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Language, thinking and menthality with special concern to Hungarian language.
Aspects of the linguistic image of the world in the Hungarian and Romanian languages

PhD Thesis

ABSTARCT

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Contents

Keywords: language, thought, culture, linguistic relativism, linguistic image of the word, meaning; friend, enemy, woman, man, husband, wife, life, death, work, money, time, to stay, to make (do).

Abstract:

By analysing the relationship between language, thought and mentality, we have intended to present the linguistic image of some basic conceptions, comparing their appearance in the Romanian and Hungarian languages. Through the analysis of certain keywords, we have reconstructed the linguistic image of the world, of the reality, through the cultural conceptions of *life* and *death*, of *time*, of *enemy* and *friend*, of *woman* and *man*, of *wife* and *husband*, of *work* and *money*, as well as of the verbs *to stay* and *to do*. Starting from the linguistic relativity theory we have rethought the studies of Bańczerowski Janusz, Lera Boroditsky, Karácsony Sándor, Anna Wierzbicka etc. regarding research based on the study of the relationship between language – thought – culture. This Ph.D. thesis paper sets out to analyse semantically and morphologically the keywords mentioned above, by comparing the cultural images reflected in the two languages.

The following premises stood at the basis of this study:

a. One of the most efficient research methods in the analysis of the relationship between thought and mentality is the reconstruction of the linguistic image of the world (Bańczerowski 2008). Thus, this is the method that we have used to tackle concepts about the surrounding world, concepts that reflect cultural similarities and differences.

b. A second premise that we have set out to verify, is the analysis of the linguistic image of the world through the above-mentioned keywords, making it possible to look beyond the conceptualising process which characterises the Romanian and Hungarian speaker.

This Ph.D. thesis is structured into four main chapters. The first chapter – 'Theoretical background' – sets up the theoretical substantiation of the research. In the first subchapter ('The linguistic relativity theory') we have presented the classical interpretations, beginning with Wilhelm von Humboldt, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Lee Whorf, Steven Pinker, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, Terry Regier, Neumer Katalin, Pléh Csaba and Alexandru Graur. Whorf's hypothesis – i.e. language accounts for people perceiving differently reality and the world, was criticised by many linguists, philosophers, psychologists, but the existence of slight nuances in the division and classification of the

surrounding world, of reality can not be denied and it is reflected in the different ways of expression present from one language to another. For example, the psycho-linguistic researches of Pléh Csaba have demonstrated that the biggest differences exist at the pragmatic system of the language – which appears in different communication situations, especially in politeness formulas.

In the subchapter 'Language and cognition' – we have dealt both with the problem of the relationship between language and knowledge (Heltainé Nagy 2009, Bańczerowski 1999, Boross 2010), and with the way of analysis (Slobin 2003) which we consider the most efficient in combining the linguistic relativity with the cognitive conception. The next subchapter – 'The natural semantic metalanguage theory' – uses as a main research technique the cultural script (Wierzbicka 1997). With the help of this technique different cultural communities can be analysed, if the research is based on interpreting some keywords which appear in both communities and have a universal character. The way of thinking, of perceiving reality by a culture is reflected through these keywords.

Next we have presented the main characteristics of the Hungarian language and mentality from Karácsony Sándor' point of view (1938, 1985). His ideas – restructured and modified – can be found both in contemporary and cognitive linguistics as well as in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. The semantic analysis of the verb `to stay` brings a preliminary note to the way the linguistic image of the world is formed presented by Wierzbicka and Bańczerowski.

Chapter two states the methodology of the research centred on two subchapters: in the first part we have presented the material under study, and in the second part, the research methods. The material under study consists of two parallel corpora: one in Hungarian, and one in Romanian, using as sources language dictionaries, collections of sayings, idioms, questionnaires etc. (see *Sources*). A database in Hungarian and one in Romanian was set up, both formed of derivatives, idioms, collocations, proverbs, short folklore texts, written literature book titles etc. Here we have presented the way the material has been selected and the way the data collected from the questionnaires have been processed. Applying different methods (the corpus linguistics approach, the comparative method, the dynamic semantic model), the semantic interpretation of the

corpora was substantiated. The methods complete each other, they juxtapose, intermingle or overlay.

Chapter three constitutes the basis of this paper. It is the amplest and the most practical part. This chapter contains the interpretation of the linguistic material: the semantic analysis, stating the concepts behind the keywords, presenting the cognitive domains (Bańczerowski 2008) and the profiles which stem out of the corpora. The thirteen lexemes helped to outline the creeds and conceptions reflected in the discourses on *friend-enemy, man-woman, husband-wife, life-death, work-money, time*, or which are reflected through the semantics of the verbs *to stay* and *to do*. For example, the perception of *time* is done with slight differences in Romanian and Hungarian. In the two corpora the value domain is presented with the money profile, i.e. time is perceived as money (*timpul înseamnă bani* = *az idő pénzt jelent* = time is/means money). The bird–like animal domain also appears (*zboară timpul* = *röpül az idő* = time flies; *az idő szárnyán* = *pe aripile timpului* = on the wing of time), but in Hungarian this image of time is emphasised. In both cultures there is the image of the time which heals (*Timpul vindecă toate* = *Az idő mindent meggyógyít* = Time heals everything), the image of time as substance (*trage de timp* = *húzza az időt* = to pull time 'to buy time') and time perceived as location (*în ianuarie* = *januárban* = in January; *în decembrie* = *decemberben* = in December, *din timp în timp* = *időről időre* = from time to time). A few differences can be noticed when in Hungarian, in the animal domain there appears the monster's profile (*az idő vas foga* = *dinţii de fier ai timpului* = the iron teeth of time, *szorítása* = *strângerea timpului* = the grip of time), and in Romanian its counterpart is the metaphor of the time which kills, from the person's domain (*Timpul este ca un profesor care din păcate îşi ucide elevii* = *Time is like a teacher who unfortunately is killing his students*). Based on the data from the Romanian corpus, there appears, in the animal domain, the profile of the small animal which manages to escape, slip away from man's hands (*Vremea scapă prin crăpătură, când n-o strângi bine în mână* = Time slips away through a crack when you don't hold it tightly). In the domain of the person, the woman's profile appears in both languages, but in Hungarian the image of the mother takes shape (*Az idő néha anya, néha mostoha* = *Timpul câteodată e mamă, câteodată e vitregă* = Time sometimes is a mother, sometimes is a stepmother), and in Romanian, the image of

the woman who gives birth (*Vreme pe vreme a născut* = Time gave birth to time). In the Hungarian corpus the worker's profile also appears (*Az idő mindennek mestere* = *Timpul e meşterul tuturor* = Time is master of all), and the relationship between task and the transient, ephemeral (*Telik az idő, múlik az esztendő* = *Se scurge timpul, trece anul* = Time flows, the year goes by 'Time slips away, the year goes by'), which means that segmented time is associated with a series of well-defined tasks.

Thesis conclusions:

One of the premises that we have started from, and which we believe to have been confirmed, is that one of the most efficient research methods in analysing the relationship between thought and mentality is the reconstruction of the linguistic image of the world. In this way, we have highlighted concepts about the surrounding world, concepts through which cultural similarities and differences are being reflected. We have seen which are the concepts emphasised by the Hungarian speaker and which the Romanian speaker considers more important. (ex. through the image of *time*, the Hungarians emphasise the monster, while the Romanians emphasise the killer).

We have reached the conclusion (see premise b.) that the two corpora have more elements in common than differences. Analysing the nouns, the difference appears in profiles, and analysing the verbs we have noticed the different encoding (ex. in Hungarian, the process of the activity, in Romanian, the result of the activity).

By reconstructing the linguistic image we were able to prove that everything we feel, notice and experience is done through our body (Ning Yu 2009), and we can talk about them only in relation to the human body. It is quite a common thing for people to represent things in an anthropomorphic way in their mind, because the body is the symbol and the condition of existence.

A part of the linguistic images (whose keyword are abstract notions) are perceived as being certain substances, because this is the only way we can talk about them; the process of embodiment is often used in these cases.

Keywords which refer to persons (*enemy, friend, man* etc.) appear in both corpora either in the form of a substance or are rendered through certain characteristics.

This endeavour was able to demonstrate that the speakers of both languages use two stable, firm landmarks: man and space, the first one being a complex and stable landmark

to which anything non-human can relate. This procedure is used when we conceive abstract notions such as *life*, *death*, *time*. Thus, we perceive death as being a man, life as a healer, life with the image of a woman. Personification is a technique through which a community specifies which are the notions that are important to it.

The nouns which name persons (*friend, woman, husband* etc.) are mainly related to man too, but, highlighting the human characteristics or activities. Generally, these lexemes are placed in the value domain and are defined through man's most important characteristics: industry, laziness, beauty, intelligence, doing something useful etc. Conceptualising person notions is also done by associations with substance words (ex. *a true friend is a rare jewel, the woman shows up like money, the man is a treasure*).

Space is also being related to in the process of the discourses on abstract notions. Life, death, time and work are all placed in the space domain. Their presence is expressed with the help of space related metaphors but it is also emphasised morphologically: they appear often in grammatical categories which express place (*rămâne în viaţă* = stays in life 'stays alive', *este pe moarte* = is on death 'is dying', *în februarie* = in February; *életben van = este în viaţă* = is in life 'is alive', *időben van = este în timp 'are timp'* = is in time 'has the time to do something').

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