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**LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY: COGNITIVE AND
COMMUNICATIVE ASPECTS**

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Abstract

The present paper seeks to explore the phenomenon of linguistic creativity. Over the years there have been numerous theoretical and experimental studies on the topic of language and creativity. However, among the research papers few discuss linguistic creativity in cognitive and communicative aspects, which are of particular relevance to the current study. The findings are discussed in the light of cognitive-discursive approach. In today's world violations of norms are manifested at all levels of a language and in almost all types of discourse. The existing standards determine the use of language tools in accordance with the rules of a language, its laws of register, genre, code, function, rules regarding the appropriateness of language units, their collocability, derivation, etc., as well as, in a broader sense, with the objectives of communication. Taking into account the latter statement, the question arises if a linguistic personality should prioritize the choice of preserving the linguistic norm or violate it in their lingua-creative activity to achieve a particular goal of communication. A lingua-creative personality while searching for a name to some innovative mental formations, those that have not yet been verbalized by linguistic means, either produces novel linguistic units and categories by further exploiting the productive potential of a language; or rethinks the existing models, bending the rules and norms of a language; or violates those rules and norms.

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Keywords: Discourse, linguistic creativity, cognitive-discursive method, cognitive mechanisms, communication.



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1. Introduction

The current research addresses the issue of linguistic creativity in the theoretical frameworks of cognitive, communicative and discursive viewpoints. The discursive characteristics of language phenomena are in a way continuation of their cognitive nature. Language units, fixed in the language system as having certain conceptual characteristics, can attain different characteristics and convey different meanings while functioning in a discourse. Moreover, discourse provides conditions for novel units (those that are not fixed by the language system but are potentially there) to be introduced for communicative purpose, e.g. to convey semantic content that is original and novel or is not yet made explicit by the language.

Recent research papers explore a wide range of case studies in linguistic and other forms of human creativity providing a varying degree of detail while analysing empirical data. However, it is the mechanisms and strategies that language users employ in the process of linguistic creativity, as well as the aims they pursue, that are of specific interest to the current study.

2. Problem Statement

Studies regarding creativity have tended to focus upon this phenomenon from myriad perspectives, e.g. neurological (Diedrich, Benedek, Jauk, & Neubauer, 2015; Khalil, Godde, & Karim, 2019), psychological (Amabile, 1983; Gabora, 2017), cultural (Bondebjerg, 2017; Charyton, 2015; Leung & Morris, 2010), linguistic (Aikhenvald & Storch, 2019; Carter, 2015; Chomsky, 1965; Swann & Deumert, 2018; Vishnyakova, Dobroradnykh, Aleksandrova, & Klimanova, 2019) and others.

An increasing number of studies contributes to the fact that creativity is a complex multidimensional construct, the attempts to limit the studies to specific domains (neurological, psychological, cultural, linguistic, etc.) help to research the phenomenon from different angles and viewpoints. However, the specific studies are sporadic and for the most part lack complex analysis of the phenomenon. In general, there appears to be agreement that creativity is defined by novelty and appropriateness (Runco & Jaeger, 2012) or usefulness (Diedrich, Benedek, Jauk, & Neubauer, 2015). However, a valid definition is yet to be developed. One should also note that a specific domain affects the way creativity is perceived, described and assessed.

Here we focus on the cognitive and communicative aspects of linguistic creativity, applying cognitive-discursive approach. Thus, the current research takes into account general studies on discourse (Arutyunova, 1990; Demyankov, 2016; Karasik, 2004), discourse analysis (Battalova, 2015; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002), linguistic personality theory (Belianin, 1998; Karaulov, 2010), cognitive studies (Boldyrev, 2016), creative discourse studies (Michailidis & Paschalidou, 2019), language play (Bell, 2016; Gridina & Talashmanov, 2019; Kshenovskaya, 2017), language anomalies (Kozlova, 2012), language and communication theory (Sedykh & Kugan, 2015) and others.

Cognitive-discursive approach helps to reveal the specificity of non-trivial interaction between linguistic and conceptual systems of a linguistic personality and shed light on some mechanisms of conveying novel mental constructs of knowledge (concepts) about existent or constructed reality by means of either regular or non-standard language units.

3. Research Questions

In this paper, we examine whether cognitive-discursive approach to examples of linguistic creativity can reveal strategies and mechanisms that language users (linguistic personalities) exploit in the process of word creation and why speakers tend to depart from regular patterns and units to construct something new. Thus, we ask the following Research Questions:

1. To what extent can cognitive-discursive approach be applicable to linguistic creativity analysis?
2. What is likely to cause users of a language depart from the established norms and turn to linguistic creativity instead of sparing an effort and using the existing material and following the regular patterns?
3. What are the strategies and mechanisms involved in the process of linguistic creativity?
4. Does context facilitate the creative units to become a tool for conveying novel content and to be accepted by recipients? If so, in what way?

4. Purpose of the Study

Although the topic of linguistic creativity remains in the focus of recent research papers, there have been few efforts to systematically compile the empiric evidence related to the process of linguistic creativity; or to describe cognitive processes involved in the production and comprehension of novel units created by language users, as well as goals and strategies that both creators and recipients pursue to encode and decode a particular content or meaning. Our aim is twofold: to apply cognitive-discursive method to analyse the phenomenon of linguistic creativity and hypothesise about cognitive processes and mechanisms involved in coding and decoding novel meaning through creative units. We also specify the definition of linguistic creativity and broaden the classification of its types.

The tasks of the current study fall into the scope of its overall objectives and specific aims:

- define discourse, describe its communicative nature
- define linguistic creativity and single out its types;
- collect samples of linguistic creativity, classify and analyse them.

5. Research Methods

The empirical data (examples of creative units, analysed using a qualitative method) were taken from modern English literary works, media sources, dictionaries (Oxford Dictionary of New Words, Longman Register of New Words, Meriam Webster Dictionary, etc.), corpora (COCA, British National Corpus, 2020). In the current paper only a few examples are provided to illustrate the findings. For processing the collected data the following methods were employed:

- a) cognitive-discursive approach;
- b) definitional analysis;
- c) descriptive, contextual and interpretational analyses. Particularly, these were used to interpret motivational contexts and classify novel units according to motivational patterns and cognitive mechanisms.

6. Findings

Discourse in linguistics is viewed as a complex and many-sided linguistic formation. Discourse is defined as a cohesive and coherent text existing along with extra-linguistic factors, e.g. pragmatic, sociocultural (Arutyunova, 1990), as a communication system with real and potential domains (Sheigal, 2000), as a text submerged into the communicative situation (Karasik, 2004), as a particular way of talking about and understanding the world or its aspect (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Discourse as a result of communicative process realised in the textual form is characterised by semantic integrity, cohesion and coherence. Discourse is double sided – it is both a communicative unit existing within certain historical and social context and a linguistic unit that appeared as a result of communicative process fixed and packed in a textual form.

Discourse is characterised by field structure (Battalova, 2015, Sheigal, 2000) and includes genres, types, subtypes, has its own markers, formulae, algorithms, patterns, examples, precedent texts and pursues certain communicative aims. Thus, domain-specific discourses have their distinctive features and can be hypothetically modelled according to a formula or pattern, following a particular algorithm, taking into account their structural, functional and pragmatic specificity.

Talking about domain-specific discourses one should note that their character, features and borders are far from being unequivocal. Discourse is a complex of discursive practices fixed in texts of different genres, sometimes combining several kinds of texts from different discourses within one, making the so called poly-discursive or hybrid formation (e.g. mass media discourse, political discourse, advertising discourse, etc.). Discourses may overlap and interact via intertextual links (e.g. expert discourse functioning within advertising discourse).

As discourse is characterised by the process of coding and decoding information and is constructed in a certain way to convey a speaker's / writer's intention to affect their reader / listener, it is an act of communication.

Leech (2016) describes discourse as both written and spoken English and sees it as a 'deal' between participants of a communicative event.

Thus, language users (linguistic personalities) can transfer certain meanings via discourse. Both authors (writers/speakers) and recipients (readers/listeners) 'strike a deal' and participate in communication by means of discourse. This 'mediated' communication occurs in certain historical, ethnic, cultural and social conditions, thus, along with individual author's intentions, cultural, social, historical information can be transferred via discourse. Hence, discourse analysis helps to reveal universal and regular features of language systems, ethnic and cultural specificity, and individual language user's distinctive linguistic features by means of which they realise their creative potential.

Language users (linguistic personalities) constantly construct discourses by choosing, sometimes carefully selecting, linguistic units to express their ideas and thoughts. Discourse, being a complex communicative phenomenon with a set of both linguistic and extra-linguistic aspects, is, thus, a fertile ground for exploitation of language capacities. Discourse acts as a testing laboratory for creative linguistic personalities to unfold their creativity by re-thinking rules, reforming patterns of a language in an attempt to benefit from its potential properties and to communicate their message successfully. This being said,

language is viewed by a creative linguistic personality not only as an abstract system of prerequisite universal meanings but also as ‘use’, as a successful tool for creating and experimenting.

In this light, studying linguistic phenomena devoid of their discursive characteristics does not fully reveal their properties and functions. It is discourse that helps to differentiate creative re-thinking of a language (exploiting its productivity, reforming and expansion of its patterns, intentional deviation from its rules and standards within a certain communicative situation) from unacceptable mistakes. One should also note that communicative intentions are not always fully and successfully realised due to different factors, such as differences in communicants’ (author’s and recipient’s) competences, literacy, social, cultural or educational background, ethnicity, and, crucially, novelty and utility of the creative outcome. To communicate their ideas successfully and reach their potential target audience language users exploit conventional language tools and follow regular patterns, departing from them exclusively within the framework of semantic focus (when the ready-made units offered by the language system are not enough to transfer a particular meaning). The target audience (recipients) should have conditions for successful interpretation of a message conveyed by a novel (creative) unit in the discourse. Discourse frames those conditions by providing a context. In some cases the context is set by cultural, economic, social or political events, precedent texts or personalities – discourse in a broader sense. Hence, appearance of such words as *to Meghan Markle* (to value oneself enough to leave a situation where your true self is not welcomed), or, previously, *to Leo* (to achieve after years of trying); *instagrammable* (visually appealing enough to be posted on the social media Instagram), *podcastable* (worth making into a podcast); *Brexit* (British exit) and other words induced by the events closely preceding and following the British referendum (*brexiter/brexitteer*, *brexitrismist*, *brexiety*, *bregret/regrexit*, *brextension/flexextension*, etc. – more than 70 in total); or *COVID19*-induced neologisms (*SARS*, *MERS*, *super spreader*, *covidiot*, *covidol*, etc. – more than 30 in total), etc., built according to productive word-building patterns (composition, conversion, affixation, blending, acronymy, etc.). The meanings of the novel units are understood by those language users who know who Meghan Markle and Leo(nardo di Caprio) are and what life events they encountered for their names to become eponyms, i.e. re-categorized as common nouns; what Instagram and podcasts are; who have some information about the Brexit referendum; or, finally, the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

In cases of morphological productivity (when a linguistic personality exploits language productivity to make a new content) the meaning of a constructed unit is derived from its constituent elements, this is exactly the case with the previously mentioned *instagrammable* and *podcastable*. The productive suffix *-able* can be attached to virtually unlimited number of stems, supporting N. Chomsky’s view on linguistic creativity (Chomsky, 1965) as generative creativity, we name it pattern-following creativity or linguistic productivity.

However, Chomsky’s idea can also be applicable to another example of linguistic generativity (1):

(1) Most of the exercises in this book are joyful. Some are silly. But all are designed to help *uncork* the creative voice (Day, 2019).

Merriam Webster Dictionary (Merriam Webster n.d.) defines *uncork* as 1) to draw a cork from and 2) to let go, release from a sealed state. Thus, the figurative meaning of a word *uncork* which developed by means of transfer from its direct meaning offers potentially unlimited number of collocations, though

British National Corpus (2020) offers just 6 examples of usage, 5 of those in the primary meaning (*to uncork a bottle, to uncork the champagne, etc.*).

However, *to uncork* is crucially different from *to Meghan Markle*, as the latter conveys a novel meaning, while the former does not.

This leads us to the differentiation between a) linguistic creativity as a creative ability of a linguistic personality to produce novel units in order to convey novel concepts or those that have not been objectified by the language yet and b) linguistic generativity as merely generation of new units (on word, phrase or sentence level) without producing new meanings. Thus, we refer all possible collocations with *to uncork* to linguistic generativity. The same can be applied to some cases of reduction (phonetic reduction, morphological shortening, etc.) that appear due to language economy and do not serve to convey new meanings.

The sample analysis showed that linguistic creativity occurs in the forms of

- 1) creative productivity (pattern-following creativity)
- 2) creative expansion (pattern-reforming creativity)
- 3) creative deviation (pattern-violating creativity)

Creative productivity occurs when novel units are executed via affixation, composition, conversion, blending, sound imitation, i.e. by means of regular patterns.

Creative expansion reveals itself in innovative collocations, fresh metaphors, creative idioms, etc.

Creative deviation occurs when a creative linguistic personality departs from system laws and regular patterns. It finds its way through pun and language play, oxymoron, decomposition of set expressions, cases of zeugma, transposition, etc.

However, this classification should be subject for further discussion.

There are overlapping cases. Let us consider the following example (2):

(2) I said, 'Chris is not their father, Dilys'.

'But he does want to be like a father to them', Dilys answered, as if stung. 'The same as Angela is like a mother'.

I'd been *kebabled* on my own skewer (Hill, 2012).

In the given example the author extrapolates the figurative meaning of the verb *grill* – 'to torment as if by broiling' (Merriam Webster n.d.) – onto the semantics of the verb *kebab*, as they are synonymous in their primary meaning 'to cook by exposing to heat' (Ibid.). Thus, the verb *kebab* expands its semantics on the analogy of its synonym *grill*. Meaning extension in synonyms is a regular pattern in languages, however, the intentional placement of the verb *kebab* into the context that actualizes connotative aspect of its lexical meaning that has not yet been made explicit by the language but is implicit in its semantics on the analogy of its prototypical synonym, is a case of linguistic creativity. This case demonstrates both creative productivity (on the analogy with *grill*) and creative expansion (transfer of the meaning).

Speaking about cognitive mechanisms involved in linguistic creativity, we can hypothesise that in the mind of a linguistic personality there is a blurred image of a concept, to fix it, to give it a form, a creative personality selects linguistic material according to a prototypical model, by means of association, transfer, analogy, imagery, conceptual blending (Kshenovskaya, 2016), triggering the mechanism of coding mental images into language units. The better the choice of language material or a prototypical model is, the easier

a novel unit would be perceived, assessed and accepted by the target audience. Discourse here serves to facilitate the recipients in eliciting the meaning of a creative unit. In the act of communication, oral or written, recipients expect conventional signs and regular patterns, when encountering a creative unit, they fail to find it in their language database and for a moment experience cognitive dissonance, as reality conflicts with their linguistic and conceptual experience. However, contextual cues, background knowledge, language experience trigger the same cognitive processes for decoding the meaning that had been involved in its coding (Kshenovskaya, 2017).

As novel units are cognitively demanding they are critically assessed and are either accepted and shared or rejected by potential users. Recipients thus perform expertise of creative outcome and may stimulate creative language use.

Discourse is thus not only a laboratory or a playground for a creative linguistic personality, but also a domain for transfer of novel knowledge and human creative experience.

7. Conclusion

The creative potential of a language is exploited by its users. Creativity is broadly defined as the production of something novel and appropriate (useful). However, creativity is domain-specific. Linguistic creativity in a broad sense is understood as the fundamental human capacity to create new linguistic units (words, phrases, sentences and texts) according to certain patterns, reflecting the unlimited creative potential of a language, its generativity. We suggest differentiating language creativity from language generativity, as the latter excludes production of new meanings. Language economy, for example, stimulates language users to produce new language units. However, language units generated by means of shortening (abbreviating, clipping, phonetic reduction, etc.), do not create new content and are samples of linguistic generativity, while blends do and thus refer to linguistic creativity, namely, creative productivity. So, more specifically, linguistic creativity is associated with novel productions. Innovations that are constructed by following the regular patterns present creative productivity, by reforming them – creative expansion and by violating them – creative deviation. Thus, linguistic creativity embraces a wide range of phenomena – word coinage, original collocations, figurative units, idioms, wordplay, verbal humour, language anomalies. Even when it is merely production of novel units according to existent patterns, complex cognitive mechanisms (e.g. of transfer) are activated. Linguistic creativity involves such cognitive processes as categorisation, analogy, association, mapping, transfer, imagery, conceptual blending, etc.

Language creativity is triggered by a language user's desire of turning new and imaginative concepts into reality, by reflecting in a language things and ideas that are either individual and original, or prompted by progress, social events, precedent texts and personas, etc.

Language users convey novel meanings in a variety of creative ways by setting a context in different discourses for communicative reasons, so that the meaning of a novel unit could be decoded by a potential recipient by means of different cues that contribute to a better understanding of creative language use.

Thus, linguistic creativity is both cognitive and communicative – on the one hand, there are complex cognitive processes involved in selecting the material and constructing the novel units according to regular patterns or deviating from them; on the other, the process is triggered by a speaker's need to realise a certain

communicative intention in a particular discourse. The whole process then becomes a tool of novel knowledge transfer.

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