The Structural Features of the Concept STRENGTH in the Modern English Language

Tatiana M. Shekhovtseva, Ksenia A. Strakhova, Elena N. Taranova and Yulia A. Razdabarina
Belgorod State University, Pobeda Street 85, 308015 Belgorod, Russia

Abstract: The idea of reconstruction of cognitive structures on the basis of exterior language form is basic in the modern cognitive approach to the language. The aim of the study is to determine the structural features and contents of the concept STRENGTH in the modern English language on the basis of linguistic means of its representation. The methods of definition analysis, contextual analysis and cognitive interpretation were used during the research. The researchers describe some peculiarities of the encyclopaedia field which has a segmental organization and is presented as a set of conceptual signs. One of the segments "Social power" is examined in the study. This segment is actualized by six conceptual features and is the most volumetric component part of the encyclopaedia field of the concept STRENGTH. The concept under consideration is a multicomponent formation with a complicated structure including the core (image component and encyclopaedia field) and the periphery (interpretation field). Nevertheless, a structure and inner organization of a concept is a hypothetic model even if experimental methods of research and verification were used because any concept belongs to the mind and a researcher builds a concept on the basis of some indirect signs of its manifestation.

Key words: Concept, representation, structure, conceptual signs, social power

INTRODUCTION

The modeling of a conceptual structure attracts cognitive linguists' special attention. The researchers concur that concepts have a structural organization which is at the same time defined as relative. This point of view is apparently a result of a dynamic role of a concept in the process of thinking it constantly functions, actualizes in its parts and aspects, joins other concepts and pushes off them. This is the sense of thinking itself (Popova and Sternin, 2003). A widely spread field model of structurization describes concepts in terms of core and periphery with no clear boundaries between the elements of a whole structure. Thus, Boldyrev (2002) asserts that concrete-image features which form as a result of a world perception can be attributed to the core of a concept. Abstract features are secondary with respect to more concrete ones and reflect special knowledge of objects acquired as a result of theoretical, scientific learning.

Sternin (2008) pays attention to the fact that the majority of researchers recognizes image, information core and some additional features in a conceptual structure and comes to a conclusion that there is a certain similarity as to a structure of a concept in Russian scientific schools. But it can also be understood in a different way. Thus, American Linguist Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is sure that the structure of some concepts is systematically inherited from other concepts by means of such specific operation as mapping. Kovecses (2008) who studied emotional concepts happiness/joy believes that their structure includes four basic cognitive components: conceptual metaphors, conceptual metonymies, related concepts and cognitive/cultural models. We will not focus on these theories in the present research.

The aim of this research is the review of structural features and contents of the concept STRENTH in the modern English language.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

During the research the following methods were used:

- The method of definition analysis directed on the finding of the semantic structure of a lexeme-representative of a concept
- The method of contextual analysis which lets to allocate and specify the conceptual features on the basis of elements of sense actualizing at the appearance of a lexeme-representative in a certain context
- The method of cognitive interpretation which lets to model concepts as the units of cognition on the basis of received linguistic data

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Finding out the structural components of the concept STRENGTH, we used semantic-cognitive approach to the research of language and cognition developed by Popova and Sternin (2007).

The results of the analysis of explanatory dictionaries data, encyclopaedias data and the examples taken from fiction and newspapers let us refer the concept STRENGTH to segmental concepts which include image component, encyclopaedia field and interpretation field.

Considering the results of analysis of lexicographical sources and factual material, we consider that the concept STRENGTH in the modern English language is the segment formation with a complex structure and includes the following components:

- Image component
- Encyclopaedia field consisting of four segments
- Interpretation field representing the periphery of the concept

Image component contains perceptual and cognitive (metaphorical) images. Perceptual image reflects the results of perception of a concept referent by senses and is determined with the help of experimental methods. Experimental methods were not used in the current research. Cognitive image is formed by means of metaphorical comprehension of appropriate subject or phenomenon (Sternin, 2008). Cognitive image is rather large and represented by the raw of metaphorical models received as the result of analysis of compatible features of the lexeme-representatives of the concept STRENGTH. Metaphors form the sensual-visual image which fills an abstract concept with concrete image contents (Popova and Sternin, 2007).

Encyclopaedia field contains features reflecting people's experience of cognition of the phenomenon of strength in different situations and characterizes it from different points of view (Sternin, 2008). The results of definition analysis of the lexeme-representatives let to outline the encyclopaedia field of the concept. Considering semantic features of lexeme-representatives of the concept SRTENGTH, we came to a conclusion that they cannot be described in terms of the core and near and far periphery because they disport into four conceptual fields and can be structured as four segments: " Physical strength", "Mental power", "Vital force" and "Social power". In other words, the encyclopaedia field of the concept under investigation has the segmental organization.

On the periphery of the concept is the interpretation field (the totality of cognitive features which interpret the image and encyclopaedical content and represent their practical comprehension by the human consciousness). The analysis of proverbs, aphorisms and popular expressions lets to discover such features (Sternin, 2008).

For maximally full characteristic of the content of the concept it is necessary to determine the set of means which lets to reflect this concept in the language.

As a result of work with Roget's thesaurus the card index of lexical means in an amount of 170 units was composed. They form the semantic space of the concept STRENGTH. The units belonging to other semantic groups and bearing the meaning "strength" on functional level in certain contextual encirclement, bookish, out-of-date lexis, slang and lexemes for which the meaning "strength" is not main were excepted from the research. Thus, the concept is represented by means of such units:

- In the category of a noun: brawn, domination, energy, force, forte, fortitude, influence, power, strength, vigour, violence, vitality
- In the category of an adjective: brawny, burly, energetic, forceful, muscular, powerful, robust, stalwart, strong, sturdy, tough, vigorous, violent, vital

The definition analysis of the selected lexeme-representatives lets to represent the contents of the concept in such a way in which it is reflected and fixed in the language. The lexemes strength, force and power are the most representative and presented in all four segments of semantic space of the concept under consideration. In the category of adjective the word strong has the widest semantic. These lexemes entirely cover the semantic space of the concept STRENGTH which means that they can be called key-lexemes.

The next stage of the work is cognitive interpretation of the results of description of the semantics of language units which lets to move from semantic to conceptual features to "transfer language data into cognitive data" (Popova and Sternin, 2007).

According to Popova and Sternin (2007), conceptual features differ by the degree of brightness in native speakers' mind and are organized in the conceptual structure by the field principle. However, after the analysis of lexicographical and empirical data, we join Boldyrev (2002) point of view according to which in the interposition of the conceptual features there is no strict sequence and it has individual character as far as, it depends on the conditions of concept formation at each

person's mind. Nevertheless, it seems convincing that the usage of experimental methods and statistic analysis lets to rank conceptual features taking into the account their brightness in native speakers' mind as it is shown in the works by Popova and Sternin (2003, 2007).

Conceptual features form the content of a concept. Let us demonstrate, the process of distinguishing and describing conceptual features by the example of the segment "Social power".

In this example strength is represented as the ability of one person to influence another person. We call it social power because it manifests itself only in a society and has the forms of management, organization, control and domination as well as its own methods: authority, right, violation, persuasion, manipulation. Such interpretation of strength correlates with the concept of power.

To reconstruct this segment it needs to specify its lexeme-representatives: power, powerful, strength, force, forceful, influence, domination which have the integral semantic feature "power" in their semantic structure. The widest semantic among the members of this synonymic raw has the lexeme "power" whose main features can be divided into two groups. The first group is formed around the feature "ability, opportunity of the object/subject". It is necessary to define here such features as:

* The ability or capacity to perform or act effectively; strength or force exerted or capable of being exerted; might (Anonymous, 2000a)
* Physical force or strength (Dictionary MSN Encarta)
* Faculty, skill, or ability; all the abilities of a person's body or mind (plural) (Dictionary MSN Encarta)

The second group is formed on the basis of the general feature of "possibility of subject/object of sociocultural reality". The semantic features referred to this group can be united with the help of integral component "right, control, authority, influence": a person or thing having great influence, force, or authority (Anonymous, 2000b); the ability to control people or things; control and influence over other people and their actions (Dictionary MSN Encarta); special authority assigned to or exercised by a person or group holding office; legal ability or authority (Anonymous, 2000b).

The results of definition analysis were added by the contextual analysis. It is important to note that while carrying out the contextual analysis the examples of both metaphorical and non-metaphorical combination of words were found out. Taking into account the fact that "compatibility of a name reflects both logical, rational

relations of its designatum with others and illogical, irrational, reflecting emotional and estimated perception of the world by the person" (Cherneyko and Dolinskiy, 1996), we refer the derived characteristics to different structural components of the concept. In particular, conceptual features allocated on the basis of examples of non-metaphorical compatibility (reflecting real, logical relations) form an encyclopaedia field of the concept STRENGTH. Conceptual metaphors found out with the help of the analysis of metaphorical combination of lexeme-representatives form image component in the structure of the concept under study.

Basing on semantic features of the lexeme-representatives found out with the help of definition analysis and considering data derived during the processing of factual material, we have settled following conceptual features relevant for this segment:

* Moral influence, authority
* High social status, influence, wealth
* Management, control
* Domination, rule, suppression, compulsion
* Rights, authorities
* Strength of word

We present the principle of our work by the example of one of them.

Conceptual feature "domination, rule, suppression, compulsion": Power in the most general sense is an ability to have impact, to influence. Riker (1964) distinguishes two types of power conceptualization: other-oriented conception considers power as an ability to control actions of other social subjects, whereas ego-oriented conception represents power as a possibility of a certain result achievements (for example, quick decision making) (Riker, 1964) which in the research corresponds to a phenomenon of internal mental strength of a person. It is obvious that within this conceptual feature it is appropriate to consider power phenomenon from the point of view of other-oriented conception where the concept of power intersects with the concept of authority.

Power in fact is the opportunity to impose one's will on others despite resistance, the right to lay under obligations and to force to actions. As follows from examples, imperious relations objectify in the sphere of interpersonal relations: with interaction of adversaries, opponents (1); in the relationship between a man and a woman (2) (3); in the sphere of family relations, including the scheme "senior-junior" (4); in business and professional spheres (9):

1   His brush with John soothed him; it was always satisfying to the senses to wield power (www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk)

2   Eve enjoyed the power she had over their bodies (Sheldon, 2005)

3   He wanted to gain her total submission and she knew that it was not beyond his power (www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk)

4   "The power of the uncles" from which Leonard suffered in adolescence, obtruded itself on the maturing boy (www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk)

5   Douglas's brutality epitomizes racial, cultural and sexual domination in its most callously direct form (www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk). Combinability with the adjectives racial, cultural, sexual actualizes corresponding spheres of domination

The verbs with prepositions to rebel against (6), to protest at (7) explicit active attitude to such adverse factor as domination. Thereby this conceptual feature also actualizes a conflict situation:

6   Engle concludes that all the heroes rebelled against female domination (www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk)

7   On International Women's Day, over a hundred women arrived to protest at the male domination of the event (www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk)

8   History involves the development of exploitation, or the domination of one group by another so that the dominant group can appropriate to itself the surplus value obtained from the labour of the other (www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk). The lexeme exploitation in this example is defined by paronymous lexemes domination and dominant. It is obvious that the conceptual feature "violence" is also implied here

9   Men's habit of working through power and domination doesn't work in a more personal environment (www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk). In this case, power and domination probably imply striving for superiority which according to psychologists is more peculiar to men than women

In general, the lexeme domination is mainly presented in combination with adjectives which explicit the sphere of domination of a specific person/group of persons: man's domination of nature, Hitler's domination, parental domination:

10 It drove me mad to think that I and all that I held most dear should be in the power of such a man as this (Doyle, 2004)

The attitude toward power as a container is found in the research by American anthropologist McIntosh (2014) whose opinion is that power represents a certain asymmetry in distribution of privileges, resources, knowledge and the subject and object of the imperious relations are included in special "force fields" which make this formation of power (www.cogweb.ucla.edu/Culture/McIntosh.html/). The word-combinations with prepositions to be in/beyond smb's power (3) (10) to have power over smb (2), to be under smb's domination are metaphorical and are members of image component of the studied concept structure.

CONCLUSION

The segment "Social power" considered by us is actualized by six conceptual features and is the most volumetric component part of the encyclopaedia field of the concept STRENGTH. On the one hand, it can be an indication of the significance of the power phenomenon for society which received in this regard a wide language objectivization. On the other hand, the phenomenon of social strength is expressed externally, it can be observed which somewhat simplifies the cognitive interpretation stage of language material.

In its ontological nature power is a complicated, multidimensional phenomenon and this fact is reflected in the contents and in the structural organization of the corresponding concept. We determined that the concept STRENGTH in the modern English language is a multicomponent formation with the complicated structure including the core (image component and encyclopaedia field) and the periphery (interpretation field). Nevertheless, a structure and inner organization of a concept is a hypothetic model even if experimental methods of research and verification were used because any concept belongs to the mind and a researcher anyway builds a concept on the basis of some indirect signs of its manifestation. In other words, any model of a concept is only a research model, some approximation to a concept as to a mental unit.

REFERENCES

Anonymous, 2000a. American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. 4th Edn. Houghton Mifflin Company.

Anonymous, 2000b. Webster's New World College Dictionary. Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Boldyrev, N.N., 2002. Kognitivnaya semantika: kurs lektsiy po angliyskoy filologii. Tambov: Izdatelstvo TGU imeni G.R. Derzhavina (In Russian).

Cherneyko, L.O. and L.A. Dolinskiy, 1996. Imya SUDBA kak obyect kontseptualnogo i assotsiativnogo analiza. Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta, 6: 20-41. (In Russian).

Doyle, A.C., 2004. The adventures of Sherlock Holmes. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books.

Kovecses, Z., 2008. The conceptual structure of happiness. Studies Across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, pp: 28-40.

Lakoff, G. and M. Johnson, 1980. Metaphors We Live By. The University of Chicago Press.

McIntosh, J., 2014. Cognition and Power. [Online] http://www.cogweb.ucla.edu/Culture/McIntosh.html.

Popova, Z.D. and I.A. Sternin, 2003. Ocherki po kognitivnoy lingvistike. Voronezh: Izdatelstvo VGU (In Russian).

Popova, Z.D. and I.A. Sternin, 2007. Semantiko-kognitivniy analiz yazyka. Voronezh: Izdatelstvo "Istoki" (In Russian).

Riker, W.H., 1964. Some Ambiguities in the Notion of Power. Am. Political Sci. Rev., 58: 341-349.

Sheldon, S., 2005. Master of the Game. New York: Warner Books.

Sternin, I.A., 2008. Makrostruktura kontsepta. Kemerovo: KemGU, pp: 100-106 (In Russian).