

Hierarchical-Semantic Nature of the Conceptosphere “Morality”

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Abstract: *This article reflects the hierarchical-semantic approach to the arrangement of units in the concept sphere by the level of generalization, as well as how the content of "morality" is systematized through relationships such as hyperonymy-hyponymy, synonymy, antonymy, and meronymy.*

Key words: *Ethics, Attitude, Sema, Content, Norm, Evaluation, Conceptosphere, Field, Modeling*

Introduction

Based on the connection of “morality” with social norms and evaluation, language units encode and reflect not only moral content, but also evaluative meanings such as “good/bad”, “approved/disapproved”, “merit/sin”, “appropriate/inappropriate”[1]. As a result, the conceptosphere of “morality” is not a general semantic field, but an evaluative-regulatory system, the structure of which is explained through cognitive-semantic modeling[2].

Four sources serve as their empirical basis:

1. Explanatory dictionaries and special dictionaries (synonym, antonym, phraseological, terminological).
2. Encyclopedic materials (in particular, the National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan).
3. Electronic corpus of the Uzbek language and its integrated resources (thesaurus, synonym dictionary, term base).
4. Literary, journalistic and official-style texts.

The task of the article is to identify the structural relationships between units and their evaluative function. Therefore, the examples presented in the tables and diagrams are selected according to the “corpus/textuality” criterion. They show typical units commonly used in the Uzbek language, but the frequency of each example may vary depending on the size of the corpus and the composition of the subcorpus [3].

The issue of the conceptosphere hierarchy is explained, first of all, by the principle of “from general to particular”. In human thought, there is a system of the most general moral values and norms, which is realized in everyday communication by “fragmenting” into concrete cases of behavior, treatment, evaluation, and sanction [4]. Language creates the nominative platform of this system of thought: while general lexemes (morality, decency, behavior) cover a wide range at the cognitive level, specific lexemes (honesty, justice, conscience, honor, integrity; lies, betrayal, gossip, envy, arrogance, etc.) distinguish more specific “pieces” within this range. Thus, the hierarchy is measured not only by the level of abstraction, but also by the level of nominative differentiation[5].

Methodology

In hierarchical modeling, concepts are usually described at the following levels:

1. Megaconcept - a higher level that represents the general axiological system of society, including many concepts.
2. Macroconcept - a large thematic section within a megaconcept.
3. Mesoconcept - a semantic group within a macroconcept
4. Microconcept - a specific semantic unit associated with a specific behavior, quality, or communicative act.

These levels show the conceptsphere as a “large system” and the existence of “small systems” within it. In the cognitive-semantic literature, the concept space and the core-periphery model of concept structure are often described in precisely such a hierarchical form; this approach provides a convenient methodological platform for determining the internal branching of the conceptsphere.

On the example of the conceptsphere “ethics”, the “system of socio-cultural values” can be shown as a megaconcept. The macro level of this megaconcept is usually divided into two large sections:

1. Positive values (virtues)
2. Negative values (supervalues, vices).

Within the virtues, micro groups such as “honesty-honesty”, “justice”, “respect”, “compassion”, “humility”, “shame”, “responsibility”, “conscience”; and within the vices, they are divided into micro groups such as “lie”, “fraud”, “betrayal”, “backbiting-slander”, “envy”, “arrogance”, “violence and oppression”.

At the micro level, typical nominations, collocations and phraseological expressions of each division are placed. For example, in the “honesty” group, honest, honest work, honest path, honesty; in the “backbiting” group, units such as backbiting, backbiting, gossiping, slander complete the micro level.

The linguistic motivation of the hierarchical-semantic model is that in the conceptual sphere of “morality”, central units often act as hyperonyms and serve as semantic “keys” for other units. For example, in the series morality - manners - behavior, morality is relatively general, and manners and behavior are relatively specific [5]. However, depending on the communicative situation, “manners” can also function as a metaunit: combinations such as polite/immodest, manners-morals, and rules of etiquette indicate the conceptual centralization of etiquette. Therefore, it is appropriate to interpret the hierarchy not as a rigid pyramid, but as a “dynamic hierarchy” in which the central (dominant) and subordinate (subordinate) relations alternate.

The methodological stages of hierarchical modeling are recommended as follows:

- 1) Dictionary-definitional description: separation of the minimum semantic components of the concept based on definitions in explanatory dictionaries (for example, “morality” - manners of behavior and behavior).
- 2) Encyclopedic description: determination of the expanded meaning of “morality” in relation to social institutions, norms, and the education system.
- 3) Discursive-corpus description: determination of the practical (pragmatic) profile of the concept through typical collocations, evaluative constructions, and deontic modality forms found in the corpus and texts.
- 4) Hierarchical classification: placement of isolated units on mega-macro-meso-micro levels.
- 5) Model verification: observation of which level the same unit “moves” to in different discourses and correction of the model.

Results and Discussion

These stages create a reliable basis for the systematic construction of the conceptosphere and subsequent stages of modeling[6].

The table below summarizes typical linguistic indicators for each level. Megaconcepts are realized more at the intertextual (discourse) scale, microconcepts at the level of lexical and syntactic units, and meso-level groups are usually identified by synonymic series, antonymic pairs, and thematic groups[7].

Table 1. Linguistic Representation of Moral Values in Uzbek: A Conceptospheric Approach

Level of Conceptualization	Structural Unit	Linguistic Indicators	Semantic Relations	Examples	Functional Role in Discourse
Megaconcept	System of socio-cultural values (Ethics/Morality)	Abstract discourse-level units, intertextual references	Hyperonymy (generalization), axiological centralization	morality, ethics, value system	Forms the global conceptual framework; regulates societal norms and worldview
Macroconcept	Value dichotomy (Virtues vs. Vices)	Thematic oppositions, evaluative categories	Antonymy (binary opposition)	virtue – vice; good – evil	Organizes ethical space into evaluative domains; enables moral categorization
Mesoconcept	Thematic semantic groups	Synonymic series, lexical clusters	Synonymy, partial semantic overlap	honesty, justice, compassion / lie, envy, arrogance	Structures conceptual fields; clarifies domain-specific meanings
Microconcept	конкрет semantic units (behavioral traits, communicative acts)	Lexical items, collocations, phraseological units	Derivational antonymy, contextual variation	honest person, moral responsibility, gossip, slander	Realizes concepts in actual speech; ensures pragmatic usage
Core (Nucleus)	Stable normative concepts	High-frequency, culturally fixed units	Strong positive/negative evaluation	conscience, honesty, justice, honor	Acts as axiological “center”; maintains stability across discourses

Periphery	Context-dependent units	Variable lexical realizations	Contextual synonymy, semantic shift	politeness, manners, etiquette	Adapts meaning to specific communicative situations
Vertical Structure	General → specific hierarchy	Taxonomic classification	Hyperonym-hyponym relations	morality → virtue → honesty	Ensures logical organization of conceptual system
Horizontal Structure	Parallel semantic relations	Lexical variation within level	Synonymy, complementary relations	etiquette – behavior – upbringing	Expands semantic richness and interpretative flexibility
Morphological Layer	Word-formation mechanisms	Affixation (especially negation)	Derivational antonymy	honest – dishonest; conscientious – unconscious	Generates evaluative contrasts efficiently in language
Part-Whole Structure	Conceptual segmentation	Terminological combinations	Meronymy	moral norms, principles, responsibility	Represents ethics as a structured system of components

Analysis of the conceptsphere based on the core-periphery principle allows us to distinguish between the stable content of “ethics” and its context-dependent content[8]. The core usually contains generally accepted normative moral units: such nominations as etiquette, behavior, conscience, honesty/honesty, justice, honor, and integrity constitute the main semantic “skeleton” of “ethics” in the Uzbek language. These units are either stably associated with positive assessments in different discourses (conscientious, honest, honorable, decent) or their privative variants are used to create negative assessments (unscrupulous, dishonest, dishonorable, indecent)[9]. The core units are the “axiological support” of the conceptsphere, and their meaning is often directly related to social norms[10].

The hierarchical model of the conceptsphere of “ethics” is based on the interaction of semantic relations.

First, the hyperonymic (general-specific) relationship determines the “vertical” structure of the conceptsphere: if “morality” is a general category, “virtue/vice” are its major structural divisions, and units such as “honesty”, “justice”, and “compassion” are interpreted as specific components of the division of virtues[11].

Secondly, synonymy shows the “horizontal” structure of the conceptsphere: for example, the units of etiquette, behavior, treatment, upbringing can enter into a complementary synonymous relationship in certain contexts, but they are not completely equivalent, since each of them more strongly illuminates different components of the moral content (etiquette, behavior, educational process)[12].

Thirdly, antonymy strengthens the axiological sign in the conceptsphere at the language level. Moral antonyms are manifested in two types: lexical antonymy (halal-haram, justice-cruelty, mercy-mercy, humble-arrogant), derivational antonymy (conscience-conscientious, honest-dishonest, decent-immodest, andishali-andishasil)[13]. Derivational antonymy is especially active in the Uzbek

language. The affix -siz introduces the same “absence/deprivation”, quickly forming the opposite assessment of the moral quality. In this regard, antonymy in the conceptsphere operates not only through lexical connections, but also through morphological mechanisms[14].

Fourth, the meronymy (part-whole) relationship serves to imagine “morality” as a system composed of parts. From a linguistic point of view, this relationship is expressed through terminological combinations such as “moral norms”, “moral rules”, “moral principles”, “moral responsibility”. Such combinations conceptualize morality, despite being an abstract concept, as a system that is “divided into parts”. Norms are realized at the level of rules, principles at the level of general orientation, and responsibility at the level of internal control of the individual[15].

Conclusion

The primary basis for determining semantic relations is the explanatory dictionary and specialized dictionaries. For example, in an online explanatory resource, the lexeme “ethics” is briefly defined as “manners of behavior, manners of conduct”. The definition itself indicates that the moral category is directly related to behavior and conduct. In encyclopedic sources, “ethics” is interpreted as a set of social norms and rules regulating human behavior, which reinforces the regulative nature of the conceptsphere. The materials of the National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan contain interesting observations on the assignment of units belonging to “ethics”, their definitional core components and socio-ethical connotations [8]. Semantic relations, in particular, facilitate the use of the “field” technology in modeling the conceptsphere [9]. According to the field model, moral units are grouped around a single center. The most general and multifunctional units (morality, etiquette, behavior) are located in the center, and thematic groups (honesty, justice, modesty, mercy; lies, betrayal, gossip, envy) are located around it. In the outer layers of the field, paremiological units, figurative expressions, and discursive formulas (necessity/condition/necessity; shame; merit/sin) are collected.

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