

Cognitive Functions of Proverbs in Moral and Ethical Concepts Representation in Modern English

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Abstract: The study considers the issue of investigation of the role of English proverbs (proverbs and sayings) in representation of the moral and ethical concepts. It has been proved that proverbs illustrating the moral concepts in the modern English language have their own features for example, the analogy with such non-abstract realities as representatives of the fauna and nature are drawn. The analysis of the factual material also illustrates the necessity of existence of particular moral and cultural values in the spiritual life of a nation.

Key words: Proverbs, proymology, proverbs, phraseology, moral and ethical concepts

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the linguists pay more and more attention to the issues of correlation of cognitive structures lying at the heart of our thinking and the linguistic structures formed in a language and being an important mean of representation of our knowledge, emotions, thoughts, feelings. The global coverage was given to the issues of representation of cognitive structures in the lexis and phraseology; however, we believe that the issue of representation of cognitive models in the proymological fund of languages requires more detailed investigation.

We completely share the opinion of the professor Semenenko (2009) that today the precedent linguistic units shall become one of the main subjects of analysis in the anthropocentric linguistics. However, the issue of analysis of proverbs at the present stage constitutes a certain dilemma: should they be studied as cognitive phenomena. i.e., how formation and perception of proverbs in the thinking of a linguistic identity proceeds (Lackoff and Turner, 1989; Sullivan and Sweetser, 2010). or as folklore units of culture representing the life and traditions of one or another society (Mieder, 1989). The two approaches have both the supporters and detractors. We believe that today, it is necessary to combine these approaches to consider proverbs both as the units of culture represented by the moral precedent texts and the linguistic units representing particular cognitive structures containing knowledge of the culture life and traditions of the society.

The basis of each society is the system of its moral-ethical norms and values. Following I.V. Kononova, we believe that the national-cultural identity of the moral-ethical conceptual sphere of an ethnic group consists in the specificity of the set of its value dominants and may be identified by means of analysis of the facts of linguistic objectification of the concepts (Fedulenkova, 2000).

Hence, the main objective of our study is investigation of the cognitive function of proverbs in the modern English language. In order to solve this task we use a set of methods of the traditional linguistic analysis (etymological, contextual, component, etc.) and the cognitive-linguistic (analysis of the main conceptual components of the moral-ethical concepts and the linguistic representation thereof in the proverbs semantics).

MAIN PART

The cognitive interest in proverbs is determined by the fact that they are the basic structures of consciousness and the concepts represented by them are clearly perceived in the cognitive system of most of representatives of the entire linguo-cultural community.

The specific nature of proverbs allows considering them both as the phraseological units and as folklore texts and as precedent phenomena included in the core of the cultural space of a society. The inner form of a proverb

records some situation that took place in the reality that is re-thought and having become the basis of the inner form incorporates a certain value orientation attached to it by the consciousness of further generations.

In its direct meaning, a proverb does not differ from a common sentence representing a particular speech situation, i.e. is a particular judgment. In terms of its figurative meaning this is generalization, a formula applied to numerous particular situations. In this regard, the meaning of a proverb is similar to the allegoric meaning of a word, i.e. to a metaphor. Thus, the direct meaning of a proverb implies a particular situation that served as the basis for further generalization and metaphoric re-thinking of an expression.

The figurative meaning of a proverb is not only the surface knowledge. Based on the assumption that at the heart of a metaphor the ability of consciousness to find analogies lies it follows that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the two real situations described in a proverb. This knowledge also participates in the creation of the general meaning of a proverb. The own observations and studies of the phraseological material of the English language allows stating that most of paroemias represent the moral-ethical concepts the fundamental one among which is CONSCIENCE.

High figurativeness of paroemias representing this concept as analysis of examples shows is created by means of metaphors. The CONSCIENCE concept is often interlaced in a cognitive metaphor and begins to represent properties of living creatures. For example in the proverbs Someone's conscience began to prick him and A quiet conscience sleeps in thunder the personification of conscience is contained (remarkably that the cognitive metaphor of a sleeping conscience is universal in many languages of the world). Such proverbs feature inner figurativeness. The abstract concept of conscience is transformed by means of metaphors into a visible image that is commonly understood and appellative: "to do something with an easy (clear) conscience"(Kunin, 1984). The secondary nominative meaning is primarily typical to the words formed with the use of the semantic method: figurative, metaphoric formations.

The analysis of proverbs speaks of a huge layer of the English paroemias containing the motivated names of animals. In the representation of the negative moral-ethical concepts such as dishonesty, hypocrisy, qualms of conscience various names of domestic and wild animals, birds, insects, reptiles are used: one scabby sheep will mar a whole flock, Rats desert a sinking ship, The cat shuts its eyes when stealing cream; When the fox preaches, take care of your geese. In our opinion, all the above-mentioned concepts lying at the heart of the paroemias semantics represent the structural

characteristics of the macro-concept CONSCIENCE as they are inevitably integrated in its conceptual content.

During the process of representation of the moral-ethical concepts in the English paroemias one should also take into account the peculiarities of their compositional structure. Most paroemias have a two-member composition. Both parts of a paroemia separated from each other by a pause are often pronounced with a similar intonation which creates a specific rhythmicity. For example: not only for fear but for conscience's sake; Be slow to promise and quick to perform; Don't spit into the well, you may need its water (Kunin, 1984). Another compositional feature of such paroemias is repetitions of sounds alliterations and assonances ensuring the musicality, symmetry of the structure and as the result greater emotionality and expressivity for example: A fault confessed is half redressed.

Paroemias representing the concept CONSCIENCE like many others may distinguish through an intentionally ironic content: if you've stolen a pig its squeal will stick in your ears. Among attributive combinations in which the word 'conscience' is the basic component the following proverbs arouse interest: Guilty conscience needs no accuser; Someone's conscience began to prick him.

Some paroemias representing the moral-ethical concepts are the direct didactic sentences, friendly wishes and reasonable advice: One ought to know what conscience is; Do something conscientiously, Be slow to promise and quick to perform.

However, some linguists find it disputable to refer paroemias to phraseological units appealing to the situational variation of their component composition. The question arises: are the reduced versions of paroemias the integral phraseological units? Let's consider a number of English proverbs representing the concept CONSCIENCE.

In the modern English language, there is a common tendency to reduction of the number of components in the proverbs, i.e., long proverbs including over ten components gradually less used in the full form and elliptical derivatives. For example, the communicative phraseological unit You could spit in his eye (face) and he'd call it God's (divine) dew, consisting of 13 components and having the meaning "a man of no scruples" is rarely used in the modern English in its full form: "Well, a man who gets rich by that trade may be all very well in some ways but you could spit in his eyes and he is blind as to what workingmen want" (Sewell, 2004). "But look ye, the only owner of anything is its commander and he'd call everything God's dew and hark ye, my conscience is in this ship's keel" (Melville, 1992). Reduction of the component structure is observed not only in the oral but in the written speech form as well. The

quantitative changes in the proverb form are followed by occasional changes in the grammar structure which creates a certain pragmatic effect. From the perspective of the cut off part of the proverb it makes sense to speak of:

- The initially reduced phraseological derivatives: “The cowardly effects of pulling the chestnuts out of the fire were evidenced in the conduct of one of the captain’s men” (Washington, 1978) (to make someone pull the chestnuts out of the fire for someone)
- Finally reduced phraseological derivatives: “Nor with such a man could you expect not to lick the mud” (Maugham, 1997) (to lick mud off someone’s shoes)
- Bilaterally reduced phraseological derivatives: “My conscience would never be easy if I kept silent on the subject, he is a scabby sheep” (Montgomery, 2004) (one scabby sheep will mar the whole flock)

The units obtained as the result of reduction are also phraseological as the meaning of the whole differs from the meanings of its components. It may be assumed that life of the multi-component proverbs is prolonged by means of their reduced derivatives which in their turn act as permanent allusions pointing at the multi-component prototype. The reduced proverbial derivatives gain the status of independent phraseological units as they gain their won form, their own meaning and more than that their own function in the speech. Thus, the most productive trend of formation of phraseological derivatives in the English language is reduction of the communicative phraseological units one of the kinds of which the proverbs are.

The analysis of paroemias allows making an assumption that in the English language the ratio between the linguistic units without figurative meaning, i.e., proverbs without figurative world perception and the metaphoric proverbs is almost the same. It shall be noted that the English proverbs are more restrained, leveled and subordinate to specific strict rules: A guilty conscience needs no accuser; Confession is the first step to repentance; Creditors have better memories than debtors.

SUMMARY

All the above-mentioned proverbs characterize in English phraseological worldview a person possessing or not possessing such quality as conscience and representing different aspects of this universal concept. Paroemias of any nation are the bright illustration of the national linguistic mentality revealing the layer of the spiritual and moral values of an ethnic group and helping to perceive peculiarities of life and customs with the use of different linguistic means.

CONCLUSION

The national cultural identity of the moral-ethical conceptual sphere of the English nation consists in existence of the specific cognitive structures value dominants, in particular the CONSCIENCE concept and are revealed during the process of analysis of facts of its representation in the paroemias semantics.

The main functional feature of English paroemias is their ability to represent the moral-ethical concepts both within the own compositional structure (through objectification of the words conscience, honesty) and within more complex semantic cognitive blending conceptual metaphors the basis of which is comparison with animals, plants, natural phenomena.

Paroemias representing the moral-ethical concepts are an important evidence of presence of such concepts in the English culture, i.e., it is the phraseological fund of any language that allows identifying the presence or absence of some or other moral-ethical values in the spiritual life of a nation, ethnic group and even a separate linguistic identity.

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