
LINGUO-PHILOSOPHIC SUBSTANCE OF A SYMBOL

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ABSTRACT

The methodology of modern cognitive linguistics faces the urgent question of symbolic means aimed at expressing the knowledge, which is not used directly in specific acts of communication, but still plays an important role in the life of the ethno-cultural community. The article considers a symbol as one of such means, as a linguo-philosophic category that serves to correlate the significant with the designatum, the inner meaning with its external form, the individual with the universal. The aim of research is to show the cognitive-semiotic nature of a symbol through its relationship with an image, a word and a sign in terms of new ideas of mentalinguistics. To achieve this aim, the method of cognitive-hermeneutical analysis is used.

During the study, we came to the following conclusion. An image expresses direct interaction between the speaker and a certain fragment of the world (or is stored in the linguistic memory as a trace of such an interaction). A word, fixing the image, turns it into an element of the common cultural communication system. A sign (in its narrow sense) indicates a certain cell of the linguistic consciousness, where the right words and phrases are stored. A symbol determines the direction to a thought, sets the target we are able to achieve using these phrases and words.

The research results are of prime importance for the cognitive cultural linguistics, as it allows differentiating categories related, but still different. A symbol is nationally specific and motivated by semantic ties, which are established between the subject and the abstract elements of its content, and is similar to the signs of indirect nomination. An image serves as the foundation for symbols and signs. The embodiment of the image in a sign of indirect nomination (metaphor and idiom) is associated with linguo-creative thinking, as metaphors are able to generate new concepts within the linguistic worldview. **The linguistic images are the products of «visual generalization» of culturally significant events and situations, which are particularly important for understanding the discursive idioms.**

Research methods. The study is carried out using authorial cognitive-semiological method [5], aimed at the comprehension of (a) the internal structure and the principles of development and functioning of signs-symbols, and (b) their gnoseological potential. Its main techniques are:

a) comparative analysis of paradigm postulates; the main purpose of such comparison is to obtain secondary (derivative) information;

b) hypothetical modeling (based on the hypothesis of regularities of verbal and cogitative process, which reflects the level of modern cognitive semiological knowledge and based on cause-effect relationships between the intension and real designation in speech-producing semiosis).

Keywords: symbol, linguistic sign, image, linguo-creative thinking, cognitive linguistics, mentalinguistics

INTRODUCTION

Even thinkers of the past knew that the natural life of every authentic culture consists in constant creating new symbolic forms, new cultural domains, cultivated within their native linguistic culture to express their spirit [1]. Once downtrodden and forgotten, verbal sources are not able to replenish the ethnic culture with the life-giving energy as they did before, and it certainly loses its creative energy. Therefore, the normal development of a culture requires a shared supply of cultural values, accumulated in the mother tongue, the historically and socially established fund of figurative and evaluative linguo-cultural means, through which these values are delivered from generation to generation [2]. Cp.: a *lock* is the symbol of the mystery (*to keep one's mouth shut*); a *rod* is a symbol of transformation (*Mercury rod*, a symbol of trade); a *mirror* is a symbol of truth, wisdom (Rus. *юности честное зеркало*, lit. 'a fair mirror of youth'; a *great mirror*, a *mirror of the sinful*); a *sword* is a symbol of power (*the sword of retribution*, *to lower / draw the sword*, *to sheathe the sword*); a *halo* is a symbol of holiness associated with shining gods of ancient cults – Sun and Fire (*halo of glory*); a *scapegoat* is a symbol of **others'** expiation; a *thread* is a symbol of course of life (*the thread of life*); a *cup* is a symbol of collegiality, faith, mental health, knowledge (*cup of endurance / drink the cup to the end*, *drain the bitter cup*, *let this cup pass from me*); a *pillar* (or a column) is a symbol of support, the sacred axis of the universe, the divine power, strength and permanence (*pillars of society*, *Pillars of Helcules*) [3], [8].

Main part. Let us consider the symbolic linguo-creative potential by the example of a somatism *hand*. Initially, a *hand* was a symbol of power, strength, domination (Rus. *своя рука владыка*, lit. *one's own hand is the lord* – 'the possibility to do something **one's own way**'). Its derivatives are an instrument of protection and punishing power: Rus. *прибирать / прибрать к рукам*, lit. to take to hand '**get hold of something**'; to be *in one's hands*. In Christian culture, the hand of God is a symbol of God, connected with the belief in the healing power (hence goes the laying-on of hands during the religious blessing) [6]. As one of the basic notions in the Christian worldview, a *hand* symbol became an active derivative for the symbolism of the right and left hand. In European culture, the right hand is preferred (in the biblical stories Jesus Christ is sitting to the right side of God). God gives mercy with his right hand, and holds a fair trial with the left one. The right symbolizes sincerity and logic, and the left emblemizes duality. The right hand is used for the blessing, and left one for a curse. Not by chance, everything that is rightwards has a positive symbolic meaning. It's the expression *right-hand man* what approvingly names the closest helper at anything, the main trustee. Instead, everything that is on the left side is associated with a negative connotation: *left wing* (of a party or line) – 'left opposition'; *left side* (of fabric, clothing, etc.) – 'wrong side'; Rus. *выворачивать на левую сторону*, lit. to turn onto the left side – 'to evert

inside out; **turn over**’; to get out of the bed on the left (wrong) side – ‘**to be in a bad mood**’.

Since the hand is also used as a means of gestures, it came to symbolize a variety of meanings [14]. Both raised hands mean admiration, acceptance of divine blessing, surrender (cp.: *to raise hands up* – ‘to surrender, to give up further struggle for smth.’). Knuckled hands, fists in general objectify threat, aggression, mystery, power, cp.: *mailed fist* 1) military: ‘main attack force, reinforced by military vehicles (tanks, etc.)’; 2) publicist: ‘aggressive military power, militarism’; *raise one’s hand* (against smb.) – 1) ‘try to hit or kill smb., to encroach upon smb.’; 2) ‘to join the fight against someone, smth., to condemn, to blame someone, something’; Rus. *давать волю рукам*, lit. give free rein to hands – ‘fight with smb.’; Cp. antonym *рука не поднимается*, lit. a hand cannot be rised (smb.) – ‘one does not dare to hit or kill smb’. The combination of word *fist* with the lexemes which do not correlated with its symbolic semantics, form colloquial and humorous phrasemes, e.g. *свистеть в кулак*, lit. to whistle into one’s fist – ‘to remain without money, to be in dire need’; *смеяться в кулак*, lit. to laugh into one’s fist – ‘secretly laugh at smb., smth., to gloat’. Folded hands symbolize peace of mind or humility. Cp.: *сидеть сложа руки*, lit. to sit with the folded hands – ‘do nothing, stay idle, twiddle one’s thumbs’; lay down arms – ‘stop doing smth’. Shaking hands is a symbol of friendship, brotherhood, greeting, reconciliation. So, finishing the letter, we often use speech formula expressing these symbolic meanings: *I firmly shake your hand*.

For centuries every culture has been creating their symbolic systems. Thus, a thumb and two fingers raised go with the adjuring. Making an agreement or a contract is accompanied with beating the hands. Cp. the expression *beating (hitting) hands*, which is typically used when the question: *Well, shall we beat our hands?* (i.e. agreed, okay?). Apparently, that is why the symbols are by their nature one of the most enduring sign-oriented means of ethno-poetic continuum. “Memory of a symbol is always older than the memory of its non-symbolic text surrounding, as it is to remind the ancient, eternal foundations of **culture**” [9]. Therefore, the symbol is usually followed by mysterious trail of archaic, long-established axiological ideas. At the same time, one or another scale of values, which is answering mainly to the question of “what is good and what is bad”, has sense only in the framework of the given linguistic culture, as conventional nature of a symbol remains open only to the socialized person who became an individual only in certain ethno-cultural community where he or she was brought up.

And, perhaps, the most sacred about the symbol is that it not only expresses relationships between things, events and ideas, but also reveals the laws of connection between the material and the supernatural world: “What is below is like what is above” [15]. In this regard, symbolic knowledge was a secret, which was carefully guarded and confided only to a narrow circle of initiates.

Usually the symbol is considered as a significative phenomenon. Without any doubt, a symbol is a sign, but sign of a very special kind, playing the role of *significative medium*. Everything that people experienced throughout their life, everything that happened in their world, was perceived as the influence directed precisely on them. That is why any event or occurrence were assessed by the degree of their importance for people. Signs in use not only allow to capture all the most important events from the point of view of human within the social memory, but also give opportunity to rank

them in order of importance, to emphasize such features as “hazard” or “usability”, “neutrality”, “danger” for the person, and so on. As a result of the fusion of event and its assessment within the sign, those natural phenomena that were able to be expressed in sign system, were perceived as both the elements of the environment and the part of human world itself. Therefore, because of their close connection with human interests and needs, the signs gradually appeared to substitute various subjects and events of human interest.

As a result, semiosphere of a certain language creates the structure of the corresponding value and semantic space, which is formed by acquiring the rules of the interhuman communication, while pronouncing and perceiving linguistic signs, which express the common cultural meanings [7]. Interhuman communication processes are implemented, as a rule, through the specific language that stores basic information of an ethnic culture. **Therefore, it's** words and expressions that build and send different messages, determine the nature of origin and functioning of the cultural semiosphere, its value and semantic space. Usually when the concept of “sign” is used, they mean a certain material, sensuously perceptible object, which, during the processes of production, storage and transferring information, replaces a certain image of another object (or phenomenon), correlating with the information above. It is quite well known from semiotics. For cultural linguistics, the more significant is the problem of correlation between signs and images of the referred objects [13].

Let us define the place of a symbol in the sequence “**an image** (expressed in verbal form) – **a sign** – **a symbol**”. Comparing a symbol to the first two items of this sequence, we can see that it plays the linking role to them.

The image directly and clearly represents the corresponding object of reality by means of human knowledge about it, whereas the sign merely refers to a set of images, defining its interpretation. Thus, in cognitive and communicative processes, signs are about to displace and replace images. The peculiarity of symbolic means, generated by any culture, is conditioned by the fact that the symbol allows detecting those meaning areas that are beyond the context, actualized in a specific situation. Thereby, human interaction is determined not so much by what is clearly given, but by what is implicitly prohibited. Symbols include the “forbidden” in the area of human attention. As Ricoeur wrote, they “hide and reveal, conceal and express at the same time” [10].

Various types of signs, which can be found in every culture, are due to multilevel nature of human interaction with the environment and are identified by the specific repeating situations in which this interaction is carried out.

Thus, **image**, **word**, **sign** and **symbol** are different steps of fixing human interaction with the surrounding reality. The image expresses “momentary” interaction with a certain fragment of the world (or is stored in the memory as a trace of such interaction, carried out in the past). The word describes this image, turns it into an element of common cultural communication system. The sign (in its narrow sense) indicates the “address” of the cell, where the right words and phrases are kept. The symbol determines direction of thinking, i.e. sets the target one needs to achieve using these particular signs and words.

The same images generate the same type of feeling. Signs are also always associated with the same subject area. As we can see, images and signs express consistent

connections and relationships. However, the goals of human activity, as a rule, are constantly changing [12]. This fact forms the nature of the original imaginative base for all our ideas about the world. Focusing on certain presumptive result, people often imagine it vividly enough, actualizing the fragments of the worldview that correspond to given culture. Changing the target orientation usually leads to emerging new ideas about the final result, i.e. to re-organizing the elements of the image system, changing their contextual importance. This cannot but encourage the further evolution of the entire structure of the semiotic (value and semantic) space in the direction of its symbolization.

Revealing various shades of general cultural meanings and expressing them clearly, the symbolic systems enable heuristic dynamic of all value and semantic space of language. Heuristicity of symbolic form as a semiotic element of culture is due to the fact that, unlike the sign, a symbol not only determines the relevant subject area, but shows its objects within the boundaries of known characteristics [11]. Being associated with the human target positioning, the sign affects the appearance of contexts where it becomes mandatory to account these characteristics [4].

So, one of the most common lexemes, identifying the poetic discourse of Sergei Yesenin, is *bird cherry*. Sloughing bird cherry flowers resemble snow, snowstorm, “bird cherry blizzard”, ср.: “*Сыплет черёмуха снегом*”, lit. “*The bird cherry pours down snow*”. Snowstorm and bird cherry flowers seem not to be combined, but combining them, S. Yesenin achieves an entirely new feeling of delightful snow bloom. White flowers and white birch bark (elm) are paired with each other, too. Their common feature, white color, is associated with white snow, snowstorm, a symbol of disorder, and with a white shroud, a symbol of death:

<i>Снежная равнина, белая луна,</i>	<i>Snowy plain, white moon,</i>
<i>Саваном покрыта наша сторона.</i>	<i>Our place is covered with the shroud.</i>
<i>И березы в белом плачут по лесам.</i>	<i>And birches in white are weeping in the</i>
<i>Кто погиб здесь? Умер? Уж не я ли</i>	<i>forests.</i>
<i>сам?</i>	
(“Снежная равнина, белая луна”)	<i>Who fell here? Died? Wasn't it me</i>
	<i>myself?</i>

(“Snowy plain, white moon”)

Each image-symbol has its own attributes that, when combined, are arranged in a new series of closely related images: a troika – horses, sleigh – bells... And it fills the simplest words with new meaning. One of the interesting images is a *window*.

<i>Воробышки игривые,</i>	<i>Playful little sparrows,</i>
<i>Как детки сиротливые,</i>	<i>Just like orphan kids,</i>
<i>Прижались у окна.</i>	<i>Cuddled up to the window.</i>

In this context, the word *window* means a kind of art detail that fills this word with a new sense, expanding its meaning in the poem. Repeating in conjunction with the epithet *frozen*, it turns into a poetic image:

<i>И дремлют птички нежные</i>	<i>So, tender birdies drowse</i>
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*Под эти вихри снежные
У мерзлого окна.*

*To these snowy whirlwinds
By the frozen window.*

Interestingly, in the poem the cross-cutting image of the *window* turns into a kind of observation point for the author. From the window, he sees the forest, clouds, courtyard, blizzard in the yard and little sparrows.

CONCLUSION

The image of an object can include in its structure a variety of minor, random attributes, sometimes depending on some features of human interaction with this object. Naturally, such a view of reality in human knowledge significantly hinders to organize the most effective ways to interact with it. Instead, symbols set more or less certain boundaries of human understanding both their needs and those features that can provide the satisfaction of these needs. Symbols are essential for human purposes. However, the stability, constant reproducing the same symbolic structures is largely due to the fact that symbols, unlike signs, are connected not so much with the specific items, as the semantic designation of panhuman activity. Once emerged, these senses keep their value long enough, because they express the deepest properties and attributes of human nature.

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