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ОБ ОДНОМ ПОДХОДЕ К МОДЕЛИРОВАНИЮ КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНОГО ПРОСТРАНСТВА ЯЗЫКОВЫХ ЗНАКОВ И ТЕКСТОВ

Аннотация

В статье анализируется один из возможных подходов к исследованию концептуального пространства, репрезентированного языковыми знаками и текстами. Определяется понятие когнитемы как пропозициональной единицы знания, функционально значимой для моделирования концептуального пространства, приводятся некоторые принципы когнитемного анализа. Когнитема рассматривается как единица моделирования ментальных образований, отраженных в языке, например, таких как концепт, или концептуального пространства, связанного с текстом, и в то же время как единица концептуализации, значимая сама по себе, свидетельствующая о важных для социума элементах знания, находящих закрепление в языковых знаках и текстах. Описывается возможная классификация когнитем, приводятся примеры, иллюстрирующие эту классификацию.

Ключевые слова: концепт, концептуальное пространство, когнитема, моделирование.

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ON AN APPROACH TO MODELLING THE CONCEPTUAL SPACE OF LANGUAGE SIGNS AND TEXTS

Abstract

The paper examines one of the possible approaches to exploring the conceptual space represented by language signs and texts. The notion of the cognitheme as a unit of knowledge in the form of a proposition, functional for modelling the conceptual space, is defined and some principles of the cognitheme analysis are discussed. The cognitheme is considered as a unit of modelling mental entities reflected in the language, for example, such as the concept or the conceptual space connected with a text, and at the same time as a unit of conceptualization significant in its own right, revealing elements of knowledge important for a language community and thus fixed in language signs and texts. A feasible classification of cognithemes is described, examples illustrating this classification are given.

Keywords: concept, conceptual space, cognitheme, modelling.

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Introduction

The latest decades in the national linguistic research were marked by the extensive interest towards the conceptualization of the world reflected in language signs of various structures, as well as texts. Back in the 90-s V.B. Kasevich pointed out the existence of two types of knowledge – language knowledge, i.e. knowledge extracted from language signs, and text/textual knowledge, i.e. knowledge derived from texts [5, P. 99-100]. (It is necessary to make a reservation that we are concerned with verbalised knowledge here, leaving aside, say, social experience knowledge as such, which is not within the competence of linguistics.) Hence there are two basic lines of exploring and modelling conceptual space, in particular, concepts as the focus of many researches – based on language signs analysis and based on text analysis, between which there is no rigid border and which are often combined in one investigation. In modern linguistics there are numerous diversified approaches to the notion of concept, the detailed consideration of which is outside the scope of this paper. In general the concept could be defined as "the fundamental unit of knowledge central to categorization and conceptualization" [8, P. 31]. This definition does not contradict the majority of opinions and is in full accordance, for example, with that given by V.N. Teliya, who regards the concept as all the knowledge about an object extracted from the semantics of the language [8, P. 96]. There is a group of researchers who explore the concept as a mental entity having a multiple representation in different language signs, considered in a paradigm [1], [2], [5], [6]. Other linguists focus their attention on concepts based on a text/discourse [9, P. 11]. These concepts are often more modern and more connected with the contemporary society outlook than concepts based on language signs, which often represent obsolete knowledge of the world. Mass media concepts, e.g., tend to reflect an average contemporary

outlook of this or that stratum of the society [10]. But if a text goes back a long time, it will represent largely dated concepts as well.

As for the conceptual space, it is a wider notion, embracing various conceptual structures, such as concepts, prototypes, fragments of the language picture of the world, the language picture of the world as a whole, etc. This notion is nowadays employed in the works of many cognitive linguists, permitting them to speak generally of any verbalized conceptual fragment, be it the language system as such, a number of texts or one word, cf. [3], [9].

Method and Discussion

Our attention in this article is focused, primarily, on the principles and units of modelling the conceptual space, formed by language signs and texts.

The conceptual analysis often falls back on the notion of the semantic field / nominative field [7]. This notion, though having its origins in structural linguistics, turned out to be nevertheless widely employed for the description of various concepts, thus finding its way into the area of cognitive linguistics.

The paper is aimed at considering another plausible approach to modelling a concept, a prototype, a fragment of the language picture of the world, in other words, the conceptual space represented by a language sign/signs, as well as the conceptual space connected with a text/discourse. Introduced in 2002 by the author of this paper [3] and later developed by other researchers [1], [2], [5], [6], the above approach is based on a cognitheme as a unit of analysis and relies on the cognitheme analysis of language signs. In general, a cognitheme is defined as an element of knowledge organised as a proposition and extracted from the semantic / conceptual space of one or several language signs [3, P. 57]. The analysis depends on the assumption that the semantics of the language sign taken as a whole, including both the

meaning and the literal meaning, as well as the connotation, is reflected into the conceptual space. This conceptual space contains the results of the world perception and interpretation realized by the community of native speakers of this or that language. Thus, to be more precise, the cognitheme analysis is aimed not at language signs as such, but at the conceptual space connected with these signs. The cognitheme was introduced with the purpose of having one unit of analysis for this space and originally used for the exploration of the conceptual space connected with proverbs, but later successfully employed for the description of that reflected by other language signs. As mentioned above, it could be functional for modelling a concept, a prototype or a fragment of the language picture of the world, and its usage could be extrapolated onto the analysis of the textual conceptual space. So the aim of this article is to demonstrate the prospects of the cognitheme analysis as a method of modelling various kinds of conceptual space.

Results

At first let us look at the possibilities of analysing the conceptual space based on language signs taken without any context.

The language signs of complex structure, such as compounds, derivatives with affixes, phraseological units and proverbs, are especially resourceful for the cognitheme analysis, but the conceptual space represented by words of simple structure can undergo this analysis as well.

Let us consider as an illustration of the above the phraseological unit "to put all your eggs in one basket" (to make everything dependent on only one thing; to place all one's resources in one place, account, etc.). The cognithemes in the conceptual space of this idiom are as follows: "eggs are put in a basket", "all eggs can be put in one basket", "to put all your eggs in one basket is dangerous", "eggs are like your resources", "a basket is like an account, a place for your resources, etc", "to concentrate all your resources in one place is dangerous".

Cognithemes can intersect, be part of one another, or differ in the degree of concreteness / abstractness. No aim is set to list all the prospective cognithemes in the space connected with the language sign / signs, the main focus being on the repetitive cognithemes, characteristic of the conceptual space of several language signs, for they reflect the elements of knowledge, which are mostly important for the speakers.

The main questions that could arise in connection with the above are as follows:

1. Is the proposed approach akin to the structural analysis?

2. Is the proposed approach subjective?

3. Does the proposed approach simplify very complex mental structures?

The answer to the first question would be negative because no intention of building a formal rigid structure is pursued, and no such structure results in the course of the analysis.

The answer to the second question is positive, but with reservations. The analysis based on the delineation of cognithemes is no more subjective than any analysis of the language semantics, like the division of the meaning into semes, for example. The only difference is that in this case we singularize elements from the conceptual space, which means moving from the level of semantics to the projected plane of conceptualization.

The answer to the third question will also be positive but again with reservations. The mental structures under investigation have many sides and levels to them, and by using the cognitheme analysis we formalise them and inevitably simplify. But, on the other hand, it is well-known, that we can not study what we can not formalise [6, P. 19], formalisation being inherent to any scientific theory [14, P. 141].The notion of the cognitheme allows us to fall back on one unit of analysis in modelling various kinds of the conceptual space, but does not exclude the application of other methods of research, if necessary.

Cognithemes could be classified in various ways depending on various criteria. There could be outlined, for example, basic, conclusive and interpretive cognithemes [4, P. 30-32]. Basic cognithemes represent units of the basic knowledge acquired at the first stage of ontogenesis and phylogenesis, like "pigs do not fly" (when pigs fly), "a cock crows" (As the old cock crows, so crows the young). They define the integral characteristics of familiar objects, which all members of the society are well aware of. Conclusive cognithemes reflect the knowledge received through the process of further interacting with the surrounding world and then drawing the conclusion, e.g., "it is bad to be idle" (Idle hands are the devil's tools), "a stone can not be thrown far" (at a stone's throw). The interpreting cognithemes are the result of interpreting the experience: "a person who threatens others is like a barking dog" (Barking dogs seldom bite), "a person criticizing the driver from a back seat is like another driver" (back seat driver). There is no sharp border between the three types of cognithemes, especially the first two. The main purpose of this classification is to specify three different types of knowledge they can reflect. There also exist other classifications of cognithemes [1], [2], [5], [6].

The conceptualization of the world embodied in language signs reflects the knowledge in possession of the community of native speakers. It is possible to suggest that the minute units of knowledge represented by cognithemes in the conceptual space of a language correspond to the units of knowledge in the collective consciousness of the people, speaking this language. The investigation of this hypothesis requires the joined efforts of several disciplines closely related to cognitive linguistics – psycholinguistics, psychology, cognitive science, philosophy, and computer science. So far it is possible, for example, to draw a parallel with the propositional structure of human memory [6], which can be in favour of the supposed propositional structure of collective consciousness. Meanwhile it seems justified to conclude that a cognitheme as an element of knowledge is not only a unit for modelling a more complex conceptual entity, like a concept or a prototype, but is also a representation of specific language conceptualization in its own right. This could be demonstrated especially clearly, if we compare cognithemes of two or more languages. E.g., it is possible to find an English cognitheme "a fox can be grey" (The fox may grow grey, but never good) that does not have a corresponding Russian cognitheme, fixed in a language sign. Insignificant though it may seem as a single example, in practice the comparison of common and specific cognithemes of two languages shows the coincidence and difference in the cognition and fixation of the acquired knowledge in a language.

The notion of a cognitheme as both the unit and the purpose of the analysis can be further extrapolated to modelling concepts / conceptual space represented by a text or discourse. In this case cognithemes are extracted from the conceptual space formed by much bigger entities than groups of language signs or just one language sign.

Texts largely reflect the knowledge of the world shared by most members of a language community. But a text can also verbalise a highly individual and original perception of the surrounding world. This refers first of all to poetic texts.

In this respect it is interesting to compare cognithemes encountered in poetic texts with those inherent to the conceptual sphere of the language system with the purpose to trace their interaction.

Let us consider a short poem by D.H. Lawrence "Little Fish" [16]:

The tiny fish enjoy themselves
in the sea
Quick little splinters of life,
Their little lives are fun to them
in the sea.

In the concept "Fish", based on this poem, it is possible to delineate cognithemes, typical of the corresponding concept represented by language signs, as well as individual cognithemes, characteristic of the author's vision of the object. E.g., the cognithemes, coinciding with those that reflect the social vision fixed in language signs, are "fish can be small" (Little fishes slip through nets, but great fishes are taken), "fish live in the sea" (There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it). The cognithemes "tiny fish enjoy the sea", "tiny fish enjoy their lives", "tiny fish are lively", "tiny fish are like splinters", "tiny fish are like splinters of life" form the individual, original part of the concept "Fish", verbalised in the poem. The proposed approach allows us to outline the social and individual aspects in the conceptualization of an object in a more tangible way, than the traditional description of the author's perception and metaphor, pursuing primarily stylistic and literary analysis aims.

Conclusion

To sum up, it is possible to suggest that the subdivision of the language or textual conceptual space into cognithemes should prove useful for modelling cognition and interpretation of the world reflected in the language.

A cognitheme could be regarded as both the tool and the purpose of the analysis. As a tool it is employed to model the structure of a conceptual space. As a purpose, it reflects a unit of knowledge relevant for the interpretation of the world in this or that language.

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