

RECONSTRUCTION OF VALUE CONCEPTS IN THE LANGUAGE MODEL OF THE WORLD

Olga Byessonova

Abstract: The paper presents the results of the reconstruction of the hierarchy of values in the English language model of the world. The hierarchy is built up on the basis of the language data obtained from lexicographic sources and from the native speakers of English, who took part in the linguistic experiment held within the framework of the research.

Key words: value, concept, evaluation, evaluative thesaurus, gender

Introduction

The article presents the results of the reconstruction of the values' model of the world on the basis of the language data obtained from lexicographic sources and from the native speakers of English in the course of the linguistic experiment.

The values' model of the world is arranged through the system of the cultural universals, i.e. a set of interconnected universal notions, which can be expressed by language means. The approach pursued in the present research enables to focus on the way, in which human mentality is reflected in the language.

The language model of the world with a word being its basic unit is an important constituent of the national culture. The language model coincides with the language system, its units and their interrelations and reflects the values system typical of the speaking community in general and individual language speakers in particular. Value being a category of logic is contrasted with a linguistic category of evaluation. Evaluation is defined as speaker's objective or subjective attitude to a certain object, which is explicitly or implicitly expressed by language means (Kunin 1996). As a semantic category, evaluation is based on the logical notion of "value". This correlation is interpreted by the following proposition "A (subject of evaluation) considers that B (object of evaluation) is good / bad" (Wolf 2002). Value is a positive or negative significance of the objects of the surrounding world for the speaking community. This significance is determined not by the objects' properties as such, but by their

role in the life of an individual language speaker and in the life of the speaking community in general.

Evaluative meaning is understood as information about the speaker's attitude to a certain property of an object in terms of the opposition "good / bad". Evaluation can be part of both a word denotative and connotative meaning (Byessonova 1995). Connotation is a macrocomponent of a word meaning, which incorporates emotional and evaluative attitude of a speaker to the subject of nomination. This point of view is shared by such scholars, as I. Arnold, I. Sternin (Arnold 1981, Sternin 1986). I. Arnold singles out four types of connotation: stylistic, evaluative, emotional, expressive (Arnold 1981). Thus, connotation is treated as a specific superstructure over the logical content, which combines evaluative, expressive, emotive and stylistic functions.

As anthropocentric category evaluation depends on the system of norms and principles of a language community and is inseparable from the national specifics of the perception of the world by language speakers. Evaluation is characterized by a number of criteria, which are reflected in national culture and which gain a particular value importance expressed in the language in its evaluative thesaurus.

1. Evaluative thesaurus of the English language

Evaluative thesaurus is a set of lexical units which semantically reflect interrelation between the gnoseological categories of substance, process and attribute and the extralinguistic reality, associated with values. The axiological vocabulary system, being represented in the form of the language evaluative thesaurus, corresponds to the values' model of the world.

The dictionary sample of the present research numbers 5 000 words and includes evaluative nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, excerpted from the ideographic dictionary Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English. The sampling material included two groups of lexical units: explicitly and implicitly evaluative words. There are evaluative markers of meaning in the lexicographic definitions of explicitly evaluative words, for example: *pig* – 1. domestic and wild animal; 2. (colloq) dirty, greedy or ill-mannered person. To elicit the evaluative meaning of implicitly evaluative words a further extension of the definition was

needed, for instance: *loafer* – a lazy person, idler → idle, inactive, motionless, do-nothing. The dictionary sample was expanded with the help of Roget's II Electronic Thesaurus. The analysis procedure included dictionary definitions interpretation in order to identify the meaning of the components of the evaluative concepts under study. A number of authoritative explanatory dictionaries were used for this purpose.

The evaluative thesaurus was arranged into 90 groups of lexical units verbalizing 11 clusters of concepts in the evaluative thesaurus network model. Among them are concepts of emotions (*fright, spine-chilling, to appal, horrifically*), general evaluative concepts (*decent, proper, nice, pleasing*), social concepts (*tyrant, dictatorial, to police, bossy, a dropout, vagabond*), biological concepts (*hideous, senile*), concepts of moral qualities, traits of character of a person (*deceitful, artfulness, to trap, cunningly*), concepts of state (*handicapped, disability, fit, sound*), concepts of action (*innuendo, grouse, to gripe, to concur, dissent, denial*), concepts of relations (*amiable, affable, closeness*), parametrical concepts (*pile, giant, hugeness, teeny-weeny*), concepts of perception (*tasty, stinking, evil-smelling*), gender concepts (*epicene, effeminate, womenfolk, virile*).

The English language evaluative thesaurus is characterized by systemic character, hierarchical structure, iconicity, nucleus and periphery, conceptual universals and is treated as a network structure with the junctions based on the nucleus / periphery principle. The nuclear position is occupied by 28 concepts, for example: *LOVE, ADMIRATION, RIGHT, WRONG, EVIL (GENERAL EVALUATION), GOOD (GENERAL EVALUATION), LAW, ORDER, POWER, APPEARANCE, LIE, TREACHERY, HONESTY, LOYALTY, COMMUNICATING, DEATH, WAR, STRENGTH, EASY*, etc. The lexical density of a concept depends upon the nature of the integral seme: the more concrete the integral seme is, the less words verbalize the concept in question. Person is the crucial notion of the evaluative thesaurus and its invariant kernel. The majority of lexical units with evaluative meaning are connected with person. The distribution of words on the axiological scale is connected with the so-called axiological principle according to which the degree of evaluative saturation depends on the human factor.

The English language evaluative thesaurus is mostly negatively marked. The English language has a wider variety of means for differentiating negative things. The majority of concepts (about 40) are placed at the negative edge of the axiological scale: *WRONG, EVIL, HARM, ENMITY, LIE, TREACHERY, UNUSUAL, DIFFICULT, USELESS* etc. There are 29 “positive”

concepts in the English language thesaurus, such as *RIGHT, GOOD, EASY, IMPORTANT, KINDNESS, LIFE, FREEDOM, STRENGTH, LOVE* etc. 20 concepts can be treated as mixed ones, i.e. negative and positive evaluation is possible in the semantics of such concepts. Among them are *SOCIAL STATUS, POWER, SIZE, AMOUNT, APPEARANCE, COMMUNICATING, AGE*. The most numerous evaluative clusters in the thesaurus are as follows: emotional concepts (1506 evaluative lexical units), concepts of people's qualities and traits of character (1393 evaluative words), parametrical concepts (1040 words). There are concepts-oppositions in certain clusters of the thesaurus, for instance, in the cluster of the emotional concepts, in the cluster of the general evaluative concepts, in the clusters of people's qualities and traits of character, concepts of state, action, relations, in the cluster of parametrical concepts (*USEFUL – USELESS, LOVE – HATRED, KINDNESS – UNKINDNESS, HONESTY, LOYALTY – LIE, TREACHERY, COURAGE, BRAVERY – COWARDICE*). It is the evidence of the polarity in people's cognitive perception of mental spaces.

2. Linguistic experiment

It is possible to reconstruct the value concepts representation in the linguistic model of the world of the English language native speakers by means of a linguistic experiment. The objective was to identify the main components of the English language speakers' value system, to expose common and specific features of this system depending on the speakers' gender and such other sociolinguistic characteristics as the speakers' age, educational background, and social status.

The data for the analysis was obtained in the course of the experiment, in which the respondents answered questions either during the interview or by filling in the questionnaire in writing. The participants were 100 native speakers of English at the age of 16 – 65 years old, living in Great Britain, USA, and Canada. Women made 60% and men made 40% of the respondents. The respondents belonged to different age groups: there were 80 respondents at the age of 16 – 30, 15 people at the age of 30 – 50, 5 people – at the age of 50 and older. 40% of the experiment participants have a university degree, 60% – have a certificate of secondary education. 20% are married. The results obtained are described and discussed in terms of gender principle, i.e. the language material is represented in the both genders' view.

In the course of the experiment the hierarchy of values in the language model of the world has been identified. The respondents were asked to respond to the stimuli “*values that are important for women*” and “*values that are important for men*”. The participants of the experiment were also encouraged to arrange their associations in the order of importance.

2.1 Female values

The experiment results prove that the hierarchical structure of "female" values has a ramified character and numbers 38 notions, which constitute the values system of female native speakers of English. Out of 38 concepts 20 were mentioned by at least 10% of respondents. The central notions among them are *LOVE* (90% of the respondents), *FAMILY* (70% of the respondents), and *CHILDREN* (50% of the informants). The concepts *WORK*, *CAREER*, *LOYALTY*, *FAITHFULNESS*, *FRIENDSHIP*, *MONEY*, *HONESTY*, *PHYSICAL HEALTH*, and *FITNESS* were mentioned by 40% of women. 20% of the respondents think that *STABILITY*, *HAPPINESS*, *INDIVIDUALITY*, *IMAGE*, and *YOUTHFULNESS* also constitute the values system in the English language model of the world. The concepts *EDUCATION* (17%), *SUCCESS* (17%), *CLEANLINESS* (15%), *CARE* (13%), *SOCIAL STATUS* (12%), and *TENDERNESS* (10%) are peripheral in the female respondents' view. Less than 10% included in the hierarchy the concepts *EQUALITY*, *CREATIVITY*, *INTEGRITY*, *HOBBIES*, *RESPECT*, *QUALITY OF LIFE OVERALL*, *MAINTAINING VIRTUE*, *RELIGION*, *HOME*, *DISCIPLINE*, *SUPPORT*, *COOKING*, *PRIDE*, *VANITY*. The comparison of the female and male vision of the values hierarchy makes it possible to observe only partial coincidence of concepts. The full coincidence has been spotted as far as the notions *HONESTY* (40% of both male and female respondents), *INDIVIDUALITY* (20%), *UNIQUENESS* (23%), *CARE* (13%) are concerned. The semantics of 9 concepts turned out to be similar, but having different hierarchical position in men's and women's views (*LOVE*, *FAMILY*, *CHILDREN* are prioritized by women, i.e. they are positioned as # 1, 2, 3 correspondingly; men place them into positions # 3, 5, 12). Men consider the concepts *SECURITY*, *SAFETY*, *PROTECTION*, *COMMUNICATION* to be # 1 concepts in women's hierarchy. Women do not include *SECURITY*, *SAFETY*, *PROTECTION* in their hierarchy at all, and the concept *COMMUNICATION* is included by 30% of women (compare with 85% of men). *LOYALTY*, *FAITHFULNESS* play a more important role in women's hierarchy than man think (position #5 in women's view versus position # 14 in men's view). There are divergences in the perception of

such notions as *STABILITY* (position # 11 in women's view versus position # 24 in men's view), *MONEY* (position # 7 in women's view versus position # 17 in men's view), and *HEALTH* (position # 9 in women's view versus position # 15 in men's view). Divergences in the conceptual modelling of the world manifest themselves in the fact that 50% of male respondents included in women's values hierarchy the concepts *APPEARANCE*, *INDEPENDENCE*, 45% – *ENTERTAINMENT*, 38% – *STRENGTH*, 30% – *KINDNESS*. 20-25% of men include into women's values hierarchy such notions as *ADAPTABILITY*, *INTELLIGENCE*, *CREATIVITY*, *HOME*, and *COMPASSION*. The experiment data prove the correlation between the values hierarchy content and structure and the respondents' gender. It turns out that a modern independent woman's image does not correspond to men's patriarchal views. Being not satisfied with the role of a housewife and home keeper, a modern woman aspires to increase her social status and includes into her values system the opportunity to have an interesting job and to pursue a career.

2.2 Male Values

Male values system is less ramified in comparison with the female values system and numbers 33 concepts. The coincidence of the conceptual vision of values by men and women concerns 4 notions: *FAMILY*, *HONESTY*, *FRIENDSHIP*, *SUCCESS*, *ACHIEVEMENT*, *EDUCATION*. Divergences concern the place of 8 value concepts in the hierarchy. 70% of men prioritize *STRENGTH* (position #1), while only 12% of women include it into the hierarchy (position # 11). 70% of women prioritize the role of *SEX* in men's value hierarchy (compare: only 15% of men include this concept into their values system and place it in position # 14). 60% of women include into the male values system the notions of *MONEY*, *WORK*, *CAREER* (the same concepts are included by only 28% and 30% of men correspondingly). 50% of women and 40% of men consider *LOVE* to be an integral part of the male value system. Divergences concern the role of the concepts *CHILDREN*, *FATHERHOOD* (13% of men and 30% of women included it in the hierarchy) and *AMBITION* (mentioned by 20% women versus 30% of men). As it was expected, male and female cognitive views of value systems differ. The material analysis shows that men incorporate into their values system such concepts as *POWER* (*AUTHORITY*, *CONTROL*, *INFLUENCE*) – (45%), *INDEPENDENCE* (45%), *SATISFACTION* (40%), *INTELLIGENCE* (35%), *UNDERSTANDING* (25%), *PRESTIGE* (25%), *ENTERTAINMENT* (25%), *RESPECT* (25%),

CREATIVITY (18%), *RESPONSIBILITY* (13%), *ADVANCEMENT* (10%). The concepts mentioned above have not been included by women into the men's values system. According to women-respondents the male values hierarchy comprises *PHYSICAL HEALTH* (20%), *COMMUNICATION* (20%), *INTEGRITY* (18%), *CAR* (16%), *HAPPINESS* (15%), *QUALITY OF LIFE* (15%), *COMFORT*, *RELAXATION* (12%), and *STABILITY* (10%). The experiment results prove that the native speakers of English perceive the male values differently. Men are rational in defining their values hierarchy. They prioritize strength, power, independence and include prestige, success, respect, advancement, satisfaction, which is connected with is connected with wider spectrum of social activity of men in comparison with women, with specific perception and estimation of their role in social life.

Conclusion

The linguistic experiment has shown that the gender representation of men's and women's value models differ, because the respondents suggested their own individual vision of the values hierarchy. Primarily, the divergences are connected with the respondents' gender. They are not related to the biological peculiarities, but to the deeply rooted existing social and cultural stereotypes concerning the genders' roles in the community. The lack of coincidence can also be explained by the respondents' age; by the territorial variety of English the speakers represent. The experiment data prove that educational background, marital status of the two genders does not influence the values hierarchy structure and content. Men's and women's communicative styles exist in the stereotypic form as the evidence of gender distinctions. The convergences in stereotypes can be accounted for by different value systems. As a result there are distinctions in men's and women's communicative behaviour, which can be explained by women's lower social status and gender asymmetry as a whole, which manifests itself in semantic derogation of women and language sexism.

References

- Arnold, I. V. (1986): *The English Word*, M. Vyššaya škola.
- Byessonova, O. (1995): *Evaluation as a semantic component of lexical meaning of the word (on the material of nouns denoting a person in English, French and Ukrainian)* (in Russian). Manuscript. Thesis for a candidate degree in philology: speciality 10.02.19 – General Linguistics, Donetsk National University. Donetsk.

- Kunin, A. V. (1996): *English Phraseology*, M. Vyššaya škola. Dubna, Phenix Publishing Centre.
- McArthur, T. (1998): *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English*, Longman Group Limited.
- Roget's II Electronic Thesaurus/Microsoft Bookshelf CD-ROM reference library*, Wearnes, 1993.
- Sternin, I. A. (1986): *Lexical meaning of the word in speech*, Voronezh: Voronezh University Publishing House.
- Volf Ye, M. (2002): *Functional semantics of evaluation*, M. Editorial URSS.

Author

Olga Byessonova, Professor, DrSc., Department of British and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ss Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Trnava, Slovakia; e-mail: olgabessonova@mail.ru
