

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THE CONCEPT OF MULTICULTURALISM

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Summary

Until the last quarter of the 20th century, the human factor was neglected in the study of linguistic phenomena. It was only during this period anthropocentrism came to the forefront, and as a result, several new directions in linguistics were formed. Scientists began to study linguistic phenomena in the unity of concepts formed in the human mind through the interaction of language and culture, and reality. The concept is formed as a result of cognitive processes taking place in the mind and is represented in discourse through verbal and non-verbal means. The concept of "multiculturalism" possesses a complex content structure, characterized in some cases by its multilayered meanings and the most diverse possibilities of representation. This makes it difficult to schematically model it in the spatial algorithm of the "center – periphery – associative field" type. This concept finds its reflection and expression possibilities in practically all spheres of public life in both British and Azerbaijani societies and, accordingly, is realized in these areas through many verbal and non-verbal means. In this regard, the most significant feature of the concept of "multiculturalism" is its dynamic nature, since it is shaped within a communicative situation. The concept of "multiculturalism" as a phenomenon that resists to unambiguous interpretation and evaluation in various situational and verbal contexts in which it is verbally represented has a high evaluative potential. The process of explication of the concept of "multiculturalism" is a complex phenomenon shaped by various ideological interpretations of its content potential. Consequently, the conceptualized field of "multiculturalism" is represented in media discourse contexts with varying degrees of expressiveness, ideologically conditioned positive or negative evaluations. The conceptualized field of "multiculturalism", as the sphere of realization of the concept of the same name, in reality becomes quite diverse influenced by discursive factors across different types of communicative production.

Key words: multiculturalism, concept, cultural concept, language, culture, anthropocentric.

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1. Introduction

The globalization processes that have been intensifying since late twentieth century affect all spheres of human life. Large-scale population movements conditioned by certain reasons, lead to serious changes in human society. Although displacements occur for a variety of reasons, the challenges they create are very serious and require their own solution. One of these challenges, perhaps the first, is the problem of multiculturalism, which currently receives significant attention at the state level in Azerbaijan. To solve this problem, it is first necessary to clarify the meaning of this concept, to define the conceptual framework that underlies it. This involves exploring how the concept is encoded in language, what cognitive images it evokes in

the mind of the perceiver, and through which linguistic units the representation of this concept is expressed.

2. Literature Review

This problem has been the subject of numerous studies. Among them are scholars such as Taylor J. R., Jahangirov F., Valiyeva N. and others. In the second half of the last century, especially towards the end of the century, a number of new directions began to take shape in linguistics and the sciences directly related to it and developed rapidly as a new scientific field. The emergence of these new directions gave rise to new approaches to solving the problem of the interaction of language and culture within the framework of the anthropocentric paradigm. Since the newly emerging directions developed at the junction of language and other humanitarian disciplines, they are based on the unity of the triad "human – language – culture" and are developing rapidly nowadays.

Task statement. The main goal is to explore the concept of multiculturalism in an interdisciplinary context.

3. Results and Discussions

Currently, three such directions are distinguished: linguo-country studies, ethno-linguistics and linguo-culturology. Other disciplines such as sociolinguistics (social linguistics), pragmatics, discourse analysis, anthropological linguistics, hermeneutics (theory of interpretation of texts), semantic analysis and others may be included to this group. However, in our view, it would be more appropriate to refer to cognitive linguistics, since all of the aforementioned fields are, in one way or another, based on processes of cognition, and their findings are used to varying degrees within cognitive linguistics. In our opinion, this diversity of linguistic disciplines that take the mutual influence of language and culture as their object reflects the particular relevance of this problem.

Although each of the above scientific directions studies a relatively narrow and specific field, they do not exist in isolation from each other, and the achievements of one direction can be productively applied in others. The term linguoculturology reflects the interaction of linguistics and culturology, which deals with the relationship between language and culture. This is evident, because "each language is connected to its culture. Language plays a key role for the culture with which it is connected, especially through literature" (Valiyeva, 2016: 72). Linguoculturology, as a complex field of scientific inquiry about the interaction and mutual influence of language and culture, is currently developing rapidly. This is explained by a number of factors. "First, the rapid globalization of world problems has created a need to take into account both universal and specific behavioral and communication characteristics of different peoples in addressing the most diverse questions, the need to anticipate situations where there is a high probability of intercultural misunderstanding, the importance of identifying and accurately recording cultural values that underlie communicative activity. Secondly, this reflects the objective integrative tendency in the development of the humanities and the growing need for linguists to incorporate the findings of related disciplines such as psychology, sociology, ethnography, cultural studies, and political science. A significant body of linguistic data has accumulated that requires interpretation from a linguophilosophical perspective.

In this regard, following the tradition originating with Wilhelm von Humboldt, language is viewed as the "soul of the people," and that's why we try to identify key aspects

of the relationship between consciousness, communication, behavior, values, and language. Thirdly, this approach is also linked to the understanding of language as a means through which collective experience is socially interpreted. It is within this collective experience that the meanings of words, phraseological units, well-known texts, and formulaic etiquette situations are encoded”.

Linguoculturology studies the interaction between language and culture in a synchronic aspect, taking into account, first of all, the living communicative process that synchronously shapes the mentality of the people and the relations used in the expression of language, and treats linguistic and cultural units as a whole system in their interaction. The main feature of linguoculturology is that any given phenomenon is analyzed equally in the context of both culture and language.

The definition of linguoculturology is still quite ambiguous, since its object itself is not clearly delineated. Thus, the interaction between language and culture is studied by ethnolinguistics and sociolinguistics, the status of cultural information has not yet been determined and an unambiguous interpretation of the term culture has not been given. The appeal of linguistics to linguoculturological research is driven by the desire of scientists to better understand the role of language in expressing culture, to trace the evolution of word meanings, and to examine the historical changes in the functional properties of grammatical and semantic categories across different languages. Moreover, in this case, the determination of what cultural facts are expressed through language, and what linguistic methods are created to express culture, come to the fore. From this perspective, linguoculturology is quite naturally oriented towards a semi-otic understanding of the nature of both language and culture.

What is the final conclusion of cognitive linguistics regarding the relationship between language and culture? The founders of cognitive linguistics proceeded from the perspective of “the description of the meaning of linguistic forms only in the context of specific cultural norms and practices” (*Taylor, 1995: 81*). Accordingly, cognitivists also attach great importance to the relevance of background knowledge and believe that the background knowledge should be integrated into the characterization of linguistic meanings (*Taylor, 1995: 82*). The mental lexicon (or mental dictionary), which reflects our linguistic knowledge, is not an encyclopedia in itself, (although there is a clear distinction between a speaker’s knowledge of language and the knowledge gained through interaction with the surrounding world). Nevertheless, in understanding the relationship between language and culture, it is the speaker’s knowledge of the world that plays a more significant role. This postulate of cognitive linguistics accounts for the discipline’s perspective on everyday knowledge.

Thus, linguoculturology, as an independent field of knowledge, solves a set of specific problems, among which the study of the interaction between language and culture occupies a key place. In addition, linguoculturology examines the methods developed by language to express culture, studies the national-cultural component of discourse, analyses and describes cultural codes and cultural standards, because linguoculturology studies language as a cultural phenomenon.

Concept and Cultural Concept. In the early 80s, under the influence of Western linguistic and cognitive theories (works by R. Schank, G. Lakoff, C. Fillmore, and W. Chafe and others) and due to the failure of structuralist ideology, new approaches to language emerged and they exposed ambiguities in the existing terminological apparatus used when examining the main linguistic problems concerning the relationship between language, thought, and reality. This ultimately led to the emergence of the term “concept”, thereby clarifying its place and function in the research framework of modern linguistics.

In modern science, the “concept” is interpreted in various scientific and philosophical schools and trends, functioning as an inherently interdisciplinary category. The history of the formation of this concept in linguistics demonstrates a consistent engagement with cognitive science, logic, philosophy, linguoculturology, etc. The introduction of a new concept in linguistics has caused debates on a number of levels regarding meaning and its significance within Saussure's paradigms and structuralist interpretations of language. There has already been a gradual shift away from interpreting meaning as another logical structure and invariance, and there are tendencies to actualize other propositions arising from L. Wittgenstein's theory, such as “meaning is application”, “as much as there is meaning, there is application”. “Concept” is understood as the the dynamic totality of development of words and word combinations that describe its meaning, significance, composition; its content (or sometimes it is called the content of the concept) is disclosed through these linguistic realizations.

It should be noted that the phenomena included in the definition of the concept are not new. Contemporary research in the field of conceptual studies continues the traditions of W. von Humboldt, L. Weisgerber, E. Benveniste, E. Sapir, B. Whorf and other thinkers who studied the process of the spiritual formation of the world through the word and viewed language as a system of secularization.

Wilhelm von Humboldt occupies a foundational position in formulating the problem of the interaction between language and culture. It is no coincidence that the history of linguistics of the 20th century is viewed as the history of a return to Humboldt's ideas. Cognitive linguistics develops W. Humboldt's ideas about the influence of language on people and on the spiritual organization of humanity. The notion of “linguistic worldview” is a central concept in W. Humboldt's theory and justifies the diversity of languages. Language and the “spiritual power of people” are closely interconnected and inseparable in their development. Cognitive linguistics also uses the following postulates of W. Humboldt about language: language is activity (energy), language is a tool that “enables human understanding at different levels of cultural development”; culture should attract attention to the teaching of grammar and other sciences. Linguistic determinism, founded by E. Sapir and B. Whorf, confirms the primacy of language in the interaction of language and culture. E. Sapir, on the one hand, notes the independence of language and culture, and on the other hand, emphasizes that “language, through its formal power of completeness and also in its implicit expectation (of language), shapes *the way we unconsciously project and organize our experience of reality.*”

The postulate concerning the influence of language as a means of communication that shapes culture was based on linguodidactic determinism, later developed by B. Whorf, who investigated the impact of grammar on culture. Modifications of the theory of linguistic determinism (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) are the theory of linguistic relativity. Whereas the theory of linguistic determinism emphasized the superiority of language, in linguistic relativity language is used for categorizing and interpreting reality in accordance with the communicative and cultural needs of society. Cognitive-oriented linguists accept the principles of linguistic relativity. New scientific directions are aimed at solving the problem of the interaction between language and culture from an interdisciplinary perspective and are based on the ideas of W. von Humboldt, E. Sapir, B. Whorf and their followers. Most modern linguistic disciplines of an anthropocentric orientation, the object of which is the interaction between language and culture – linguoculturology, ethnolinguistics, linguodidactics and, above all, cognitive linguistics, also include other scientific fields. Linguoculturology, linguodidactics, and linguography are distinguished by their great achievements in practice.

Attempts to provide a fully systematic description of a concept are accompanied by the problem of determining its interaction with the corresponding terms that served as analogues before the emergence of this concept. Therefore, defining a concept frequently intersects with the task of distinguishing it from such terms as meaning, image, sense, essence, internal form, sign, symbol, and archetype. This overlap, naturally, creates certain difficulties. Thus, the phenomena represented by existing terms have sparked an exceptionally wide range of discussions in the scientific literature, giving rise to various approaches. Let us consider several of these approaches. A primary methodological challenge arises in attempts to delimit the boundaries between a concept and understanding. The difficulty of such procedures is largely due to the close conceptual and semantic relationships between these terms. As already mentioned, the concept is primarily derived from the Latin word “*concepsum*” – “meaning”, which determines the activity of these terms in the general sphere and their mutual substitution. In modern scholarship, a tendency was shown in addressing the problem of the relationship between the concept and related notion. The first term (concept) is associated with the mechanisms of identification and understanding of the concept and the exclusion of one of the terms from scientific “everyday usage”.

Fikrat Jahangirov explains the national characteristics of concepts in his book *Language and Culture* published in 2014 as follows: “In the collective consciousness of an ethnos, a set of concepts came to be referred to as a *concept sphere* (a circle of meaning). Concepts have a national characteristics. A national concept sphere is a set of concepts categorized, processed, and standardized in the consciousness of the people. Since a number of concepts are inherent in an ethnos, non-equivalent lexical items are possible. However, since most of the concept spheres across different ethnos overlap, their translation from one language to another is explained” (Jahangirov, 2014: 30).

The simultaneous use of the terms *concept* and *cultural concept* in scientific literature naturally leads to a possible distinction between “cultural” and “non-cultural” concepts. Research on cultural concepts imply the keywords of culture. Most likely, among the concepts that form a general worldview, there are also concepts that are culturally loaded to various degrees, including culturally irrelevant ones. For instance, concepts related to the human bioprogram, although even in this case, complete cultural irrelevance cannot be assumed. Therefore, attempts to distinguish the concept of a cultural concept shaped by the state of the terminological system in modern linguistics from its etymological roots are ongoing and recurrent. It should be noted that there are even special culturally loaded concepts that become objects of cultural reflection, particularly those that are semantically and semiotically significant within language and culture, and those with the understanding of language. Such concepts are related to a person's self-understanding. As evident, cultural concepts are correlated with the cultural worldview, which is an integral part of the overall picture of the world.

The introduction of the notion of a *concept* for the semantic analysis is typical for the current state of linguistics, which is marked by an active search for new methodological foundations. Traditional approaches to describing semantics (despite the encyclopedic nature of language units, the wealth of information regarding their multiple meanings and their undeniable practical value) have failed to address the demands of cognitively oriented semantic research which is comparable to the widespread popularity that component analysis achieved in its classical form over the past decade. It should be noted that, much like the notion of the *concept* itself, the foundations for explaining concepts, the working procedures of conceptual analysis, and the final descriptive formats of its results do not have a single, universally accepted interpretation in modern linguistic methodology. Systematizing the

main approaches to conceptual analysis, the following heuristic approaches characteristic of this method can be identified, including:

- 1) conceptual analysis is based on the analysis of the meaning of the keyword;
- 2) Conceptual analysis is grounded in the consideration of the contexts in which words are used. Philosophically significant insights are derived from examining the use of relevant words across different contexts, which is achieved by limiting the relevance of the main role of the word;
- 3) during conceptual analysis, ideas arise that collect words into a “single gestalt” and “unifying them into a coherent whole”.
- 4) during conceptual analysis, the semantic relations of culture with other words are considered;
- 5) The study of conceptual sources requires attention to semiotic oppositions that may underlie a concept.
- 6) different nominations of the same object are examined;
- 7) the etymology of the word is also taken into account;
- 8) the system of values is explained.

A real conceptual analysis may incorporate all of the above points, but it may also be based on only a few of them, depending on the nature of the material under study and the specific objectives of the research.

Definition of the Concept of “Multiculturalism” and Various Approaches.

Although the concept of multiculturalism may seem relatively recent, in order to determine its full range of meanings and representation possibilities one should first examine its definition and clarify meanings reflected in dictionaries and scholarly literature. Multiculturalism actually refers to “the coexistence of people belonging to different cultures and religions. “Historically, Azerbaijan has been a region where representatives of different peoples and religions lived in peace and friendship” (*Multikulturalizm Azərbaycanı dövlət siyasətinin ən önəmli istiqamətlərindən biridir*; 2014). That is, this concept has existed in Azerbaijan for centuries, and it still exists and is being strengthened today. The Azerbaijani people have lived under various socio-political structures at different times. Nevertheless, in all periods, and particularly during the period of independence, these positive trends have been reinforced and continue to be strengthened today (*Vəliyeva, 2016: 210*). E. Babayev calls multiculturalism “...a social phenomenon that affects all layers of society, politics, economy, state administration system, public life, science, etc.” (*XXI Century: Hopes and Challenges, 2011*). E. Babayev’s expression emphasizes the breadth of the concept, highlighting that multiculturalism can permeate virtually every aspect of socio-political life. In the current era of globalization, people’s movements, migration from one language and cultural, social, political environment to another for the purpose of recreation, work, and most importantly, residence, are becoming increasingly common, and this necessitates the dialogue among cultures and civilizations. In any case, this process requires learning about the life, culture, history, and customs of other peoples and treating them with respect. In the current era, these processes are often very tense, and the main reason for this is the conflict between the desire of “new-comers” to preserve their national identities and the risk of their assimilation into the local majority. Moreover, when this assimilation is raised to the level of state policy, these tensions can become even more pronounced. Consequently, in today’s context, this issue demands the careful attention of state authorities and heads of state, who must identify potential points of cultural conflict and address them proactively. This issue is in the focus of special attention of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, İlham Aliyev.

The concept of "multiculturalism", or more precisely its conceptual domain, also exists in English, and its expression through specific terms dates back much earlier than in the Azerbaijani language. Already in the 70s of the last century, the range of issues encompassed by the concept of multiculturalism manifested itself with full sharpness in a number of European countries, and serious attention was paid to its study. Consequently, attention began to be paid to aspects ranging from its representational features to the most diverse semantics included in its conceptsphere. As a result, the definition of the concept and its conceptsphere was articulated more rapidly and extensively in English-language sources. Let's consider some of them.

Collins Dictionary of Sociology provides the following information regarding the concept of multiculturalism: "*The acknowledgement and promotion of cultural pluralism is a feature of many societies. In opposition to the tendency in modern societies to cultural unification and universalization, multiculturalism both celebrates and seeks to protect cultural variety (e.g. minority languages), while at the same time focusing on the often unequal relationship of minority to mainstream cultures. After decades of persecution, the prospect of indigenous or immigrant cultures are now helped somewhat by the support they receive from the international public opinion and the international community*" (*The United Nations*).

The key points in this definition are "the recognition and encouragement of cultural pluralism as a characteristic feature of many societies" and "the preservation of cultural diversity (for example, minority languages)." As noted, it is indicated here that references to the culture of national minorities also encompass their languages.

Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture devotes more space to multiculturalism, providing extensive material over several pages. The section entitled "Multiculturalism in the UK" consists of several subsections: "Ethnic Diversity in the UK", "Immigration to the UK", "Food", "Religious Faith and Religious Holidays", "Festivals". Let's consider some of them: "Immigration in the UK increased greatly after World War II. During the 1950s, the country was still rebuilding its economy after the war. It needed workers for the factories, and for the hospitals of the New National Health Service. Immigrants were encouraged to come to Britain to take up these jobs. Many came from Ireland and from countries that were part of the former British Empire, especially the West Indies, India, and Pakistan. Immigrants from these Commonwealth countries held a British passport and had the right to British citizenship. At first, they were considered to be different and not everyone welcomed them. In the 1970s, a law was passed which made it illegal to treat black people differently from anyone else. Now, 50 years later, the children and grandchildren of the earlier immigrants are well-established members of British society" (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, 2005*).

This section initially focuses not on the concept of multiculturalism, but on the reasons for its emergence in English society and the problems caused by these reasons. This is because this concept does not emerge fully formed; it develops within the consciousness of the language users, verbalized with specific "voices" when the need arises for its expression, and gradually its meaning as a concept expands and deepens. In the oldest concepts, it is possible to distinguish parts such as microconcepts, aspects, segments, and semes. New concepts such as "multiculturalism" allow us to observe how concepts are formed as a whole and how their meanings expand.

To identify both the general and specific aspects of this phenomenon, it is useful to examine several definitions of the concept of multiculturalism given in various sources. It should also be noted that these definitions draw on examples from both British and American contexts.

- "Multiculturalism – the belief and practice of giving equal importance to each of the different cultures in a society" (*Macmillan English*).

- “Multiculturalism – is a situation in which all the different cultural or racial groups in a society have equal rights and opportunities, and none is ignored or regarded as unimportant” (*Collins English Dictionary*).

- “Multiculturalism (n) – The practice of acknowledging and respecting the various cultures, religions, races, ethnicities, attitudes and opinions within an environment” (*Cultural diversity*).

- “Multiculturalism – It now means the political accommodation by the state and/or a dominant group of all minority cultures defined first and foremost by reference to race or ethnicity: and more controversially, by reference to nationality, aboriginality, or religion, the latter being groups that tend to make larger claims and so tend to resist having their claims reduced to those of immigrants” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*, 1996).

- “Multiculturalism – the view that the various cultures in a society merit equal respect and scholarly interest. It became a significant force in American society in the 1970s and 1980s as African-Americans, Latinos, and other ethnic groups explored their own history” (*The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, 2002).

- “Multiculturalism: The policy or process whereby the distinctive identities of the cultural groups within a society are maintained or supported” (*Oxford dictionary*).

A comparative analysis of the given examples shows that in the texts of various authors, the concept of multiculturalism is presented as a content-based structure, and the most important definitions for it are: "belief", "situation", "practice", "view", "policy", "process".

In the examples, the most important units that expound the conceptual essence under consideration are the semantically opposed lexical units "equal" and "different", as well as the words "cultures", "countries", "races", "religions", "identities", "groups" (in the word combinations "cultural groups", "different cultural or racial groups"), "ethnicities", "attitudes", "opinions", "acknowledgment", "respecting", "society", "nationality", "integration", which carry a special meaning in the process of verbalizing the concept of multiculturalism. Thus, the complex of these linguistic units can also be taken as a representative of the concept under consideration.

4. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that there is no unambiguous approach to the concept itself, as it is formed through cognitive processes occurring in human consciousness and is represented through a “mediator” in the form of lexical choices, context, and discourse. Therefore, any concept and conceptosphere must be examined within the broadest possible discursive framework, involving both verbal and non-verbal means of expression.

Although the problem of coexistence of representatives of different ethnic groups, religions, and cultures is not a new phenomenon, in the era of globalization this problem has acquired special relevance giving rise to the concept and notion of multiculturalism. Despite the emergence of a unified concept of multiculturalism, since globalization and multicultural processes proceed differently in each country, the content of the concept of multiculturalism, which is expressed with the same term in each of the existing languages, has its own peculiarities, and its aspects and elements play different roles in shaping its interpretation.

There is almost no single definition of the concept of multiculturalism in the literature. However, since multiculturalism has been elevated to the level of state policy in our country in recent years, this concept has been quite fully characterized in the speeches of the head of state and other government officials, applying it to the reality of Azerbaijan.

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