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The Concept ‘Sadness’ and Its Metaphorical Models in the 21st Century American Fiction

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Abstract: The article identifies metaphorical expressions underlying conceptualization of the negative emotive concept “sadness” in modern American English. The verbal means of metaphoric realization of the concept “sadness” are viewed from the metaphor theory proposed by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, in terms of which thematically related schemes of metaphorical projection form the so-called “metaphor models”. The analysis revealed twelve metaphorical images, which are associated with the concept “sadness” in American prose literature. In this research they are considered as figurative constituents within the structure of the negative emotive concept “sadness” in modern American language.

Keywords: negative basic emotive concept, conceptual metaphor, metaphor model.

Introduction

Emotions express our attitude towards the environment and they are our reactions to different events or situations in the real world. Therefore, negative or positive character of an emotion depends on our capability to meet our demands and reach our goals. For instance, negative emotions (e.g. sadness, anger, fear) give impetus to some action referring to avoid harmful influence; they are associated with frustration of human wants [25, 197; 8, 10].

In contemporary science sadness is usually classified in psychology and linguistics as follows: 1) a basic emotion [18, 146; 10, 105] and a negative emotion [25, 197; 2, 114]; 2) a basic emotive concept [21, 186].

In psychology the phrase “basic characteristics of an emotion” is used to talk about the universal communication signals of a certain emotion (for instance frown, which stands for the emotion of sadness or tremor indicating fear) [2, 103; 19, 77; 1, 26]. While on the subject, sadness has a low level of intensity and is considered to be a long-lasting feeling [2, 84; 9, 507].
Cognitive linguistics points out two fundamental criteria when specifying basic emotive concepts: 1) they are intuitively correlated to the notions of emotions; 2) key verbal representations of the basic emotions are morphologically primitive words [13, 140]. Although mimic and pantomimic signs of all basic emotions are universal, some languages have few words which denote sadness (e.g. the word “song” in the language of Ifalik means “sadness” or “anger” depending on the context of its use) [27, 211]. Moreover, there are languages with no naming unit for “sadness” (specifically, Tahitian language has various types of anger verbalized by 46 words, but there exists no specific word for “sadness” or “anger” in this language) [12, 219].

Basic emotive concepts denote abstract notions and that’s why they are not always easily identified in a language. The conceptual domain “human emotions” involves plenty of concepts from different domains and, thus, draws in lots of conceptual metaphors (and metonymies) in multi languages [7, 94-104]. These metaphors can be considered as guides of outgoing notions, which lead us through the domain of emotive concepts [13, 139-140].

Cognitive linguistics defines metaphor as “the phenomenon where one conceptual domain is systematically structured in terms of another” [3, 38]. Thus, metaphorization is based on the interplay between two cognitive structures – a source domain or “significative descriptor” (more concrete, easily defined knowledge of the world, gained by experience; metaphorical expression is drawn from this concept area) and a target domain or “denotative descriptor” (the concept area with specified abstract notion, to which the metaphor is applied) [23, 9-12; 5, 26]. Thematic fields of significative descriptors form the so-called “metaphor models” [23, 12]. For example, the metaphor model Emotion is a Substance has such lexical realizations in English as: be filled with love/pride/rage, react to things with astonishment/anger/enthusiasm, fall in love [5, 29].

The aim of this research is (1) to define the metaphoric images, which underlie the conceptualization of the negative basic emotive concept “sadness” in the 21st century American prose literature, and, consequently, (2) to figure out the metaphoric models of “sadness” representation in contemporary American discourse.

Means and methods

The data are retrieved from the novels by the New York Times bestselling authors at the beginning of the 21st century (D. Brown, J. Gregory, J. T. Hawks, S. King, J. Patterson).
Methods of investigation are specified by text-centric approach to linguistic analysis of language units and include, in particular, contextual analysis, used (a) to reveal the semantics of emotive lexicon meaning “sadness”, (b) to classify these emotive words and expressions into subgroups according to deferential characteristics, (c) to single out sub-concepts of the macro-concept “sadness”; analysis of lexical co-occurrence, applied to single out metaphoric collocations verbalizing the concept “sadness”; descriptive method implemented to summarize the main points of the thesis. With the help of the field methods the figurative constituent of the concept “sadness” in modern American prose literature was introduced.

The text-centric approach is relevant to linguo-cultural analysis of the emotive concept “sadness” hence it enables the essence specification of a concept reconciling figurative perceptions of a certain phenomenon by fiction writers [15, 32].

The metaphoric approach to emotion description aims at drawing parallel between the emotion and other concepts with similar characteristics. And due to the above mentioned emotions should be described in terms of conceptual metaphors. According to Z. Kövess, Emotion is among the most common target domains [6, 46]. It is considered to be a basic domain [3, 233-234]. The source domains in the process of metaphorization of emotions usually include orientational or spatial concepts, such as: Up/Down and In/Out [5, 31; 23, 35], Container [11, 337; 4, 110], Journey [3, 280; 11, 338], etc.

Results and discussion

In this thesis “sadness” is defined as a negative basic emotive concept (further acronym NBEC) in view of the most common concept definitions in linguistics [20, 76; 26, 50] and emotive concept definitions in emotiology (linguistics of emotions) [17, 14; 21, 49]. Being a culturally induced formation the NBEC “sadness” keeps the record of all individual negative experiences of this emotion (separation from a significant other, blow to hopes, non-fulfillment of expectations) and also universal, socio-cultural perceptions of sadness, which are realized by nominative units of American English. In these terms nominative units (lexical and phraseological) represent notions of the objects relative to their names in a language as the result of verbal and cognitive activity of a human being [22, 7]. Hence, nomination of sadness by the language unit means that there exists a specific verbal naming unit, which is always on your mind and is used cut and dried in the process of language expression.
The classification of the emotive lexicon denoting “sadness”, featured in the thesis, is based on two fundamental principles of linguistics of emotions. First, the means of verbalization of emotive concepts include three major: nomination, description and expression [21, 90; 29, 18]. Second, due to “explicit and implicit characteristics” of a literary text they divide the emotive lexicon into two groups: (a) lexical and phraseological units with direct nomination of emotions, and (b) language units, which just refer to the emotions meant without naming them directly, thus, dealing with interpretation of these emotions in terms of background knowledge of a reader and context of a literary text [29, 6]. So then, we suggest categorizing the emotive lexicon used to realize the NBEC “sadness” in American prose literature into four groups: 1) nominations of the emotional state of sadness; 2) nominations of reasons of sadness; 3) nominations of non-verbal reactions and 4) nominations of verbal reactions in the emotional state of sadness. The last ones fulfill communicative functions in speech and express the emotion of sadness experienced by a character in the moment of speaking. These verbal realizations might include the interjection Oh and other exclamations as: Oh, God! Oh, no! It cannot be! etc. For example: ‘Oh, Scott.’ I shook my head as I slapped the file closed and opened another [36, 129]; ‘Oh, God. His poor mom and sister… they were so close. They’re going to be… I don’t think I could tell them. No, I... Could you?’ [36, 96].

Regarding the structures or scene-frames of semantic knowledge relating to emotive concepts having been introduced so far in emotiology (see [21, 60; 16, 16-17; 14, 343; 13, 142]), we take as a basis the field organization of a concept modeled by Z. Popova and I. A. Sternin [28, 106-115]. Thus, in this research the field-model of the concept “sadness” comprises three constituents: image component (including perceptual and metaphoric images), informative zone (essential features of a notion) and interpretative layer (socio-cultural evaluations). So then, the verbal reactions in the emotional state of sadness form the interpretative conceptual layer within the structure of the NBEC “sadness”. On the one hand, these language units verbalize spontaneous emotional reaction of a human being to some kind of loss (real or unreal, physical or psychological), on the other, they may express condolences for some tragic events.

The nominations of the emotional state of sadness and the nominations of the reasons of sadness are realized by lexical units with explicit expression of this emotion. They assert directly either the relevant feeling of the emotion (the nominations of the emotional state of sadness) or the reasons for its experience (the nominations of the
reasons of sadness). The above-noted groups of units form the informative zone in the structure of the concept of “sadness”. Among the most commonly used nominations of the emotional state of sadness in the 21st century American fiction are: nouns pain (31), grief (16), sadness (10), the adjective sad (30) and its derivative – the adverb sadly (19). For example: I turned away from the pain in Trahan’s bloodshot eyes. He looked as if he’d lost a best friend more than a co-worker [36, 102]; Rabbi Tzvi Goldstein’s widow was a delicate, fawnlike woman who’d collapsed into herself in grief [33, 137]; “What is it? You look sad.” [33, 212]; “I can’t, Maggie. You know that,” he said sadly [37, 199]. The most frequent nominations of the reasons of sadness in prose literature include the adjective painful (26), the verb to hurt (11) and the adjective sad (9). The reasons that cause the feeling of sadness, expressed by the above mentioned words, rely on the context and may vary as follows: (a) the corruption of somebody’s dear creation, e.g. Almost equally painful was that her father’s creation had been corrupted – now a tool of terrorists [36, 278]; (b) separation from a beloved one, e.g. He had told Maggie to use the Molly B as often as she wanted, and she thanked him, but said it would make her sad to be on board without him, which touched him [37, 175]; (c) emotionless voice tone about the death of a closed one, e.g. Your father has been murdered… Kohler’s emotionless tone hurting as much as the news [30, 82], etc. Unlike other nominations, the word sadness was determined as the keyword representing the concept “sadness” in American English according to such characteristics as: dominant frequency use of the direct meaning of the word, minimal dependence on the context, and precise part of speech identification (hence the name of every concept is the noun, expressing general notion [24, 258-259]). For example: Her voice took on a tone of sadness [32, 424]; He felt an inexplicable pain in his soul… an aching sadness he could not explain [31, 568] …Vicki felt a deep sadness… [34, 266].

The process of naming the emotional state of sadness and the reasons of sadness at the lexical level is carried out usually in modern American novels by means of adjectives (43.18% of the total number of lexemes denoting “sadness”), referring to predominance of qualitative characteristics of sadness.

The analysis of the data under investigation showed that the process of metaphoric verbalization of the NBEC “sadness” in modern American fiction is realized by means of twelve metaphor models (further M-models). Each M-model has the following integrated structure “SADNESS IS SMB/SMTH”, where the target concept
area SADNESS comprises interrelated subconcepts GRIEF (including PAIN, HURT, SORROW) and DESPAIR (including DISAPPOINTMENT, APATHY). The basis for the acquisition of the latter ones made relevant criteria in psychology (intensity of feeling, duration of the emotion, causes of its manifestation, and etc.), according to which several gradations or types of the emotion sadness are singled out [12, 397].

In our research metaphorical realizations of the NBEC “sadness” form the part of its periphery in the so-called “core-periphery model of a concept” [28, 165].

M-model 1 SADNESS/APATHY IS LIQUID SUBSTANCE (15% of the total number of metaphoric expressions under investigation) denotes the feeling of being sad because of hopelessness, which fills a person like a vessel. This conceptual model has the following lexical realizations in the novels by S. King and D. Brown: to fill smb with sadness [35, 399]; the apathy evaporated [30, 583].

M-Model 2 SADNESS IS BURDEN (7%) refers to emotion of sadness as a kind of longtime load for a human being, e.g. the sadness had burdened smb for long [33, 118].

M-model 3 DESPAIR/and HURT IS AGENT (15%) indicates the ability of extreme sadness, when there is no hope (despair) or feeling of pain because of missing someone (hurt) to act all alone (to overtake, to etch). For example, in the language of J. Patterson we come across such word-groups as: the despair overtook smb [36, 349]; raw hurt etched smb’s face [36, 122].

M-model 4 GRIEF IS SWAMP (7%) means that the deep emotion sadness will absorb you if you let it. This model can be represented by the following expression from the novel “The Book of Names” by J. Gregory: grief swamped smb [33, 339].

Another M-model 5 GRIEF IS AURA (7%) symbolizes radiant energy that comes from a person, who experiences very great sadness in the novel by J.T. Hawks “The Dark River”, e.g. to feel the aura of grief [34, 64].

M-model 6 GRIEF IS BLACK PIT (7%) shows that the strong emotion of sadness seems to have no limits, and anyone can get sucked into it for several times. For example: to get sucked into the black pit of grief again [33, 18].

M-model 7 GRIEF IS STRAFE (7%) signifies that intense sadness can attack someone with gunfire. See the example from D. Brown’s novel “Angels and Demons”: the grief strafed smb’s heart [30, 112].
M-model 8 PAIN IS FLASH (7%) represents sadness as an emotional suffering. Pain appears suddenly on person’s face and is expressed briefly. It is verbalized by the word combination a flash of pain passed across smb’s face [34, 220].

M-model 9 PAIN IS POOL (7%) defines sadness as unpleasant emotional experience. It is accumulated like standing clear water in someone’s eyes, e.g. smb’s eyes are clear pools of pain [33, 122].

M-model 10 PAIN IS GRINDER (7%) denotes the acute sadness moving slowly through your heart with great discomfort. For example: the pain grinding through smb’s chest [33, 213].

M-model 11 SORROW IS WAVE (7%) symbolizes almost unbearable sadness moving rapidly up and down a human body. This metaphoric meaning is expressed by the word combination to feel a wave of sorrow [33, 140].

M-model 12 DISSAPOINTMENT IS STAB (7%) indicates the feeling of sadness injuring someone like a pointed weapon when things are going wrong, e.g. disappointment stabbed through smb [33, 212].

Percentage ration of the above mentioned M-models showed that M-models SADNESS/APATHY IS LIQUID SUBSTANCE and DESPAIR/HURT IS AGENT are more often applied to the concept “sadness” in contemporary American fiction.

**Conclusions**

The carried out analysis leads to the conclusion that the modern American authors associate the NBEC “sadness” with twelve metaphoric images (liquid substance, burden, agent, swamp, aura, black pit, strafe, flash, pool, grinder, wave, stab). These figurative constituents form the source domain SMTH/SMB (mainly SMTH) in the structure of the integrated metaphor model SADNESS (specifically GRIEF) IS SMTH/SMB. The most frequent metaphoric images associated with the concept “sadness” in the 21st century American fiction are LIQUID SUBSTANCE and AGENT when the emotion of sadness is interpreted in terms of both nonliving and living matter.

**References:**


30. Illustrations.