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VOCABULARY AS A SYMBOLIC INDEX OF SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ETHNOPSYCHOLOGICAL PECULIARITIES (On the material of English and Georgian languages)

Summary

The paper represents a comparative linguocultural research which aims to reveal the role of vocabulary in the expression of socio-cultural and ethnopsychological peculiarities in the English and the Georgian languages. The paper demonstrates how cultural analysis can gain important new insights from linguistics and that the semantic perspective on culture is something that cultural analysis can ill afford to ignore. We rely on Edward Sapir's theses, which prove the huge significance of language in cultural analysis: 1) "language is a symbolic guide to culture" (Sapir 1949: 162); 2) "vocabulary is a very sensitive index of the culture of a people" (p. 27); and 3) "linguistics is of strategic importance for the methodology of social science" (p. 166).

We have linked vocabulary and culture by the principles, suggested by Anna Wierzbicka: the principle of "cultural elaboration" and the principle of "key words". "Key words" can be studied as focal points around which entire cultural domains are organized. By exploring these focal points we have been able to show the general organizing principles which lend structure and coherence to a cultural domain as a whole, and which often have an explanatory power extending across a number of domains.

The paper focuses on the lexical entities expressing kinship and friendship relationships, both in English and Georgian languages, since the concepts of "kinship" and "friendship" play crucial role in social and cultural lives of the people who speak these languages. Our research has shown that each of these strata of vocabulary represents a system built by the principle of hierarchy, which implies hyper-hyponymic relations among words, based on a generic-aspectual relations. We studied the meanings of the lexical units with the help of componential analysis of their dictionary definitions, i.e. dictionary entries, as well as in different word-combinations that enabled us to reveal their socio-cultural and ethno-psychological peculiarities in both languages. Besides, we analysed the evolution of both concepts which showed the modifications, they had experienced through years.

Our research has proved that kinship relations through marriage are equally important and significant for Georgians as kinship by blood, and this is manifested in the vocabulary, as each type of kinship is identified separately, respectively the number of kinship words amounts to 43. However, the study of English vocabulary showed that in English culture nowadays only the family ties are of significant importance, the English don't differentiate between relatives, from whose-ever side they might be. Respectively, the number of kinship words is considerably less in the English language. As for the lexical entities, denoting "friendship relations", in Georgian they tend to be based on interpersonal close and mutual relations, while in English they tend to be impersonal and socialized rather, than personal. The comparative study of the lexical units describing the "kinship" and "friendship" relations has revealed the clues giving away the peculiar features of the cultures in question and emphasized the importance of our research itself.