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SEMANTIC-ASSOCIATIVE POTENTIAL OF LEXEME "CHRISTMAS" BASED ON IDEOGRAPHIC DICTIONARIES AND ASSOCIATIVE EXPERIMENT

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the consideration of the lexical unit denoting the name of Christmas. The need to turn to lexicographical sources in the study of the Christmas lexeme is due to the fact that in these lexicographical sources it is possible to trace the nature of this vocabulary in a certain period of time. These dictionaries give an opportunity to trace the syntactic and semantic changes of the words. The process of using the associative experiment in the study, where the word Christmas is a representative, involves an attempt to present the mental information in a verbal form of a set of reactions-associates. Going beyond the semantics fixed by ideographic dictionaries allows revealing the national way of perception and understanding of reality. The selected areas of association can verbalize the semantics presented in ideographic dictionaries and reflect fundamentally new realities of the modern Russian speaker. Penetrating into the linguistic consciousness of Russian speakers and explicating a significant part of the conceptual space of the language in the content of the linguistic consciousness, the associative experiment allows you to go beyond the lexicographically fixed semantics and discover the cognitive-psychological and linguistic reality. Thus, this study represents an attempt of identifying the main lines of associating the word Christmas, which will expand the meaning boarders, which get a communicative relevance and become actual in the linguistic consciousness of a modern Russian native speaker.

1. Introduction

The issues of reality representation and the focus on those phenomena of the language that have a special national and cultural specificity have always been of a great interest for many linguistic research. In the 21st century the areas of research related to the religious component are becoming more popular in Russia. The religious component of the nominations is interesting for a wide range of studies and disciplines that focus on various aspects of religion-related concepts in the century of technology and "reconstruction" of a culture, religion and language. The legitimacy of religious organizations, the development of the relations between Church and the Government on the political, economic and social levels cannot but affect the linguistic consciousness of modern Russian people.

2. Problem Statement

The analysis of the linguistic unit Christmas in the linguistic and cultural aspect is necessary for a number of reasons.

First of all, the religious content of the lexeme includes axiological characteristics, as it reflects the most important issues of being, and the language establishes close relationships with religion, which is due to the interpenetration and mutual influence of religion and language.

Second of all, the connection between language and religion is necessary for understanding the culture of the native speakers. In linguistics of the 21st century a language is presented as a source of knowledge and ideas about the world and culture to which the native speaker belongs. Appealing to religion, to the history of a language promotes understanding and penetration into the national world-image. The language verbalizes the images of the national worldview and embodies them in the sign language units. The study of the unit Christmas in the linguistic and cultural aspect is necessary for identifying naive ideas of the modern native Russian language, formed under the influence of national worldview and world perception.

3. Research Questions

It is interesting to consider the lexeme Christmas, containing a religious component, since the religion in Russia of the 21st century acts as a cultural identification and tradition of social life, which is reflected in a significant fragment of the language and verbalized in the linguistic consciousness of the modern native speaker. The image of the Russian holiday is influenced by economic and social changes in society, which determine the mobility of the corpus of lexical means that verbalize the semantics of the holiday in modern Russia.

The active use of the anthropocentric approach in scientific research in the 21st century is closely related to the ideographic description of vocabulary, as well as to the cognitive approach used in this description. The reference to ideographic dictionaries in work with vocabulary is necessary, because, firstly, the vocabulary of these dictionaries is presented not in the alphabetical order, but in lexical groups and subgroups, and secondly, it is possible to identify the nature of the presented vocabulary in a certain period of time by using ideographic dictionaries. Thirdly, ideographic dictionaries make it possible "to predict various syntactic and semantic changes by the fact of placing a number of related words in a row" (Babenko,

2005, p. 58). Finally, the ideographic dictionary gives, in a certain sense, a complete or almost complete representation of the human image of the world.

In the analysis of the Christmas lexemes the following defining and ideographic dictionaries were used: Ideographic Dictionary of the Russian Language edited by Baranov (2000).

We consider the relation of the analyzed lexeme Christmas to the religious holiday in these dictionaries, based on the main method of interpretation – a logical definition. This lexeme is represented in all the dictionaries. In GEDRN the studied lexeme is described in the "Religion" denotative sphere and further in the ideographic group "Nouns Denoting Holidays". It should be noted that in the dictionary entry devoted to the Christmas lexeme, using a capital letter is recommended and this dictionary unit is interpreted in the first meaning as one of the twelve main Orthodox holidays.

It is significant that in the RSD the lexeme is represented in the lexical group "Church Services, Sacraments, Rites and Holidays. National Holidays Associated with the Church" and in the lexical-semantic variety "Church Holidays and the People Associated with Them." The dictionary entry devoted to the Christmas lexeme gives the following interpretation of the Christian holiday: "In Memory of the Birth of Jesus Christ", as well as the dates of celebration in the old and new style of periodization. As an illustration, the examples with the adjective Christmas are given: "Christmas holidays. Christmas days. Christmas holidays (in the meaning of vacation), Christmas service" (Shvedova, 2003). The dictionary contains interesting examples of the use of the lexeme in word combinations, phraseological units and proverbs (Shvedova, 2003). The IDRL has no dictionary entry, since the main meaning of the dictionary is, first of all, to present a semantic picture of lexical units. Words are represented in semes, which are united by their meanings and form a unity of a concept, which can be associated with generic relations. The studied lexeme is presented in the section "Culture", in the subsection "Religion", in the group "Church Life", the subgroup "Religious Customs" and in the ceremonial system of ritual actions.

Consequently, the data of various ideographic dictionaries show that the semantics of the lexical unit is differently represented in semantic classes or spheres, depending on what principle of description and representation of the vocabulary was chosen by the authors. Since the identification of the corpus of lexical means that verbalize the semantics of this lexeme is not possible without reference to ideographic dictionaries, the analyzed unit of the name of the holiday allows us to present the semantic volume, which is contained in lexicographical sources.

4. Purpose of the Study

In this regard, it is necessary to identify the semantic-associative potential of the Christmas lexeme according to ideographic dictionaries and on the basis of the associative experiment.

5. Research Methods

As an effective method of studying the Christmas lexeme based on the recorded data of ideographic dictionaries, it is interesting to conduct a free associative experiment (FAE), where the stimulus is represented by the research unit, and consider the results of it.

The use of experimental studies of lexical semantics suggests us to discuss the possibility of an in-depth description of the meanings of the words (Maklakova & Sternin, 2013). The associative experiment is one of the effective methods of experimental research not only in linguistics, but also in other scientific fields. In the first works on psycholinguistics (in the 50s of 20th century in the USA and Germany) the advantage of associative experiment was in the study of the language specificity, human language ability and the structure of the word meaning. This experiment was widely used in semasiology and in cognitive linguistics, revealing cognitive images in the process of cognitive interpretation. The use of the AE provides an opportunity to investigate associative links from the stimulus to reaction and from reaction to the stimulus. The analysis of the semantics and functioning of lexemes in the modern Russian language is often based on the data of associative-verbal fields, those are a network of the words associated with the linguistic persona, covering "with a certain completeness the entire lexicon of the modern average Russian speaker" (Tarasov, 2000, p. 25). Semantic features of certain linguistic units that are relevant to the consciousness of native speakers are shown in the content of the associative-verbal network and are found not only as "conscious and used in communication semantic components associated with the word", but also as "the signs that reflect the general informational base of a person, their encyclopedic knowledge about the subject and the phenomenon" (Popova & Sternin, 2007, p. 43).

Associations are of great importance in the human speech and mental activity. Each word-associate has a conceptual and value component, it fixes information and reproduces it in the flow of speech, which provides an understanding of the informative and semantic potentials of the word. Exploring the semantics of the Christmas lexeme, which represents a particular meaning in the language, it is necessary to take into account the semantic space of the language, which verbalizes a significant part of the conceptual content of the lexeme and the cognitive community of associations as mental units in the language consciousness.

The method of a psycholinguistic experiment, to which, first of all, refers FAE, allows revealing the content and conceptual meaning of the semantics of the Christmas lexeme.

An association is the connections between the objects and the phenomena, which are based on personal – subjective experience. Despite the fact that the experience of the subject may coincide with the experience of the culture to which a society belongs, it will always represent a purely personal cognition of an individual, based on the past experience (Frumkina, 2001). Thus, the most effective method of studying the "real meanings" in the "real consciousness" of a native speaker is AE, since the data on the semantics recorded in lexicographic sources may differ significantly from the real image of the world of the native Russian speaker. Being relatively simple in relation to other AEs, the free associative experiment is an effective research tool. The advantage of AE is that it provides the associates not of the selective, but of the mass experiment, allowing us to use this source of linguistic information; moreover, the founded associates are easy to be mathematically processed.

In order to identify the semantics in the content of the Christmas lexeme in the minds of Russian speakers, the FAE was held among students of Russian universities in 2015 based on the generally accepted international practice of such experiments. During the experiment, the informants were asked to respond in writing to the proposed stimulus by any five language units-associates, denoting images that arise in their minds in a certain period of time. The time of the experiment was limited to five minutes. The approximate age of the subjects was 18-20. The final product of the AE was a set of associates, which are ranked by the

degree of frequency and identification of the main directions of association. Further, the associative-verbal network of reactions became the subject of research analysis. The reliance on the linguoculturological and cognitive approaches in this study allowed us to identify the realities that are important for the Russian language consciousness in modern Russia of the 21st century.

6.   Findings

There were no difficulties in providing the responses by respondents when considering the results of the associative experiment on the Christmas stimulus. 0 failures were recorded, 2500 associates for the proposed representative were received. In the analysis of the associative array of the Christmas lexeme, an attempt was made to unite the reactions objectively existing in the national consciousness in groups, on the basis of a common feature.

Extralinguistic information reflects concepts and ideas about the facts, characteristics of lexemes, objects, features, qualities, etc.

The semantic information includes (information of the religion, the name and the perception of time periods).

Emotional-expressive information contains: reactions that express the semantics of a holiday; color perception of a holiday; emotional-subjective component of the perception of a holiday; reactions that verbalize the "miracle" component in the minds of respondents; actualization of the "family" concept; reactions that express the semantics of birth.

Sociological information contains: the national characteristics of a holiday; Christmas traditions; Christmas features outside RNT (Russian National Tradition).

The background information contains: the component of the meaning of "food" in the semantics of the Christmas lexeme; names of weather conditions and seasons.

Associations are interpreted as the linguistic representations that acquire the communicative relevance in the representation of a modern native speaker, which have a common component fixed in the representation of a linguistic persona.

The percentages accompanying each lexeme reflect the number of votes that objectified the reaction in the experiment.

Semantic information of the content of the lexemes (This group includes the lexical units that reflect the idea of matter, real, abstract, they call the objects, properties, actions and qualities).

The religious component of the meaning

- connection with religious ideas (faith, religion, Christianity, Orthodoxy, Catholicism);

- religious buildings and related attributes (Church/temple, bells, candles, icon, face image);

- actions during the service (lighting candles, prayer service/a prayer, sacred procession, Church service).

- the names of the persons of God (God, Jesus the Christ/ the Savior);

- birth of the Central figure of Christianity (birth of Jesus Christ/Christmas, the Visitation (of the Christ));

- characteristics of the Christmas holiday (Christ, the great and main holiday for Christians, Christmas eve);

- spiritual and sensual content (soul, grace, special feeling of confession);

- connection with the Advent (Christmas Fast /end of the Fast);

The lexemes related to the biblical story of the Nativity of Jesus Christ (the Bible, puppet show of the Nativity, Holy family in the cave, star, star of Bethlehem, cradle, angels/angel, the Magi, gifts, a lamb, Joseph, the Virgin Mary, mystery play, the Jews).

Name and perception of time periods:

- the component of the rest time and its end (weekends, holidays);

- associations due to the fixed date of Christmas in the Christian and Orthodox culture (the 7th of January, night, evening);

- associations due to the fixed date of Christmas in the European religious culture (the 12th/25th of December, the 24th of December);

- reactions recording the calendar image (the beginning of a new era, the difference of calendars, Gregorian and Julian calendars).

Emotional and expressive information of the content of the lexemes (This group includes the lexemes that express human feelings, emotions, sensations, images).

Reactions, explicating the semantics of the holiday:

- associates-classifiers of the holiday (family holiday, Christmastide);

- associates-actions accompanying the holiday (open air celebrations, Christmas songs, fair, music, songs, meetings, guests).

Color perception of the holiday:

- in the meaning of color (yellow, blue, cyan, white);

- in the meaning of light (light, grace).

Emotional-subjective component of the perception of the Christmas holiday:

- emotions, feelings and sensations associated with the perception of the Christmas lexeme (warm moments, congratulations, the smell of tangerines, moonlit festivities, waiting, silence, good, calm, warm, dark, simplicity, joy, happiness, smile, hope);

- component of the meaning of fire (lights, the Holy Light, bright lights).

Reactions, explicating the semantics of the word "miracle" in the meaning of the Christmas and New Year holidays:

- the component "miracle" in the reactions of respondents (magic, miracle, fairy tale, wish fulfillment, mystery);

- New Year's day, accompanying Christmas, and attributes of these two holidays (new year, gifts under the tree, a fabulous evening by the Christmas tree, bright decorations, spruce/Christmas tree).

The component of the meaning of the word "family":

- reactions related to the ideas of the respondents about Christmas as a family holiday (family, home, family dinner, home comfort).

The reactions representing the semantics of birth:

- (birth, new life, baby).

Sociological information of the lexemes content (This group has the vocabulary containing sociological information, including characteristics of the social environment, characters, actions, stylistic

effects, irony, and nonce words. The vocabulary informs about local social occurrence and reflects the markedness of the geographical area of the lexeme existence).

National characteristics of the festival:

- reactions that actualize the national ideas in the consciousness of the native speaker (Russia, Empire);

- connection with the Goverment (Putin, Kremlin, government);

- precedent name (Gogol, Ded Moroz – Father the Frost).

Christmas traditions:

- rituals and their elements associated with traditional Christmas activities (to go Christmas caroling, fortune telling, Christmas carols, guiser, millet, powdering, mystery, mirror);

- actualization of observance or non-observance of the traditions in the minds of the respondents (traditions, lost traditions).

Characteristics of Christmas, beyond the Russian national tradition (RNT)

- connection with the accompanying holiday decorations (decorations, cards with angels, bells, socks, Christmas stocking);

- realities of the European social culture (Catholicism, AveMaria, Europe);

- reactions of the names of the North American folk character (Santa Claus, secretsanta);

- precedent phenomena (Grinch, the Home Alone movie).

Background information of the lexemes content (the vocabulary of this group reflects the national forms and types of material culture, naming the realities, symbols and socio-cultural features that function in appropriate situations).

The component of the meaning of the word "food" in the semantics of the Christmas lexeme:

- the meaning of the word "feast" in the semantics of Christmas (food, dinner, feast, treats, New Year table);

- names of the dishes related to the Russian feast tradition of celebrating Christmas (baked goose, duck with apples, salads, kutiya, pies, the Pigeon's Milk cake, open air barbecue, red wine);

- names of the dishes related to the European table tradition (gingerbread, cupcake, baked Turkey, mulled wine, Coca-Cola).

Names of weather conditions and seasons:

- weather conditions and season (winter, snow, frost, cold);

The frequency responses given by the respondents to the word-stimulus Christmas reflect significant "the connections between the words objectively existing in the minds of the respondents and in the language" (Leontyev, 2001, p. 64).

7.   Conclusion

The conducted experiment with the key word-representative Christmas allows us to note the actualization of the lexemes with the religious component that characterizes the holiday and coincides with the interpretation given in the ideographic dictionaries – the birth of Jesus Christ. Thus, on the basis of these reactions (8.68%) we distinguish the meaning of the Birth of Jesus Christ, which is one of the key meanings in ideographic dictionaries.

The component of meaning of time actualized both European and Christian time periods of Christmas celebration in the language consciousness of the respondents. It is significant that the reactions verbalizing the date of the celebration of the Catholic Christmas are in the amount of 4%. Thus, we highlight the following meaning: the Catholic holiday.

It should be noted that some associations actualize the semantics of the western European traditions and elements of the Christmas celebration, which are reflected in the lexical content of reactions. In sum, the reactions that verbalize the layer of European and American Christmas cultures, are 6.92%. It is significant that the Santa Claus lexeme has 0.68% of the votes, and the Ded Moroz (Father the Frost) lexeme has 0.48%. In the group of the associates, objectifying the meanings of drinks and dishes, the red wine has 0.12%, and Coca-Cola has 0.84% of the votes.

The emotional and subjective content, accompanying the Christmas holiday, is a positive-estimated accentuation in the amount of 5.65% of the reactions. In general, Christmas is perceived by the modern speakers as a family holiday, which is reflected in the language by actualization of the lexemes associated with the family. Here we can distinguish the following meaning: a family holiday.

The objectification of the meanings characterizing the festive period of the winter calendar is noted. Thus, the Christmas lexeme actualizes the Christmas period and the traditions associated with Christmastide in the linguistic consciousness of the respondents: fortune telling, carols, dressing.

Let us note the associations that cannot be interpreted in one particular way. Those associations reflect the individual perception of the holiday, but are interesting to study, as they record new unexpected reactions that go beyond not only lexicographically fixed meanings, but also the meanings recorded as a result of the experiment (E.g.: Putin, government, Russia, Empire). These reactions revealed the peculiarities of the state policy towards the Church. We highlight the following meaning: a public holiday.

The analysis of the founded data shows that there have been significant changes in the content of the associative-verbal network of the Christmas lexeme. Additional semantic features beyond the lexicographically fixed meaning in ideographic dictionaries were actualized.

The associative array carried out as a result of the experiment makes it possible to detect the peculiarities of both national and author's ideas, which acquire the communicative relevance and are actualized in the linguistic consciousness of a modern native speaker. The selected directions of association as a result of FAE allow expanding the meanings allocated in the lexicographical sources. It is possible to say that in the Russian language image of the world the meaning of the selected characteristics verbalizes a set of social, cultural, ideological, mental, religious and domestic factors.

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