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Семантические модификации англоязычных языковых единиц пространственной семантики

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Аннотация. Цель исследования - выявить закономерности метафорического моделирования непространственных объектов на основе переосмысления пространственных признаков в английском языке. В статье охарактеризованы основные сферы жизни человека через метафорические значения, создаваемые многозначными существительными, репрезентирующими пространство. Научная новизна данного исследования состоит в том, что разработана научная идея, раскрывающая лингвоментальный механизм формирования метафоры на примере парадигмы пространственных существительных английского языка. В результате выявлено наличие закономерностей формирования вторичных обозначений непространственных объектов на базе пространственной метафоры для обозначения социальной сферы деятельности человека.

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Semantic Modifications of English-Language Units of Spatial Semantics

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Abstract. The aim of this study is to identify the patterns of metaphorical modeling of non-spatial objects based on the rethinking of spatial features in the English language. The article characterizes the basic spheres of human life through metaphorical meanings created by polysemantic nouns representing space. The scientific novelty of the study lies in the fact that a scientific idea that reveals the linguo-mental mechanism of a metaphor formation by the example of the spatial nouns paradigm in the English language has been developed. As a result of the study, we have determined that there are regularities in the formation of secondary designations of non-spatial objects based on a spatial metaphor for defining the social sphere of human activity.

Introduction

On the one hand, the linguistic means of space representation are oriented towards reality, i.e. reflect the properties of the perceptual geometric space, on the other hand, they interact with the units of the entire language system and other semantic areas. It seems interesting and important to describe the process of this interaction, one of the results of which is the semantic modifications of the language units of spatial semantics. It seems that spatial nouns can serve as the necessary material for solving this problem. The relevance of this study is due to the need to study the units of nomination of spatial objects in English to identify features that are relevant for understanding and linguistic designation of fragments of physical space and metaphorical models, an assessment mechanism for the figurative nomination of elements of non-physical space.

To achieve this aim, it is important to solve the following tasks: 1) to characterize the mechanisms of formation of figurative meanings of nouns and identify the dominant spheres of metaphorical transfer; 2) to determine which spatial features contained in the structure of the lexico-semantic variant (LSV) of the nouns with spatial semantics are relevant for the metaphorical naming of objects in the mental, intellectual and social spheres; 3) to identify evaluative components in the structure of the secondary meaning of spatial nouns indicating the specifics of the perception of space by representatives of the English-speaking linguoculture.

In order to successfully solve the tasks set, the following research methods were applied: a descriptive method (generalization, systematization and typology), methods of component, definitional and contextual analysis, quantitative calculations.

The material of the study was the most frequent polysemantic nouns of the modern English language with spatial semantics, selected by continuous sampling from lexicographic sources, as well as contexts that illustrate the functioning of the studied lexical units, extracted from modern multi-genre works by English-speaking authors.

The solution of the tasks set became possible owing to the theoretical background, presented by the works that are devoted to the general description of the category of space (Кубрякова, 2000; Шамне, 2000; 2004; Shamne, Petrova, Rebrina et al., 2014; Яковлева, 1994); linguistic means and ways of expressing spatial localization (Jakendoff, Landau, Napoli, 1991; Lander, Maisak, Rakhilina, 2013; Маляр, 2002; Маляр, Селиверстова, 1992; 1998; Всеволодова, Владимирский, 1982; Талму, 1983; 1985); spatial metaphor (Anikin, Budaev, Chudinov, 2015; Domínguez, 2015; Лакофф, Джонсон, 1988; Stocker, 2014; Xie, Zhang, 2014; Вольф, 1988).

The practical significance of the study lies in the ability to apply the data obtained in the practice of teaching modern English, the results of the study can be used in theoretical courses in general linguistics, lexicology of the English language, special courses in lexical semantics, linguoculturology.

Results and Discussion

We believe that spatial nouns have a complex semantic structure that changes and expands over time. In addition to the main spatial meaning, these nouns can also develop various additional meanings, which over time can come to the fore and thus change not only the semantic structure of the word, but also the semantic status of the spatial noun itself. The semantic features present in the structure of the direct meaning of these nouns served as the basis for the formation of figurative meanings, in which the subjective assessment of the nomination object by a native speaker is expressed. Modern linguists evaluate the mechanism of transformation of physical space values into social space values as a metaphorical transfer (Krongauz, 2001). The identification of the primary directions of the initial spatial meanings on the formation of metaphorical semantics related to certain conceptual spheres is significant for the interpretation of certain divisions of space fixed in the lexicon. Metaphor, as a cognitive mechanism, mediates the comprehension of objects and phenomena of the social, mental and intellectual spheres that are directly inaccessible to comprehension (Лакофф, Джонсон, 1988).

The description of some fragment of space is by no means the only function of linguistic units that reflect spatial relations. These units are used regularly to denote concepts related to the social, intellectual, mental spheres. The mental sphere is an area of human mental activity, mental processes reflected in the form of sensations, perceptions, ideas, feelings, emotions, etc. By the intellectual sphere we mean an area of human mental abilities, mind, mental abilities of a person. The social sphere is an area of human social activity reflecting life in society and relationships with other people.

In the semantics of non-spatial, figurative LSV of the considered polysemantic nouns, there is an indication of the presence of an assessment of reinterpreted spatial features that are relevant to objects in the social, mental and intellectual spheres. Such spatial features as “filling”, “distance”, “coordination parameters”, “size”, “configuration”, “border” and “structural characteristics” of limited fragments of space are relevant in the evaluation process.

Let us consider how the semantics of filling is transferred from the spatial sphere to non-spatial conceptual spheres.

Partial filling of space, filling with an immovable substance, filling with homogeneous objects when metaphorizing the social sphere is associated among representatives of the English-speaking culture with an uninteresting life, a place that is scant on events, with a hopeless situation (*desert, wasteland, backwater, morass, quagmire, doldrums*), filling space objects that have a negative characteristic is associated with a place unsuitable for life (*dump, pigpen*), filling the space with objects that have a positive characteristic is associated with a comfortable place to live, a place in professional activity that a person occupies (*niche, playground*). Complete space filling is associated with an impressive amount (*landslide, avalanche*), filling beyond measure is interpreted during transfer as the presence of fierce competition (*jungle*). Let us give an example of the metaphoric transfer of the semantics of filling space with an immovable substance from the spatial sphere to the social sphere: *LSV morass₁* – has a direct spatial meaning: “a dangerous area of soft watery ground in which it is easy to get stuck” (Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). Let us analyze the semantics of the significant components of the dictionary interpretation of the *LSV morass₁* – ‘dangerous’: “able or likely to harm or kill you”; ‘soft’: “not hard, firm, or stiff, but easy to press”, which allow us to identify additional semantic features in the semantic structure of the *LSV morass₁*. The interpretation component “not hard, firm, or stiff, but easy to press” allows for verification of the semantic feature ‘having a shaky surface’; the interpretation components “containing or filled with water” and “not hard, firm, or stiff, but easy to press” indicate the qualitative composition / material of filling the space. The interpretation component “able or likely to harm or kill you” explicates the semantic feature ‘negative assessment’. These semantic features served as the basis for the formation of a figurative meaning in *LSV morass₂* – “a complicated and confusing situation that is very difficult to get out of” (Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). In this example, the changed structure of the earth’s space, which is a shaky and swampy place that threatens human life, is reflected in a figurative sense as a difficult, hopeless situation. For example: *We’re trying to drag the country out of its economic morass* (Merriam-Webster, 2022). In the examples given, the *LSV morass₂* is used to negatively characterize a certain spatial object for a swamp, which in the analyzed context is defined as a situation from which it is difficult to get out, a hopeless situation, and the transformation of a spatial object into an object of the social sphere is demonstrated.

Lack of filling, empty space in the figurative understanding of the mental sphere is thought of as sadness, loneliness, spiritual devastation (*emptiness, void*), lack of mutual understanding (*rift*), something uninteresting (*desert*); filling with objects that have a positive characteristic is thought of as a state of bliss (*heaven*), as something pleasant, pacifying (*oasis*); filling with objects that have a negative characteristic, being rethought, underlies the metaphorical designation of something unpleasant (*prison*). Let us give an example of the transfer of semantics – filling with objects

that have a positive characteristic of space from the spatial sphere to the social one: *LSV heaven₁* has a direct spatial meaning: “*the sky, especially perceived as a vault in which the sun, moon, stars, and planets are situated; the place where God is believed to live and where good people are believed to go when they die*” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Interpretation components “*a vault in which the sun, moon, stars, and planets are situated*”, “*the place where God is believed to live and where good people are believed to go when they die*” indicate the semantic features ‘*the nature of filling a limited fragment of space*’, ‘*filling with objects that have a positive characteristic*’. By analysing the dictionary definition, we are able to identify the following semantic features that constitute the semantic structure of the *LSV heaven₁*: ‘*filling with heterogeneous objects*’ (indicating through the components of the interpretation “*in which the sun, moon, stars, and planets are situated*”, “*where God is believed to live*”, “*where good people are believed to go*”, i.e. a given quantum of space is thought of as a space-container); ‘*non-homogeneous filling*’, i.e. the signified part of space is constituted by different objects; ‘*filling specificity*’ (unusual, non-trivial objects – “*the sun, moon, stars, and planets*”, “*God*”, “*good people when they die*”); (*space is meant for the stars, God, good people have to die to get there*).

These semantic features served as the basis for the formation of the figurative meaning of *heaven₂* in the *LSV* – “*a place, state, or experience of supreme bliss*” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Thus, these spatial features turn out to be relevant for the nomination of objects and phenomena of the human mental sphere, as a result of which the corresponding spatial noun can be used to denote the emotional state of the subject (“*experience of supreme bliss*”).

In addition to the transfer of the nomination, in this case one can also say that the derived *LSV heaven₂* is a means of nomination within the same spatial sphere (“*a place*”), but acquires the characteristics of an evaluative language unit, i.e. it can serve as a means of expressing a subjective attitude to the object of the nomination. For example: *Living on the farm for Jim was heaven* (Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). In this example, *LSV heaven₂* is used to characterize the emotional state of the subject, for additional qualification of the described situation, in the analyzed context it is defined as bliss, a state similar to being in paradise. Contextual analysis confirms our conclusion about the relevance of the spatial features we have identified, which can act as a motivational basis for the nomination of objects in the non-spatial (mental) sphere.

The semantics of distance is also a source for a metaphorical rethinking of the phenomena of the social and mental spheres. A significant distance in the social sphere is interpreted as something unattainable, unfamiliar, unknown, undeveloped by man but at the same time as something attractive, supernatural (*star*). A small distance between objects is interpreted as the presence of competition (*jungle*).

In the mental sphere, a significant distance, being rethought, underlies the metaphorical designation of alienation, lack of connection, lack of commonality (*distance*), something inaccessible (*heaven*), the presence of a distance between objects – a break in relations, disagreements, lack of mutual understanding (*rift*).

The semantics of spatial coordination is the basis for the metaphorical naming of phenomena in the social and mental spheres. In the social sphere, based on the semantics of the lower space, images of something secret, illegal, hidden, forbidden (*den, nest, haunt*) are created. The upper space is associated with power, with a high social position in society, something better, successful (*top, summit, pinnacle, star*). The peripheral location is interpreted as uninhabitable (*dump, pigpen*), the interior space is interpreted as comfort (*niche*). In the mental sphere, the semantics of the lower space, being rethought, motivates the metaphorical designation of a spineless, weak-willed, weak (morally) person (*doormat*); vile, boorish behavior (*heel*); the semantics of the upper space is associated with inaccessibility, an unusual state (*heaven*); the semantics of the external space is connected to something pretentious, deceptive (*façade, surface*).

The initial semantics of the size of space serves as the basis for understanding the social and intellectual spheres. A significant size in the social sphere, when rethinking, is interpreted as something that has outstanding qualities (*star*), as well as a hindrance, something that interferes with movement (*pothole*), an insignificant size is interpreted as something petty, a loophole, a dodge in legislation (*loophole*). In the intellectual sphere, the semantic features ‘indefinite’ and ‘big’, being rethought, underlie the metaphorical designation of a stupid person (*lump, mug*).

The semantics of space configuration is a source of metaphorical rethinking of the intellectual and social spheres. Within the framework of the intellectual sphere, the semantic features ‘*rectangular*’, ‘*equilateral*’, being rethought, motivate the metaphorical designation of a boring, uninteresting, conservative person (*square*). Consider the following example. *LSV square₁* has a direct spatial value: “*a flat shape with four sides of equal length and four angles of 90°*”. Contextual analysis allows us to conclude that various objects of anthropogenic origin surrounding a person can have the shape of a square.

The semantics of the significant component of the dictionary interpretation of *LSV square₁* – “*flat*”: “*smooth and level, without raised or hollow areas, and not sloping or curving*” makes it possible to highlight additional semantic features in the semantic structure of *LSV square₁*. Thus, according to the results of the analysis of dictionary definitions and the contextual analysis, the semantic structure of *LSV square₁* is constituted by the semantic features ‘*rectangular*’, ‘*equilateral*’, ‘*with a smooth surface*’, ‘*without bends*’. These semantic features served as the basis for the formation of a figurative meaning *LSV square₂*: “*a boring and old-fashioned person who does not like new and exciting ideas*” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). A figure simple in form, with sides and right angles of equal length is metaphorically interpreted as an uninteresting person, a conservative who does not accept new ideas. Even though conservatism is one of the hallmarks of the English society, the rejection of new ideas is assessed negatively. There is a transfer of the spatial features ‘*rectangular*’, ‘*equilateral*’, ‘*with a flat surface*’, ‘*without bends*’ to the intellectual sphere of human activity. For example: *Reg is such a square! He does not wear fashionable clothes and has old fashionable interests* (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2022). In the abovementioned context, *LSV square₂* is used to characterize a person as boring, uninteresting, old-fashioned through association with a spatial object – a square shape.

The semantic feature 'formless', being rethought, underlies the metaphorical designation of an uninteresting and stupid person (*lump*); the semantic features 'cylindrical', 'equilateral', being rethought, make it possible to metaphorically designate a trusting, naive, simple person (*mug*); the semantic features 'curved line', 'angle gradually turning into a horizontal plane', being rethought, underlie the metaphorical designation of a look, a dissenting opinion, a point of view (*slant, angle*). In the social sphere, the shape of the circle is rethought as perfect, arched – a clause in the legislation (*loophole*), the nodular shape is complex, confusing.

In the social sphere, the semantics of the border is interpreted as something that interferes, the presence of rules, something personal, inaccessible, safe; moving borders – leading (*landslide, avalanche*), having sharp outlines – deceptive. In the mental sphere, the semantic feature 'the presence of a border', being rethought, motivates the metaphorical designation of a refuge (*oasis*); emotional environment characteristic of a particular place (*atmosphere*); restrictions on freedom (*prison*); something isolated, shelter (*den, nest, haunt*), 'lack of visible boundaries' motivates the metaphorical designation of sadness, loneliness, spiritual devastation (*emptiness, void*); vagueness of boundaries, when rethinking, motivates the metaphorical designation of an uninteresting, stupid person (*lump*).

The semantics of the structural characteristics of space is the basis for the metaphorical naming of the social and mental spheres.

In the social sphere, the semantics of the vertical position is the basis for the formation of the image of something successful, convincing, and just like a significant position within the team, vertical movement is metaphorically thought of as progress, promotion in professional field; the frontal position is interpreted as a protective function, a leading position, something irresistible; the closed space in the figurative understanding of the social sphere is interpreted as a hopeless, impasse situation; a part of the whole is evaluated positively as a responsible attitude towards something. For example: *His ascent to power was rapid and unexpected* (Compact Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). In this example, the *LSV ascent₂* is used to additionally characterize the already named object of the nomination, i.e. a road, a slope leading up, which is defined in the analyzed context as an increase in a person's position in the social or professional sphere. In the mental sphere, the semantic attribute 'frontal position', being rethought, makes possible the metaphorical designation of something that hides (*façade, surface*); 'closed' – something that provides solitude, peace (*den, nest, haunt*), isolation (*prison*).

Conclusion

The results of the study led to the following findings:

1. As a result of the study of the metaphorical meanings of polysemantic spatial nouns, we have determined that the analyzed nouns in their figurative meanings are most often used to denote the social sphere of human activity, which reflects the realities associated with a person's occupation, his position in society, his social status.
2. The semantics of space filling, space distance, spatial coordination is a source of metaphorical rethinking of the social and mental spheres, the semantics of size, configuration of space is a source of rethinking of the social and intellectual spheres, the semantics of the boundary – the social and mental spheres, the semantics of the structural characteristics of space – the social and mental spheres.
3. Polysemantic nouns that name limited fragments of space fix the location in space and actualize the assessment, which correlates with the human value system. The actual spatial features that determine the formation and actualization of the assessment in the secondary meanings of the analyzed polysemants are: 'size', 'border', 'configuration', 'filling', 'constituents', 'coordination parameters' and 'structural characteristic'. Thus, it can be noted that the assessment of space was formed in the process of human life and the cognition of the world.

Further research perspectives lie in the need of applying the approach implemented in the work for studying the metaphorical potential of other units of the lexico-semantic system of the English language.

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Информация о статье | About this article

Дата поступления рукописи (received): 22.03.2022; опубликовано (published): 31.05.2022.

Ключевые слова (keywords): семантическая модификация; языковая единица; пространственный признак; метафорический перенос; semantic modification; language unit; spatial feature; metaphorical transfer.