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Lyalya G. Yusupova
Ural State Mining University
Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation
lyalyax@bk.ru

Image as the most important cognitive component in the functioning of figurative meanings

Abstract

This article attempts to consider the mechanisms of metaphoric conceptualization of the anthropomorphic space of human life activity through identification, systematization, and description of the semantic structure and functional properties of metaphoric units. The current stage in the study of the functional development of figurative meanings finds its utmost relevance when linguistic phenomena are analyzed on the basis of the anthropocentric approach with an emphasis on a human as the object of conceptual awareness. It can be said that the very nature of polysemy is anthropomorphic since it is initially inherent in the human consciousness to handle the experience gained in the processes of conceptualization and categorization of the surrounding world. Yet, the images resulting from the interaction of a person as a subject of language with the real objects surrounding him / her emerge as the brain constructions rather than mirror reflections of the surrounding reality. The system of images is included in both collective and individual view of the world as mentality that reflects the ideas about the world around us, about a person's place in it and the subsequent verbalization of this experience. The practical part of this study considers imagery as a holistic model of the semantic structure exemplified by the word *suit* with 10 definitions and 15 functioning patterns. The paper argues that the image has an undifferentiated nature, like gestalt. It is syncretic in the way that it combines different sensually perceived mental aspects and objects into a single whole.

Keywords: anthropomorphic space, mechanism of conceptualization and categorization, polysemantic word, cognitive image, semantic structure of a word, semantic component

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Юсупова Ляля Гайнулловна
Уральский государственный горный университет
г. Екатеринбург, Российская Федерация
lyalyax@bk.ru

Образ как важнейшая когнитивная составляющая функционирования переносных значений

Аннотация

Данная работа представляет собой попытку исследования механизмов концептуализации метафорическими единицами антропоморфного пространства жизнедеятельности человека путём выявления, систематизации и описания их семантической структуры, функциональных свойств. Современный этап изучения развития функционирования переносных значений наиболее актуален при антропоцентрическом подходе к анализу языковых явлений с акцентом на человека как субъекта понятийного осмысления. Можно сказать, что сама природа полисемии антропоморфична, поскольку изначально присуща человеческому сознанию, обрабатываемому получаемый опыт в процессах концептуализации и категоризации окружающего мира. При этом образы – это результат взаимодействия человека как субъекта языка и объ-

ектов окружающей его действительности; возникающие образы являются конструкциями мозга, а не зеркальными отображениями окружающей действительности. Система образов входит в коллективную и индивидуальную картину мира как ментальность, отражающая представления об окружающем мире, о месте в нём и последующей вербализации этого опыта. В практической части исследования образность рассмотрена как модель семантической структуры слова, взятая в целостности, и проиллюстрирована на примере слова *suit* с 10 определениями и 15 случаями функционирования. Выявлено, что образ имеет нерасчлененный характер, как гештальт, и является синкретичным в том смысле, что он объединяет разные чувственно воспринимаемые ментальные аспекты и объекты в целостный облик.

Ключевые слова: антропоморфное пространство, механизм концептуализации и категоризации, многозначное слово, когнитивный образ, семантическая структура слова, семантический компонент

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1. Introduction

Imagery is known to be an important component of cognitive understanding of the mechanisms ensuring the formation and functioning of phraseological units and metaphors. The content of these units is based on the set of images that emerge in perceiving the fragments of reality in the human psyche which is necessary for a human to function in society. The perception itself considerably depends on the structural features of the human body and sociocultural traditions that contribute to the formation of human consciousness. Studying figurativeness, we share the opinion that the expressions such as *falling or rising prices, in the atmosphere of full democracy, in a row of other military men*, etc., are figurative. “Never for a moment do we imagine literally *falling* and *rising prices*, the literal *atmosphere* of literally *full* democracy, or a literal *row* of other military men” [Gorelov, 1997, p. 40]. I. N. Gorelov shares W. Chafe’s view about the interpretation of the idiom *red herring* (false trail) when consciousness is not free from the ideas about the fish of red colour. The experiment conducted by I. N. Gorelov confirms that W. Chafe’s theory [Chafe, 1975] is valid only for children’s perception of speech.

Meanwhile, S. A. Pesina is confident that the expression like *red herring* has a better chance of getting a figurative response than the other expressions presented by I. N. Gorelov. The more specific and referential the meaning of a metaphor is, the more visual and vivid is the image the word conveys. On the contrary, the more abstract the expression is, the more fleeting and schematic is the image behind it. An image largely seems to be a subjective phenomenon. S. Bally notes, “If a native speaker sees an image, the expression should really be considered as figurative” [Bally, 1961, p. 224].

The formation of emotional responses in the neurobiological sense is closely connected with the organization of neural patterns providing the basis for the emergence of images which are not a passive reflection of the brain work. Observing different objects, people form comparable images. However, it does not mean that a person perceives a visible image as a picture of an object. Within the framework of the theory of corporeality, “a certain ensemble of sensor detectors distributed throughout our body helps to construct neural patterns that map significant interactions of the body with an object according to various parameters” [Damasio, 1999, p. 325]. The image is formed under the influence of changes in the human body as the physical structure of a particular object interacts with the consciousness.

The activity of the subject in the process of image construction and the secondary nature of the image in relation to the objective reality act as the fundamental factors. In terms of biolinguistics, the images that arise in the human brain are the brain constructs “prompted” by

the objects rather than their mirror reflections. Imagery functions as a link between the reality and its idea of linguistic awareness, with the image being an indirect, detached reflection of reality.

While representing objects and phenomena of the surrounding reality, imagery aims at concretization and integrity. For example, a dog mentioned in the process of communication is not understood as a combination of features attributed to it: a domestic animal, covered with fur, likes to gnaw bones, guards the house, etc. The human consciousness forms the image of a dog through the conceptual idea of an animal which is given figuratively. Images can become overgrown with details and specifications including those resulting from the speculation if a communicative situation requires it. Distinguishing images from ideas, A. A. Potebnya notes that ideas as an instinctive beginning of self-consciousness are fleeting and demand the language help [Potebnya, 1989, p.152]. But when the conditions of communication call for an immediate response, an individual can instantly “cover” a surprisingly large amount of information enhancing this ability linguistically. At the same time, the anthropomorphism of figurative perception lies in the fact that abstract non-objective concepts are comprehended through the image of the objective world.

2. Material and methods

The lexeme *suit* from the lexical thematic group “Clothing” was chosen as the research object. Cognitive approach was used to study figurative meanings on the basis of the cognitive images underlying them with reference to nominative non-derivative meanings, speech and linguistic contexts. 10 definitions and 15 functioning patterns were analyzed.

3. Results and discussion

The primary meaning of the polysemantic word *suit* (1) is singled out on the basis of the semantic components of the definitions from various dictionaries. The most frequent semantic components of the nominative-non-derivative (NN) meaning are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequent semantic components of the NN meaning of the polysemant *suit*

Semantic component	Number of repetitions
<i>a set of clothes</i>	7
<i>a set of garments</i>	2
<i>consisting of skirt</i>	9
<i>consisting of a jacket</i>	7
<i>consisting of trousers</i>	7
<i>made from the same material</i>	4
<i>Outer</i>	3
<i>made of the same fabric</i>	2
<i>designed to be worn together</i>	2

3.1. *Suit* as a set of clothes or a clothing item

A set of clothes to be worn on a particular occasion or for a particular activity [ODEL]; a set of clothes made from the same cloth, usually a jacket with pants or a skirt [Quick def]; a set of garments (usually including a jacket and trousers or skirt) for outerwear all of the same fabric and color (“*They buried him in his best suit*”) [Wordnet]; *a man's suit consists of a jacket, trousers, and sometimes a waistcoat, all made from the same fabric* [COBUILDICic];

a jacket and trousers or a jacket and skirt that are made from the same material: *All the businessmen were wearing pinstripe suits* [CIDENn]; a set of clothes made from the same cloth, usually a jacket with pants or a skirt [MackM]; a set of clothing, armor, or the like, intended for wear together [Infoplease].

Thus, the generalized NN meaning of the noun suit can be represented as *a set of clothes consisting of a jacket and a skirt or trousers that are made out of the same material*. It should be noted that ALLWORDS dictionary has moved the meaning “a set of clothes” to the fourth position while the first is the lexical-semantic variant (LSV) “an attempt to end something by legal means; a legal action to recover the right or claim in court; a lawsuit”. Meanwhile, DICT.COM and Online plain dictionaries put first the meaning “a set of clothes” together with the meaning “a full set of ammunition” or “in general a complete set of something similar”: a set of clothing, armor, or the like, intended for wear together.

Then, the NN meaning is narrowed down to the meaning associated with the limitation of the functional use of this clothing attribute: *suit (2) – a set of clothes to be worn on a particular occasion or for a particular activity (Being cold is no fun, so pack the right diving suit and be damned, but remember that your head is the area of greatest heat loss)* [OXFORD]. This LSV is also used in some synonyms such as *dress, outfit, set of cloths, costume, ensemble*. The rest of the analysis (3–10) is presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Metonymic and metaphorical meanings of the substantive *suit* and their basic semantic components

Metonymic and metaphorical interpretations and their speech implementations	Basis for the meaning transfer	Basic semantic components underlying the substantive <i>suit</i>
<i>suit (3) – someone who works in an office and wears a suit</i> [Macmillan] (metonymy) (<i>The issue wouldn't have entered the public domain were it not for the suits within these organizations discussing these proposals over a coffee when on SPL business</i>) [OXFORD]	transfer based on two mechanisms: 1) adjacency: “clothes worn by a human – a human”; 2) synecdoche, since it refers to those who wear a uniform on service/at work and who are only interested in the financial side of the matter, i.e.; it marks a disdainful attitude towards a person who is able to think only about business and numbers; mostly used in relation to middle and senior management with a negative connotation)	based on the primary meaning: <i>suit (1) – a set of clothes consisting of a jacket and a skirt or trousers that are made out of the same material</i>
<i>bag suit (4)</i> [OXFORD] (<i>If you, like Colthirst, find yourself donning a suit of armor at work, then your workplace has become a battlefield</i>)	similarity of a human suit to battle armor: a suit is a complete set of clothing that covers and, therefore, protects a human body. To the same extent, armor or armored clothing covers a warrior protecting him from wounds	<i>a set of pieces of armor, complete, worn by soldiers/warriors, covering the whole body, to protect the body in battle</i>
<i>suit (5)</i> [OXFORD] (metaphor) (<i>A new vessel would always be provided with at least two suits of sails from the sail-making firm engaged by the owner</i>) [OXFORD]	similarity of a suit as a clothing set consisting of a jacket and trousers or a jacket and a skirt i.e. quite a complete set of clothes to a complete set of sails or masts necessary for sailing (similar to the function “to supply”)	<i>set of sails/masts, complete, required for a ship</i>
<i>suit (6)</i> [OXFORD] (metaphor) (<i>The other players must all play spades if they can, but players 2 and 3 have no spades and so are allowed to play other suits</i>) [OXFORD]	the concept of a complete set of cards of the same rank and all four suits; based on the image associated with such a complete clothing set as a suit. Five cards of the same suit in poker or bridge are called "Flush".	<i>one of four sets of playing cards, distinguished by their pictorial symbols, into which a deck of playing cards is divided</i>
<i>suit (7)</i> [AHDEnL] (metaphor)	an umbrella LSV for the previous two meanings based on the similarity of a suit as a set of clothes to a complete set of any things or objects (rooms, buildings, compositions, tools, etc.) considered as a single whole, having similar functions and viewed as a collection	<i>a group of things/objects, similar, related, used together, considering as a whole</i>

Continuation of Table 2

Metonymic and metaphorical interpretations and their speech implementations	Basis for the meaning transfer	Basic semantic components underlying the substantive suit
<i>suit</i> (8) [Online plain] (metaphor)	similarity of a suit as a clothing set, including at least two components, to a situation where these objects are in motion, following one another in a certain order	<i>a group of things/objects, similar, related, used together, considering as a whole, that follow one another in order</i>
<i>suit</i> (9) [Online plain] (metaphor)	the same as the previous LSV referring to the objects following one another in order but, in this case, attempting to get a result: to reach the end of a process or to obtain something for use	<i>a group of things/objects, similar, related, that follow one another in order; an attempt to get a result, gain an end/an object</i>
<i>suit</i> (10) [Online plain] (metaphor)	conceptual metaphor: it refers to the very process of following in order rather than to the objects or people; being an abstract concept, it is associated with the closest and most understandable artifact for a person which is a suit, namely, a suit (7) which is a group of things used together ; a set or collection; a group of similar or related objects or items considered as a whole	<i>the act/process of following, in order, regular</i>

3.2. *Suit* as a part of legal discourse

Special emphasis should be placed on the meaning *suit* (11) which is not connected with cloths whatsoever but is found in legal discourse. It is the short for *l a w s u i t* – a petition or entreaty made to a person in authority: *Nothing can be expected from her avarice, unless it be wrested from her by a lawsuit* («Arthur Mervyn» by Charles Brockden Brown); *It is a matter of great moment to end lawsuits between men of such eminence in the State as these* («The Letters of Cassiodorus» by Cassiodorus); *He could even go so far as to bring Brennan to lawsuit to have Brennan stopped from his interference* («The Fourth R» by George Oliver Smith); (synonyms: *legal action, suit at law, case, court case, action, cause, legal proceeding, legal process, proceedings, judicial proceedings, litigation, trial, legal contest, legal dispute, bringing to book, bringing of charges, indictment, prosecution*).

The emergence of the term *lawsuit* (petition or entreaty) in the legal discourse of Great Britain dates back to 1615–1625. Originally, *lawsuit* was used as two words – *law suit*. In the XVIII–XIX centuries, lawyers distinguished between the expressions *to bring an action at law* (i. e. ‘to sue in accordance with the law’) and *suit in equity* (i. e. ‘a claim based on the rules of justice’). Such a distinction was exemplified in the text “Civil Rights Act” of 1871. The merger of the common law and the equity law in England reflected in the legal acts of 1873 and 1875 led to the loss of semantic differences between the two lexical units. It became possible to use *lawsuit* as one word meaning ‘legal process’. This meaning is presumably based on *suit* (7) which is a group of similar or related objects or items considered as a whole, that is, some generalized meaning. This LSV includes such components as *a proceeding, in a court of law, following in order, concerns a disagreement between two people / organizations, other than a criminal legal proceeding against someone*.

Suit (12) – short for *l a w s u i t*: The process of trying to win a woman's affection, typically with a view to marriage [OXFORD]. The act of wooing in love; the solicitation of a woman in marriage; courtship [Online plain]. (*He could not compete with John's charms in Marian's eyes and his suit came to nothing; He took the rejection of his suit to the princess hard, and has plotted revenge against those caused the rejection of his suit. The knight undertakes a love suit to the daughter of Selestinus, a wise emperor in Rome, and certain*

strange terms are agreed upon between them as the condition of her favor) [OXFORD] a man's courtship of a woman. (*She showed no interest in marriage, and eventually he gave up his **suit***) [wordsmyth] (synonyms: *courtship, wooing*). This metaphor conveys the concept of the process of courting a desired woman with the intent to win her heart and the view of further marriage. This LSV relates to the previous one and suggests the presence of certain obligations according to the “norms of justice” which were previously called *suit* in equity or The meaning is based on such semantic components as *the process of seeking the love of a woman, with the intent to marry*.

3.3. *Suit* in phraseological units

The word *suit* appears in some phraseological units (PU). Two of them are considered below.

Suit (13) – t o f o l l o w s u i t: to play a card of the same suit as the card played immediately before it; to act in the same way as someone else [Collins] (*The day the United States declare war on Nazi Germany, the Central and South American republics will **follow suit***. (P. Fitzgerald «Human voices»)); *If the ME's office had seen fit not to give her any information, it seemed wise **to follow suit*** (J. A. Jance «Breach of duty»). This phraseological unit emerged in the middle of the 19th century. It was borrowed from a card game where players were required to use cards of the same deck. Later, due to the LSV abstraction, the PU began to denote a situation when someone acts in the same way as another. The phraseological unit is based on the meaning of *suit (6)*, but, unlike the latter, it means just ‘a deck of cards’ rather than ‘a set of cards of the same rank in all four different suits’ (*any of the sets distinguished by their pictorial symbols into which a deck of playing cards is divided*).

Suit (14) – s t r o n g s u i t: something that one excels in – *I know it's not your **strong suit**, duck, but yon Yankee bloke is busy outside* (Christina Jones «Tickled pink»); *Do you really think a disinterested observer would declare fidelity to be your **strong suit**?* (Howatch, Susan «Absolute truths»); *I settled myself as well as I could into my position beside the pool and prepared to exercise patience – not normally my **strong suit*** (Tapply, William «Follow the sharks»). This phraseological unit is used to mean ‘to be one’s strength’, ‘to succeed in something’. It is also supposedly associated with a card game when a player has strong cards in his/her hands. In accordance with the anthropomorphic principle, a familiar and concrete situation of a card game is used to interpret a more complex and abstract scenario associated with a winning position in any conceivable situation a person can find himself/herself.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the LSV of the noun *suit* shows that the structure of this lexeme is based on both the NN meaning and the identified semantic components. The study enables to draw a number of conclusions. Firstly, it is evident that the phraseological units as part of the polysemant are based not on the NN meaning but rather on one of the figurative meanings. Thus, the metaphor *suit (6)* denoting a deck of cards or, more precisely, a hand of cards.

Secondly, all the metonymic and metaphorical meanings contain the same of comparison ‘as if’ that provides a reason to bring them back to the nominative non-derivative meaning. Table 3 shows the other secondary meanings of the word *suit*.

The analysis has resulted in distinguishing three semantic clusters. The first cluster involves a cognitive image associated with a set or a group of similar objects used as a whole or following one another in a certain order. The second cluster conveys the concept of a legal action over disagreements that are not criminal in nature. The third cluster assumes the scenario of courting a desired woman with the intent to marry her.

Table 3. Metonymic and metaphorical meanings of the polysemant *suit* and their basic

Metonymy	Basic semantic components underlying the word suit
<i>suit</i> (3) – someone who works in an office and wears a suit, especially a senior manager who you dislike because they think only about the financial aspects of a business [Macmillan]	<i>contents associated, in a certain way, when part of the clothing (suit (1) – is issued for the person (synecdoche: part – whole)</i>
Metaphor	Basic semantic components underlying the word suit
<i>suit</i> (4) – a complete set of pieces of armor for covering the whole body [OXFORD]	<i>set of metal coverings, worn by soldiers/warriors, to protect the body in battle</i>
<i>suit</i> (5) – a complete set of sails required for a ship or for a set of spars [OXFORD]	<i>set of sails/masts, complete, required for a ship</i>
<i>suit</i> (6) – any of the sets distinguished by their pictorial symbols into which a deck of playing cards is divided, in conventional decks comprising spades, hearts, diamonds, and clubs [OXFORD]	<i>one of four sets of playing cards, distinguished by their pictorial symbols, into which a deck of playing cards is divided</i>
<i>suit</i> (7) – a group of things used together; a set or collection: a suit of tools [AHDEnL]	<i>a group of things/objects, similar; related, used together, considering as a whole</i>
<i>suit</i> (8) – things that follow in a series or succession [Online plain]	<i>a group of things/objects, similar; related, used together, considering as a whole, that follow one another in order</i>
<i>suit</i> (9) – the act of suing; the process by which one endeavors to gain an end or an object; an attempt to attain a certain result; pursuit; endeavor [Online plain]	<i>a group of things/objects, similar; related, that follow one another in order; an attempt to get a result, gain an end/an object</i>
<i>suit</i> (10) – regular order; succession. [Online plain]	<i>the act/process of following, in order, regular</i>
<i>suit</i> (11) – short for lawsuit (a) – a petition or entreaty made to a person in authority [OXFORD]	<i>a proceeding, in a court of law, following in order, concerns a disagreement between two people/ organizations, other than a criminal legal proceeding against someone</i>
<i>suit</i> (12) – short for lawsuit (b) – the process of trying to win a woman's affection, typically with a view to marriage [OXFORD]	<i>the process of seeking love of a woman, with intent to marry</i>

The obtained results enable to conclude that the image can have an undifferentiated syncretic character, combining different sensual and mental essences and objects into a holistic model. A vivid comparison based on reality can revive a hackneyed image associated with direct nomination and increase its expressiveness. Without being a mirror reflection of the surrounding reality, the system of images behind the structure of a polysemantic word has been particularly shown as having an undifferentiated syncretic character, connecting different sensual and mental essences and objects into a single whole.

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