

SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENT OF TASTE ADJECTIVES IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE: EXTRA-LINGUISTIC FACTORS

^aTATYANA A. LUKANKINA, ^bTATYANA YU. SHCHUKLINA, ^cLEYLA A. MARDIEVA

^aKazan Federal University, 18 Kremlyovskaya St., Kazan, Tatarstan, Russian Federation, Russia

^bKazan Federal University, 18 Kremlyovskaya St., Kazan, Tatarstan, Russian Federation, Russia

^cKazan Federal University, 18 Kremlyovskaya St., Kazan, Tatarstan, Russian Federation, Russia

email: ^aRusia@Prescopus.Com, ^bt.yu.shchuklina2016@gmail.com, ^ca.mardieva2015@gmail.com

Abstract: The article examines the semantic development of adjectives in the Russian language. In the theoretical sense, the investigation relies on studies of culture and semasiology in its historical aspect, which look at language in close connection with culture and mentality of its users. The linguistic database for the current research is presented by taste adjectives from the Russian literary texts, as well as historical and contemporary explanatory dictionaries of the Russian language. The results of the research showed that the semantic development of taste adjectives is determined by social and cultural factors, which may vary in each historical period of social development (sociocultural traditions of native speakers; the system of their religious, aesthetic, or philosophical values; changes in human thought and cognitive processes). The semantic of taste adjectives shifted away from the old syncretism of names (the initial stage of semantic process) to polysemy (the intermediate stage in history of words) and derivation (a stage in the evolution of semantics which comes after the old syncretism disintegrated). From the theoretical point of view, the paper clarifies scientific concepts of lexical semantics as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. The results of the research can contribute to the development of historical semasiology studies, lexical semantics, linguoculturology. They expand the understanding of the processes connected with formation and development of the adjective semantics in the Russian language. We may suppose that regularities in the semantic development of taste adjectives (regarded as an integral micro-system) form a typical case for other lexical groups – a case which reflects the features of word semantics development in the Russian language. The practical significance of the research is related to the possibility of applying the results in teaching high school courses on Russian lexicology, semasiology, linguoculturology, and also in lexicographic practice.

Keywords: Lexical semantics, semantic structure of the word, semantic syncretism, lexical compatibility, polysemy, semantic derivation, semantic models, word-formation models, national mentality, national culture.

1 Introduction

At the end of the 20th and the start of the 21st century, a number of trends in linguistics are characterized by a clear turn to the semantic aspect of language. Semantics is used as a starting point for various studies. Semantic approaches also reinvigorated the study of some “old” linguistic problems in new aspects. The activation of anthropological approach to the language semantics study became crucial for linguistics; it dates back to the works of W. von Humboldt, who was the first to call for considering human factor in linguistics, as well as the interrelation between a people and a character of its language (Humboldt 1984).

Contemporary linguistics, both foreign (Danesi 2008, Gao 2006, Jourdan 2006, Kovceses 2006), and Russian (Kolesov 2006, Maslova 2007) pays great attention to language as one of the nation-specific phenomena which accumulates and translates cultural experience, traditions, world perception of generations of native speakers, and a system of their moral and ethical values. Some scientists consider primarily such culturally marked units as phraseological units (Arsenteva & Kayumova 2014, Kovshova 2012), symbols (Medvedeva 2008, Nurullina & Yusupova 2016), stereotypes (Kikleovich 2011, Yusupova 2016), derivatives (Vendina 1998, Erofeeva & Sadrieva 2016, Matveeva & Fatkhudinova 2016). The dependence of language semantics specifics and its development on both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors (social and cultural traditions of native speakers, the system of their religious, aesthetic, moral, philosophical values, their worldview, mindset, etc.), is just as evident when considering lexical semantics which most directly reflects the mentality of different peoples in different historical periods, succession of their mental activities related to the cognitive process.

Taste adjectives as the units from the same lexical micro-system present considerable interest in this regard, since they express vital concepts, belong to the basic vocabulary of the Russian language and are parts of its most ancient lexicon.

2 Materials and methods

The objective of this article is to identify the regularities of semantic development in taste adjectives in the Russian language from the ancient period of syncretism up to the current stage of language history. We will focus on the lexical group of adjectives expressing taste.

The linguistic database for the current research is presented by taste adjectives from the Russian literary texts, historical and contemporary explanatory dictionaries of the Russian language.

The theoretical framework for the study is found in the ideas of the Russian linguists A.A. Potebnya (Potebnya 1958, 1968) who studied historical semasiology, and contemporary authors V.V.Kolesov (Kolesov 2006) and G.A.Nikolaev (Nikolaev 2010) who studied the ancient period of syncretism associated with a particular (mythological) stage in the human thought development, when people did not distinguish between a subject and an object, a thing and its properties, an item and its name. Historical and semasiological approaches to linguistics make it possible to study the evolution of semantics in taste adjectives from the old syncretism of the name (the initial stage of semantic process) to polysemy (the intermediate stage in history of words) and derivation (a stage in the evolution of semantics which begins after the disintegration of old syncretism), which enables to consider polysemy and derivation as results of various stages of a single semantic process.

The study is also based on the research of W. von Humboldt and his culture-centric approach, the main idea of which is the study of language in close relation to the culture of its native speaker (Humboldt 1984).

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Semantics of taste adjectives in the Old Russian language

The old syncretism is a distinctive feature of the early period in the history of Slavic society; it corresponds to the mythological stage in the development of human mentality. Integrity and indivisibility of the image perception common to the primitive intellect, inability to decompose it into the substance and predicate or attribute (Potebnya, 1958) are directly reflected on the characteristics of the Old Russian word semantics. Such syncretism was inherent for the ancient language signs which presented different types of nomination for taste: горький, кислый, сладкий, соленый (солонный), пресный, терпкий etc.

The research showed that semantic syncretism of such words was presented by non-differentiated character of their lexical semantics (combination of two different meanings in their semantic structures – “physical”, relating to taste, which was originally Slavic, and “spiritual”, Greek in its origin, resulting from Christianization of Slavic society and the rise of texts belonging to new culture) and indefinite part of speech (i.e., their ability to perform the attributive or substantive functions). The degree of explication for different meanings was determined, on the one hand, by its functional necessity (general semantics); on the other hand, it was dependent on the social and cultural background of the Ancient Rus’.

Specific semantic of taste words was determined by sensitive and image-based cognition, when the quality was felt at the moment of a direct “confrontation” of a human being with an object of the physical world. For example, the “sweet taste” was

construed in connection with an image of a fruit, honey, honeycombs, etc.; the bitter taste was relevant to poison, bile (золчь), wormwood (пелынь) etc.

The language situation in the Old Rus' was strongly affected by Christian Byzantine traditions through the influence of church books. Together with the texts belonging to new culture, the Old Russian language acquired formulas with key words сладькьи, горькьи which were used to explicate of main terms determining the system of common religious, aesthetic, philosophic tendencies. As calques from Ancient Greek, they dated back to Byzantine biblical sources containing relevant formulas designating good/evil, holiness/sinfulness, etc. Syntagmatic combinations of syncretes сладькьи, горькьи, being the integral part of the main body of the church books and updating the seme "spiritual", reflected the peculiarity of the early Christianity epoch mentality founded on the idea of the dualism of the worlds and had sacral character full of religious symbolism. Ideological opposition between positive and negative connotations ran back to a more generic opposition of "sacral" and "secular", which lay the foundation of the antithetic usage of сладькьи, горькьи, bounded by the correlating terms heaven-earth, up-down, god-devil, good-evil, etc. The word сладькьи was connected with everything positive, kind, righteous, holy – i.e. "pleasant". On the contrary, горькьи was associated with everything negative, devilish, faithless, vicious, wicked – "unpleasant". The abovementioned syncretes realized the sacralized semes "pleasant" (holy, heavenly, "positive") and "unpleasant" (vicious, faithless, "negative") in syntagmatic usage with words of absolutely different semantics which formed a database for the combinatorial models.

3.2 Semantics of taste adjectives in the Russian language of the Middle Ages

In the Middle ages, there occurred a certain specialization of word semantics, polysemy development and formation of abstractive generalized feature forming the basis of taste meaning in adjectives: сладькьи – "sweet, pleasant taste" (сладькьи: оwoць, вишня, груша etc.), кыслыи – "unpleasant, sour taste" (кыслыи: ягоды, виноградь, плоды, etc.); горькьи – "unpleasant, bitter taste" (горькьи: ядрышки) etc. This specialization was based on the following linguistic factors: distribution of Russian business texts and, as a result, activation of "physical", "taste" aspect in the semantic structures of words; syntagma disintegration by semantic splitting of a word by including different distributors, determinates, comparisons – сладькьи как медь, кыслый как уксусь; increase of syntagma combinations and specialization of seme content of a word in each syntagma use with simultaneous generalization of meaning by its extraction from the definite contextual usage etc. The second reason for this specialization were such extra-linguistic factors as destruction of syncretism in human mentality, its rationalization resulting from complication of social-economic relations, growth of production activity, liberation from theological context of the previous ages, commitment to knowledge acquisition and increase of information on the surrounding world, etc. Everything that was canonized, religious, generalized and symbolic in the ancient world, that had an imprint of old religious Christian ideas connected with the dual world of nature implemented in the opposition of sacral-secular, heavenly-earthly, objects as symbols and objects in the common not ritual meaning has materialized and started expressing other – real – features and qualities simultaneously with rationalization of human mentality and society which resulted in de-sacralization of all aspects of human life.

Further development of semantics of the words сладькьи, горькьи was based on the opposition of the high, holy and the earthly, secular. Correlative semes "pleasant" – "unpleasant", which have occurred in ancient times on the basis of the indicated oppositions and de-sacralized in the Middle ages, served a base for establishment of semantic paradigm of antonymous words сладкий – горький. Development and distribution of Russian texts, activation of secular essence,

introduction of borrowed (Greek in origin) formulas into surroundings, which were new for them, resulted in development of secondary meanings. Formally remaining the same, but getting into the other language surroundings, they received already another, real content, and expressed definite feature, not connected with the holy essence. For example, сладькьи – "pleasant, delightful, full of or making pleasure, delight" (сладькьи: весть, глась, пение, жизнь, смерть, etc.); горькьи – "unpleasant, miserable, painful, heavy, expressing sorrow or caused by it; bringing distress and suffering" (горькьи: глась, совет, плачь, воспоминание, etc.).

3.3 Semantics of taste adjectives in the Russian language of the 18-19th centuries

The researched revealed that this period was characterized by functioning of a unified system of words used as taste designations, including adjectives сладкий, горький, кислый, соленый, пресный, пряный, терпкий. This system was established as a result of lexical-semantic processes in the sphere of taste adjectives during 18-19th centuries (the so-called "gaining quality", words abstraction, widening the combinability spheres of taste adjectives, their further specialization and terminologization resulting from the development of different industrial and scientific branches, etc.). The meanings of these words specialized in the Middle ages experienced a certain degree of "settlement", specification and further differentiation in the period of shaping the unified system of the national Russian language.

Widening of combinability spheres of these adjectives due to a number of borrowings into a literary language from Western European languages (names of fruits, plants, dishes, different drinks) did not cause alteration of their semantics. However, a certain degree of specialization and terminologization of phrases containing taste adjectives was due to the rise of various sciences and industries – chemistry, mineralogy, medicine, biology (горькая, кислая, соленая земля; кислые, пресные, соленые воды; кислые, горькие соли, etc).

The 18th century became a crucial stage in the development of "polysemy" adjectives with taste meaning. "Transfer" of Greek formulas into the Russian texts, their total assimilation and adaptation in the Russian environment, pushing aside of Church-Slavic and strengthening of secular essence, and, as a consequence, the loss of ability by all native speakers to perceive them as non-original, borrowed – all of these tendencies resulted in formation in the 18th century of the "primary - secondary" relation between "abstract-figurative" (derivatives) and "taste" (generating) meanings on the basis of the established semantic paradigm, which became the base for the development of semantic derivation as the next stage in the progress of the word semantics. The result of this process is presented by the derivatives with high metaphoric level which function in the individual word-building processes in the sphere of occasional word as means of creating an artistic image (verboid, lexical-semantic variant – LSV).

3.4 Semantics of taste adjectives in the modern Russian language

At the current stage of its development, the Russian language features a unified group of adjectives used as taste designations represented by lexemes сладкий, горький, кислый, соленый, пресный, пряный, терпкий expressing generalized and abstract taste characteristics and possessing common typical value of "having this or that taste; being something to the taste".

In the modern Russian language the adjectives сладкий, горький (on the basis of application sphere widening, placing into a new semantic and conceptual sphere, change of denotation, transfer from individual word usage into common usage, loss of "figurativeness" in this respect, and as a consequence, lexicalization of occasional speech variants), as well as derivatives formed as a result of linking by the existing

semantic models (without the stage of LSV) кислый, соленый, пресный, пряный, терпкий present independent words, new nominative units belonging to lexical system of language and being in homonymous relations with their generating units сладкий, горький, кислый, соленый, пресный, пряный, терпкий with the original meaning of taste characteristic.

4 Conclusion

The research in taste adjectives has shown that semantic development of Russian adjectives is determined by the character of each period in the history of human society (social and cultural traditions of a native speaker; their religious, aesthetic or philosophical values system; the dynamics of change in human thought and cognitive processes) and progresses in the direction from the ancient syncretism of a name (as the initial stage in words history) to polysemy (the intermediate stage in history of words) and derivation (a stage in the evolution of semantics which appears as a result of old syncretism disintegration).

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