

Lexical units with the semantics of spatial extension in the Russian and English linguocultures

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the means expressing the concept of space in the Russian and English languages; the concept of space is viewed with concern to its national and cultural peculiarities of perception. The focus of the issue is the semantic structure of the lexical units with the meaning of extension on the horizontal axis in the Russian and English languages (*далеко, близко, far, close* and others). The semantic structure of the analyzed lexical units is considered in terms of a hierarchy of categorical, integral and differential semes. The categorical seme 'spatial extension' is realized through integral semes 'nature of extension' and 'nature of orientation' which are represented by set of differential semes.

The article analyzes the results of existing researches in this area. The analysis of factual material allows to draw conclusions about analyzed problem and to compare these results with the work of predecessors. The analysis of semantics shows that concept of extension on the horizontal axis has much in common both in the Russian and English languages but for the Russian and English native speakers there is certain ethnic differentiation typical of national linguocultures as far as perception of space is concerned within the aforementioned lexical systems. National peculiarities of space perception make themselves evident in the fact that representatives of the Russian linguoculture have «unrestricted» space perception, but for the British one it is important to provide clear borders and the structure of space.

Keywords: comparative linguistics, linguoculture, concept of space, semantic structure, seme, spatial extension

Introduction and the theoretical base of research

The universal conceptual category of space being reflected in the verbal sign system along with other categories is a base component of the view of the world of any ethnic group. It has been described in detail in linguistic works (Apresyan, 1995; Boguslavskaya, 2000; Evtushenko, 2002; Korneva, 2000).

Despite the existence of numerous scientific studies on linguistic means of expressing the concept of space there is no complex and systematic analysis of these linguistic means with the application of a comparative approach. It seems promising to compare the means of expressing the concept of space in the Russian and English languages in terms of their national and cultural peculiarities. We examine the concept of space as a reflection of ethnic perception of extension in space and in time. Our research is based on the approach to the analysis of lexical units developed by S.P. Lopushanskaya and approved by studies of her followers (Gorban', 2000; Lopushanskaya, 1998; Milovanova, 2007; Shamne, 2009). The semantic structure of the analyzed lexical units is considered in terms of hierarchy of categorical, integral and differential semes – components of the meaning which differ from each other in accordance with their role in the structure of the word meaning.

The lexical units with the meaning of spatial extension can be classified on different bases: 1) extension on the horizontal axis (*далеко, близко, far, close, etc.*), 2) extension on the vertical axis (*вверх, вниз, up, down, etc.*), 3) the subject of perception (*рядом, около, close, near, close up, etc.*).

The semantic structure of the lexical units with the meaning of extension on the horizontal axis in the Russian and English languages

The article deals with the lexical representation of the concept of space which expresses the sense of distance in terms of the extension on the horizontal axis. The examples are the Russian lexical units *далеко/ близко* and their synonyms *вблизи, поблизости, недалеко, неподалеку, невядалеке, вдали, издали, вдалеке, издалека* in contrast to the English words *far, close, near, not far away (not far off), in the distance, afar, from a distance (from afar), hereabouts, thereabouts, close up*. The list of lexical units of this group was formed on the basis of our factual material and thus it is not the final result of research. When selecting these lexical units as the means of expressing extension we took into account the scientific work of contemporary linguists (Apresyan, 1995; Pankov, 2005; Yakovleva, 1994, etc.).

We used the seme 'spatial extension' as a categorical seme in the semantic structure of lexical units of the group analyzed since extension is the basic characteristic of the concept of space. For spatial orientation the following factors are of paramount importance: the actual spatial extension and existence of spatial landmarks against which an individual (subject) can determine his or her location in space (Apresyan, 1995: 67; Evtushenko, 2002; Kubryakova, 1997; Yakovleva, 1994, etc.).

In spite of the fact that lexical units *далеко / близко* are synonymous with their derivatives we support the point of view of E.S. Yakovleva who thinks that "each of the words describes the nature of remoteness of the object in its own way and therefore in most cases the words being close in meaning are not interchangeable" (Yakovleva, 1994: 21).

In the semantic structure of lexical units of the given group the categorical seme 'spatial extension' is realized through integral semes 'nature of extension' and 'nature of orientation' which are represented by set of differential semes.

The integral seme 'nature of extension' is specified by differential semes 'extension for a short distance', 'extension for a long distance', 'extension for an indefinite distance'.

The differential seme 'extension for a short distance' is realized in the semantic structure of the words *близко* and *вблизи*.

In spite of the synonymy these words are not completely identical and interchangeable. For example: 1. *Рядом он, совсем близко, я это чувствовал* (Куприн «Гранатовый браслет», 27) and 2. *Вблизи, в огромном пространстве долины, в прохладной и влажной свежести тумана лежало голубое, прозрачное и глубокое озеро* (Бунин «Тишина», 41). In these examples it is impossible to change the word *близко* to the synonym *вблизи* as it leads to the distortion of the sense of the sentence. The specifier *рядом* in the first example emphasizes that the distance between the subject and the object is minimal whereas the specifier *в огромном пространстве долины* in the second example shows that the word *вблизи* refers to a special space in close proximity to the subject of perception.

The semantic structure of the English words *close, near, close up* is characterized by the differential seme 'extension for a short distance', for example: *Suddenly Weena came very close to my side* (Wells «The Time Machine», 71); *Mr. Darcy had been standing near enough for her to hear a conversation between him and Mr. Bingley, who came from the dance for a few minutes, to press his friend to join it*

(Austen «*Pride and Prejudice*», 9); *If you won't let me live with you, I can build a house of my own **close up** to your door, and you may come and sit in my parlour when you want company of an evening* (Bronte «*Jane Eyre*», 624).

The words *close*, *near*, *close up* are used to specify the minimal spatial extension between two or more objects or between the subject and the object of perception. Compare: *Fairfax had taken her knitting, and I had assumed a low seat **near** her, and Adele, kneeling on the carpet, had nestled **close up** to me, and a sense of mutual affection seemed to surround us with a ring of golden peace* (Bronte «*Jane Eyre*», 351). As they are synonyms, these words can be interchangeable: *There is a bank **near** / **close** to the movie theatre* (BNC). However, their meanings are not completely identical that can be proved by the next example where *near* and *close* are used in the same context and they specify each other: *The other wounds were not the result of firing in contact, **near** contact or **close** range, but it is not otherwise possible to determine the exact firing range* (BNC).

The differential seme 'the extension for a long distance' is typical of the semantic structure of the Russian words *далеко*, *вдали*, *издали*, *вдалеке*, *издалека*. All of them are characterized by one peculiarity: semantically they are similar to the adjective *далекий*, which has one of the meanings "being or happening in the far distance or having a large extension" (OSRYa, 123).

The lexical unit *далеко* and its derivatives are used to tell about the furthest and latest among two or more objects, for example: *Потом **откуда-то издалека** дважды донесся аплодисмент* (Булгаков «Мастер и Маргарита», 91). – *Из города Гамалы, – ответил арестант, головой показывая, что там, **где-то далеко**, направо от него, на севере, есть город Гамала* (Булгаков «Мастер и Маргарита», 10). The contextual specifiers show the utmost remoteness of the subject (the narrator) from the object (the town). In the following context *Вдалеке* все было в легком светлом тумане, а *мостовая в конце улицы* блестела под солнцем, как золотая (Бунин «Тишина», 40) the word *вдалеке* points to a space perceived by the subject and that is emphasized by the specifier *мостовая в конце улицы*.

The differential seme 'the duration for a long distance' is a part of the semantic structure of the English lexical units such as *far*, *afar*, *in the distance*, *from a distance* (*from afar*). For example: *By sitting in the alcove, and keeping well back, Winston was able to remain outside the range of the telescreen, so far as sight went* (Orwell «1984», 5); *having reached the leads, looked out **afar over sequestered field and hill**, and along dim sky-line – that then I longed for a power of vision...* (Bronte «*Jane Eyre*», 152); *In the distance, right at the bottom of the hill, they saw throngs of people* (BNC); *From a distance of thirty feet she heard it clawing the earth* (BNC).

The differential seme 'extension for an indefinite distance' can be distinguished in the semantic structure of lexical units *поблизости*, *недалеко*, *неподалеку*, because they express very subjective perception of space.

In addition, these lexical units are used in cases where the speaker finds difficulty in determining the spatial extension, i.e. correlating it with either large or small distance. For example: *И ещё, когда замирали вокзальные окна, **где-то поблизости** слышался хруст и хrap* (BNC). *Окончив тур, она нарочно села **неподалеку от Ромашова**, стоявшего около дверей дамской уборной* (Куприн «Поединок», 44). In the latter example, there are not contextual qualifiers which indicate a specific spatial location of the subject and the object, for the heroine it is important to be in space proximity to the object. The meanings of the words *поблизости*, *недалеко* and *неподалеку* given in the "Dictionary of the Russian lan-

guage" by S.I. Ozhegov and N.Y. Shvedova are similar in many ways. Compare: *поблизости* – "nearby, close to something" (OSRYA, 426); *неподалеку* – "near, nearby" (OSRYA, 329); *недалеко* – "a short distance away" (OSRYA, 324). However, we believe that these lexical units are not always interchangeable, that is, their meanings are not entirely identical. This is confirmed by the following example, where the lexical units *поблизости* and *недалеко* are used in the same context and specify the location of something: *Недалеко от площади, поблизости от лавки Плотниковых, стоит небольшой, очень чистенький и снаружи и внутри домик вдовы чиновника Красоткиной* (NKRYA). In this example, the word *поблизости* и *недалеко* specify the location of the house related to the various landmarks.

The seme 'extension for an indefinite distance' is realized in the semantic structure of such English units as *hereabouts* and *thereabouts*, for example: *Mrs. Bennet, have you no more lanes hereabouts in which Lizzy may lose her way again today* (Austen "Pride and Prejudice", 351). *He lives in R. or thereabouts* (Austen "Pride and Prejudice", 35). These lexical units differ in the following way: *hereabouts* – "somewhere here" and *thereabouts* – "somewhere there" express different spatial extension concerning the subject. On this basis it is possible to draw a conclusion that the word *поблизости* is an equivalent of *hereabouts*, nominates uncertain minimum spatial extension, and the word *неподалеку* as an equivalent of *thereabouts* is used for designation of a little bigger extension.

In the semantic structure of the units nominating the concept we have marked out the integral seme 'nature of orientation' which is realized in the differential semes 'orientation towards the subject' presented in the semantic structure of the lexical units *издали, издалека*, or the differential seme 'orientation towards the object' presented in the semantic structure of the units *вдали, вдалеке*.

The following meanings of the considered lexical units are given in the explanatory dictionary by S.I. Ozhegov and N.Y. Shvedova: the word *издалека* (*издали*) – "from far distance, from the remote place" (OSRYA, 196); the word *вдали* (*вдалеке*) – "at far distance" (OSRYA, 59).

The main difference between these lexical units can be defined as follows: the word *издали* characterizes a certain space which is at a certain distance from the subject (orientation towards the subject), and the word *вдали* characterizes the location of the object at a long distance from the subject (orientation towards the object). For example: *Издали я видел эти наполненные светом, обледеневшие ящики и слышал их омерзительный скрежет на морозе* (Булгаков «Мастер и Маргарита», 79).

The word *издали* means the place where currently the subject is. *Действительно, где-то вдали послышался шум многочисленных крыльев* (Булгаков «Мастер и Маргарита», 138). In this example, the subject is in a different space than the perceived objects: *шум многочисленных крыльев* ("the sound of many wings"). Interchange of the units *издали* ("from a distance") and *вдали* ("in the distance") in these examples leads to a distortion of the meaning of sentences.

The lexical unit *издалека* characterizes the space, which is at a very great distance from the subject; in this case the subject does not know much about this area and often has nothing to do with it. For example: *Среди этих гудков откуда-то издалека послышался тяжкий, мрачный голос...* (Булгаков «Мастер и Маргарита», 56). In this example, the contextual qualifier *откуда-то издалека* ("from somewhere") emphasizes the long distance and spaces mismatch between the subject and the object, but it is orientated towards the perceiving subject.

The differential seme 'orientation towards the object' is actualized in the semantic structure of the English lexical units *in the distance* and *afar*. For example: *Once or twice he thought he heard footsteps approaching in the distance and they hid in the shadows until deciding it was safe to continue* (BNC). In this example the contextual qualifier *approaching footsteps* actualizes the specified seme.

The differential seme 'orientation towards the subject' is actualized in the semantic structure of the lexical unit *from a distance*, which is used in cases where the subject is in a space where he perceives the surrounding reality. For example: *from a distance of twenty feet Martha could read all the headlines and some of the smaller print ...* (BNC).

Research results

Thus, in this article we reconstructed the semantic structure of lexical units, indicating the distance according to the actual length of the horizontal axis in the Russian and English languages. The categorical seme in their semantic structures is the seme 'spatial extension', which is actualized in integral semes 'nature of extension' and 'nature of orientation', which are presented by a variety of differential semes.

As a result of the comparative analysis, we concluded that the designation of the spatial extension by the native speakers of the Russian and English languages is the same in many ways. This is expressed in particular in the fact that in both languages, there are lexical units semantic structure of which implements not only the semes indicating a certain distance ('extension for a small distance', 'extension for a long distance'), but also its relative uncertainty, for example, differential seme 'extension for an indefinite distance'.

Conclusion

An analysis of the factual material showed that in Russian and English there are lexical units, reflecting the national identity in the perception of space and the idea of the distance between the subject and the object. The Russian language to a greater extent than English, is characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty, subjectivity and relativity in the naming of spatial extension or location. Native speakers of English, on the contrary, are distinguished by the desire for strict consistency and specificity in characterizing the concept of space. For the representatives of the English linguistic culture it is important to clearly separate, organize and distribute the space.

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