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Metaphors for Language and Speech in Russian and Chinese: a Comparative Study

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Abstract

The study focuses on the ways of modeling the figurative component of the concept of “language” in Russian and Chinese. The concept is represented in lexical metaphorical nominations of speech, talking and the talking person. Basic metaphorical models are defined, as well as the degree of their commonness between the two languages. The ways of specific figurative modeling of formal and content aspects of speech are outlined.

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1. Introduction

The language faculty, being one of the principal characteristics of a human being, is also a means of his/her social, cultural and ethnic identification. This explains the interest that the concept of “language” has provoked among linguists. For example, in the field of Russian language studies two important collections of works have been edited in recent years: “Yazyk o yazyke” (2000) and “Kartiny russkogo mira: obrazy yazyka v diskursakh i tekstakh” (2009). These works represent the results of exploration in the various aspects of linguistic interpretation and formalization of conceptual notions in the language system that manifest themselves in different functional variants and styles of the Russian language. A number of works interpret these problems within the framework of conceptual

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and semasiological studies (N. N. Boldyrev, Yu. N. Karaulov, Z. D. Popova, I. A. Sternin, G. N. Sklyarevskaya, I. B. Levontina).

The research devoted to the concept of “language” has revealed the important role of metaphorical modeling in the general system of linguistic interpretation. This aspect has been the focus of a number of studies (N. A. Mishankina 1998 in the Russian language, D. Yu. Polinichenko – in the English language). However, we do not know of any studies of linguistic representation of the concept of “language” in Chinese. No comparative analysis of the way this concept is manifested in the language worldviews of various peoples has been undertaken yet. Such an analysis would allow to resolve the theoretical problem of the interrelation between the universal and ethnical components in the modeling of key cultural concepts.

In the present article, the authors’ aim is to characterize the interrelation between the universal and the ethnical and the ways of its cognitive modeling. We do it by modeling the concept of “language” in the Russian and Chinese linguistic worldviews.

2. Material

The material of the study is the lexemes that contain the semes “language”, “speech”, “talking” in their literal or metaphorical sense and possess the property of semantic dualism.

The material was collected by applying the method of complete sampling to dictionaries of the Russian and the Chinese language: *Slovar' russkogo yazyka* (1999); *Slovar' sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo yazyka, 1950-1965*; *Sovremennyy tolkovyy slovar' kitayskogo yazyka* (2005). The conclusions that were reached are based on the analysis of more than 1000 lexical units in Russian and Chinese.

We take into account the fact that all elements of the semantic structure of metaphor possess modeling potential. The resulting image (metaphorical meaning proper), reference image (direct nominative meaning which is the source of the metaphorical image) and the aspect that relates the source meaning and the resulting meaning. In the analysis we included the lexemes that have the semantics of a person’s verbal expression. This semantics can have the status of direct nominative meaning (Russian: *sheptat'*: 1. whisper → 2. make soft, murmuring sounds (*Shepchut list'ya*, leaves are whispering); Chinese: *kōnghǎn* 1. cry in vain → 2. only talk without doing anything). Alternatively, the semantics of the lexeme may have metaphorical meaning (Russian: *raskarkatsya* 1. start to croak loudly → 2. start to talk excessively, at length, foretelling unpleasant things to come (disappr.); Chinese: *zhāngzǔi* 1. open one’s mouth in preparation to speak → address sb with a request).

The ability of a linguistic unit to serve as the basis for metaphorical nomination of other linguistic units that belong to other semantic spheres is based, first and foremost, on the figurative understanding of this unit. Its semantics form the symbol of the metaphor, according to G. Sklyarevskaya (1993), the basis of the metaphorical image. Such an approach has proved its effectiveness in a number of studies (Mishankina, 2002, Rezanova, 2003).

3. Method

The present study is based on the theories and methods of cognitive linguistics. The main methodological point is the principle of combining the techniques of structural semantic analysis (componential and distributive analysis) and the techniques of cognitive modeling. The latter include the description of metaphorical models and subsequent reconstruction of the cognitive model of a linguistic worldview. Additionally, in every stage of the study we applied the technique of comparing the linguistic structures of the languages studied.

4. Discussion

The analysis showed that metaphorical lexical and derivational systems of languages that have different structure present common principles of organizing the figurative component of the concept of “language”. These principles are as follows.

The figurative component of the concept is structured when the corresponding cognitive domain functions as a source or as a target of metaphorical mapping. In Russian linguistics the following semantic classes are distinguished, according to the way they characterize speech: 1) its external expression; 2) its content, directed at a)

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