “concept”. There is a significant number of controversial issues related to the theory of concepts: about the status of the concept, its structure, features of verbalization, as well as about the typology of concepts. In modern linguistics, the following main approaches to the study of concepts are distinguished: semantico-cognitive, conceptual studies, linguoculturology, linguocultural conceptology. But despite the existing differences in understanding of concepts, representatives of these schools believe that concept is the main unit of consciousness, capable of verbalization through linguistic units, having a multidimensional complex structure. At the moment, we can talk about two trends in the study of concepts. Firstly, this is the study of the features of concepts and their functioning in different texts. Secondly, the experimental study of concepts by method of free associative experiment and receptive experiment. The article also considers the linguocultural perception of the concept and notes that the linguocultural direction, in our opinion, is a base.

Keywords: linguistics, cognitive linguistics, picture of the world, concept, concept sphere, conceptual research, cultural linguistics.

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1. Introduction

One of the topical areas of modern linguistics is cognitive linguistics, or linguoconceptology. The basic concepts of this science are linguistic and cognitive picture of the world. The main effective unit of cognitive picture of the world is the concept.

Considering the leading role of concepts in process of cognitive and mental activity of a person, studies regarding structure, semantics, features, functions, ways of representing the

concept within the linguo-cognitive direction, which will expand the understanding of the deep essence of language, the versatility of its speech manifestations in a cognitive perspective, in particular, to reveal the concept as a representative of knowledge, as well as ideas, sensations, associations, reflected in the linguistic picture of the world, stay up to date. In categorical terms of cognitive linguistics, concept is one of the key units.

Currency of this article lies in the fact that linguocultural modeling of concepts is currently one of the most actively developing areas in linguistics and not all cultural concepts have been sufficiently studied. The theoretical basis for the study of concepts was: 1) the works of V.I. Karasik, I.A. Sternin, Yu.S. Stepanov, S.G. Vorkachev, V.A. Maslova on the essence, structure, content, features of the concept and the ways of its representation in the language; 2) the works of G.G. Slyshkin, dedicated to the structural and semantic organization of the concept sphere; 3) research by Yu.N. Karaulova on the verbal representation of concepts in the text. The purpose of the article is to get acquainted with the theoretical foundations of cognitive linguistic and cultural linguistics for the study of concepts. It is important to note that in modern scientific literature there is no clear definition of the method of conceptual analysis, there is no universal methodology for its implementation, there are only intuitive steps in this direction. The choice of the methodology for the study of concepts remains largely subjective and is determined by the content that the researcher puts into the term “concept”, the material of the study, and the type of concept being studied (*Pimenova, 2016: 18*).

2. The linguistic picture of the world

The understanding of the term “linguistic picture of the world” in modern linguistics is ambiguous. So, Yu.N. Karaulov defines the linguistic picture of the world as “reflected in specifically national linguistic forms and semantics of linguistic expressions, a set of ideas about a person and the world around him”, woven “of contradicting theses, facts and statements, connected in a whimsically mosaic (non-system) way and create a native speaker has an illusory confidence that within the framework of his national culture he will find answers to all the basic questions of life” (*Karaulov, 1987: 156*).

The study of the linguistic picture of the world, according to Z.D. Popova and I.A. Sternin, includes: 1) a description of the “division of reality” reflected by the language in linguistic paradigms (lexico-semantic, lexicophraseological and structural-syntactic groups and fields; 2) a description of the national specifics of the meanings of linguistic units; 3) identification of missing units (lacunae) in the language system; 4) identification of endemic (characteristic only of a given language) units (*Popova, Sternin, 2003: 46*). Note that, according to the same authors, the concept sphere is the sphere of thought, the information base of the cognitive consciousness of the people, consisting of concepts. The linguistic picture of the world is that part of the concept sphere that has been expressed through linguistic signs. The main source of the formation of concepts is the cognitive activity of the individual, including through her communicative activity (communication, reading, study). The conceptual sphere of a person is the information base of the cognitive picture of the world, but it does not exhaust it. The cognitive picture of the world and the linguistic picture of the world are interconnected as primary and secondary, as the content of a concept and a means of the researcher’s access to this concept. At the same time, the authors note that the linguistic picture of the world only partially reflects the conceptual system, not all concepts have linguistic expression and become the subject of communication. Therefore, the study of the linguistic picture of the world only fragmentarily allows us to judge the concept sphere,

although there is apparently no more convenient access to the concept sphere than through language (*Popova, Sternin, 2003: 8*).

3. The content of “concept” notion

Concept is a key concept in cognitive linguistics. However, the content of this concept varies significantly in the concepts of different scientific schools and individual scientists.

In Russia, the first doctoral dissertation devoted to the study of concepts was M.V. Pimenova “Concepts of the Inner World of a Person (Russian-English correspondences)” (2001), the main provisions of which were set out in monograph (*Pimenova, 1999*). Nevertheless, there is still no clear interpretation of the term “concept”, there is a significant number of debatable issues related to the theory of concepts: about status of concept, its structure, features of verbalization, the relationship between concept and notion, concept and meaning, as well as about the typology of concepts (*Pimenova, 2016: 10*).

V.I. Karasik characterizes concepts as “mental formations, which are significant, conscious typified fragments of experience stored in a person’s memory” (*Karasik, 2004: 59*), “multidimensional mental formation, in which the figurative-perceptual, conceptual and value sides are highlighted” (*Karasik, 2004: 71*), “a fragment of a person’s life experience” (*Karasik, 2004: 3*), “experienced information” (*Karasik, 2004: 128*), “a quantum of experienced knowledge” (*Karasik, 2004: 361*).

We find close to this understanding in Z.D. Popova and I.A. Sternin. These scientists define the concept as belonging to a person’s consciousness, a global unit of mental activity, a discrete mental formation, which is the basic unit of a person’s mental code, having a relatively ordered internal structure, being the result of cognitive (cognitive) activities of an individual and society and carries complex, encyclopedic information about the reflected subject or phenomenon, on the interpretation of this information by the public consciousness and the attitude of public consciousness to this phenomenon or subject (*Popova, Sternin, 1999: 49*).

V.A. Maslova notes that “a concept is a complex formation including various characteristics: evaluative, figurative, associative, and all of them must be taken into account in the process of reconstructing the concept” (*Maslova, 2013: 249*); “A concept is a linguomental formation, a partially verbalized cultural meaning that has a name / names in the language and includes meaning, cultural connotations, the concept and image underlying the name, as well as value meanings” (*Maslova, 2012: 20*). She emphasizes: “If we are talking about concepts behind which there are specific objects of objective reality, extra-linguistic orientation, observation, and the intuition of the researcher are of greater importance. When conceptualizing abstract entities, language orientation is more important. However, cultural and linguistic data are most often used in reconstruction of concept” (*Maslova, 2013: 249*).

For S.G. Vorkacheva, concept of “operational unit of thought” (*Vorkachev, 2001: 66*), “a unit of collective knowledge (sending to higher spiritual entities), having a linguistic expression and is marked by ethnocultural specifics” (*Vorkachev, 2001: 68–69*). If mental education does not have ethnocultural specificity, it, according to the scientist, does not apply to concepts.

According to Yu.S. Stepanov, the concept can be defined as a concept, but the concept is expanded as a result of entire modern scientific situation. A concept without such an extension is the subject of the science of logic, a description of the most general and essential features of an object, an indication of its closest genus and the difference in its type, that is, the genus and species distinction. The concept is the subject of another science – culturology and the description of a typical cultural situation. Concept is “determined” and “experienced”.

It includes not only logical signs, but also components of scientific, psychological, avant-garde artistic, emotional, everyday phenomena and situations (*Stepanov, 2007: 32*).

M.V. Pimenova notes: “What a person knows, thinks, imagines about objects of external and internal world is what is called as a concept. A concept is a representation of a fragment of the world” (*Pimenova, 2004: 8*). She puts forward that “a concept is a kind of representation of a fragment of the world or a part of such a fragment, which has a complex structure, expressed by different groups of features, implemented by various linguistic methods and means. The conceptual feature is objectified in the fixed and free forms of combinations of the corresponding linguistic units – the representatives of concept. Concept reflects categorical and value characteristics of knowledge about some fragments of the world. The concept structure displays characteristics that are functionally important for the respective culture. A complete description of this or that concept that is significant for a particular culture is possible only when studying the most complete set of means of its expression” (*Pimenova, 2004: 10*).

G.G. Slyshkin notes that “a concept is a unit designed to link together scientific research in the field of culture, consciousness and language, since it belongs to consciousness, is determined by culture and is objectified in language” (*Slyshkin, 1998: 86*).

4. The main approaches to the study of concepts

Summarizing these data, we can conclude that in modern linguistics there are the following main approaches to the study of concepts: semantic-cognitive (Z.D. Popova, I.A. Sternin), conceptual studies (M.V. Pimenova, O.N. Kondratyeva), cultural linguistics (V.I. Karasik, G.G. Slyshkin), linguocultural conceptology (S.G. Vorkachev).

Despite the existing differences in understanding of concepts, in methods and approaches to their research, representatives of these schools argue that concept is the basic unit of consciousness, capable of verbalization through linguistic units, having a multidimensional complex structure. The multidimensionality of a cultural concept is associated with internal dismemberment, implying the need to build more than one model to study its features and nature as a whole.

“Description of a concept is a special research procedure for the interpretation of the meaning of its name and the nearest designations” (*Karasik, 2004: 110*).

V.A. Maslova notes that “a concept is a ‘bundle’ of meanings, sticking out in different directions, creating a concept field. It is possible to speak about concept in an interpretive way, in terms of its reconstruction” (*Maslova, 2012: 25*).

In general, at the moment we can talk about two trends in the study of concepts. Firstly, this is the study relating to the features of concepts and their functioning in various kinds of texts (dictionaries, psalms, fiction and journalistic texts) and, secondly, the experimental study of concepts, in particular, by the method of free associative experiment and receptive experiment. Within the framework of the associative experiment, subjects react to the words-stimuli of any verbal reaction that comes to mind, and as a result of data processing, obtained associates are interpreted as a reflection of conceptual features of studied concept. A receptive experiment explores the knowledge and understanding of the meaning of a language unit by native speakers (*Pimenova, 2016: 18*).

The linguoculturological direction is, in our opinion, basic, since it is based on the study of the language from the point of view of its ability to express the categories of culture and to be a means of preserving the cultural component of society, formed in the collective linguistic consciousness of this society. The most important, in our opinion, the level of the linguistic

embodiment of the linguocultural concept is the textual implementation, that is, the appeal to the concept for specific communicative purposes. The text contains factual information, associations, figurative representations, value attitudes.

Putting the linguocultural understanding of the concept at the head, we are talking about the value component as the main criterion, distinguishing linguocultural concept from the cognitive one. Understanding the cultural value and relevance of concepts in this direction presupposes a serious study of their verbalization.

Verbalization of texts is based not only on the search for lexemes objectifying concepts, but also on the study of their contextual space, paradigmatic and syntagmatic connections, into which concepts enter.

5. Conclusions

The establishment of a new anthropocentric paradigm attracts attention of linguists to the interaction of language with thinking, consciousness, and culture. This contributes to the formation of new linguistic branches, in particular, cognitive linguistic and cultural linguistics. The unifying moment in the development of these two independent linguistic branches is the presence of conceptual directions, one of the main tasks of which is the analysis of concepts. In this regard, on the basis of cognitive linguistic and cultural linguistics, a new linguistic discipline is emerging that studies concepts – linguistic conceptology. Within the framework of linguo-conceptology, there are two main approaches: linguocultural and linguo-cognitive, difference between which lies in the understanding of concept notion and the method of its analysis. The concept refers to the fundamental concepts of modern linguistics. Summing up the review of approaches to understanding the concept, we emphasize that each of the above approaches does not exhaust the concept of “concept” but allows you to deeper knowledge of its nature. It should be recognized that the theories under consideration are often cross-cutting, correlated and complex. We interpret concept as a multidimensional culturally significant socio-psychological education that can have linguistic expression.

The many concepts that linguists use have given rise to various classifications of concepts presented in the scientific literature, but none of these classifications can be considered universally accepted. The question of methods and techniques for analyzing concept remains unresolved, representing a prospect for further research in the modern period of the development of science.

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