

PhR 2019 Philological Readings

EMOTIVE VERBALISATION OF THE CONCEPT SCHOOL: SCHOOL STUDENTS' VIEW POINT

Irina Yu. Moiseeva (a)*, Valentina Remizova (b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Orenburg State University, 13 Pobedy pr., Orenburg, Russia, desire2003@yandex.ru,

(b) Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Orenburg, Russia, very-valentina@list.ru

Abstract

The paper presents the results of the practical research in the field of cognitive linguistics connected with the concepts, and the particular concept of SCHOOL is at the study focus. The concept SCHOOL is considered to be one of the most important concepts both for English and Russian nations and consequently it is axiologically marked in both cultures. Being of great value, the concept under study originates various associations and emotions. Our main objective in the framework of this research is to find out the verbal emotional components of the concept, presented in the comprehension of the school students. The lexical fund, which is actively used for the concept verbalisation, has been formed with the help of the associative experiment, or its modification, to be precise, – the method of unfinished sentences. The analysis of the data has revealed that the concept SCHOOL is associated with positive emotions as well as the negative ones. Positive emotions connected with school prevail to a very considerable degree. At the same time some English associations are more negatively coloured in comparison with the associations given by the Russian students we questioned. Further research of the emotive components of the concept SCHOOL may touch upon the associative experiment with adults, thus, interrelating such branches of linguistics as cognitive studies and sociolinguistics.

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Keywords: Concept, concept SCHOOL, emotions, method of unfinished sentences.



1. Introduction

Concept studies deal with a large number of aspects of human knowledge and experience, such as cultural values, philosophical ideas, language means, phraseology, folklore, literature, arts, eventual contexts, pragmatic situations, psychological characteristics, traditions, etc.

In contemporary linguistic studies the notion of the concept has been more or less outlined. It is defined as a distinct unit of the collective consciousness, a component of the common national cultural inheritance expressed by lexical means (Chen, Lin, Ku, Zhang, & O'Connell, 2018). The concept contains both cultural sense and lexical meaning (Nemickien, 2011). Due to its complicated nature, the concept is observed from the viewpoints of different linguistic areas: from cognitive linguistic it has sprung into semantic linguistics, linguo-cultural studies, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics.

Concepts are connected with phenomena and objects of great importance for the nation, of considerable cultural values (Stepanov, 2007). Every nation has its peculiar concepts with their habitual senses and meanings. Some concepts can go across concept spheres of different nations, but the volume of their implications may vary. There is no point in arguing that SCHOOL falls under the category of the concept and it is of a great significance for the Russian and British nations.

2. Problem Statement

The correspondence between a certain nation-wide concept and speech representation of an individual emotionally coloured thought arose as a reaction to what a concept bears on issue in concept studies.

The way a concept is reflected in the language is a result of comprehension, contemplations and experience, both collective and individual. Hence the representation of a concept lacks clear boundaries. One and the same concept initiates likes and dislikes, both positive and negative emotions, contradictory feelings, inconsistent evaluations.

Emotions are defined as corporal, facial and acoustic reactions to inner thoughts or mind interpretation of outer happenings. It might be of some use to compare emotions and an attitude (Ben-Ze'ev & Krebs, 2017): emotional attitude is closely connected with evaluations that appear in the mind as a reflection of objects, situations and entities (Chen et al., 2018).

Physical emotions, mental evaluations and emotion and evaluation vocabulary are interwoven, their existence is interdependent, as emotions and evaluations are verbalised. The inquiries into the concept SCHOOL cannot avoid being subjected for observation of its emotive lexical manifestation.

The historic development of a certain concept may influence its contemporary state, or its present form may have very little or even nothing in common with its historic prototype.

At a certain period of time the contemplation and verbalization of a concept differ from the previous epoch. For instance, if we take the concept SCHOOL as it is presented in Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre", we feel the atmosphere of teachers' hatred and children's fear. In the novel the teachers yell, command, order, demand silence, speak loudly, exclaim. The school girls seem to them as dirty, disagreeable and hardened slatterns. The school image in the girls' eyes is reflected with the words

“silence”, “whisper”, “strokes with the bunch of twigs”. So SCHOOL was a source of only negative emotions in the times of Bronte.

In the course of time the attitude to school has changed and the concept SCHOOL has acquired some new connotations. Revealing the present-day insights of the concept SCHOOL is at the study focus.

The frames of a particular culture may give limits to the content of the concept SCHOOL. But nowadays frequent contacts and cooperation between nations, unification of life conditions and the reality itself have eliminated restrictions in the conceptual content and have brought similar features into them, so the concepts have changed. However, the emotive components of the concept SCHOOL may differ from culture to culture.

3. Research Questions

Concepts are not heterogeneous in their essence. They include different layers derived from various sources, both conventional and personal ones. The key notion which gives the concept its name is the centre, the core of the concept.

The core is wrapped up in different connotations, associations, transferred meanings, situationally and contextually imposed features, etc. Thus we have faced the following research questions:

- What is the core element of the concept SCHOOL?
- How is the concept SCHOOL emotionally coloured?
- What emotions are involved in the concept SCHOOL?
- Are the arisen emotions similar or different in Russian and British cultures?
- Does a modern school reflect the same emotions as in the times of Bronte?

4. Purpose of the Study

Our main objective is to find out the verbal emotive components of the concept presented in school students' comprehension. School students aged between 14 and 18 have been chosen as a target group of our research. The reasons for it are the following: firstly, inasmuch as they are today's representatives of the school reality, they know the inner sides of school life; secondly, to put it emphatically, their hot hearts rule their cold heads, or that is to say they are eager to express and share their spontaneous and enduring emotions.

5. Research Methods

The associative experiment has been proven to be a reliable, effective, valid and trustworthy method to study concepts. To investigate the concept SCHOOL we divided the experiment procedure into two steps.

For the first step we have attempted a free multiple association experiment. It has given us an opportunity to obtain a bulky language inventory of the concept SCHOOL. Then we have chosen a set of the most frequent words in the list which present components of everyday school reality and which can be emotionally estimated: “junior pupils”, “senior students”, “classmates”, “teachers”.

For the second step we have carried out the modification of the associative experiment – the method of unfinished sentences. We have asked school students to complete the following sentences: “Junior pupils are...”, “Senior students are...”, “My classmates are...”, “Teachers are...”, “At school I feel...”. 100 students from Russian schools and 100 British students aged between 14 – 18 have participated in the experiment.

6. Findings

The core element of the concept SCHOOL is its dictionary definition. The most trustworthy source of the Russian vocabulary is the fourth volume of the Dictionary of the Russian language. It defines school as “teaching institution which provides secondary education and upbringing of a younger generation” (Evgeniyeva, 1988, p. 2). English sources state that school is “an organization that provides instruction, as an institution for the teaching of children”, “an institution for educating children” (Gullandand, & Hinds-Howell, 1988, p. 16). It can be seen from the above quotations that the core element of the concept differs to a very slight degree. The Russian conceptual picture includes educating, teaching, upbringing. The English conceptual picture leaves away upbringing, but adds instructing.

The associative experiment gives much more information about the concept contents. So, we have got a hefty word stock at our disposal.

It may seem that individual choices combined together bring us a depiction of collective representation of the concept SCHOOL. The following description touches upon only the most frequent reactions. Almost all words used in the continuation of sentences are emotionally coloured. Only a small percentage of the responses are neutral (“Junior pupils are small and fast”. “Senior students are tall”).

According to our findings junior pupils turn out to be funny (19%), nimble (13%), joyful (10%), amusing (7%), impudent (9%), fast (5%), small (5%) for the Russians and very confident (12%), annoying (11%), naughty (11%), loud (8%), funny (8%), interesting (7%), small (6%), fast (5%) for the British students. The “junior pupils” part of the experiment contains the largest number of neutral lexical units; even the word “loud” seems to be just factual information. The evaluation of junior pupils linked with their moving speed (“fast”, “nimble”), fun (“funny”, “joyful”, “amusing”), behaviour deviations (“annoying”, “naughty”, “impudent”; even “confident” bound with the intensifier very has a negative connotation).

Senior students in Russia have acquired such attributives as “clever” (12%), “joyful” (12%), “funny” (11%), “kind” (9%), “stupid” (8%), “insolent” (7%), “responsible” (7%), “communicative” (5%), “nice” (5%). In the UK they are “clever” (13), “funny” (13), “intimidating” (11), “kind” (10), “stupid” (9), “scary” (7), “friendly” (7), “communicative” (5), “tall” (5). Some senior students’ characteristics are completely opposite: they are “clever” and “stupid”; “insolent” and “nice”; “friendly”, “kind” and “intimidating”, “scary” at the same time. Here we can’t help but mention that the evaluation of Russian senior students, and consequent emotions associated with them have positive implications in a bit larger scale than those of British students. Besides, the description of Russian senior students has nothing in common with fear (cf. intimidating, scary).

Classmates are characterised as “joyful” (23%), “kind” (13%), “funny” (12%), “clever” (11%), “positive” (10%), “communicative” (9%), “friendly” (8%) in Russia and “friendly” (23%), “nice” (16%), “funny” (15%), “with a sense of humour” (15%), “witty” (13%), “favourite” (12%).

The list of these properties gives us the idea of the most favourable attitude of school students towards each other in both countries.

Students’ perception of their teachers is quite contradictory. Teachers are “kind” (27%), “intelligent” (18%), “fair” (13%), “wicked” (10%), “nice” (8%), “appreciative” (8%), “strict” (7%), “joyful” (6%), “hardworking” (3%) in Russia and “mostly boring” (35%), “mostly kind” (25%), “very insolent” (12%), “strict” (9%), “friendly” (8%), “fair” (8%), “funny” (7%) in the UK. Such characteristics as “kind”, “nice” and “wicked”, “strict”, “boring” and “joyful” are opposed. We cannot help paying attention to the fact that associations with British teachers are more negatively shaped than with Russian ones.

Emotions are explicitly revealed when direct questions are asked. So, the sentence “At school I feel...” was completed in the following ways: “excited” (22%), “tired” (20%), “fun” (13%), “interested” (11%), “affectionate” (9%), “calm” (9%), “bored” (7%) by Russian students and “comfortable” (22%), “fun” (20%), “at home” (15%), “tired” (11%), “bored” (9%) by British students. Opposing emotions and evaluations meet in the given enumeration. Nevertheless, positive emotions prevail.

7. Conclusion

So, we can arrive at the conclusion that the experiment has inevitably revealed the fact that the concept SCHOOL is associated with positive emotions as well as negative ones. Positive emotions connected with school prevail to a very considerable degree. At the same time some English associations are more negatively coloured in comparison with the associations given by the Russian students we questioned. It concerns the evaluations of senior students and teachers.

The concept SCHOOL is not static or unchangeable. On the contrary, it is dynamic, flexible. In the times of Bronte negative properties of school were typical, nowadays the concept SCHOOL is filled with positive emotions and evaluations.

Further research of the emotive components of the concept SCHOOL may touch upon the associative experiment with adults, thus interrelating such branches of linguistics as cognitive studies and sociolinguistics.

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