

Published by the decision of the Scientific Council
of Khachatur Abovian
Armenian State Pedagogical University



Department of Philosophy and Logic
named after Academician Georg Brutian



W I S D O M

1(21), 2022



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YEREVAN – 2022

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

FIELD STRUCTURE OF THE VALUE CONCEPT “KINDNESS”
IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
(BASED ON THE BRITISH MEDIA TEXTS)

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to structurize the concept of KINDNESS representing a part of the British value system. The research is conducted on the basis of media texts evincing the most dynamic source of creating and developing social values.

The analysis of language facts proves that the given value concept represents a complicated structure including nominative, informational and interpretative fields.

The nominative field is represented by the basic lexeme *kindness* and its synonyms. Semantic components acting as cognitive features of the concept KINDNESS form its informational field, namely in the British media texts.

Special attention is focused on the analysis of the interpretative field that consists of several spheres, among which most axiologically explicant stand out the utilitarian and evaluative spheres. The cognitive features of the utilitarian sphere of the concept are associated with the peculiarities of manifestation and goal-setting of kindness, while the evaluative sphere is determined by combinatory facilities of the lexeme *kindness*.

Keywords: value concept, axiological component, field structure of the concept.

Introduction

Spiritual life is the most important social and philosophical problem. It determines relationships between the world and society, where basic spiritual values play a key role. They reveal people's ideological and vital interests, satisfy their spiritual needs, direct and permeate human activity in all spheres.

Kindness is one of the major and universal spiritual values. It is considered as a spiritual and moral quality, desire and ability of a person to demonstrate his/her goodness (The Teacher's Encyclopedic Dictionary “The Fundamentals of the Spiritual Culture”). The latter is understood as a person's adequate attitude to his affairs, other people and the surrounding world (Koval, 1997, p. 280). As a psychological phenomenon,

goodness is seen as something “good, pleasant and useful” and, therefore, valuable, done for the sake of another person in specific living conditions (Brazhnikova & Zuzya, 2011, p. 35), conscious activity and behaviour.

Kindness is a component of the value system, which is determined by mental representations of a particular nation. They are fixed in the language and realized in the discourse in the form of value concepts. The given concepts designate universal and specific features of communication and activity of the nation and reflect the gist of mental axiology (Erofeeva, 2010, p. 26).

Social and cultural values, new and traditional, are primarily propagated by media texts. They contribute to the national picture of the world and determine value priorities of the social, political and spiritual life of the nation. This research

is based on the material of more than 200 articles (900,000 p.c.) selected from the high-quality British newspaper “The Independent” (2018-2021) and English lexicographic sources.

Theoretical Framework

A significant part of the information about the surrounding world comes through the linguistic channel. We can say that we do not live in a world of things but in the world of concepts that we create to meet intellectual, spiritual and social interests and needs. Representing a micromodel of a culture, a concept creates it and at the same time is created by it. Being “a cluster of culture”, a concept conveys extralinguistic and pragmatic information (Stepanov, 1997, p. 40), experience and understanding of the world, thus moulding the conceptual field of the human mind.

Nowadays, scholars are particularly interested in value concepts, considering them to be “keys” to the disclosure of living conditions, stereotypes, norms and rules of behaviour of representatives of national cultures. Value makes up the core of any concept employed for culture study, and culture is known to be axiologically biased (Kononova, 2010, p. 7). The value concept does not only exist in the human mind. In the process of speech communication, it is verbally transmitted by lexical and phraseological units, proverbs and sayings, sentences and texts (Ryabkova, 2012, p. 187).

Like any other concept, the value concept has a structure about which the opinions of scientists vary. V. I. Karasik, V. V. Krasnykh, S. G. Vorkachev, L. O. Chernyko and others suppose that the concept structure is rather multicomponent and includes nominative, conceptual and axiological constituents. Y. S. Stepanov (1997), for example, considers the concept as a “layered” formation consisting of the dynamic, static layers and literal sense (p. 41).

Following Z. D. Popova and I. A. Sternin (2010, pp. 106-114), we understand a concept as a field structure having three basic structural

components: image (perceptual and metaphorical), informational content (cognitive features representing the most important distinctive features of an object or phenomenon) and interpretative field, in which several spheres are identified – evaluative, encyclopedic, utilitarian, regulatory, socio-cultural and paremiological. This structure is rather flexible, as “any concept is functioning and being actualized in its various components and aspects, it constantly gets into connection with other concepts and derives from them” (Popova & Sternin, 2001, p. 58).

According to G. G. Slyshkin (2004), the axiological relevance of the linguocultural concept is determined by its actuality and evaluativity (p. 23). Actuality is realized in the number of language units actualizing this concept, and evaluativity presupposes the presence of an evaluative component in the meaning of the concept’s name, as well as its combinations with evaluative epithets.

Methodology

The purport of this study is to reconstruct the value concept KINDNESS in the English language. This purpose and empirical data predetermine the complex research methodology, including methods of conceptual, interpretative and component analysis. With the help of the *continuous sampling method*, examples for further analysis of the value concept KINDNESS are selected from British high-quality media texts. By means of the *conceptual analysis in combination with definitional and contextual*, the reconstruction of the value concept KINDNESS is carried out.

The procedure of the conceptual analysis involves the identification and description of nominative, informational and interpretative fields. Within the framework of the nominative field, the basic lexical representatives of the concept and its synonyms are determined, and the cognitive features of the concept are revealed in the informational field. The overall image of the

concept KINDNESS is gradually reconstructed through the analysis of the interpretative field of the given value concept in the English media discourse.

Results and Discussion

In this research, KINDNESS is considered as a value concept, the nominative field of which is represented by the lexeme *kindness* and its synonyms. By the data given in the Dictionary by Merriam-Webster, synonyms of the word *kindness* can be classified according to the following specific meanings:

- “*an act of kind assistance*”: *benevolence, boon, courtesy, favour, grace, indulgence, mercy, service, turn*;
- “*the capacity for feeling for another’s unhappiness or misfortune*”: *bigheartedness, charity, commiseration, compassion, feeling, goodheartedness, heart, humanity, kindheartedness, kindness, largeheartedness, mercy, pity, softheartedness, sympathy, warmheartedness*;
- “*sympathetic concern for the well-being of others*”: *beneficence, benevolence, benignancy, benignity, compassionateness, goodheartedness, humaneness, kindheartedness, kindness, softheartedness, tenderheartedness, tenderness, warmheartedness* (Dictionary by Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

In the media texts, *kindness* is identified alongside the following representatives of the nominative field: *goodness, generosity, charity, humanness, compassion* and *benevolence*.

Clawson stated that Mauller’s act of kindness had inspired her children to follow in her footsteps and show compassion for others in their day-to-day lives (The Independent, 14.08.2018).

The data of thesaurus and encyclopedic dictionaries (The Premier Educational Dictionary-Thesaurus, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, Penguin Concise English Dictionary, The Webster’s New Online Dictionary) enable us to deduce semantic components that act

as cognitive signs of the concept KINDNESS and represent its informational field:

- the quality/ability to be kind;
- a kind act/action;
- a generous or charitable action;
- benevolent or obliging action;
- an act of kind assistance;
- a compassionate act;
- a consideration and caring act.

Let’s investigate how the cognitive features of the concept KINDNESS are explicated on the basis of media texts describing various acts of kindness (the lexemes explicating the analyzed cognitive features are hereinafter given in a bold type).

The quality/ability to be kind can be explained as the ability and desire of a person to spend his time, emotions and vital energy on another person, be responsive and show his patience and compassion for others.

Disney research found 90% of British parents with young children believe kindness is the most important quality. “Showing kindness and having courage are qualities everyone hopes to possess and teaching these traits to children from a very early age and praising children when you see them is really important (The Independent, 30.04.2021)

A kind act/action. Every year, on February 17, the whole world, including Britain, celebrate Random Acts of Kindness Day. This is one of the recent initiatives of international charitable organizations which call to be kind to everyone perform kind, sincere and noble deeds. Newspapers give coverage to these examples of kindness to inspire people to do good things show humanity, tolerance and empathy.

Random acts of kindness day: 12 amazing stories of kindness that will warm your heart (The Independent, 17.02.21).

Clawson stated that Mauller’s act of kindness had inspired her children to follow in her footsteps and show compassion for others in their day-to-day lives (The Independent, 14.08.2018).

A generous or charitable action. *Kindness,*

generosity and *charity* are interrelated virtues directed to help people. The difference between these concepts is as follows: *kindness* is the desire/ability to be useful, attentive, caring, friendly, etc. to other people; *generosity* is giving or sharing in abundance and without hesitation (Dictionary by Merriam-Webster, n.d.), especially giving things to people (Macmillan Dictionary, n.d.); *charity* is the giving of necessities and especially money to the needy (Dictionary by Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Therefore *generosity* and *charity* are kindness shown materially.

When nine-year-old Molly McGinley spotted charity workers helping the homeless in 2017, she felt inspired to do what she could to provide support for those sleeping rough on the streets of Manchester (The Independent, 17.02.21).

A benevolent or obliging action is defined as the ability to show a friendly and kind disposition to people, the willingness to help and being generous towards people (Macmillan Dictionary, n.d.). It improves both your health and the people around you, make yourself and them happier, give positive emotions in hard times.

If you want to be happy, Ricard says you should strive to be "benevolent," which will not only make you feel better but it will also make others like you better (The Independent, 12.09.2020).

"If your mind is filled with benevolence, you know – the passion and solidarity ... this is a very healthy state of mind that is conducive to flourishing," Ricard says. "So you, yourself, are in a much better mental state. Your body will be healthier, so [it] has been shown. And also, people will perceive it as something nice." (The Independent, 12.09.2020).

An act of kind assistance is physical and spiritual help given to sick and isolated people, children and women.

Kate Middleton tells the children ... to "spread a little KINDNESS" and encourages listeners to talk to each other and share their problems. "You can also play your part in helping others to feel better too, whether offering a

friendly ear or helping someone in need. The Duchess asks the children: "What is KINDNESS?" to which one replies: "Sharing, that is KINDNESS" (The Independent, 17.06.2020).

Simple acts of kindness are more important than ever. Supportive phone calls, an empathetic ear and expressions of love do not just feel good – they can also bolster the immune system on a molecular level (The Independent, 06.94 2020).

A compassionate act. In the articles under consideration, a kind attitude is often accompanied by compassion or empathy – the ability to put yourself in other people's shoes, fully feel their worries and make a decision to help in any situation.

In the past month, the majority of us have been galvanised into the kinds of good deeds and shows of compassion; what's undoubtable is that kindness and compassion have a well-documented feel-good effect in the immediate. "If we are all working to be more compassionate towards one another, then there is a possibility that we'll change the world during this pandemic." (The Independent, 24.04.2020).

Here are six ways travel companies are doing their bit by spreading a little compassion and kindness, from offering hotels to key workers to repatriating Brits stranded abroad (The Independent, 24.03.2020).

On the basis of analyzed articles, consideration and caring act is defined as an act of kindness that doesn't have to be a grand gesture. It can be a small sign of attention and care, such as a compliment, a wish of a good day, a smile or an offer of help.

Acts of KINDNESS don't have to be grand gestures. Showing someone that you care could take something as little as paying for their coffee order or wishing them a good day (The Independent, 17.02.2021).

The study of British media texts showed that all the above-mentioned cognitive features are inherent to the value concept of KINDNESS.

In the interpretative field of the concept

KINDNESS, there are several spheres: encyclopedic, socio-cultural, paremiological, regulatory, utilitarian and evaluative. Without dwelling on all these spheres, let's examine in detail the evaluative and utilitarian ones as they expose the axiological component of the concept of KINDNESS.

The analysis provided on the basis of the factual material (media texts) revealed that the evaluation sphere of the concept is represented by cognitive features actualized in combination with adjectives having positive connotations: *good, incredible, powerful, beautiful, great, tremendous, exceptional, modest, true, disinterested, selfless, easy* and others.

'That is the most beautiful act of kindness,' one person commented (The Independent, 19.03.2021).

From selflessly giving to the homeless to honouring fallen heroes, take inspiration from 12 of the most incredible acts of kindness (The Independent, 17.02.2021).

Study of the concept KINDNESS designated some cases of combinability of nominative lexemes with neutral and even negative adjectives: *microscopic/ random/ tiny/ small/ viral/ contagious acts of kindness, uncommon kindness, unexpected public generosity, underrated generosity, inherent goodness, little compassion* and so on. As a result, negative characteristics shift to positive ones. It can be explained by the fact that the basic concept of KINDNESS is exclusively positive by its nature.

One clear message from the experts is to act small – performing what Simon calls “microscopic acts of kindness”. ...Continuing to support those nearby is a tiny but powerful act (The Independent, 16.05.2020).

Kindness is contagious – and it makes both you and the person you got it from feeling great (The Independent, 30.04.2021).

The utilitarian sphere combines cognitive features that express people's utilitarian, pragmatic attitude to the denotation of the concept as well as knowledge about its practical use (Popova,

2010, p. 112). This zone is openly exposed by various linguistic units possessing positive connotations:

1. combinations with adjectives *important, all-purpose, heartwarming, overwhelming, searching, critical, selfless* and others. They describe such a feature of good deeds as *selflessness*, when *good* is done without any benefit and self-interest, but only with good intent. The expectation of a subsequent reward devalues such an act.

From selflessly giving to the homeless to honouring fallen heroes, take inspiration from 12 of the most incredible acts of KINDNESS (The Independent, 17.02.2021).

Such sincere acts bear positive results and make people respond gratefully.

“Many of you donate to charities on his behalf and mark the occasion by giving back or doing an act of service – all through the goodness of your hearts. You raise funds for those who need it most and continue to do so organically and selflessly. We remain incredibly grateful.” (The Independent, 6.05.21).

2. word combinations: *improve depression; make feel great; have a positive impact; help in need; make smb feel valued; multiply and positively impact; inspire to follow; make a real difference to people's lives; cope better with stress, lessen the symptoms of depression and anxiety; minimize stress; improve depression; lower blood pressure; change the world; reduce our perception of pain and even help us live longer* and others.

Kindness is shown to boost the immune system, lower blood pressure, lower cortisol, reduce our perception of pain and even help us live longer. Repetitive acts of KINDNESS also boost our mental health (The Independent, 24.04.2020).

3. set metaphoric expressions: *warm your heart; make someone's day; help restart their life; set the world in the right direction; build positive, healthy, strong relationships; switch off the threat response* and so on.

“These findings suggest that being kind to oneself switches off the threat response and puts the body in a state of safety and relaxation that is important for regeneration and healing,” says Dr Hans Kirschner of the University of Exeter, first author of the study (The Independent, 07.02.2019).

Other studies suggest being kind to others can minimize stress, improve depression, reduce the risk of cognitive impairment and contribute to a sense of belonging, which is a key contributor to a healthy, longer life (The Independent, 18.02.2020).

As a result of factual data analysis, there have been stated cognitive features of the utilitarian zone of the concept KINDNESS, which are associated with the peculiarities of kindness representation:

- 1) positive impact on human health and quality of life;
 - 2) causing a feeling of happiness;
 - 3) strengthening of relations;
 - 4) changing the world.
- 1) *Positive impact on human health and quality of life.* According to the research, the ability to treat people with kindness is a key point leading to a healthy life. It is explained by the fact that acts of kindness have a positive effect on the psychological state of a person; it reduces the feeling of stress, anxiety and depression, as well as positive, kind thoughts help to relax and feel safe.

These findings suggest that being kind to oneself puts the body in a state of safety and relaxation. Thinking kind thoughts about yourself and your loved ones can prove beneficial for your overall wellbeing, a study has discovered (The Independent, 07.02.2019).

Manifestations of kindness, support and compassion improve the immune system and physical health of a person and, as a consequence, extend his life expectancy.

Supportive phone calls, an empathetic ear and expressions of love do not just feel good – they can also bolster the immune system on a

molecular level. Whether you are the recipient or the giver, kindness is good for your health. One of the most important things kindness can do is ease our reaction to stress (The Independent, 06.04.2020).

- 2) *Causing a feeling of happiness.* By good doings, we fill ourselves with joy and happiness, “infect” other people with these feelings and help them feel better.

“There was a study that found that even seven days of repeated small acts of kindness boosted levels of happiness. It’s amazing because it’s something all of us can do.” (The Independent, 24.04.2020).

- 3) *Strengthening of relations.* Kindness also contributes to high-quality interaction and strengthening healthy and friendly relationships between people.

Kindness helps us to connect with friends and family – it makes them feel valued and builds positive, healthy, strong relationships (The Independent, 30.04.2021).

- 4) *Changing the world.* Kindness can improve the quality of human life and help start it over again, as well as change the whole world for the better.

If we all do one random act of KINDNESS daily, we just might set the world in the right direction (The Independent, 18.02. 2019).

“The storyline illustrates how acts of KINDNESS, large and small, can multiply and positively impact the world ... (The Independent, 13.11.2020).

The conceptual features of the utilitarian sphere, determined on the basis of the media texts, describe the concept of KINDNESS as one of the most important constituents of the value system: it positively impacts people’s health, makes them feel happy, strengthens relationships and changes the world for the better.

Cognitive features as constituents of the utilitarian and evaluative spheres of the concept KINDNESS characterize it as a value improving human health and quality of life. It’s worth noting that many scholars consider life as *the su-*

preme value (A. K. Rychkov, B. L. Yashin, V. M. Rozin, V. M. Talanov, V. A. Kuvakin and others), “something that is self-evident, beyond any doubt or discussion, and, consequently does not require any theoretical investigation” (Rozin, 2000, p. 2). Kindness is “*the most important, central and initial value*” because it acts as the basic one for others (Talanov, 2010), helps to realize our humanity, all our positive qualities and virtues, all our values” (Kuvakin, 1998, p. 157).

Drawing from modern British media texts, the interaction between the utilitarian and evaluative zones of the concept KINDNESS has been established, thus explicating it as a positive and valuable component of human existence.

Conclusion

The data obtained verify the structure of the value concept KINDNESS as a complicated multi-layered phenomenon consisting of three fields: nominative, informational and interpretative.

The nominative and informational fields of this concept are described in detail in the linguistic literature. In the given study, the nominative field of the value concept KINDNESS is diagnosed on the basis of modern British media texts and represented by the basic lexeme *kindness* and its synonyms: *goodness, generosity, charity, humanity, compassion* and *benevolence*.

As a result, we established that the informational field of the concept KINDNESS is formed by the following cognitive features; *the quality/ability to be kind; a kind act/action; a generous or charitable action; benevolent or obliging action; an act of kind assistance; a compassionate act; a consideration and caring act*.

The interpretative field includes encyclopedic, regulatory, socio-cultural, paremiological, utilitarian and evaluative spheres. The results of the analysis of the interpretative field are very significant as they demonstrate fluctuations of the cognitive features caused by functional dif-

ferentiation and subjective interpretation. Namely, utilitarian and evaluative spheres convey ethnospecific peculiarities of the concept.

The evaluation sphere designates combinatory facilities of the concept while cognitive features of the utilitarian sphere contribute manifestation of the kindness and its goal-setting: *positively impact on human health and quality of life, strengthen relations between people and make them happy, change the world for the better*.

Acknowledgements

The reported study was funded by RFBR, project number 20-312-90038 “The concept sphere of spiritual values in British and Russian linguistic cultures”.

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