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INTENTIONALITY AND CONVENTIONAL MEANING (SOCIO-HISTORICAL APPROACH)

Linguistic studies of collective consciousness are practically nonexistent though insightful ideas are found in works of many linguists (Chomsky 1985, Fowler 1996). The central tenet of this paper is that archetypes (mental representations of concepts in collective consciousness) are built around socially significant experiences of people and comprise meanings which incarnate collective sentiments and ideologies. The number and composition of such meanings can change and vary due to an interplay of environmental factors – social, political, economic, cultural, etc. – and can be drawn from discourses which perform an ideational function concerned with the representation of world views in a language. Two propositions are preconditional for the present research: first, the acknowledgement of the force of authorial intent (intentionality) in discourse and, second, the assumption that over a long history, language has learnt to suit the needs of the society it functions in (mainly the needs of dominant social groups) by legitimatizing some meanings (conventional meanings) and rejecting others. The concept chosen for the analysis is monetary DEBT. Debt plays an important role both in the economic life of a country and in private lives of individuals. The attitude to debt has been changing throughout the history, and we hypothesize that economic discourses have had a major impact on collective perception of the concept in question.

KEY WORDS: collective consciousness, archetype, archetypal meaning, discourse, intentionality, ideational meaning, conventional meaning.

The concept of DEBT

When students start reading newspapers and magazines they may come across such a statement: “A home mortgage is the best kind of **debt**: The interest is usually low, it’s tax deductible and it finances a durable asset” (BNC-1999). So, is debt good? They hear on TV every day: “Depressed? Go on a shopping spree. Use your credit card. You are worth it.” Charge cards are pushed on them

in big department stores. Debt seems to be the answer to all problems. They also know that the richest country in the world is the biggest debtor. They study in economics that there is debt capital, but it has ruined not one company. Has it always been like that? And what is this wondrous phenomenon called ‘debt’? The present article is an attempt to look into the concept of DEBT from the socio-historical and linguistic points of view.

The subject matter is economic discourses centered on the notion of debt. **The aim** of the research is to analyze the structure of the archetype and the composition of archetypal meanings via a discourse analysis set against a broad social and historical background. **The objectives** are: 1) to study archetypal meanings in a historical perspective; 2) trace shifts in their combination and content; 3) try and find a plausible explanation to such shifts; and 4) analyze linguistic devices used in discourses which perform a perlocutive function.

Collective consciousness and intentionality

Ever since the publication of Emile Durkheim's (Durkheim 1997) pioneer work introducing collective consciousness as a set of common beliefs and collective practices shared by members of a society, the content of collective consciousness described in terms of either Jung's archetypes (Jung 1981) or Gee's cultural models (Gee 1996), or Neumann's cultural canon (Neumann 1995) has been studied in philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and other sciences (Gray 1996). This paper takes a linguistic approach to this phenomenon and hypothesizes that a concept is represented in the minds of people as a bundle of archetypal meanings whose conception and continual change occur in written or oral discourses and, consequently, can be construed from these discourses. The number and composition of archetypal meanings can vary under the influence of exogenous factors: religious beliefs, economic and political ideas, various ideologies and ethical norms.

The fundamental property of human consciousness to be directed at the outside

world is instrumental in forming collective mental representations (archetypes) which are saturated with various ideologies because numerous social factors come into play when archetypes are constructed and communicated through discourses. Intentionality may be viewed from different angles. The above mentioned property of the human mind is called intentionality or "aboutness" and goes back to medieval scholars. It was introduced to modern philosophy by F. Brentano (Brentano 1995) and later constituted the cornerstone of Husserl's phenomenology (Husserl 1973). Husserl distinguished a "situation of affairs" (a given context) and a "state of affairs" (judgment about this context). One situation of affairs through acts of consciousness can generate multiple states of affairs. Husserl understood the meaning of a sentence as a proposition or judgment which refers to a state of affairs with a situation of affairs being its reference base.

This takes us to the second understanding of intentionality, regarded as authorial intent, i.e. why a discourse is produced the way it is. Modern philosophers stress authorial intent as a clue to meaning, with the author being a "rational agent who harbors beliefs and desires and other mental states and whose actions can be explained on the basis of the content of these states" (Dennet 1991, p.76). When producing a discourse, the speech originator takes a particular perspective which involves deciding what is normal, acceptable, moral, right, possible, and what is not (Gee 1999).

And finally, intentionality is understood as the ability of a discourse to be oriented towards recipients and produce a certain effect, also called dialogicality (Bakhtin 1975).

Meaning in Discourse

There are many definitions of discourse. In this article, by discourse we mean “a continuous stretch of language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative” (Crystal 1992, p. 25). Discourse has been a focus of attention in philosophy, linguistics, psycholinguistics, social sciences, psychology, anthropology, cognitive sciences, political sciences, etc. (Shiffrin 2000, Foucault 1989, Fairclough 2001, Pêcheux 1982, Gee 1999, Gunnell 1998, Levelt 1989). Our interest is in the ‘economic discourse’ by which we mean discourses, through which their originators (authors) view economic issues.

Paul Grice was, probably, the first scientist to have incorporated intentional meaning into the semantics of an utterance/discourse. According to his theory, to mean something by an utterance is equivalent to intending to produce some effect in an audience by an utterance with the audience recognizing this intention (Grice 1957). Unlike Gricean theory of meaning, D. Lewis’s approach to meaning is based on conventionality. According to this philosopher, language is ruled by convention, i.e. linguistic meaning is shared by people and constitutes common basis for successful communication (Lewis 2002). R. Fowler went so far as to suggest that language as a code system is a result of social convention, and that concepts and meanings are conventionally constructed. His vision of conventionality entails an existence of certain patterns of behavior and thinking among large groups of people relating to meaning. He thinks that language is deeply ideological and that many concepts are loaded in favor of political or economic interests of certain groups of people

(Fowler, 1996). M. Halliday was, probably, the first scientist to see the ideological dimension of meaning. Language performs simultaneously three functions: the textual (organizing messages), the interpersonal (interacting with other people), and the ideational (encoding world-views or ideologies) (Halliday 1994). The extreme views are expressed by French sociologists who claim that “words, expressions, etc. change their meaning according to the ideological positions held by those who use them” (Pêcheux 1982, p. 111).

In this paper, we apply an integrated approach to the analysis of the meaning of discourse and assume that it has a threefold dimension: authorial intent, or the desire to influence the public (intentional meaning), which manifests itself in the author’s attitude to the conventional meaning of the concept referred to, the attitude depending on the author’s personal views or his conformity to mainstream ideology (ideational meaning); together they impact the recipient and may cause changes in the conventional meaning. Words may change their conventional meaning in discourses or acquire new meanings as they ‘slip’ from one discursive formation to another (Pêcheux 1982).

Methods and Material

As it has been stated above, the subject matter of this research is the concept of DEBT represented by the word *debt* in the English language, which has two distinct meanings: ‘moral obligation’ and ‘pecuniary indebtedness’; we are concerned with the latter only. To get at archetypal meanings, we have analyzed discourses from American newspapers and magazines over a period of two centuries drawn from the British

National Corpus (BNC). The meanings were sorted out manually.

The main methodology used in the paper is a qualitative corpus-based content analysis of discourse. In a discourse, meaning is constructed through the social use of language; the author indicates his/her judgments using a variety of linguistic devices and expresses his attitude to the concept.

Our research is corpus-based because the data of a corpus (in our case, the British National Corpus) represent a real-life language use. The corpus is a good size: it contains about 100 million words, represents different genres, and provides sufficient linguistic evidence. The data represent the language used by a community with common world-views and focus on those things that are most common. Words are presented in contexts, which makes it possible to study discourses. The corpus provides both contemporary and historical data starting from 1810 and has two different corpora for the British and American variants.

Content analysis is employed in this work because it allows studying the concept from the point of view of the message it conveys and gaining an in-depth understanding of its meaning, whether explicit or implicit. We adhere to a broad definition of content analysis offered by Ole Holsti who regards this method as “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti 1969, p. 2). Content analysis does not only help summarize the formal content of written material, it can also describe the attitudes of the author to that material and highlight the dominant views if we deal with large volumes of textual data and the reasons for them.

Let us now examine in some detail one excerpt from the Wall Street Journal in order to show the method used.

*“(1) In many instances, **debt** can be a means to a valuable end, particularly when used prudently to purchase things that hold long-term value, such as an education, a home, or a small business. (2) Even borrowing to buy a car may be wise. (3) **Good debt** improves your life for a long time. (4) It provides an improved standard of living by allowing people access to better jobs or better neighborhoods than they would otherwise have.”(WSJ, 05/06/2007)*

For a start, let us look at modality. The writer expresses various degrees of assurance with the help of modal auxiliaries (can, may, would have); sentences (1) and (2) contain a certain degree of caution, whereas sentences (3) and (4) are positioned as true. Such sentences are called generic sentences; they ostensibly claim something to be a universal truth, and make it look like truth, though it may not be true at all. The discourse contains latent antitheses to sentences (1) and (2): ‘in many cases, debt leads to a disaster and ruin’ and ‘a car is not a good investment because it loses its value over time’. Argumentation in this discourse is based on opposing the conventional and the novel. Firstly, we see a departure from the established conventional meaning of the dichotomy: ‘good debt’—‘bad debt’ (banking) which means ‘debts that are likely to be paid’ versus ‘debts that are likely never to be paid’. The new meaning deemphasizes (defocalization) the idea of repayment (parting with money is not very pleasant) and foregrounds the idea of ‘improved life’ (which is a long-cherished dream of many people). Secondly, a positive emotiveness is created by placing the word *debt* ‘on equal footing’ (semantic prosody) with words which have an established

favorable connotation (home, education, better job) and evaluative adjectives (wise, good, prudent). This discourse is fraught with inner dialogicality: explicitly presented new ideas about debt are at odds with implicitly present conventional wisdom. These linguistic devices are used to impress on people that debt may be beneficial and add a positive coloring to the notorious concept.

Research results (evolution of new archetypal meanings)

By the beginning of the XIX century, a certain archetype had been formed in collective consciousness regarding DEBT based mainly on religious teaching, cultural traditions, practical wisdom, and commonsense. Debts were disapproved of and hard work praised. The main archetypal features of the concept DEBT at that time were: 1) debt is something to be avoided; 2) debt makes a person unfree; 3) debts should be repaid; 4) life is better without debt. “Once there was a golden age of American thrift, when citizens lived sensibly within their means and worked hard to stay out of debt. The growing availability of credit, however, has brought those days to an end – undermining traditional moral virtues such as prudence, diligence, and the delay of gratification while encouraging reckless consumerism” (Calder 2001, p. 1).

As far back as in the XVII century, the British philosopher F. Bacon in his famous “Essays” eulogized debt and usury. He wrote that easy borrowing had two main commodities [advantages]: “*Usury in some respect advanceth merchandizing [business]*” Without it “*there will ensue a great stand of trade*” and “*were it not for easy borrowing, bad markets would swallow*

them [merchants] quite up.” (Bacon, 1957, p. 102) This idea was repeated more than once, later on forming a new archetypal feature ‘debt is good for business’: “*In the competition for trade every encouragement is given to the incurring of **debt**, the creditor relying upon the law to aid him*” (BNC-1816); “*Do not let lack of money or fear of **debt** ever for a moment slow down production.*” (BNC-1940); “*There have been both advantages and disadvantages in the recent rise in **debt**. The advantage was that it promoted a rapid and complete recovery from the 1954 recession.*” (BNC-1955).

Another archetypal feature ‘debt is morally acceptable if it benefits nations and people’ evolved in the middle of the XIX century and was to a great extent inspired by the spread of utilitarian philosophy and ethics whose founder and ardent promoter J. Bentham (1748–1832) claimed that anything that had a positive impact on human welfare and benefited many people was ethically right (Bentham 1970). In the press, we find the following discourses:

“*Your committee will not conceal that they feel a natural repugnance at the idea of a **debt** to be created. Yet a little consideration has made it apparent to them that this **debt** is justified by maxims of prudence as well as by calculations of public profit*” (BNC-1816). or “***debt**, by no means desirable in itself may, when circumstances compel nations to incur its obligations, be made by discreet use less burdensome, and even instrumental in the promotion of public and private security and welfare.*” (BNC-1863).

The next spate in popularizing debt was caused by the appearance of a new social theory – consumerism – which is based on fostering a desire to purchase new things, very often unnecessary. Proponents of this economic behavior tried to convince people

that it was a way out of low standards of living. Debt allowed people to live beyond their means.

“The country people are easily beguiled into believing that many unnecessary things are necessary, and that it costs nothing to buy on the accursed installment plan. They purchase pianos and organs on which they never learn to play; hanging-lamps, rarely lighted, which, when lighted, are unfit to read, to write, or to sew by, etc. Wasteful expenditure is an immediate result” (BNC-1897).

Conspicuous consumerism flourished in the 1950s:

“A difference in mental attitude and sense of values is being inculcated. The people are so eager to rush into debt for television sets and other luxuries that the Government must place restraints on credit buying.” (BNC-1950).

Thus, the idea that ‘debt provides prosperity and luxury’ has taken root in collective thinking. This process of ‘conspicuous consumption’ was interrupted by World War I; however, it added another positive archetypal meaning: ‘debt is patriotic’:

“You mustn’t be timid. Think of the courage our soldiers must show in the trenches, and then stop for a moment and consider whether you are showing anything like equal courage in the way you are proposing to handle the loan.” (BNC-1917).

The credit revolution of the 1920s gave birth to catchphrases: ‘buy now, pay later’, ‘easy little payments’, ‘Beautiful credit!’ Everything – from houses to cars to household appliances – was sold on credit, and household debt skyrocketed. Conferences were held throughout the country to teach people to use credit.

“Women do not make as much use of credit at banks as do men. Women, as a rule, dislike

the idea of being in debt and frequently pass big opportunities which men take advantage of by using their credit. Women must realize that most accumulations of capital have come about through the assumption of obligations” (BNC-1928).

Debt provides an opportunity to succeed.

The trend was interrupted by the Great Depression and World War II only to resume with new intensity in the 1950s.

The 1950s witnessed the final stage in the formation of a new culture – the culture of consumption. The Eisenhower Administration endorsed debt stating that debt was indispensable.

“In the meantime, the debt must be lived with and managed so as to do the least damage to the nation’s economy” (BNC- 1953).

The 1950s also saw the introduction of credit cards which made debt easily accessible. A professor of the Stanford Business School summarized the new attitudinal and behavioral model:

“Our attitude toward debt, which once could lead to prison, has changed. Think only of how consumer debt was merchandised until it became an accepted habit, not an abhorred practice” (BNC-2000).

This model was forced on the society because the Anglo-American economic model regarded individual spending as the largest single factor of economic growth. New archetypal meanings were formed: 1) debt is good for business; 2) debt is morally acceptable; 3) debt is conducive to prosperity; 4) debt provides better opportunities, etc. Nevertheless, it should be wrong to say that the old archetype was ousted; though it receded, it emerged every now and then, especially in times of economic and political troubles.

*“We flattered ourselves that the idea of a permanent **debt** would never be transplanted to American soil. Now, however, attempts are being made in many quarters to seduce us into the belief that it has advantages to compensate for its evils. A more dangerous delusion could not be imposed on a nation.” (BNC-1866). “It’s a bit hard to see the downside of gluttony as we run up thousands of dollars of credit card **debt** without any obvious negative consequences. Greed and consumerism are breaking this nation apart. Frugality seem more, not less, important. It’s obviously up to us, as parents, to decide which morals we want to emphasize” (BNC-2009).*

Conclusion

The study of the concept DEBT presented in this article in a rather cursory way, nevertheless, allows making some conclusions:

1. Archetypes are built around basic experiences and incarnate collective sentiments about a concept. The research has exposed a cumulative building of archetypal meanings catering to the needs of society.
2. New archetypal meanings are conceived in discourses and reflect the ideology of an individual or institution that produced that discourse. Since in each period there exists a dominant normative set of values alongside with opposing points of view, archetypal meanings reflect ideological plurality of a society. However, there are ‘preferred’ archetypal meanings endorsed by dominant social groups.
3. Archetypal meanings have been changing over time, the changes being caused by novel philosophical ideas, economic models, ethical norms, the development of productive forces, etc.

The greatest influence on the structure of the archetype DEBT in American society has been exercised by utilitarian philosophy, welfarist ethics, and social order of consumerism.

4. In indoctrinating new ideas, the media has been playing a potent role by employing a certain argumentative structure of a discourse. We may single out some prototypal features. Discourses are characterized by intrinsic dialogicality (the new – the old; thesis – antithesis; conventional and stable – novel and challenging, etc.). Since meaning in discourse is ideological, oppositional ideologies are always present. Modality, semantic prosody and elaborately formulated generic sentences load DEBT with positive emotiveness and help shift the attitudinal model from complete rejection to tolerance to full acceptance.
5. Practical implications of this research are: we must teach students interpretative reading, by which I mean the ability to explain why a text is written the way it is, what the author says and why, what values and ideologies are reflected in the text, etc. I have been trying to show that any text/discourse is set in social, economic, cultural, ideological conditions as well as a specific historical context and that the meaning of text-forming concepts depends on these conditions. Interpretative reading involves an interdisciplinary approach which requires integrated knowledge of many subjects. To interpret an economic text, besides economics, students must know a bit of philosophy, a bit of sociology, a bit of ethics, and some history.

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INTENCIONALUMAS IR KONVENCIONALI REIKŠMĖ (SOCIALINIS IR ISTORINIS POŽIŪRIS)

Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama skolos sąvoka anglų kalboje, taip pat aiškinamasi, kaip ji reprezentuojama kolektyvinėje sąmonėje, kokius pokyčius ji yra patyrusi ir kokie socialiniai virsmai šiuos pokyčius lėmė. Kolektyvinė sąmonė yra suprantama pagal Emilė'o Durkheimio (1997) apibrėžtį, t. y. tam tikras rinkinys įsitikinimų, elgesio modelių ir vertybių, būdingų kurios nors visuomenės nariams. Kolektyvinės sąmonės turinys yra pristatomas archetipais (Jung 1981) – sąvokų, sudarytų iš įvairių laikui bėgant kintančių reikšmių ir atspindžių žmogaus sąmonėje. Tiriant siekta išnagrinėti, kaip kito archetipinės reikšmės per du šimtmečius nuo 1816 metų (anksčiausias rašytinis diskurso pavyzdys BNC). Straipsnyje taikytas istorinis požiūris, tad buvo pastebėta, kad archetipinės reikšmės kito palaipsniui, tai lėmė vyraujantys filosofiniai, ekonominiai ir ideologiniai požiūriai bei tendencijos.

Pagrindinis tyrimo objektas – ekonominis diskursas, kuriuo perteikiama informacija ekonominiiais klausimais. Šio diskurso reikšmė yra suvokiama per intencionalumą: kas yra sakoma (autorius ketinimas) ir apie ką yra kalbama (skola). Diskurso pobūdį lemia institucija, t. y. jis atspindi jį sukūrusios institucijos ideologiją, šiuo atveju tai buvo spauda. Kiekvienas diskurso pavyzdys analizuotas kokybinės turinio analizės būdu, kuriuo buvo siekiama išsiaiškinti archetipines reikšmes. Taip pat buvo atliekama lingvistinė analizė tipiškiesiems struktūrų ypatumams nustatyti.

Šiuo tyrimu buvo nustatyta, kad dalies visuomenės požiūris į skolą keitėsi dėl galingos spaudos institucijos (vėliau masinių informacijos priemonių) įtakos. Ekonominiame diskurse

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INTENTIONALITY AND CONVENTIONAL MEANING (SOCIO-HISTORICAL APPROACH)

Summary

The article is devoted to the study of how the concept of DEBT in the English language is represented in collective consciousness, what shifts it has undergone, and what social changes have brought these shifts about. We understand collective consciousness in Durkheimian sense as a set of beliefs, behavioral patterns, and values shared in by the members of a society (Durkheim 1997). The content of collective consciousness is represented by archetypes (Jung 1981) – mental representations of concepts comprising a number of meanings which change and vary over time. The aim of the research was to analyze changes in archetypal meanings over a period of two centuries starting from 1816 (the earliest recorded discourse in BNC). The historical approach adopted in the paper made it possible to see the gradual changes in the archetypal meanings under the influence of prevailing philosophical, ethical, economic views, and mainstream ideology.

The main unit of analysis is economic discourse, by which we understand a coherent language unit representing language in use and conveying a message about some economic issue. A clue to discourse meaning is intentionality, that is WHAT is said (authorial intent) and ABOUT WHAT (debt). Discourse is institutionally conditioned in that it reflects the ideology of an institution that produced it (in our case THE PRESS). Each discourse was subjected to qualitative content analysis aimed at construing archetypal meanings as well as to linguistic analysis highlighting typical features of the argumentative structure.

As a result of this analysis, we have arrived at the following conclusions: the attitude to debt on the part of society has been changing under the

kuriamos naujos prasmės, kurios atspindi kintančius visuomenės poreikius, o archetipas parodo kumuliacinį reikšmių formavimąsi. Ekonominio diskurso struktūriniai bruožai gali būti charakterizuojami taip: dialogiškumas, antitezės, modalinių veiksmažodžių ir kitų žodžių vartojimas, vertinamieji būdvardžiai irrieveiksmai, teigiamos semantinės prozodijos kūrimas žodžiui skola ir t. t. Intencionalumas vaidina didžiausią vaidmenį įdiegiant mintis žmonių protuose ir keičiant įprastas reikšmes. Tyrimo rezultatai patvirtina, kad didelę įtaką šiam procesui yra padariusi utilitarizmo filosofija ir etika, vartojimo ideologija bei angliškas ir amerikietiškas ekonomikos modelis.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: kolektyvinė sąmonė, archetipas, archetipinė reikšmė, konvencionali reikšmė, intencionalumas.

influence of such a potent institution as the press (later the media). New meanings are conceived in economic discourses and cater to the changing needs of society. The archetype manifests cumulative formation of meanings. Economic discourses display a typical argumentative structure characterized by intrinsic dialogicality, antitheses, use of modal verbs and words, generic sentences, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, foregrounding and defocalization, creating a positive semantic prosody for DEBT. Intentionality plays a major role in instilling ideas in people's minds and in modifying conventional meaning. The greatest influence on it was exercised by utilitarian philosophy and ethics, the ideology of consumerism and Anglo-American economic model.

KEY WORDS: collective consciousness, archetype, archetypal meaning, discourse, intentionality, ideational meaning, conventional meaning.

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