Cognitive-pragmatic view on interpretative representation

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Abstract
INTRODUCTION. The aim of the study is the cognitive-pragmatic view on the interpretative representation in English. MATERIALS AND METHODS. Research methods include cognitive analysis, semantic analysis, discourse analysis and a method of inferential analysis. We also propose a method of cognitive modeling for a visual presentation of interpretative processing model. The factual material is based on samples of examples from authentic English dictionaries, as well as online resources. The data analysis proved that much information can be presented indirectly, and it leads to hidden associations and evaluative inferences. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION. The study has shown the role of such mechanisms in processes of the interpretative representation, as the mechanism of meaning extension, the mechanism of opposition, the mechanism of duplication, the mechanism of conceptual substitution and the mechanism of associative implications, as well as the syntactic constructions, representing various interpretations. Among them there are constructions with interpersonal parentheticals, quasi-subordinate constructions, syncretic constructions, constructions with the phraseological unit *God knows*, backhanded compliments, tautological constructions and constructions with conceptual metaphors, conceptual metonymies and conceptual comparisons. CONCLUSION. It is concluded that the interpretative representation process is complex and multidimensional, however, engaging a cognitive-pragmatic approach allows to reveal the information complexity and to interpret hidden meanings, as well as to infer all evaluative associations.

Keywords: cognitive-pragmatic approach, processing mechanism, procedural knowledge, interpretative representation, construction, cognitive model, information complexity

Когнитивно-прагматический подход к интерпретативной репрезентации

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Аннотация

ВВЕДЕНИЕ. Целью исследования является когнитивно-прагматический подход к изучению процессов интерпретативной репрезентации в английском языке. МАТЕРИАЛЫ И МЕТОДЫ. Методы исследования включают когнитивный анализ, семантический анализ, дискурсивный анализ и метод инференциального анализа. Мы также предлагаем метод когнитивного моделирования для визуального представления модели интерпретативной обработки информации. Материалом исследования являются выборки примеров из аутентичных английских словарей и онлайн-ресурсов. РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ. Анализ данных показал, что значительная часть информации может быть представлена косвенно, что приводит к скрытым ассоциациям и оценочным инференциям. Исследование показало роль таких механизмов в процессах интерпретативной репрезентации, как механизм расширения смысла, механизм оппозиции, механизм дублирования, механизм подмены понятий и механизм ассоциативных импликаций, а также роль синтаксических конструкций в представлении различных интерпретаций. Среди них выделены конструкции с межличностными парантезами, квазипридаточные конструкции, синкретические конструкции, конструкции с фразеологизмом, двусмысленные комплименты, тавтологические конструкции, а также конструкции с концептуальными метафорами, концептуальными метонимиями и концептуальными сравнениями. ЗАКЛЮЧЕНИЕ. Сделан вывод, что процесс интерпретативной репрезентации является сложным и многомерным, однако привлечение когнитивно-прагматического подхода позволяет раскрыть комплексный характер информации и интерпретировать скрытые смыслы, а также вывести все оценочные ассоциации.

Ключевые слова: когнитивно-прагматический подход, механизм обработки информации, процедурное знание, интерпретативная репрезентация, конструкция, когнитивная модель, сложное знание

INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses the question of interpretative representation and English syntactic constructions as means of objectifying this type of representation. It is argued that there appear many hidden meanings and evaluative inferences in processes of interpretative representation. As processes of human thought activities are not observed, we need to explain them via linguistic elements in the syntactic constructions. If language structures and syntactic propositions are stored in memory, they are cognitive and can be used to investigate the specifics of information processing. This suggests that we need to consider both linguistic input and its cognitive foundation. We propose a cognitive-pragmatic approach to show mysteries of interpretative representation. Thus, the goal of this paper is to reveal the specifics of interpretative representation under the cognitive-pragmatic approach.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To achieve the goal of this study such methods as cognitive analysis, semantic analysis, discourse analysis and a method of inferential analysis are used. Cognitive analysis allows to define cognitive mechanisms which underlie the information configuration, represented via syntactic constructions. Semantic analysis makes it possible to reveal the implicitly configured meaning. With the discourse analysis underway, cognitive and pragmatic functions of interpretative representation are explained. The method of inferential analysis is useful for predicting both positive evaluations and critical messages to avoid potential conflicts in communication. Besides, we propose a method of cognitive modeling which might be useful for a visual presentation of interpretative processing model. The research material is based on samples of examples from authentic English dictionaries, as well as online resources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since P. Grice's theory of implicatures [1] and J.R. Searle's theory of indirect speech acts [2] have been proposed, the body of research develops around the ways in which phenomena of hidden associations and evaluative inferences play a major part in representation processing. Moreover, D. Wilson and D. Sperber have pointed out the need to consider the relationship between the processes of representation and the principle of relevance in human speech and thought activity, emphasizingthat "a person unconsciously strives for maximum relevance, i.e., for maximum cognitive effect with minimal effort during processing" [3]. These theoretical ideas provide grounds for considering interpretative representation as a manifestation of the pragmatic aspects of language. It is significant that the principle of relevance is associated both with the acts of information processing (in this case, it is assumed that there should be minimal costs on the part of the speaker) and with the result (the result is understood as achieving the maximum cognitive effect). Another aspect to be pointed out is the law of linguistic economy, according to which some information can be presented in an implicit form.

Alongside the pragmatic approach, we also propose the cognitive view on information processing. In this case we consider the way of structuring information which leads to irregular loading of sentence meaning and finally to evaluative interpretation (about irregular loading of sentence meaning see: [4]). The cognitive approach reveals cognitive mechanisms, activated in information structuring. Both cognitive and pragmatic views allow to accentuate cognitive basis of implicit construal. The cognitive-pragmatic approach to sentence analysis allows one to take into account the speaker's intentions and communicative goals. Since human speech-thinking activity is characterized by creativity, the same situation can be constructed in alternative ways depending on the speaker's intentions. This approach will be further demonstrated in factual data analysis.

The concept of interpretation is central for an anthropocentric nature of language and is considered to be a major principle of cognitive linguistics [5]. As N.N. Boldyrev has noted, knowledge interpretation is dynamic on both an addresser and addressee part [6]. R. Langacker, W. Croft and A. Cruse observe the perceived

knowledge to be context-based (see [7; 8, pp. 98-99]). From this perspective, people are seen as actively making sense of what they describe and imagine, and syntax serves a leading role in the linguistic representation of real world situations. Syntactic interpretation is something that happens in response to contextual factors. Interpretations arise as people actively cooperate in a communicative context. In other words, any interpretation process is subjective (subjective interpretation is discussed in: [9]).

Being a key term of this study, an interpretative representation is defined as a procedure of representing a set of meanings objectified by a syntactic construction in communication. Such a representation is related to the "semantic load" of the sentence structure. The factor of a "cognitive filter" ensures variable perception of evaluative meanings, when an information interpretation is carried out in accordance with the expectations of an addressee. The factor of "cognitive filter" reflects the active, dynamic and controlled nature of human perception. A crucial feature of this factor is the activation of "nested" attention (see: [10; 11]). This type of attention relates to a person's subjective experience ability to hold a number of attractors in the focus of attention simultaneously. Although we intentionally construct the sentence in such a way, that it might represent both a positive and a negative evaluation of the event, the addressee's focus of interpretation depends on the communicative context.

Let's turn to the data study to show syntactic constructions, which allow interpretative representation, with the focus on the underlying processing mechanisms:

(1) a mechanism of meaning extension

*He is saying you can't imagine **what*** (Collins).

The mechanism of meaning extension involves processing information in such a way that a linguistic unit represents implicit meanings. Constructions with parentheticals imply a number of hidden meanings. We can interpret this example below: 1) He says nice things; 2) He says bad things; 3) I prefer not to discuss what he says. The first interpretation is a positive evaluation, while the second one projects a critical view and the last interpretation provides an evasive point of view. Obviously, the constructions with parentheticals are effective means of interpretative representation.

Sentences with the phraseological unit *God knows* also demonstrate the activation of a mechanism of meaning extension, which leads to a set of possible interpretations:

God knows *where he put the keys!* (CD).
God knows *if the reports are true* (MWD).

The first sentence outlines the following interpretations: 1) I do not know and nobody knows where he put the keys; 2) I have no idea where he put the keys and I refuse to talk about it. The second example also allows a few inferences: 1) I do not know if the reports are true; 2) I do not know if the reports are false; 3) nobody knows how to assess these reports. Taking into account the result of meaning verification and the modality of the analysed utterances we conclude that such sentences can be perceived as critical remarks and they lead to a communicative dissonance as a speaker avoids a direct discussion of the above mentioned situations.

Another case of interpretative representation is the usage of syncretic constructions. Syncretism of a linguistic unit is defined as a combination of opposing meanings representation. The most ambiguous constructions are models: What + Noun!; Such + Noun! For example: *What a place! Such a plan!* These sentences are ambiguous and can be interpreted as means of representing both positive and negative evaluation: *What a good place! / What a bad place!; Such a good plan! / Such a bad plan!* Verbalization of evaluative meanings correlates with conditions of communicative context. What is evident from the speaker's side, this is an intentional construal of uncertain evaluation. The two possible evaluative focuses put the addressee in a difficult position, as there are two alternatives for him: 1) the addressee has to ask additional questions to clear up the speakers intentions; 2) the addressee can ignore such exclamations. This puts the recipient in a dependent position because he has to guess the purpose of the message himself and it can also lead to a cognitive dissonance.

Another option of interpretative representation is illustrated by quasi-subordinate sentences

which involve the subordinate clauses, functioning as independent ones:

If only he knew the truth (CD).

If only they would talk to each other (CD).

When transformed into a subordinate clause, the meaning of this quasi-subordinate structures change substantially. Instead of expressing emotive meaning, they express an unreal condition (If I knew the truth, I would do it; If we could talk, all would be different). In fact, quasi-subordinate sentences project a few hidden meanings. The first example implies the following situations: 1) the speaker feels sorry that he does not know the truth; 2) the speaker feels sorry that he missed a good opportunity to implement something; 3) the speaker is disappointed that he was not told the truth.

Another case of interpretative representation includes backhanded compliments which are non-prototypical. Such complimentary statements are considered non-prototypical, since they are ambiguous and can be interpreted as not only a compliment, but also as criticism. The ambiguity is constructed through the mechanism of opposition.

(2) **a mechanism of opposition**

*Your **new hairstyle** makes you look so much younger!* (RD).

This sentence expresses potential criticism. A speaker's attention is focused on two domains: APPEARANCE – *new hairstyle*, AGE – *young*. A comparative degree of the adjective *younger* allows us to project a TIME opposition "younger at the present moment – not so young in the past" (the present moment is opposed to the past). By inference, we construe an IMPLICATION: a person looked bad as the old hairstyle made her look old. This indirect uncomplimentary message can cause a communicative conflict.

*You're so beautiful **when you smile*** (RD).

This example represents an evaluative focus within the same domain (APPEARANCE – beautiful), but the projected opposition refers to the ACTION domain "smile – no smile". The possible interpretation of this compliment with an implication is like this: a person does not look beautiful in general, only at the moment of smiling. The interpretation of compliments with implications through an activation of a mechanism of opposition allows to infer hidden meanings. This process is complex and multifaceted.

(3) a mechanism of duplication

This mechanism is activated when we use tautological constructions. In such constructions, the duplication of meaning is formed according to the model "Noun + Noun". In this case, linguistic norms are clearly violated, but taking into account the principle of relevance, such constructions are considered by speakers to achieve certain goals. Thus, duplication is a processing mechanism, aimed at encoding some information by implicit means, that is decoded on the contextual basis. The next example illustrates this phenomenon:

Agreements are agreements (MD).

Based on the situational context, we can suggest a number of possible interpretations of this statement: agreements are agreements, and 1) they cannot be revised, as they are certified by signature and seal; 2) they confirm both parties decision to implement what was agreed; 3) there might be disappointments; 4) they take into account each other's interests.

Here is another example with a mechanism of duplication:

Compromise is compromise (MD).

There are a few interpretations of the situation, represented by this tautological construction: compromise is compromise, and it means that 1) each side gives up something it wanted; 2) both sides have to be ready for mutual concessions; 3) each side found a "golden middle" during their discussion.

Tautological constructions as means of evaluative interpretation prove their effectiveness in organizing conflict-free communication.

(4) a mechanism of associative implications

Associative implication is linked with implicit communicative intentions, when a listener can reveal more information about the situation than it was explicitly expressed. The fact is that the background knowledge provides clues for the addressee to understand the evaluative meanings. Various implications are objectified by conceptual metaphors, metonymies and conceptual comparisons. In a conceptual metaphor the construal projects links between two domains to create evaluative associations [12; 13].

As a result of this process, we deal with the richness, complexity and creativity of the speaker's imagination.

There are some examples:

*You have always been **my rock*** (II).

The source domain of this metaphor specifies a natural object – a rock, which is a monolithic stone block with steep slopes and sharp ledges. This knowledge structure is associated with a person. Consequently, the person is conceptualized as someone who is reliable, strong, and supportive. Such a sentence sounds complimentary.

The elephant in the room *is obvious* (Collins).

Here the source domain of a metaphoric transfer points to an elephant, the largest animal on the land. These animals grow up to four meters and weigh about six tons. The information about elephant's sizes and weight is essential for understanding the possible associations. Such animals are always in our visual focus. These characteristics project the idea that there is an obvious problem or issue that everyone is aware of but avoids talking about it. Moreover, the sentence with this phrase is a kind of a warning, as it holds a suggestion of immediate actions to prevent the situation from getting worse and more complicated.

*You will have **a taste of your own medicine** and see how you like it* (WH).

The expression *a taste of your own medicine* is related with a sensation of taking medicine, which is usually bitter and unpleasant. The target domain refers to social relationships. As a result of similarity analogy, it is indicated that someone is mistreated the same way he has mistreated others. Thus, this idiomatic phrase sounds as a warning not to behave in such a way.

*You are building **a house of cards*** (CD).

A metaphoric expression *a house of cards* defines an organization or a plan which are very weak and can easily be destroyed or can easily go wrong (see: [CD]). This phrase is used to prevent somebody from risky actions.

*This plan is our **North Star*** (Examples).

Here the source domain covers the characteristics of North Star to be the brightest star in the constellation of the Northern Hemisphere. The light of this star is a kind of beacon for travelers at sea, where there are no other landmarks. The target domain refers to the plan content. Finally, the domain cross-mapping leads to an evaluative association, such as: this plan is a guiding force in our business. The speaker evaluates the importance of a plan.

An opposite evaluation is constructed in the example below:

*This plan is **as useful as a chocolate teapot*** (Examples).

The syntactic element "plan" in this sentence functions as an object of observer's evaluation. The source domain includes the information about the situation when pouring boiling water into a chocolate teapot melts chocolate pieces. We consider such an action completely useless. The target domain points to details of a plan. Due to cross-domain mapping, an evaluation is formed. The given sentence with a conceptual comparison provides the speaker's point of view about the discussed plan: it is utterly useless.

Building *a successful business **is like cooking a recipe; you need to follow the steps carefully and use the right ingredients*** (II).

This example illustrates both a conceptual metaphor and a conceptual comparison. A metaphoric transfer is based on the interplay between a source domain "Construction of buildings" and a target domain "Business". This cognitive operation leads to an evaluative association: creating a new business takes time and is a complex process. Besides, a conceptual comparison projects the idea that running a business is like following a recipe to cook a dish, which involves many steps and requires using the right ingredients for success.

*I am **all ears*** (Collins).

Finally, we turn to another very powerful means of interpretative representation, which is based on the analogy by contiguity. Using the metonymic link "a human being – an organ of auditory perception", the speaker sends a few messages: 1) I am listening to you very attentively; 2) I am eager to listen to what the others are saying; 3) I pay all my attention to your problem.

(5) a mechanism of conceptual substitution

This mechanism is activated in constructions with euphemisms:

*She was **a late bloomer** as a child and didn't start reading until she was 7* (SCE).

People prefer to listen to phrases which are nice and positive. Moreover, there are some topics we avoid to touch on, for example, the age of people. The euphemism *a late bloomer* is used metaphorically to focus the listener's attention not on child difficulties with reading, but on the stage of developing reading skills. According to the created association, a person is described as successful, attractive, more mature and the fact of acquiring reading skills later in life than others is not so important.

*My grandfather's **golden years** were filled with adventure and laughter* (SCE).

The euphemism *golden years* describes a person's age phase of life after retirement. It sounds metaphorical, as characteristics of precious metal are directed at a person's age, which emphasizes the value of this period of life.

*She is **a well-seasoned teacher**; she knows her stuff!* (SCE).

The idea that everything is supposed to happen in time lets us understand the situation in terms of orderliness, organization and stability. This understanding allows us to define a person who is well-organized, alive and experienced in handling any situation.

The results of this study are illustrated in Table 1 (see Table 1).

As Table 1 shows, it is clear that the processing mechanisms belong to a procedural type of knowledge, aimed at declarative knowledge processing (see: [14]) to realize a few cognitive and pragmatic functions. Activating the mechanism of meaning extension a speaker puts the focus on "nested" attention to involve many aspects into analysis. To achieve this goal, the constructions with interpersonal parentheticals, quasi-subordinate constructions, syncretic constructions and constructions with the phraseological unit *God knows* are used.

The mechanism of opposition allows to construct backhanded compliments which are non-prototypical and sound critical.

The mechanism of duplication is effective for generalizations and helps to create a modus variation. It is objectified by tautological constructions.

As for the mechanism of associative implications, it is activated in constructions with conceptual metaphors, conceptual metonymies and conceptual comparisons. This mechanism is extremely effective in creating evaluative inferences.

The mechanism of conceptual substitution is realized in constructions with euphemisms. Activation of this mechanism leads to alternative conceptualization, which allows the utilization of descriptive expressions that are neutral in meaning.

Table 1

The interaction of processing mechanisms with cognitive
and pragmatic functions in an interpretative representation

Processing mechanism	Cognitive function	Pragmatic function
Mechanism of meaning extension	activation of "nested" attention	implication of hidden meanings; realization of linguistic economy law
Mechanism of opposition	deviation from a prototype	expression of hidden criticism
Mechanism of duplication	generalization	modus variation; realization of linguistic economy law
Mechanism of associative implications	evaluative association	acts of warning; complimentary message; hidden criticism
Mechanism of conceptual substitution	alternative conceptualization	utilization of descriptive expressions that are neutral in meaning

Source: compiled by the author.
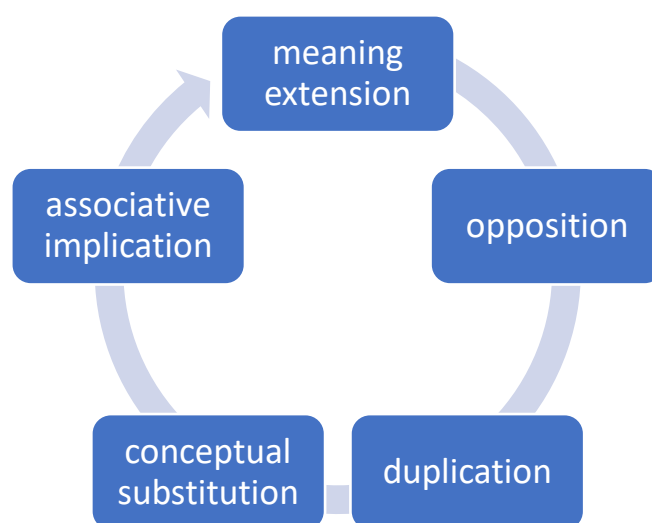
Fig. 1. The model of the interpretative representation

Source: compiled by the author.

Through the analysis, outlined in this paper, we can propose the model of the interpretative representation in Fig. 1 (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 is a cognitive model of interpretative representation, carried out on the basis of processing mechanisms which are defined to be a procedural knowledge (knowledge "how"), ensuring human thought activities in processes of interpretation. In this model, there are no dependencies, which indicates the autonomy of each mechanism and its activation with the focus on the goals of communication. In form, this model is cyclical in nature and involves the inclusion of any mechanism into human thought process in accordance with the speaker's intentions. It also emphasizes that interpretative representation is realized through the activation of selected mechanisms. On the whole, interpretative representation processes reflect the cognitive dynamics of human speech-thinking activities (see [15]). We believe that insight into cognitive aspects of these processes helped us to understand the nature of interpretative representation.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the cognitive-pragmatic view on the interpretative representation has been put forward. We have argued that the proposed ap-proach reinforces our point about the ambiguity of some syntactic constructions.

The analysis highlights the following important observations:

1) much information is presented indirectly, which leads to hidden associations and evaluative inferences. This fact correlates with realization of linguistic economy law;

2) a speaker intends to express some information implicitly to avoid a cognitive dissonance;

3) a listener is oriented to various linguistic attractors to understand both explicit and implicit information;

4) the interpretative representation as a result of information processing is based on activation of cognitive (processing) mechanisms;

5) the preceding analysis has shown the role of such mechanisms in processes of the interpretative representation, as the mechanism of meaning extension, the mechanism of opposition, the mechanism of duplication, the mechanism of conceptual substitution and the mechanism of associative implications;

5) the interpretative representation means include constructions with parentheticals, quasi-subordinate constructions, syncretic constructions, constructions with the phraseological unit *God knows,* backhanded compliments, tautological constructions and constructions with con-

ceptual metaphors, conceptual metonymies and conceptual comparisons. Conceptual metaphors are certainly more significant in creating evaluative associations, yet conceptual metonymies and conceptual comparisons also emerge as vivid examples of expressiveness, though they are not often used;

6) from the evidence provided by these constructions, participating in interpretative representation, we have shown the model of this type of representation (Fig. 1) and also described the interaction of processing mechanisms with cognitive and pragmatic functions, activated in an interpretative representation.

As noted earlier, the whole interpretative representation process is complex and multidimensional, however, engaging a cognitive-pragmatic approach allows to examine its specifics and to interpret hidden meanings, as well as to infer all evaluative associations. We emphasize that this approach is extremely useful in explaining the processing mechanisms of human cognitive activities, as applying insights from cognitive linguistics is crucial to the very basis of interpretative representation. In addition, the pragmatic view is aimed at studying the speaker's intentions and the formation of indirect meanings (see works by P. Grice, J.R. Searle, D. Wilson, D. Sperber). The proposed approach proved its relevance via data analysis.

However, a further research can be conducted to analyse how useful the given mechanisms are in different types of discourse, especially with data from another language. As a direction for a future research, we consider the application of discussed above cognitive-pragmatic approach to the study of other complex linguistic phenomena.

Internet resources

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