



“CONCEPT AND ITS DEFINING FEATURES: A THEORETICAL STUDY”

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Abstract. *Cognitive linguistics is recognized as one of the most dynamic areas within contemporary linguistic studies. In this thesis, we examine the notion of the concept in greater depth. As a branch of modern linguistics, research in cognitive linguistics remains highly relevant today. The discipline took shape through the influential works of American scholars such as J. Lakoff, R. Langacker, R. Jackendoff, among others.⁶⁶*

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Until the 1980s, the term *concept* in linguistics was often treated as synonymous with “notion.” However, in recent decades its interpretation has expanded considerably. The concept does not possess a fixed structure, and individuals internalize it in different ways. It is understood as a complex, multi-layered mental formation, which explains why it is studied both in cognitive and linguocultural frameworks. The widespread use of the term began in the 1990s. Etymologically, *concept* derives from the Latin *conceptus*, whose meaning in the humanities corresponds to “notion.”

The Russian linguist S. A. Askoldov was the first to introduce the term into modern linguistic discourse. He defined the concept as “a unit that reflects the process of thinking about notions of one kind or another.” In the *Dictionary of Cognitive Terms*, the concept is described as a unit that enables the mental and psychological resources of human thought to be reflected in knowledge and skills. Within modern linguistics, the term “concept” is employed to denote the mental image associated with a lexical unit. In everyday scholarly practice, it is often treated as synonymous with “notion.” The idea of the concept has been extensively examined by leading linguists, each offering their own distinct interpretation.

“Concepts are abstract units that reflect the content of acquired knowledge, experience, the results of all human activity, and the outcomes of a person’s cognition of the surrounding world in the form of specific units.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶Croft, W., & Alan, D. (2007). *Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: CUP. 365p. [in English]

⁶⁷ Sternin, I.A. (2007). *Cognitive Linguistics*. Moscow: AST-Vostok-Zapad, 314 p.



As S.G. Vorkachev notes, the core of a concept is surrounded by a cloud of various figurative associations, including metaphorical ones⁶⁸, since metaphor is the only way that can embody abstraction in a tangible image.

Yu. S. Stepanov defines the concept as follows: *"A concept is a condensation of culture in human consciousness; it is that through which culture enters the mental world of a person. On the other hand, a concept is also that by means of which an ordinary person—not a 'creator of cultural values'—himself enters into culture, and in some cases even influences it."*⁶⁹ One of the fundamental units of modeling in this context is the concept, understood by us not as a synonym for 'notion,' but—as a 'condensation of culture in human consciousness, that through which culture enters the mental world of a person'

In different linguocultures, the focusing and segmentation of conceptual space is carried out in different ways. The ability of concepts to expand and enrich themselves through the individual emotional and cultural experience of language speakers determines their elasticity, instability, and mobility⁷⁰

A concept possesses a complex, multidimensional structure. According to V. A. Maslova, its structure includes, in addition to the notional basis, a socio-psycho-cultural component which is not so much thought by the language speaker as it is experienced by him; it encompasses associations, emotions, evaluations, national images, and connotations inherent to the given culture.⁷¹

Z. D. Popova and I. A. Sternin speak of three basic structural components of a concept: the image, the informational content, and the interpretive field. They explain the presence of an image by the *neurolinguistic nature of the universal object code: the sensory image encodes the concept, forming a unit of the universal object code*. The sensory image may be perceptual, formed under the influence of the senses, or cognitive, formed through the metaphorization of an object or phenomenon. The informational content of a concept includes certain cognitive features that determine the essential characteristics of the conceptualized object or phenomenon. The interpretive field is formed under the influence of cognitive features *which, in one way or another, interpret the basic informational content of the concept, derive from it, representing some inferential knowledge, or evaluate it*.⁷²

V. A. Maslova notes that there are other perspectives on the structure of the concept. She emphasizes that the center of any concept is always a value,

⁶⁸ Воркачев С.Г. Любовь как лингвокультурный концепт. - М.: «Гнозис», 2007. - 284 с.

⁶⁹ Степанов, Ю.С. Константы: Словарь русской культуры: Изд. 2-е, испр. и доп [Текст] / Ю.С. Степанов. – М.: Академический проект, 2001 – 590 с.

⁷⁰ Леонтович, О.А. Россия и США: Введение в межкультурную коммуникацию: учеб.пособие [Текст] / О.А. Леонтович. – Волгоград: Перемена, 2003. – 399 с.

⁷¹ Маслова, В.А. Когнитивная лингвистика: учеб. пособие [Текст] / В.А. Маслова. – М.: Тетра Системс, 2004. – 115с.

⁷² Попова, З.Д., Стернин, И.А. Когнитивная лингвистика. – М.: АСТ: Восток – Запад, 2007. – 314 с.



since the concept serves the study of culture, and the foundation of culture lies precisely in the principle of value.

Each concept, as a complex mental construct, includes not only semantic content but also evaluation, a person's attitude toward the reflected object, and other components:

1. Universal, or common to all humanity;
2. National-cultural, conditioned by life within a particular cultural environment;
3. Social, determined by belonging to a particular social stratum;
4. Group-based, conditioned by belonging of a linguistic personality to a certain age or gender group;
5. Individual-personal, formed under the influence of personal characteristics—education, upbringing, individual experience, and psychophysiological traits⁷³

Thus, a concept is a mental unit that reflects human knowledge and experience and possesses a complex, multidimensional structure. Linguists structure the concept in different ways, but all agree that it consists of multiple layers. Human beings think in concepts. By analyzing, comparing, and combining different concepts in the process of thought, they form new concepts as the result of thinking. The transmission of information and the process of communication as a whole likewise represent the transfer and exchange of concepts in both verbal and non-verbal form.

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⁷³ Маслова, В.А. Когнитивная лингвистика: учеб. пособие [Текст] / В.А. Маслова. – М.: Тетра Системс, 2004. – 256 с