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On the Question of Cultural Dimensions
in Conceptual Analysis
К вопросу о месте концепций культурных измерений
в концептуальном анализе

Аннотация

Настоящая статья посвящена анализу перспектив использования концепций параметров измерения культур и ценностных ориентаций в ходе лингвокогнитивного анализа концептов, а также сложностей, связанных с осуществлением данной процедуры.

Abstract

The article presents the prospects of applying cultural dimensions and value orientations to cognitive-linguistic conceptual analysis and the challenges that accompany this procedure.

Ключевые слова: концептуальный анализ, когнитивная лингвистика, культурное измерение, ценностная ориентация, межкультурная коммуникация.

Key words: conceptual analysis, cognitive linguistics, cultural dimension, value orientation, intercultural communication.

It goes without saying that interpersonal relationships are defined not only by individual worldviews of interlocutors but also by their national cultures. It is known that concepts as 'operational informative units of memory, mental lexicon, <…> reflected in human psyche' [Kubryakova et al., 1996: 89-90] are 'embodied' via language. Therefore, linguistic means of concept verbalization capture 'meaningful, recognizable, categorized fragments of experience' [Karasik, 2009: 29], i.e. the ideas, realia and value orientations that are significant for given cultures.

The undeniable link between language and culture brings us to the idea that researchers who study cognitive and functional features of various concepts could use certain theoretical contributions from the field of intercultural communication in conceptual analysis, namely classifications of cultural dimensions and value orientations, while processing linguistic data of concept actualization.

This article seeks to 1) justify the potential of analyzing the correlation between various linguistic means of concept verbalization and cultural dimensions/value orientations; 2) analyze the challenges that accompany the above-mentioned procedure.

It stands to reason that individuals belonging to different cultures are dissimilar in the way they perceive human nature, space, time, activity, interpersonal relationships, the place of humanity in the natural world etc. Hence the theories of cultural dimensions and value orientations developed by the leading researchers in the area of intercultural and cross-cultural communication – the classifications of underlying culture-bound assumptions regulating human interactions, which provide the possibility of making inferences and drawing conclusions about axiological codes of different cultures. An example of cultural dimensions would be the so-called 'monochronic/polychronic' time management – the idea described by Edward T. Hall (Hall, 1983). Thus, in monochronic cultures people tend to perceive time as a straight line and perform one action at a time, not dispersing their efforts. They are long-term- and goal-oriented, whereas in polychronic cultures the past, the present and the future are predominantly viewed as a whole, as a never-ending river. Therefore, individuals engage in simultaneous activities and pay more attention to interacting with each other than to

accomplishing a task. Other examples of cultural dimensions include the opposition between individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1994), past-/present-/future-orientation (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961), mastery/harmony (Schwartz, 1999) etc.

The range of concepts with culture-bound content is wide beyond doubt, *mañana*, *कल*, *chutzpah*, just to name a few (analyzing the Spanish *mañana* allows researchers to infer ideas about the specific way of perceiving time that is characteristic of representatives of Spanish culture and speakers of Spanish as a native language (the key word 'mañana' can be used to denote both 'tomorrow' and 'sometime in the unspecified future'); in Hindi the key word '*कल*' conveys both the idea of 'tomorrow' and the idea of 'yesterday' (*kal* – 'one day from today', the meaning is usually determined either from the context, the tense of the verb, or from longer expressions 'आनेवाला कल' – *aanevaalaa* (forthcoming) *kal* or 'बीता हुआ कल' *beetaa huaa* (gone by/elapsed) *kal*); the Hebrew *'chutzpah'* is used to refer to the quality of audacity, for good or for bad). Culture-specific features are contained in linguistic means of verbalizing seemingly universal concepts, such as *home*, *harmony, revenge* etc. On that account the idea of analyzing the correlation between cultural dimensions and linguistic data of conceptual analysis in order to reveal the core cultural maxims that exist in both individual and collective mind (hidden beneath linguistic 'skin' of the concept) might appear logical, useful and productive to researchers in the fields of cognitive linguistics and cultural studies (Gretskaya, 2012).

However, it seems improper to neglect a number of reasonable comments concerning the effectiveness of the procedure in question. Among its most probable and obvious challenges is globalization: nowadays researchers analyze concepts under the circumstances of ever-intensifying interaction between cultures and ever-blurring and shifting cultural boundaries, which complicates the process of eliciting features of traditional cultures on the whole and culture-specific value orientations in particular through the study of linguistic

means of concept verbalization. Nonetheless, it appears that this hindrance is surmountable due to the fact that, despite the course of time and growing intercultural contacts, human relationships are still being governed by the core principles of given cultures, which are reflected through the prism of national languages.

For example, on the one hand, it is apparent that the axiological component of the concept *revenge/месть* in English and Russian has transformed over time: modern English-speakers seem to be passive rather than active or aggressive in terms of their attitude to revenge (*Sometimes you are the insect; Sometimes you are the windscreen* (Alexander, 2007); *Accept that some days you're the pigeon and some days you're the statue* (URL: http://doheth.co.uk/funny/proverbs) – modern anti-proverbs that verbalize the English variation *revenge* of the given concept – vs. *Dead avails not and revenge vents hatred*; *Living well best revenge* (CODP, 1985); *Revenge all wrong, had I/I had not worn my skirts so long* (ODEP, 1984) – traditional English proverbs that focus on the use(ful/less)ness of revenge). In turn, modern Russian anti-proverbs depict present-day Russian-speakers as pragmatic, resolute, goal-oriented, perceiving forgiveness as a means of taking revenge, compared with traditional Russian proverbs verbalizing the Russian variety *месть* of the concept under consideration (*Дают – бери, бьют – сдачи давай; Против лома нет приема, окромя другого лома; Всегда прощайте своих врагов – ничто не раздражает их так сильно* (Adamchik, 2012) – Russian anti-proverbs that encourage responding to evil – vs. *Тому тяжело, кто помнит зло; Вою, вою, а Господь с тобою* (Dal, 2000) – traditional proverbs concerning revenge that either characterize it as emotional burden for the avenger or accentuate the impropriety of repaying evil with evil).

On the other hand, the analysis of the correlation between the manifold linguistic ways of actualizing the concept *revenge/месть* (individual implications in fiction and media texts included) and cultural dimensions/value orientations developed by E.T. Hall, G. Hofstede, F. Kluckhohn and F. Strodtbeck, F. Trompenaars, S. Schwartz shows that the

goal of avenging oneself in modern English-language discourse consists in rising above the offender by inflicting direct damage upon them or concentrating on one's own well-being; while the Russian variation *месть* of the concept *revenge/месть* implies the aspiration of the offendee to achieve the same level with the offender, the aim being to feel complete and fully functional rather than to punish the wrong-doer. These conclusions correspond to the cultural dimension 'individualism/collectivism' described in the works of G. Hofstede (Hofstede, 1980) and F. Trompenaars (Trompenaars, 1994) and are consonant with the theory of 'guilt/shame cultures' by R. Benedict (Benedict, 2007), cultures of the former type placing more importance on individual interests and cultures of the latter type focusing on in-group balance and adapting to the needs of others for harmonious coexistence. Therefore, the study of the concept *revenge/месть* attests to the fact that processing linguistic means of concept verbalization in a given language through the prism of the theories of cultural dimensions/value orientations is useful for revealing the most valid and solid cultural maxims.

Another remark against the procedure in question is the infeasibility and impropriety of drawing conclusions about the unique characteristics of any culture from the study of only one concept. In this regard it is crucial to emphasize the idea that using cultural dimensions in conceptual analysis does not presuppose making an exhaustive list of cultural guidelines that define human interactions within a particular culture. The purpose of taking value orientations into account while analyzing linguistic data lies in identifying culture-specific reference points that are captured by the means of verbalizing a specific concept in a specific language. The above-mentioned study of the concept *revenge/месть* suggests that this task has been accomplished. The results demonstrate a range of value orientations guiding representatives of English culture and Russian culture: e.g. in both cultures human nature is viewed as inherently **sinful** (see Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961); those belonging to Russian culture tend to see revenge as heavy emotional and psychological burden for the avenger rather than for the offender, whereas in English culture individuals are eager to consistently transform the

world around them in order to defend their interests and/or ensure/boost their well-being; under the circumstances of globalization Russian culture is being exposed to the influence of cultures that tend towards individualism, which is why it gravitates towards assertiveness, impulsivity and ***masculinity*** (see Hofstede, 1980), regardless of the remaining emphasis on interpersonal harmony; as far as time management is concerned, English culture can be characterized as ***monochronic*** – it is not typical of its representatives to perform several actions at a time (e.g. inflicting harm in return for harm and reinforcing one's position through other means), while Russian culture may be referred to as ***polychronic*** (in accordance with the description of M-time and P-time models of cultures by E.T. Hall (Hall, 1983)); people belonging to Russian culture manifest an inclination to eliminate physical and emotional discomfort caused by the offender as soon as possible, which suggests that they are less ***tolerant towards ambiguity and uncertainty*** than those who consider themselves representatives of English culture (see Hofstede, 1981).

The following challenge that accompanies using classifications of value orientations and cultural dimensions in conceptual analysis pertains to the specific features of different types of concepts. It should be borne in mind that not all of the concepts chosen for a linguistic and cognitive study are 'regulative', i.e. undoubtedly containing fragments of a particular culture's axiological system (e.g. *honour*, *revenge*), or 'parametric', i.e. representing classification categories that help to compare and contrast various characteristics of objects (e.g. *space*, *time*).

Finally, regardless of their popular appeal and frequent application, the theories of cultural dimensions and value orientations developed by E.T. Hall, G. Hofstede, F. Kluckhohn and F. Strodtbeck, and other leading researchers in the field of intercultural communication, have been attracting criticism on the part of their contemporaries and successors (DiMaggio, 1997; Hirai, 1987; Nasif et al., 1991; Schwartz, 1999; Zaharna, 2000)

concerning the very attempt to categorize cultures using a finite number of criteria, the essence of each criterion, their objectivity/subjectivity and relevance for particular cultures.

In conclusion, notwithstanding the above considerations about the possible hindrances to unraveling the core cultural value orientations as a result of conceptual analysis (i.e. the impact of globalization on national cultures, the diversity of concept types and the criticism of cultural dimensions), the results of the present study indicate the correlation between the linguistic means of concept verbalization and cultural dimensions. Not only does this procedure provide the possibility of revealing the similarities and differences between objects, phenomena and views of the world that exist in different national cultures and gaining a better understanding of unique concepts, but it might also shed light onto culture-specific features of the seemingly universal concepts.

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