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## **POLYMODALITY OF THE VERBS OF PERCEPTION (AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE WESTERN ROMANCE LANGUAGES)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article considers the verbs of perception in the three Western Romance languages: French, Italian and Spanish. The objective of this research is the analysis of the polymode operation of the verbs of perception. The basis of polymodality is formed by the cognitive mechanisms of the perceptual human activity. The meanings of modi of the examined verbs are expressed in the mental, emotive terms, in terms of volition, etc.

**Key words:** verbs of perception, perception, polymodality, universals, cognitive modus, mental modus, valency

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The perception verbs are considered within the frameworks of the semantic field (SF) of perception consisting of the lexical-semantic paradigms of the five sensory systems in the French, Spanish and Italian languages. The universal concepts and categories have been taken for the reference point in this research. The analysis of features of expression of the same semantic universal in different languages may be referred to the topical issues of semasiology [1]. A linguistic universal is "a uniform, isomorphic way of expressing the intrasystem relations of the language elements or a process that is homogenous by its nature and provides the same results expressed with a significantly high frequency rate in different languages of the world" [2,5]. The relevance of this research is determined by its cognitive-prototypical orientation within the frameworks of which the taxonomy of perception of different languages investigated at the interlingual level is considered as the result of conversion of the perception information to the cognitive one. Due to the percepts formed in our mind we not only perceive the real world but at the same time interpret it attaching our personal attitude. The key feature of the verbs of perception is the cumulative nature of their semantics [3].

### **2. METHODS**

The basic methods used within this research are the system-centric and anthropocentric approaches. Searching for the common and specific features in the studied languages is carried out with the use of the following methods: comparative-typological, contrastive-lexicographic, valency, field- and universal-related method.

### **3. MAIN PART**

The study of the semantic field of the perception verbs has shown that one of the key features of perception is its polymodality: the human perception is not limited by a single sensory kind, it is of syncretic nature and combines not only the intersensory processes, for example, it. sentire (the most multiple-meaning perception verb) [4] but also the intermodus

ones (fr. entendre - 'to perceive aurally', 'to perceive mentally', 'have an attitude towards another person') "The human cognitive activity does not proceed relying on a single isolated modality (vision, hearing, tactile perception, smell, taste), each perception of objects is consistent, it represents the result of the polymodal activity" [5]. By studying the verbs of perception (VP) in terms of their non-perceptual functions we refer to the semantics of modi. The polymodality of the VP relies upon the cognitive mechanisms of the human perception activity [6]. By analyzing the functioning of the vocabulary relating to the perception area S. Ulmann distinguishes the three semantic processes that form the linguistic universals. These are:

- 1) synesthetic metaphors – associative shifting of attributes from one area to another;
- 2) shifting from the area of physical perception to the mental sphere;
- 3) shifting from the perception area to the moral sphere [7].

The meanings of modi may be broken down by the following perspectives: perceptual (sense), mental (epistemic), emotive, modus of volition. According to the author, the sense perspective includes the mode of sensory perception: the verbs to see, to hear, to feel, sense, etc. Perception is not separated from the mental operations, the stage of development of a cognitive cycle is represented by a comprehensive mental mode which includes the modes expressing:

- 1) opinion: to think, to believe, to suppose, to seem, etc.;
- 2) doubt and assumption: doubtfully, probably, may be, etc.;
- 3) truth evaluation: true, false, correct, incorrect, impossible;
- 4) awareness: to know, to be known;
- 5) ignorance, concealment: not to know, unknown, secret, it's all the same, etc. [5, 414].

The modern cognitive psychology also insists on the inextricable connection of perception with the epistemic processes. Which part of an object or phenomena is perceived by a human depends on its attitude predetermined by intuition and conventional category of stimuli [8]. The question of how large is the distance between perception and thinking has been discussed by nearly all philosophy schools and cognitive-oriented psychological sciences [9]. Perception and thinking assimilate and grow into each other to such an extent that the main verb of perception "to see" develops the main mental meanings [10].

The emotive perspective includes the modes of emotional condition and attitude: sadly, it's a pity, disgusting, happily. The volitive perspective includes the following modes: 1) wish and volition: 'to wish, to demand, ordered, etc.'; 2) necessity: 'it is necessary (needed, required)' [5]. The visual images are subjected to the cognitive processing more easily than the auditive percepts. The perception mode in the Western Romance languages is distinguished, first of all, in the verb to see (fr. voir, it. vedere, esp. ver) that is directly convertible to the epistemic mode. By switching to the cognitive perspective, this verb is torn between the meanings that are specific to a number of mental modes. Let's consider the functioning of this verb in the French language. The Le Petit Robert Dictionary distinguishes in the verb voir the meanings at the intersection of with the other semantic fields:

- 1) percevoir, saisir par l'intelligence 'to perceive mentally';
- 2) étudier se faire une opinion sur qch 'to explore, investigate, form an opinion';
- 3) prévoir, discerner: 'to foresee, forecast, distinguish, recognize';
- 4) constater 'to state';
- 5) savoir – 'to know' [11].

The verb voir loses its perceptual meaning within these meanings; it appears at the periphery of the SF of the visual perception on the border of the field of "mental activity". Depending on the nature of valency and semantics of actants, the studied verb undergoes certain shifts in the meaning since the set of the verb valences may serve for differentiation

of its meanings. Thus, by the valency verb + N, where N – is an abstract noun, the synonyms thereof are represented by a great number of verbs with mental meanings: For example, in the sentence *Il vit tout de suite un lien entre les deux nouvelles*. “He has seen the connection between these two pieces of news at once”. In this example the verb *voir* as an object environment is combined with abstract nouns, the seme “ability of visual perception fades away, the seme ‘mental activity’ is put into the foreground revealing such meanings as ‘to understand, to know, to deduce’. By the valency of the verb *voir* qch à, en, avec followed by an object (complement) or a modifier of manner expressed by an adverb the meaning “to state” is revealed. In case of an intransitive construction (S+V+Oi) an indirect object is attached to the verb under consideration by means of the preposition *à, dans*, for example, *voir à qch, à qn*, revealing in the verb the meanings that are synonymous with such verbs of the mental activity semantic field as “to detect, to find out, to notice” located at the periphery of the SF of visual perception.

In the infinitive constructions the verb *voir* in combination with an abstract noun indicates that the actor perceives the fact notionally, it acquires cognitive meanings. The verb under consideration means mental perception by actualizing the following meanings: ‘arrive at an idea’, ‘realize’, ‘understand’, ‘draw a conclusion, deduce’.

The loss by the verb *voir* of its basic meaning ‘to see’ allows fulfilling different syntactic tasks, in particular, it introduces the object clause by means of the conjunctions *que, combien, comment, quel, où*. In these cases the verb under consideration actualizes the meaning that is synonymous with the verbs relating to mental activity: ‘to understand’, ‘to notice, note’.

Perception is also closely related to the affective (emotional-evaluative) sphere of the human mind. Emotions and evaluation as part of the connotative macro-component of a lexical unit are interrelated, in most cases the evaluation as part of connotation functions along with an emotion. Perception may be involved into cooperation with emotional phenomena. The emotional system is one the most complicated systems of a human. Almost all the other systems participate in the appearance, development and expression of emotions: perception, physiological reactions, intelligence, physical systems including various motility and facial gesture. The attributes of emotiveness often accompany the key functions of sensations as the elements of perception. For example, the verb fr. *admirer* (esp. *admirar*, it *ammirare*) means ‘to look at smb./smth. admirably’. The semantic component included in the meaning of this verb directly relates to the field of emotions, thus, the verb under consideration that occupies a lower level in the hierarchic field organization is shifted from the center of the visual perception field to the periphery and is located at the intersection with the semantic field of emotional experience. However, it should be noted that if within the linguistic system there is an equivalence between lexemes in their basic meaning, then from the functional perspective once the verbs of perception are placed in a minimal context the equivalence is broken and the relationships between them become either alternative or synonymic.

The motivational determinants and motivational attitude along with the seme “will (volition)” constitute an important presuppositional component in the semantic structure of the perception verbs. The verbs of perception are expressed also in an act of volition, for example: fr. *Voyez qu'il ne lui manque rien*. – ‘Make sure that he has everything he might need’. *Voyez à nous faire souper, à nous loger*. ‘Make sure that we get food and accommodation’. By the verb *voir* in the imperative mood in the structure *voir + à + verb* the attenuation of the direct relations takes place and its component composition is changed so much that it already means not an action but may actualize the meaning belonging to the SF of volition (5).

The verbs of perception may express spatial relationships and motion. The prototypical verb to see is involved in denomination of both of them. It should be noted that it forms the

basis of semantics of many other verbs. In some of them it is present explicitly, for example, *voir* in the verbs of the spatial movement such as fr. *visiter*, esp. *visitar*, it. *visitare* (with regard to the etymology of the visual perception verb), cf., it. *vedere un museo*, and fr. '*visiter un musée*' 'to visit a museum' but in most cases this verb is represented implicitly: the actions of the verbs of non-perceptual semantic groups as a preposition describe visual perception.

#### 4. SUMMARY

The lexical system of a language is not just a structured combination of separate words but a system of the interrelated, crossing classes of words of different range and nature with no distinct borders between them. The lexical system consists of the phenomena tending to mutual conversion and convergence. The semantic field of the verbs of perception as a systemic-structural combination exists in the form of the logically organized hierarchic structures. A field is an open formation the borders of which are diffused by the areas of the other fields which ensures integrity of the entire linguistic system. The SF of the verbs of perception is one of the basic linguistic structures representing the mental activity of a human. The cognitive essence of this structure is of epigrammatic nature, i.e., formed by crossing-over of the connotations in the line of polysemy and derivation constituting the inherent axis of the field.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, we have presented some results of the study of the VP polymodality the basis of which is formed by the cognitive mechanisms of the perceptual activity of a human. It should be noted that the verbs of perception do not constitute an isolated class within a linguistic system. The lexical-semantic field of the sensory verbs is related to the semantic field supporting the systems of the mental, valuation activity, emotional system, systems of different actions. This relation is mostly revealed in respect of the SF of mental activity and to a lesser extent – in respect of the semantic field of the verbs of motion.

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