

## SECTION III. METHODOLOGY OF LINGUISTICS

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### **THE BASIC LEVEL OF TAXONOMY OF THE CONCEPT «VISUAL PERCEPTION» (THE CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH VERBS)**

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### ABSTRACT

The article deals with verb representation of visual perception in the English and French languages on the basis of construction of a complex cognitive model called the verb taxonomy of the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION. The model allows us to present a part of the lexical system of the English and French languages with account of the conceptual level, namely the concepts represented by verbs of visual perception. The semantic structure of the verbs of visual perception and conceptual characteristics of the corresponding concept that they represent helps to construct such hierarchy for both languages. The hierarchy has two levels characterized by a different degree of abstraction and specification. The analysis shows the linguistic and conceptual content of basic level and helps to understand the way native speakers conceptualize and categorize visually perceived objects. It is important to note that categorization of the perceptual process is mainly dependent on communicative conditions, i.e. verbal context.

**Key words:** verbs of visual perception; taxonomy; conceptual taxonomic analysis; basic level.

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## РАЗДЕЛ III. КОГНИТИВНАЯ ЛИНГВИСТИКА И ПРАГМАТИКА

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### БАЗОВЫЙ УРОВЕНЬ ТАКСОНОМИИ КОНЦЕПТА «ЗРИТЕЛЬНОЕ ВОСПРИЯТИЕ» (НА ПРИМЕРЕ АНГЛИЙСКИХ И ФРАНЦУЗСКИХ ГЛАГОЛОВ)

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### Аннотация

В статье рассматривается глагольная репрезентация зрительного восприятия в английском и французском языках на основе построения комплексной когнитивной модели, которая называется глагольной таксономией концепта зрительного восприятия. Модель позволяет представлять часть лексической системы английского и французского языков с учетом концептуального уровня, а именно за счет концептов, активированных глаголами зрительного восприятия. Смысловая структура глаголов зрительного восприятия и концептуальные характеристики соответствующего концепта, который они репрезентируют, помогают построить такую иерархию для обоих языков. Иерархия имеет два уровня, которые характеризуются разной степенью абстрагирования и конкретизации. Анализ показывает языковое и концептуальное содержание базового уровня и помогает понять, каким образом носители языка осуществляют концептуализацию и категоризацию визуально воспринимаемых объектов. Важно отметить, что категоризация перцептивного процесса в основном зависит от коммуникативных условий, т. е. вербального контекста.

**Ключевые слова:** глаголы зрительного восприятия; таксономия; концептуальные таксономического анализа; базовый уровень.

## I. Introduction

The complex character of human perceptual system connected with the work of consciousness, its conceptual content is emphasized by many psychologists such as A.R. Luria, S. L. Rubinshtein, A. N. Leontiev, A. V. Zaporozhets and others. Nevertheless the role of visual perception is undoubtedly primary. According to B. G. Ananiev, for a human being the system of visual perception is «the most powerful source of information about the outer world» [1]. It's difficult not to agree with this statement regarding how helpless we become without seeing. The most complete representation of a stereotyped situation of visual perception is given by the verb as exactly this part of speech represents the proposition of an event. Moreover, being a part of a linguistic system of a particular language the verb conveys national peculiarities of the conceptual system of its native speakers as well as the way a speaker visually perceives the environment, shows what part of the perceived information receives psychological salience and what is left «unnoticed». To understand this we analyze the language as the most objective source of learning the human consciousness, the processes of conceptualization and categorization.

## II. The method of conceptual taxonomic analysis and its application to the analysis of the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION

Lots of works of well-known psychologists and linguists are devoted to the analysis of the process of natural categorization of the reality and, in particular, to the problem of distinguishing the basic level that is the level of general, «undivided» knowledge of the objects of the world. Among these scientists are E. Roche, B. Berlin, R. Browne, D. Cruse, F. Ungerer and H. Schmid. Their theoretical and practical evidences of the specificity of natural categorization formed the grounds for the development of a particular linguistic method. With the help of this method it's possible to analyze linguistic objects with consideration of the concepts they represent. This method was developed by N. N. Boldyrev who described it as «a system of techniques used for analysis of the hierarchical organization of linguistic objects regarding the conceptual hierarchy, i.e. the hierarchy of concepts these objects represent» [2, p. 51]. Conceptual taxonomic analysis allows us to present the process of lexical categorization of visual perception as a hierarchy of levels of cat-

egorization with different degrees of abstraction and specification. Thus, in the taxonomy of the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION two levels can be discriminated, the basic level and the subordinate one (the level of specification). Superordinate level as a level of abstraction presupposes the linguistic objects that represent generalized knowledge about all the categories of lower levels. The verb always represents the exact process, condition, character and relationship. That's why this level isn't included into verbal taxonomies.

The article deals with the construction of the basic level of the taxonomy of the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION through the analysis of English and French verbs. To construct the taxonomy it's necessary, first of all, to analyze the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION, its characteristics that form the speaker's knowledge about specific features of the process of visual perception. These characteristics are represented in English and French by verbs of visual perception. Secondly, it's necessary to take into account the criteria of setting the verbs on a definite level of the taxonomy. In our article we are going to use the criteria given by N. N. Boldyrev.

## III. The concept of VISUAL PERCEPTION in the English and French languages

Relying on the analysis of the English and French verbs of visual perception the basic and additional characteristics of the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION were distinguished. To the basic conceptual characteristics we attribute 'Subject', 'Object' and 'Direction' (for the verbs of the groups *to look* and *regarder*). The basic conceptual characteristics are typical for all situations of visual perception. Additional conceptual characteristics are also similar in both languages. These characteristics include 'Quality of perception' ('Duration'/'Intensity', 'Obstacle', 'Visibility', 'Distance', 'Holistic perception of an object', 'Direction' of the look (its specification)), 'Reason', 'Causation', 'Manner', 'Concurrent activity', 'Purpose', 'Type of an object of visual perception'. The characteristic 'Duration' refers us to the concept TIME that in its turn refers to a definite temporal interval of an activity. This characteristic is often connected with the characteristic 'Intensity' that determines the degree of a subject's involvement into the perceptual process, some tension, strain of the situation, fixidity of look. Taking into account the context

it's possible to speak either about the characteristic 'Obstacle' or 'Visibility'. If it is some physical object, its part or someone's unwillingness to allow other people to see something then we deal with the conceptual characteristic 'Obstacle'. But if it is the state of environment in which there is a subject and an object we'll have the characteristic 'Visibility'. In case of a holistic perception of an object the perceiver takes in a definite part of the space, an object, and the things that interest him at the moment. Profiling of the characteristic 'Reason' presupposes the existence of some force that changes the subject, his own existence. As opposed to this characteristic the characteristic 'Causation' is profiled when the subject isn't the initiator of the perceptual process. The characteristic 'Manner' indicates the kind of influence aimed at achieving some goal. The characteristic 'Concurrent activity' as well as 'Purpose' indicates that the verbs representing it are at the same time a means of representation of other concepts. Additional conceptual characteristics reflect some peculiarities of the perceptual process, a definite perspective of an event conceptualization.

#### IV. The basic level of taxonomy of the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION

The verbs that belong to the basic level of the taxonomy of the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION in English and French represent the process of visual perception as a gestalt without any specification of some parameters of the perceptual process. It means that the verbs of this level profile only the basic conceptual characteristics 'Subject', 'Object' and 'Direction'. The following criteria help to discriminate such verbs: morphological simplicity, wide distribution, stylistic neutrality, etymology (verbs of the basic level have the German origin (for English verbs) and the Roman origin (for French verbs)).

The analysis of verbs of visual perception as well as works on perceptual psychology allows us to argue that the English and French taxonomies have two focuses that correspond to the kind of visual perception. It's rather admissible to distinguish two kinds of visual perception, passive and active. The passive one describes a purposeless perceptual process while the active one is connected with a focused and purposeful activity, the subject's intention to look at something. One of the famous psychologists, S. L. Rubinshtein once wrote: «A possibility of visual perception pre-

supposes the subject's ability to react towards a sensuous stimulus as well as to realize a sensuous quality as a quality of the object. For this purpose the object must become salient as a comparatively stable source of its influence on the subject and as a possible object of the subject's influence» [4, p. 234]. In English the purposeful and purposeless processes of visual perception are represented by two verbs, *to look* and *to see*, in French – by the verbs *voir* and *regarder* consequently. Let's see what criteria help use to set these verbs on the basic level of the taxonomies. The verbs *to see*, *to look*, *voir* and *regarder* represent the process of visual perception as a gestalt, without its specification. The definitions of the verbs prove this fact: *to look* – «to turn your eyes towards something, so that you can see it» [15]; *to see* – (not used in the progressive tenses) «to become aware of somebody/something by using your eyes» [11]; *voir* – «percevoir quelqu'un, quelque chose par les yeux, les organes de la vue»; *regarder* – «porter le regard vers, sur quelque chose, quelqu'un» [14]. The verbs *to see* and *voir* profile the basic conceptual characteristics 'Subject' and 'Object' while the verbs *to look* and *regarder* – 'Subject', 'Object' and 'Direction'. The verbs *to see*, *to look*, *voir* and *regarder* are monosyllabic and can be used with prepositions and as a part of phrasal and phrasal-prepositional units:

- She *looks at* me enquiringly [8, p. 206];
- Dantès *regarda autour de* lui, cherchant à quelle horloge l'abbé avait pu lire l'heure d'une façon si précise [7, p. 187].

The verbs *to see* and *voir* represent a purposeless visual perception, they are transitive verbs. That's why it's not characteristic for them to be used with prepositions of direction. In most cases the verb *to see* in combination with a preposition is used as a modal verb: She's *seen to* that all right [8, p. 184]. Phrasal-prepositional collocations with the verb *voir* are more frequent, although these are constructions with prepositions that express spacial relations: C'est la fille du père Constant, le coiffeur de la rue Vavin; tu *vois d'ici* sa boutique bleue, surmontée d'une boule d'or, d'où pend une queue de cheval [13].

The analyzing verbs have a wide distribution, being used with different kinds of subjects and objects (animate, inanimate and abstract nouns):

- *His wife* looks at *me* [a woman, the main character] archly from beneath her plucked eye-

brows [8, p. 244]; For a moment *I* [a woman, the main character] *saw a brief return of animation* to her features [8, p. 226];

– Everything is clean there, but the one tiny *window looks* onto the river <...> [8, p. 232];

– *The year 1927* was a good year from several viewpoints, although *it* [the year] *saw* the death of Sir Anker Simmons <...> [6];

– Dantès *regarda le visage* livide de Faria <...> [7, p. 205];

– <...> *je* [Dantès] *ne vois rien qu'un papier à demi brûlé* [7, p. 210];

– <... > *l' Europe* continue à *se regarder dans le miroir de le passé* <...> [10].

It must be noted that in combination with inanimate and abstract nouns as well as postpositions (i.e. satellites in Talmy's terminology) the verbs *look*, *to see*, *voir* and *regarder* are used metaphorically. It is quite logical regarding the fact that only living beings can actually see and look.

The verbs *to look*, *to see*, *voir* and *regarder* are the most frequent verbs of visual perception in both languages: among the most frequently used English verbs the verb *to look* has the 13<sup>th</sup> position and the verb *to see* – the 10<sup>th</sup> one [12]; In the French dictionary of word frequencies «Dictionnaire des frequences. Vocabulaire litteraire des X1X et XX siecles» the verb *voir* has a frequency of 149 662, the frequency of the verb *regarder* – 41742 (compare: frequency of the verb *entendre* – 42421, of *sentir* – 34192, of *ecouter* – 17124). The verbs *to look* and *to see* are of the German origin that can be proved by the etymology dictionary: *look* (v.) - before 1121 *locon*, in Peterborough Chronicle; later *loken* (about 1200); developed from Old English *lōcian* see, gaze, look, spy (**before 899**, in Alfred's translation of St. Gregory's Pastoral Care) [5, p. 609]; *see* (v.) look at. Before 1126 *seen*; earlier *sen* (1106); developed from Old English *sēon* (**about 725**, in Beowulf) [5, p. 979]. The verbs *voir* and *regarder* are the verbs of the Roman origin (the verb *voir* was borrowed from Latin (the Latin verb *videre*); the verb *regarder* goes back to the verb *wardôn*, a dialectism used in the northwest of Gallia [3, p. 55]. So, both in English and French taxonomies of the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION there are two focuses due to the peculiarity of language representation of two types of visual perception. The «basicness» of the analyzed verbs on the conceptual level is revealed in the generalized character of their conceptual con-

tent. With the help of these verbs native speakers can operate the notions of a considerable meaning by making minimum cognitive efforts: «This principle is called cognitive economy, and it probably explains best why the basic level is particularly well suited to meet our cognitive needs» [9, p. 68].

It's important to stress that the difference of the natural categorization from the lexical or scientific taxonomies lies in the existence of so-called «transitional zones» and gaps: depending on the cognitive needs of the ordinary language user they [the folk taxonomies] may tolerate gap and alternative hierarchical paths, and this is what radically distinguishes them from scientific taxonomies [9, p. 85]. Taking this into consideration we argue that the basic level consists of two tiers. Significantly, in the English taxonomy the basic level can be presented as comprised of two levels while in the French one it's doubtful. Perhaps, it can be explained by the prevalence of the verbal representation of the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION in the English language and the use of other parts of speech in French for representing some peculiarities of the process of visual perception. So, in the English taxonomy on the second tier there will be verbs unsatisfying only one criteria of the basic level, the verbs that can profile one (or two but interrelated) additional conceptual characteristic(s). Among such verbs we can name the verbs *to watch*, *to stare*, *to gaze*. These verbs profile an additional conceptual characteristic 'Duration' and a characteristic 'Intensity' connected with the former.

## V. Conclusion

So, the English and French taxonomies of the concept VISUAL PERCEPTION prove that a language representation of the process in both languages reflects the peculiarities of categorization of extralinguistic reality by native speakers. Underlined similarities show the similarities of categorization, comprehension of visual images, and the differences highlight, in particular, the importance of verbs in representation of the perceptual process: the absence of differentiation of the basic level in the French taxonomy illustrates the preference of other parts of speech for conveying such peculiarities of the perceptual system as its duration and intensity. At the same time the possibility of their representation by other parts of speech means another interpretation of the overall process, within a different proposition, with its own conceptual links and relations.

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