

WUT 2020**10th International Conference “Word, Utterance, Text: Cognitive, Pragmatic and Cultural Aspects”****METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF “SOCIAL NETWORKS” CONCEPT IN THE RUSSIAN ONLINE DISCOURSE**

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Abstract

The article features metaphorical representation of “social networks” concept in the Russian online discourse dated 2014-2019. The research material was posts from *Odnoklassniki*, *Twitter*, *Vkontakte*, *Facebook Photostrana*, *Facebook*, *LiveJournal*, ***LiveInternet*** and *Diary networks*. The metaphorical modeling method revealed the metaphors by which users of social networks interpret and evaluate the new communicative space. We identified and ranked the dominant models with content analysis method. We found, that metaphors used by participants of virtual communication allow explicating significant features of social networks as well as characterizing their functions. In particular, social networks are perceived as a space in which communication is carried out (*ocean*), where they spend a lot of time (*home*), as a storage of diverse (not always reliable) information (*ocean*, *garbage hole*). The complex structure of social networks (*web*, *network*, *jungle*) has also been noted. The Russian online discourse dominates metaphors with pronounced negative pragmatic potential, most of which actualizes addiction on social networks, the difficulty of returning to reality (*web*, *swamp*, *jungle*, *disease*). Metaphors representing the need for restrictions in the use of social networks or the complete rejection (metaphors of *uprooting from the whirlpool*, *escape from home*, *getting rid of garbage*, *healing from disease*, *detoxifications*, etc.), reflecting users’ awareness of the problem and their willingness to find a solution. Thus, the analysis of metaphorical representations of “social networks” concept allows analyzing cognitive mechanisms involved in understanding the new communicative phenomenon, as well as explicating the social problems associated with the new format of communication.

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1. Introduction

Rapid development of technology at the end of the XXth – beginning of XXIth century gave rise to a fundamentally new space of communication – social networks – and to a new type of communication – online discourse, which is significantly different from other types of discourse. Discourse-making signs are (1) common interests of participants and their connection to a single electronic resource, (2) polymodality of messages (visual, audio and text components), (3) the possibility to receive an instant response to the content, (4) the reduced distance of communication, in which the boundary between private and public communication formats is dissolved (Karasik, 2018, p. 164). Linguists immediately took the interest in the new discourse: the research object has been the language of social networks, genres, virtual linguistic persona, typology of network characters, online strategies and tactics, a virtual conceptual system formation (Akhrenova, 2016; Dobrinskaya, 2016; Frischmann, 2018; Karasik, 2018; Language and speech on the Internet, 2018; Pavlov, 2017; Prokofiev, 2017, etc.).

2. Problem Statement

An important and yet insufficiently studied aspect of social networks is the metaphorical interpretation in different types of discourse (science, media, network, everyday-life, etc.). The need for research is determined by the fact that, social networks terminology is largely metaphorical (cf. *social network*, *page*, *gallery*, etc.). Besides, analyzing and assessing social networks phenomenon, IT specialists, common users, linguists, journalists actively use metaphors to explicate the most significant features of the relatively new phenomenon in communication. An important and yet insufficiently studied aspect of social networks is the metaphorical interpretation in different types of discourse (science, media, network, everyday-life, etc.). The need for research is determined by the fact that, social networks terminology is largely metaphorical (cf. *social network*, *page*, *gallery*, etc.). Besides, analyzing and assessing social networks phenomenon, IT specialists, common users, linguists, journalists actively use metaphors to explicate the most significant features of the relatively new phenomenon in communication.

3. Research Questions

The study focused on two issues: first, defining the role of a metaphor in conceptualization, interpretation and assessment of reality, the article demonstrates the effect of metaphorical cognitive mechanisms in the exploration of a new conceptual space – social networks. Secondly, the online discourse as research material will reveal the features of metaphorical interpretation and assessment of a new communicative phenomenon immediately by its users, and not by observers in case of studying of “social networks” concept in other types of discourse (Galichkina, 2016; Kondratyeva, 2019; Makeeva & Borodulina, 2017, 2018; Tomaszewski, 2011; Voiskunsky, 2001, etc.). In addition, the study will highlight the most disputable moments of modern virtual communication.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose is to analyze the metaphors representing “social networks” concept in the Russian online discourse. *The research material* was the posts taken from VKontakte, Facebook, Odnoklassniki, Twitter, Fotostrana, LiveJournal, LiveInternet and Diary social networks. Language material was collected through social media monitoring services Socialseek and Blogs.yandex. The research file included 1687 metaphors dated 2014-2019. The purpose is to analyze the metaphors representing “social networks” concept in the Russian online discourse. *The research material* was the posts taken from VKontakte, Facebook, Odnoklassniki, Twitter, Fotostrana, LiveJournal, LiveInternet and Diary social networks. Language material was collected through social media monitoring services Socialseek and Blogs.yandex. The research file included 1687 metaphors dated 2014-2019.

5. Research Methods

We used the method of metaphorical modeling to analyze the language, consisting in the defining of sources of metaphoric expansion used in online discourse for representation of “social networks” concept, the identification of metaphorical transfer and the explication of assessments of a cognizable phenomenon contained in the metaphors. We also used content analysis method, which allows determining the frequency of metaphoric models. In statistical processing of the material the percentage distribution of metaphoric models with their subsequent ranking was applied. At the final stage, we interpreted the information, providing linguistic and cultural comment.

6. Findings

The study showed that most metaphors representing “social networks” concept are determined by English origin “the original terminology, which is based on the Russian-speaking usage gets a new understanding, acquires specific cultural texts and connotations” (Kakorina, 2013, p. 145). Metaphors of web, water reservoir, swamp, wilds, garbage hole, home and disease are used most actively for the representation of the concept (target sphere) in online discourse.

6.1. Web metaphor (23%)

The metaphor is connected with the metonymic transfer from the generic social networks concept – the Internet, metaphorical by its nature in the language source, to its part – social networks: *WWW is an abbreviation of “World Wide Web”, “World Wide Web”.... Many believe that the World Wide Web, WWW, is the Internet, although this is certainly not the case* (eponim2008.livejournal.com).

Translating the word *net* into Russian, the rich semantic potential of the word is revealed. For such metaphors “semes of the direct meaning of the word, its components “device for catching fish or birds, etc. “, “thread knotting”, “threads crossing”, “knotting” (Kakorina, 2013, p. 146), on the basis of which the figurative meaning ‘to be bound into a single system’ arises: *The world has long been quite firmly linked in the social Internet networks. Invisible threads intertwined in a bizarre macrame of Facebook, Vkontakte and twitter, sometimes captivate weak minds and inexperienced souls into the virtual world so deep that real life is already seems to them bland and boring* (

The representatives of the metaphors are network, web and related verbs to entangle/confuse, etc.: On the web of social networks. Social networks have entangled my generation, probably, since I was an eleven-grader, if not earlier (pay.diary.ru~Cjoe/? from=20); We were all mired in the web of social networks, or rather got confused (patri0t.livejournal.com). The metaphor has negative connotations in Russian linguoculture: the word-play to get into the network often indicates addiction to virtual reality.

6.2. Water space metaphor (14%)

Marine theme “from the very beginning of the formation of the Internet metaphoric language dominated both English and French” (Makeeva & Borodulina, 2017, p. 9). As part of the metaphorical transfer “ocean – Internet” in the English discourse there were metaphors *to surf the Internet*, *to navigate*, *navigation system*, which were calqued in Romance, German and Slavic languages (see more details Jamet, 2010; Juanals, 2004; Kakorina, 2013; Makeeva & Borodulina, 2017). There is similar metaphorical understanding of social networks. Mainly, the metaphor compares search for information and online communication with sliding on the water surface or with full immersion in water space.

Representatives of the metaphorical model are verbs *to surf*, *to drift*, characterizing the search for information in the network, as well as following one site / page to another without a search strategy or definite objective: *That's where you need to surf. Oddly enough, but every day I find more and more resources in the boundless ocean of social networks* (natalya-kiriche.livejournal.com); *What do people do in social networks, spending here a few hours daily? Drift in search of new information* (paradoxov.livejournal.com).

Spending time in social networks is metaphorically interpreted as immersion in water, which is facilitated by the use of verbs *to dive*, *to plunge*, *dip*: And how do volunteers live? *We decided to dive into social networks and find it out* (ok.ru›news/1416320853); *I can't wait to come home and quickly plunge into social networks!* (nickkein.livejournal.com); *I personally dive into social networks every night like a diver to the depth!* (vk.com›wall253001020). The return to the real world in metaphorical meaning the verb *to come out / up* is used: *Having removed his profile, he come out to the real world and saw that this world is not so boring* (molli-dolli.livejournal.com).

6.3. Swamp metaphor (17%)

It is an implementation of water metaphor with a negative connotation, since it is used to indicate negative information found in social networks: *Social networks (especially FB) are increasingly reminiscent of the swamp: the same bad smelling and sticky matter. News feeds are full of gossip, squabbles, arguments* (ikrima.livejournal.com); *In the abyss of social networks, users drown in fecal whirlpools, Opinion leaders horse around on the shit- waves, scoffing and spitting* (manyunya1116.livejournal.com).

In addition, verbs *to suck*, *to tighten*, *to get bogged*, explicating immersion in social networks for a long time, the difficulty of getting out of virtual space: *How not to get bogged down in the “swamp” of social networks and move forward?* (vk.com›wall-100123914? own=1); *The abyss of social networks can suck at any time of the day* (OK. Nadezhda Fatyanova). Swamp metaphors represent Internet addiction mostly.

6.4. Garbage hole metaphor (9%)

Actualizes negative characteristics of the information and the way it is presented in social networks: unreliable, disorderly, undifferentiated: *Social networks are garbage. Reliable information may be found, but it takes pains to check for its accuracy* (gusev-a-v.livejournal.com). Representatives of the model are *garbage, cesspool: I've deleted my profile in VKontakte (I haven't been there for a long time), Odnoklassniki (even longer), MirTesen, PhotoStrana, My Circle, Facebook, and several other social dumps* (liveinternet.ru/users/ylogru); *I've found a new cesspool. The abyss of social networks suppressing our minds* (@Eledantes). Such lexemes as *dirt, stick, etc.: Another dirt from the social network* (ok.ru/rznnovosti); *People wished they hadn't got stuck in social networks* (30rus.livejournal.com)

6.5. Forest metaphor (wilds, jungle) (11%)

Metaphors of wilds highlight the idea of difficult orientation in the virtual world and the tricky exit from the world of social communications. It includes lexemes, denoting impassable forest areas – *woods, wilds, jungle: We will guide you through the wilds of empty communities over the abyss of content right where abandoned publics with millions of people have frozen in silence* (vk.com/wall-26760927?own=1); *Going through the jungle of social networks, I came across the full version of the poem*, (aged-hare.livejournal.com). The jungle metaphor additionally actualizes conflict behavior of the users: *Guide to Survival in the "Jungle" of Social Networks* (by SecWorld); *Digital Jungle: how to avoid danger in social networks* (vbudushee.ru/upload/iblock).

6.6. Home metaphor (12%)

The metaphor is of English origin: Internet resources, their separate parts, interface elements are interpreted with house/home metaphor, e.g., **Home Page, Gallery, News Room**. The similar metaphorization principle is observed in social networks.

Home metaphor is realized through the nomination of site visitors: *residents, inhabitants, guests or regulars* (depending on the degree of involvement or the amount of time spent in the network): *The unfortunate inhabitants of Facebook. A person, who once joined the popular social network, finds it difficult to quit using it* (matveychev-oleg.livejournal.com); *Permanent residents of the network join in groups* (alexhitrov.livejournal.com); *Last night "VKontakte" regulars found that all the downloaded audio files disappeared from their profiles* (vk.com/wall-125503122? q); *My former "barrack-mate" turned out to be a regular of social networks...* (minorowsky. livejournal.com); *Social networks can make life more comfortable. Provided that every guest of social networks thinks about the probable consequences...* (mihalych_org). Some users' nicknames are also indicative in this respect, e.g., *Live_in the network* and *Livininet: Living in the network*. 36 years old, Tynda (Amur region), Russia; *Live online*. 42 years old, Moscow, Russia (ok.ru/search/profiles/Livein-network).

Home metaphors are also created by verbal vocabulary, denoting living in the house or visiting the house – *to live, call on, live, walk/enter, move, be registered in: OK, social networks won*. All people went to live in social networks (tema.livejournal.com); *I wonder, what social networks you live in* (minakovas.livejournal.com); *Social networks: Who goes there and why?* (rubin65.livejournal.com); *Those who got registered in social networks, cannot be called polyglots* (

Spending a lot of time in social networks is also represented by means of the verb *to stay/to sit*. It is indicative that users exploit the home metaphor: “*Staying in Facebook, LiveJournal, the computer, Vkontakte. It feels like an invisible room, limited space around us. That didn’t use to be the case – one cannot sit/stay in a book/video, although it seems to be, in fact, the same temporal move to another, virtual, world* (ru-etymology.livejournal.com).

Account deleting or refusal to communicate virtually is described by *leaving* metaphors: *Escape from social networks. Action Plan* (shakkar.livejournal.com); *Are you ready to leave social networks* (zay-ac.livejournal.com); *Leaving social networks is the best solution to combat this addiction. Not everyone can break their habits and log out of (=leave) the profile never to return there again* (ok.ru>shakkar/topic/65978042919741).

Home metaphors create the image of a space replacing a real home in which users spend much time (often to the detriment of the real communication).

6.7. Disease metaphor (16%)

Social media users are actively discussing the dangers of excessive pastime in the virtual world, using medical metaphors. Such lexemes as *disease, treatment, medicine*, etc. are of frequent occurrence: *IS SOCIAL NETWORK A DISEASE?* (liveinternet.ru/users/buvay_sar); *Do you consider social media addiction a disease? And if so, what should be the treatment?* (k-poli.livejournal.com).

Most users are concerned about the steady dependence on social networks. They compare their condition – when they cannot visit their favorite resources – with withdrawal syndrome: *How has your life changed after deleting your profile? (in particular “Vkontakte”)*. *What urged you to do it? How long did the withdrawal syndrome last? (And did you have it?* (justforus.diary.ru>p209549234.htm); *To forbid myself to sit in a social network (and at the same time test my addiction) was difficult. So hard that there even were withdrawal symptoms...* (jennifer-hot.livejournal.com).

Many users also reflect on finding treatment for the virtual dependence, using metaphors of hygiene and detoxification: *Digital hygiene: how to use social networks, not letting them use you* (karhu53.livejournal.com); *Social detox. I’ve deleted Facebook profile and messengers from the phone, life immediately sparkled* (shri-boomer.livejournal.com). Morbid metaphor is a bright indicator of the presence of social problems and has the greatest force in terms of emotional impact.

7. Conclusion

The study of metaphors representing “social networks” concept in the online discourse revealed several trends:

1. Metaphors used by participants of virtual communication allow explicating significant features of social networks as a complex phenomenon as well as characterizing their functions. In particular, social networks are perceived by users as a space in which communication is carried out (ocean) and where they spend a lot of time (home), as a storage of diverse information (ocean, garbage hole). The complex structure of social networks (web, network, jungle) has been also noted.

2. Online discourse metaphors are less diverse than, e.g., in media and science discourses (Kondratyeva, 2019; Voiskunsky, 2001), e.g., such metaphors as of a mirror, labyrinth, or a frontal were unpopular. It is probably due to a rather low cultural level of average users.

3. Metaphors with strongly-marked negative pragmatic potential (*tightening web, sticky swamp, large garbage hole, impassable wilds, severe disease*) are dominating. Moreover, metaphors used in online discourse increase the tension degree compared to the same metaphors of media discourse (*The swamp is filled with faeces, A rubbish dump is transformed into a garbage hole, etc.*).

Most metaphors represent the addiction on social networks, the difficulty of returning from the virtual world to reality (*web, swamp, jungle, disease*). Compared to the media discourse, there is increased number of metaphors that represent the need for restrictions in their use or complete rejection (*Coming out of a whirlpool, escape from home, getting rid of garbage, recovering from a disease, detoxification, etc.*). This clearly demonstrates not only the problem itself, but also the users' concern about finding a solution to it.

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