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## Sociocultural specificity of discourse: the interpretive approach to language use

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### Abstract

In discussions of the relation between language use and culture, it is often assumed that discourse construction reflects ethnic identities and patterns of behavior of its representatives. In the article, however, it is argued that discourse construction depends on contexts of sociocultural knowledge that language speakers activate as representatives of sociocultural groups. In this view, the process of discourse construction involves selection, classification and evaluation of objects within contexts of sociocultural knowledge. It is claimed that discourse construction is knowledge-dependent rather than culture-dependent. This dependence can be revealed by means of cognitive-discursive interpretant method of analysis.

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### 1. Introduction

*Society* and *culture* in relation to language and language speakers have always been of interest and highly disputed in the works of scholars of different academic frameworks: anthropologists, sociologists, cognitive linguists. It is argued that *cultures* constitute patterns of behavior acquired by people throughout their lives as members of a society and transmitted by symbols, values and norms. Traditionally, the word *society* is used to refer to groups of people who have a sense of unity in terms of religious, political, professional, or other identities. They

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form *communities of practice* – a concept that resides in the importance of social grouping not in virtue of shared characteristics, such as workplace or class, but in virtue of shared practice (Eckert, 2000).

Well-known are definitions of culture as “that complex whole” which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 2010), as “communication” (Hall, 1976), or as “the mental programming of the mind” (Hofstede, 2010), as well as universal characteristics of cultures, reflecting their basic functions, such as:

- orienting human beings in life (cultures are made up of learned behaviors and shared by members of a group);
- interpreting the world (cultures involve symbols);
- protecting individuals (cultures are adaptive mechanisms), and others (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2010; Tylor, 2010).

The role of a society in the life of an individual is traditionally highlighted by the following functions:

- providing and satisfying basic needs (in face-to-face interactions);
- protecting and keeping order (within homogeneous societies);
- promoting solidarity and stability (for groups of people).

Cultures and societies set patterns for behavior as well as networks of meanings that regulate our lives. The knowledge that we acquire is highly dependent not only on our psychological and cognitive capacities as human beings but on the sociocultural environment we live in. The knowledge can be verbalized in the process of communication. Thus, discourse as language use reflects our intentions, emotions as well as sociocultural knowledge that forms contexts of it: contexts of professional knowledge, contexts of knowledge about politics, economics, etc.

The rationale of this work is reinforced by the idea that cognition is culture-specific. The argument we present in the paper is that sociocultural knowledge which is obtained as a result of personal cognitive development differs a lot within one and the same group and representatives of different groups and, thus, influences discourse.

## 2. Aim and research objectives

The aim of the work is to analyze discourse as language use constructed within the framework of contexts as sociocultural knowledge structures that reflect cognitive experience stored in conceptual-and-thematic domains, such as: HUMAN BEINGS, ARTEFACTS, NATURE, WILDLIFE, SPACE, TIME (Boldyrev, 2014). The aim is emphasized by the following objectives: to elaborate the notion of ‘cognitive-discursive interpretant’ (CDI); to implement the method of cognitive-discursive interpretant analysis; to estimate advantages of the academic perspective taken in the work.

## 3. Method of study

The method of CDI analysis (Boldyrev and Dubrovskaya, 2015) is rested mainly on the methodologies that are standard in the field of linguistics and cognitive linguistics, in particular. They are empirical, focusing on the meanings and structures of linguistic forms, and are not limited to: *the analysis of interaction of thought, language, and body*; the examination of *linguistic interpretation via corpus-based discourse analysis*; the *experimental techniques of psycholinguistics*; the *simulation* of human linguistic activity in the field of artificial intelligence (Barsalou, 1992; Bergen, 2012; Demyankov, 1994; Evans, 2009; Fairclough, 2006; Fauconnier, 2007; Hart, 2010; Kubryakova, 2012; Lakoff, 2007; Langacker, 2007).

Cognitive-discursive interpretant that represents a process of interpretation and discourse construction involves *selection*, *classification*, and *evaluation* that refer to particular concepts within particular contexts of sociocultural knowledge (Boldyrev, 2012). *Selection* provides profiling, *classification* triggers the assignment of the profiled meaning to groups within a system of categorization, *evaluation* implies assessment within a set of norms, values, and other standards that a participant acquires as a member of a particular socioculture. As a cognitive structure represented by linguistic units, cognitive-discursive interpretant narrows interpretation in terms of a particular

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