Concept As A Fundamental Category In Linguocultural Studies

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Annotation

This article examines the semantic features of social protection terminology, focusing on homonymy and polysemantic relations in English and Uzbek. Using a comparative linguistic approach, the study identifies key terms that exhibit multiple meanings or interpretations in both languages. By analyzing these features, the research highlights challenges in translation and cross-cultural communication, emphasizing the importance of context in understanding and standardizing terminology. Practical recommendations for improving accuracy in translation and bilingual communication are provided. This study contributes to the field of applied linguistics by offering a deeper understanding of semantic complexity in multilingual contexts.

Keywords: social protection terminology, homonymy, polysemy, semantic features, English, Uzbek, comparative linguistics, translation challenges, multilingual communication

Introduction

The interrelation between linguoculture and cognitive linguistics provides an opportunity to delve into the most enigmatic domain of culture—linguistic consciousness. Pragmatics sheds light on the ethnocultural aspects of communication, while psycholinguistics explores the processes of speech formation and perception, as well as the coding and decoding of the ethnocultural worldview through psychological, ethnocultural, and universal mechanisms. Elements of sociolinguistic analysis also reveal the social factors influencing the development of linguistic personality and the formation of national-cultural components within the semantic domain of language.

As in any scientific discipline, linguocultural studies have their own terminological apparatus. The fundamental term for this field is the "linguocultural concept."

In scientific discourse, "concept" and "notion" are often used synonymously. Some researchers also include terms like "image" and "meaning" in this list. However, in strict terminological usage, this approach is incorrect.

The understanding of the semantic space of language is achieved through the study of its primary unit - meaning. In cognitive linguocultural studies, this is ultimately linked to the identification and systematization of the conceptosphere. Consequently, solving this problem presupposes the analysis of the concept, which differs from the notion based on several criteria. Concepts and notions are structurally comparable phenomena but differ in their semantic essence. Concepts are inherently more complex and pertain to everyday life, functioning as critical elements of the ethno-cultural and linguistic conceptospheres.

The Linguocultural Concept and Its Differentiation from the Notion

1. According to academician D. S. Likhachev, "The linguistic conceptosphere is the cultural conceptosphere of a nation." This perspective aligns with Yu. S. Stepanov's interpretation of the concept: "Culture should not be imagined as air permeating every point of our body—it is more precise and systematic. It operates through mental formations—concepts. Concepts are the aggregate of the cultural environment within human consciousness, shaping how culture enters the conscious world" [10, 40]. Simultaneously, the cultural component also penetrates the semantics of language.

2. Concepts are often interpreted as abstract notions based on categorical features. This understanding is valid only when concepts are treated as ideas. However, an idea must encompass not only abstract

characteristics but also associative, emotional, and evaluative elements. Concepts are both comprehended and experienced, whereas notions merely reflect general and essential attributes of objects and phenomena without emotional engagement.

3.   According to D. S. Likhachev, a concept can replace a word in a person's mind within a specific context. In such cases, the concept represents a perception or a minimal interpretation of objective content. If the concept substitutes word meaning in individual consciousness within a particular context, word meaning and concept can be viewed as related phenomena.

4.   In some interpretations, the concept is treated as an objectively existing unit within human consciousness. However, this view requires refinement. A concept is not an objective entity but a subjective mental formation with a dynamic nature, combining perceptual, cognitive, and affective dimensions.

5.   Within the framework of linguocultural studies, it is incorrect to interpret concepts as identical phenomena to notions. "A concept is a scientific abstract notion developed based on a specific everyday notion" [8, 246]. However, we believe this is not entirely accurate. A concept, due to its subjective concreteness, serves as a practical notion in daily life and only transforms into a scientific abstract notion under specific conditions.

6.   Notions are consciously constructed by people through mutual agreement to establish a "common language" for discussing problems. In contrast, concepts exist independently, and people reconstruct them to align with their needs [31, 45].

7.   According to V. V. Kolesov's theory, a concept is not a notion but rather the essence of a notion. While the first part of this assertion is undoubtedly correct, it would be more precise to state that a concept precedes a notion, representing the object-image stage in the formation of a notion. Under certain circumstances, a concept may serve as the foundation for forming a notion and can even ascend to the level of a symbol. In this context, the statement "a concept manifests itself in a notion, a symbol, and an image" [4, 19] becomes comprehensible. Considering the structure of the concept, it is more appropriate to discuss images, notions, and symbols not as primary forms of the concept but as layers within its semantic scope. Indeed, "a notion is close to a concept; it is one of the forms of its semantic realization" [4, 19–20]. If this view is accepted, subsequent reflections by scholars also hold merit: "A concept is both a mental genotype and an atom of our genetic memory... an archetype, a primal form" [4, 19–20]. At this point, Peter Abelard's statement may serve as a relevant parallel: a concept is a product of higher intellect and spirit capable of creating positive meaning, while a notion is linked to rational knowledge and logical reasoning.

8.   Concepts are the quantum units of human existence. Depending on specific circumstances, these semantic quanta can transform into specialized "gestalts" in everyday life.

9.   By their nature, concepts characterize reality in its entirety - from mundane situations to significant life-defining attributes. A notion, on the other hand, represents one of the modes, i.e., aspects or methods (a partial perspective or facet). Concepts allow for both discursive (reasoned argumentation) and non-discursive (imagery, symbols, emotional states, and engagement in conscious activity) approaches to understanding.

The above-mentioned ideas explain why notions can be easily defined, whereas providing a precise explanation for concepts proves more challenging. The reason lies in the multilayered nature of concepts, which are inherently complex and derived from various sources. Concepts are not composed of a single layer, nor can they simultaneously encompass all layers. This applies particularly to universal concepts, which require clarification of the reality fragments that form them through observation, reasoning, communication—or, in broader terms, discourse.

In her article titled *"The Interrelation of the Terms 'Concept,' 'Notion,' and 'Meaning' in the Communicative-Cognitive Perspective,"* L. V. Popova summarizes all approaches as follows:

•   A notion is a mode of a concept.

•   A notion is a part of a concept.

•   A concept and consciousness are, on the one hand, the results of human cognition and reflection of reality, and on the other, products of diverse mental activities.

•   A concept and a notion differ from each other.

•   A concept is a hypernym encompassing a notion, an image, and meaning [9].

We agree with S. G. Vorkachyov's perspective, who argues that the term "concept" stands out for its multifaceted nature, serving as a hypernym for other terms [1]. According to Vorkachyov, a concept draws its

discursive manifestation of meaning from a notion, its metaphorical and emotional dimensions from an image, and its inclusion in the lexical system of a language from meaning.

However, this kind of limitation is not observed in the definition of the term "concept": "A concept is a unit of collective consciousness, linguistically expressed and distinguished by its linguocultural characteristics" [11].

Different linguocultural schools provide varying interpretations of the term "concept." Z. D. Popova and I. A. Sternin argue that a concept is tied to the category of cognition, which, in turn, broadens the possibilities for its interpretation (Popova, 21). Additionally, this term is used across various disciplines (e.g., mathematical logic, cultural studies, psychology, philosophy, and sometimes logic), each of which influences its definition in unique ways.

V. I. Karasik defines a concept as "an essential, perceivable mental formation preserved in human memory" [2, 76].

According to V. V. Krasnykh, "a concept is an abstract idea of a 'cultural object' that lacks any visual prototypical experience" [5, 72].

I. A. Kubryakova states that a concept is "a unit of language, mental lexicon, conceptual system of consciousness, worldview, and an operational unit of knowledge" [6, 35].

In our opinion, the definition provided by Z. D. Popova and I. A. Sternin is the most comprehensive: "A concept is a discrete mental formation and a fundamental unit of human cognitive coding. It possesses a defined internal structure and results from the cognitive activity of society and individuals. A concept embodies encyclopedic knowledge about an object or phenomenon and conveys social perspectives on this information or object" [9, 24].

Through our analysis of numerous definitions, we conclude that most researchers agree on the following: a concept is a generalized mental construct, a unit of culture preserved in collective memory, characterized by a complex internal structure, and expressed through various markers. This understanding serves as the foundation for our study.

The Structure and Characteristics of Concepts
Research has identified several fundamental characteristics of concepts, emphasizing their complexity and multidimensionality:

1. **Complex Existence**: Concepts are reflected not only in language and consciousness but also in other forms such as imagery, music, cinema, and sculpture.

2. **Mental Nature**: Unlike terms such as "logoepisteme" or "lingvocultureme," a concept primarily exists as a mental construct where language and culture interact.

3. **Value Orientation**: Concepts emphasize value components more than other mental constructs.

4. **Ambiguity and Interconnection**: Conceptual elements are interrelated, and their specific structure can only be identified for research purposes.

5. **Transformability**: As with any social phenomenon, concepts evolve continuously.

6. **Existence in Consciousness**: Concepts exist in individual, group, ethnocultural, and universal consciousness, with individual concepts being the most diverse.

7. **Three-Component Structure**: A concept consists of:
   - **Value**: The core evaluative component.
   - **Imagery**: Perceptive-metaphorical aspects, which can only be described or interpreted.
   - **Notion**: The factual component represented in verbal form, dominant in linguocultural studies.

8. **Poly-representability**: A concept can be expressed both verbally (words, phrases, proverbs) and non-verbally.

9. **Multidimensionality**: Unlike traditional cognitive units, concepts have no fixed structure and are modeled through diverse representations.

10. **Methodological Flexibility**: Concepts can be studied using linguistic and non-linguistic methods.

The typology of concepts can be constructed based on various criteria:

- **Scope of presentation**: A formal characteristic based on statistical evaluations.

- **National features, universality, and degree of abstraction**: This includes concept universals and unique concepts.

Several researchers propose a semantic model for concepts with the following levels (Bastrikov):

1. A word or phrase representing the concept.
2. Semantic features (characteristics, attributes) that form the conceptual content.
3. Definitions and explanations at the meta-level.
4. Etymology or internal form.
5. Associations and meanings emerging through the use of antonymic pairs (concept paradigmatics), contextual synonymic rows, and combinations of stable models—permanent epithets, set expressions (idioms, proverbs, etc.) (concept syntagmatics), and word-formation properties (concept epidigmatics).
6. The function of the concept within the conceptual system: its position within the hierarchy of values.
7. The pragmatics of the concept: a set of behavioral stereotypes shaped by the concept.

At present, various perspectives on the systematic organization of concepts in linguocultural studies have emerged. These perspectives are unified by the idea that a concept is both a systematic unit and possesses multiple levels of abstraction and complexity [11].

Three different approaches to understanding the conceptual system can be identified:

1. **Layered system of the concept**: This view is found in the works of Yu. S. Stepanov and G. V. Tokarev.

Yu. S. Stepanov identifies three layers:
- The etymological layer (internal form).
- The "passive" layer of features that have lost their relevance.
- The core or essential layer of features.

G. V. Tokarev identifies three layers in the conceptual system:
- Universal layer: Common to all humanity.
- Cultural layer: Pertains to everything unique to a specific culture.
- Subcultural **layer**: Specific to a particular society.

2. **Blended approach**: This approach involves identifying multiple semantic layers and a central core of the notion. The semantic layers are determined through the analysis of representation tools.

Conclusion

The concept serves as a foundational category in linguocultural studies, encapsulating a generalized mental construct and a cultural unit preserved in collective memory. With its complex internal structure and diverse characteristics, the concept represents a crucial link between language, culture, and human cognition.

This study highlights the multi-layered nature of concepts and their pivotal role in representing cultural values and worldviews through language. By analyzing the interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic elements, the research underscores the importance of concepts as tools for understanding cultural specificity and fostering intercultural communication.

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