ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКАЯ, ПРИКЛАДНАЯ И СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО-СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНАЯ ЛИНГВИСТИКА / THEORETICAL, APPLIED AND COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS

CONCEPTUAL AREAS OF "SHELL-NOUNS" IN ENGLISH

Research article

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Abstract

The article deals with the cognitive basis for the formation of meanings nouns general semantics (shell nouns) in the process of functioning of the language. Based on the analysis of the existing classifications of "shell-nouns", we selected the following English nouns for more detailed learning: **thing, matter, fact, case, stuff, point, idea, way**, as having the deepest functional potential. In the paper one of the areas of conceptualization, but also indicates a number of meanings, formed on the conceptual background of this field is described. The analysis of dictionary prescriptions of these lexical units allows to identify the most characteristic aspects of the interpretation of their concepts.

Keywords: conceptualization, conceptual field, shell nouns, cognitive matrix, cognitive-matrix analysis.

КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНЫЕ ОБЛАСТИ СУЩЕСТВИТЕЛЬНЫХ ШИРОКОЙ СЕМАНТИКИ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

Научная статья

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Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются когнитивные основы формирования значений именами существительными широкой семантики в процессе функционирования языка. На основании анализа существующих классификаций таких существительных нами были выбраны следующие английские существительные для более детального изучения: вещь, материя, факт, случай, материал, точка, идея, путь, как обладающие наиболее глубоким функциональным потенциалом. В статье описывается одно из направлений их концептуализации, а также указывается ряд смыслов, формирующихся на концептуальном фоне этой области. Анализируются приемы когнитивно-матричного анализа применительно к существительным широкой семантики.

Ключевые слова: концептуализация, концептуальная область, существительные широкой семантики, когнитивная матрица, когнитивно-матричный анализ.

Introduction

Nouns general semantics are considered in line with the structural-functional approach in terms of the semantics of lexical units (A.L. Lenz, D. Boliger, M.A.K. Halliday, R. Hasan, Z. Vendler et al.). Certain aspects of this group of nouns are examined from the standpoint of the cognitive approach (O.K. Iriskhanova, E.S. Kubryakova, H.-J. Schmid et al.).

The name shell-nouns, proposed by H. Schmid [13, P. 18] refer to nouns, that incorporates all the features of a group of nouns, such as **thing, matter, fact, case, stuff, point, idea, way,** etc. These words are a special group of lexemes, which, due to the broad meaning, performs a specific function in the process of nomination. It should be mentioned that the value of such nouns is possible to generalize, because they cannot be interpreted unambiguously. These linguistic units possess semantic uncertainty, they point to a fairly wide class of objects or events, which has blurred boundaries.

Shell noun **thing** is able to hold any one class of nouns. Meanings transmitted noun **thing,** in the examples, are quite diverse and belong to different spheres of human activity. In this case, the wear (Example 1), the support (Example 2) and the cloud (Example 3).

1. An amah was knelling on the floor, the lamp besides, unpacking Kitty's **things** [14, P. 185].
2. The public telephones are built on very thick stone **things** causing difficulty in getting into the box [14, P. 976].
3. Those fluffy **things** in the sky [14, P. 992].

Thus, a kind of semantic nature of those words allows them to be completely different types of names and subjects of various orders of thought, devoid of any connection between them. Similar examples can be given for the English noun **matter**:

1. He was not particularly interested in financial **matters** (subject) [14, P. 724].
2. Have you raised the **matter** (problem) with your union representative? [14, P. 598]
3. In 1914 everyone expected the war to be over in a **matter** (amount) of months [14, P. 650].

As can be seen from the examples above, the meaning of statements is completely retained when replacing a noun general semantics of a particular word. Thus, shell noun possessing lexical abstraction, an idea is not about a particular subject, but on a number of different objects, having both properties, were represented by each of them.

Unlike concrete nouns, backed by knowledge of simple format, it is possible to assume that the knowledge of nouns general semantics is a complex format, the designation of the matrix format in N.N. Boldyrev, which can be represented as a cognitive matrix [4, P. 14]. Cognitive matrix brings together knowledge about different aspects of the same phenomenon.

It is caused by the fact that the cognitive matrix appears as a system of different cognitive contexts which are interactively represented by its components within a single complex concept [4, P. 15]. Relying on the above-mentioned theoretical principles in the study of shell nouns as complex format knowledge implies a particular research method of cognitive-matrix analysis proposed by N. N. Boldyrev [5, P. 34].

Research methods and principles

The goal of cognitive-matrix analysis with regard to shell nouns is to identify the conceptual characteristics of core, cognitive contexts as areas of comprehending these characteristics, to analyze their relationship, and to describe cognitive mechanisms of the formation of senses conveyed by such nouns.

Accordingly, while analyzing such nouns, the techniques of cognitive-matrix analysis are as follows:

1) identifying (through a conceptual analysis) interrelated aspects of unitary, integrative knowledge underlying semantics of shell nouns;

2) building a cognitive matrix of an integrative concept on this basis;

3) describing components of the matrix (as a system of cognitive contexts) that are necessary for the formation of senses of shell nouns;

4) selecting (through the conceptual analysis) main characteristics of shell nouns that are interpreted in specific cognitive contexts;

5) describing cognitive mechanisms of the formation of corresponding senses during the functioning of shell nouns.

Such cognitive mechanisms as specialization, generalization, profiling, perspectivization, conceptual metaphor, inference and configuration are involved in the process of formation of meanings conveyed by nouns. All of them are closely interrelated; moreover, several mechanisms can be typically involved in this process at the same time. While studying problems of formation of senses conveyed by shell nouns, two main cognitive models of the formation of senses can be identified: specifying and generalizing ones.

The initial stage deals with the selection of the cognitive matrix which is the background for the comprehension of shell nouns in the process of their functioning. It includes four main conceptual fields: PEOPLE, NATURE, ARTIFACTS and ABSTRACT NOTIONS, each of them consists of several subfields representing interrelated contexts of understanding. The content of conceptual subfields is defined by a set of characteristics that, depending on the context, are activated in the corresponding subfield.

At the next stage an actuated feature gets in focus of attention, is profiled that provides the basis of semantics of a shell noun used in this context. Then the process of formation of senses conveyed by shell nouns deploys in two different ways: according to a specifying or generalizing model.

Cognitive mechanism of specialization is the basis for clarifying the content of components of the cognitive matrix, on which basis shell nouns are interpreted. This process is reversed, where we can witness a transition from the particular to the general. We consider the process of formation of senses by shell nouns against the background of the conceptual field PERSON. Relying on the examination of dictionary definitions of the notion "person" two main interrelated contexts of comprehending the conceptual field PERSON are specified: conceptual subfields "personality" and "human activity".

The analysis of dictionary definitions of the lexical unit "person" in English helps to determine the following substantial characteristics of the conceptual subfield "personality":

1) a living being;
2) a social being;
3) individuality;
4) a being having consciousness, mind;
5) a social role (a member of society, community, family).

Main results

The following senses conveyed by shell nouns were identified and analyzed against the background of the subfield "personality" of the conceptual field PERSON.

1. Indication of gender identity. Gender division is a key indicator of belonging to one's own sex. It is generally known that the gender identity is revealed through social-defined roles, learned and expected patterns of behavior associated with men and women. Shell nouns, in combination with the various means of the context, can form senses that indicate a person's gender. Let us consider several examples representing the indication of the male gender.

- I tell you, if I am really a male **thing** at all, I never run across the female of my species [15, P. 476].

In the process of formation of the meaning "indication of the person gender" by the shell nouns in example 1 the following characteristics are activated: "a living being" and "a being with consciousness or mind". These characteristics are profiled and form the basis of the shell nouns thing semantics when used in this context. As a result of a cognitive mechanism of concretizing, the given characteristics are specified to the characteristics of "male". At a linguistic level, this is reflected in a prepositional attribute rendered by the adjective male, indicating the gender of a person.

In the example, the formation of meaning occurs on the basis of a generalizing model. The meaning of the shell noun **thing** in this context is formed under the influence of a cognitive mechanism of generalization. The characteristic "adult male" is activated, profiled, and then, under the influence of the cognitive mechanism of generalization, is aggregated to the characteristics of "a living being". At a linguistic level, the meaning formation occurs by means of direct nomination (man).

By the influence of these cognitive mechanisms the configuration of conceptual content has occurred that created the basis for the meaning formation by the shell nouns in these contexts.

2. Expression of the evaluative attitude to a person. The evaluative attitude to the person is a certain way of interpreting reality and reflects the human's axiological picture of the world. The combination of shell nouns with different adjectives provide the extensive material for the formation of such meanings as:

She is a delicate **thing** – dresses always in white; and the sweetest, simplest manners! [14, P. 825]

In the process of formation of the meaning "the expression of the evaluative attitude to a person" by a shell noun in this example the characteristics of the "a living being" and "a being with consciousness or mind" are activated. These characteristics underlie the semantics of the noun thing in the given context. The next step is the profiling of these characteristics that in the future as a result of a cognitive mechanism of concretizing is refined to the characteristics of "female".

The formation of a positive evaluative meaning in this example is based on an individual performance, which is explicated through a descriptive adjective delicate. At a linguistic level, due to the use in the context of a prepositional attribute expressed by the adjective delicate and a subject expressed by a personal pronoun she, the formation of meaning, expressed by a noun thing – a gentle, lovely woman occurs.

Assessment, however, can be both positive and negative. Negative evaluation may be rendered by shell nouns under the influence of certain means of the context:

- And now I can tell all I think about you! You evil, greedy, stupid **thing**! [14, P. 136]

Characteristics "a living being" and "a being with consciousness or mind" are the basis of the semantics of the noun thing when used in this context. Characteristics are profiled by specifying a particular person. At a linguistic level, this is reflected by a personal pronoun You. The prepositional attributes expressed by descriptive adjectives of the feminine gender evil, greedy, stupid have a negative connotation.

Subjective emotional evaluation is contained in the semantics of descriptive adjectives themselves. In contexts of this type, the formation of noun meaning thing occurs under the influence of a language mechanism of direct nomination.

The main factor of formation of sense is a contextual factor that is reflected through the prepositional attributes expressed by descriptive adjectives. The configuration of conceptual content occurs that creates a cognitive basis for the formation of meanings rendered by shell nouns in the given contexts. The formation of sense in the above examples developed in accordance with specifying model.

3. Expression of the evaluative attitude to a child. In relation to a child as a rule we use a phrase consisting of a shell noun thing and an adjective little, and quite often a prepositional attribute, expressed by a phrase with numerals indicating the age:

Connie turned to the child, a ruddy, black-haired **thing** of nine or ten [14, P. 281]; On the other hand, a child of six is a very curious **thing**, and he is already bored in kindergarten to cut out paper circles and sleep during nap time [14, P. 637].

4. Indication of the relationships. To refer to relatives of different sex and age we use shell nouns thing in combination with the various means of context:

This little **thing** is my brother. He is one and a half meters tall [14, P. 314]; Nina's father and mother were from among those very ordinary fathers and mothers, who intend price for their daughters, as for a **thing**, not thinking at all about their true happiness [14, P. 863].

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing, it should be noted that shell nouns are quite specific class of words, distinguished by the blurriness of conceptual content and reference diffusion. Such nouns can indicate a broad class of objects or events, they are inherent in the semantic emptiness and contextual nature, besides such nouns have their nominative meaning, which is just partly desemanticized. Shell nouns are able to "frame" any type of experience that cannot be described with the help of a particular word. They allow you to "encapsulate" the complicated structure of the information in "temporary concepts". These nouns give the impression that the experience that they "encapsulate" as a concept belongs to a class of things, but the nature of their content is temporary and impermanent. The analysis and systematization of the revealed features allow to come to the conclusion that shell nouns present the broad knowledge of complex format, which can be represented in the form of a cognitive matrix of an integrative concept of private character.

The study of the cognitive specifics of shell nouns in English language revealed that a cognitive matrix of a private nature, built on the principle of "core-periphery" acts as a cognitive basis. The core of the matrix comprises a lexical unit of wide semantics. The peripheral region of the matrix forms the conceptual area of people, nature, artifacts, abstract concepts as different aspects of knowledge about the world (cognitive contexts), appealing to which is necessary for understanding the studied lexical units. These cognitive contexts are represented in the structure of the matrix as a set of its components. Multidimensional analysis simultaneously of cognitive contexts and conceptual characteristics makes it possible to systematize the meanings transmitted with the help of shell nouns and to explain the processes and mechanisms of their formation. The classification of meanings formed in the process of shell nouns functioning is represented on the basis of cognitive-matrix analysis and summarizes the results of the study.

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