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COGNITIVE SIGNIFIED AS MENTAL REPRESENTATION OF REALIA

Abstract

The article studies the conceptualisation of the worldview, where language, as the system of signs and, hence, a means of cognition, is of high importance. Understanding the sign as a unity of the signifier and the signified, the research is focused on the latter, since it is not limited only to the reflection of objects, situations of objective reality, but also to displaying the observed, experienced, various phenomena of the person's inner world and speech activity. Due to the nature of information, the signifieds can be classed in cognitive, communicative, evaluative, exclamatory, and relational, where cognitive is the most essential since it is the basis of the communication content, a cognitive model which contains the knowledge of the speakers about the classes of realia. Thus, the cognitive signified is studied in terms of cognitive semantics, which describes the meaning as a result of categorisation and conceptualisation of the world by representatives of a particular culture and covers the experience, feelings, which may not correspond to the real situation. Hence, the cognitive signified is the frame for reflecting objective and subjective reality, being the result of cognition of individual realia in certain forms of human thinking.

Keywords: linguistic sign, signifier, signified, cognitive, frame, cognitive model, objective reality, subjective reality.

Introduction

Topical linguistic issues have always been included in the philosophical structure of any epoch and school since language is an integral component of life, a means of interpersonal communication, reflection, and cognition. It is the language, from the times of antique philosophy, that has been the linking chain in the systems "man-world" and "man-man". All this accounts for the unquenchable interest in philosophical studies of language carried out in the last century by many outstanding researchers like D. Austin, P. Strawson, P. Florensky, G. Shpet, O. Losev, M. Bakhtin, and others.

Since ancient times, philosophers (Plato, Aristotle) have been the authors of numerous scientific works, where language, as a social formation, is regarded as a system of signs (Hlukhoman, 2006). Thus, a sign is a material, sensory

object that enters the process of cognition and communication as a substitute (representative) of another item and is used to obtain, store, converse, and transmit information.

In the scientific paradigm, there traditionally exist two opposing views on the structure of the sign. Some researchers consider the sign a one-sided unit, claiming the sign possesses only a plane of expression. This group of scientists is represented by such prominent philosophers and linguists as R. Carnap, L. Bloomfield, L. Reznikov, A. Vetrov, V. Panfilov, A. Zinoviev, O. Losev, O. Melnichuk, T. Lomtev, V. Solntsev, Z. Popova and others. In their opinion, a sign is always associated with meaning, but the meaning is not included since it is a fact of consciousness, a perfect reflection of the phenomenon of reality. This theory of the sign is generally known as unilateral.

However, F. de Saussure, L. Abrahamian,

I. Narsky, Yu. Stepanov, V. Zvegintsev, V. Kodukhov, etc., consider a linguistic sign as a two-sided unit with the plane of expression and plane of content, i.e. meaning. Due to these scientists, a sign without meaning loses its sense; a sign without meaning is not a sign. Hence, a sign is an organic unity of two parts; it is a union of meaning and its bearer (I. S. Narsky), that is, a concept and an acoustic image. The considered theory of a sign is generally acknowledged as bilateral.

In his fundamental work “Course in General Linguistics”, F. de Saussure suggests that the sign has two components: the signifier (or “sound-image”) and the signified (or “concept”). The signified and signifier, due to de Saussure, are purely psychological. They are form rather than substance. Nevertheless, contemporary researchers focus their attention on the ideas of L. Hjelmslev, who considers the signifier as material form (something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted) and the signified as a mental concept. So, a linguistic sign is to be regarded as a link between a concept and a sound pattern.

Following researches, aimed at investigating the linguistic sign proper, we can’t but mention the works by outstanding American philosopher Charles Peirce (1985), who proposes his classification of the sign based on relations between the signifier and the signified. This typology emphasises the different ways in which the sign refers to its object. So, the philosopher distinguishes icons (physical resemblance to the signified), indexes (the connection between signifier and signified), and symbols (no resemblance to the signified). Such an approach establishes an essential relationship between the main semiotic categories from sign to symbol, where the sign is represented by a universal principle of perception and understanding of the world by man, and the symbol is understood as a unit of culture. Thus, the sign becomes included in all spheres of human life and a condition for the existence of not only a person but also the entire society as a whole, since the perception and understanding of

the world by man occur through the sign.

The classification suggested by Peirce is the division of the signifiers, whereas there is no classification of the signifieds. So, the objectives of the article are to investigate the existing classifications of the signifieds, study their types and study how these types influence the cognition of the world.

The main research methods are determined by the objectives of the article. The general scientific methods applied – observations, induction, deduction, analysis, taxonomy – have contributed to comprehending the signified due to the nature of information expressed. The descriptive method has been applied for the general description of the constituents of the linguistic sign – signifier and signified. The methodological basis of the study is the dialectical approach (while considering the sign and its constituents, their interrelation as the basis for semiosis) and the anthropocentric approach, which presupposes the orientation of language on a person and his world view.

The Signifieds: The Informational Correlates of the Signifiers

The signifieds (in different conceptions – significations, designates, concepts, meanings, sense, semantics) of the linguistic signs in the broad sense are their meanings in the language system, representing various information about the objective and subjective reality, the speaker’s attitude to it, aspects of speech acts and statements, that is, the signifieds are the informational correlates of the signifiers.

The signifieds of linguistic signs are very diverse and not limited only to the reflection of objects, states, situations of objective reality. They also display the observed, experienced, various phenomena of the inner world of any person and speech activity, which are no less important for a person and his communication than only objective reality.

It is well-known that the totality of all the sig-

nifieds in a language constitutes its semantic system, and the diversity of the semantic system of each language is traced in the formation of a new lexical sign, in particular in the selection of those features of its denotation that already have a sign (signifier) and serve as a motive for the nomination of a new lexical meaning (an internal form of the word). The internal form of the word, according to the observation of M. Shelyakin (2005), states the reason for the sound form of the word, demonstrating the correctness of the choice of a particular signified for the signification (p. 131).

The semantic system, as M. Shelyakin suggests, is specific for each language since it reflects the linguistic picture of the world of its speakers. However, this reflection in lexical meanings does not relate to the scientific picture of the world but reproduces the usual “naïve” everyday ideas of native speakers about the world around (Shelyakin, 2005, p. 132).

The semantic structure of language, the researcher suggests, is determined by the relationship between subjective reality and forms and processes of thinking and reflects the orientation of a man in the world, his knowledge, thinking, attitude to the world, self-knowledge, physical, physiological, emotional states, intentions, mental and speech processes, i.e. the structure and levels of subjective reality, processes and forms of thinking (Shelyakin, 2005, p. 132). The holistic structure of consciousness comprises structural levels (Shelyakin, 2005, p. 132), generalised phenomena of subjective reality, associated with various physiological mechanisms, to which M. Shelyakin includes:

- semantic, i.e. epistemological level that reflects certain phenomena and relations of objective and subjective realities;
- formal level, representing such forms of reflection as feelings, perceptions, ideas, concepts, judgements, emotions, dreams, aesthetic experiences, etc.;
- axiological, i.e. the level of truth/falsehood as a directive onto the adequacy of knowledge

about reality; estimation of reality in terms of the “I” significance (positive, negative, indifferent);

- communicative-pragmatic, or the level of the activity-volitional vector (purposefulness, intention, projection into the future).

It should be noted that the semantic system of language reflects all these levels of consciousness.

In terms of the nature of information, expressed by the signified as a constituent of a language sign, M. Shelyakin (2005) distinguishes:

1. cognitive;
2. communicative;
3. evaluative;
4. relational (p. 133).

A cognitive signified, according to M. Shelyakin (2005), is “the basis of the content of any communicative information, since it reflects the classes of objects, phenomena, states, properties, relations, situations of objective and subjective realities, identified by certain features” (p. 133).

The correlate of a communicative signified is information about the communicative attitudes of the speaker and the nature of the information organisation of the message (the value of narrative, interrogative intonation, logical emphasis) (Shelyakin, 2005, p. 138). Such type of signified reflects the speech actions and behaviour of the speaker and does not mean the result of knowledge of individual realia in logical forms. By its nature, this is a special signified associated with the communicative activity of the speaker (Shelyakin, 2005, p. 138).

Another type of signifieds – evaluative – contains the evaluative attitude of the speaker towards the denotation.

In the semantic system of language (Shelyakin, 2005), there are also relational signifieds that reflect mental operations to establish connections and the relationship between the components of events and the events themselves. These include conjunctions, negative particles, etc., which are also not cognitive because they do not reflect the operations of human mental activity.

Unfortunately, none of the domestic or foreign scholars has further developed Shelyakin's position on the differentiation of the signifieds in view of the information that they contain. In our deep conviction, such a classification enables us to understand the content of communicative information.

The Cognitive Signified as a Framework for Communication Content

Following the structural levels of human consciousness, reproduced by the semantic system of a language, considering the types of the signifieds of the linguistic signs and the actual nature of information, its worth mentioning that the meaning of any linguistic sign is the essence of language, which establishes the relationship between the word and the phenomenon, the subject. Consequently, the cognitive signified is the characteristic of the communication content.

The cognitive signified is revealed through the prism of frame semantics (cognitive semantic modelling of language) and makes it possible to model the principles of structuring and reflecting human experience fragments, knowledge in the meanings of language units, as well as to determine ways to activate general knowledge, which provides understanding in the communication process. Subsequently, in frame semantics, the meaning of a word is associated with a frame, which is used to denote different types of structures – frames, schemes, scenarios (Popova & Stermin, 1999, p. 3; Selivanova, 1999, p. 56; Petruck, 1996, 2013; Fillmore & Baker, 2009).

Following the traditional approaches, frame – is a system of correlated concepts, so that to understand any of them, you need to understand the whole structure into which this concept is included (Fillmore, 1987; Zhabotinskaya, 1999).

An outstanding scholar Charles Fillmore (1977, 1982, 1985, 1987), regarded the frame as a tool for describing and explaining lexical and grammatical material, arguing that between lexical units and frames, there is a connection. The

researcher considers the frame from three points of view:

1. from the actual linguistic aspect as a choice of language tools associated with typical situations;
2. from the cognitive plane as a unified framework for knowledge;
3. from the cognitive-linguistic dimension as a cognitive structure, knowledge associated with concepts realised in words (Fillmore, 1977).

Based on the position of Charles Fillmore, the contemporary researchers suggest interpreting the frame as follows:

1. a unit of knowledge, organised around a concept, containing data about the essential, typical, and possible for this concept within a particular culture (Boldyrev, 2000; Dejk, 1989);
2. data structure for the presentation of stereotypical situations (Minskiy, 1978, pp. 249-338);
3. the type of cognitive model representing knowledge and thoughts associated with specific situations, the structure of knowledge connected to a large number of areas, associated with a particular linguistic form (Boldyrev, 2000).
4. cognitive structure existing in the phenomenological field, based on typical situations and on relations between real and hypothetical objects (Levickiy, 1998, p. 168).

So, the cognitive signified is a frame, where realia get their explication. The basic frames include subject, action, possessive, identification and comparative frames, representing initial, most generalised principles of categorisation and organisation of verbalised information concerning the objects of the world, their properties and relations between them (Zhabotinskaya, 1999). Frames reflect the world in a simplified form, being images of physical and socio-cultural reality, allowing the communicator to more or less adequately interpret people's behaviour. Propositions, which comprise different types of frames, are a particular form of knowledge representa-

tion, the basic cognitive unit of information storage playing an essential role in the generation and interpretation of speech activity.

So, a cognitive signified is a cognitive structure, a cognitive model since it contains the knowledge of native speakers about the classes of realia and communicative situations of reality, which form the lexical meaning of words, the syntactic meaning of constructions, the meaning of grammatical and derivational morphemes (number, tense, aspect, case, etc., verbal prefixes, noun suffixes, etc.) (Shelyakin, 2005, p. 133).

The signified of this type is the result of the cognition of certain realia of world around in specific forms of human consciousness (concepts, judgements) and processes (comparison, analysis, synthesis, classifications, abstractions, generalisations) by particular language speakers.

Thus, lexical signs of the cognitive type have signifieds and constant assignment to certain realia. The cognitive meaning of a language sign always captures certain features of the reflected realia that are revealed in its interpretation. It is a mediator of the independent nominative designation of the denotations proper, named not directly by a sign, but by a fixed meaning. Between the denotation and the cognitive meaning of the sign, writes M. Shelyakin (2005), there is no direct correspondence: the same denotation can have

different cognitive meanings, highlighting its different aspects.

Thus, the linguistic sign of the cognitive type is related to the meaning of the corresponding denotation, and vice versa – the denotation in the language is reflected in the meaning and has its name, which corresponds to the name of the signified. This is represented in G. Frege’s triangle (1977), the vertex of which is a sign, and its base is a line connecting the denotation with the meaning, where meaning (concept) corresponds to cognitive signified.

Cognitive signifieds, in addition to frame semantics, should be studied in terms of cognitive semantics, which describes the meaning as a conventional result of categorisation and conceptualisation of the world by representatives of a particular culture and covers the experience, feelings, the knowledge that may not correspond to a real situation (M. Johnson, G. Lakoff, C. Fillmore) (Selivanova, 2006, p. 263), i.e. with the help of concepts. As a unit of cognition of the world, the concept can have varying degrees of information content, remaining a holistic entity capable of replenishing, changing, and transmitting human experience.

We can graphically confirm our previous conclusion in the following figure:

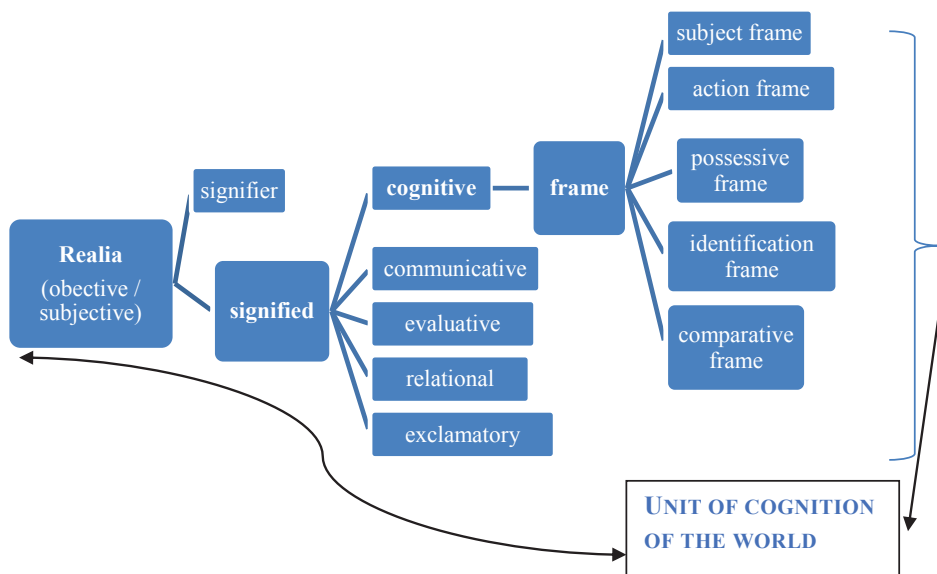


Figure 1. The model of mental representation of realia.

Conclusion

So, the signified of the linguistic sign represents various information about the objective and subjective reality, aspects of speech acts and statements, signified is the informational correlate of the signifier. Due to the nature of the information, the signified can be classified into various types, where the most important is cognitive. It is the foundation of communication content and can serve as a model to display human experience.

Consequently, the cognitive signified is a frame displaying classes of objects, phenomena, actions, situations of objective and subjective reality, separately isolated according to certain criteria (Figure 1). Signified of this type is the result of cognition of individual realia in certain forms of human thinking.

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