

Restricted Collocations: Cultural Boundness

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the idea of language and culture as one symbolic domain within which language units enter into a relationship with cultural categories. This idea was proposed by Telia et al (1994) as the fundamental concept of the linguocultural approach. This paper suggests new criteria of collocation restriction in terms of the “cultural boundness” of a set word combination. These criteria might be applied in lexicographic presentation of restricted collocations.

1. Introduction

Similarity between language and culture has been established by semiotics. Greimas (1987) wrote about interconnection between language and myth and suggested the possibility of a metalanguage for the study of both. Jacobson pointed out analogies between language and folklore resulting from common mechanisms of collective text generation (Ivanov & Toporov 1977). A structural analogy between language and culture was discovered by Levi-Strauss (1958).

In recent linguistic research, much attention has been given to methods of linguistic interpretation of cultural meaning. Cultural meaning can be defined as the result of constitution of culture-specific configurations of elementary language meanings which provide clues to culture specific ways of thinking (Wierzbicka 1992:21). As was shown by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1987), values which are deeply rooted in culture correspond to the metaphorical system of language.

In this paper, emphasis is put on the type of relations that language and culture maintain with each other and that represent themselves in phraseology. Therefore, phraseology would be the field of research best suited for the testing of our initial hypothesis. The interrelationship between language and culture can be followed more closely in idioms; set phrases (or restricted collocations, according to Cowie (1981)) have more complicated behavior. Nevertheless, it is the purpose of this paper to outline possible ways of cultural interpretation of meaning in restricted collocations.

Besides purely linguistic interest, this problem is also important for lexicography, since there exists growing interest among dictionary

makers towards the elaboration of adequate methods of representing cultural knowledge. One of such attempts has been made by a group of authors (V. Telija, N. Bragina, E. Oparina, I. Sandomirskaja) who suggested a zone of cultural commentary to be included in the body of a dictionary entry.

2. Materials

Restricted collocation is a term that describes non-uniform linguistic phenomena. At the present stage of research I would like to exclude word combinations like Russ. *prichinjat' vred komu* (lit. 'to cause sb harm') or *prinimat' vannu* ('to take a bath'), as their relation to cultural categories is questionable.

Also excluded will be word combinations that describe cultural objects, cultural rites and informal rituals, e.g. *narjazhat' jelku* (lit. 'to dress up a Christmas tree'). Such word combinations describe acts that are part of cultural rites. They have purely descriptive relation towards other cultural symbols. Such word combinations are successfully dealt with by *linguostranovedenie*.

In this paper, however, I would like to focus on such restricted collocations that have referential meaning (a description of a mental state, an intellectual process, a psychological feature etc.), but can also be interpreted in terms of cultural categories such as mythologemes, ideologemes, sociologemes, etc., without losing, by the same token, their initial connection with original discourse types.

It is not by chance that combinations with abstract nouns denoting anthropological concepts (feelings, thoughts, situations of interpersonal communication, etc.) would make interesting material for cultural interpretation of linguistic meaning. This is only understandable, since the human being stands in the center of the domain of Culture. Such collocations serve to construct the world rather than describe it. In other words, restricted collocations shape human modes of perception.

Restricted collocations in question, in general, subsume under two types. One type is collocations with an abstract noun base and a collocate used in a figurative meaning, e.g. *umirat' ot ljubvi* (lit. 'to die from love'), *nesokrushhi-maja vera* (lit. 'undestructible faith'). The other type of culture-specific collocations does not include any figurative meanings, e.g. *materinskaja zabota* (lit. 'motherly care'), *bratskije chuvstva* (lit. 'brotherly feelings').

3. Cultural Boundness of Restricted Collocations

Thus, it can be assumed that cultural categories are involved in linguistic mechanisms. It should be noted, however, that the term cultural specificity is not used here as a synonym of national or ethnic specificity. It is assumed that different cultures can coincide in some elements, which fact results in coincident cultural connotations in restricted collocations generated by different languages.

Our hypothesis is that cultural knowledge is the factor that motivates stability and recurrence in restricted collocations. Therefore, one can speak about culturally bounded meanings. The culture factor sometimes acts as a sole factor maintaining stability within a phrase, or it can cooperate with other factors, such as semantic boundness. For instance, the culture factor produces stability in combinations with a collocate used in non-figurative meaning, while combinations with collocates used in figurative meanings employ both the semantic and the cultural mechanisms of collocation restriction. Consider some examples.

Combinations like *materinskaja zabota* (lit. 'motherly care'), *bratskie chuvstva* (lit. 'brotherly feelings') do not have the same stability behavior as phrases like *otcovskaja zabota* (lit. 'fatherly care') and *sestrinskije chuvstva* (lit. 'sisterly feelings'). The former two can be described as restricted collocations while the latter two would be most probably classified as free word combinations. Thus, combination like *ne znat' materinskoj zaboty* (lit. 'to know not motherly care') is usual in Russian, while similar phrase *ne znat' otcovskoj zaboty* (lit. 'to know not fatherly care') is, obviously, an occasional free combination. However, in both cases, there is no evidence of either semantic or syntactic boundness. *Materinskaja zabota* implies Mother as an archetypal symbol of kindness and care towards a child. This archetype is regularly reproduced in folk poetry, while the role of the father is not that evident. The fact that the Mother concept is more thoroughly developed in poetic folk discourse than that of the Father, is also testified to by the stable opposition of Mother vs Stepmother = Good vs Evil in folk tales, proverbs and sayings, while there can be found no similar Good vs Evil opposition in the Father vs Stepfather counterparts. As noted by Cherdantseva (1996), in Italian idioms Father is the strong position, while Mother is the weak counterpart, and Russ. *mamen'kin synok* (lit. 'mamma's little son') can be adequately translated by It. *figlio di papa* (lit. 'daddy's son').

Bratskie chuvstva ('brotherly feelings') contain an allusion to the Bible (cf. *bratija vo Xriste*, 'Brothers in Christ'). It is not by chance that, as noted in Biblical Encyclopaedia, in the Old Testament the word *brother* is mostly used as a name of a blood relative, while in the New

Testament it more often refers to close spiritual association shared by Christ and the Apostles. (Incidentally, the usage of *brother* as in the New Testament is the result of semantic transposition, therefore respective collocations cannot be considered as semantically non-transposed per se). Allusions to Christian meanings can be also found in the slogan of the French Revolution (*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*), which was later on translated into Russian and used as a political slogan of the Russian revolution (*Svoboda, Ravenstvo, Bratsvo*); in the stereotypic statement *Vse ljudi bratia* (lit. 'All people are brothers'). Similar allusions also occur in set phrases that are typical for Russian totalitarian discourse: *bratskie narody* (lit. 'brotherly peoples'), *bratstvo narodov* (lit. 'the brotherhood of peoples'); *bratskie strany* (lit. 'brotherly countries'), *starshij brat* (lit. 'the eldest brother'), compare, however, Orwell's *Big Brother*. It is evident that the noun *sister* which had no such history of development, would not have respective political connotations and word combinations with Russ. *sestra* ('sister') would tend to free (unrestricted) usage like *sestrinskoe chuvstvo* (lit. 'a sisterly feeling') or impossible like **sestrinskie narody* (lit. 'sisterly peoples') or **sestrinskie strany* (lit. 'sisterly countries').

Collocations like those analyzed above can be defined as culturally bound, and this type of boundness is certainly motivated by their connection with the discourse of folk poetics (as in the first case) and with the discourse of religion (as in the second case). A collocation can be characterized as culturally-bound if it contains culturally-relevant information which actualizes a stereotype. By stereotype, we understand a cultural category that can be described as (a) collective, since it is shared by the whole of the community and ensures mutual understanding between its members; (b) normative, since community members tend to treat a stereotype as a normalizing factor; (c) reproducible, since it regularly occurs in unmodified form in different types of discourse. Cultural stereotypes are formed by the influence of philosophy, fiction, politics, religion, mythology.

3.1 Restricted Collocations in their Relations with Religious Discourse

1. Citation. Such collocations can be: (a) literal, word-by-word extractions from religious texts, as for instance: *gnev Bozhij* ('Lord's anger') – Isaiah, (b) syntactic transformations of text fragments like *I najdite pokoj dusham vashim* – Matt. (lit. 'and you will find rest for your souls') into *dushevnyj pokoj* (lit. 'rest of soul'); (c) generalizations of utterances like

Ibo [...] gordost' zHITEjskaja, ne jest' ot Ottsa – John ('[...] everything in this world that people are so proud none of this comes from the Father') into the restricted collocation *greshnaja gordost'* (lit. 'sinful pride').

2. Transposition. Collocation semantics is the result of secondary nomination. Cf. the biblical parable about a buried treasure (Parable of the Three Servants – Matt) and the restricted collocation *zaryvat' talant v zemlju* (lit. 'to bury a talent in the ground') which acquired figurative meaning 'to prevent natural abilities from further development'.

3. Interpretation. Collocations in their semantic and/or connotative aspect are motivated by textual implications. For instance, invariably positive connotations are formed by collocations with the modifier *svetlyj* ('light, luminous'): *svetlaja lichnost'* (lit. 'a luminous personality'), *svetloe budushee* (lit. 'luminous future'), etc. Similarly, collocations with *temnyj* ('dark') have negative collocations *temnaja lichnost'*, (lit. 'a dark personality') 'a crook or a suspicious person', *temnye sily* (lit. 'the dark forces'), etc. Such collocations are motivated by the interpretation of light as the emanation of Divinity and darkness as the emanation of devil.

4. Re-interpretation. Collocations that in their semantic and/or connotative aspect relate to a specific type of discourse are motivated by textual implications which belong to some other type of discourse. Thus, *otec narodov* (lit. 'the father of peoples') – one of Stalin's semi-official names – can be traced down to religious texts and correlates with the collocation *Otec nebesnyj* ('Our Father in heaven'). This case can be viewed as the result of re-interpretation. Thus, deification of political power finds its own development in language.

To sum up, restricted collocations can be classified as direct citations, syntactically modified phrases, and/or semantically modified citations, as well as combinations which bear allusions to cultural (biblical, in our examples) texts. In other words, culturally marked restricted collocations are more or less linked to texts, and this linkage can be considered as a differentiating (fundamental or optional) feature that accounts for the stability of the phrase.

3.2 Collocations with Figurative Meanings and Mythological Discourse

One example of how restricted collocability can originate from a combination of semantic and culture factors are restricted collocations with figurative meanings. The semantic factor shows in the semantic transposition of the collocate, while the factor of culture shows in the presence of a motive for semantic transposition. Cultural categories perform as a motivating basis of a figurative image that can be read in a collocation.

The method of processing the image contained in a metaphoric phrase was largely developed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980). For our purposes, special attention should be given to the fact that image processing also involves culture-specific data, i.e., interpretation in terms of culturally relevant texts. In this connection, two things should be made note of.

The synchrony/diachrony dichotomy would seem somewhat superficial, from the perspective of the present research. It would be useful to treat cultural boundness in restricted collocations in the pan-chronic aspect (Telia 1995) or in a dynamic aspect (Ivanov 1987). Therefore, while interpreting language metaphors, it would be worthwhile to neglect the difference between so called "dead" and "living" metaphors. This is what makes our research different from those studies that investigate the image component of restricted collocations in synchronic aspect (Apresjan 1995). Consider the following analysis of restricted collocations formed by names of emotions.

The root metaphor of emotion as an alien, dangerous being that is clearly manifested in language metaphors and has been investigated by scholars (Apresjan 1995) seems to have most intimate relations with the myth. Alien beings act as strange gods, demons of the Chaos, carriers of destruction, for the human being. The human heart and soul can be visualized as the arena of the fight. The process of struggle develops stage-wise: emotions (primarily negative ones) attack a human: *grust' napadaet, oxvatyvaet*; the human being fights back: *borot'sja so skukoj* (lit. 'to struggle against boredom'), *prevozmogat' skuku* (lit. 'to overcome boredom'), the human wins a victory over feelings: *peresilit' tosku* (lit. 'to overpower grief'), *razognat' pechal'* (lit. 'to disperse sorrow') or is defeated in the fight: *skuka odolela* (lit. 'boredom overcame smb'), *pechal' izvela* (lit. 'boredom exterminated smb'). The image of mythical fight is equally contributed to both by "living" *napadaet* ('attacks'), *dushit* ('suffocates'), *davit* ('presses') and dead metaphors *ovladevaet* ('takes possession of'); *oxvatyvaet* ('embraces'), etc. As an aggregate, the corpus of restricted collocations formed by names of negative

feelings shows a striking analogy with the myth about the opposition between humans and demons. This can be deduced from the “choice” of specific predicates with the meaning of aggression and attack: *toska dushit, davit, soset* etc. (lit. ‘anguish suffocates, presses, sucks smb’). Respective “methods” of aggression can be found in Slavic mythologies. Besides, the struggle is waged for the possession of human heart and soul, which also coincide with the traditional mythological concept: *grust’ zakralas’v serdce, poselilas’ v serdce* (lit. ‘sadness crept into smb’s heart’, ‘sadness made its home in smb’s heart’). Besides, just like mythical demons, negative feelings are harmful for the human being, with the following consequences: (a) physiological symptoms *pobelet’, potemnet’, zadyxat’sja, trjastis’ ot jarosti* (lit. ‘to go white’, ‘to go dark’, ‘to suffocate’, ‘to shake with rage’); (b) psychological and behavioral symptoms *obezumet’, vpast’ v melanxoliju ot gorja / s gorja* (lit. ‘to go mad’, ‘to fall into melancholy with grief’). Similar situations are experienced by mythical heroes when exposed to dark forces. Another point of similarity is that the domain beyond the human world where emotions abide is not strictly delineated. Alien gods’ habitat lies beyond the borders of Culture (Lotman 1992).

Philosophically, the connection between myth and metaphor was established by Cassirer (1925), Greimas (1987). The analysis presented here is but a new confirmation of the idea. However, the important thing is that mythological discourse seems to be connected with language, which connection is effected through restricted collocations with figurative meaning that are closely linked to the discourse of myth.

4. Conclusion

The analysis given above shows that stability can function as one of the ways by which language expresses cultural knowledge. Information about possible modes of interaction between restricted collocations and discourse of different types must be included in a phraseological dictionary, possibly, in the form of a cultural commentary. A cultural commentary is expected to actualize the knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation in the form of collective memory. The collective memory tends to be unconsciously reproduced in speech.

There are at least two reasons why cultural information should be included in lexicographic description. The first reason is that the description of cultural data in a dictionary provides an adequate motivational base for restricted collocations that helps to overcome the popular notion that restricted collocations are something essentially

arbitrary and inexplicable, something that just has to be learnt by heart (see also Swanepoel 1990). The problem of elaboration of motivation in a dictionary was specially stressed by Fillmore (1994).

The second reason is as follows. It should be remembered that the interest in other peoples' cultures motivates a person to learn a foreign language. Therefore, if the wish to acquire cultural knowledge is a stimulus to the acquisition of a foreign language, how, then, is the factor reflected in learners' dictionaries and other pedagogical sources? In spite of well-advanced research in linguostranovedenie, in spite of the considerable amount of text readers that have been published, the problem of reflecting ethno- and sociocultural worldviews has not been solved. A cultural commentary in a dictionary is not the only solution, either, but is hoped to be a considerable step forward in this direction.

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