

## THE CONCEPT AS A FORMING UNIT OF THE CULTURAL CODE

**Abstract.** The present article is dedicated to the study of the position of the concept in modern linguistic studies. Special attention is given to the role of the concept in the formation of cultural code in modern society. In the study the concept is taken as a system of units of the material and spiritual world. Detailed study and understanding of the linguo-cognitive aspects allows to conduct detection and reconstruction of various socio-cultural processes and mechanisms through the prism of verbal representation. Special attention is given to the verbalization and nonverbalization processes in terms of formation of the cognitive structures.

*Key words:* concept, culture, cultural code, linguistic persona, society, verbalization.

Over the past few decades, philological studies have been focused on the position of linguistic persona in the global scientific world picture. Anthropology-oriented directions of modern linguistics are aimed to study and recreate the integral processes of perception of the outside world, and of the human being by itself and for itself.

Special attention to the problem of the concept in terms of cognitive linguistics is presented in the works of V. I. Karasyk, V. V. Krasnykh, O. S. Kubriakova, R. W. Langacker, D. S. Likhachov, Z. D. Popova, A. M. Prykhodko, Yu. S. Stepanov, I. A. Sternin, L. Talmy, S. G. Vorkachev. The research of cultural nature of the concept is based on the studies of A. Ya. Flier., V. V. Krasnykh, Yu. S. Stepanov, V. N. Telia. The problem of verbalization mechanisms of conceptual formations is highlighted in the studies of T. A. Fesenko, A. M. Prykhodko, I. A. Sternin.

The present study aims to analyze specific approaches to the understanding of the concept through the prism of modern linguo-cognitive studies. The purpose of the present article is to generalize modern approaches to the concept and to outline its position within the cultural code.

It is known that “cognitive linguistics” notion that linguists have been using for more than a quarter of a century, provides incredible opportunities for the study of any language, conceptual systems, human cognition, and even the general meaning of constructs [30, p. 104].

The cognitive approach allows recreating a complete picture of the relations between human consciousness and language and brings into sharp focus the fundamental mental abilities of human: the ability to form structured ideas at the conceptual level with multiple levels of an organization, the ability to imagine situations with different levels of abstraction, the ability to establish a connection between all margins of different structures and to recreate selfsame situations in terms of alternative ways of development [29, p. 105].

By the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the problem of the relationship between language and human thought emerged mainly in terms of philosophical approaches. The concept as a key notion of cognitive linguistics did not immediately acquire linguistic semantics. From the beginning, it was associated with philosophy, and it

was widespread in virtue of the works of medieval French scholastic philosopher Peter Abelard. His ideas were concentrated on the creation of the neutral position between realism and nominalism [4, p. 5].

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, European poets started to refer to this notion. The concept became an integral part of Mannerism poetics. According to the works of J. Donne, L. de Gongora, F. de Malherbe the concept was a bizarre metaphor. Prominent thinker and linguist W. von Humboldt focused on the connection between language and mental processes. Consequently, for the first time, special attention was given to the influence of mental activity on the language activity [18, p. 181].

Today the variety of definitions to the term “culture” is evidence of appliance of this notion in various fields of scientific studies and human activity – from philosophy and culture studies to agriculture and microbiology [8]. In the context of this study, we look through a broader lens and understand culture as “any product of human activity, which affects the development of various spheres of human life, including language” [8, p. 46].

The *cultural code* in the study is a system of signs of the material and spiritual world, which carries and reflects cultural meanings, transmitting the specifics of the linguistic persona. We also rely on the understanding of V. V. Krasnykh, according to which the ethnocultural code is an “ethnocultural net” that culture throws at the world around it, representing its categorization and structuring in linguistic consciousness, language, and discourse [12].

The relationship between the concepts and their meanings is quite complex, so today there are two areas that study these relationships – cognitive linguistics and linguoculturology – which are based on the study of semantics in language and meaning in a particular national or global culture.

Such scientists as N. D. Arutyunova [1], D. S. Likhachev [16], O. S. Kubryakova [14], I. A. Sternin [25] et alia study the concept on the ground of cognitive linguistics; S. G. Vorkachev [6], V. I. Karasyk [10], Yu. S. Stepanov [23] et alia chose the linguoculturological direction [8]. The main purpose of both approaches is to determine the essence of language consciousness and try to understand the basic differences between different cultures. In both scientific fields of study, concepts are taken as

formations that have been constructed through an understanding of meaning. The concept demonstrates the ability to operate with certain notions that are part of this specific concept.

Today, there are three main approaches to the understanding of the concept: *linguistic*, *culturological* and *cognitive*. The *linguistic* direction in the concept study is presented in the works of S. O. Askoldov [2], D. S. Likhachev [16], V. V. Kolesov [11], V. M. Teliya [26]. Representatives of this approach define the concept as the total potential of the meaning of the word including its connotative element.

In terms of the *cognitive* direction, the essence of the concept is considered to be a phenomenon that has a mental nature. Z. D. Popova, I. A. Sternin, and other representatives of the Voronezh scientific school attribute the concept to mental phenomena and point out that it is a global mental unit, in other words, “a quantum of structured language” [19, p. 20].

Scientists who follow the *culturological* direction define culture as a set of concepts and the relationship between them. The concept is defined as “the main element in the mental world of linguistic persona, and an important role is given to the cultural information transmitted by the native speaker” [24, p. 63].

It should be noted that the linguistic and cultural approaches perceive semantic formations as concepts that have their own linguistic and cultural specificity and which are a reflection of the linguistic individual in the plane of a particular culture. Concepts are units of consciousness that represent human experience. At the same time, cognitive linguistics takes the concept as a working unit of bigger conceptual formations and draws the conclusion that it has verbal expression.

Today, scientists have concluded that the formation of the concept is the result of collective consciousness processes. In this case, the concept acts as a discrete unit, “which is stored in the national memory of native speakers in terms of a verbally marked form” [3, p. 30]. This indicates the fact that the concept preserves not only individual knowledge and experience but also the knowledge that is common to the whole specific linguistic community. They (concepts) in some sense are collective unconscious “of modern society” [15, p. 31].

In the modern linguo-cognitive studies the concept can be taken as an operative unit of memory, mental lexicon, conceptual system and language, the whole world picture, quantum of knowledge [129, p. 142]. The most important concepts are expressed by verbal means. At the same time, the concept demonstrates individual nature and shows its “multidimensionality of simultaneous structure” [69, p. 253].

The authors of the “Short Dictionary of Cognitive Terms” define the concept as “a perfect and abstract unit, the meaning of which is used by linguistic persona during mental processes, it reflects the content of experience and knowledge, the results of all human activities and processes of cognition in the form of certain units, “quanta of knowledge” [13, p. 83].

The outstanding linguist V. I. Karasyk generalized the ideas about the concept represented in the linguistic

studies of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. V. I. Karasyk underlined the essential characteristics of the concept by noting the fact that “the linguocultural cultural is a quantum of experience and it is modeled as a three-dimensional formation, which can include conceptual, figurative and value characteristics” [10, p. 172].

Classifications of concepts can base on various criteria, such as – the informant of the concept, sphere of functioning of the concept, mental processes and cultural meanings that are embedded in the concept. According to the studies of V. A. Maslova, concepts can be divided into individual, microgroup, macrogroup, national, civilizational and universal [17, p. 58].

Analyzing the modern linguo-cognitive studies, we can conclude that in modern linguistics there are various approaches to the interpretation of the concept – *culturological*, *psycholinguistic*, *semantic*, *logical*, *integrative* and *cognitive*.

Formation of the concept is a process of correlation of the results of experience with previously learned cultural values, which are expressed in religion etc. [22, p. 34]. The idea of a close connection between the concept and culture is represented in the scientific works of V. A. Maslova, who believes that the concept preserves the cultural memory of each nation [17, p. 38]. In terms of this study, culture is a basic notion, which realia reflect and fasten in terms of the language means.

Within the framework of the study, the concept is interpreted as a mental unit, which focuses on forming an understanding of certain phenomena and providing them with definitions used by the linguistic persona in the process of mental activity, and which is a reflection of experience in the process of cognitive activity.

Special attention is to be given to the *verbalization* and *nonverbalization* processes in terms of the concept formation. T. O. Fesenko describes the nature of the concept as “an expression of aesthetic specificity of mental process, and its verbalization is predetermined by the ethnoculturally marked linguocognitive associative competence of the conceptual system bearer” [27, p. 144].

Today there are various approaches to this problem. Even though the concept has a mental nature, to understand it and to describe its nature is possible only through language resources, and this automatically eliminates the problem of non-verbal concepts [18]. According to the next approach, nonverbalized cognitive structures move to the next level – *protoverbal*, as a result of the speaker's selections from the knowledge bank of the appropriate verbal fillers, which is the evidence of the pure diverse nature of the concept [10].

Verbalized and nonverbalized concepts can be separated according to another approach to the problem. Nonverbalized concepts can include “various facial expressions, graphics, stage, art, music and other means of conceptualization, transfer or interpretation of knowledge about life” [5]. Also, nonverbalized concepts can be studied in terms of psychology and

verbalized ones can be discussed as a part of linguistic studies [13].

In our view, the most neutral and balanced vision belongs to A. M. Prykhodko, as scientist suggests that the presence or absence of verbal expression does not affect the reality of the concept as an operational unit of mental process. Linguistic persona constantly uses both verbalized and nonverbalized concepts spontaneously and empirically [21].

All the above-mentioned approaches to the problem of the formation of verbalized and nonverbalized cognitive units stimulate the problem of identification of basic concepts. By the term “basic concept” in the study we mean “concepts of culture” – names of abstract concepts, the basic units of the world picture, which have existential significance for both the individual linguistic persona and the linguistic-cultural community.

Also, worth noting is that close study of lexical units allows tracking and analysis of processes and mechanisms in terms of any culture. Understanding and reconstruction of verbal structures and their perception as a cognitive formation through the prism of verbal processes give a chance to come closer to the essence of a cultural code.

From that, it is necessary to clarify the difference between basic notions of *cultural concept* and *concept of culture*. The first term presents a mental entity that can function within a certain national world picture and beyond national specifics, representing global cultural processes, reflecting the experience of a large group of

linguistic personas. The nature of the concept of culture is far more narrowed, as obtained information forming this mental unit exists within the borders of a certain cultural code.

Conceptual units can create open nonlinear systems and this is evidence of the self-organization ability on different levels. Such formations are based on a set of verbally marked and unmarked basic concepts that represent basic concepts and conceptually significant values, meeting the needs of the cognitively discursive sphere of a particular culture.

The position of conceptual units in the frame of material and spiritual culture stimulates to identification of its basic components. Each cultural phenomenon passes through the “prism” of the creator/user of culture and means of creation/product of culture [8, p. 61]. In this way, it is possible to distinguish the universal categories AGENT and OBJECT, which simplify the process of cultural concepts analysis.

According to the cognitive approach, the concept can be characterized as a mental phenomenon that represents a certain idea of a fragment of the world or a part of such a fragment [28, p. 109].

Each concept is part of the cultural matrix. According to the recent studies, the concept can be taken as a micromodel of culture, as it generates culture and is generated by culture [23]. The concept is a “cluster of culture” [23] and it carries all the necessary extralingual and pragmatic information.

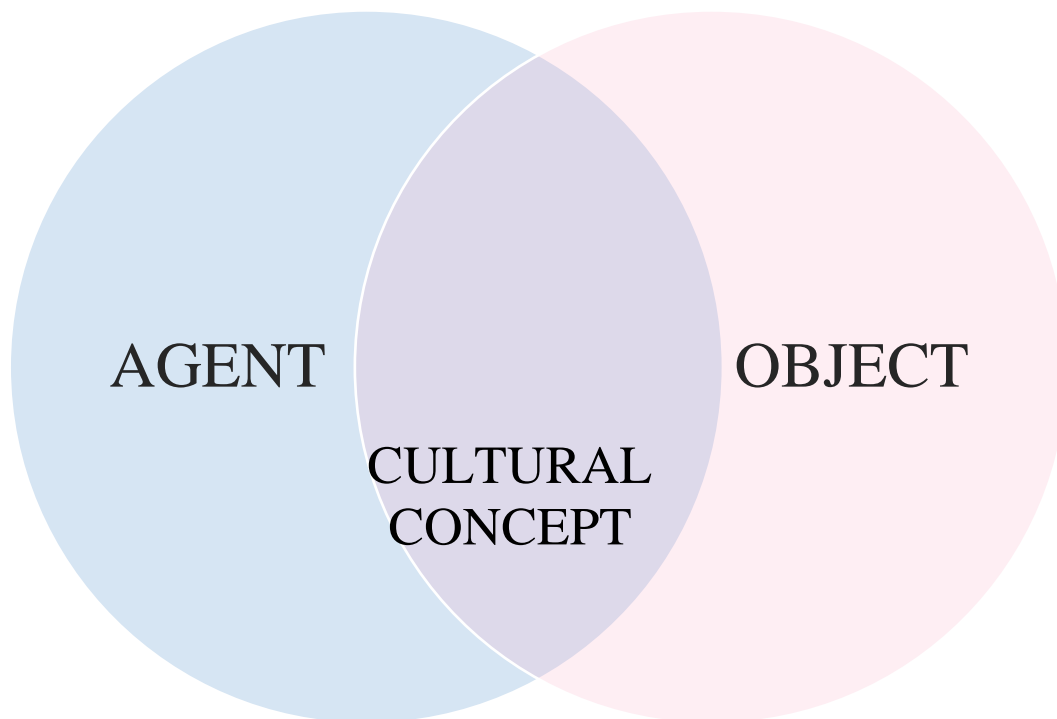


Fig. 1 – Interaction of the universal cultural categories AGENT and OBJECT [8, p. 246]

The concept is the bearer of the cultural memory of each nation, so it leads to the conclusion that there is a tight connection between the concept and culture [17].

Formation of the concept is a process of correlating the results of experience with previously obtained cultural

values, which are expressed in religion, art and other spheres of culture.

The abovementioned definitions of the concept represent similar positions about its place in the human life. Many scientists define the concept as a set of meanings in the mind of linguistic persona and believe that the concept acts as a cultural layer between a person and the world. So, the concept, unlike the notion, is not only interpreted but also experienced within a certain cultural space and experience. In addition, the concept is a discrete meaningful unit of collective consciousness, reflected in the language through the verbalization process, which has a direct impact on the vocabulary update.

Basic concepts take part in the creation of bigger conceptual formations. They preserve and represent spiritual elements of culture, which are reflected with the help of linguistic means. With the help of linguo-semantic forms of concepts, the linguistic discourse of culture is formed. Today, the concept plays a special role in the understanding of culture. It can be attributed to the macro-unit, which plays a significant role in the formation of the cultural code of mankind.

The most substantial for the culture basic concepts reflect in terms of the language corpus and they carry cultural essence that is impossible to analyze at the beginning of its existence. During the formation process concepts become a part of various cognitive systems where they are influenced by other concepts and at this point, metamorphoses start to happen.

The search for relationships between concepts is a complex and consequential process. Through the prism of basic concepts study it is possible to trace and analyze consistent patterns and new directions of development in different spheres of human activity.

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