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METAPHORICAL AND SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF AGE

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Abstract

The article examines the metaphorical and symbolic representations of the concept of age within the framework of contemporary linguistic research. The study is grounded in the principles of cognitive linguistics, linguoculturology, and the anthropocentric paradigm, which regard age as a fundamental category of human cognition and cultural experience. Special attention is paid to the ways in which metaphorical and symbolic expressions of age reflect national worldviews, cultural values, and social attitudes across linguistic communities.

Keywords

concept of age, metaphorical representation, symbolic meaning, cognitive linguistics, linguoculturology, anthropocentric paradigm, age groups, conceptual metaphor.

The metaphorical and symbolic representations of the concept of age constitute one of the most pressing issues in contemporary linguistics. The relevance of this problem is determined by several factors. First, age as a category represents a fundamental concept for humanity and is characterized by culture-specific metaphorical and symbolic modes of expression in every language. Figurative designations that have emerged in different languages to represent the human life cycle require special scholarly attention from the perspectives of cognitive linguistics and cultural studies.

Second, in the modern world, demographic changes, processes of globalization, and the intensification of intercultural communication have introduced new semantic layers into the concept of age. Traditional notions of youth and old age are being reconsidered within contemporary contexts, thereby opening up new research directions in linguistic studies.

Third, metaphorical and symbolic expressions related to age constitute an important body of linguocultural material that reveals the national worldview, mentality, and cultural codes of individual speech communities. The analysis of these expressions makes it possible to identify deep and systematic interrelations between language and culture.

Fourth, linguistic research into the concept of age corresponds to the core principles of the modern anthropocentric paradigm in linguistics, as the study of linguistic means used to represent the most significant stages of human life allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship between language and the human subject.

Within thematic categories, the metaphorical representation of different age groups varies significantly in terms of expressive intensity. Each stage of age is characterized by specific linguistic and cultural features, and its metaphorical potential is manifested to differing degrees. This differentiation is determined by several factors.

First, each age stage holds a different level of significance in society in terms of social roles and expected patterns of behavior. The period of youth, for instance, is associated with novelty, hope, and future prospects, which results in the formation of a rich metaphorical field. Expressions such as *“youth is spring,” “a young girl is a flower,” “youth is the flight of a bird”* are widely used. Similar metaphorical units are found in English, including *“youth is the spring of life,” “she is a blooming flower,” “young as a bird,” “in the bloom of youth,”* and *“fresh as*

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morning dew.” In addition, expressions such as “*budding beauty*,” “*the springtime of life*,” and “*the dawn of womanhood*” emphasize the dynamic and prospective nature of youth. This metaphorical parallelism demonstrates the universal character of the youth concept across different linguistic and cultural environments. Images drawn from natural phenomena, the plant world, and the animal kingdom function as universal means of reflecting the natural, spontaneous, and developmental characteristics of youth. At the same time, the national and cultural specificity of each language determines the semantic nuances of metaphorical expressions.

Second, the emotional attitudes of society toward particular age groups differ considerably. While childhood and youth are enriched with predominantly positive connotations, old age is often associated with loss, weakness, and completion, which leads to a more limited metaphorical system.

Third, the cultural stereotypes and archetypes associated with each age stage determine the semantic density of metaphorical expressions. The stage of maturity is linked to responsibility, stability, and experience, and therefore tends to be characterized by less dynamic but structurally deeper metaphorical patterns. Moreover, in the course of a language’s historical development, metaphors associated with specific age groups acquire a traditional character and become an integral part of linguocultural memory, which in turn determines their frequency of use and stylistic value in contemporary discourse.

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