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Lexicon Core and Its Functioning

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Abstract

The critical issues related to functions of words in verbal and mental processes are linked to the problems of the lexicon structure and functionality. A closer look needs to be taken at the theories of organization and functioning of the lexicon as a mental and lexical component of the communication activity. Words representation in lexicon as well as investigations of word semantics focusing on forms of words formation and their functions in memory lead to the theory of lexicon organization.

1. Introduction

In linguistics the opposition of two opinions concerning word functioning in a lexicon is observed. According to the first concept language is presented as "self-sufficient" and "self-adjusted" system which is a mirror reflection of speech. To construct a certain speech context a speaker "inspects" by an internal look the whole language system and makes a necessary choice. Listener, in return, receives this information ready for use and only rechecks it for conformity to the conditions of a speech situation. The essence of this concept reduces to the fact, that a word is represented in long-term memory in the whole system of its meanings (usual, contextual and potential) and their possible combinations ready to be demanded at a speech level.

So when understanding contextual meanings and decoding senses, expressed by a word a speaker "applies" its semantic core to various situations. In his turn a listener uses essentially the same algorithm of a meaning derivation on the basis of the semantic core. During repeated actualizations of different meanings of this or that polysemantic word the abstract components are singled out which form the semantic core.

We believe, that functioning of this interpretational mechanism, instead of a mechanic one (scanning all the

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meanings before finding a correct one) reveals creative character of thinking and speaking activities. This approach explains the possibility of storage of extensive volume of the operative information. It can serve as a basis of functioning of a polysemantic word in a lexicon of a person, providing its semantic integrity.

1.1 Lexicon structure

Initially the term "lexicon" was used to characterize a list of morphemes of a specific language different from a word list. As the ideas of transformational generative grammar developed, some researchers started to treat the lexicon as a component of the generative language model playing an auxiliary role in respect of grammar. The word was defined as a meaningful unit that can be identified in a syntactic chain, and the lexicon was seen as a list of indivisible finite elements regulated by morpholexical rules.

Later lexis was included into the so-called «basic component» of a language along with the transformational rules which operate the original dictionary units. It was believed that inclusion of words occurred in the last phase, when the issue of sentence phrasal markers was already resolved; and the rules of transcription of these symbols lead to their substitution with specific lexemes (according to the categorical meanings of the latter). To make this step, the speaker must recall units reflecting his/her concepts from his/her memory. Thus, one started to treat the lexical component as lexicon, and no special differences were made between the dictionary and its reflection in the consciousness.

Later research stressed that words are means of experience organization, while the set of attributes associated with the word represents its major part. The studies of this kind laid a foundation for establishment of the cognitive approach to be used for analysis of the "brain lexicon". The commitment inspired by C. Osgood to find the internal (categorical) structure of the lexicon and to identify the peculiarities of its development in children had a significant impact on the lexicon concepts. Experimental research results were published with a focus on word's connotative meaning and on the united verbal and cognitive structure. It was mentioned that the lexicon represents one of the most important mechanisms of cognitive processing of information linked to the level of representation and responsible for recoding in two directions: from perceived units – percepts (perceptive and language signs) to meanings and from intentions to the activity program (language or other). The lexicon is rather a process, than «storage». The lexicon contains a very large set of links between signs and codes of semantic attributes (Osgood, 1980).

Since mid-1960s many representatives of generative grammar started analyzing the problem of word synthesis, its assembly from semantic attributes. This meant that a word is not reproduced, but constructed from components. When a concept of a sentence is born, firstly, its semantic representation is generated, then, if a certain configuration of semantic elements coincides with the semantic representation of lexical units, then this configuration is replaced with a phonological form. During that period the mental lexicon (lingua mentalis) was postulated, i.e., nonverbal units of the conceptual system – images, schemes of actions, gestalts, pictures, on one hand, and the language lexicon where concepts and notions have verbal form, on the other hand. The hypothesis that words are synthesized in the lexicon and not simply stored arose from a suggestion that the thought is created in the word, and was not given beforehand. Moreover, the concept groupings are so much linked with the sign language that they do not involve synthesis and exist as gestalts.

Researchers of the Soviet period in Russia lexicon merit to be called cognitive scientists. They believed that there existed the world and its projection in the human brain, and that reflection of the world refracted as a united conceptual system with its images, concepts and notions had a powerful verbalized part (proper lexicon). While the language itself in no way reflected the world, it gave a concept of the latter by verbalizing (symbolizing) individual concepts of the world obtained through active world cognition.

Thus, the lexicon concepts which gained a language form and meaning are used for two functions – representation of the contents of an individual quant of information about the world and for its storage, accumulation and further use. Words help to easily and naturally combine two types of knowledge, two levels of consciousness: verbal and nonverbal. They act as means required, firstly, to detect the object in question from the totality of objects, and, secondly, to identify it verbally in the subsequent speech. A word represents a body of the sign for a concept or a group of concepts, as a carrier of a certain quant of information attributed to its shell in the act of nomination of a respective object. Simultaneously, it acts as an operator which brings to life a chain of complex associations, whatever long, when the consciousness is activated. The operational role of the word also involves "matching" of