

**WUT 2020****10<sup>th</sup> International Conference “Word, Utterance, Text: Cognitive, Pragmatic and Cultural Aspects”****INTERPRETIVE POTENTIAL OF ENGLISH MYTHOLOGEMS AS COMPONENTS OF THE LINGUISTIC WORLD IMAGE**

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***Abstract***

The term “linguistic image of the world”, introduced into science by L. Weisgerber, has been attracting the attention of domestic and foreign scientists for the last decades. In the framework of cognitive linguistics, the study of the interpretive function of the language has become relevant and, accordingly, the question of the interpretive nature of the linguistic image of the world has arisen. The study aims at considering the interpretive potential of English mythologems which are important components of the English linguistic image of the world. Since the question of the nature of mythological knowledge remains open – whether it serves as a form of reflecting the surrounding reality, or it is an expression of the psychic nature of man, or a way of social interaction, - there emerges a need for a conceptual analysis of mythologems to identify cognitive models and schemes that stand behind definite language units. This method allows researchers to find out relations between the linguistic meanings and the conceptual system of the representatives of a particular linguistic culture. The results obtained indicate that mythological knowledge, objectified in the language through mythologems, represents a complex of information, which can be called «mythological image of the world». In addition, the ability to produce mythological knowledge serves as an indicator of a certain level of consciousness being formed.

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## 1. Introduction

The problem of the interpretive function of consciousness has already been raised in the works of many domestic and foreign philosophers, sociologists, linguists. It has become an axiom that human experience of being is closely connected with conceptual interpretation, and in different historical eras the human mind can resort to different ways of obtaining this experience and to various forms and methods of its interpretation. According to Mannheim (1936), "the specific character and life-situation of the subject influence his opinions, perceptions and interpretations" (p. 50). Hence the main question that arises in connection with this fact is the fundamental principles of interpretation. These cognitive principles are conceptualization and categorization and they precede any experience and do not depend on it, since they are innate, and therefore determining and prescribing. As a result of the process of experience interpretation, knowledge is formed. This knowledge can be of different kind and is objectified in the language by means of different units, thus making the process of language interpretation the main key to the person's inner world and the experience preserved by the whole nation or generation.

## 2. Problem Statement

It's obvious that interpretive activity of a person is a complex, multidimensional process. It includes two components: direct data, i.e. the meanings that are presented or transmitted to the mind, and the form or construction which is the result of the work of thought. One of the main issues, that arise in this connection, is objectivity, reliability of the information that is perceived, processed and further transmitted by means of a natural language. Here the language serves as a medium in which and due to which the subject divines himself and the world finds itself (Ricoeur, 2008). Thus, one can speak about the interpretive function of the language. Linguistic interpretation is organized in accordance with the personality structure and types of human activity, and is based on existing collective knowledge schemes and guided by the individual's conceptual system (Boldyrev, 2017). The individual conceptual system, including all its internal connections, is a conceptual image of the world of a person. This conceptual image of the world is always wider than the linguistic image of the world.

Despite the fact that language means do not allow to objectify the conceptual image of the world to its full extent, a linguistic research can reveal a lot about the specifics of the functioning of human consciousness, the ways of interpreting the obtained information and different types of knowledge, formed in the process of interpretation of this information. The main problem that should be stated here lies in the identification of interpretative structures of knowledge, i.e. cognitive models and schemes, which stand behind the studied lexical units and constitute the so-called *interpretive potential* of these language formations.

## 3. Research Questions

The main questions posed in this article are directly related to the interpretive function of language and mythological knowledge, which is one of the types of so called "ordinary" knowledge. Mythological knowledge, together with other types of ordinary knowledge, forms the basis of the conceptual image of the world. The study of the nature of mythological knowledge is still open, although it has been discussed

for a long time. Thus, according to Durkheim (2018), religion and mythology are based on collective representations that reproduce, reflect social conditions. In E. Cassirer (2002)'s opinion, myth-making is nothing but a type of symbolic activity. Malinowski (2015) believed that myth in a primitive society is not a means of scientific or pre-scientific knowledge, but a lived reality. From the point of view of analytical psychology of Jung (1996), myth is a product of the collective unconscious. In C. Lévi-Strauss (2001)'s "Structural Anthropology" we find that mythological thinking presupposes "the transformation of sensory experience by means of the semiotic system" (p. 103) (for a more detailed analysis of different approaches see (Shelepova, 2019a).

Thus, the nature of myth, mythology remains debatable. In order to clarify it somehow and get a little bit closer to understanding the essence of mythological thinking, it's necessary to research the cognitive structures of knowledge, which constitute the interpretive potential and which stand behind mythological elements found in the English language.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The research aims at studying the interpretive function of the English language, revealed through the interpretative potential of mythologems which objectify mythological knowledge and form the mythological image of the world. English mythologems have been chosen as the object of the research, whereas the subject of the study is cognitive structures, models of interpretation.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The main approach to solve the scientific problem is a cognitive one. The applied method of modeling the interpretive potential of mythologems is based on the method of modeling the interpretive potential of lexical categories, suggested by prof. Panasenko (2017).

#### **6. Findings**

Being linguistic means of expressing mythological consciousness, mythologems have a number of specific characteristics, revealed in the process of the research. Firstly, mythologems denote fictional objects of thought, although they are "combinations of separate elements of reality" (Beliaevskaya, 2017, p. 94). For example, a *mermaid* has "the head and upper body of a woman and the tail of a fish" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020c), a *fairy* has "diminutive human form" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020a), a *giant* is "a humanlike being of great stature and strength" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020b). Secondly, on the cognitive level mythological concepts stand behind mythologems. These concepts denote a variety of mythological, unreal objects and phenomena and serve as expressers of a person's mental nature, his perception and vision of the world, as well as personal relationships in a particular historical society. Thirdly, mythological concepts objectified by mythologems are complex integrative cognitive formations, polymodal structures formed by mental representations of various sensory modalities (sensory, motor, emotional, evaluative, verbal) (to learn more about concepts as multimodal structures, see the works by Thagard (2019). These characteristics can be applied both to mythologems in general and English mythologems in particular.

The analysis of the mythologem "*chimera*" has revealed the following structure of its interpretive potential. Its meaning is "*an imaginary creature that breathes fire and has a lion's head, a goat's body, and a snake's tail*" (Longman Dictionary, 2020). The mythological concept *chimera* includes several integral components – *a creature* and *a monster* – that enable to unite this concept with other similar concepts, e.g., *harpy*, *hydra*, *siren* and others, into one category "*mythological beings*". Also, differential components, which are schematized representations, can be distinguished. They are simple models that serve the basis for constructing more complex mental structures: *a lion's head*, *a goat's body*, *a snake's tail* (N's + N, a part of the body belonging to a living creature) and *fire-breathing* (the ability to produce fire).

In addition to these components, one can distinguish those, formed due to the work of various sensory channels. They are conveying the following attributes in the word combinations *a long tail* and *a frightening imaginary creature* (Macmillan Dictionary, 2020): 1) "size" – *long* (through visual, tactile channels); 2) "causing fear" – *frightening* (psycho-emotional reaction); 3) "reality / unreality" – *imaginary* (the cognitive domain responsible for comparing and establishing correspondences). Thus, the mythological concept *chimera* is a multimodal formation. All these attributes correspond to "*ontologically oriented module*" (Panassenko, 2017, p. 226). Another type of module is "*a socially oriented module*" represented by an associative format, i.e. a format of knowledge, for which individual associations are formed under the influence of society, culture, history (ibid). Thus, the studied mythologem *chimera* is often associated with dark forces. In psychoanalysis, the image of a *chimera* denotes a deformation of the human psyche. In addition, in various types of discourse – artistic, publicistic, scientific, etc – there may be examples of individual author's associations.

As in the case with other mythologems, e.g., *leviathan* (Shelepova, 2019b), the process of demythologization of the mythologem *chimera* takes place, which manifests itself in the formation of figurative meanings (secondary nomination). This process can be called *reinterpretation*. It's followed by the deconstruction of myth. The main reasons of demythologization include extralinguistic ones, connected with changes of values in the society and cultural or industrial progress.

## 7. Conclusion

In the context of this analysis, it has become clear English mythologems, being a part of the linguistic image of the world, are complex structures, which on the cognitive level are represented by mythological concepts. The interpretive potential of these language units comprises integrative and differential components and is formed during the processing of the experience obtained through different sensory channels. Mythological knowledge turns to be the result of the interpretation of the person's inner state, the world around him and his relations with the reality and other people in it.

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