

**FaR 2021****International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”****COGNITIVE PHENOMENON OF SALIENCE IN THE  
LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE**

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shilina.alla@rambler.ru**Abstract**

The article is devoted to the problem of the essence of salience in cognitive linguistics. Being researched in psychology and neurophysiology, salience does not receive enough attention concerning the language means of its manifestation. Salience is defined as a cognitive condition, which mechanism highlights the most important and relevant elements of an object. The distinction between salient and non-salient members of the cognitive category is made employing the theory of prototypes. In the course of study the connection of salience with cognitive processes is explored. Salience is believed to be manifested fully on a text level; that is why text is viewed as the main source of study. It was confirmed that a deep analysis of the notion of salience is impossible without taking into account non-cognitive factors that can affect the mechanism of salience. Such factors were called socio-cognitive and included different types of contexts. It was discovered that the role of an addresser and an addressee is of high importance for identification and interpretation of salience. Future research should be done taking into account time, place, linguistic context, background language and cognitive knowledge, social roles and relationship between the interlocutors who employ and perceive salient elements in the interaction.

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## 1. Introduction

The topic under consideration deals with the studies of the cognitive mechanisms that perform a significant function in the coding and transformation of language. The goal of cognitive linguistics is to understand how the processes of perception, categorization, classification and understanding of the world are implemented, how knowledge is accumulated, which systems provide various types of operation with information (Kubryakova, 1994).

The definition of cognitive science includes a special range of scientific disciplines that have united for the joint study of processes related to the receipt and processing, storage and use, organization and accumulation of knowledge structures, and in addition to the formation of these structures in the human brain (Skrebcova, 2018).

Each component occupies its own niche in cognitive science, has a certain meaning. The present stage of cognitive science reflects such a stage in its development, when the solution of a lot of pressing problems of conceptual analysis is seen in the systematic study of linguistic manifestations of the activity of human consciousness.

## 2. Problem Statement

Cognitive salience is quite widely known in psychology and neurophysiology (Menon, 2015), the concept is also researched in cognitive linguistics (touching upon the notions of salience, entrenchment, profiling), but despite this, no single interpretation regarding this language phenomenon has been established.

Scholars are still exploring this area; the needs of semantic research and cognitive linguistics itself require a more detailed, in-depth study of this area. The most relevant problems refer to the distinction between salient and non-salient elements, the nature of factors that affect salience from the point of view of a text-producer and a text-receiver.

## 3. Research Questions

At this point there are several research questions employed for clarification of the notion:

- How is salience connected to the cognitive processes?
- Is it more productive to study salience on a text level?
- What members of the cognitive category are considered salient?
- Is salience a purely cognitive notion?
- What non-cognitive factors can affect salience in the text?

The present article is going to outline the possible answers and consider the material for further in-depth research.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this work is to summarize the theoretical information on the essence of the notion of salience in cognitive linguistics. Though being deeply connected with cognition, salience cannot but be

affected by non-cognitive factors in a coherent text. The study should make it possible to see what salient elements are, what salience is in its nature and if salience in a language is a fixed phenomenon for an addresser and an addressee. The study will enable to formulate further research problems in this area.

## 5. Research Methods

In the course of the study, the following methods were used: the method of contextual analysis, revealing the features of the verbal realization of the cognitive mechanisms of salience; the method of discursive analysis that identifies a number of factors that determine the type, components and means of salience in discourse.

## 6. Findings

The category of salience is a significant unit in cognitive psychology and neurophysiology (Taylor, 1989). It is determined as the quality or state of an object, with the help of which it stands out noticeably against the background of other units. The object thus becomes salient (highlighted) as compared to other objects. It is of high importance in the cognitive processes linked to perception, understanding, assimilation and storage of information, organization of knowledge, attention, categorization (Armeeva, 2001). The connection between cognitive processes and salience works both ways. On the one hand, the salience of a particular linguistic phenomenon is realized with sufficient attention - concentration on an object connected with the activation of knowledge. On the other hand, seeing cognitively salient phenomena in a text leads to better concentration of focus as it naturally attracts attention.

In this regard, it is necessary to recall the process of perception, in which reality is divided into a background and a figure; this principle is also characteristic of linguistic phenomena. Here it will be relevant to mention the organization of information in discourse. Discourse may be defined as a structural composition where highlighted as well as background elements interact, therefore dividing the information into highlighted and background (Kubryakova et al., 1996). As it seen in a discourse there is a background and a figure, non-salient elements and salient ones.

Even though salience can be traced on different levels of language, it is believed that text allows looking more thoroughly into the phenomenon. Therefore, it is the text that most fully allows us to study salience, since the text is regarded as the longest linear sequence that represents a holistic meaning; the phenomena of interest are interconnected and interacted there. In the text the category of salience, like all other linguistic facts, manifests and reveals itself in its entirety (Luzina, 1994).

Salience may be analyzed as a text strategy, which, from the point of view of a text-producer, has the power to strengthen the most important components of the text and reduce the least significant ones. From the point of view of a text-interpreter salience helps with understanding, analyzing the text by encoding the most important acute information thus reducing the need to maintain and process large amounts of information inherent in the process of perception of the text. It is possible because the highlighted – salient – elements interact with background elements. Therefore, the salience expressed by various language means allows us to consider the marked parts as the main facilitators of not only meaning

understanding but also interpreting of intentions, attitude and emotions of the author (Oppermann & Spencer, 2013).

Speaking about the salience of particular text elements, it is necessary to take into account its essence. The prototype theory, which emerged as a further development of Wittgenstein's ideas (Wittgenstein, 1953), helps to understand this; its main provisions were formulated by American psychologist Rosch. The theory is directly related to the study of the categorization process, which is largely based on human experience and imagination. When assigning an entity to a certain category, a person identifies the similarity relationship between the individual elements of the category, and compares the object being categorized with the prototype, the "best sample of the category". The prototype reflects all the most characteristic features of the category. According to the theory, the members of the category, from a cognitive point of view, are in unequal conditions: central and peripheral members are distinguished among them. The central members form the prototype of the category are most often stereotyped, are more often observed in practical usage and have similar qualities with other subjects. Peripheral members have fewer such qualities, but there may be unique, even specific signs (Rosch, 1973).

This effect was found in a wide range of language categories, from phonology to syntax. There is no doubt that this effect is directly related to the term salience. The question under consideration is what is salient in the structure of the language – the central members or the peripheral ones? The central members are fixed, easily recognizable, reusable interpreted language units: neutral vocabulary from the point of view of stylistics, sentence models with the direct word order, clichéd intonation contours, etc. They are of great importance for the cognitive sphere of a person, for example, they are assimilated at a very young age, have an immensely high frequency and form the basic layer of the language. Sometimes only such members are considered salient (Sutrop, 2001). Peripheral members can be seen less often, and they attract attention with their unconventionality, originality in comparison with the central members. Here we can mention non-codified pronunciation variants, intonation emphasis, sentences with inversion, historicisms, figurative or special meanings of words, etc. These phenomena are salient for a person, but in a slightly different way.

This type of salience dealing with nonstandard, unusual realization of language units has its own psychological and informational background. A standard unit is recognized and understood by the addressee faster than an atypical one, but its information value is lower than the latter, and in this sense it is trivial (Norman, 2019). Therefore, it may be more logical to talk about entrenchment in the case when we work with central, more fixed members of a category, and salience, when we analyze peripheral members (Popova, 2004; Schmid, 2012).

Entrenchment is a phenomenon that deals with verbalizing concepts employing all the linguistic knowledge that we have. It is believed that the long-term memory stores the pre-made concepts and structures that people often refer to and use. Such work of the long-term memory makes it possible to easily encode the concepts by words. They are available because they are relevant for a person, and no cognitive effort is needed to activate their language form and put them in a context. The process of activation becomes practically automatized, it runs without being consciously monitored.

It is worth mentioning that the more people activate a cognitive structure, the more entrenched it gets. With this regard, it is impossible to talk only about entrenched and non-entrenched elements, because

the phenomenon of entrenchment appears to be gradated. Sometimes only the frequency of usage is taken into consideration when differentiating the degrees of entrenchment, sometimes the focus is on the frequency of usage regarding the choice between similar structures with the same function. Since the central members of a cognitive category are quite fixed and recognizable, entrenchment is likely to take place there. Such central members are more often activated, thus they tend to store in a long-term memory, which enables its automatic usage. The peripheral elements of a cognitive category will be less entrenched, less activated, therefore more salient. However, if a peripheral member becomes relevant and is activated more and more often as a result of possible changes in a socio-linguistic reality, it may be entrenched. When talking about salience it is of high importance to take into consideration the prospective addressee of the salient information, as the process of identifying and interpreting salient pieces of information much depends on them. In this regard, the category of salience must be considered not purely cognitive but rather socio-cognitive.

It should be mentioned that the elements of the discourse that were not meant to be made salient by the addresser in a specific context might be perceived as salient by an addressee. In this case, not only attention and focus will contribute to identifying salience. Besides the cognitive processes, the addressee will employ their linguistic and encyclopedic knowledge, will decide what elements are salient based on his or her language routines and patterns stored in long-term memory. This may create different salience effects.

The role of context and expectations facilitated by it is important in understanding the occurrence of salience effects (Divjak & Caldwell-Harris, 2015). The contexts were divided into linguistic, situational, social and general cognitive (Schmid & Günther, 2016), which represent what has already been said, take into consideration time, place, participants themselves, their social roles and relations and general knowledge and patterns concerning language that are in long-term memory.

The example “Miriam’s won the tournament after all” seems to focus the attention on the positive result, the rheme is considered to be salient. An addresser and an addressee know who Miriam is since she is placed on a theme position in a sentence, however in a real life conversation there is not always an introductory linguistic context preceding the sentence on a new topic. An addresser may have spontaneously recalled the news about Miriam through association, but the same process does not take place in an addressee’s cognition. In this case more salient element for an addressee may be “Miriam”, if an addressee fails to quickly match the name with an acquaintance. The linguistic context in such an example was missing, which made a typically non-salient element become salient.

General cognitive context deals with language habits and routines as well as general knowledge. This type of context differs from person to person. The sentence “You should of called me!” demonstrated a colloquial usage of the construction “should have done”. Being non-standard, it draws attention, but if two interlocutors have the same linguistic habit, the colloquial construction will not be salient for them. The same example may be employed to illustrate the importance of a situational and social context. Depending on the place, social role and relationship between an addresser and an addressee, the colloquial construction may be salient or non-salient.

On exploring the contexts the conclusion can be made that salience effects are closely connected with processing the linguistic and extralinguistic information.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper presented a material on the general notions of salience in modern cognitive linguistics. The results of the summary suggest that the mechanisms of salience and cognitive processes are interconnected and interdependent. A big role is played by the processes of attention and focus. The approach to what is considered salient in the discourse must be complex, as there are various points of view on the matter. At this point, it is believed that salience effects are produced by the peripheral members of the cognitive category.

Researching salience on a text level gives a wider opportunity for exploring the phenomenon. It is possible to identify non-cognitive factors that can affect salience in the text. Among such factors were linguistic, situational, social and general cognitive contexts that are connected with an addresser and an addressee.

The result mentioned above confirms that salience is not a purely cognitive notion; it depends on social factors as well. On this stage the category of salience remains open for further research, namely for exploration of the role of context in interpreting linguistic salience.

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