

Theories of cognitive semantics are concerned with the reconstruction of the “naïve picture of the world” reflected in natural language. In other words, their aim is to reveal how people think when they speak in their native language.

There are no straightforward approaches to this problem, because the naïve picture is manifested in a natural language indirectly. Several strategies have been used for this purpose, for example, theory of metaphors put forward by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980; 2001), cognitive reinterpretation of traditional linguistic domains represented in Construction grammar (A. Goldberg, W. Croft), analysis of “marginal” speech acts (or of speech disturbances), etc.

The main point of this paper is to present the approach of Moscow semantics school (see Apresjan 1974 / 2001, cf. also Rakhilina 2000). According to it, the analysis of lexical combinability must be one of these strategies. Lexical combinability can furnish the clue to natural language logic and philosophy. The reason is very simple: acceptable combinations of lexemes indicate acceptable combinations of concepts. Note that unacceptable combinations appear to be of great interest as well: they point out incompatible concepts. Ideally, a thorough analysis of lexical combinability would allow reconstructing the entire fragments of the naïve picture as mirrored by the language.

In my presentation, I will discuss several “eternal” questions, using the lexical combinability strategy, namely:

- To what extent does the naïve picture of the world differ from the scientific / logical one?
- Are there some universal tendencies in the organization of the naïve pictures of different languages?

The illustrations proposed are:

- Combinability of Russian *kruglyj* ‘round’ shows how Russian conceptualizes the idea of shape.
- Combinability of names of parts with names of their wholes reveals the Russian system of mereology as more complicated than a purely logical one.
- Combinability of several Russian verbs as compared to their equivalents in other languages (Russian *sidet* ‘sit’ and its Dutch equivalent *zitten*; Russian *kolyxat’sja* ‘wave’ and its Polish cognate *kołysać się*) brings into light the difference between natural languages in conceptualizing the same situation.

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