

**PERAET 2021****International Scientific Conference «PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL: Mythologies and Social Technologies of Digital Civilization-2021»****SPOTLIGHT ON MYTHOCONCEPTS IN A DIGITAL CONTEXT**Elena M. Shevchenko (a)\*, Olga N. Prokhorova (b), Igor V. Chekulai (c),  
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**Abstract**

The article spotlights on myphoconcepts in a diachronical aspect. Ancient archetypes underlie mythoconcepts which represent mental ideas of a nation being structural components of a mythological picture of the world. As more and more information becomes digital, “digital natives” create mythoconcepts in a digital context. Currently, interest in the mythological picture of the world is increasing, nevertheless, it remains a little-studied area of linguistic knowledge. The relevance of the article is determined by contemporary mythologization in a digital context. The purpose of the research is to analyze mythoconcepts in a diachronical aspect comparing traditional and new cultural notions underlying them in digital contexts. The authors differentiate mythoconcepts and mythologemes, recognizing the mythoconcepts as certain stereotypes imbued with cultural meanings; meanwhile a mythologeme is an invariant complex of ideas and a “core” stable constituent part of mythoconcepts. The “core” of mythoconcepts – mythologemes represent the unchangeable archaic part which is transmitted from generation to generation. The key point is that a frame-structure of a mythoconcept can be represented by a blending of real (R) and irreal (IR) frames. The part of a mythoconcept determined by irreal descriptive and action frames with zoomorphic characteristics doesn’t transform in a diachronic aspect. It can be explained by an obscure nature of mytholexemes: their denotation is sacred, mystical, difficult to “touch”, taboo.

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*Keywords:* Archetype, mythoconcept, mytholexeme, mythologeme, mythological picture of the world

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## 1. Introduction

At dawn of civilization the “primitive” human mind mythologized the mysterious phenomena of nature and the surrounding reality. In the past myth was a way of reality conceptualization, the relevance of the article is determined by contemporary mythologization in the digital context. In the contemporary world of modern technologies “sophisticated” minds create mythoconcepts in a digital context. As more and more information becomes digital and most people are “digital natives”, a new culture phenomenon appears – “digital culture”– which starts forming its own values and rules of behavior (Shilnikova et al., 2020). The term digital is used to denote the whole of information technology, including books, music. “Broadcasting text, audio and video data in the digital space using emails, blog posts, forums, web pages, social networks and various instant messaging platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc.) is a dynamic social phenomenon that requires a comprehensive study...” (Potapova & Kuryanova, 2021, p. 6). In this paper we analyze mythoconcepts in modern films, cartoons, computer games as a part of digital context.

Along with digitalization, there is mythologization in a digital context. Ancient archetypes of a certain ethnic group form a mythological picture of the world. According to Yung (1997), archetypes are images connected with an individual by emotional ties. We consider archetypes as images in the consciousness of an individual connected with historical images and typical for a collective consciousness of a nation. Archetypes underlie mythoconcepts which represent mental ideas of a nation being structural components of a mythological picture of the world. Focusing on the story-world of British folk-tales about fairies and the supernatural represented in a modern digital context, we explore that mythoconcepts still relevant to modern audiences.

In the structure of mythological conceptualization a man is in the focus of study being a subject and an object of cognition. In a modern linguistic paradigm a dominating anthropocentric approach has become the basis of a significant number of studies and some scientists as Fefelova et al. (2020) even differentiate “linguistic personality as a key concept of anthropolinguistics”, which predetermines “the consideration of the semantic ...features of lexemes in correlation with cognitive structures that underlie them” (Drygina et al., 2019, p. 409). The world famous experts in the field of cognitive linguistics consider frame as a structural part of a concept (Miroshnichenko et al., 2018, Prihodko & Prykhodchenko, 2018). According to some scientists a frame is a unit of knowledge organized around a certain concept. The frame is also interpreted in modern linguistics as structured knowledge for representing stereotypes (Minsky, 1979), and as a type of cognitive model representing knowledge. Some scientists underline that frame evokes communally oriented forms of behavior (House et al., 2021).

Following Teliya (1996), the authors consider a concept as “knowledge structured by frames”, they can be structured in the form of an episode, a scene, a scenario. They are united by frames. Thus, frame is a “structured knowledge of the world associated with a language unit” (Teliya, 1996, p. 96).

Scenario involves concept in a plot line. Different situations reflected in our consciousness in the form of images with evident participants, functions, etc. The unity of these components forms a scene. Scenes follow one after another developing as a certain scenario (Tokarev, 2003).

Mythoconcepts represent certain stereotypes imbued with cultural meanings, meanwhile under mythologeme we recognize “an invariant complex of ideas associated with a certain scenario, the “perception” of an important character, situations that pass from myth to myth (myth is understood in a broad sense as stereotypes of mass everyday consciousness)”. Mythologemes are a constituent part of mythoconcepts, they are a “core” of a mythoconcept, presenting the unchangeable archaic part which is transmitted from generation to generation. “The denotation of mythologeme might be expressed by a text, a word and other language units” (Kosharnaya, 2002, p. 87).

## **2. Problem Statement**

The present research is based on the assumption that mythoconcepts, as “knowledge structured by frames”, contain all ancient associations, sacred information, and represented by mytholexemes at the language level. Frames can be organized in the form of episodes, scenes, scenarios. Scenario underlying mythoconcept is unreal, because it represents mythologeme as a text. Taking into consideration the fact that mythoconcepts, being the result of real and unreal structures blending, contain real and unreal information, we suggest that the conceptual structures underlying them might be real and unreal. We differentiate real (R) and unreal (UR) frames, descriptive and action frames. We inclined to think that predominantly the action frames are unreal, meanwhile the descriptive frames are real, but there might be exceptions. The research endeavored to determine the modern interpretation of ancient mythoconcepts, structured by frames.

## **3. Research Questions**

We differentiate mythoconcepts and mythologemes, recognizing the mythoconcepts as certain stereotypes imbued with cultural meanings; meanwhile a mythologeme is an invariant complex of ideas and a “core” stable constituent part of mythoconcepts. We think that the analysis of structures underlying mythoconcepts in a diachronic aspect helps to identify stable precedent and variable parts of mythoconcepts, also it helps “to model the semantic field” (Bespalova, 2021). We suggest that the part of a mythoconcept structured by real frames can change in the course of time, especially those containing anthropomorphic features. The part of a mythoconcept determined by unreal descriptive and action frames with zoomorphic characteristics doesn't transform in a diachronic aspect. It can be explained by an obscure nature of mytholexemes: their denotation is sacred, mystical, difficult to “touch”, taboo. Mythologeme is a precedential “core” of mythoconcepts, it renders the mythological knowledge from generation to generation reflecting the national and cultural peculiarities of the mythological picture of the world. The denotation of mythologeme might be expressed by a text, a word and other language units.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the research is to analyze mythoconcepts in a diachronical aspect comparing traditional and new cultural notions underlying them in digital contexts. Ancient archetypes underlie mythoconcepts which represent mental ideas of a nation being structural components of a mythological picture of the world. The research is aimed to identify the stable and dynamic of mythoconcepts.

## 5. Research Methods

The choice of methods used in the study is determined by the cognitive linguistic paradigm. As the basic research methods, we rely on conceptual and frame analyses. The methods of component, definitional, word-formation, comparative analyses of mytholexemes were also used at various stages of the work. Linguocultural approach and etymological analysis allow identifying semantic basis of mytholexemes origin.

## 6. Findings

The focus of our research is the cognitive structures underlying traditional and contemporary mytholexemes. The present research is based on the assumption that linguocultural information can be explicated from the language forms. The main form of a mythoconcept representation at the language level is a mytholexeme. Consequently, the definition analysis can help to reveal some additional notions. The mythological world of British tales is simply “infested” with mytholexemes representing supernatural beings with magic powers: *fairies*, *elf*, *gnomes*, *dwarfs*, *mermaids*, *kelpies*, *selkies*. We think that the key mytholexeme for English linguoculture is *fairy*. The study of the authoritative lexicographic sources of the English language (Cambridge dictionary, n.d.; Collin’s online dictionary, n.d.) has revealed the following meanings of the lexeme *fairy*: 1) an imaginary supernatural being, usually represented in diminutive human form and characterized as clever, playful, and having magical powers 2) slang: a male homosexual.

It’s crucial to underline that “a frame-structure of a mythoconcept can be represented by a blending of real (R) and irreal (IR) frames” (Kosharnaya, 2002, p. 89). It can be illustrated by a basic mythoconcept “*Fairy*” consisting of descriptive frames “small people” (R), “with wings” (IR) and action frames “it can fly” (IR), “it can abduct children” (IR), “it can enchant” (IR). Thus, mythoconcept “*Fairy*” contain all ancient associations, sacred knowledge represented by mytholexeme *fairy* at the language level. It’s worthy of note that real frames underlie the meanings of secondary nomination signs. *Fairy* in the course of time got a derogatory meaning appealing to a male homosexual.

It’s evident, mythoconcepts correlate with certain conceptual structures, that is called conceptual valence. Frames determine conceptual valence. It can be illustrated by the correlation of mytholexemes representing concept “*Fairy*”. An ancient archetype underlies mytholexeme *changeling* believed “fairy children left in the place of stolen human babies” (Sensagent Dictionary, n.d.). Scenario *fairy* – *changeling* presupposes the following situations: “fairy steals a human child”, “it leaves a fairy child instead of stolen”. In a contemporary digital context there are a lot of computer games connected with mythoconcept “*Fairy*” such as “Changeling: The Dreaming”, “Changeling: The Lost” , TV series and cartoons such as “True Blood” , “The Fairly Odd Parents”, “Winx Club”.

Additional conceptual features can be revealed within synonymous group. According to Collin’s online dictionary mytholexeme *fairy* has got the following synonyms: *sprite*, *elf*, *brownie*, *hob*, *pixie*, *puck*, *leprechaun*, *peri*, *Robin Goodfellow*. The analysis of above mentioned dictionaries reveals the following meanings of the mytholexeme *elf*: 1) (in folklore) one of a kind of legendary beings, usually characterized as small, manlike, and mischievous 2) a mischievous or whimsical child.

A mythoconcept “*Elf*” is represented by the following frames: a descriptive frame “small people” (R) and an action frame “they trick people in a mischievous way” (IR). As we have already mentioned, a mythoconcept represented by real frames, develops additional notions in the course of time. Thus, the mythoconcept “*Elf*” in a digital environment gains secondary reinterpretations, highlighting additional cognitive structures, which can be differentiated in such films as “Santa Claus”, “*Elf*”.

The following structure of a contemporary mythoconcept “*Elf*” is distinguished: a descriptive frame “green-clad elves” (R), “with pointy ears” (R), “long noses” (R), and “pointy hats” (R) and an action frame “help Santa to present Christmas gifts” (IR). In the digitalized world abbreviation ELF stands for: 1. Executable and Linkable Format, a computer file format; 2. The COSMAC ELF, a microcomputer kit. The modern video game “Cyber Elves” also appeals to a traditional mythoconcept.

One should note that mytholexeme *mermaid* is frequently used in English and defined by Collin’s Online Dictionary as: “an imaginary sea creature fabled to have a woman’s head and upper body and a fish’s tail”. A mythoconcept “*Mermaid*” is represented with descriptive frames “a young woman” (R), “with a fish tail” (IR) and an action frame “it can live under water” (IR), “it can drown men” (IR). As it mentioned, real frames underlie the meanings of secondary nomination signs. Thus, in modern English they call a beautiful girl with loose hair. Eg., Her hair flows *mermaid* long and her legs strut. (Collins)

One of the examples illustrating the mythoconcept “*Mermaid*” in the modern English mythological picture of the world is the film “Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides”, where traditional mythoconcept “*Mermaid*” gains some new features. Mermaids are said “to sing to sailors to entice and enchant them into the water” (IR), “to take the sailor down to the depths of the sea to drown them”. This knowledge refers to a traditional mythoconcept “*Mermaid*” in many cultures.

In a modern digital context the mythoconcept “*Mermaid*” gets a new coloring in a frame “they eat men at the bottom of the sea” (IR). It’s interesting to note, that according to folk tradition, mermaids on dry land “can change and have legs” (IR), but in the recent context appeared specifying knowledge “they will dry up and die if out of water too long” (IR). At last, the reference to the film “Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides ” allows to identify additional features “the kiss of a mermaid will physically heal a human”, “her tears have magical properties, necessary to activate the true power of the Fountain of Youth” (IR). Thus, unreal frames determine the correlation of a word-notion with a mythologeme. Generally speaking, the success of the “Pirates of the Caribbean” series, “Lord of the Rings”, “Game of Thrones” and “World of Warcraft” proves that the mythical past still holds the power to enthrall adult audiences.

Another fictional character appealing to ancient archetypes in the “Pirates of the Caribbean” series is *Davy Jones*. The computer-generated imagery used to complete *Jones* was highly praised, earned the 2006 Academy Award for Visual Effects for “Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest” (Sensagent dictionary). This character is based on the legendary spirit of the seas, according to superstition among sailors in the 18th and 19th centuries. *Davy Jones* is the captain of *the Flying Dutchman* (another mythoconcept of a legendary ghost ship featured in nautical lore), roaming the seas in search of souls to serve upon his vessel for a century. In the recent digital context, appears the unreal frame “to carry souls of those who died at sea from this world to the next on his vessel”. Features of modern individualism are differentiated in a digital environment: *Davy Jones* is “desperately in love

betrayed” (R). He “gets enraged” (R), it refers to the archaic mythoconcept, but then modern striking interpretation appears he “rips out his heart”, “places it in a chest, burying it on land” (IR). *Jones* then abandoned his duties, and instead ruled the seas as a tyrant with a damned crew bound by oath to serve aboard the Dutchman for one hundred years each. Bound to the duties of *the Flying Dutchman* both he and his crew slowly transformed into sea monsters” (Sensagent dictionary). Thus, appears a modern mythological version of a traditional mythoconcept expressed by a principally new scenario.

Mythoconcepts make digital environment all-consuming and addictive, drawing people away from reality into imaginary worlds. One should note that mythoconcepts, being constituents of a mythological picture of the world, in a digital environment gain conceptual features connected with individual identity and self-determination. It is interesting to mark that in recent years mythoconcepts from digital environment influence an economic sphere determining an international franchise of other toys – usually high-tech toys like computers, video games DVDs and DVD players, and even mobile phones.

## 7. Conclusion

The results of the study show that, mythologemes, being a constituent part of mythoconcepts, are a “core” of a mythoconcept, presenting the unchangeable archaic part which is transmitted from generation to generation. Predominantly, the action frames are unreal, meanwhile the descriptive frames are real, but there might be exceptions, which present prospect for further research. The results of study showed that real frames are changeable in the course of time, especially those containing anthropomorphic features. The part of a mythoconcept determined by unreal descriptive and action frames with zoomorphic characteristics doesn’t transform in a diachronic aspect. It can be explained by an obscure nature of mytholexemes: their denotation is sacred, mystical, difficult to “touch”, taboo. A mythologeme is a precedential “core” of mythoconcepts, it renders the mythological knowledge from generation to generation reflecting the national and cultural peculiarities of the mythological picture of the world. All this underlines the urgency of the material and gives the source for future scientific research.

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