SYSTEMATISING THE DEFINITIONS OF THE 'LINGUOCULTURAL CONCEPT' IN MODERN LINGUISTICS: IS IT POSSIBLE TO REACH A CONSENSUS?

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Abstract

Aim. An attempt to systematise various interpretations of "concept" notion in linguoculturology and cognitive linguistics.

Methodology. The key research method was content analysis. The theoretical and methodological approaches previously outlined by linguists in this field are analysed. The typology of concepts outlined in the works of predecessors in relation to modern challenges and trends is also clarified.

Results. The research concludes that the understanding of concepts as linguistic units differs in the works of representatives of different linguistic directions. Proposals for revising the existing concept classification for future research are formulated.

Research implications. The study suggests the need to develop a new classification of concepts, which in turn would facilitate the task of describing as accurately as possible all the linguistic world-views of all the cultures that have existed or will exist on our globe.

Keywords: the English language, culturology, concept, linguoculturology, linguoconceptology

Научная статья

СИСТЕМАТИЗАЦИЯ ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЙ «ЛИНГВОКУЛЬТУРНОГО КОНЦЕПТА» В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ЛИНГВИСТИКЕ: ВОЗМОЖЕН ЛИ КОНСЕНСУС?

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Аннотация

Цель: попытка систематизации различных трактовок понятия «концепт» в лингвокультурологии и когнитивной лингвистике.

Процедура и методы. Ключевым исследовательским методом стал контент-анализ. Проведён анализ теоретико-методологических подходов, ранее обозначенных лингвистами в этой области. Также уточняется типология концептов, изложенная в работах предшественников в соотнесении с современными вызовами и тенденциями.

Результаты. По итогам исследования сделан вывод о том, что понимание концептов как языковых единиц разнится в работах представителей разных лингвистических направлений. Сформулированы предложения по пересмотру существующей классификации концептов для будущих исследований.

Теоретическая и/или практическая значимость заключается в необходимости создания новой классификации концептов, что, в свою очередь, облегчило бы задачу максимально точного описания всех языковых мировоззрений всех культур, которые существовали или будут существовать на нашем земном шаре.

Ключевые слова: английский язык, культурология, лингвокультурология, лингвоконцептология, концепт, английский язык

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, the word 'concept' has been actively used in the linguistic literature. For in this day and age it would be foolish not to pay attention to the more and more obvious growth of culture as one of the fundamental human values. The growing diversity of cultural affiliations around the world requires scholars to develop certain theoretical postulates or user-friendly terms. This is necessary for the simple reason that they would greatly help to generalise such vast empirical material, but would not prevent it from becoming unintentionally diminished. One such useful tool is the term 'concept'. However, because of the different approaches and methods used in different fields of science, it is interpreted in very different ways. Simultaneously, its methodological possibilities vary because of the different objects of study and conceptual apparatuses of these disciplines.

Obviously, this leads to interdisciplinary studies of the category of concept as such, given that modern linguists most often approach human thought through the prism of relevant evolutionary changes in language. That is, the concept itself is an 'umbrella term' or 'collective term' [1, p. 6]. The concept is at the centre of several scientific disciplines simultaneously: without a doubt, linguocognitology (or cognitive semantics) in general and, naturally, linguistics and cultural studies in particular. However, famous Russian researchers G. G. Slyshkin and V. I. Karasik warn us that in modern works such terms as "linguocultural concept" and "cognitive concept" are often mixed and difficult to distinguish from each other. [2, p. 75].

It seems to us, however, that whatever the nature of the research and whatever the framework, one very important thing must be kept in mind. Namely, it seems to us reasonable to first define as clearly and precisely as possible what is meant by the term "concept". The scientist is then faced with the task of understanding in what sense he is going to use this term – cognitive or linguistic. It is important to remember that all the previously described differences between the various nuances of this concept, both linguistically and cognitively, are entirely relative.

Their relationship can only be described as being unified in terms of the techniques used to differentiate the research objects and the methodologies employed to explain them, not in terms of the overarching goals of the transdisciplinary domains of expertise in which they are situated.

To begin with, let's look at where the word 'concept' came from. This term was first used by medieval philosophers such as P. Abelard, W. Ockham, John of Salisbury. They had the following general idea: knowledge and experience are inseparable matters, and the concept by itself is a kind of universal content of the latter. Previously, back in Plato's time, 'knowing' and 'experiencing' were often kept apart in every possible way. This contradicts the Platonic idea that the concept is a separate general type of idea, and that the concept is always in a person's mind and is universal in nature. The proponents of this school of thought are of the opinion, without of course falling into the extremes of realism, that concepts are the creation of the mind itself for no other purpose than its internal use. All of this, of course, arises in the context of a long theoretical dispute about the origins of human existence as such.

The linguocognitive and linguocultural approaches to understanding the concept are not mutually exclusive, according to the famous linguist V. I. Karasik. Obviously, the term inevitably enters the social and cultural conceptual sphere, being simultaneously an intellectual formation in the human mind. Logically, these two approaches have diametrically opposite vectors in relation to the individual's personality: *"the linguocultural approach assumes a direction from culture to individual consciousness, while the linguocognitive approach implies a direction from individual consciousness to culture itself"*. [2, p. 139].

INTERPRETING THE TERM "CONCEPT" IN DIFFERENT WAYS

In his 1928 article "The concept and the word", S. A. Askoldov-Alekseev was the first academic to use the term "concept" in its contemporary sense. It is a type of mental formation that replaces numerous uniform objects, activities, and mental functions throughout the course of human thought [3]. Let us focus on the three most developed approaches to interpreting the concept in contemporary linguistics, which are:

1. Considering a concept as an expression of a set of dictionary meanings of a word is proposed by representatives of the _linguistic school_ (S. A. Askoldov [3], V. V. Kolesov [4], V. N. Telia [5]).

2. The linguocultural direction is represented by the works of such scientists as V. I. Karasik [6], S. G. Vorkachev [1], G. G. Slyshkin [7], G. V. Tokarev [8] and others. According to them, concepts are elements of national linguistic culture, which are directly connected with national values and national peculiarities of this culture.

3. The culturological direction emphasised the importance and significance of cultural notions, as represented by Y. S. Stepanov [9], N. D. Arutyunova [10; 11], O. D. Vishnyakova [12; 13; 14]. These scholars acknowledge the vital significance that concepts play in the processes of cultural formation at the same time.

1.1. What is 'concept' according to linguistics?

First of all, there have been a number of main approaches to the understanding of concepts from a linguistic point of view. N. N. Boldyrev first proposed one of these approaches, albeit in a rather narrow sense: a concept is a kind of "ideal abstract unit" [15, p. 23-24]. The so-called mental component, which plays an important role in the process of conceptualising a term (concept), is also taken into account in the second approach. A concept is described as follows by E. S. Kubryakova and V. Z. Demyankov, the creators of the Cognitive Dictionary: *"A concept is a term that outlines specific components of mental assets of a person's consciousness, as well as a framework of information that reflects the entirety of a person's experience and knowledge"* [16, p. 6]. This indicates that the

thought is a component of a larger operating system, namely consciousness, which conveys a comprehensive understanding of the universe through the use of a mental language. N. F. Alefirenko also defines the notion of the concept. He asserts that the idea is nothing more than an internal (cognitive) category, a piece of "cultural memory", or a quantity of knowledge [17, p. 17]. The concept is an intricate, loosely structured semantic creation with a descriptive, metaphorical, valuable quality.

The diversity and, if we can say so, the non-linearity of the structure of concepts are pointed out by Z. D. Popova and I. A. Sternin. They see a concept as a complex mental entity that can take on various facets, attributes, and meanings. In addition, the corresponding attributes or layers of a concept may not have a linguistic equivalent in the mother tongue of a person [18, p. 93].

As far as the linguistic approach is concerned, the following can therefore be said. Given the superpersonal nature of the concept and the plurality of its semantic aspects, it is undoubtedly productive. However, it is not without its disadvantages. In the nonverbal realm of human knowledge, this approach does not allow the manifestations of concepts to be fixed and analysed. To fully grasp a culture of another country, its conceptual volume as a whole, and how and what people believe regarding other people and themselves (which includes the world around them), it is crucial to directly study what is part of material culture.

1.2. What is 'concept' according to linguoculturology?

Let us therefore proceed on to the subject of linguoculturology. Modern linguoculturology investigates the ways in which a specific people's culture is expressed and preserved in their language. The following is based on Humboldt's theory that language not only helps and directs people in the cultural world, yet additionally helps to create it. The focus of cultural linguistics is on how worldwide ideas that, as we've seen, shape our conception of the world relate to the empirical information that people acquire during their lives (within a given culture).

As a result, the national language perspective is reduced to the role of a "lens" that allows researchers to examine culture as a whole. To put it another way, linguoculturologists look at how a person utilises a language to develop a culture and how a language spreads that culture. The range of ways in which these processes are portrayed shapes their dynamism.

Language and culture concepts are intricate phenomena. It has elements that are figurative, intellectual, and judgmental. A concept is more complex than the literal meaning of a single word, and it is frequently communicated through a themed cluster of words rather than in the concept's name. Representatives of cognitive linguistics (A. P. Babushkin, N. N. Boldyrev, E. S. Kubryakova, I. A. Sternin, and others) interpret a concept as a unit of the human consciousness. The main difference, however, is that this interpretation indicates the concept's comprehensive, cumulative nature. In other words, concepts are a representation of all of the knowledge that has ever been learned as well as the outcomes of human action and how the environment is perceived, and they are presented as distinct entities, or what are known as the "specifications" that constitute understanding.

The cognitive interpretation of the concept is, therefore, first and foremost a particular primary and concrete picture, which, after a while, becomes the process of cognition and communication activity of the human being. It is for this reason that the image in his or her mind gradually rises to new semantic levels. It progressively takes on new meanings that, of course, increase the immediate volume of the concept itself, filling it with new content to add to those already present. Therefore, by studying the linguistic means of representing the concept, it is possible to identify the general structure of the latter.

We can see that the term represents some kind of separate unit of the collective con-

sciousness, reflected in the objects of the ideal or actual worlds. From this point of view, it can be said that the presence of a concept within the national memory of the speakers of a particular language can be detected by means of a verbally marked substrate that ensures the storage of acquired knowledge and its transmission from person to person through the generations. In this interpretation, only some concepts have an association with language, while others are only certain mental images: diagrams, pictures, charts, and so on. A concept's semantic complexity turns out to be its discreteness, which W. James mentioned: *"The formation of a concept as an act of thinking is part of the general flow of feeling, but concepts exist separately, discontinuously in the sense that they each have a particular significance"*[1].

It should also be noted that a slightly different definition of the term "concept", described as a kind of universal (or basic) cultural concept that refers to the ideal world itself, can be found in the works of the Polish linguist A. Wierzbicka [19]. In this case, the concept is determined by a set of semantic structures and is reflected in a person's specific culturally determined worldview of reality. As a result, one may add that, given a contemporary standpoint, concepts develop and work at a level far more profound than consciousness. For instance, many ways that conceptions exist as such are discussed in the writings of V. V. Kolesov. Figurative and symbolic patterns are among them. Symbols, in turn, can be embodied in a wide range of artefacts and cultural phenomena, from the sacred to the mundane, and can even be the determinants of their formal attributes [4, p. 19–20].

Linguoculturalists have been researching concepts as specialised bearers (units) of cultural information since the 1990s. Concepts can be expressed linguistically and culturally, according to research. That brings up a different idea definition. A concept is a multi-

faceted mental unit, as defined by G. G. Slyshkin and V. I. Karasik [20, p. 76–77], in which the dominating value component occupies the most significant role. Thus, the assumption that the essence of concepts is a set of values is highlighted in this definition. Additionally, the definition of the idea varies between cultures. In other words, the aforementioned scholars claim that terms are essentially a type of cognitive projection of the global (world) cultural background that each individual possesses.

We believe that the interpretation of the concept by V. I. Karasik is worthy of the reader's attention. In his opinion, the concept in the cultural sense is a multidimensional, culturally significant, as well as sociopsychological semantic formation, which is part of the collective consciousness. In certain linguistic forms, it can also be delimited. V. I. Karasik highlights three important areas in which the concept can be measured: the figurative, the conceptual and the value.

• *Concept: figurative side.* These are merely the characteristics of sight, sound, smell and taste of objects, phenomena and events which are reflected in our memories. In other words, in the process of exploring the world around us, this is what we can experience.

• *Concept: the conceptual side.* This refers to its fixation in language, i.e. its description, its definition and its comparison with other concepts that can be grouped together. Its most important quality is a peculiar multidimensionality and the inclusion of such group concepts in the system of human experience.

• *Concept: value side.* In other words, the relative need for, and importance of, an intellectual entity, both for the individual in general and for the collective in particular [20, p. 76–77].

In this way, we can assume that concepts act as a kind of building material, as a form of cultural genes that support its transpersonal nature. To put it another way, concepts serve as both a byproduct of the development of culture and a means of preserving its values. It is thus the guarantor of the linguistic and

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[1] James, W. Psychology (Джеймс У. Психология). In: RoyalLib.com. URL: https://royallib.com/read/dgeyms_uilyam/psihologiya.html#0 (accessed: 10.08.2023).

socio-cultural identity of each member of a particular nation. It is possible to say that the concept sphere is interpreting and, above all, unifying the activities of people in a particular cultural and linguistic sphere. It enables researchers to speak of something more translucent and elusive, such as the *soul of nation*, as manifested in intercultural communication.

According to S. G. Vorkachev, concept can be defined as *"an entity of collective knowledge/awareness (referring to the highest spiritual values), which has linguistic expression and is ethnically and culturally specific"* [1, p. 6]. In his work, the author states that such mental formation as a concept can be correlated to the plan of expressing the lexico-semantic paradigm. In other words, the whole of the heterogeneous means of describing them in language, i.e. lexis, phraseology and aphorisms. In this interpretation, the concept has, from a linguistic and cultural perspective, a rather complex multilayered structure that includes qualitatively different semantic components, namely linguistic, pictorial, evaluative, behavioral, etc.

1.3. What is 'concept' according to culturology?

According to Yu. S. Stepanov, the concept has extralinguistic information and is itself a micromodel of culture [9, p. 42–67]. The use of concepts is somehow conditioned in all carriers of a particular culture. However, there are some circumstances where you can directly affect the latter. According to Y. S. Stepanov's writings, it is much simpler to comprehend the distinctiveness of each culture when viewed through a certain set of conceptual lenses. Several "tiers" of the cultural word make this possible:

1) the predominant feature;

2) a couple of "passive" traits that are "historical" and no longer relevant;

3) an internal shape that is fixed in an outward, linguistic form.

On the basis of the analyzed material devoted to the study of notions from a cultural perspective, we can firmly state that the no-

tion of "concept" in the works of cultural scientists is considerably extended. It was born from practical philosophy, from an interaction of national traditions, life experiences, religions, value systems and, naturally, ideologies [9]. The concepts form *"a kind of cultural layer that mediates between the human being and the world"*.

For example, the concept of "National Identity" which can be considered as one of the most 'powerful' in the human subconsciousness. In the video published in the New York Times "National Identity is made up"[1], the author claims that every country is battling for a shared past and future. Even though, *"it may not be real, but that's irrelevant"*. The idea that being citizen of particular country (in our case – an American) is all about having a long ethnic, religious and language history. The question immediately arises: what is a country? Which identity should be important? That conflict is defining a great deal of the globe right now. And it's getting worse.

"American" is a group identity, just like any other. Identifying as a member of a group is not inherently harmful. It's normal and healthy in many aspects. Individuals who live in communities, either as neighbourhood residents or as a nation, want definition. When the well-being of the in-group is only possible at the price of the welfare of the out-group, identification takes on ominous and destructive connotations. You can see that in the reaction of the European Union. *"We've got our country back."* You can see that, for instance, in how Donald Trump launched his campaign. *"If we have a country, we have to have borders. We have borders, we have to have laws. We either have a country or we don't, and it's that simple."*

It is getting more and more evident that creating a global community based on common ideals necessitates the creation of a new myth. However, it can only be effective if it

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[1] Fisher, M., Keller, J., Ryan, M. & O'Neill S. National Identity is made up. In: The New York Times. URL: https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/100000005660651/national-identity.html (accessed: 10.08.2023).

appears just as strong as the previous one [21].

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the use of the term 'concept' in the cultural sciences provides linguists, including ourselves, with a very important opportunity. This is that we can consider the social and cultural space as something integral, multilayered; as a constantly changing dynamic system in which the static fixation of things gives way to the movement of the frequency of appearances of different kinds of ideas, namely – concepts.

2. THE FUTURE OF THE NOTION OF "CONCEPT": WILL THERE BE A CONSENSUS HOW TO DEFINE IT?

This brings us to the most important part of this article. What is the main feature of the linguocultural concept? The answer, it seems to us, lies directly in how it's verbalised and how it's linguistically represented. This can be found in the definition of the concept as a linguocultural concept. The typology of concepts is currently one of the most controversial issues in linguoculturology. In accordance with the results of the analysis, there is usually a classification of concepts into the following schemes

– structural-semantic (lexical/phraseological);
– discursive (colloquial/writing/academic);
– sociological (ethnic/individual/group).

When we talk about linguocultural approaches to the classification of concepts, we would like to highlight one of the most important from a methodological point of view. This is the so-called distinction of *"universal concepts"*, which exist in different manifestations in each ethnoculture [22]. In particular, we are talking about epistemological and axiological categories as well as the so-called *"idio-ethnic concepts"*, which are unique to a particular culture. Hence, as G. G. Slyshkin points out [7, p. 61], the theory of linguocultural concepts itself, presented as a set of references to various concepts, in our opinion, gives almost unlimited possibilities for the construction of absolutely new ideas about

communication. Thus, within the framework of the conceptual approach, a given unit (we will call this *"communicative competence"*) should be considered as an organic combination of both the ability to select cultural units (concepts) and the best impact one wants to have on the receiver. In addition to all of the above, it seems to us that it is also necessary to find those very linguistic means that allow these cultural units to be expressed in an appropriate way [23; 24].

Concepts therefore convey the very essence of culture, including its main meanings and values. It is thanks to these that the phenomenon of cultural identity itself is guaranteed. Furthermore, if a person possesses knowledge of all of the aforementioned, this contributes to intercultural communication, which, in our opinion, can only be welcome.

Conclusion

In light of the question of interpretations and qualities of the concept, the following conclusions might be made:

First, the 'linguocultural concept' can be considered as one of the most important notions in linguoculturology and linguoconceptology respectfully. For the moment, however, we think that a concept should be regarded as a specific intellectual construct, defined in the language of the nation concerned, with varying degrees of ethnosemantic specificity.

Second, we have discovered a relatively erroneous collection of "semiotic concepts" among all language concepts, to which names representing sign relations are supposed to match. The names of terms as they are employed in language fall under a category of sign systems, defining the connections among sounds and meanings.

Third, there is currently a fairly large number of interpretations of the "concept" that differ from each other on certain levels: psychological, cognitive, cultural, etc. That is to say, there is a deliberate fragmentation of the concept as a comprehensive construct into smaller, less comprehensive areas of knowledge by separating it from the whole.

A reasonable question arises: what if, instead of fragmentation, we were to attempt to characterise the concept as fully and accurately as possible in some kind of harmonious unity?

Ergo, all the above notions of 'concept' should not be considered in isolation, not as contradictory but, on the contrary, as complementary! (E Pluribus Unum) This would facilitate the task of describing as accurately as possible every linguistic worldview of every culture that has existed or will exist on our globe. However, since it is necessary to distinguish the gradation of concept attributes from the most important to the least important, this very classification (scale of values) still needs to be developed. However, this is a topic for future research and is beyond the scope of this article.

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