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CONCEPT GENIUS IN THE ENGLISH PICTURE OF THE WORLD

Summary. The article is dedicated to the investigation of the peculiarities of verbalization of the concept GENIUS in the English picture of the world. The research presents main aspects of the study of the phenomenon of *genius* in philosophy and psychology. The research singles out conceptual features of the analyzed concept in the English explanatory dictionaries and specialized encyclopedias. These sources represent two variants of the English picture of the world, namely, naïve and scientific. The following conceptual features have been singled out: intelligence, creative abilities, extraordinariness, originality, age, ability to deal with difficult tasks, exclusivity, achievements which were proved, demonstrated, deep knowledge of a certain sphere, mastery, independence, endurance, inspiration, dissimilarity from others, fervor, work, originality.

Key words: concept, conceptual feature, picture of the world, genius.

Introduction

Cognitive linguistics grew out of the work of a number of researchers active in the 1970s who were interested in the relation of language and mind, and who did not follow the prevailing tendency to explain linguistic patterns by means of appeals to structural properties internal to and specific to language. At the present stage of its development, cognitive linguistics has a great deal of works devoted to the study of related concepts, in particular, BRAIN, INTELLECT [1]. However, the phenomenon of *genius*

as the highest manifestation of intellectual or creative activity of a person – who is called a *genius* – has remained beyond the attention of linguists which adds to the *relevance* of this study.

Among main trends in the study of the phenomenon of *genius* are: *irrational approach*, which emphasizes the divine nature of *genius* and is closely related to archaic and religious ideas; *rational approach*, within which *genius* is seen as the innate quality of a person, which makes it possible to clarify *genius* as a property of the human mind and to study it

in different directions in psychology and genetics, as well as to determine biological (instincts, memory, genetic heredity, innate abilities to creativity) and psychological (fantasy, imagination, inspiration, spontaneity) factors of *genius*; *empirical approach*, according to which genius is the acquired property of a person in the process of his/her development; *socio-cultural approach*, which considers the significance and, at the same time, problematic interaction of a genius and society.

The aim of the present paper is to study the means of embodiment of concept GENIUS in the English language. The theoretical premises of the work are the basics of semantic-cognitive approach to the study of concepts. According to Z.D. Popova and J.S. Sternin, representatives of the semantic-cognitive approach, *concept* is a basic unit of human mental code, which has an internal structure consisting of conceptual features; it is the result of the individual and social cognizing of the world. Conceptual features contain comprehensive information about the corresponding object or phenomenon, as well as the interpretation of information of public consciousness and the treatment of the subject or phenomenon [2]. Thus, representatives of this trend treat language as one of the main tools of cognition and conceptualization of the world. To examine a concept through the language is the most reliable way of linguistic analysis which allows to detect its conceptual features and to work out the model of the concept. The structure of a concept is manifested through dictionary definitions of the corresponding lexical units (the name of the concept and its synonyms) and through speech contexts. The linguistic embodiment of the concept under study is being considered on the basis of English explanatory dictionaries and specialized encyclopedias.

Results and discussion

First of all, let us consider the motivational features of the studied concept through the analysis of the etymology of the English lexical unit *genius* which comes from Latin.

"*L. genius the superior or divine nature which is innate in everything, the spirit, from genere, gignere, to beget, bring forth*".

The Latin noun *genius* for a long time maintained links with the verbs *genere, gignere* (give birth). In a historical perspective, the term *genius* is rather problematic: it has had a long history of use, and has acquired multiple meanings, describing vastly different phenomena. The first known instance of the term *genius* being used in the English language is during the Roman Empire, where it referred to a male spiritual protector or a guardian spirit. Typically, the protection offered by a genius was applied to individuals, families, and physical spaces. Every person, family, city, body of water, or other important physical structure had its own genius. In addition, a genius could also refer to the "spirit of the times" or *zeitgeist*. Over time, genius became more intimately connected with individuals. However, it was not until the Enlightenment when the connotations of the word obtained its present implications: *genius* referring to the superior or unique abilities of an individual person. In the second half of

the XVIII century there was a turning point in the semantics of this lexical unit. Since then, *genius* has denoted not only a *special ability*, but also a *person* who has such quality. That is when there appeared numerous researches, which gave impetus to further study of this phenomenon [3].

Thus, the inner form of this nomination foregrounds the irrational component of the corresponding concept.

Modern explanatory dictionaries of the English language register four senses of lexeme *genius* and offer the following definitions.

"**Genius 1.** *A good or evil spirit, or demon, supposed by the ancients to preside over a man's destiny in life; a tutelary deity; a supernatural being; a spirit, good or bad. Cf. Jinnee "The unseen genius of the wood." We talk about the genius still, but with thought how changed! The genius of Augustus was a devotee of the demon, to be sworn by and to receive offerings on an altar as a god*".

The first sense refers to the genius-spirit, that affects the destiny of a person or locality, which testifies that, the original meaning of this lexical unit rooted in Latin is preserved up to now.

"**Genius 2.** *A man endowed with uncommon vigor of mind; a man of superior intellectual faculties and creativity; Shakespeare was a rare one genius*".

The second sense indicates a person with extraordinary abilities. These abilities relate to human intelligence or his/her creativeness. Such qualifiers as *uncommon, superior* emphasize the uniqueness of the intellectual and creative capabilities of a person.

"**Genius 3.** *Distinguished mental superiority; uncommon intellectual power; especially, a superior power of invention or the generation of any kind, or of forming new combinations; as a man of genius. "Genius of the highest kind implies an unusual intensity of the modifying power*".

The third sense indicates this extraordinary ability, quality of a person. Again, such senses as *uncommon, superior, distinguished* emphasize the novelty of the discovery or invention made by such person.

"**Genius 4.** *The peculiar structure of mind with which each individual is endowed by nature; that disposition or aptitude of mind which is peculiar to each man, and which qualifies him for certain kinds of action or special success in any pursuit; special taste, inclination, or disposition; a, a genius for history, for poetry, or painting*".

Finally, the last sense denotes the natural inclination of a person to a certain type of occupation – *aptitude, disposition*, which is inherent in every person and is an individual feature – *peculiar to each man*.

Since explanatory dictionaries reflect the naïve image of the world, the following notional conceptual features of GENIUS in the English naïve world image can be singled out: **intellect** (verbalized by the following lexical units used in dictionary definitions: *intellectual faculties, intellectual power, intelligent, mental, vigor of mind*); **creative abilities** (verbalized by such lexical units: *creative power, talent, creativity*); **outstanding**

/ **highest** / **extraordinary** (verbalized by the following lexical

units: *uncommon, superior, distinguished, highly, exceptional, extraordinary, marked superiority*); **novelty** / **originality** (verbalized by the following lexical units: *the power of invention or the formation of new combinations; the original work*).

I. Alongside with the lexeme *genius*, which nominates the given concept, they constitute the nucleus of the corresponding nominative field.

One of the stages of the analysis of the nominative field of a concept concentrates on singling out the medial part of the field. In our case it is represented by several synonymic lexical units.

II. The first of the registered nominations is formed by compounding of two units which refer to the brain and the computer respectively:

"Brainiac (n.)"very smart person," 1982, U.S. slang, from brain (n.) + ending from ENIAC, etc. Brainiac also was the name of a comic book villain in the Superman series and a do-it-yourself computer building kit, both from the late 1950s, and the word may bear traces of either or both of these";

"ENIAC – acronym from "electronic numeral integrator and computer," device built 1946 at University of Pennsylvania by John W. Mauchly Jr., J. Presper Eckert Jr., and J.G. Brainerd. It cost \$400,000, used 18,000 radio tubes, and was housed in a 30-foot-by-50-foot room".

Until 1982, this nominative unit served as the name of certain cartoon characters, so probably some features of these characters are still reflected in the meaning of the word, which is defined as:

"Brainiac. (Slang) *A person who is highly intelligent*".

It is worth mentioning that the explanatory dictionaries used in the study indicate prototype examples of geniuses, such as Shakespeare and Mozart. Another example of the typical representative of the category "genius" is the scientist Albert Einstein whose surname became synonym to the lexical unit "genius". This case of *antonomasia (einstein)* is registered in the dictionaries.

"Einstein – someone who has exceptional intellectual ability and originality".

The definition of the next nomination contains an indication of a very smart person and the specifics of his/her activity: namely, running some important and difficult project:

"Mastermind. A *highly intelligent person, especially one who plans and directs a complex or difficult project*".

Another nominative unit is an example of metonymy used to denote (in colloquial English) an extremely clever person:

"Brain (Informal) *A highly intelligent person*".

It should be noted that these synonymous nominative units have several common features. Their definitions contain an indication of a high level of intelligence and they, as a rule, function in the colloquial layer of the English language.

The only exception here is the nominative unit *prodigy*, which has the following semantic components in its dictionary definitions: the indication of a young person with extraordinary intellectual and creative abilities:

prodigy – *an unusually gifted or intelligent young person; someone whose talents excite wonder and admiration; "she is a chess prodigy"*.

We treat PRODIGY as a subconcept that should be included in the medial part of the analyzed nominative field of the concept GENIUS. The given subconcept in its turn is represented by the following lexical units: *wunderkind, child prodigy, infant prodigy, whiz kid*. The analysis of the definitions of all mentioned units enabled singling out such conceptual features as **age** (*a child or young person*); **intelligence** (*ability, intelligent*); **creative abilities** (*talent, gifted*); **extraordinariness** (*unusually, excite wonder and admiration*).

Thus, in the English naïve picture of the world concept GENIUS is represented by the following core conceptual features: intelligence, creative abilities, extraordinariness, originality, and medial ones: age, ability to deal with difficult tasks.

The next stage of our research deals with the analysis of conceptual features of GENIUS in the English **scientific image of the world**. The investigation is based on the material of specialized medical dictionaries [4] and encyclopedias [5; 6].

Let us first consider the definition of the lexeme that nominates the studied concept in the given lexicographic sources.

"Genius: *the demonstrated exceptional achievement in a person. Different theories: born with, environmental reasons, overcompensation for inferior feelings. Generally seen as a joint product of heredity and environment*".

The given definition contains a short definition of the phenomenon of genius, which manifests itself in the exceptional, extraordinary achievements of a person, and gives three basic theories of the emergence of this phenomenon and its generally accepted interpretation as a combination of heredity and the environment.

Another definition in the English specialized dictionary foregrounds extraordinary abilities and creativity of a person, in particular, intelligence, with one of its indicators being the level of IQ – 140 and above:

"Genius: *a term used to describe a person with exceptional ability and creativity within a particular field, for instance intellect (by defining IQS of 140+ as the guideline for genius)*".

Both the above mentioned definitions foreground such conceptual features of GENIUS as **exclusivity** (manifested by the same *exceptional*), **intellectual abilities** (*intellect, defining IQS of 140+*), **creative abilities** (*creativity*), **achievements that have been demonstrated** (*demonstrated achievements*).

One of main differences between the definitions of general explanatory dictionaries and medical ones is that the latter emphasize exclusively the intellectual abilities of a person-genius, while the

explanatory dictionaries also mention outstanding creative potential.

Another feature of the scientific interpretation of the phenomenon of genius is the indication that it can be measured by the IQ test: according to psychologists, a person is considered a genius if his level of IQ is higher than 140. According to official statistics, such personalities make up only 1% of mankind.

Focused on a wider range of readers *Encyclopedia Britannica* contains an article defining the phenomenon of genius, at the beginning of which genius is specified as a person with extraordinary intelligence:

“Genius (in psychology) a person of extraordinary intellectual power”.

Then the article gives the history of the theory which defines genius through intelligence tests and criticism of such researches:

“Definitions of genius in terms of intelligence quotient (IQ) are based on research originating in the early 1900s. In 1916 the American psychologist Lewis M. Terman set the IQ for “potential genius” at 140 and above, a level exhibited by about 1 in every 250 people. Leta Stetter Hollingworth, an American psychologist who studied the nature and nurture of genius, proposed an IQ of 180 as the threshold—a level that, at least theoretically, is exhibited by only about one in every two million people”.

As seen from the given definition, another conceptual feature – **rareness of a genius** – is foregrounded here – *one in every two million people*. The article also highlights a term *potential genius*, that is, a person who has certain exceptional abilities but does not always realize them.

Psychologists who specialize in the study of gifted children, however, have observed that the *genius* designation occurs much more frequently than it should be reasonable, leading some to speculate that a “bump” has emerged, with many more geniuses appearing in the general population than seems statistically probable. There is a probability, of course, that conventional intelligence tests are ineffective in measuring intellectual ability beyond a certain point. In any case, “genius,” as determined by these tests, simply means great intellectual ability and signifies *potential* rather than *attainment*.

The article in *Encyclopedia Britannica* also highlights two theories concerning the phenomenon of genius. M. Terman's theory holds that genius is an exceptionally extraordinary intellectual ability. The second theory which was presented in to the works of F. Galton and which is more popular, according to the author of the article, defines genius as creative abilities that *were realized* in a particular achievement, having a long-lasting value.

“The word genius is used in two closely related but somewhat different senses. In the first sense, as popularized by Terman, it refers to great intellectual ability as measured by performance on a standardized intelligence test. In the second and more popular sense, as derived from work of the 19th-century English scientist Sir Francis Galton, it designates creative ability of an exceptionally high order as demonstrated by actual achievement—always

provided that such achievement is not merely of transitory value or the result of accident of birth”.

The next fragment of the *Encyclopedia* article considers differences between **talent** and **genius**. Here new conceptual features of GENIUS can be singled out, namely, **originality** and **possibility of discovering something new** in spheres which were not previously explored:

“Genius is distinguished from talent, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Talent refers to a native aptitude for some special kind of work and implies a relatively quick and easy acquisition of a particular skill within a domain (sphere of activity or knowledge). Genius, on the other hand, involves originality, creativity, and the ability to think and work in areas not previously explored—thus giving the world something of value that would not otherwise exist”.

The overview of existing theories of the nature of genius foregrounds two other conceptual features, namely, **fervor** and **work**:

“There have been a variety of attempts to explain the nature and source of genius, as well as many investigations of the relationship of genius to madness. Galton, who inaugurated the systematic study of genius, formulated the theory that genius is a very extreme degree of three combined traits—intellect, zeal, and power of working—that are shared by all persons in various “grades.” In his Hereditary Genius (1869), he put forth the idea that genius, as measured by outstanding accomplishment, tends to run in families. This became a controversial viewpoint, and, since its introduction, scientists have disagreed about the degree to which biological heredity, as distinct from education and opportunity, is responsible for the great differences in achievement between individuals”.

Although the theories which associate **genius** and **insanity** are rather controversial, we consider the same *madness* as a representation of the conceptual feature **dissimilarity**. This feature is also foregrounded in the following fragment:

“The qualities of extreme genius may, however, be associated with unique problems. While Terman found that children of high general intelligence, classified as “gifted” or “potential genius,” are on the average superior to other children in physique and health and in emotional and social adjustment, Hollingworth's studies (as well as more-recent investigations) showed that profoundly gifted children may suffer a variety of problems related to their clear deviance from their age peers”.

Modern researchers point out that genius is always accompanied by perfect knowledge in a particular field, his skill and his autonomy, which allows not only to work alone, but also to express pioneering looks, endurance and inspiration:

“The study of eminent men and women showed how great creative achievement cannot exist without mastery of the skills and specific knowledge of a domain. These can be achieved only through excellent training and access to accomplished teachers and mentors. At the same time, Csikszentmihalyi

demonstrated a link between creative genius and “flow,” a state of mind in which the creative individual experiences a sense of challenge, timelessness, and oneness with the work at hand. Finally, in studying the personalities of prominent individuals, Csikszentmihalyi identified common attributes in their psychological makeup. One such trait is **autonomy, which is needed for working alone and for daring to express novel or divergent points of view**. Another example is **endurance, which involves an ability to persist, to complete tasks, and to follow through**—a characteristic that all true geniuses seem to have”.

Thus the definitional analysis enabled singling out the following conceptual features of the concept GENIUS in the English scientific image of the world: exclusivity (manifested by semes *exceptional, superior*), intellectual abilities (*intellect, defining IQS of 140+*), creative abilities (*creativity*), achievements which were proved, demonstrated (*demonstrated achievement*), deep knowledge of a certain sphere (*specific knowledge of a domain*), mastery (*mastery of the skills*), independence (*autonomy, which is needed for working alone and for daring to express novel or divergent points of view*), endurance (*endurance, which involves an ability to persist, to complete tasks, and to follow through*), inspiration (“*flow*”), dissimilarity from others (*deviance, madness*), fervor (*zeal*), work (*power of working*), originality (*originality, the ability to think and work in areas not previously explored*).

Conclusions

The study of a concept through the language is the most reliable way of linguistic analysis which allows to detect conceptual features and to work out the structural model of the concept. The structure of a concept is manifested through dictionary definitions of the corresponding lexical units and through speech contexts. The linguistic embodiment of the concept GENIUS was considered on the basis of English

explanatory dictionaries and encyclopedias which represent two variants of the English picture of the world, namely, naïve and scientific. In the English naïve picture of the world concept GENIUS is represented by the following core conceptual features: intelligence, creative abilities, extraordinariness, originality, and medial ones: age, ability to deal with difficult tasks. The definitional analysis enabled singling out the following conceptual features of the concept GENIUS in the English scientific image of the world: exclusivity, intellectual abilities, creative abilities, achievements which were proved, demonstrated, deep knowledge of a certain sphere, mastery, independence, endurance, inspiration, dissimilarity from others, fervor, work, originality.

The prospect of further research is seen in consideration of the verbalization of concept GENIUS in the English artistic discourse.

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