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LINGUISTIC WORLDVIEW OF ANCIENT GERMANS THROUGH THE RUNIC WRITING SYSTEM

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Abstract

The paper deals with the phenomenon of ancient Germanic runic inscriptions and the runic system itself. This system is of a high cognitive value as it contains a lot of information concerning Germanic key concepts as well as main global features for any key concept characterization. Thus, the system can be a model for the general key concepts restoration. The authors apply the cognitive approach to the symbolic meaning of runes, although this type of meaning is not the priority target in the most classical works and researches on ancient runic inscriptions and the origin of the runic system. The paper seeks to use the runic script system and the symbolic meaning of runes within this system as a material for the study of the key concepts represented in the linguistic worldview of ancient Germans. The authors focus on analysing some runic songs containing important symbolic meanings and seek to reveal these meanings and their manifestations within Germanic and Slavonic languages, which proves the universal nature of the key concepts of any linguistic world-image. On the whole, our research leads to a more complete understanding of concepts as key elements of cognitive linguistics and shows the potential and high value of further research into the runic writing system in terms of cognitive linguistics.

Keywords: Runic inscriptions, runic songs, symbolic meaning of runes, symbolic meaning.

1. Introduction

Analysing different functional aspects of runic writing and features of ancient Germanic worldview, a researcher quite frequently has to return to the problem of symbolic meaning of runes (Askeberg, 1944; Marstrander, 1928; Wimmer, 1887), and to some general problems of runic writing system (Damsma & Versloot, 2016; Kalinin, 2015; Van Renterghem, 2019; Waldispühl, 2015).

Despite the large number of works on cognitive linguistics, or, perhaps, due to this fact, the fundamental basis of cognitive science still suffers from a certain uncertainty. The problem is that if you imagine cognitive linguistics as a kind of a colossus on two legs, it stands firmly with one foot on the language system, where everything is clear and transparent enough, and numerous exceptions and deviations just confirm the rules. But the second leg of this "Duisburg Colossus" is firmly anchored in the human consciousness, a kind of "inner space", full of mysteries and discoveries. This appears to be the source of the above-mentioned uncertainty in cognitive researches.

There are a lot of indirect signs which confirm the existence of both concepts themselves (whatever definitions we give them) and the process of conceptualization in the human consciousness.

Indeed, one cannot deny the fact that the process of thinking is going on even if one does not know the language system (for example, imagine a hypothetical person who has lived on a desert island alone since childhood and, thus, does not need to communicate). Consequently, the thought is primary and not directly related to the language system, although it is difficult for us to imagine it, as we have long been the slaves of our language systems and view the world only through this filter.

As Worf (1940) stated, "We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds - and this means largely by the linguistic systems of our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way - an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, but its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data that the agreement decrees. We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated" (Worf, 1940, p. 229).

A similar idea is promoted in Weisgerber's (1929) work "Native Language and Spiritual Formation". According to him, W=NxB, where W is a word as a mental element, N is a mental conformity of a name, i.e. the sound part of a word, otherwise also called a world-image (Wortbild), B is a concept as a spiritual element; sign x means that the connection between both components is not external, associative, and that both are inextricably linked and condition each other.

In our opinion, this idea raises a number of questions: what is this spiritual element, where to look for it and how to make it available for a research?

In this paper, we intend to suggest a possible answer.

2. Problem Statement

As we mentioned in our introduction, one of the key challenges for cognitive linguistics is to prove the very existence of key concepts and to identify their essential properties. In our opinion, the problem is that there are no sufficient instruments for revealing the concept system hidden in one's mind.

As any language system is a complex system, it is necessary to apply some ideas of synergetics as a science which deals with complex systems. According to Haken (1982), synergetics is the cumulative, collective effect of interaction of multiple subsystems that form stable structures, as well as self-organization in complex systems.

In other words, all systems in the universe develop according to the same laws and principles. Some critics specify that the principles of synergetics should be used only discussing the systems where the mathematical apparatus is applied, but not the language system. However, any language system is based on the interaction of neurons in a human brain, and thus it completely fits in Haken's definition of synergetics.

One of the most illustrative examples of the conceptualization of our consciousness is the evolution of programming languages. In fact, there is no essential difference between a programming language and a "living" language system: both are created for communication between people or between a person and a machine. A programming language defines a set of lexical, syntactic and semantic rules which determine the appearance of a program and its activity.

Now it is important to see the difference between the two stages of the programming languages evolution - procedural programming and object-oriented programming.

Procedural programming is programming in a mandatory language, in which sequentially executed operators can be assembled into subroutines, that is, larger coherent units of code, using the mechanisms of the language itself.

Object-oriented programming is a programming methodology based on the representation of a program as a set of objects, each of which is an instance of a certain class, and the classes form a hierarchy of inheritance.

It can be easily seen that the second definition is very similar to the definitions of concepts applied in cognitive linguistics nowadays.

Thus, it is clear that programming languages develop towards "conceptualization". And since they are a reflection of our own thinking, it is in fact another indirect proof of conceptualization of our consciousness. But the set of basic classes in programming is determined by the standard of a particular language. The problem is that most of modern languages lost these classes as they were conceptualized too long ago. That is where the runic writing can be of a great research value as an instrument of revealing and observing these lost classes.

3. Research Questions

The very idea of symbols is as ancient as the human civilization itself. We can say we're just a warehouse of symbols, but losing the old ones, we keep generating new ones. At the dawn of human civilization, people gave symbolism to absolutely everything. They could draw the sign of the sun and

worship it as their deity, associating it with good or evil. But these symbols always had their own logic. When attempts were made to decipher the Egyptian pictographic inscriptions, one of the questions was about the direction of the writing: right to left, or left to right, or maybe vertically. It turned out that one had to read where the head looked in each particular line. Everything is logical from the point of view of ancient Egyptians, but nowadays people would not immediately find any logic there, and it would seem that all this writing is absolutely chaotic. But if we assume that language is a system, then we should also assume that this system is logical.

In this sense, the runic writing is absolutely logical, including where we may not expect it. The main question we seek to answer is: do the symbolic meanings of the runes under study possess the properties of stability and universalism typical of key concepts?

4.   Purpose of the Study

here is a number of theories which discuss the origin of runic signs, a huge number of lances were broken, and the battlefield was dotted with corpses of failed theories and hypotheses. But in this paper we intend to focus on considering the set of signs from a symbolic point of view.

Before we start analysing the runes under study, it is necessary to mention the critique of F. Askeberg on this subject. In Askeberg's (1944) works the priority is the communicative function of runic writing, as he considers a magic spell as a kind of a message. However, he rejects the previously widespread idea of the magical essence of runic signs: "Alphabetic magic, runic names and order of runes are secondary phenomena" (Askeberg, 1944, p. 41).

But, as we said before, we consider runic signs from their conceptual symbolic side, and in this case, the symbolic meaning of runes will be our priority. In our previous works we analysed some aspects of symbolic meaning of runes (Bogachev et al., 2015). However, we did not consider the problem of defining concepts (especially key concepts) in such detail.

So, what is the symbolic meaning of runic signs from the cognitive point of view? Imagine a person who washes gold. The principle of action is to wash out the placer rock, while the gold particles will settle at the bottom because they are much heavier. In the same way, the key concepts in the linguistic worldview are much heavier and remain intact under the pressure of time, so everything irrelevant and unnecessary is ruthlessly washed out of the language system. The value of the runic writing is that it fixes these golden particles of deep meaning of key concepts. The only problem is the lack of practical material. But, nevertheless, the very presence of these symbolic meanings allows us to see a model of a set of key concepts within one conceptual sphere (at least in its structural version), because in other languages these key concepts need to be restored by analysing language units, and this process is not free from errors and broad assumptions.

5.   Research Methods

In this paper we analyse short fragments of three runic songs - Norwegian, Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon. First, we intend to find the symbolic meanings of runic signs mentioned in those songs. We then have to see whether these runic signs possess a property of stability. To achieve this, we check their

meanings in the Old English within the period when runes were already out of use. Finally, in order to see whether the runes under study possess a property of universalism, we'll try to find the traces of their meaning in the Russian language.

6. Findings

As soon as one starts considering the OS concept using the example of the corresponding symbolic meaning, the question arises immediately: which symbol was the opposite in its conceptual meaning? The point is that the ancient Germans had no equivalent negative figure, like, for example, the devil in Christianity. In the worldview of ancient Germans supernatural phenomena expressed by the concept OS were opposed by giants who represented personified expressions of natural disasters (fire and ice), hunger and need - that is, a collective image of all negative phenomena. This semantic field includes three signs: Kaun - ulcer, disease; Hagall - hunger, hail; and Nauðr - need. It is clear that not all these meanings have been preserved in their original form, which can be easily seen in the table below.

Table 01. Types of runic songs

Norwegian	Icelandic	Anglo-Saxon
Kaun er barna bölvan; böl gørver mánn fölvan.	Kaun er barna bölok bardagi ok holdfúa hús.	---------------------------------
Hagall er kaldastr korna; Kristr skóp hæimenn forna.	Hagall er kaldakorn ok knappa drífaok snáka sótt.	Hagol biþ hwítost corna; hwyrft hit of heofones lyfte, wealcaþ hit windes scúra; weorþeþ it tó wætere siþþan.
Nauðr gerer næppa koste; nøktan kælr í froste.	Nauð er þýjar þrá ok þungr kostr ok vássamlig verk.	Nied biþ nearu on bréstan; weorþeþ híe þeah oft níþa bearnum tó helpe ond tó hælu gehwhæþre, gif híe hlystaþ æror.

Let's start with a word which occurs in the Norwegian and Icelandic lines. It's the word "bölvan". This word also exists in Icelandic, but in the table above it is represented by the same root "bölok". However, if we look into the ancient Icelandic dictionary, we will easily find this word there: "bölvan, f. curse, imprecation" (Zoëga, 1910, p. 83).

The Russian word "bolvan" is considered etymologically as an element of Old Slavonic since it exists in Slavonic language. But it is suggested that the etymology itself stems from the Turkic "baluan" or "balabun" and the Persian "pahlavan" (the general meaning of these words is "hero"). However, nowadays this theory is being actively challenged. We suggest looking at this word from the other side. Its main meaning in Old Slavonic (as well as in all other Slavonic languages where it occurs) was "a massive block of undefined shapes, idol". The word "idol" was usually applied to the native god of a tribe, while all foreign idols were named "bolvans". Accordingly, a foreign god could cast the curse. In fact, here we see a common root, but in this context this root means not "tree", as some sources suggest, but "curse".

Now let's deal with the meaning of the word "need". The word clearly has Indo-European roots, because it exists in Russian - we can find the word "Nuda" in Dal dictionary:

NUDA of captivity, coercion, extreme constraint, oppression; thin life; ‖ flesh wounds, especially skin wounds, scabies, crust, tar. lower perm (Dal, 1880, p. 576).

So it's a direct parallel to the Norwegian and Icelandic versions. If we try to find this word of the Anglo-Saxon version of the runic song in Beowulf, we may fail. For example, in the text under the normalization of Benjamin Slade, we can't find such a word. However, it should be remembered that in the ancient English period, the spelling of words often depended on the region of the country where it was written.

Look at line 2454 in Beowulf:

Yrfeweardas þonne se án hafað   þurh déaðes nýd   daéda gefondad

guardian of inheritance, when the one he has through Death's compulsion experienced deeds;

Déaðes nýd means "forced or violent death". Once again we can see a certain syncretism in the fact that in this case man is weak in face of death and fate, but in Christianity God defeats death, and within the Scandinavian pantheon of the gods everybody is powerless in face of fate.

Actually, there are many variants of representation of the given concept in Old English, which complicates its analysis. Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary gives the following meanings of the variant nid:

Nid - neád, néd, neód, niéd, nýd, es; n.: e; f. I. necessity, inevitableness Neód (néd, Lind. Rush.) ys ðæt swycdómas cumon necesse est ut veniant scandala, Mt. Kmbl. 18, 7 : Homl. Th. i. 514, 33. Gif ðæt nýd ábǽdeþ cum ipsa necessitas compellit, Bd. 1, 27; S. 497, 1. Nemne hwylc nýd máre ábǽdde, 3, 5; S. 526, 28.

And the second meaning on the same page:

Add: I. violence, force, compulsion, exercised by or upon persons Hé cwæð þ wǽre mid gafoles neáde (neóde, v. l.) geþrafod sum geleáffull wer fidelis vir quidam necessitate debiti compulsus. Gr. D. 157, 22. Hé wæs beótiende þ hé wolde mid nýde (violenter) gán in þá cyran (Bosworth & Toller, 1898, p. 97).

In the Beowulf text, this is rather a frequent concept, although different forms have different frequencies, although much depends on normalization. Here is an example of an adjective derived from the root neád:

Hæreþes dohtor næs hío hnáh swá þeah né tó gnéað gifa   Géata léodum.

Haereth's daughter was not mean though nor too grudging of gifts to the people of the Geats.

In this case, we give the normalization and translation of Benjamin Slade, where this variant means "jealous". Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary gives some other meanings:

gnéð; adj. Sparing, frugal, stingy, scanty, small; parcus Næs hió to gneáð gifa she was not too sparing of gifts, Beo. Th. 3864; B. 1930. He self lifde on gneáðum woroldlífe án tunece wæs his gegerela and ðæt wæs hǽren and beren hláf wæs his gereorde he himself lived a frugal life in the world, one tunic was his raiment, and barley bread was his food (Bosworth &Toller, 1898, p. 32).

Thus, all versions of synonyms show that this adjective defines the subject as "in need". Not in the sense of being in need, but in the sense of being "under the influence of necessity". "The need to have more" is also represented by the words "stingy, greedy, jealous".

And one more point. We have already noted that this concept is a key one not only for the German

society of which Makaev (1996) spoke, but also for Indo-European languages in general (Makaev, 1996).

Pay attention to one of the meanings of the word "Nuda" in the dictionary of Dal - "oppression". It is also a certain synonym, i.e. the additional meaning of "pressure, (be) under pressure". And then another option appears - the word "Anger". Now its etymology stems from the word "rot" in the Old Slavonic language. But in this case, "rotting", means exactly "be under the oppression (of time)". It is much easier to determine its etymological belonging through the adjective gnéað (Rage - oppression - gnéað - neád - Nauð), especially if we take into account the second meaning of nid in the Botworth-Toller Dictionary (see above).

7. Conclusion

Language has been a social phenomenon, inextricably linked to the culture, history and various extralinguistic factors of its speakers since self-organization and the advent of its developed system (Ogneva et al., 2018, p. 730).

In this article we analysed the symbolic meanings of some runic signs which comprise all destructive and negative aspects of life represented in the linguistic worldview of ancient Germans. The symbolic meaning specified in runic songs appeared as well in the text of Beowulf in various variants. It is important to note that some of these variants were not directly linked to the symbolic meanings of the above-mentioned runic signs, but still were derived from these (for example, an adjective gnéað - "jealous"). What ṡ more, these symbolic meanings also have equivalents in the Russian language, similar in both semantics and form. Thus, these symbolic meanings proved to be stable and universally applicable. On the basis of this we can conclude that they represent corresponding key concepts, which means that the runic system can be a sufficient instrument for revealing the concept system. On the whole, in this paper we tried to outline the main ideas of the research, which, in our opinion, has a great potential of the studying runic writing system in the frame of the cognitive approach.

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