The meaning as a linguistic and mental structure

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The meaning is the unit of the elements of mental and linguistic nature. We suppose that there are interconnections between mental and linguistic components: both are formed and develop in the limit of a concrete culture, which also depends on special conditions of people’s life and their activities, both have the trace of national character, both have a complicated structure. Therefore, we suppose that there is some correlation between different level of consciousness and different types of meaning. In this work we will try to present the meaning of a word as the unit of mental and linguistic elements.

For this purpose, we conducted the semantic differential experiment with the group of French students who do their studies in Russia. As the object of the experiment we chose the value of “success” because on the one hand it is an important social phenomenon, and on the other hand it obtains value for every person. In other words, we think that this helps us to demonstrate the correlation of different levels of the meaning and different levels of people’s consciousness. Since consciousness finds reflection in language and it realizes itself in semiotic way, in signs, including linguistic signs, comparing the meaning of two words of different languages, we normally can find a common part in a “body” at the level of denotation meaning. This corresponds to the “social” level of consciousness, and different elements at the periphery of the meaning, which are reflected, for example, in associative and connotative part of meaning and correspond to the “individual” and “common” level of consciousness.

In this work, I compare the meaning and sense of the word “success” in Russian and French languages at different levels of the meaning. For discovering the sense of this notion the most precisely, not only in part of fixed consciousness but in perception not always reflexed of every native speaker of a language, I use data of different dictionaries, including dictionaries of association and phraseological units, and data of psychosemantic experiment (experiment of psychosemantic differential) and data of “perception experiment” (participants of experiment were proposed to give three answers on a question: What does “success” mean?).

Data received with all these methods will help us to discover the difference between equivalent concepts in different languages, not only at the level of linguistic but also at the level of mental representation of the meaning, and eventually to create a piece of world-view of native speakers.