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DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS A WAY OF INTERPRETING
MOTHER'S COGNITION OF CHILD'S INDIVIDUALITY

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Abstract

The present paper is aimed at the analysis of applying semantic methods in studying the mother's cognition of the child's individuality and their interpretation using discourse analysis. A group associative experiment is used as a semantic method in the study. The phrase "my child" is a stimulus for the subjects. It is shown that the discourse of the mother's cognition of the child's individuality manifests in the correlation of explicit and implicit types of knowledge. The discourse has both general and specific features that depend on the number of children in the family and family position of the child. In particular, in most cases maternal knowledge contains the associations reflecting the child's character traits and the specifics of their communication and social roles of children. They are considerably presented in the explicit part of the discourse. The findings also point to a significant proportion of associations known as figurative associations, which reflect the implicit part of the discourse of the mother's cognition. The implicit meaning of these associations can be conveyed as a feeling of love toward the child. The common associative semantic universals revealed for all the three groups of mothers reflect the emotional acceptance of the child. The general context of discourse can vary. It ranges from two-category semantic associations, which individualize characterological and communicative features in the one-child mother group and in the two-child mother group. The range includes distinctive psychological characteristics in the explicit component in the third group of the mothers having many children.

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1. Introduction

In the context of cognition and knowledge of a person's individuality it is considerably important to study the specifics of cognition of a person's individuality by a naive subject who does not possess psychological knowledge. As it has been shown in some studies, the process of cognizing the individuality of a close person consists in the acquisition of the knowledge that has both explicit and implicit properties. Two key concepts are proposed in Polanyi's theory of implicit knowledge. Polanyi (1985) distinguishes two types of knowledge: the explicit one (articulated and expressed in concepts and judgments), and the implicit knowledge (that is personal cognition, not articulated in the language, and which is embodied in bodily skills, perception schemes and practical mastery (Mokhova, 2004). The explicit knowledge of the individuality of a close person in a naive subject has the characteristics of everyday knowledge. Some elements of this knowledge can be both the individual characteristics of a close person and awareness and understanding of cause-effect relationships between the elements of individuality system (Zhdanova, 2005).

2. Problem Statement

The implicit knowledge of the subject formed in the process of cognition is of relevant interest for the researchers. In this regard, there are actual questions of what is displayed in the consciousness of the subject, how this process occurs, what qualities the cognizer chooses from the whole complex of individual properties of cognizable objects, which of them are included in the structures of the inner world and which remain outside the cognition of an individual. When one considers the problem of knowledge from the point of view of the specificity of scientific and everyday knowledge about individuality, one can say that an independent problem is the problem of studying the relationship of explicit and implicit knowledge about the individuality of a close person.

One of the directions in qualitative research has arisen on the wave of "linguistic turn". The new method that allows us to study the ratio of explicit and implicit knowledge is discursive analysis.

3. Research Questions

It is generally accepted that the notion of discourse is introduced by professor Harris, the founder of transformational and distributive analysis in 1952. In modern studies, discourse is considered as a "builder" of the psychological reality being experienced (Rusakova, 2006). In recent years, various attempts have been made to systematize and classify the existing theories of discourse and discourse analysis. Among them, the most interesting methodological approaches are the classifications by Van Dijk (1989), Torfing (2005), Jorgensen and Phillips (2002). Modern discourse theories consider it not only from the linguistics' point of view, but also through applying interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, the understanding of modern discourse is much broader ranging from the definition of national identity and social interaction to gender aspects and social justice, and etc.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) distinguish three main fields of social life determined by discourse: 1) worldviews (discourse shapes mentality); 2) social relations between people (discourse produces social identification and social positioning); 3) personal individuality (discourse gives a person distinctive features).

Makarov (2003) notes that various discourses of social communication have become the subject of special studies, for example, discourses of communication between the parent and the child, a doctor and a patient, discourses of the court session, etc. Social discourse of a particular social group has a specific ideology that manifests in the context of discourse. The context of discourse is indirectly expressed, for example, via group opinions, personal opinions or through some specific mental models of events and actions.

Application of discursive analysis in characterizing the cognition of individuality is possible due to the concept of the communicative nature of the text developed by Van Dijk (1989). According to the researcher, discourse is an essential component of sociocultural interaction, which common features are interests, goals and styles. He notes that cognition has a social dimension, and arises and varies in both oral and other forms of interaction. When people say something or write, they, thereby, perform social actions. The main notion of discourse in Van Dijk's theory is a communicative event that allows us to consider discourse through categories of social interaction. This approach is based on the concept of symbolic interactionism by Mead (1934), who states that "...only owing to that individuals internalize the attitude of the generalized other towards themselves, a universe of discourse becomes possible as a system of common or social meanings which in terms of context is conceived by thinking" (p. 156). In accordance with its name as a main principle, an interactive model of communication puts forward interaction placed in sociocultural conditions.

Thus, we can assume that the process of maternal cognition of the child's individuality occurs in the sociocultural context of a particular family and has a pronounced situational orientation, i.e. it refers to the natural interactions such as everyday communication between acquaintances. These types of interactions are most likely to be subject to study from the perspective of discourse analysis (Kasavin, 2007).

4. Purpose of the Study

In order to study the peculiarities of the mother's cognition of the child's individuality, we conducted our own empirical study, in which discursive analysis was used as one of the ways of characterizing the cognition of individuality. It was carried out on a sample of women with maternity experience, who were residents of one administrative settlement. The sample was represented by three groups of respondents. The first group included one-child women (34 mothers), the second group included two-child women (38), and the third group (30 mothers) was represented by women having three or more children. The total number of the people under test was 102.

5. Research Methods

Discourse implies a dominant role of the subject not only in pragmatics, but also in semantic-syntactic relations. Accordingly, the semantic methods of research (in particular, the method of associative experiment) are of special interest in the study of the discourse of cognition of the individuality of close people, including cognition of the child's individuality.

5.1. Associative Experiment

Associative experiment is one of the important methods that enables us to get insights into the nature of the phenomenon in question. It has been successfully used in psychotherapeutic practice, in the study of the representations of the investigated object in groups as well as in the investigations of the value-orientation unity of groups (Serkin, 2008). This method is discussed in detail in the works by Doise (1994). The psychological nature of the processes underlying associations is analysed in a large body of literature (e.g. Anan'ev (2016); Leontiev (1978); Brudny (2005); Petrenko (2005); Luria (1979), Artemieva (1999); Palkin (2008); Shmelev (2002); Serkin (2008) and others).

In the Russian psychological science the method of associative experiment has been improved and tested in the experimental studies by Luria and Vinogradova (1959). The general scheme of associative experiment is as follows: the subject is presented with a word-stimulus. Then, he is asked to give the first associations that come to his mind. At that, it is possible to conduct it as both a free associative experiment (where the subject is not limited in the choice of possible associations), and directed associative experiment (where the associative flow is restricted by instructions to the frames of some grammatical class). Among verbal reactions besides others, there are also reactions that reflect socially-determined relationships (Glukhov, 2005). The nature of associations depends on age, sex, educational level and profession of subjects under test. This means that the associative technique reflects both cognitive structures behind linguistic meanings and the individual characteristics of subjects under test, their personal meanings (Kosarevskaya, 2009). The semantic field obtained as a result of associative experiment is analyzed qualitatively only, while sequentially identifying associative semantic universals for each group (Serkin, 2008). The use of discourse in the analysis of the semantic field makes it possible to distinguish both explicit and implicit components of the mother's cognition of the child's individuality.

In our study the method of associative experiment is applied as a group directed experiment in which the stimulus for the subjects is the phrase "My child". Approximately 600 associations have been obtained and analyzed during the research. The basis for grouping the obtained associations is the structure of individuality in accordance with the approach to the identity by Merlin (1986).

6. Findings

While analyzing the obtained semantic field that expresses the peculiarities of maternal knowledge of the child's individuality, one may point out that in most cases it contains associations reflecting the child's character traits (from 26% to 35%), the features of their communication (from 5% to 19%) and social roles of children (from 6% to 20%). In the indicated directions, the explicit part of the discourse is well traced. A significant proportion of associations is represented as figurative associations (from 20% to 40%), which reflect the implicit part of the discourse of the mother's cognition. The implicit (unspoken) meaning of these associations can be conveyed as a feeling of love for their child.

The common associative semantic universals revealed for all the three groups of the mothers reflect an emotional acceptance of the child: *an intelligent, kind, affectionate child*. The implicit part of the discourse also reveal itself through these semantic universals, in addition to the explicit component, which can be interpreted as a feeling of love for the child, as well.

It is necessary to note that, despite high specific value of associations linked to characterizing social roles and figurative associations, no semantic universal has been obtained among them. That can be explained by the variety of associations used. This feature of the associative field allows us to discuss only the general direction of discourse in specifying socio-psychological characteristics of the child in the mothers' knowledge.

Thus, the discourse of the mother's knowledge of the individuality of the child is aimed at determining the psychological characteristics of children, which are reflected in the characterological and communicative features and socio-psychological characteristics through the definition of the child's social roles.

Along with that, depending on the number of children, a general context of the discourse of the mothers can vary. So, two-category semantic associations are found in the one-child mothers. They reflect characterological features (*an inquisitive child*) and characteristics of communication (*a sociable child*), which individualizes the explicit component of the discourse of cognition of the individuality of the child by the one-child mothers.

In the group of the two-child mothers, a conditional group extent of the expression of semantic universals is the largest one. In other words, one may assume that the two-child mothers in the process of cognition use the closest categories than in two other groups of the respondents. A common semantic universal for the two-child mothers in relation to the both children is the association that reflects characterological features (*an independent child*). Seemingly, with the increase in the number of children, the importance of an organizational component of the intrafamily livelihood grows. It also specifies the explicit component of the discourse of cognition of the child's individuality by the two-child mothers.

In the group of the mothers having many children, the resulting group semantic universal reflects the child's psychological characteristics, in particular, the temperament (*a calm child*). A further increase in children has an impact on the explicit part of the discourse, which manifests in the expansion of the structure of the cognition of the individuality of each child by the mothers with many children.

One should note that the context of discourse depends not only on a number of children in the family, but also on the position of the child in it. So, the two-child mothers with respect to the elder and younger child determine the semantic universals that emphasize their specific family roles. For an elder child it is *a hard-working child*, whereas for a younger child it is *a vulnerable and handsome child*. Accordingly, the semantic universals, obtained in the group of the mothers with many children, have been defined, too. The semantic universals in relation to the elder child are *a responsible and accurate child*, and in relation to the younger one it is *active and fidgety*. With regard to a middle child, there are no specific universals. This is correlated with theoretical studies on the position of the middle child in the family (Adler, 1998; Andreeva, 2005). Thus, both the explicit and implicit components of the discourse of cognition of the individuality of the older child by the mother endows him or her parental roles in relationships with younger siblings. The general discourse of cognition of the individuality of the younger children by the mothers is more evident in the implicit part of it, which can be characterized as a manifestation of a greater tenderness towards the younger child.

7. Conclusion

In the present paper we have considered the possibility of using semantic methods for studying the mother's cognition of the child's individuality and their interpretation from the position of discourse analysis. As a semantic method, the directed associative experiment is used with the help of the phrase "My child" as a stimulus for the subjects under test.

The results of the research demonstrate that the application of the directed associative experiment enables us to determine a general discourse of mother's cognition of the child's individuality and reveal the context of discourse depending on the number of children in the family and the position of the child in the family. The explicit part of the general discourse manifests in the mothers' knowledge, which reflects psychological and socio-psychological characteristics of the child. Its implicit component manifests in the emotional subtext that expresses love for the child. Group features of the discourse of knowledge, depending on the number of children in the family, are found in a clearer expression of the explicit component. The features of the discourse of cognition depending on the position of the child in the family are also reflected in the explicit component. These determine the psychological characteristics of an elder child, whereas the mother's emotional manifestations in the implicit component are found for a younger child.

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