Means of Verbalization of the Concept Threat in English Media Discourse

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Abstract: The present paper deals with various ways of expressing the presence and absence of a threat in the face of potentially dangerous objects, presented in English media discourse. The most frequent linguistic means used to express the presence and absence of a threat are analyzed.

Key words: concept, concept sphere, media discourse, frame, slot

Способы вербализации концепта УГРОЗА в англоязычном медийном дискурсе

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются различные способы выражения наличия и отсутствия угрозы в лице потенциально опасных объектов, представленные в англоязычном медийном дискурсе. Анализируются наиболее
частотные языковые средства, используемые для выражения наличия и отсутствия угрозы.

**Ключевые слова:** концепт, концептосфера, медийный дискурс, фрейм, слот.

Cognitive linguistics is a relatively new branch language science which studies a language as a system of signs coding and transforming information. It appeared in the second half of the XX century as a result of a merge of linguistics and cognitive science.

Cognitive science studies the processes of thinking as well as mental processes and conditions connected with it. From the point of view of cognitive science, people’s everyday experiences are considered to be a crucial point in such processes as comprehension and conceptualization.

There is no wonder why languages attract the attention of cognitive scientists. Languages let us understand and analyze human behaviour as the relations between language and other human activities are being observed in all the anthropocentric sciences.

Mental processes cannot run without language participation. Frame building is one of the basic mental processes demanding involvement of language. A frame is considered to be a stereotyped situation, which is an instrument of cognitive linguistics. These instruments are used to build a worldview of a particular ethnocultural group. The main aim of cognitive linguistics is, therefore, the modelling of language consciousness and linguistic world-image of a particular nation.

Whereas the research object of cognitive linguistics is quite clear – the language itself, the subject of research is not that obvious. It is reasonable to divide it into the following parts:

1) cognitive semantics;
2) metaphor and metonymy from the point of view of cognitive science;
3) study of discourse from the point of view of cognitive science;
4) study of a concept [1, p. 202].
The last point should be observed more attentively as a cognitive-linguistic phenomenon.

The phenomenon of concept is quite abstract, that is why a distinct and consistent definition of the term does not exist. Different linguists study this notion from different points of view and considering different aspects, it is natural that each scholar presents their own definition.

Russian philologist D.S. Likhachev points out that a concept exists independently for every particular definition of any word definition. Moreover he claims that a concept should be considered as «an algebraic expression» of any notion which we use in oral and written speech, as the full comprehension of notions is impossible due to lack of time, ability or due to personal interpretation which depends on such factors as profession, education, personal experience etc. [2, p.28]

The crucial point here is that the basic kind of cognition in cognitive science is not scientific knowledge but personal experience. As far as a concept is a mental, abstract notion, it is based on personal observations of a particular person and of the whole society. Depending on the experienced situations, a clear image in relation to a particular phenomenon and concepts similar to it, is formed in the mind of a person. Naturally, the knowledge acquired on the basis of experience correlates in the minds of people with the definitions given to a particular phenomenon in dictionary sources. The result of this relationship is the concept.

However, in this work the concept is being observed as a unity of all the meanings connected with a word.

Concepts are built with the help of frames. Frames are stereotypical situations, scenarios that act as an operating tool in cognitive linguistics. With the help of these tools, a linguistic picture of the world is built for each individual ethno-cultural group. Thus, the goal of cognitive linguistics is to model the linguistic consciousness and linguistic picture of the world of a particular nation.

The concept THREAT cannot be analyzed without the concept SECURITY. In fact, the concept THREAT is a part of the concept sphere SECURITY/SAFETY. To analyze the volume of the concept sphere SECURITY the definitions from Macmillan
Dictionary, Cambridge English Dictionary and American Heritage were observed. The following definitions were found:

1) safety, freedom from attack, harm, or damage, a state in which or a place where you are safe and not in danger or at risk; [4]

2) protection of a person, building, organization or country against threats; [3]

3) things done to keep people, places, or things safe. [6]

It is reasonable to conclude that the concept THREAT is one of the dominating units inside the observed concept sphere.

The concept THREAT, in turn, can be divided into two frames – “threat absence” and “threat presence”. The following frames are built with slots. The representation of the observed concepts and its frames can be illustrated by the examples from British media discourse. For this research we used the articles from the Guardian published in 2020. The attention was focused on the lexemes and phrases that verbalize threatening activity, means of threat, reaction to threatening activity, etc.

On the 15th of June the article devoted to the election process in Great Britain was published. Here we observe some lexical units which verbalize the concept THREAT and represents the Russian Federation as a source of threat.

1) ...it is important to establish whether a hostile state took deliberate action with the aim of influencing a UK democratic process... [The Guardian 2020]

The phrase “hostile state” nominates Russia, which is presented as a threat to the security of the democratic process in Britain. The observed phrase applies to the slot “Threat sources”, which is a part of the frame “Threat presence”.

2) ...post-Soviet Russian interference in a western democratic process.

In the phrase “post-Soviet Russian interference” the crucial lexeme is “interference”. It verbalizes the meaning contributing to the appearance of some threat. This example applies to the slot “Threatening means”.

3) ...If we consider the Russian threat to have been clearly indicated in 2006 with the murder of Alexander Litvinenko, ...
The phrase “Russian threat” points to the forming of the image of threat and belongs to the slot “Threatening activity”. It verbalizes the act of the direct appearance of a threat.

The lexeme “murder” also belongs to the slot “Threatening activity” as it nominates the act of violation of system stability. The notion of instability is the key one in the concept THREAT.

4) ...take events such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014...

The lexeme “annexation” belongs to the slot “Threatening activity” and nominates the act of violating stability. The above mentioned examples form the concept THREAT and contribute to the creation in the national consciousness the image of Russia as an enemy.

As it has already been mentioned, the concept THREAT can be verbalized by the frame “Threat absence”. This frame can be divided into two slots – “Threat prevention” and “Threat response”.

The same article from The Guardian gives the following examples of verbalization of the frame “Threat absence”:

1) ...any measures now being taken by the government are not preventive but rather constitute damage limitation.

The highlighted phrases belong to the slot “Threat prevention” as they are used to verbalize prevention activity.

1) ... the question is whether the intelligence community should – and could – have reacted more quickly and increased operational effort on Russia...

Should have reacted more quickly – this structure belongs to the group “response means” of the slot “Threat response”.

1. Protecting our democratic discourse and process ... should be a ministerial priority.

The lexeme “protecting” is a dominating one in the slot “Threat absence” and is used to verbalize prevention activity.
1. ...to defend the UK against agents of a hostile foreign power such as Russia.

2. ...to tackle criminal activities...

The structures verbalize the act of protection and threat prevention, that is why they belong to the group “prevention activity”.

1. ...promising further action to combat the GRU.

Further action to combat the GRU – at first sight, this structure may belong to the frame “Threat presence”, as it verbalizes the act of violating stability (to combat). However, this action is observed as a reciprocation to the threatening activity from the outside, this phrase belongs to the group “Response means”, the slot “Threat response”.

Thus, we can conclude that verbalization of the concept THREAT may be viewed as the following scheme:

The analyzed material from The Guardian represents Russia as a potentially threatening side. This proves the idea that concepts are inextricably linked with the process of forming the language picture of the world. The verbalization of the concept THREAT in British media reflects the major views of the nation.

Unlike many macroconcepts, the concept THREAT cannot be considered stable, since the ways of its verbalization largely depend on objects that native speakers consider potentially dangerous at the current time. Thus, the direct relationship of concept spheres with the language picture of the world of society is confirmed.
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Информация об авторах

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