

THE CONSTRUAL OF THE CONCEPT OF MEMORY IN ENGLISH

O CONSTRUAL DO CONCEITO DE MEMÓRIA EM INGLÊS

LA CONSTRUAL DEL CONCEPTO DE MEMORIA EN INGLÉS

Olga N. PROKHOROVA¹

Igor V. CHEKULAI²

Yuliya N. YATSENKO³

Elena V. PUPYNINA⁴

Irina V. BELKINA⁵

ABSTRACT: This study treats the construal and perspectivization of the concept of memory in modern English. Using data from British National Corpus and various literary sources, we examine the lexical field of memory verbs. Employing the analytical model of Frame Semantics, the investigation demonstrates how a combination of semantic feature and frame analysis may capture the various ways that English construes the concept of memory and remembering.

KEYWORDS: Memory. Verb. Semantics

RESUMO: Este estudo trata da construção e perspectivação do conceito de memória na língua inglesa moderna. Usando dados do British National Corpus e várias fontes literárias, examinamos o campo lexical dos verbos de memória. Empregando o modelo analítico de Frame Semantics, a investigação demonstra como uma combinação de recurso semântico e análise de frame pode capturar as várias maneiras que o inglês constrói o conceito de memória e lembrança.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Memória. Verbo. Semântica

RESUMEN: Este estudio trata la interpretación y perspectiva del concepto de memoria en el inglés moderno. Utilizando datos del British National Corpus y varias fuentes literarias, examinamos el campo léxico de los verbos de memoria. Empleando el modelo analítico de Frame Semantics, la investigación demuestra cómo una combinación de características semánticas y análisis de marcos puede capturar las diversas formas en que el inglés construye el concepto de memoria y recuerdo.

¹ Belgorod State University, 85 Pobeda Street, Belgorod, 308015, Russia.
prokhorova@bsu.edu.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2088-0458>

² Belgorod State University, 85 Pobeda Street, Belgorod, 308015, Russia.
checkulai@bsu.edu.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4841-8110>

³ Belgorod State University, 85 Pobeda Street, Belgorod, 308015, Russia,
yatsenko_yu@bsu.edu.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9366-9111>

⁴ Belgorod State University, 85 Pobeda Street, Belgorod, 308015, Russia.
pupynina@bsu.edu.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0514-8712>

⁵ Belgorod State University, 85 Pobeda Street, Belgorod, 308015, Russia. belkina@bsu.edu.ru
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7578-7299>

Introduction

The object of the current study is the lexical field including both memory verbs (remember, recall, reminisce, recollect, bethink, mind, remind, forget, memorize etc.) and non-memory verbs. We especially consider verbs of motion, perception, manipulation, and hyperonymic verbs of cognition, which can express a memory event and semantically enrich it due to the mechanisms of conceptual interaction and perspectivization.

The purpose of the paper is to find out the way the frame “memory” is represented by the verbs both in the system of the language and in the speech.

In order to meet the purpose of the study, the following tasks were set:

- 1) to work out the analytical model of the memory situation called frame “memory” which can be applied to any situation of remembering, memorizing, forgetting some information;
- 2) to analyze how the profiling of the components and attributes of the frame and a certain perspective from which the frame is viewed result in lexical synonymy;
- 3) to analyze the interaction of the neighboring frames resulting in the ability of non-memory verbs to nominate memory processes on the functional level (in the speech).

Theoretical Background

One of the main theoretical foundations of this study is the idea that the meaning of a word tends to be the result of conceptualization (LANGACKER, 1987; TALMY, 1985). The meaning of the expression cannot be reduced to an objective characteristic of the situation, that is, it is determined not by reference and truth as the correspondence of the symbol to the object of the external world, but by how a person conceptualizes the world, what perspective is chosen when considering the situation and for its expressive portraiture (FAUCONNIER, 1984; SKREBTSOVA, 2000). The main goal of cognitive semantics is to describe the cognitive structure associated with the meaning of the word, which determines the process of nomination. Such cognitive structures can be described in one of the specially developed knowledge representation languages. The elements of this language are frames, scripts, plans, figure-ground, model, etc (BARANOV, DOBROVOLSKY 1997). Much attention is paid to the identification, description and explanation of the internal cognitive structure common to

the speaker and listener (DEMYANKOV, 1994; TAYLOR, 1995; GIBBS, 1996). The ideas of R. Dirven (Dirven, 1982), G. Fauconnier (FAUCONNIER, 1984, C. FILLMORE, 1982), B. Atkins (Fillmore, Atkins 1982), M. Minsky (Minsky, 1975), G. Lakoff (LAKOFF, 1987) with reference to frame semantics and perspectivization of concepts have served as theoretic background for the problem under study. Following E. Belyaevskaya (BELYAEVSKAYA, 1992), we believe that frame can be a hierarchically organized structure consisting of two levels. The upper level is the obligatory attributes and components that represent true ideas about the mnemonic situation, the lower level is the optional attributes and components. In our research we also rely on data from the psychology of memory. Memory is traditionally understood in psychology as remembering, preserving (including the reverse process-forgetting) and reproducing an individual's experience (ZINCHENKO, 2000).

Methodology

We first establish a wide range of verbs with the use of dictionaries and thesauruses. Examples for these verbs are subsequently extracted from the BNC and various other sources. Second, we pursue a frame analysis of each of the verbs identified. Here we distinguish semantics features based on the structural elements of the event and their syntactic coding. The ensuing analysis of the argument structure allows a more rigorous description of the verb semantics. Third, we examine non-memory verbs and other syntactic modes that are commonly used for the expression of a memory event. We examine not only how the nominal profiling of this event changes the construal but also how it permits the speaker to semantically enrich the representation of memory.

Findings

In cognitive-oriented research the semantic analysis of the meanings of memory verbs is closely connected with the deep mechanisms of a person's intellectual activity. Hence, the meanings themselves embody the results of a person's conceptualization of the surrounding world.

The main goal of cognitive semantics is to describe the cognitive structure associated with the meaning of any word that is involved in the process of nomination. In our study, we relied on the idea of the possibility of correlating a word with such a structure of knowledge representation as a frame. The use of frame semantics (one of the cognitive methods of

semantic analysis) made it possible to describe memory verbs in their correlation with the cognitive model (the "memory" frame), which unites into one lexical category both memory verbs and non-memory verbs that can nominate memory processes on the functional level (in the speech). Memory verbs, considered as autonomous, isolated from the phrase lexical units, only partially convey the attributes of the concept "memory". Non-memory verbs are generally not able to represent the concept of "memory" on the system level. On the functional level, due to the combination of predicate, subject, object, and meaning modifiers in the sentence, the concept "memory" can be represented by verbs of movement, sensory perception, cognition, preservation, etc. Therefore, it is possible to analyze the peculiarities of representation of the concept "memory" by English verbs by profiling the components and attributes of the frame from a certain perspective. The frame may be characterized as a model of the memory situation that embodies native speakers' knowledge, feelings and thoughts about the attributes of the concept "memory" (the substantial aspect of mnemonic situation) and the participants/components of mnemonic situations (the structural aspect). Under mnemonic situations we understand the situations when one memorizes, recalls, forgets or keeps in mind some information.

The "memory" frame is modeled on the basis of conceptual analysis, analysis of dictionary entries in English explanatory dictionaries, semantic analysis based on the corpus of uses of the verbs under study with their contexts, extracted from the written speech, as well as with the involvement of extralinguistic data (from the psychology of memory).

We believe that frame "memory", on the one hand, reflects the interaction of semantics, pragmatics and syntax observed when verbs are used in speech. On the other hand, it mirrors the "dual" nature of any verb, which possesses not only a lexical meaning, but also valency properties.

In fact, we keep to the following ideas when modeling a frame:

- the idea that every feature of the situation can't be mirrored in the analytical model;
- the idea that frames are not isolated, they can interact with each other;
- the idea of perspectivization;
- the idea that the frame is an analytical model that represents the stereotypical situation;
- the idea that the structure of a frame can be modeled as a hierarchy of obligatory cognitive components/attributes and optional ones.

To begin with the obligatory components of the analytical model that represents the situation when a person remembers, memorizes, forgets, recalls something. The first obligatory component of the model should be the SUBJECT of the situation (a person who uses the memory). In some cases the SUBJECT as a whole category can be replaced by a subcategory denoting human brain or memory block. This substitution is possible because metonymic transfer is one of the main mechanisms of human cognition: “... *his brain immediately pulled up those old India smells from wherever the memories of smells are stored*” (Waller). The second obligatory component is the OBJECT of the situation (a mental image). An OBJECT can be expressed in a language by a noun (personal, abstract, concrete), a personal pronoun, a subordinate clause, or an infinitive or gerund. Another obligatory component is STIMULUS (a person, an object, an event) that functions as a "trigger" for memory processes. In the semantic structure of a sentence that describes the process of remembering, forgetting or memorizing something, this component can be expressed explicitly, implicitly or contextually. The explicit way of representing STIMULUS can be observed in the following example: “...*and small pouches reminded me of a sudden, pleasant memories*” (Clark). In the next example we can see how STIMULUS is expressed in the surrounding context: “*The important thing she wrote was that she didn't have the power to make him happy. I remembered that feeling, life with a moody man*” (Smiley). The implicit way of expressing the component is to be found in the example “*I could recall vividly sitting under the sunshade outside the cafe in the little town...*” (Halt). As for another obligatory component of the frame under study, PREDICATE, we assume that it mirrors a certain relationship between the other participants of the situation. It is expressed by a particular verb in a language. The verb, as the carrier of a specific propositional function, is the organizing center of the utterance, since it represents the entire situation in a nutshell.

As for the optional components of the frame “memory”, we should mention that they are not necessarily verbalized on the language level. In contrast to the obligatory components, the optional components express the subjective assessment of what is reported in the sentence. The optional component VOLITION correlates with the psychological division of memory into two types – voluntary and involuntary. If this component is perspectivized, the memory situation carries the attribute "voluntary". If it is not focused on, then the memory situation should be characterized as involuntary. Thus, the choice of language means (verbs and syntactic structures) will depend on whether this component is activated or not. The optional component GOAL, by which we understand the goal to remember, to memorize something, to remind of something, etc., is ontologically related to the VOLITION

component and forms a single block with it, since a person will make efforts to perform a mnemonic action only on answering the question "What for?". This unity of the two components allows the speaker to express explicitly in a sentence only one of them. As for the second one, it is activated simultaneously and therefore is implied: *Where would she go? Has she really been serious about quitting the job? Jack recalled the fatalistic look on her face and concluded that, yes, she had been serious (Baldacci).* – This sentence describes the situation of voluntary recalling, when the main character makes a special effort to recall every detail of the past in order to solve the problem caused by the disappearance of the girl (the GOAL component is presented explicitly, the VOLITION component is implicit).

The EVALUATION component is qualified as optional, since the mnemonic situation is not always assessed by the SUBJECT, but even if it is evaluated, there is always a range of opinions and attitudes towards the object of evaluation. The EVALUATION expresses the attitude of the SUBJECT to the OBJECT, qualifies the OBJECT. In English, EVALUATION can be represented by a variety of adjectives and adverbs in a sentence.

On the basis of the typology of assessments offered by N. D. Arutunova (1988), we have identified the following types in regard to mnemonic situations:

- general assessment refers to how well the memory works. To evaluate the quality of the memory processes, one can use such adverbs as: *good/bad, well*, or their contextual synonyms: *perfectly, clearly, correctly* and others. The speed of the memory processes can be qualified by means of the following adverbs: *quickly, briefly, immediately, at once* and others. The period during which mental images tend to preserve their original state can be described by such adverbs, as: *permanently, temporarily, always* and others;

- individual assessment refers to the emotional attitude a person feels toward certain events kept in the memory. Such type of assessment can be expressed by various descriptive words (adjectives or adverbs): *pleasant, rueful(ly), gently* and others. Describing this type of assessments, N.D. Arutyunova notes that they are usually not motivated, since they originate from what a person feels regardless of will and self-control: *Jack's face flashed across her mind. She angrily pushed it out (Baldacci).* Next, the most important obligatory conceptual attribute of the mnemonic situation seems to be "mentality", since memory processes refer to the mental sphere. Another obligatory attribute of a mnemonic situation is the "connection with the past", as one can process intellectually only the event, that has already occurred. The obligatory attributes "reality", "knowledge", "truth" determine each other, since mnemonic processes are always associated with a person's true knowledge of real events. As we see it, the obligatory component PREDICATE is associated with some optional conceptual

attributes that specify the mnemonic situation. Thus, the activation of the TYPE attribute can specify the mnemonic process (memorization, preservation, forgetting, reproduction), as well as, the type of memory (visual, auditory, etc.). Among the optional attributes, we should mention the "focus on the future", since memory is a mental system that regulates the subject's behaviour in relation to the future. This attribute is activated mainly in the situation when something or someone makes somebody remember something important that they must do: *Remind me to answer this letters this evening* (Oxford Dictionary).

Consequently, the profiling of the components and attributes of the frame and a certain perspective from which the frame is viewed result in lexical synonymy. Lexical meanings of memory verbs (remember, recall, reminisce, recollect, remind, think, mind, forget, memorize) are associated with the only frame by focusing on its individual elements. Profiling of the components of the frame determines the choice of the syntactic structure and the function of the verb in it. So, as a result of our analysis it was found that memory verbs can be placed in the center of the sentences of two types. The first type can be presented by the scheme S + V + O, where S is the semantic subject, V is a predicate, O is the semantic object. As for the second one, it is the so called causative construction S1/O1 + V + S2 + O2, where S1 is the agent, O1 is the cause, V is a predicate, S2 is the patient, O2 is the effect. The syntactic model S + V + O profiles subject-object relationships, focusing not on how, but on what a person remembers in a broad sense: *She remembered something about the plaza* (Waller). The sentence model S1/O1 + V + S2 + O2 profiles the relationship between the STIMULUS and the SUBJECT within the mnemonic situation, emphasizing the effect the STIMULUS has on the SUBJECT in order to change the latter's state: *The scene reminded him a little of Provence* (Durand). Thus, the basis for the primary classification of memory verbs can be their ability to organize around themselves sentences of one of two types. The scheme S1/O1 + V + S2 + O2 can be implemented by the verbs "remind" and "recall", and the scheme S + V + O can be manifested by all other verbs from the list given above.

Furthermore, memory verbs focus on such obligatory attributes of the concept of memory as "mentality", "connection with the past", "knowledge", "truth", "reality". However, each memory verb represents one or more optional attributes when taken by itself or within a sentence. The profiling of the optional attribute TYPE allows us to distribute memory verbs into groups in accordance with the memory processes they nominate. Such verbs as *remember, recall, recollect, reminisce, bethink, mind* are used to describe the situation when a person brings back to their mind some piece of information. Such verbs as *memorize and remember* focus on the process of learning something carefully to remember something

exactly. Such verbs as *remember* and *forget* can describe one's ability or inability to store information. Verbs *recall* and *remind* focus on the stimulating factor, which makes you think about something that you have forgotten or would like to forget. When the obligatory components "VOLITION" and "GOAL" are activated, then due to the lexical meanings of certain verbs (recall, reminisce, recollect, mind, memorize), the mnemonic process is qualified as voluntary, when the SUBJECT deliberately remembers, stores and reproduces information: *recollect – to be able to remember something, especially by deliberately trying to remember* (Longman Dictionary). Other memory verbs represent this feature only on the functional level, when combined with additional meaning modifiers (for example, modal verbs; verbs with the meaning of effort, goal, desire; grammatical forms of progressive, imperative, etc.): *I too was remembering the fishing expeditions we used to have* (Whitehead). The profiling of the optional component ASSESSMENT can be represented in the meanings of verbs on the system level (reminisce) and on the functional level (all other verbs, combined with meaning modifiers): *reminisce – to talk or think about pleasant events in the past* (Longman Dictionary). *People will remember it for a long time* (Baldacci). *That was an event she could not recall with pleasure* (Whitehead).

However, the frame of memory can interact with the neighboring frames. As a result of such interaction non-memory verbs are able to nominate memory processes on the functional level (in the speech). Among such non-memory verbs we can name the verbs of motion, sensory perception, cognition, and preservation, since not only verbs with the system meaning of memory, but also verbs of other semantic groups can describe situations of memorizing, remembering, forgetting, and reproducing information. We have identified frames that are regularly activated along with the "memory" frame by their lexical representatives. The "memory" frame can interact with the "motion" frame. The latter is activated by the verbs of motion, pursuit, manipulation, reverse movement, rotational motion (to flood, to fill, to seize, to slam, to banish, to block, to clear, to wander back, to drift back, etc.): *George's mind tumbled back to initial visions* (Hill). *Jack's words came back, biting hard* (Baldacci). *After that I'll tuck him away in a corner of my head* (Durand). The frame "sensory perception" can be represented together with the "memory" frame on the functional level by the verbs of visual and auditory perception, some verbs of sound (to see, to visualize, to picture, to hear, to reverberate, to sound, to echo, to reverb, etc.): *He tried visualizing what he had watched on TV* (Clark). *But the words kept reverberating in her head* (Sheldon). *I could still hear them teasing in low voices* (Cornwell). As memory processes are mental, cognitive by their nature, it is obvious that memory processes can be nominated by the

hyperonymic verbs of cognition: to think, to reflect, to look back, to retrospect, to know, to learn, to recognize: *When she reflected on her adventures of the previous night...*(Maughm). *He knew Nuala's phone number from memory...*(Clark). In case the frame "memory" is activated together with the frame "preservation" the verbs of preservation (to retain, to hold, to keep, to preserve, etc.) can specify the process of saving information: *He kept in his head the plan...*(Durand).

We concluded that taking into account cognitive mechanism of frame interaction, when one cognitive model is activated together with another one, non-memory verbs can be considered as (quasi)synonyms of verbs with the system meaning of memory. It becomes possible if they are included into the semantically filled sentence, which simultaneously activates the frame "memory".

One of the ways to activate frame "memory" with its obligatory attributes "mentality", "reality", "knowledge", "truth", "connection with the past" is to introduce into the structure of the sentence the nouns that nominate "locality" of mnemonic processes (mind, brain, memory, head, thoughts): *His face loomed up in her mind* (Clark). *Anna's mind returned to the evening that had led to it all* (Mosco). Another way to represent the obligatory features of the "memory" frame in case it overlaps other frames is to use the nouns "memory", "recollection", "image", "remembrance" in the meaning of "memory image" as hyperonymic nouns that can nominate the OBJECT. It is also possible to activate frame "memory" by means of some adverbs, for example "mentally": *She conjured up memories from the past...*(Murdoch).

When the frame "memory" interacts with the frame "cognition" the obligatory attribute "mentality" is represented in the text by the lexical meaning of the verbs of cognition. The representation of the obligatory attribute "connection with the past" (simultaneously accompanied by the attributes "knowledge", "truth", "reality") is carried out in the text by some modifiers: the postpositive "back" with the verbs "think", "look"; the adjective "previous" or the Past/Present Perfect form of the verbs in the relative clause: *Donald...thought back to the visit he had had from Justin Wells* (Clark).

In case of the "memory" frame and the "sensory perception" frame interaction, the obligatory attributes of the "memory" frame are implicitly represented in the sentence. It becomes possible to guess that the sense verb nominates a memory process from the adjacent context: *The familiar scent seized me with emotion. Suddenly I saw him behind her desk... I remembered his striking features...*(Cornwell).

To sum up, unlike the verbs with the system meaning of memory, verbs of other semantic groups cannot verbalize all the obligatory attributes of the "memory" frame only by their lexical meanings. They can participate in the description of a mnemonic situation only if there are special modifiers representing obligatory attributes that are not covered by the lexical meaning of non-memory verbs. However, verbs of other semantic groups activate the frames together with the "memory" frame in order to specify memory processes in this or that way. Such interaction of the frame "memory" and the frames "motion", "sensory perception", "preservation", "cognition" results in a certain "mental picture" of the mnemonic processes, which is particularly important when a person needs to qualify mental processes that cannot be manifested by facial expressions or gestures.

Conclusion

The main result, in our opinion, is the confirmation of the hypothesis that the verbs nominating memory processes have a common cognitive basis – the frame "memory", and the choice of the verbal lexeme is stipulated by specific mechanisms of human information processing: the perspectivization of some features and ignoring others, or the interaction of cognitive structures.

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