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THE CONCEPTS *CENTRE* AND *PERIPHERY* IN THE HISTORY OF LINGUISTICS: FROM FIELD THEORY TO MODERN COGNITIVISM

The terms "centre" and "periphery" commonly used nowadays in cognitive studies of language can be traced to earlier linguistic theories. One is field theory advanced by German linguists in the inter-war period. Here, the notions of centre and periphery, along with an array of other spatial images served to visualize the structure of lexical fields. Another tradition in the use of the terms stems from the works of the Prague linguistic circle. Czech scholars claimed that linguistic units vary in their degree of integration into the system. Well-integrated items are associated with the notion of centre while those lacking integration are characterized as peripheral. Cognitive linguistics has offered yet another perspective on the notions concerned. Drawing on Eleanor Rosch's prototype theory, centre is associated with the category's best example and periphery with its non-typical members. Thus, terms being the same, their implications differ significantly. It turns out that both field theory and Prague school used them in the context of language-as-an-autonomous-structure view, in accordance with the dominant structuralist paradigm. Cognitive linguistics picked up the psychological approach to the notions of centre and periphery, linking them to subjects' ratings of category members, and hence to our mental models of the world. These interpretations more often are compatible than non-compatible.

KEY WORDS: field theory, Prague linguistic circle, cognitive linguistics, categorization.

1. Introduction

In present-day linguistics it is commonly acknowledged that the conception of natural language as a regular, hierarchical, neatly patterned system does not hold. Linguistic phenomena neither naturally fall into non-overlapping classes nor have equal status within classes. To account for asymmetries in language, scholars have often resorted to the notions of centre and periphery. The terms have become so habitual that are normally taken for granted and employed without any reference whatsoever. In cognitive linguistics, their interpretation and justification rest on Eleanor Rosch's prototype theory; however, this is by no means the only source of their vitality in linguistic studies.

Well before cognitive research on categorization began, the terms *centre* and *periphery* had been introduced into European linguistics by (at least) two distinct academic schools. One was field theory (*Wortfeldtheorie*) thoroughly elaborated by German linguists in the inter-war period. The other major tradition stems from the works of Prague linguistic circle whose activity was on the rise throughout the same period. However, as will be shown below, terms being the same, their background and implications differed significantly.

2. Field theory

The terms *centre* and *periphery* (with reference to language asymmetries) seem to have originated in field theory advanced by Jost Trier, Leo Weisgerber, Walther Porzig and other German linguists in 1920–1930s. The very term *field* was coined by Günther Ipsen. In his words, the semantic field (*Bedeutungsfeld*) is a space neatly divided, without neither gaps nor overlaps, into smaller spaces corresponding to individual word meanings in essentially the same way a mosaic is composed of individual small stones: "Words in a language do not exist on their own but are arranged in semantic groups <…> like in a mosaic, words are linked together outlining one another so that their contours merge" (Ipsen 1924: 225) (translation mine—T. S.). Being well aware of the term's metaphorical nature, Ipsen (1932: 16) noted: "At the same time, semantic fields are means of grasping the language, they are metaphors…" (translation mine—T. S.).

Among the scholars who quickly picked up the field concept, Trier's early elaborations were perhaps closest to the original. Thus, he retained the mosaic metaphor, which implied the closeness of the field, its neat division (*Gliederung*) into smaller units, clear outer and inner boundaries (*Außen- und Innengrenzen*). Trier distinguished between the conceptual field (*Begriffsfeld*) and the lexical field (*Wortfeld*), or the linguistic field (*sprachliches Feld*). A conceptual field corresponds to a content domain (*Sinnbezirk, Sinnbereich, Sinngebiet*). Most conceptual fields are naturally thought of as two-dimensional, though that of examination marks, for instance, is conceived as a line. The space of the field (*Raum*) is gaplessly (*lückenlos*) divided into parts (*Ausschnitte, Stücke*) corresponding to the conceptual content of words that make it up. Conceptual and lexical fields are considered isomorphic. Both have clear-cut outer boundaries and are strictly divided into individual concepts and words respectively.

According to Trier, each word has its unique place in the lexical field determined by its semantic relations with other words of the same field. In a field, words can be situated nearer or farther from one another (*enger oder ferner benachbart sein*). The boundaries between neighbouring words (*Nachbarn*) are as clear-cut as the outlines of individual stones in a mosaic (*Mosaiksteinchen*). Within a field different areas can be identified, such as "centre" (*Mittelpunkt*)*,* "kernel" (*Kernstück, Kernwort*), "periphery" (*Peripherie*), borderline areas" (*Randzonen*).

The linguistic field is not an isolated sphere in the vocabulary. As individual words are arranged to form a field, lexical fields articulate into fields of a higher order until an overall linguistic vision of the world (*Weltbild*) is obtained.

Time brings about changes in delineation and structure of the field. Both outer and inner boundaries keep shifting and the whole field is constantly reshaping. Being critical of Ferdinand de Saussure's opposition of synchronic and diachronic treatment of language, Trier saw the field concept as a means to overcome this division and re-establish the integrity of linguistic study.

The spatial metaphor of the linguistic field as a territory partitioned into smaller areas informs Trier's works of 1930s. Its dominance seems natural: the metaphorical meaning is explained in terms of the primary meaning of the same word. Later Trier (1973: 193) confessed that when he had come across it in an Ipsen's paper it was like an insight: "…

his <Ipsen's> term *field* proved quite useful, it was like a sudden insight for me" (translation mine—T. S.).

Moreover, the field metaphor offers an incredibly simple model of the linguistic field as a closed entity with neatly delineated borderlines. It is no surprise, then, that despite criticism and his own shift toward more complex images, this idea recurs in Trier's later works. It shows in the puzzle metaphor (essentially the same as the mosaic one) and in the metaphor of a net being thrown over a domain, its cell structure determining partitioning of the corresponding field, cf.: "<...>...a net is thrown over a domain, and its cells determine the concepts that speakers have at their disposal" (Trier 1973: 190) (translation mine—T. S.). Interestingly, a similar image was used by Rudolf Hallig and Walther von Wartburg (1963: 63) to account for the overall design of their ideological dictionary: "Our schema must be constructed in such a fashion that it could be drawn over the linguistic conception of the world like the latitude and longitude grid" (translation mine—T. S.).

However, to deflect criticism and being aware of oversimplification inherent in these straightforward images, in his later works Trier put forward a couple of more complex metaphors for the field concept. The image of mosaic stones came to be replaced by that of starlike radiant kernels located so, that they touch (or can potentially touch) one another with their ray tips (Trier 1972: 930). The new metaphor signals a shift in the overall conception: while originally both outer and inner boundaries are thought clear, as the outlines of stones, now Trier admits that they are often uncertain and blurred.

Another highly creative metaphor from Trier's later papers is that of a horse race. The linguistic field is compared with a field with horses running through space and time whereby their relative positions and values of these positions keep changing (Trier 1972: 930). This metaphor, offering a combination of static and dynamic perspectives, perhaps best of all embodies Trier's idea of the field designed to bring together descriptive and historical linguistic research.

All Trier's works are heavily metaphor-laden which must be due to the metaphorical nature of the basic concept; Trier, as well as Ipsen (see above) made an explicit statement to the fact: "We must admit, though, that the term *field* is a metaphor. There are rigorous persons who would like to ban metaphors in linguistics. But the metaphorical process goes deep into the very essence of language, being in general a prerequisite of its functioning" (Trier 1973: 188–199) (translation mine—T. S.). He hoped, though, that eventually the field metaphor would become conventional, as it happens to all metaphors in the long run, and nobody would any longer wonder about the origin of the term.

In his research, Trier was inspired by the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Ferdinand de Saussure, to whose works he referred more than once. Yet another possible source of influence can be pointed out. Thus, Suzanne Öhman (1953:128) argued that Trier's field concept implies "a dynamic relationship exactly like that between the parts of a field in Gestalt psychology, with each event in a part of the field influencing all other parts of the field". As for the concept of field in Gestalt psychology, it can in turn be traced to gravitational fields in physics. This suggestion, however, looks even more valid if applied to the conception of language put forward by members of the Prague linguistic circle.

3. Prague linguistic circle

While Jost Trier in dealing with language asymmetries relied largely on static spatial images, Czech scholars introduced a number of force-dynamics metaphors for the same purpose. František Daneš (1966: 12) wrote: "The system of language may thus be presented as space with an uneven density of elements, structured according to the principle "Centre—Periphery—Transition", or as masses of centres with their "fields of gravitation" (of various extent and power) which are in contact, mutually infiltrate one another and are hierarchically ordered <…>".

The idea of unequal status of linguistic items in the system of language had been discussed at length by Czech linguists throughout the inter-war period. Actually, the instability of language system was pointed out by Vilém Mathesius as early as 1912, when his paper on potentiality of linguistic phenomena appeared (Mathesius 1912).

The instability and incomplete balance in language was a major topic running through the works of Czech linguists. They maintained that language is an open system undergoing constant change due to the inherent lack of balance. At every moment and on every linguistic level one can find items of varying degrees of integration into the system, hence the differentiation between central and peripheral items. Well-integrated items were associated with the notion of *centre* while those lacking integration were characterised as *peripheral*. The periphery of the language system enjoyed much more attention in the Prague linguistic circle than in any other linguistic school. It was described in terms of irregularity, non-productivity, possibility, variability, rarity, exceptionality (Leška 1966). However, Czech linguists stressed that no clear line exists separating centre and periphery; rather, many items are located in a transitional zone and can be defined as *more central* or *more peripheral*. Moreover, centres are not static: they have their gravitation fields and interact with one another.

Generalizing across particular manifestations of the asymmetries in language, Czech scholars advanced the idea that "some lack of balance is even an indispensable pre-requisite for the development of language" and "the co-existence of the central and peripheral elements in the system of language <...> constitutes another hardly unimportant universal feature of language" (Vachek 1966: 32–33).

Force-dynamics metaphors also showed up in the works of scholars who did not belong to the Prague linguistic circle but are known to have been under its influence. Thus, Sergej Karcevskij (1927) in his discussion of Russian morphological verb classes relied on the notions of *energy, force, activation, radiation, attraction*. Having identified five verb classes, he then structured them according to the centre-periphery principle, each centre being metaphorically viewed as the source of radiation and associated with the notion of productivity. Language as a whole, according to Karcevskij, is a system of semiological centres of radiation.

In his famous book "Economy of sound changes", André Martinet (1955) lavishly used physical terms to account for historical phonological processes. Here, the abundance of force-dynamics metaphors (e.g. *poussée, pression, attraction, propulsion, déplacement, mouvement, déviation, extension, dispersion, centre de gravité, réaction en chaîne*) may

have been due to the significant achievements in physics (nuclear physics, in particular) witnessed after World War II.

4. Cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics has developed the idea of asymmetries in natural language from the so-called "prototype theory of categories" advanced by cognitive psychologist Eleanor Rosch. Having accumulated huge empirical evidence on the way subjects rated members of common everyday categories (such as *bird, furniture, vegetable,* etc.), Rosch challenged the conventional, classical, view which holds that categories have clear and fixed boundaries and are defined by a set of necessary and sufficient attributes, all members having equal status within the category. Rosch argued that this conception is cognitively inadequate. Her experimental data showed that some category members were judged to be more representative ("good examples"), others less representative ("bad examples"). The "best example" was associated with the category's prototype, and the asymmetry between category members in this perspective has come to be known as the "prototype effect".

Rosch seems to have made no use of the terms *centre* and *periphery*, but they became abundant in later interpretations of her work. Thus, in discussing the prototype theory George Lakoff (1987:12) introduced the term *centrality* to convey the "idea that some members of a category may be "better examples" of that category than others". Centrality is graded, so that one can speak of *more* and *less central* as well as *more* and *less peripheral* members of a category. The notion of the central member is associated with those of the best example and category prototype.

Summarizing numerous experimental findings, Lakoff (1987) claims that the structure of categories varies. Some of them (e.g. *bird*) have clear boundaries and can be visualised as two-dimensional, with the best example located at the geometrical centre and other members seen as extensions from it (Ungerer, Schmid 1996: 27). This is perhaps the most obvious with what Lakoff has called radial categories. Other categories, like *cups*, have fuzzy boundaries and their periphery merges into that of adjacent categories (such as *mugs, bowls and vases*) (Labov 1973). There are also categories, like *tall man*, members of which are arranged in a line and the best example is associated with one end of the line rather than its geometrical centre. Interestingly, similar structures had earlier been identified by Trier with respect to semantic fields. Thus, the structure of the *bird* category is reminiscent of his original conception of the field, while that of the *cup* category can be accounted for by the metaphor of starlike radiant kernels (see above). Categories with linear arrangement of members can be compared to the one-dimensional fields.

John Taylor (1989) convincingly demonstrated the usefulness of the prototype theory in dealing with linguistic categories on all levels of language structure. From phonology to syntax, category membership is gradable, with asymmetries between prototypical and non-prototypical units being conveniently handled in terms of their *central* (*more central, less central, non-central, etc.*) or *peripheral* (*marginal, borderline, etc.*) status in the category. The most remarkable case is perhaps polysemy, both lexical and grammatical. Thus, the fact that individual senses of a word lack close delineation and stability (the same applying to the semantic content of the words, too), defies the classical view of categories but can be accomodated by the prototype theory.

In particular, cognitive scholars have put forward a number of different models of polysemy designed to represent the semantic structure of words, morphemes and syntactic constructions. They are lexical networks, with nodes normally corresponding to individual senses, and links reflecting the relations between the senses. Aiming at cognitive adequacy, it is assumed that the salience of the nodes as well as the distance between them may vary. The pictures of such networks automatically prompt spatial metaphors (*central, periphe-ral, marginal, close, far, adjacent,* etc.). Given such graphical justification, the terms in question look natural and self-evident. However, it should be noted that the notions of a central meaning and extensions from it have long been established and cannot be counted a recent cognitive development. Throughout centuries, lexicographers elaborating the inner structure of dictionary entries have done virtually the same thing, grouping similar instances together and pondering relations between the groups.

Discussion

The fuzziness of linguistic categories and the ensuing complications for the classical theory were not discovered by cognitivists, either. As Daneš argues (1966: 10), "the situations in which our analytic practice meets the difficulty or even impossibility to determine unambiguously the place of the given item in the system, are very often con-nected with classing linguistic units with different categories. Mostly the difficulties lie in the assumption that each element contains all properties of the given category and that it contains them to the full extent (in other words, that the categories are clear-cut and unambiguously delimited)".

Having corroborated the thesis with a few examples he concludes that (Ibid 11): "All such insoluble dilemmas and useless disputes can be clearly removed if one gives up the common notion of strict compartmentalization and simply admits an obvious idea, viz. that the organization of linguistic elements in the "system of systems" has a different nature, a different structure, than is usually assumed: the classes (and subclasses) of elements should not be regarded as "boxes" with clear-cut boundaries but as formations with a compact core (*centre*) and with a gradual transition into a diffuse periphery which, again, gradually passes (infiltrates) into the peripheral domain of the next category".

This line of reasoning is strikingly similar to modern cognitive treatments of linguistic categories, and one cannot but agree with Dirk Geeraerts (1988: 674) that Lakoff (1987) has overstated the novelty of the prototype approach to natural language. Thus, the un-derlying conception of linguistic categorization in general and the notions of centre and periphery in particular held by cognitivists were anticipated in earlier works by scholars belonging to different academic traditions.

Yet a problem arises concerning the nature of centrality with respect to linguistic categories. Is might be questioned what is actually meant when a member is qualified as central or peripheral and on what criteria the judgement is based. Taylor (1989) has suggested two possible frameworks for the interpretation of this notion, one structuralist, the other psychological. Structurally, centrality can be understood as a function of the relations between categories and of their internal structure. It is this approach that clearly underlies the interpretation of the notions "centre" and "periphery" in Trier's works and

in Prague linguistic circle. The psychological approach, favoured by cognitivists, empha-sizes mental unity of the category and explains its extensions in terms of subconscious adaptations. Though distinct, the psychological and the structuralist approaches do not necessarily yield different results.

To sum up, the terms *centre* and *periphery* are popular with linguists because they make it possible to account for specific features of language organization such as blurred boundaries of linguistic categories and membership gradience. These terms seem self-explanatory due to the inherent orientation metaphor, but this is misleading. The metaphor is too general and allows of different interpretations. The identity of terms does not gener-ally guarantee the identity of notions behind them, and this is indeed the case with *centre* and *periphery*. The notions of centrality suggested by the field theory, Prague linguistic circle and cognitive studies more often than not are incompatible.

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CENTRO IR *PERIFERIJOS* SĄVOKOS LINGVISTIKOS ISTORIJOJE: NUO LAUKO TEORIJOS IKI ŠIUOLAIKINIO KOGNITYVIZMO

Santrauka
Šiandien dažnai kognityvinėse kalbos studijose minimos sąvokos *centras* ir *periferija* gali būti kildinamos iš ankstesnių lingvistinių teorijų. Viena iš jų yra lauko teorija, kurią tarpukariu patobulino vokiečių lingvistai. Joje centro ir periferijos sampratos kartu su kitais erdviniais įvaizdžiais padėjo vizualizuoti leksinių laukų struktūrą. Kita sąvokų vartojimo tradicija kildinama iš Prahos lingvistinio ratelio kalbininkų darbų. Čekų mokslininkai teigė, kad leksiniai vienetai skiriasi savo integracijos į sistemą mastu. Tinkamai integruoti elementai yra siejami su centro sąvoka, o tie, kurių įsiliejimas nepilnas, apibūdinami kaip periferiniai. Remiantis Eleonoros Rosch prototipų teorija, centras yra siejamas su geriausiu kategorijos objektu, o periferija su netipiniais objektais. Taigi, nepaisant terminų vienodumo, jų reikšmės skiriasi. Paaiškėja, kad tiek lauko teorijoje, tiek Prahos lingvistinės mokyklos tradicijoje šie terminai naudojami kalbos-kaip-anoniminės-struktūros kontekste, pritaikant vyraujančią struktūralizmo paradigmą. Kognityvinė lingvistika centro ir periferijos sąvokoms pritaikė psichologinį metodą, susiedama minėtas sąvokas su kategorijos narių vertinimu, taigi su mūsų pasaulio suvokimo modeliu. Šios traktuotės dažniau suderinamos, nei nesuderinamos.
REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: lauko teorija, Prahos lingvistinis ratelis, kognityvinė lingvistika, kategorizacija.

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POJĘCIA 'CENTRUM' I 'PERYFERIE' W HISTORII JĘZYKOZNAWSTWA: OD TEORII POLA DO WSPÓŁCZESNEGO KOGNITYWIZMU

Streszczenie
Obecnie często stosowane w kognitywnych studiach nad językiem pojęcia 'centrum' i 'peryferie' mogą się wywodzić z wcześniejszych teorii lingwistycznych. Jedną z nich jest teoria pola, którą w okresie międzywojennym udoskonalili niemieccy językoznawcy. W teorii tej pojęcia centrum i peryferii wraz z innymi obrazami przestrzennymi pomogły zwizualizować strukturę pól leksykalnych. Inna tradycja stosowania tych pojęć ma swoje korzenie w pracach językoznawców z Praskiego Koła Lingwistycznego. Czescy naukowcy twierdzili, że jednostki leksykalne różnią się między sobą stopniem integracji do systemu. Dobrze zintegrowane elementy są związane z pojęciem centrum, podczas gdy te, których zlanie się jest niepełne, są określane jako peryferyjne. Na podstawie teorii prototypów Eleanor Rosch centrum jest kojarzone z najlepszym obiektem kategorii, zaś peryferie z obiektami nietypowymi. Zatem, mimo identyczności terminów, ich znaczenia się różnią. Okazuje się, że zarówno w teorii pola, jak i tradycji szkoły praskiej terminy te są używane w kontekście języka-jako-autonomicznej-struktury, zgodnie z dominującym paradygmatem strukturalistycznym. Językoznawstwo kognitywne wybrało dla pojęć centrum i peryferii metodę psychologiczną, wiążąc je z oceną członów kategorii, zatem z naszym modelem postrzegania świata. Takie interpretacje częściej są niekompatybilne niż kompatybilne.
SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: teoria pola, Praskie Koło Lingwistyczne, językoznawstwo kognitywne, kategoryzacja.