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**SEMANTICS AMBIGUITY: RUSSIAN LINGUISTIC WORLD-
IMAGE FOR “PROVINCE” LEXICAL UNIT**

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Abstract

The “province” lexeme, being one of the dominants of Russian linguistic world-image, has a significant level of its semantic ambiguity. The “province” lexeme has been functioning in the Russian language for a long time and has a long tradition of lexicographical documentation in fiction, journalism and internet discourses representing both actual and irrelevant meanings. It makes a rather vast area of semantic ambiguity for its naming; and within the studied area, new meanings that are considered to be quite difficult for semantization may be created. It is necessary to identify the context-situational conditions where the naming for “province” unit acquires its semantics ambiguity. Such conditions can be recognized as syntactic positions occupied by the nomination or naming. In this case, the position of the subject of speech mentioned for the first time is considered as a possible variant; the inclusion of the word “province” in the names of blogs and public pages is recognized as a special case. The predicate position for the “province” lexeme unit allows it to act as a representative of the class for the same name objects or qualitative varieties of the class. It is also of interest to describe the ambiguity for the polysemant “province” through the identification of different types of metonymic attractions. In addition, the combination with ambiguity indicators including indefinite pronouns and adverbs influences the semantics. Metalinguistic reflexive formation and quotation marks can also be considered as important structures for the studied phenomenon.

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1. Introduction

The ambiguity phenomenon can be studied and viewed from different points of view. According to logic it is seen as the absence of complete identity for some material or ideal object (A) to itself and the possibility of its clear distinction between different objects (A and not A). From the Information Theory point of view, the definition of ambiguity can be considered as a measure of information. In the gnoseological approach it is studied as a phenomenon that is an integral cognition element for the surrounding world and environment. It can be identified in all human processes that are used for the perception of reality. The cognition of the surrounding space is recognized as one of the ontologically primary and important processes. N.D. Arutyunova, E.V. Paducheva, E.S. Yakovleva, V.V. Korneva and others devoted their research to the objectification of spatial relations in linguistics (Korneva, 2006; Logic analysis of language..., 2000; Paducheva, 1996; Yakovleva, 1994).

According to Taylor (1995) the study of the meanings for “language forms” is considered as a necessary condition for the study of the processes for the world’s description, perception and its categorization; which is considered as knowledge fostering represented in all these meanings. E.P. Ivanyan (formerly E.P. Senichkina), a well-known Russian researcher of the ambiguity category, notes that this phenomenon can be represented in the form of the grading scale that contains a wide range of particular values including imprecision, approximation, vagueness, obscurity, generalization, etc. (Senichkina, 2004).

2. Problem Statement

In the Russian language, the considered “province” lexical unit and its derivatives vary and are used to denote a significant space for the territory of Russia in opposition to the capital/center. In other words it can have naming “backwoods or boondocks”. Modern researchers note that the phenomenon of province implies a significant degree of ambiguity. According to Spivak (2004), the word “province” and its derivatives “provincial”, “backwoods” etc. denote primarily phenomena from the area of everyday life, culture and morals; it acquires numerous, but predominantly negative connotations. Belarusian language scholar Tur (2019) notes that flexibility of the boundaries for lexical meaning should be considered as “the phenomenon of ambiguity for mental categories and their meaning can be refracted through language” (p. 278).

The lexeme “province”, having its documentation in fiction, journalistic and Internet discourse, denotes space with a significant level of semantics ambiguity; sometimes it is also used for naming a wide range of events, qualities and properties that are not directly related to the dictionaries in the Russian language.

3. Research Questions

This research is based on the thesis that ambiguity is one of the “semantic dominants” of the Russian language. It aims to study and describe the semantic category of ambiguity by analyzing the means of its expression due to the contextual and situational conditions of its use. According to Paducheva (1996) one more essential condition for ambiguity in any language is its correlation with a subject: it can be unknown

to someone but known for someone else; or the object is not identified for one subject but it is identified for another one. Therefore, when describing the semantics of ambiguity, it is necessary to take into account the subject component as well. In connection with the indicated features of ambiguity, two questions can be outlined in a comprehensive analysis of the “province” naming:

- What is the reason for semantics ambiguity?
- What context is the semantic ambiguity for the “province” naming usually revealed?

4. Purpose of the Study

According to the meanings, represented in different dictionaries, the lexeme province reveals a large number of connotations, mostly negative by its meaning (Voronina, 2012). Thus the aim of the present paper is to describe the semantics ambiguity for the “province”, reflecting the changes in the semantics of this phenomenon. It is necessary to study the semantics of “province” lexeme in fiction, journalist and Internet texts and discourses through a set of linguistic experiments.

5. Research Methods

Shmelev (1973) was one of the first in Russian science to designate the problem of semantic ambiguity. He named the semantic diffusion of a polysemantic word’s boundaries as the key cause, because “the principle of meanings diffusion for a polysemantic word is the decisive factor that affects semantics” (p. 124). Another language scholar V.V. Tur, having followed D.N. Shmelev’s scientific ideas, considers that lexical items can have intersecting, and then create “a new cluster of overlapping linguistic domains, leading to different interpretations in the context of different overlapping categories” (as cited in Tur, 2019, p. 279).

According to several researchers, the semantic ambiguity is generated by a “semantic drift”. This refers to the process of word acquisition due to its ability to easily accumulate linguistic boundaries by overlapping meanings; consequently it is used in the extended or augmented and even the widest semantic range (Belyakov & Serebrennikova, 2005; Orlov, 2011; Zayontz, 2006).

Another Russian language scholar Kharitonchik (2019), supposes that in the process of communication “latent” components in a word’s semantics, provide the design of dynamic coverage for the semantic field through the actualization and the latent components foregrounding due to the influence of current context.

According to Syomina (2018), the lexical units’ wide-meaning leads to semantic ambiguity which is revealed in multidimensional tracks for different types of polysemic units.

In view of the above mentioned information, the authors of the article consider the main methods of contextual and semantic analysis as the most relevant ones because they allow language scholars defining the lexis meaning as an emergent unit affected by the current discourse. It corresponds to the studies of American linguist Langacker (2008) who considered the physical, linguistic, social and cultural context of interlocutors as being the most relevant one.

Nowadays in humanitarian sciences, hybrid methods for linguistic texts analysis are widely used. The model for their application is represented by Gudkova and Yanitskiy (2020) in their scientific papers.

The text analysis for the selected texts from fiction, journalistic and Internet discourses were done according to the hybrid method model for text linguistic analysis.

6. Findings

Having analyzed more than 1450 linguistic examples of “province” lexical unit selected from fiction, journalistic and Internet discourse by the method of continuous sampling and having based on the texts included in the Russian language National Corpus (<https://ruscorpora.ru>), the authors of the article are revealing the key notes of their study, that are the following. A detailed semantics analysis for the “province” is based on the analysis of dictionary definitions represented in more than 20 lexicographic and knowledge (Parshina, 2019).

Within the framework of this study, the authors consider the definition of the lexical meaning for “province” documented in the “Big Academic Dictionary of the Russian language” as the key one (Big Academic Dictionary of the Russian language, 2012, p. 665). According to the dictionary, studied lexeme is defined as a polysemy, representing five basic meanings:

- *province*₁ – ‘in Ancient Rome, a conquered territory of some people dependent on Rome’;
- *province*₂ – ‘administrative-territorial unit in some states’;
- *province*₃ – ‘administrative unit in Russia (18th century)’;
- *province*₄ – ‘a place which is far from the capital city or a big cultural center’;
- *provinces*₅ – ‘about something or somebody stagnant, backward, outdated’.

The authors consider that the semantic ambiguity of the “province” lexical unit has been formed and fostered for a long time (its first recordings and documentation in the Russian language belong to the end of the 17th century) (Parshina, 2019). As a result, in the Contemporary Russian language the semantics of the analyzed lexeme is represented by both its irrelevant meanings: *province*₁ and *province*₃ indicated as obsolete in modern dictionaries and relevant meanings for *province*₄ and *provinces*₅ that are widely used in contemporary discourses. Moreover, the authors note that the word definition for *provinces*₅ already contains the ambiguity marker: the pronominals *что-либо* – *anything, something or somebody* that can point to any attribute and its content is determined in speech according to the current discourse (Russian Grammar..., 2005, p. 542).

In Contemporary Russian, the meaning *province*₂ is used only in a narrow context, when describing the features of administrative-territorial division for foreign states territories. However, the authors suppose that semantic components of irrelevant or outdated meanings continue to have a significant impact on the semantics of “province” lexical unit, while creating and externalizing a wide range of connotative meanings that generate and expand the field of semantic ambiguity (see Figure 1).

In the article, some text fragments representing the ambiguity phenomenon in the Russian language discourses are described. The translation and the authors’ texts interpretation are done according to the innovative methods represented by Gudkova and Dayneko (2020).

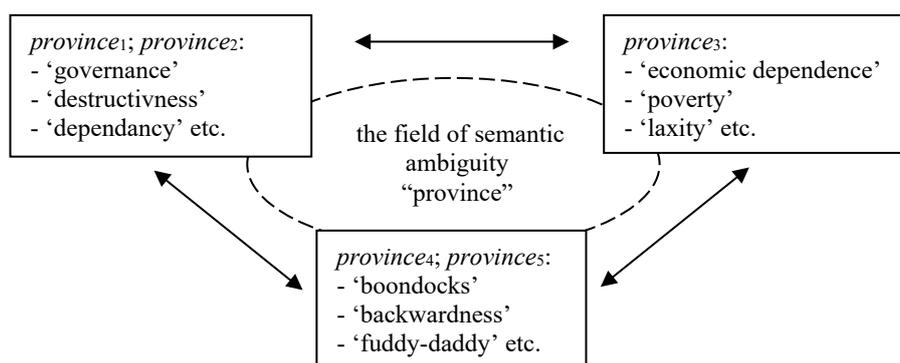


Figure 1. The field of semantic ambiguity for the “province” lexeme unit

To describe the means of expressing the semantics of ambiguity, the authors follow the integrative approach proposed by Katsitadze and Khristianova (2014). According to context-situational conditions, the scholars define different types of ambiguity including the following key ones: the primary mention of an object, not yet familiar to the recipient of the text; the representation of a class of objects of the same name or a qualitative variety of a class; words with a generalized connotation; word units with “inalienable nouns”: nouns accompanied by the pronoun determinatives *какой-то* –some, *кто-то* –someone, *кто-нибудь* –somebody.

According to the above mentioned data and as a result of the linguistic analysis for the selected text fragments, the following types of context-situational ambiguity variants have been identified.

I. Semantic ambiguity for the primary mention of an object or subject.

This type of ambiguity was identified in 301 text fragments (20.76%). Most often this phenomenon can be found in introductory or presentational sentences. Their purpose is to inform the addressee about the object that will be discussed in a further narrative or conversation.

In this example the “province” lexical unit has its meaning that is made up on the basis of the metonymic transfer transferring a name from a place/territory to the set of people living in that territory, connected with it: *province_a* ‘territory’ → *province_b* ‘inhabitants of that territory’. The meaning of the lexeme is revealed only with the help of a further text, where the opposition “center – province” is represented through the inclusion of the *Muscovites* naming, as well as the use of the word *hicks*, which additionally expands the meaning ‘inhabitants of the province, backwoods’.

Paducheva (1996) points out that the semantic dominants of language constitute a special issue in the universalist approach to semantics: while belonging to the dominant sphere, ambiguity indicators are close to grammatical indicators; and due to the fact that are imposed on the speaker by language features, sometimes they are not translated.

II. The representative ambiguity was encountered in 767 cases (52.90%). It occurs when an object appears as a representative of a class of objects for the same name or a qualitative variety of the class. In this case, the noun (often together with the specifier) is used in a predicative function and has a qualifying and evaluating meaning in some sentences.

The authors of the article suppose that in this example the “province” lexical unit can be expressed through the nominations of quality and the features for the whole country and it has the opposite meaning for *province₄*.

III. The semantics ambiguity is also possessed by the “province” lexical unit in the situation when it acts as an onym. Thus, in Russian Internet discourse 279 cases (19.24%) the “province” different in word units to name blogs/public pages have been identified. The reasons and peculiarities of such active usage are represented in our scientific papers (Parshina & Ivanyan, 2020).

Провинция души –Province of soul (serene for soul); Провинция в самоизоляции – Province during lockdowns (backwaters); Провинция финансовой грамотности – Province of financial literacy (to be a soft touch); Провинция в красках – The colors of province (dolor and despair), etc.

According to Katsitadze and Khristianova (2014), such usage is a particularly striking phenomenon, distinguished by its exceptional vitality and productivity. Nouns connected by inalienable relations are characterized by great semantic capacity and the ability to express subtle shades of meaning.

IV. The “province” lexical unit, accompanied by the pronoun determinatives *какой-то –some, кто-то –someone, кто-нибудь –somebody*, etc. and the pronoun expressions *так называемый –so termed or so called* can also be the reasons for semantics ambiguity. According to the authors’ statistics, this way of expressing semantic ambiguity is represented in 58 text fragments (4%).

For example, the “province” lexeme unit may have a high degree of semantic indeterminacy because it is accompanied with the linguistic catalyst that is represented by the indefinite pronoun *какая-то –some-something*.

V. The ambiguity expressed by graphic and verbal reflexives is the least represented: the authors identified 27 cases of their use and it corresponds 1.86 %. Thus, Russian scholar Gurova (2018a, 2018b) notes that inverted commas convey uncertainty or conventionality for naming the subject matter. The inverted commas in the following example are external signals that the “province” lexical unit is represented in a different sense from its lexicographic meaning.

Thus, the semantic ambiguity for the “province” in fiction, journalistic and internet discourse is represented quite widely in Russian linguistic world image. Table 1 represents the authors’ vision according to the conducted text analysis and assessment based on hybrid methods and digital tools for analysis (Gudkova & Dayneko, 2020).

Table 1. The summary table: cases of semantics ambiguity for the “province” lexical unit

N	Type of semantic ambiguity	Number of cases identified	Percentage ratio
I.	The ambiguity of the subject mentioned for the first time	301	20.76%
II.	The representative ambiguity	767	52.90%
III.	The onyms ambiguity	279	19.24%
IV.	The ambiguity through the pronoun determinatives	58	4.00%
V.	The ambiguity expressed by graphic and verbal reflexives	27	1.86%
Total:		1450	100%

7. Conclusion

The “province” lexical unit, despite its long tradition in lexicographic documentation, possesses a high level of semantic ambiguity in the contemporary Russian fiction, journalistic and internet discourse. In the Russian language, the considered “province” unit and its derivatives vary and are used to denote a significant range of naming the subjects. Modern researchers note that the phenomenon of province implies

a high level of ambiguity. A lot of scholars suppose that the key reason for the semantics ambiguity is the context of different semantic components in different discourses, which generates a vast area for semantics ambiguity. According to the conducted research and text analysis, the authors defined the following 5 tracks for semantics ambiguity in the Russian linguistic world-image. All of them were represented in the article.

In the next stages, it is necessary to consider the representation of semantic ambiguity for other elements of the semantic field for “province”. The obtained results are to be comprehended and used for the needs of bilingual lexicography, translation theory and teaching methodology.

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