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Concept in Cognitive Linguistics and Biocognitive Science

Pesina S.^{a*}, Solonchak T.^b

^a*Metallurgov Pr., ap.11 flat 54, Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinskaya region, 455000 Russia*

^b*Aprelsky St., 27, Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinskaya region, Russia, 455021.*

Abstract

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.

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1. Introduction

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

* Pesina S. Tel.: +79048100806; fax: +7(3519)381669.

E-mail address: spesina@bk.ru

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).

1.1 The contents of Concepts

The theory and description of concepts must separate the contents and the structure of a concept. The concept structure includes the basic structural components of various cognitive natures which form the concept – the sensual image, the informational and interpretational fields. The concept structure is described as a series of cognitive attributes which belong to each of these constituents of the concept. The content of the concept is formed by cognitive attributes which reflect individual properties of the conceptualized object or phenomenon and is described as a combination of these attributes. The contents of the concept is intrinsically structured based on the field pattern – the core and the near, remote and extreme peripheries. Appurtenance to a certain content zone is determined, primarily, by brightness of the attributes in the consciousness of the respective concept carrier. Description represents ranging of the attributes from the core to the periphery from a much to a less clearer attribute.

The concept has a relatively orderly internal structure and represents the result of cognitive activity of the person and the society. It bears comprehensive encyclopedic information about the reflected object or phenomenon, about interpretation of such information by public consciousness and about the attitude of the public consciousness to a certain phenomenon or object. The concept may reflect the level of public perception of a specific phenomenon or an object, but belonging exclusively to individual consciousness, being a certain quintessence of individual cognitive acts, the concept sometimes may not include such information.

In the 90-s of the past century quite a few theories emerged. Along with “concept”, they provided for active studies of “linguocultureme”, “mythologeme”, “logoepisteme” and other similar phenomena. Often the concept was identified as the representation and was interpreted as “algebraic expression of the meaning”, “culture keyword”, “culture cluster in human consciousness”, “a bunch of representations, notions, knowledge, associations, feelings which accompany the word”, “the main culture cell in the human mental world”, “knowledge about the signified in all its links and relationships”. A meaningful memory unit represents structured knowledge quanta of the language sign meaning, named “the seed of the primary meaning”, “semantic embryo” or “notional gene”, “lexeme meaning invariant”, “aggregate complex of attributes that is used for description of the world fragment or a part of such fragment” etc.

As we can see, some of the above mentioned terms cannot be deemed as appropriate, for example, «lexeme meaning invariant». This term provokes a few objections. Firstly, which meaning is the concept (direct, metaphoric, metonymic etc.) and why the same form stands for several concepts? Secondly, if the concept by definition includes all knowledge about the object, why is it invariant? The genetic metaphors like “gene” or “embryo” cannot be deemed appropriate either, because the concept may include quite a complete scientific knowledge about an object or a phenomenon. The term “culture keyword” transfers us from the world of concepts, i.e., ideas, to the world of language. It is obvious, that the concept becomes clear only through the language, but from our point of view, the concept has yet mental nature and is actually nonobservable. Words, word expressions, expanded sentences and descriptions act as means of objectivation and verbalization of concepts in case of communicative necessity. If certain concepts are communicatively relevant and become subjects of regular public discussion, they obtain a standard language unit for verbalization. If not, then they remain nonverbalized, and when necessary, they get verbalized by descriptive tools. The complexity of the concept means that there is a bilateral link between the

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