

Cognitive mechanisms of linguistic creativity

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In the present paper we explore the cognitive mechanisms of linguistic creativity. We build on the dichotomy *language system creativity vs language users' creativity*. To this end we draw on the analysis of how language system responds to the needs of verbalizing new concepts, on the one hand, and how the language user is creatively involved in the new concept / word formation, on the other. We also hold that creativity is based on confrontation, deviation, and novel combination of existing mental representations. Human creativity requires the combination of previously unconnected mental representations, constituted by patterns of neural activity (Thagard and Stewart 2010).

We argue that when any new meaning is formed we deal with three types of deviation: semantic, pragmatic and cognitive. The first step in the development of a new meaning is pragmatic deviation. The speaker as if invites the hearer to infer the new nuances of meaning, which the word develops due to the unusual use in a novel context. The hearer makes a cognitive effort to infer the new shades of meaning, The individual pragmatic inference in the course of time becomes salient in the speaking community, it is shared and adapted by more than one speaker and becomes conventionalized. And at a later stage generalized pragmatic inference is semanticized into a new coded meaning of a word (cf. Traugott and Dasher 2002).

It is essential for the purposes of our analysis to distinguish between two types of linguistic inferences: pragmatic and semantic ones. The former has to do with a context of a situation; the latter - with the changes in the conceptual structures of the original and new coded meanings. By method of conceptual analysis we explore concept-narrowing, concept extension, and conceptual metaphor, underlying the mechanisms of semantic changes. We draw on the results of our study of 500 new meanings from BNC.

We hold that conceptual attributes vary according to the degree of their centrality, proneness to change and their inferential potential. We prove that cognitive mechanisms of new meaning development involve activation of peripheral mutable conceptual attributes with the high inferential potential.

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References

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