

ВАРИАТИВНОСТЬ КОНЦЕПТА “DANGER” В АНГЛИЙСКОЙ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ КАРТИНЕ МИРА

Научная статья

Иванова Е.В.*

ORCID: 0000-0002-1990-3061,

Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Санкт-Петербург, Россия

* Корреспондирующий автор (lisa1810[at]gmx.us)

Аннотация

Цель статьи заключается в описании вариативности концепта опасности в английской языковой картине мира, репрезентированного пословицами и газетными текстами. В результате проведенного сравнительного анализа устанавливаются основные черты сходства и различия пословичного и газетного вариантов концепта. Сходство состоит в идентичности структуры обоих вариантов концепта и типов составляющих ее когнитивов, различия заключаются в большем количестве, разнообразии и большей конкретности когнитивов, образующих газетный вариант концепта.

Ключевые слова: концепт, когнитив, пословица, газетный текст, сравнение.

VARIETY OF THE CONCEPT “DANGER” IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PICTURE OF THE WORLD

Research article

Ivanova E.V.*

ORCID: 0000-0002-1990-3061,

St. Petersburg state university, St. Petersburg, Russia

* Corresponding author (lisa1810[at]gmx.us)

Abstract

The article is aimed at the description of the variety of the concept “Danger” in the English picture of the world, represented by proverbs and newspaper texts. The undertaken comparative analysis results in outlining similarities and differences in the proverbial and newspaper variants of the concept. The similarity consists in the identical conceptual structure of both variants and the type of its constituting cognithemes, the differences lie in a greater number, diversity and concreteness of the cognithemes, forming the newspaper variant of the concept.

Keywords: concept, cognitheme, proverb, newspaper text, comparison.

Introduction

The notion of concept is the key notion of Russian cognitive linguistics, resulting in the formation of a separate area of studies within it, called conceptology. The establishment of this area is fully justified by the vast number of works examining the theoretical principles and approaches to modelling and describing the concept in general, as well as the numerous studies of various concepts in different languages in particular. The cross-linguistic analysis of concepts is especially interesting in this respect, allowing the scholars to reveal common and specific conceptual features. The comparative analysis of concepts within one language picture of the world, based on the variety caused by their peculiar representation in different language strata, also presents some scholarly interest, revealing the dependence of the conceptual features and structure on the specificity of their language representation. In this connection the comparative analysis of the varieties of the concept represented by the paradigm of language signs, on the one hand, and texts, on the other, appears to be promising. Such comparative analysis is in many ways diachronic, for language signs, as it is well-known, contain some knowledge about the world that has largely become obsolete by now, while contemporary discourse supplies us with the up-to-date interpretation of human experience, organised in the form of a structured mental entity, a concept.

The comparative conceptual analysis of this kind can be classified as typological. The typological conceptual analysis is being vastly developed in Russian cognitive linguistics by N.N. Boldyrev and his school, and is based on the functions carried out by concepts: representing, semiotic and interpreting [2, P.17]. It is stated that the differences in the language representation of concepts depend on the differences in their types. The approach discussed in this article involves the opposite direction of the analysis and is aimed at the differences in conceptual characteristics based on the specificity of the concept representation in a language.

Method and Discussion

In the most generalised way a concept is normally considered as a structure of features extracted from the conceptual space interconnected with the semantics of language signs or texts chosen for the analysis. The conceptual feature may be also termed a cognitheme, a propositional unit of knowledge, functional as a constituent for the analysis of any mental construct, verbalised in the language [3, P.57]. The notion of the cognitheme will be used here for modelling and comparing two varieties of the concept “DANGER”, represented by English proverbs and English (British) newspapers.

Proverbs transmit the nation’s wisdom from one generation to another, instructing people how to solve typical problems, and are regarded as a mirror of national mentality. Their survival throughout the centuries is accounted for the fact that there are no radically new situations and problems, and the same situations are reproduced in the life of many generations, with proverbs recommending people how to deal with them [1, P.133].

Newspapers reflect the contemporary understanding and interpreting of this or that “fragment” of reality. They are less connected with the mentality of the people, their purpose often being that of changing the mentality and encouraging the development of a certain outlook on this or that event.

Fear is a very strong emotion, accompanying both an individual and the society as a whole throughout the history. For this reason it is not surprising that the concept of danger, the source and consequences of various dangerous situations have always played a very important part in the worldview of a person and his interpretation of the experience acquired in the process of resisting and avoiding danger. The results of this interpretation and classification of dangerous situations have been conceptualised in language signs and in texts. This makes it interesting to examine the variability of the concept of danger based on the peculiarities of its representation in proverbs and newspaper texts.

Danger awaits the modern man and the modern society as a whole everywhere: in politics, economics, health care, sport, etc. All these spheres are vastly covered by the newspapers. So to make the material for the analysis more or less foreseeable, let us narrow the discussed sphere of danger to the most topical one – the danger of corona virus and the current pandemic.

Results

The main purpose of the comparison undertaken in this article lies in tracing the similarities and differences in the two types of the concept “Danger”, depending on the specific features of their language representation and the functions they realize in the community of native speakers. Thus the task set here is not to describe both variants of the concept in full detail, but to delineate the basic lines of their comparison and its results.

The typical proverbial situation of danger comprises three basic components – the source of danger, the recipient of danger and the potential consequences of danger, including as well the two possible attitudes to the dangerous situation, consisting in ignoring it or carefully avoiding. This situation determines the structure of the proverbial concept “Danger”.

The most significant feature of the proverbial concept “Danger” is its metaphorical character. Most proverbs are metaphors, thus their literal meaning refers to some particular dangerous situation, while their denotative meaning in most cases is a general statement about danger and its aspects. Let us look at the following proverb:

Don't go near the water until you learn how to swim [5]

On the cognitive level of the literal meaning we can outline the cognithemes “water is dangerous”, “to be able to swim is important”, on the cognitive level of the denotative meaning – “a dangerous situation should be avoided, if you are not able to deal with it”, “it is important to be able to deal with a dangerous situation”. These cognithemes differ in the degree of their generality.

Some proverbs though are not based on a metaphor, like a proverb about the danger of the horse, or can be used in the literal sense as well, like some proverbs with the concept of the sea:

A running horse is an open grave. [Ibid]

He that would sail without danger, must never come on the main sea. [Ibid]

Modelling the structure of the concept “Danger” shows that its main components are represented both by concrete and general cognithemes. The proverbial interpretation of the concrete sources of danger concentrates primarily on *the sea, water, sailing* and *fire* with the cognithemes “sea is dangerous”, “sailing is dangerous”, “water is dangerous”, “fire is dangerous”. Other proverbial sources of danger include *the horse, the dog, thunder, storm, thorns* et al.

If you play with fire you get burnt; [Ibid]

He that handles thorns shall prick his fingers. [Ibid]

These concrete sources correspond to various dangerous objects (including a dangerous person) or situations on the cognitive level of denotative meaning, this source being specified in each particular usage of the proverb. The associations connected with the above-mentioned sources could be expressed as “turbulent” (sea), “violent” (storm), burning (fire), prickly (thorns), etc.

The recipient of the danger is an individual.

The consequences of danger are most frequently expressed by the generalized cognitheme “a dangerous situation causes injury”.

The fly that plays too long in the candle, singes his wings at last. [Ibid]

The other cognithemes are “danger causes death”, “danger changes people”.

He that brings himself into needless dangers, dies the devil's martyr. [Ibid]

When it thunders, the thief becomes honest. [Ibid]

The structure of the concept “Danger” also incorporates the cognithemes “danger can be ignored”, “it is better to be aware of danger”.

He that is afraid to shake the dice will never throw a six. [Ibid]

Though the mastiff be gentle, yet bite him not by the lip. [Ibid]

Turning to the analysis of the newspaper concept and its comparison with the proverbial counterpart it is necessary to point out that the conceptual space created by newspaper texts is in the end the result of the journalists' comprehension of various events and phenomena, so inevitably it is mandatory to make an allowance for that while modelling any media concept.

The same components as those of the proverbial concept of danger can be found in the newspaper concept of danger, so the general frame, underlying the conceptual structure, could be concluded to be the same. A big difference lies in the diversity and number of cognithemes corresponding to each component of the structure. Thus, e.g., the recipient of the danger of the virus could be an individual, certain groups of the community, the community as a whole, the country, a number of countries, the whole world. The cognithemes “the virus is dangerous for the elderly”, “the virus is dangerous for the people with breathing problems”, “the virus is not very dangerous for the young” can be traced. The consequences of the danger represented by the corona virus and the ways to avoid this danger are also diversified and very detailed.

The newspaper concept is dynamic, new cognithemes may add to its structure with time. E.g., “the virus can be dangerous for the young”, “the virus pandemic is dangerous for the economy” are adjoined to the above-mentioned cognithemes as time goes on.

The coronavirus pandemic could cause UK economic output to plunge by an unprecedented 15% in the second quarter of the year and unemployment to more than double, according to dire forecasts.[7]

The dynamics of the newspaper concept is also characterised by the changes in the frequency and prominence of this or that cognitheme E.g., the cognitheme “the virus spread must be contained” at the beginning of March referred to the dangerous situations in other countries and was not very frequent, while at the end of March became prominent, being connected directly with Britain.

... Italy, where much of the country is in lockdown to try to contain the outbreak. [4, P. 2]

... during the pandemic, people must have a reasonable excuse to leave their home to stop the virus spreading and resulting in a spike in fatalities. [8]

The proverbial concept is static, though it is possible to assume that a new proverb can contribute to its structure from time to time.

It is possible to find general and concrete cognithemes, but the difference in the degree of their generalization / specificity is not as significant as in the case of the proverbial concept. E.g., the above-mentioned cognithemes, specifying for whom the virus is or not is dangerous, are more concrete and particular than the cognitheme “the virus is dangerous for humans”.

Metaphorical cognithemes can also be found: “the virus is a military adversary”, “fighting the virus is fighting a war” “the spread of the virus is an invasion”.

“His (Donald Trump’s) second such address on Wednesday night was again couched in terms around the need to resist a foreign invasion that is someone else’s fault.” [6]

But on the whole metaphor is not frequently encountered in the representation of the deadly virus in newspaper texts.

The cognithemes of the newspaper concept reflect the views of the representatives from different strata of the society; the governments of various countries and their representatives, the professionals in the area of medicine and related areas, the prominent people and the members of the public, the journalists who interpret the situation, moreover all these views are liable to change accordingly, as the problems the society faces are growing.

President Trump, for example, emphasises the Chinese origin of the virus, which contributes to the cognithemes “the virus comes from China”, “the virus is foreign”.

But to be fair, it is necessary to say that the origin of the dangerous virus is underlined not only in the Guardian’s quotations of the American president’s emotional speeches, but is also mentioned in the neutral analytical articles, which allows us to state that not only the source of danger is relevant for the structure of the concept, but the origin of this source as well.

The important difference in the proverbial and newspaper concepts of danger lies in the fact that in the proverbial concept the core is formed by the general cognithemes related to dealing with danger as such, while in the newspapers the concept of danger is inseparable from the concept of coronavirus and is actually its inherent attribute. In other words, the concept of the virus is the embodiment of the concept of danger for the moment being, its most vivid and versified illustration. In the proverbial concept the particular situations connected with the cognitive level of proverbial literate meanings and illustrating various dangerous situations, thus supplying us with the knowledge, e.g., that in the past the individual feared water and fire, play the subordinate role in the structure of the concept.

It is necessary to emphasize the fact that the newspaper concept under consideration will eventually completely disappear from the human mind and the newspapers, and will be replaced by another concept posing threats to mankind. It will remain as such though in the conceptual sphere of the archived newspapers. The fate of the proverbial concept is better. It will exist as long as the proverbs representing it exist and are used.

Conclusion

The comparison of the two varieties of the concept “Danger” allows us to arrive to the following conclusions.

1. The undertaken analysis reveals that the comparison of the varieties of the concept represented in different language strata, in particular, in proverbs and newspaper texts, can be promising and fruitful regarding its scholarly results. The research has shown the similarity of the conceptual structure in both varieties and at the same time a big difference in the number and diversity of cognithemes, constituting each component of the conceptual structure, and the dynamics of their changes.

2. The important difference between the proverbial and newspaper concepts of danger consists in the fact that while in the proverbial variety the generalized cognithemes form the core of the abstract concept “Danger”, in the newspaper variety the generalized cognithemes are largely replaced by the concrete ones referring to the particular instant of danger the modern world faces – the corona virus. This difference is accounted for by the difference in the function proverbs and newspapers have, the former based on typical dangerous situations, the latter concentrating on the particular danger.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Список литературы / References

1. Барли Н. Структурный подход к пословице и максиме / Н. Барли // Паремнологические исследования. Сб. статей / Под ред. Г.Л. Пермякова. - М.: Наука, 1984. – С.127-148
2. Болдырев Н.Н. Типология концептов и языковая интерпретация / Н.Н. Болдырев // Когнитивные исследования языка. – 2016. - Вып. XXVIII - С.16-25.
3. Иванова Е.В. Пословичные картины мира / Е.В. Иванова – СПб: изд. Филол. ф-та СПбГУ, 2002. – 160 с.

4. The Daily Mail, March 7, 2020.
5. Fergusson R. The Penguin Dictionary of Proverbs / R. Fergusson - London: Claremont Books, 1995. – 331 p.
6. The Guardian [Электронный ресурс]. – URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/11/donald-trump-us-coronavirus-address> (дата обращения: 11.03.2020)
7. The Guardian [Электронный ресурс]. – URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/mar/30/coronavirus-forecast-to-cut-uk-economic-output-by-15> (дата обращения: 03.04.2020)
8. The Guardian [Электронный ресурс]. – URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/31/uk-police-reissued-with-guidance-on-enforcing-coronavirus-lockdown> (дата обращения: 31.03.2020)

Список литературы на английском / References in English

1. Barli N. Strukturnyy podkhod k poslovitse i maksime [Structural approach to the proverb and the maxim] / N. Barli // Paremiologicheskie issledovaniya. Sb. statey [Paremiological studies: collection of papers] / edited by G.L. Permyakov - M.: Nauka, 1984. – P.127-148. [in Russian]
2. Boldyrev N.N. Tipologiya kontseptov i yazykovaya interpretatsiya [Typology of concepts and linguistic interpretation] / N.N. Boldyrev // Kognitivnye issledovaniya yazyka. [Cognitive studies of the language] – 2016. - Issue. XXVIII - P.16-25. [in Russian]
3. Ivanova E.V. Poslovichnye kartiny mira [Proverbial pictures of the world] / E.V. Ivanova - SPb: izd. Filol. f-ta SPbGU, 2002. – 160 p. [in Russian]
4. The Daily Mail, March 7, 2020.
5. Fergusson R. The Penguin Dictionary of Proverbs / R. Fergusson - London: Claremont Books, 1995. – 331 p.
6. The Guardian [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/11/donald-trump-us-coronavirus-address> (accessed: 11.03.2020)
7. The Guardian [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/mar/30/coronavirus-forecast-to-cut-uk-economic-output-by-15> (accessed: 03.04.2020)
8. The Guardian [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/31/uk-police-reissued-with-guidance-on-enforcing-coronavirus-lockdown> (accessed: 31.03.2020)