

Linguistic Characteristics of Nouns Representing the Concept of “Power” in American Political Discourse¹

Yulia A. Drygina², Yulia A. Kuptsova³, Igor V. Lyashenko³, Elena V. Mashkova³, & Elena M. Shevchenko³

Abstract

The article analyzes the linguistic nature of some nuclear lexemes (power, control, authority, influence) verbalizing the basic concept of the English-language political discourse – the concept of “Power”. The paper reveals the structure of the concept, its conceptual features, as well as the main characteristics of the concept representatives at the language and functional levels.

Keywords: Concept; Concept Structure; Conceptual Attribute; Anthropocentric Approach; Conceptual Analysis.

1. Introduction

The use of an anthropocentric approach to the study of language implies consideration of the semantic and syntactic features of lexemes in correlation with the cognitive structures that underlie them and, in many ways, determine them.

Cognitive linguistics seeks to comprehend both the language itself and the mental activity of the person based on it. The sphere of its interests is extremely broad and includes a cognitive analysis of discourse, including its basic concepts. This seems to be a very urgent task, since, as Karasik (1999) rightly notes, “the central concepts that form the basis of public institutions have a large generative force in the sense that an extensive sense domain is concentrated around them” (p. 6).

Following Sheigal (2000), the author of one of the fundamental works in contemporary Russian linguistics devoted to political discourse, we consider the concept of “Power” as the basic concept of political discourse. Consideration of this concept in the framework of the anthropocentric approach seems relevant, since in the cognitive analysis of the concept of “Power”, its universality, high degree of

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² Corresponding author. Belgorod State University, Belgorod, Russia.

³ Belgorod State University, Belgorod, Russia.

importance and frequency of functioning in political discourse become apparent (Shapochkin, 2013; Jabbari et al., 2019; Novikova et al., 2018).

2. Methods

Methodologically, the study is based on the fundamental principle of the anthropocentric approach to language, considering it as a means of organizing, processing, storing and transmitting information, as well as ideas about the relationship between the semantics of a language and the world of reality projected into it, i.e., about the correlation of linguistic and semantic processes with cognitive ones.

The set of methods and techniques used in this study is determined by the choice of the cognitive direction of linguistics. The method of linguocognitive (conceptual) analysis aimed at identifying the features of the concept is fundamental in the study. The methods of component analysis, analysis of dictionary definitions, contextual analysis, and valence analysis were also used at various stages of the work. We used the method of continuous sampling for the selection of examples of factual material and statistical methods (Nakhaee & Nasrabadi, 2019; Singh & Singha, 2016; Bahremand, 2015).

3. Main Part

The problem of the relationship between language and power has, as noted by Sheigal (2000), two aspects: 1) how power is conceived or conceptualized by language; 2) how power manifests itself through language. In this paper, we are considering the first aspect.

In our work, we proceed from the classical definition of concept which is seen as an operational, substantive unit of thinking, a quantum of structured knowledge.

Most experts in the field of cognitive linguistics recognize that the concept has a certain, albeit non-rigid, structure. In the structure of the concept, we usually distinguish the following: well-known information, information known to a number of native speakers and etymological information (Stepanov, 1997); figurative component, conceptual component and value component (Karasik, 2004, p. 118); the image, concept, cognitive implication and pragmatic implication (Nikitin, 2003, pp. 59-60); image, informational content, interpretational field (Popova, 2006); denotative and significative layers (Alefirenko, 2003, p. 29), (Katsnel'son, 2001, p. 394); core and conceptual characteristics (Boldyrev, 2014, pp. 29-30).

When analyzing the representation of any concept, the researcher needs to identify a circle of lexemes that can represent it. The prototypical, or central,

substantive lexeme that verbalizes this concept is, in our opinion, the lexeme *power*. This lexeme is the most frequent among other representatives, it is also stylistically neutral.

The study of the authoritative lexicographic sources of the English language (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, Cambridge Dictionary, Macmillan Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online, Merriam-Webster Dictionary) has revealed 85 substantive lexemes capable of verbalizing the concept of “Power”. They include 22 lexemes revealed by us in 16 speeches of the American President Trump: *advantage, assumption, authority, clout, command, control, direction, dominance, domination, dominion, edge, enforcement, force, grasp, greatness, law, leadership, might, pressure, reach, standing, and strength*. Here is the analysis of the definitions of the prototype lexeme *power*:

- the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events; political or social authority or control, especially that exercised by a government; authority that is given or delegated to a person or body;
- ability to control people and events; the amount of political control a person or group has in a country;
- political control of a country or government; official or legal authority to do something;
- the ability or right to control people or events; the ability to influence people or give them strong feelings; the right or authority to do something;
- legal or official authority, capacity, or right; possession of control, authority, or influence over others.

The above definitions demonstrate that in all lexicographic sources the *power* lexeme is interpreted through several *lexemes* – *control, authority, influence*. Together with *power*, we refer these lexemes to the nuclear representatives of the concept of “Power”.

One should note that the lexeme *power* itself appears as the most semantically capacious and comprehensive compared with the rest lexemes, such as *control, influence, and authority*. They seem to reflect conceptual features that emphasize the components of power and its attributes.

Further identification of conceptual characteristics is possible with the analysis of the compatibility of nuclear lexemes and their functioning within the framework of sentences-statements.

Power is a multidimensional phenomenon, which gives rise to the diversity of its types (*executive, expressive, judicial, legal, legislative, military, political power*). No wonder that the speeches of the American president contain numerous references to military power and American power:

“Another fundamental pillar of our new strategy is the integration of all instruments of American power – diplomatic, economic, and military – toward a successful outcome”.

The frequency of references to the greatness of US power as an exceptional nation is also quite remarkable (*absolute, awesome, great, immense, mighty, sheer, supreme power*):

“We recognize that weakness is the surest path to conflict, and unrivaled power is the most certain means of defense”.

“They are doomed not only because our alliance is strong, our countries are resilient, and our power is unmatched”.

“Under the Trump Administration, America is gaining wealth, leading to enhanced power – faster than anyone thought – with \$6 trillion more in the stock market alone since the election – \$6 trillion”.

Collocation with verbal lexemes and prepositions is more diverse and reflects the entire system of the functioning of power. In the collective consciousness, power is an object of alienable identity, therefore it can be possessed and used (*have, hold, possess power, in /within one’s power, abuse, exercise, exert, harness, use, wield power*):

“We have it in our power, should we so choose, to lift millions from poverty, to help our citizens realize their dreams”.

Power can be passed to someone (*confer, give, grant, hand power*):

“Today’s ceremony, however, has very special meaning because today we are not merely transferring power from one Administration to another ...”.

Power can be gained, given and shared (*acquire, gain, get, seize, take, usurp power*):

“I was elected not to take power, but to give power to the American people, where it belongs”.

Power can also be strengthened (*centralize, consolidate, increase, leverage power*), lose (*lack, lose power*), share (*cede, decentralize, delegate, devolve*), reduce (*curb, reduce power*).

We did not come across any examples of loss, separation or reduction of power in the speeches of Trump, which is explained by the US political position in the world, ideas about its exceptional dominant role, which they do not intend to concede.

4. Conclusion

Thus, the conducted cognitive analysis of the concept of “Power” emphasizes its universality, great importance and frequency of functioning in political discourse. The obtained idea of how knowledge of power is structured in human consciousness is an important result of the study.

The results obtained in the course of the study show a successful solution of the set tasks, but in the course of the work a number of issues emerged that went beyond the scope of the present study, but presented a prospect for further research. For instance, it will be interesting to study the metaphoric nature of this concept on the example of the conceptual metaphor “*Having control or force is up; being subject to control is down*”.

A comparative research will also be important, as it will reveal the national specificity of the perception of such a complex phenomenon. The study of the representation of the concept of “Power” in phraseological units within the framework of cognitive phraseology – a direction gaining popularity – is also promising.

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