

## COGNITIVE-PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO LEXICOLOGICAL STUDIES

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**Abstract:** The paper postulates a close interconnection between cognitive and pragmatic factors in lexicological studies. This approach is demonstrated through the analysis of the changes in the conceptual world view of the English-speaking community for the past thirty years and the way these changes have been recorded in the new lexis. I am trying to analyse changes in the basic concepts and categories; new concepts that have been imbedded into both traditional and novel domains. Special attention is paid to pragmatic constraints on categorisation and verbalisation.

**Key words:** concepts, domains, prototypes, pragmatic constraints, common conceptual world view, categorisation, new words.

### 1. INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN COGNITIVE AND PRAGMATIC PARADIGMS.

In the situation of polyparadigmatism in present day linguistics there is a growing tendency towards the setting up of a new megaparadigm (Kubryakova, 1995), which accumulates recent developments of separate paradigms on the basis of some common features. The two leading paradigms of the past few decades which have contributed most of all to the new megaparadigm are pragmatic and cognitive ones.

The interconnection between cognitive and pragmatic paradigms has become a subject of interest for many linguists. D.Sperber and D.Wilson (1986/1995) reject the existence of a special pragmatic module and think it to be the constituent of the cognitive one. They view the study of pragmatics as that of the general cognitive principles and abilities involved in utterance interpretation. A.Kasher's point of view is close to that of D.Sperber and D.Wilson.

He considers pragmatics to be part of the theoretical study of cognition (Kasher, 1991). Kasher (1991) states that his main concern is "how well do theories of pragmatics fare with a general psychological conception of the nature of the human mind." J.Nuyts has suggested his own cognitive-pragmatic linguistic theory in which he holds the view that cognitive and pragmatic aspects are neither opposed nor complimenting each other but rather represent two dimensions of one and the same phenomenon (Nuyts, 1992).

The convergence of pragmatic and cognitive aspects of linguistic studies is rooted in the concept of "interpretant", introduced by Ch.Pierce (1934) and assigned to the sign-object diad as its third member. The "interpretant" has always been somewhat of a murky concept. It has been understood differently by different linguists. Some of them equate it with the relevant context in which communication takes place (Givon, 1989). Others identify "interpretant" with the mind of the interpreter; a thought or concept (1938). Citing Pierce, Morris also defines "interpretant" as a set of shared habits and rules of usage (Morris, 1938). This double nature of interpretant laid the ground for the development of a cognitively based theory of communication.

Another feature that unites cognitive and pragmatic approaches to language studies is the principle of inference, which has become a leading principle of both cognitive and pragmatic studies. It is the principle of inference that underlies the theory of implicatures by Paul Grice (1989) and the theory of conceptual semantics by R.Jackendoff (1983; 1987; 1990; 1997). "Code theories", which treat utterances as encoding messages, have been replaced by inferential theories, which treat utterances merely as pieces of evidence about the communicator's intentions (Wilson, 1997). In the process of communication the hearer tries to understand (to infer) the intention of the speaker. There has appeared a term "inferential communication" (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

## **2. THE MAIN PROBLEMS OF LEXICOLOGY IN THE VIEW OF COGNITIVE — PRAGMATIC APPROACH.**

In lexicological studies the cognitive and pragmatic aspects are closely interconnected. A comprehensive survey of the state-of-the-art in English Lexicology with emphasis on pragmatic, cognitive, textual and procedural aspects is found in the book by L.Lipka (1992). But many questions remain unanswered. Special attention should be paid to cognitive and pragmatic mechanisms underlying the dynamics of the English lexicon.

The proper choice of a word is subject to pragmatic constraints determined by the context. At the same time the language users must have knowledge of the context as relevant conditions of the appropriate use of a linguistic sign. Our hypothesis is that for communication to be successful, the speaker and the hearer need common pragmatic and cognitive space. This is created by a common conceptual world-view (CWV). So, the users of the language should be involved in the process of "co-wording the world" (Mey, 1996) in accordance with the parameters of pragmatic context. Pragmatic context is constituted by three levels: 1) general cultural world view (knowledge of the real world including society and culture); 2) deictic context (the context of the situation), and 3) discourse context (shared prior text) (Givon, 1989). The most important role is played by the first level - the cultural world view which corresponds to the conceptual world view. As soon as CWV is subject to change we think it important to analyse the changes in the CWV for the past 30 years.

The cognitive-pragmatic approach to lexicological studies based on the analysis of the dynamics of the English CWV raises the following questions: Which concepts have been most frequently used in the process of categorisation of the past few decades? Have there been changes in the list of basic concepts and categories? Has anything changed in the process of categorisation? Have there been changes in the prototypes? Which way of verbalisation has been most active for the past few decades? Which word-formation means and meanings have been most actively involved in the process of transformation of conceptual structures into the real linguistic signs? What is the role of pragmatic factors in the process of conceptualisation? What are the main pragmatic constraints on categorisation? What is the interconnection between cognitive and pragmatic factors in the process of the new word formation?

In the present paper we will try to answer some of these questions concentrating mostly on interconnection and interdependence of cognitive and pragmatic parameters involved in the changes of lexicon. The material for analysis has been drawn from one of the most reliable and representative reference books on new words (Barnhart, C.L., et al. 1980;1990).

### 3. CHANGES IN THE CONCEPTUAL WORLD VIEW OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING SOCIETY FOR THE PAST THIRTY YEARS AND THEIR RECORD IN THE LEXICON.

For the past three decades the list of the basic concepts of human society ("the alphabet of human thought") has not been changes greatly (cf.: the list suggested by R.Jackendoff (1983): "thing", "place", "time", "direction", "action", "manner", "amount", "smell", etc.). But some of these concepts have been expanded or changed. Take, for example, the concepts of space and time. The concept of space can be viewed from different points of view. It may be: 1) physical space in its continuity and three-dimensional qualities; 2) mental space as a sum of mental representations corresponding to any sphere of human knowledge; 3) language space as a special kind of space including linguistic categories and the whole language system, e.g. parts of speech, synonymic and antonymic sets, etc (cf. Kubrjakova, 1997).

Mental and language spaces are closely interconnected. As L.Vygotsky pointed out, there are several processes taking place in space and time between the idea and the pronounced word: transition from the idea to its signals, then from vague senses to the inner speech (*lingua mentalis*) and then from inner speech to outer speech (pronounced word) (Vygotsky, 1982). Presently, time necessary for all these processes is getting shorter due to *brain-storming*, *collective thinking*, and *think tank* activities. So, the time of crystallisation of the concept and its further verbalisation is contracting.

The concept of physical space has also changed due to improved communication and world networking, e.g. *telecommuting* - the practice of working at home being connected to one's office through computer; *tebanking* - bank transactions made from home computer. Cf.: "The office blocks will be deserted as the workers telecommute in the suburbs" (Safire, 1996). As a result of the changes in the concept of time for the past thirty years new conceptual metaphor has appeared: *time is a solid structure which can be deformed or distorted*. For example, *time-warp* - an imaginary discontinuity or distortion in the flow of time. The concept of time as a physical entity having form can be illustrated by such examples as *time-frame* - defined period of time in which something is planned to happen; *window* spaces of spare time in a schedule or timetable; cf. *time-slot*, *time-slice*.

Apart from changes in the basic concepts, there have appeared new concepts which have been embedded into both traditional and new domains. As it is well known, frames and domains can have different levels of embedding. For example, the new concept *acid fog*, *heat islands*, *energy belt*, *urban forest*, have been embedded into the new domain of environmental protection. The above-mentioned *telecommuting*, *teleshopping*, have been embedded into the new domain of computerisation. But the number of new domains is quite limited. The prevailing tendency is embedding new concepts into traditional domains. Here differentiation according to different levels of embedding is more vividly demonstrated. For example, in the social domain the concept of communitarism (life in “global village”) has become a hyponym (sub-domain) in regard to the whole social domain, and a hyperonym for the concept of “collective responsibility”, which in its turn serves a hyperonym domain for the sub-concept “neighbourhood watch” (an organised programme of vigilance by ordinary citizens in order to help the police combat crime in their neighbourhood; crime prevention achieved by this method). That means that one of sub-concepts of the domain can in turn be a domain itself. Concepts within domains and domains themselves are related by *conceptual contiguity* (Blank, 1997).

The traditional domain of criminal activities has been enriched by the new concept of “gungsta” (collective criminality) which has become a separate sub-domain functioning as a hyperonym for a group of such sub-concepts as *steaming* (activity of passing rapidly in a gang through public place, robbing bystanders by force of number), *wolf-pack* (a group of marauding young people engaged in mugging) and *wilding* (a kind of violent robbing), cf. *jamming*, *drive-by*, *side-walking*. So we can speak about changes in the prototype of the criminal. The boundaries of the category are expanded, and the feature (“collective” character of criminal activity) which was at the periphery of the category has moved to the centre of the category.

The domain of health care has been enriched by the new concept “a complex of syndromes”, which in its turn has become a hyperonym domain for such sub-concepts as “the 20<sup>th</sup> century syndrome” (a complex of syndromes based on stress and strain of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), “agoraphobia” (a complex of fears - fears of open spaces, bridges, crowds in the shops, etc.), “tight/sick building syndrome” (a complex of allergies caused by artificial materials used in modern construction works).

Among other traditional domains most actively enriched by new concepts mention should be made of Money and Finance, Politics, Music, Arts, Drug Abuse.

Pragmatically relevant factors are becoming more active in the process of wording the world. It is manifested in the growing anthropocentrism. This leads to a more detailed categorisation and sub-categorisation of the phenomenon *homo sapiens* in all his/her hypostases: *homo faber*, *homo loquens*, *homo ludens*, *homo agens*. For the past few decades the most active hypostases turned out to be: 1) *homo ludens* - a playing person: e.g. *couch potato*, *cacooner* (a person who spends most of his time at home watching TV), *mouse potato* (a person who spends most of the time playing with the computer), *cyberserfer*, and 2) *homo agens* - acting person: e.g. *do-it-yourselfer*, *do-it-yourselfism*, *all-at-once-ness* (when many things are performed at the same time), *life-boat ethics*; *hard-liner*, *bridge-builder*, *gut-lifer* (*tough advisory*), etc.

Activisation of pragmatically relevant factors in the process of conceptualisation and verbalisation is manifested in the increased role of such parameters of wide pragmatic context as social, professional status of the speakers, age, ethnic identity and gender. Every social, professional, age, sex and ethnic group has their own CWV. On the one hand, one and the



same object of reality will be categorised and verbalised differently by the representatives of the above-mentioned groups. On the other hand, one and the same linguistic unit is perceived differently by the representatives of various groups. For example, the representatives of the elderly generation in the US would use *ice-box* and *wireless* in reference to refrigerator and radio, while the younger generation would use respectively *fridge* and *boombox* (Safire, 1986).

Another manifestation of the increased role of pragmatically relevant parameters is emergence of the concept of “political correctness” which can be regarded as a new domain with several sub-domains formed according to the above-mentioned parameters of pragmatic context. For example, according to the parameter of gender the sub-domain “feminism” has been most active in the past few decades as a result of which the abolishment of sexism in the English language took place. E.g. *stewardess* has been ousted by *flight-attendant*, *house-wife* - by *homemaker*, *fisherman* - by *fisher*, *fireman* - by *fire-fighter*. According to the parameter of age *old person* has been replaced by *golden-ager* and *senior citizen*, *elderly person* - by *silver-ager*. According to the professional parameter: *hairstylist* has become *hairologist*, *garbage collectors* - *sanitation engineer* or *sanitation personnel*, *prison* has become *correctional facility* and *prison guard* - *correctional officer*. The examples of politically correct lexical units in the field of ethnic identity are well-known: *Afro-American*, *Afro-Caribbean*, *non-white*, *coloured*.

#### 4. COGNITIVE AND PRAGMATIC FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS OF NEW WORDS FORMATION.

There is a subtle interconnection between cognitive and pragmatic factors involved in the process of new words formation. What comes first, cognition or pragmatics, when we try to create new words? The reasons for creation of new words are mostly pragmatic ones. Take for example, the postulates of classical rhetorics, the predecessor of pragmatics, about the reasons for the creation of new tropes: (a) the necessity to name things not yet named, (b) the need for emphasis, (c) the need for beauty (Blair, 1845). So we can speak about the triad: *necessity*, *emphasis* and *beauty* as the main pragmatic motive underlying the creation of new words. But of course there are cognitive factors involved here. The necessity to name the unknown definitely carries additional cognitive impulse. As it is well-known, a new word is a way of introducing new concepts (Leech, 1981). Cognitive factors are involved here but the priority is given to pragmatically relevant ones.

Now if we turn to the act of birth of a new word we cannot fail to see the shift of priorities, the change in the distribution of roles between cognitive and pragmatic factors. Here cognitive factors come to the fore. It is common knowledge that to name something it is necessary first to identify the referent, to define its place in the cognitive system of the speaker and to categorise it. Then comes the operation of sub-categorisation (comparison with other members of the same category) and only after that the search for a name starts. Here again pragmatic factors are actively at work. As we mentioned in our earlier publication (Zabotkina, 1997), the pragmatics of new words encodes the original and unique psychological intention of the speaker. It also encodes the modality of *unexpectedness* and *surprise* as well as the component of intensity. The operations of categorisation and sub-categorisation are performed by a personality belonging to one of the professional, social, ethnic and sex groups and the choice of the proper name will depend upon one of these pragmatically relevant parameters. Apart from it, the emotional state of the creator of the new word can also affect the process of naming the new concept. For instance, when the two American physicists

discovered a new quality of an elementary particle they were *charmed* by the harmony that this quality brought to the world of elementary particles. So they chose the existing form “charm” as a name for the new quality. The new word absorbs the pragmatic features of its “mother” context, i.e. the context in which it was born.

Later, when the word goes through the process of conventionalisation (acceptance by the society) and lexicalisation (acceptance by the linguistic system), it absorbs the additional pragmatic features of the context of its recurrent use. But cognitive factors are also heavily involved in the process of conventionalisation. The operation of inference is taking place whenever a new word is perceived by the hearer. The meaning of the new word should be inferred by the hearer in accordance with the cognitive frames already existing in his/her cognitive structure. He or she should search for a proper frame into which the new information should be integrated. There exists a threshold of novelty beyond which no operation of inference can take place. If the new information has absolutely no connection with the existing cognitive system, a break in communication takes place. The new word should be recognisable by the cognitive system of the hearer. So, there should be a balance between new and old information for the successful operation of inference.

The cognitive-pragmatic approach to lexicological studies must aim at the analysis of those cognitive structures which store knowledge about pragmatically relevant conditions of appropriate choice and use of lexical items.

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