

SLANDER: EMOTIVE ASPECTS OF SEMANTICS

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The main goal of this study is to investigate an internal structure of slander concept in the Russian language, and make an attempt to explain the cognitive nature of emotive meaning of idioms and emotive words in Russian denoting this concept. Some correspondence with the English conceptual system has been found and confirmed by examples from the English language. It has been concluded that in the production of idioms and emotive words, denoting slander, such complex phenomena are employed as metaphorical concepts, the system of conceptual metaphors, idioms' inner forms, images, etc. All these entities contribute to creating the emotive function of idioms.

Keywords: Slander, libel, idiom, cognitive semantics, metaphor, emotive meaning, concept.

1. EMBODIED EXPERIENCE AND CONCEPTUAL SYSTEM

In the early 80s Russian linguistics pointed to the role of the human factor in language. Language was considered not only an abstract structural category but, first of all, a fundamental human property. This theoretical proposition is the central one for cognitive linguistics. It contrasts to the one, widely accepted earlier, when major attention was paid to the realities existing in the world, designated by the language signs, whereas the role of the human factor in categorization and conceptualization processes failed to come within the purview of linguists.

In cognitive linguistics the basic theoretical propositions have been further developed. These developments concern primarily the relationship between the components of semantic triangle: world- man - language sign.

Cognitive semantics proceeds from the assumption that the word meaning is a basic level or super-ordinate level concept correlating with a world object, its properties or phenomenon, designated by a language sign, which is formed in the human mind in the process of world perception and determined by the specificity of cognitive processes, including conceptualization and verbalization.

The formation of concepts underlying the semantics of language signs is closely associated with the peculiarities of cognitive processes in the mind; the representation of reality being, to a great extent, a subjective process with a number of constraints, imposed by specific features of the perceptual system and the mind. It results from the unique processes of perception, categorization, emotion, conceptualization and verbalization.

It was found in cognitive psychology that the properties of categories were related to the nature of human biological capacities and the experience of interaction with physical and cultural environments (Rosh, 1978; Lakoff 1988). This assumption contradicted the idea that concepts and semantics of language signs existed independently of the bodily nature and experience of human beings.

The traditional linguistics holds the view that the world is pre-given, that human beings cognize it objectively by collecting information by means of perception and make internal representations; the process of thought and reason being understood as mechanical manipulation of these representations. Besides, it was assumed that meaning of language signs was predetermined by the objective world. In contrast to the traditional approach, cognitive linguistics pays great attention to conceptual structures, which are often grounded in our embodied experience (Lakoff, 1987). The meaning of words and idioms is formed due to cognitive and emotive processes and is determined by the constraints imposed by the specificity of these processes. It has been found in cognitive science that instead of representing an independent world human beings enact the world as a domain of distinction that is closely associated with the structures embodied by the cognitive system (Varela *et al.*, 1993). In this view environmental states and organismic states should be described in the same language due to the assumption that organism and environment are viewed as interacting subsystems of a larger system in which they are embedded.

The inactive approach (*ibid.*) gives special attention to two major issues: (1) the process of perception consists in perceptually guided action and (2) cognitive structures originate from the recurrent sensorymotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided.

The term 'embodied' has the following meaning: cognition depends on the nature of experience that is determined by having a body with various sensorymotor capacities, and that these individual sensorymotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context (Johnson, 1987). The conceptual system is formed in the process of an interaction between human beings and physical and social environment (Lakoff, 1987; 1988).

These theoretical propositions prove that previous assumptions in theoretical linguistics that meaning of words and idioms is abstract and is representing objective reality independently of cognitive processes are inaccurate. Their meaning is associated with the nature of human body and various types of experience it acquires while interacting with the world.

The new cognitive approach to the study of meaning is based on the following basic principles (Lakoff, 1987):

- Thought is embodied; it means that our conceptual system is determined by bodily experience and is directly grounded in perception, body motion, physical and social experience.
- Thought is also imaginative, the concepts that do not directly grow out of experience make use of metaphor, metonymy and mental imagery, which do not represent external reality. They go beyond literal reflection of reality. The imaginative capacity allows for abstract thought and reasoning.
- The imaginative capacity is embodied indirectly as metaphor, metonymy, and images are often based on bodily experience. Thought is also imaginative due to the fact that every time we form a category of something that does not mirror the world, we employ general human imaginative capacity.

Fundamentally, we posit that the formation of cognitive structures underlying the semantics of idioms is closely connected with our sensorymotor experience. As such, the representation of reality is, to a great extent, a subjective process constrained by the organization of perceptual system and the brain, which results in the unique processes of categorization, conceptualization and verbalization. The conceptual system is an important factor in reasoning, idioms production and their understanding.

A large part of our conceptual system can be revealed by means of a detailed study of emotive lexical expressions and idioms that are related to particular concepts. We base in this study on the assumption that language, especially words of secondary nomination and idioms, is a reflection of our conceptual system. Therefore, we assume that it is possible to examine our conceptual system by investigating the emotive language we use to express our emotions and feelings about various facts of the world. Thus, we shall make a study of a single concept - "slander"- underlying idioms and emotive words in the Russian language and the way it is structured internally. The emphasis on internal structure involves also an attempt to explain the cognitive nature of idioms emotive meaning through the interaction of conventional metaphors, the system of deontic norms and cultural values in a society.

Cognitive processes are often associated with emotional ones, which motivate the production of emotive linguistic entities. Conceptual metaphor plays a significant role in these processes, forming the basis of the emotive meaning of idioms.

2. CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

We hold a view that metaphors are not just figures of speech.. Metaphor is not only a linguistic device, it is also a cognitive mechanism determining the processes of thought and reason (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; 1988; Gibbs, 1994). There are a lot of concepts denoting abstract entities that were formed due to metaphorical mapping. Conceptual

metaphor is the mapping of the knowledge from one, a more concrete domain, into another, a more abstract domain. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1987). It is significant to note that conceptual metaphors are not arbitrary, they are motivated by the nature of our body (Lakoff, 1987; 1995; Gibbs, 1994). Consequently, metaphorical concepts, formed by the conceptual metaphor are also determined by the peculiarities of the body of human beings, the specificity of their perception, action, categorization and emotions. It should be emphasized that metaphorical concepts are also grounded in social and cultural experience.

For instance, the process of communication in English is structured by a conceptual metaphor of journey (Sweetser, 1992). Speaker is conceptualized as a guide who controls the direction of the mental journey. This makes a direct correspondence to the fact that it is speaker who directs the conversation. He makes a strong impact on the hearer's mind. In case, when speaker and hearer understand each other, they are in a partially shared mental state, and it is metaphorically mapped as shared locations. Sweetser gives the following examples (p. 717): "Do you follow me? Have I lost you? I'm right with you? Where were we when we were interrupted? Would you take me back over that point?" When they understand each other they travel metaphorically from one location to another together as if they were shifting from one mental state to another.

In our long-term memory there are a great number of conventional mappings that form the basis of meaning of emotive language signs. Conventional metaphor maps conceptual structure from the source domain into the target domain (Lakoff, 1995). It may be viewed as a model that generates new concepts. Metaphor results from the creative activity of speaker that is aimed at filling conceptual "hollows" and their nomination. Metaphorisation generates new meaning that is a synthesis, to a certain degree, of the previous knowledge from two different domains of experience. This process actualizes certain features and ignores others, creating a new mental structure that not only conveys new information, but also produces expressive effect on hearer, e.g. Russian: *держат язык за зубами* - 'to hold one's tongue behind one's teeth' = Eng.: *to hold one's tongue*; Russian: *нести свой крест* - 'carry one's cross' = Eng.: *bear one's cross*.

Sense generating essence of metaphor is directly linked with the peculiarities of its cognitive mechanisms. Metaphorisation process is realized due to the interaction of two domains on the basis of existing or assumed similarity. It should be noted that the conceptual mapping from one domain to the other is selective. As has been mentioned above, some information from the source domain is ignored and some is actualized and projected to the target domain. The Russian emotive word *свинья* - Eng. 'pig, swine' verbalizes the concept generated by metaphor that brings into contact two domains: human beings - animals.

The semantics of the Russian emotive sign *свинья* conveys the idea of a dirty person not only in direct but also indirect sense, i.e. person who is involved in dirty business. In other words, it characterizes the person as filthy and immoral. While the following distinctive features of pig such as four legs, tail and the ability to consume 'almost everything' are ignored, the peculiarity of its behavior -- love for dirt -- is brought to the foreground. There is a Russian proverb describing pig's behavior: *свинья везде грязь найдет* - 'A pig will always find dirt.'

Assuming figurative meaning the Russian word *грязь* - Eng. 'dirt/filth' is transformed in the cultural context into the notion of immorality and filth, therefore the word "*свинья*" is used to describe a dirty and immoral person. The result of the conceptual mapping between the two

domains -human beings vs. animals -is a representation of the emotive language sign “свинья” as a cultural scheme that can evoke reach imagery and cause negative feelings in hearer. As is evident from the above example, conventional metaphor plays a major role in the emotive meaning of idioms. In fact, it constitutes the core of idiom’s structure.

3. COGNITIVE AND EMOTIVE NATURE OF SEMANTICS OF IDIOMS DENOTING SLANDER

Idioms and emotive words are the main means for metaphoric concept verbalization. Our main goal is to investigate an internal structure of ‘slander’ concept in the Russian language, to reveal its conventional metaphors and make an attempt to explain the cognitive nature of emotive meaning of idioms and emotive words in Russian denoting this concept. We also tried to find some correspondence with the English conceptual system and confirm it by examples using English idioms and proverbs, as well as historical texts on slander and defamation.

Slander is a verbal action designated to cast suspicion on the subject’s decency, imputing him actions which violate the norms of the society and thus to discredit him in the eyes of a listener. Spreading slander by speaker is a purposeful action, aimed at doing grave damage to the patient’s reputation. Such act is evaluated negatively by a society.

Slander has always been considered a serious offense. In Great Britain, for instance, actions for slander and defamation were brought before the civil and ecclesiastical courts (Awbery, 1988). The complainant presented not only the date and place of the offense, but also the exact wording of the slander or defamation. The words complained were accurately reported and the clerks of the court were prohibited to improve the informal language according to existing literary norms. The typical accusations were of theft and sexual misdemeanors. Awbery gives the following examples of slander brought to the courts:

Sessions held at Beaumaris on 1 October, 1660. David Griffith v. David ap Moris of Llangristiolis, yoeman (damages claimed: 100)

Declaration: the def. on 16 Sept. 12 Chas II at Erriannell spoke of the plt. these scandalous words: “Thou art a theefe and thou hast stolen two lambs from John Owen David.”

Plea: Not guilty: issue (not tried).

Jennett John of Baislegg, spinster c. Samuel David of Michaelston y Vedw.

Libel: Exhibited 12 May, 1738.

The def. in Nov. - April last at Coed Kernew dafamed the plt. by speaking these words: “She is a whore and I have had her a hundred times.”

Slanderer imputes the patience violation of the most vital norms of conduct thus making an immoral person of him, capable or guilty of dirty deeds. It is not incidentally that most frequently a person was brought into disrepute by baseless charges involving the lack of respect for private property -- theft, or violation of Christian Commandments and moral rules of conduct -- adultery or fornication.

The danger of slander is fixed in the conceptual system of English and Russian as well as in many other languages. Tarnished reputation would never allow a person to succeed. It might

cost him career, prosperity and even life. This is confirmed by the following proverbs in Russian and English: *И в напраслине, что в деле, люди погибают* - 'People might die not only due to actions, but also due to slander'; Eng. *He that hath an ill name is half hanged; Give a dog a bad name and you may hang him*. Slander is conceptualized as a tool that is used to do a grave damage to the patience - *If you want a pretense to whip a dog, it's enough to say he ate the frying pan* - therefore, one should be cautious of slanderer: Rus. proverb - *Бойся клеветника как злого еретика* - 'Beware of slanderer as if he were a malicious heretic.' The Russian conceptual system also indicates that it is extremely difficult to stop slander: Rus. proverb - *Змею обойдешь, а от клеветы не уйдешь* - 'You may get away from a snake but not from slander.' It should be noted that it is the language that passes judgment on the actor guilty of slander and deformation. He as well as his deeds is evaluated negatively by idioms and proverbs in both the Russian and English languages. Moreover, their semantics conveys a negative feeling to such a verbal behavior.

The Russian emotive language signs, denoting this concept are the following:

- *бросить тень на кого-либо*, - 'to cast a shadow on someone';
- *бросать грязью в кого-либо*, - 'to throw mud at someone';
- *обливать грязью*, - 'to pour out mud at someone' = Eng. *to fling\sling mud at someone*;
- *чернить кого-либо*, - 'blacken someone' = Eng. *blacken someone's reputation*;
- *запятнать кого-либо*, - 'to stain someone' = Eng. *to put a slur on someone's reputation*;
- *марать кого-либо*, - 'make someone dirty' = Eng. *soil someone's reputation*;
- *таптыкать в грязь кого-либо*, - 'trample down someone in mud', etc.

The concept of slander denoted by such idioms and lexical entities is formed due to metaphorical mapping that ensures projecting structure from one domain of experience -- target domain--to a totally different domain of experience -- source domain. As is seen from these examples, the spreading of slander is a physical act of 'making the patient dirty' by the agent with various means. The slander concept is based on the conceptual metaphor Slander-is-Dirt, that is slander is conceptualized as Dirt.

As has been mentioned above, metaphorical mapping evolves source domain --dirt\mud --and target domain -- slander. It is evident that there are no preexisting similarities between these two domains. They have been created in the process of mapping by means of conceptual metaphor Slander-is-Dirt. It provides support for the conclusion that metaphor may not be based on similarity. The ability to create such similarity between two domains is a property of our consciousness conceptualizing reality in a wide cultural and social context. This is consistent with the findings in cognitive psychology on the absence of preexisting similarities between concepts involved in metaphorical mapping.

Moreover, as a result of such structural projecting a new concept is formed that differs both from the source domain and the target domain. The conventional metaphor creates a new mental structure that is based on previous experience as well as cultural stereotypes, and is fixed by a language sign.

We shall address these domains separately. The target domain may be represented as a frame:

The speaker, who is also the agent X, having intention Q, gives information P to listener S about the patient Y with the goal Z. Patient Y is innocent. P is a certain action that contradicts deontic norms (moral, ethical, legal). P is false. Q is the agent's intention to cause damage to the patient's reputation. Z is the agent's goal to get personal benefit from this act. T is the result of this act.: Patient Y becomes guilty of P in the eyes of listener S.

This frame is structured by the metaphoric scene of the source domain. There are two opponents: X- the agent and Y-the patient. The agent X has an intention Q 'to make Y dirty.' Patient Y is clean. The agent X makes Y dirty by various means A with dirt\mud -D. A - the means are:

- X is flinging dirt\mud at Y
- pouring out mud over Y
- pouring out slops over Y
- blackening Y
- staining Y
- soiling Y
- trampling down Y in mud and the like.

Finally, the patient Y 'receives D - dirt\mud'. The result of this act T is that 'patient Y has become dirty'.

The purpose of the metaphorical action is to make dirt\mud stick to the patient, who was presupposed to be clean. It is very hard for the patient to become clean again, to justify himself. The patient is a victim. It is confirmed by the Russian verbs *'отмазаться, отмыться'* - 'to wash off the dirt',. 'to justify oneself', e.g. *Если тебя замарают, потом не отмоешься* - 'if someone decides to sling mud at you, some of it always sticks' and by the proverb, which is a slanderer's motto *брось достаточно грязи, что-нибудь обязательно пристанет* or *клеветы побольше, что-нибудь да прилипнет*; Eng. *Fling dirt enough and some will stick* or *If you through mud enough, some of it will stick*; *клевета, что уголь: не обожжет, так замарает* - 'Slander is like coal - it will not burn you, but will make you dirty'.

There is another conceptual metaphor that underlies this metaphorical concept. It is Actions-as-Transfers metaphor (Lakoff, 1995) in which actions are conceptualized as objects, transferred from agent to patient. In the case of metaphorical concept of 'slander' the 'object' -- dirt\mud - should be preserved, and this is fixed by the Russian and English world models. It indicates that the target domain imposes specific structuring on the source domain. Slander is considered a low and immoral act and as such is conceptualized as 'dirt'. Slander-as -Dirt metaphor is closely associated with such conceptual metaphors as Morality-is -Cleanliness and Immorality-is-Dirt; Morality-is-White and Immorality-is-Black.

The examples in Russian are: *грязные мысли* - dirty thoughts, *грязная клевета* - dirty slander, *грязные руки* - dirty hands, *грязью играть--руки марают*, Eng. 'If you play with mud you will make your hands dirty'. Opposed to *чистые руки* - clean hands, Eng. *Clean hands want no washing*; *чистая совесть*, Eng. 'clear consciousness' and proverbs: *Чистота - залог здоровья*, Eng. *Cleanliness is next to Godliness*. Examples in English: *dirty trick, dirty money, dirty weekend* = a weekend spent together by an unmarried couple: e.g. "Judging by the number of Smiths registered here, this is obviously a popular hotel for a

dirty weekend” ; *dirty work* = criminal activity; *to do the dirty on smb.* = betray, e.g. ‘I crept into work late unnoticed until the supervisor did the dirty on me and told the boss’.

Other examples: Rus. *держат в черном теле*, ‘to keep in a black body’ - to ill-treat, to treat smb. roughly. *Выводить на чистую воду* - ‘to conduct someone out onto pure water’, to bring someone’s misdeed to light, to expose someone. Eng. *to show someone in his true colors*. *Чернить репутацию* - blacken somebody’s name, *two blacks don’t make a white* - second wrong does not remedy the first; *выдавать белое за черное* - *swear black is white*: e.g. He would swear black is white if he thought it would further his career. The above mentioned conceptual metaphors are closely associated with Morality-is-Up metaphor and Immorality-is-Down metaphor: *это низкий поступок* - it was a low thing to do, *низость* - meanness, mean thing; *быть на высоте* - ‘to be at a height’, ‘to be at one’s best or not at one’s best’; Eng. *high-minded* = moralistic e.g. ‘My father was very high-minded; he would not let me wear make-up until I was sixteen years old.

The latter metaphors are connected with Good-is-Up-Metaphor; Bad-is-Down metaphor (Lakoff, 1995). Thus, the conceptual metaphor Slander-is-Dirt is included into the system of conceptual metaphors for morality, which is an integral part of the deontic world model (Latina, 1988; 1991).

The morality system exists in the Russian culture and plays an important role in the way we think, talk and behave. The deontic world model consists of deontic (behavioral) norms, underlying the rules of human conduct. They are required for the normal functioning of society. They are certain cultural values, fixed in the collective consciousness of society. Deontic norms consist of legal, moral, ethical regulations as well as various social rules of conduct. The moral norms, imposed by society and fixed in the conceptual system are considered socially positive, their observance is approved; in contrast, the norms violation is disapproved and it provokes a negative reaction in people (Latina, 1991).

It has a bearing on the evaluation processes of metaphorical concepts. Cognition is known to be evaluative in nature, directed towards making judgments as to the benefit or harm of realities for a human being (Volf, 1985). Evaluating is a result of cognitive processes correlating metaphorical concepts with evaluation criteria of a given culture, represented as deontic world model. The language mapping is also largely evaluative, both the source domain and the target domain are subjected to evaluation. Turning back to slander frame, it should be emphasized that slander is an extremely immoral act, violating deontic norms and as such is evaluated negatively.

The negative frame evaluation correlates with that of the metaphorical scene of the source domain. The act of ‘making another person dirty’ is given a symbolic interpretation as an immoral act. It is based on the system of conceptual metaphors, and is also evaluated negatively.

Consequently, idioms and emotive words denote a complex metaphorical concept subjected to a double evaluation. The result of metaphorical mapping manifests itself as an image and is evoked by the idiom’s inner form. The inner form of the idiom can be considered as a certain scheme typical of a given culture. This structure corresponds to the cultural values encoded by the language. The type of images, evoked by the idioms’ inner forms do not seem arbitrary. They are determined by conceptual metaphors which are kept in our long-term memory. The

images reflect specific features of the national world view. In the production of idioms and emotive words denoting slander all the mentioned entities are employed: metaphorical concepts, the system of conceptual metaphors, idioms' inner forms, images as cultural schemes and their evaluation. All these entities contribute to creating the emotive function of idioms.

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