

ЯЗЫКИ НАРОДОВ ЗАРУБЕЖНЫХ СТРАН (С УКАЗАНИЕМ КОНКРЕТНОГО ЯЗЫКА ИЛИ ГРУППЫ ЯЗЫКОВ) / LANGUAGES OF PEOPLES OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES (INDICATING A SPECIFIC LANGUAGE OR GROUP OF LANGUAGES)

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REFLECTION OF SENSE PERCEPTION IN ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGY

Research article

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Abstract

The research is carried out within the framework of cognitive linguistics. It is devoted to the problem of interrelation between the complex process of sense perception and human language. Its aim is to identify how perception features are represented in English phraseological units. The study focuses on English set expressions with verbs of sense perception or nouns denoting sensory organs. As viewed in the English phraseological system, sense perception appears to be an active process with specific features. Analysis shows that set phrases reflect the most essential properties of perception singled out in psychology: objectness, integrity, selectivity and meaningfulness. English phraseological units also contain the information about perception that is more likely to refer to the naïve worldview: ability to perceive, clarity, attention, duration and direction of perception. It demonstrates that language serves all spheres of human life, regardless of whether they are connected with scientific or non-scientific knowledge. The appeal to perception features clarifies the transformation of phraseological prototypes into stable phrases with fully or partially transferred meaning. Before phraseological semantics develops, sensory physical experience should undergo cognitive processing to be applied to abstract situations. Studying the manifestation of sense perception in language units helps to clarify the complex interconnection between language and cognition.

Keywords: cognition, sense perception, phraseological units, phraseological meaning, the English language.

ОТРАЖЕНИЕ ЧУВСТВЕННОГО ВОСПРИЯТИЯ В АНГЛИЙСКОЙ ФРАЗЕОЛОГИИ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Исследование выполнено в рамках когнитивной лингвистики. Оно посвящено проблеме взаимосвязи между сложным процессом чувственного восприятия и человеческим языком. Цель статьи – выявить, как особенности восприятия представлены в английских фразеологизмах. Основное внимание в исследовании уделяется устойчивым английским выражениям с глаголами чувственного восприятия или существительными, обозначающими органы чувств. С точки зрения английской фразеологической системы, чувственное восприятие представляет собой активный процесс с определенными особенностями. Анализ показывает, что устойчивые фразы отражают наиболее существенные свойства восприятия, выделенные в психологии: предметность, целостность, избирательность и осмысленность. Английские фразеологизмы также содержат информацию о восприятии, которая, скорее всего, относится к наивной картине мира: способность воспринимать, четкость, внимание, продолжительность и направление восприятия. Это демонстрирует, что язык обслуживает все сферы человеческой жизни, независимо от того, связаны ли они с научным или ненаучным знанием. Обращение к особенностям восприятия проясняет преобразование фразеологических прототипов в устойчивые словосочетания с полностью или частично переосмысленным значением. Прежде чем сформируется фразеологическое значение, чувственный физический опыт должен пройти когнитивную обработку, так чтобы его можно было применить к абстрактным ситуациям. Изучение отражения чувственного восприятия в языковых единицах помогает прояснить сложную взаимосвязь между языком и познанием.

Ключевые слова: когниция, чувственное восприятие, фразеологические единицы, фразеологическое значение, английский язык.

Introduction

Cognitive linguistics considers human language in close connection with all cognitive processes, one of them being perception. It is of particular importance to reveal how the way man receives and comprehends information delivered through senses is reflected in the language. In this regard, the relevance of our study is determined by the necessity to describe the complex interrelation between perception of the surrounding world and a particular language.

The aim of the research is to identify how perception peculiarities are represented in the English language, more precisely – in its phraseological system. The objectives of the work presuppose studying perception as a cognitive process and analyzing English set expressions in terms of perception representation in them.

The research focuses on English phraseological units containing verbs of sense perception or nouns denoting sensory organs. The choice is explained by the fact that these words directly refer to the environmental information that we receive through sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. The number of the set phrases considered exceeds 200 units. The source of the research material comprises ten English-Russian and English-English general language and phraseological dictionaries: [5], [16], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23], [24], [25].

The novelty of the work is determined by an attempt to describe the manifestation of essential perception properties in the English phraseological system, where secondary nomination is known to be based on the associative nature of human thought.

Research methods and principles

A significant range of issues in cognitive linguistics is associated with the study of perception representation in different languages. Scholars have carried out research in such areas as language fixation of time and space perception [12], [14], reflection of perception types in language systems [7], [11], [15], etc. Some works dwell on the problems of expressing perception features in the phraseological system of the language [4], [10]. However, this aspect still requires a more detailed coverage.

The theoretical basis of our study, which is interdisciplinary, relies on scientific works on psychology [8], [9], cognitive linguistics [2], [3] and phraseology [6], [13].

Perception refers to human sensory experience of the world. In psychology, it is viewed as the process or result of becoming aware of objects, relationships and events by means of the senses [17]. Scholars claim that this phenomenon involves not only receiving information through sensory organs, but also processing it [1], [8]. Such activities as recognizing, observing, etc. make it possible to organize and interpret the stimuli from the surrounding world into meaningful knowledge [17].

Cognition as a complex form of perception relies on five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Accordingly, it is customary to distinguish five perception types: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory. It is necessary to mention that man's perceptual systems are closely interconnected and complement each other.

Studies show that the essential features of perception are objectness, integrity, selectivity and meaningfulness [8]. The objectness of perception means that the object is perceived as a separate physical body isolated in space and time. This property is most clearly manifested in the FIGURE – BACKGROUND juxtaposition. The integrity of perception is its ability to operate not with individual properties of an object but with the image of this object as a whole, although such an image can be built from separate sensations, sometimes even of different modalities (i.e. visual, auditory, tactile and others). Selectivity is the preferential selection of some objects over others, which is very individual and depends on the perceiver's sphere of activity, interests, etc. Meaningfulness of perception is connected with the fact that perceiving objects and phenomena, a person is aware of what is being perceived [8].

Perception features identified in psychology have been taken into account in the analysis of English phraseological units, which are viewed as stable word combinations with a partially or fully transferred meaning [6].

In the course of the study, the inductive-deductive method, the methods of quantitative calculation and classification, structural-semantic analysis and conceptual analysis were used. The combination of the traditional method of structural-semantic analysis of set expressions with the cognitive methodology made it possible to identify and describe the manifestation of perception features in the studied English phraseological units.

Main results

Visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory types of perception are distinguished according to the predominant analyzer [9, P. 257]. The semantics of 57% of the considered phraseological units are associated with visual perception, 15% – auditory, 11% – tactile, 9% – olfactory, and 8% – gustatory. The data presented can be considered quite indicative of the role of perception types in cognition.

The identified perception types are reflected in English phraseological units by means of either verbs of sense perception or nouns denoting sensory organs.

The most frequently used verbs of sense perception are *see, look, hear, listen, feel, touch, smell, taste*, etc.:

see the light – to understand something clearly at last [21];

look down on someone or something – to regard oneself as superior to someone or something and thus act in a haughty or snobbish manner [25];

won't hear a word said against somebody – refuse to believe anything bad about somebody [19, P. 431];

listen to reason – to listen to, understand, and be persuaded by a rational assessment of a situation [25];

feel somebody's pulse – стараться разузнать чьи-либо намерения, планы (try to find out someone's intentions, plans) [5, P. 607];

touch a chord – evoke a reaction, response, or emotion [16];

smell the roses – enjoy or appreciate what is often ignored [24, P. 267].

taste blood – achieve an early success that stimulates further efforts [24, P. 29].

Phraseological units with nouns denoting sensory organs are quite often characterized by metonymy, i.e. transference based on contiguity “sensory organ” – “corresponding type of perception”:

be all ears – if someone says that they are all ears, they mean that they are ready and eager to listen [20];

be all eyes – look intently; to give all one's attention to something [20].

The two expressions above illustrate a special type of metonymy – synecdoche, which is known to be the transference “part” – “whole”.

Despite the fact that taste is perceived mainly by tongue receptors, no phraseological units with the word *tongue* meaning “taste” have been recorded during the study. This word is found in English expressions related to the process of speaking:

have a sharp tongue – to have a tendency to speak maliciously or critically [25];

hold (one's) tongue – to stay quiet despite wanting to say something [25];

lose one's tongue – to lose the power of speech [20].

It emphasizes the dominant function of the tongue as an organ of speech. However, taste perception is associated not only with the tongue, but also with the receptors of the mouth, this fact being reflected in the English phraseological unit *melt in one's mouth* – to taste delicious and feel soft or become soft when put in one's mouth [23].

English phraseological units represent perception characteristics singled out in psychology and contain corresponding concepts in their semantics.

The objectness of perception is observed in the idiomatic expression of Biblical origin *see the handwriting on the wall* – to understand that you are in a dangerous situation and that something unpleasant is likely to happen to you [19, P. 414]. The handwriting is perceived as a real object. In terms of FIGURE – BACKGROUND relationships, the handwriting here is the FIGURE and the wall is the BACKGROUND.

Objects of the surrounding world can be involved in both static and dynamic relationships. For example, the phrase *keep your eyes glued to something* depicts a static image. If you say that someone keeps their eyes glued to something, you mean that they are watching it with all their attention [20]. Quite a different situation is observed in the expression *you could have heard a pin drop* – something that you say in order to describe a situation where there was complete silence, especially because people were very interested or very surprised by what was happening [18]. The concept of movement is created as a result of auditory perception. It is worthwhile to note that in English-speaking and Russian-speaking cultures, different life experiences are used to refer to the same situation (cf. Russian «слышно, как муха пролетела»).

Integrity of perception is illustrated by the expression *a taste of one's own medicine* – harsh or unpleasant treatment that is like the treatment someone has given other people [23]. The prototype of the idiom activates in mind the situation when a person who prepared a medicine for someone else has to take it himself. What is perceived is the taste of the medicine as a whole and not that of its ingredients. The set phrase *see pictures in the fire* – see shapes and scenes imagined from the patterns of glowing coals in a hearth fire (esp. as a childish, or idle, pastime) [24, P. 455] also proves the integrity of perception: the reflections of fire flames are combined in the observer's mind into a set of images that follow each other.

Selectivity of perception is reflected in the phraseological unit *look at the dark side of things* – видеть все в мрачном свете, везде видеть плохие стороны, быть пессимистом (to see everything in a gloomy light, to see the bad sides everywhere, to be a pessimist) [5, P. 687]. According to the phrase, the observer's attention is focused selectively only on the bad side of things. An opposite situation is presented in the set expression *look on the bright side* – to find good things in a bad situation [18].

To illustrate meaningfulness of perception, let us consider the phraseological unit *wake up and smell the coffee* – to realize the truth about one's situation: to become aware of what is really happening [23]. The meaningfulness of the process is manifested in the fact that the perceived object is attributed to a certain class – a drink that is customary believed to help rise after being awakened. The idiom figuratively compares waking up from sleep with starting to understand what is happening around.

Apart from reflecting essential features of perception singled out in psychology, phraseological units give some additional information about this process, which is not traditionally attributed to scientific knowledge, for example:

1. Ability / disability to perceive something: *have eyes like a hawk* – be able to notice or see everything [25]; *hear the grass grow* – «слышать как трава растет», отличаться исключительной остротой восприятия (to have an extremely sensitive sense of hearing) [5, P. 331]; *(as) blind as a bat* – unable to see well [18]; *(as) deaf as an adder* – unable to hear anything. The deafness of an adder, a type of venomous snake, is referred to in the Bible [25].

2. Clarity of perception / lack of clarity: *see one's way clear* – to be willing to (do something) [23]; *see through a glass darkly* – to have an obscure or imperfect vision of reality (the expression comes from the writings of the Apostle Paul) [22]. This characteristic largely depends on whether there is an obstacle in the process of perception, for instance, the phraseological unit *be unable to see somebody for dust* (used to describe someone leaving quickly in order to avoid something [18]) depicts the image of a person who runs away so quickly that he leaves dust behind, which makes it difficult to see them.

3. Attention / lack of attention in the process of perception: *to have (keep) an eye out for somebody / something* – to watch carefully for someone or something to appear [18]; *keep your ear to the ground* – to pay attention to everything that is happening around you and to what people are saying [18]; *in at one ear and out at the other* – if you say that something goes in one ear and out the other, you mean that someone pays no attention to it, or forgets about it immediately [20].

4. Lasting / short-term character of perception (which is related to attention or its lack): *not to take one's eyes from (off) somebody / something* – to not stop looking at someone or something [18]; *run one's eye over something* – to look at something quickly, often in order to give your opinion about it [18].

5. Direction of perception: *look someone in the eye (or face)* – if you look someone in the eye or look them in the face, you look straight at their eyes in a bold and open way [20]; *look over one's shoulder* – to worry or think about the possibility that something bad might happen, that someone will try to cause harm, etc. [23]; *look the other way* – to ignore something wrong or unpleasant that you know is happening instead of trying to deal with it [19, P. 285]. This characteristic is observed in phraseological units associated with visual perception. In most cases, the concept of direction is specified by a preposition.

Discussion

The undertaken study shows that sense perception characteristics are vividly reflected in the English phraseological system.

First of all, it is manifested in verbs of sense perception or nouns denoting sensory organs being components of set phrases. This vocabulary points out the existence of various types of perception: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory.

Secondly, the English phraseology represents the most essential characteristics of perception process singled out in psychology. They are objectness, integrity, selectivity and meaningfulness.

Moreover, there are set phrases that provide additional information about perception properties. Thus, English phraseologisms can reflect such peculiarities as a person's ability to perceive at all, clarity, attention, duration and direction of perception. These features refer to what can be called "the naïve picture of the world" rather than scientific knowledge. This fact appears only natural, regarding that language serves all spheres of human activity.

The research carried out at the junction of cognitive linguistics and phraseology justifies the introduction of the term "cognitive phraseology" into linguistic usage.

Conclusion

Cognitive studies demonstrate deep connection between human language and all cognitive processes, sense perception being one of them. Information about the surrounding world acquired through the senses is represented in language units.

Viewed through the prism of the English phraseology, sense perception appears to be an active process with its distinct features. Prototypes of phraseological units appeal to these perception features creating certain images which is a starting point to transform them into phraseological units with their specific semantics. So, man's sensory experience undergoes further cognitive processing and becomes a source for understanding other, more abstract situations.

To conclude, the study on how perception is manifested in the language makes it possible to comprehend the complex nature of the relationship between cognition and language.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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