FUNCTIONING OF SYMBOLS AND IMAGES IN LANGUAGE STRUCTURES

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The paper analyses some peculiarities of using symbols and images in French, English and some other languages. Such research provides an opportunity to identify a system of values adopted in different cultures, provides data for penetrating into the depth of the ethnolinguocultural layer, and thus allows decoding the hypertext of any culture more efficiently. The results of the research show axiological and pragmatic orientation of the means of expression of the language studied. The method and procedure of the analysis can be applied in studying figurative and symbolic usage of linguistic means in various languages and cultures.

**Keywords:** Language, Culture, Symbols, Images.

**Introduction**

In the search for adequate ways of reflecting the cognizable aspects of reality a man constantly adjusts the meaning of existing lexical units to various new objects. Using available lexical resources in the new naming function is the essence of the language phenomena that are denoted by the common term “secondary nomination.” It is the signs of indirect nomination that enjoy a special cognitive mechanism and linguocultural significance. These signs as secondary products of semiosis are characterized by the interaction of language, communicative, pragmatic, psychological and sociocultural aspects.

The problem of image and symbol is associated with the development of the word as a semiotic sign. The analysis of the figurative and symbolic use of language units requires studies in the framework of epistemological research, because much of the structure of human knowledge is represented by models of associative and verbal networks [1].

Studying features of the figurative and symbolic system of any language deepens our knowledge about the cognitive capabilities of the reality representation. There is a continuous interest in studying the socio-cultural background characteristics on the basis of cognitive studies, since the act of naming, which is a product of linguistic reality, always refers to the sociocultural world.

**Materials and Methods**

To identify the status of the figurative and symbolic usage it is necessary to determine the ways of presenting, functions and linguocultural characteristics of language images and symbols, to identify the
common, universal, and national culture-bound on the material of various thematic groups of the figurative and symbolic system of a language (in this case it is French).

As a fundamental principle of the study there has been applied the dialectical approach to the problem of the relationships between language, thought and culture, processes of human cognition and representation of the secondary semiosis signs that transmit human experience and existing knowledge in a peculiar form.

Alongside with it there have been used the method of cross-correlations, which allows to reveal associations between various aspects of a language phenomenon and linguistic ideas related to it; the method of etymological research; the method of lingvocultural semanticization, that facilitates the identification of national-cultural components within the meaning of words; the elements of linguistics-cultural commentary, which allows to reconstruct lingvocultural area; descriptive method, on the basis of which the definitive, semantic and semiotic analyses have been conducted; and the method of linguistic modelling.

The sources of the language material include dictionaries, reference books, and encyclopaedias.

**Results and Discussion**

An image is a special type of a sign that preserves its association with the denotatum. Each image is the result of a synthesis of sensory data, that is, elements of the concrete subject area. An image as a representation is a psychological entity that is associated with some "specifics," and the latter causes emotional and evaluative responses. Its form is a special kind of sense, although there are cases where images appear to be illogical and unmotivated.

An image can be of natural or metaphorical nature, and at the base of the latter there may be conventionality or natural resemblance, and sometimes both at once.

An image underlies the appearance of symbols, emblems, comparisons, symbolic metaphors and metonymy, phraseology, proverbs and sayings. It is a fundamental component in the formation of other means of expression, which are often called figurative means. It is a sense-forming image, when the visual brings about the cerebral.

An image as a cognitive mechanism is the operator of emotions. Language images are linked to associative images. In European culture associative images of the blue are the sky and the sea, of the red - fire and blood, the white - snow or milk, the black - coal, the yellow - the sun and gold. In this case associations are based on empirical experience.

There is a dual relationship between ideas and images. There may be a horizontal relationship, in which an idea can be presented in different ways, for example, the wisdom is presented in the form of an owl or a snake. And there may be a vertical relationship, when some image, for example, fire evokes in the mind such concepts as “passion”, “danger”, and “home.” Imagery in the language is not limited to figurative use or re-interpretation of a word. Very often images are rendered by descriptive phrases or even whole sentences. For example, the Italian figurative expression *una tigre di carta* (“paper tiger”) refers to an imaginary threat. It is the associative and connotative semes that are used in forming the particular image (*tiger* represents a threat and *paper* refers to frailty).

The basis of emerging language images are iconic images in the broadest sense of the word. Not every image, brought forth in the mind by the sign perceived, is a reflection of something actually existing in reality. Such language units as *centaur, unicorn, mermaid, etc.* signify objects that do not exist in the real world. Images vary not only from language to language, but also within the same language: *lucertola* (“lizard” in Italian) is a symbol of desire for light, or a symbol of malnutrition as in *compa di lucertola* (“eat the same air”).

The concept of an image is closely associated with the concept of connotation that absorbs the facts of language, which explain the subjective attitude of the speaker to the signified on the basis of the language picture of the world and accepted norms of communication. In most cases these types of lingvocultural information are not represented in lexicography.
The concept of a socio-cultural image, which has a semiotic framework, crystallizes in the works of R. Barthes, who correctly assumes that the signified are saturated with emotional and value beliefs and ethno-cultural components, that is, vocabulary is filled with socio-cultural and affective information [2].

A language image is related to the denotatum, when it is the case of objective imagery, but this relationship may be complicated by factors of social, historical, or psychological nature. The peculiarity of a language image is that it is a linguistic sign belonging to an indirect and derived category, which has iconic characteristics. This statement reveals the ability of cognition to undergo “smelting”, rethinking and synthesis in the linguistic consciousness [3, 35].

Lexical iconism, or verbal-image designation of reality, can take the form of direct naming, the way in which a thing is represented as directly sensed and perceived, as it is conceived in reality. It is an image in its pure form, such as red as a lobster. Lexical iconism can take the form of indirect naming as well, when the image is transferred from one modality to another one, and when the matter is not the resemblance, but the inner isomorphism, that has a conventional nature, for example, poor as a rickety chair or needless as the fifth wheel of the cart. Iconicity in this case must be understood not only as a visual similarity, but also as a certain isomorphism of different senses.

A man is susceptible to various senses: visual, auditory, olfactive, taste, tactile, temperature. According to this there may be distinguished language images of different types: visual (she is slender as a birch tree), auditory (to purl like a tiny brook), olfactive (I smell a scandal), taste (bitterness of resentment), tactile (to rub salt into somebody’s wound), temperature (cold shoulder). Among the above the first place belongs to visual images, since most information is obtained with the help of eyesight. Besides, as psychologists point out, a visual image affects people more quickly than a text.

Due to their similarity to the depicted, iconic signs are understood by all categories of users, although there may be some cultural constraints. For example, l’hexagone in French designates not only a geometric figure, but also France, since the latter has a hexagonal shape.

Iconicity, based on an image, is one of the modes of the existence of signs (along with indexation and symbolicalness), having profound neurobiological, cognitive, and communicative reasons and belonging to relative (not absolute) characteristics of the language.

In case of an image the act of identification takes place, in case of a symbol there is the act of interpretation. There is an inseparable link between an image and logo, image and allegory, image and symbol.

From immemorial time certain words are imprinted in the human memory as symbols. The spirit of the symbol permeates the whole philosophy of the name. The symbol was studied from a philosophical point of view as an object that combines a phenomenon and its essence.

In psychology symbolism, or symbolic thought, was studied as a function of thought that can establish associations of natural or conventional character between the perceived object and another object or situation, and produce interchanging between these objects or a situation in which to express thoughts directly is difficult or impossible.

Most linguists agree that defining the symbol is extraordinarily difficult. A symbol is an object, action, event, quality, that functions as a conventional designation of some concepts and ideas. For example, a white dove is a symbol of peace.

The cognitive process of the emergence of a symbol can be represented as follows: a symbol is a sign that is capable of evoking in the recipient an idea based on some analogy (association) between the sign and the symbolized object, and the analogies (associations) are often vague and elusive: lion evokes an idea of strength and courage, flame evokes an idea of passion.

Symbolism is not a purely linguistic phenomenon, it exists outside the language as well, but it is borrowed by the language as a special way of representing reality, as one of the methods of rendering the meaning, as a means of expressivity.

The symbolizing is always something tangible and concrete, which is perceived by the senses: a song, color, drawing, storytelling, gesture. The symbolized is an abstract notion, emotion, moral principle. A symbol exists only when the symbolizing and symbolized coexist in the mind.
A look at the designated object varies depending on the contextual situation. For example, a bed of lilies in a garden symbolizes nothing. In the figurative use the language prefers the whiteness of lilies to their sweet, stupefying scent. Because of this there is an expression in French *teint de lis* that means “very white”, “very pure” and in Russian *liliya* (“lily”) means “white and tender”, “resembling the lily”. A wreath of lilies symbolizes the purity of the bride during the wedding ceremony. It is the lily that Archangel Gabriel gives to the Virgin Mary during the Annunciation. Lily is a symbol of the royal power in France. Royal persons were called lilies, as evidenced by the name of the Russian translation of the novel by M. Druon *It doesn’t befit lilies to spin*.

Sometimes national-cultural symbols grow so much in the practical activity of man and keep in the imaginative area so many traces of contacts with reality that the demarcation line between them begins to disappear. Meanwhile, the language is the only sign system that has recorded not only the world around us, but also the symbolic universe, i.e. creatively recycled reality.

The symbol may be inferred from the nature of concepts (*heart* is a symbol of love, a feeling which is concentrated in the heart) and be very far removed from it (mathematical symbols).

It must be emphasized that the nature of the symbol is inexhaustible, because the associative relationship, as well as infinite interpretation of the associative field can be unlimited. In the French phrase *Le ciel était rouge comme une nappe de sang* (“the sky was red as blood-stained cloth”) the colour is only a starting point. Blood calls in other associations, except for the colour. It is not only an image but also a symbol. There is a variety of ways to systemize symbols: ideological, social, axiological, thematic.

Thus, a symbol is a special sign that has a motivated relationship between the signifier and the signified; it is a unifier, an element that unites opposite parts. The symbol itself is a concrete embodiment of abstract ideas that are introduced not from outside, but come from the essence of the object, which becomes a symbol. A lexical symbol renders the best model of a phenomenon or quality (*Solomon* as a symbol of wisdom, *Venus* as a symbol of beauty, *September 11, 2001* as a symbol of a terrorist act). In such use a symbol performs a generalizing function. This is a model symbol.

Comparing such complex and ambiguous phenomena as an image and symbol in our research, we identified the following main characteristics of them. An image is a way of thinking, while a symbol is a way of the representation of thought. An image is closer to a metaphor; a symbol is closer to metonymy. An image is specificity, a symbol is generalization. There are figurative and descriptive models and model symbols that are used in a variety of stereotypical situations. For example, a *road* is an eternal image-symbol of the course of life, *streaming away water* is an image-symbol of transient inexorable time.

Images and symbols are complementary to each other. An image is tangible, associative isomorphism underlies the use of imagery. In its turn a symbol is not arbitrary either. It has a rudiment in the form of relationship between the signifying and the signified. A symbol comes from within, when the inner essence looks for its shape. In case of an image external characteristics are associated with a specific content.

To be understandable images and symbols should be visible, relevant and universally accepted. Considering, for example, the concept of a *snake*, it can be stated that the iconic isomorphism is used in forming such expressions as *plaits like snakes, lightning like a snake*. The symbolic nature of the word *snake* is associated with evil, death, danger, primal fear, surprise attack, perfidy, and caution. From the realm of semiotics a symbol goes into semantics, but an image being based on semantics becomes the property of semiotics.

A symbol and an image are two inseparable concepts, in which relationships can be closely intertwined. A symbol is always embodied in some manner, but not every image is a symbol. A symbol conveys a main feature; an image conveys an overall impression.

Images and symbols are the basis for the formation of figurative and symbolic system of language, which is an integrated system consisting of linguistic units at different levels (with iconic or symbolic features of ethnosciocultural character) and having cultural-historical, social, ethical, and aesthetic significance.
A symbol has three features, namely, a generalizing nature, replacement function, conventionally set meaning. The three features of an image are the iconic (denotative) basis, the associative-figurative derivation, and connotative and social components. An image conveys, above all, expression and evaluation, whereas a symbol is a model, the highest manifestation of a particular entity.

The results of our research have demonstrated the ethnocentric orientation of figurative and symbolic functioning. In the center of the image-symbolic system is a human being, presented in the entirety of his/her characteristics. However, each language has its figurative and symbolic peculiarities. For the French language special significance has such concepts as intellectual abilities of people (intelligence, resourcefulness, and ingenuity), their appearance (features of faces, complexion and clothes), peculiarities of their character (humor, irony, wit), their social and financial position (wealth, poverty): Il est de Saint-Malo, il entend à demi-mot (residents of Saint-Malo understand everything perfectly); Avoir une taille de Beuzeville (to have a long waist); Le sel bourguignon (wit); La Beauce est le grenier de la France (Beauce is the breadbasket of France).

The figurative-symbolic use of French language units aims, above all, at critical viewing such concepts as stupidity, ignorance, brutality, greed (Les Provençaux sont des brutaux – residents of Provence are rude) [4].

The results of the figurative-symbolic system study demonstrate how uniquely socio-cultural characteristics reflecting various values of a nation intertwine.

Conclusion

The study of symbols and images of different languages can help identify and trace the connection between the cultures of various ages and nations that unites the humanity.

Further development of this topic is related to studying secondary semiosis in the unity of its linguistic and extralinguistic categories, deeper learning the subject-visual code, investigating communicative and pragmatic nature of figurative and symbolic expressions.

Among the issues that need to be studied as well there are issues of linguistic typology, further studying the value systems inherent in various cultures, synthesis of global cultural and semiotic store of knowledge, defining universal cultural components of language semantics, identifying lingvocultural correspondences, simulating a universal system of symbols and images, renovating the figurative-symbolic systems, evaluating the artistic significance of the figurative-symbolic usage, and developing artificial intelligence.

References


