

CONCEPT IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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Annotation

The core layer of the concept is the language of schemes, images, tactile and olfactory imprints of the reality which codifies the concept for intellectual operations. This core part has national and cultural background. With the lapse of time the concept undergoes changes due to the changing worldview. The best access to the concepts, their better understanding and “transmission” are granted via verbalization, i.e., through the language.

Key words: concept, cognitive linguistics, meaning, core.

The researchers of concepts constitute two large, but unequal groups. The supporters of the first smaller group believe that they are semanticists. They treat categories of thought and language as fully identical, relying on the provision that the language sign semantics is the only tool for concept creation. Those of the second group think that the concept is a mental matter that does not arise directly from the meaning of the word, but acts somehow as an intermediary between the word and the reality. Since this approach reflects our outlook on the problem of human understanding of the world around us, below you will find its more detailed characteristics with description of respective provisions (Pesina, Solonchak, 2014). The term “concept” is quite broadly described in the papers on linguistic philosophy and cognitive science. It is more or less generally accepted that, reflecting the volume of human knowledge about the facts and material and spiritual being, thinking uses the basic structured units – the concepts which are created in the acts of cognition. They reflect and generalize the human experience and are comprehended in various activities. In other words, the concept represents an abstract unit used by a person in the thinking process. The individual transforms his/her experience into personal concepts, which are logically interconnected and form his/her conceptual system. The concept is also a combination of information stored in the memory, which ensures adequate cognitive processing of situations, and the system of concepts shapes the routine worldview of the person, i.e., his/her everyday understanding of reality. The philosophical theory of the concepts allows reconciliation of the existing numerous hypotheses and plural opinions of the modern linguists about the essence and functioning of the concept. As G. Deleuze and F. Guattari correctly believe, concepts are crystals or nuggets of the meaning – absolute space forms. The essential properties of the concept are schematically presented by the authors as creation of the concept (it bears the author’s signature and is thus personalized), nondiscursivity of the concept (the concept as a deep idea does not fully belong to the

boundaries of any specific expression), correlation of the concept with any problem (thus allowing intercrossing and mutual coordination of the concepts) (Deleuze, Guattari, 1998).

Nowadays there exist several theories of concepts genesis, which can be reduced to two principal ones – the theory of innate conceptual system and the theory of its gradual acquisition by the person. The innateness theory was proposed by Plato and later developed in Kant's philosophy. This theory has wide support in the modern linguistics. Following Leibnitz and Fodor, many modern researchers stick to a similar point of view: a person is born with the conceptual system that is either complete or capable of auto-development. G. Leibnitz thought that in the brain of every born person there was a definite set of innate elementary ideas, which were latent from the beginning and then got activated and developed, as the person was gaining experience. These innate ideas are so transparent, that no explanation can make them clearer to us; on the contrary, we use these primitive ideas or senses to explain our experience. Leibnitz called these elementary senses «the alphabet of human thoughts» (Leibnitz, 1983: 430]. All complex thoughts or senses are results of various combinations of the simple ones, similar to words and sentences which we can write thanks to different combinations of alphabetic letters. The codification of complex senses in individual words may be different for different languages, because each of them may choose its unique word to denote the given combination of simple ideas. But according to Leibnitz, the proper «simple ideas», which represent the foundation of human speech and human thought, are the same for all people on Earth. Leibnitz viewed the task of finding «notional atoms» as a difficult one that required a lot of time, but anyway, it was solvable. Its solution provided for trials and errors, i.e., lengthy and systematic search of interpretations of as many words as possible, in order to build a large and diverse empirical base and to identify the notions which would be the building materials for interpretation of all those words. That search was based on the requirement according to which the multitude of simple ideas must include only those “bricks” which are really necessary for construction of complex ideas. Everything that can be interpreted is conceptually more complex and must be interpreted; everything that cannot be interpreted (without the logical circle and not on the way from the simple to the complex or from the bright to the shaded), must not be interpreted. There is no other way to search the real alphabet of human thoughts. The theory of innate conceptual system and linguistic abilities is usually associated with the idealistic branch of analytical philosophy, but its supporters may also stand on pure materialistic grounds. It is so because they consider innateness as a result of a special biological code shaped through evolution, and the bioprogram of a person includes the ability to create concepts (think) and speak. A variant of this theory is the experiential realism hypothesis which states that a person is born with a certain ability to abstraction (Lakoff, 1990). However, the authors realize that there are no purely innate notions. Considering the theory of gradual acquisition of the conceptual system by a person, we can mention the concept by Piaget which says that the conceptual system develops gradually. This occurs simultaneously

with the general psychophysiological development of a child (Piaget, 1983). From this point of view, child's staged cognitive development occurs somewhat faster than linguistic development, i.e., understanding of the word precedes its usage

Although at first sight, two theories about the nature of concepts seem quite contrary. Their detailed review proves that they have many common points: both stress unconsciousness of mental processes, both believe that the world structure, as perceived by a person, largely depends of internal mental constructs of high abstraction degree. We can say that the differences between these positions are not absolute, but relative, because representatives of the two schools recognize importance of the certain degree of innateness of the conceptual system and do not deny its ability to develop.

In summary, this paper presents the following essential characteristics of the concept: being the central part of cognitive linguistics, the concept is the sense with emotional and cultural marking, the mental essence responsible for shaping, processing, storage and transfer of knowledge. Therefore, the concept contains emotional, expressive, evaluative components. The concept has nation-specific features, it is the main cell of culture, presumably, it is structured (it can be stratified). The concept can be of various type and different complexity, it has a soft probabilistic structure, its boundaries are indefinite and mobile. As an image, but not as a language structure, the concept can be equal to subjective perception of the reality in a certain time period, however, it hypothetically has the core, the main and the peripheral areas. The substantive forms of the concept are the image, the notion and the symbol; their development is unbalanced, but they are also perceived differently in the reflection about the phenomenon (the word). The core part that is common for bearers of the specific language and culture ensures the communication processes (the core contains prototypic layers, which have the most sensual and visual concreteness, and primary, brightest images).

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