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Theoretical Basis of Concept and Conceptasphere Activation in Fiction

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Abstract: The article reflects the fact that the study and activation of concepts and conceptual spheres in fiction have received special recognition from linguists in world linguistics, and also reflects views on mythological heroes in order to shed light on these issues.

Keywords: concept, conceptual sphere, conceptual frame, mythological hero.

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The linguist D.S. Likhachev introduced the term “conceptosphere,” drawing on V.I. Vernadsky’s ideas of the “ionosphere” and “biosphere.” Likhachev describes the conceptosphere as a distinct domain of language that reflects the collective knowledge, cultural experience, and worldview of a people. He defines a concept as a linguistic and cognitive unit connected to the shared knowledge and practical skills rooted in a given reality.

According to Likhachev, the conceptosphere supports the idea that the richer a nation’s culture—its literature, oral folklore, science, and fine arts—the more developed the conceptual structure of its language. The historical experience of each nation or social group, as well as the depth and diversity of the linguistic tools used to convey this knowledge, shape the unique nature of a language’s conceptosphere. It is a cognitive system that emerges at the intersection of language and culture.

As Kharitonchik observes, linguistic semantics acts as a bridge between linguistic theory and cognitive sciences, including areas such as visual and auditory perception. The study of language semantics is also inherently a study of the structure of thought. In contrast, Kubryakov views semantics primarily as a cognitive phenomenon, emphasizing that our understanding of it is shaped by the structure of consciousness itself.

A concept can be understood as a mental representation that helps us categorize the world and our cognitive processes. Thinking involves organizing these concepts into categories, enabling us to group similar objects based on shared linguistic features and to identify essential characteristics while filtering out irrelevant details.

In cognitive linguistics, categorization often follows the theory of prototypes. This approach was originally introduced by Eleanor Rosch in psychology and later adapted to linguistics by scholars such as K. Stumpf, E. Husserl, and M. Merleau-Ponty. The prototype theory suggests that categories are organized around the most typical or representative members, rather than fixed definitions.

The analysis of concepts in linguistics occurs on multiple levels, with particular attention to lexical concepts, which must meet specific structural and semantic criteria. Generally, concepts are verbalized through particular lexical items. Numerous definitions of this process exist. For example, the *Linguistic Encyclopedic Dictionary* published in Russia defines a concept as a phenomenon related to, but distinct from, the meaning of a word—existing within a different system of associations.

Stepanov proposed that a concept is a system of logical relationships and formal structures. When examining the semantic structure of a word, its lexical meaning is understood as both material and ideal—two inseparable aspects that form a unified whole.

A concept can be defined as a discrete, meaningful unit of collective consciousness that reflects an ideal or conceptual worldview and is retained in the cognitive framework of language speakers. From a linguistic perspective, cognitive analysis focuses on the distinctive features of such concepts.

Concepts embedded in literary texts may transcend linguistic boundaries, sometimes appearing familiar to speakers of different languages and cultures. This is particularly evident in mythological literature, where certain symbolic images recur across traditions. These images—often represented through visual media such as drawings, caricatures, illustrations, dolls, statues, masks, or costumes—can evoke similar mental representations in diverse audiences. In this way, fictional and mythical elements generate culturally "recognizable" conceptual images.

For example, in Slavic mythology, the figure of Baba Yaga is typically portrayed as a visually impaired or sickly being with a deformed leg—an image that is deeply embedded in the cultural imagination and often immediately recognizable in visual or literary form.

At this point, it is important to note that many culturally significant concepts are rooted in collective imagination, even though they refer to entities no one has directly observed. Terms such as *paradise* and *hell* exemplify this phenomenon. These lexemes, though abstract and unverifiable, have developed rich symbolic representations in language and culture.

According to the *Mythological Dictionary*, *hell* is described as a subterranean prison of divine justice, inhabited by demonic beings responsible for carrying out eternal punishment. In V.I. Dal's *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language*, *hell* is portrayed as an underworld characterized by darkness and fire—specifically, as a blazing furnace. One of its enduring symbols is a cauldron filled with eternally boiling tar.

The concept of *paradise*—often seen as the antithesis of *hell*—is defined in S.I. Ozhegov's *Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language* as a place where, according to religious belief, righteous individuals experience comfort and eternal joy after death. Like the symbolic representations of *hell*, the imagery associated with *paradise* functions as part of a broader system of conceptual frames—mental structures that shape how such abstract notions are understood and verbalized within a cultural context.

The examination of key philosophical and linguistic perspectives allows us to draw the following conclusions: the concept is a fundamental element of cognitology, a relatively new branch of linguistics; it serves as a repository of knowledge and skills that reflect aspects of reality. The conceptosphere, in turn, embodies the richness of a culture, including its folk oral traditions, which contribute to enriching the conceptual system of a language.

This brief review has outlined the theoretical foundations of concept and conceptosphere activation in fiction and analyzed research conducted in global linguistics on these notions. Notably, certain lexemes represent ideas that, while never directly observed by humanity, exist as shared mental constructs across diverse cultures.

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