

INTERPRETIVE FUNCTION OF THE META CONCEPTS AND CONSTITUTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF COGNITIVE- DISCURSIVE INTERPRETANT

Nusratullaeva Shokhista Sabirjon qizi

Uzbek State University of World Languages,

Senior Lecturer of the Course of Integrated Teaching of English 2

gamletovashokhista@gmail.com

Abstract

The article explores issues related to the investigation of the sociocultural aspects of language through the General Verbal Interpretation Variable and the Sociocultural Verbal Interpretation Variable. It argues that the primary role of the General Verbal Interpretation Variable is to activate collective knowledge represented by language as a system. In contrast, the function of the Sociocultural Verbal Interpretation Variable is to highlight the mental models of individual knowledge that speakers use in discourse. This study builds on previous research and employs a specially developed methodology called Cognitive-Discursive Interpretant (CDI) analysis, providing new insights into how the Sociocultural Verbal Interpretation Variable is triggered by meta-concepts such as ROLES, STEREOTYPES, VALUES, NORMS, SPACE, TIME, and LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE. These universal knowledge structures shape the sociocultural diversity of any language. The findings offer valuable insights into the socio-cognitive framework of linguistics, examining the interplay of society, culture, thought, language, and the human mind, aligning with the general, cognitive, and interpretive principles of the cognitive approach.

Keywords: General verbal interpretation variable, sociocultural verbal interpretation variable, meta-concepts, cognitive-discursive interpretant method of analysis, interpretive function of language.

Introduction

The phenomenon of language variation has long been a central topic in linguistics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis. Language variety is typically defined as "a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution" according to Hudson (1996). While research on language variation has a strong foundation, it is important to explore the underlying processes more broadly. It is clear that linguistic variability, influenced by sociological factors such as class, ethnicity, gender, age, social status, religion, and occupation, requires both extralinguistic and linguistic analysis and explanation.

Numerous theories have been proposed to explain how language reflects social variables and functions within social and cultural contexts, such as those by Eckert (2000), Scollon &

Scollon (2001), and Ting-Toomey (1999). These theories vary in their conceptions of language and the mechanisms underlying its use. Research in mainstream linguistics and interdisciplinary areas, including psycholinguistics, language processing and acquisition, language and the brain, language in social contexts, and computational linguistics, as noted by O'Grady, Dobrovolsky, and Katamba (1997), has established the essential role of language in daily human activity and in the interpretation process.

Language serves both social and individual functions. Socially, it reflects what speakers consider important and collectively accepted in understanding and interpreting the world. Individually, language activates personal mental models that speakers use to interpret their knowledge of the world, showcasing their sociocultural understanding, as highlighted by Boldyrev and Dubrovskaya (2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Speakers organize their minds in culturally specific ways, with knowledge originating from two main sources: cultural models and personal mental models. Cultural models are constructs representing mutual understanding of the world, constrained by language, and they function as sociocultural constraints on what language speakers consider important and collectively accepted in world understanding and interpreting. For example, the word "university" activates different sociocultural knowledge for different speakers: for a driver, it represents a location (1), for an architect, a piece of art (2), and for a child, a source of sadness (3):

To the passenger: Can I stop the car at the University?

The University is in need of refurbishment.

I am lonely when my mother goes to the University.

Thus, sociological variables like occupation and social status lead to different verbal interpretation variables: SPACE and ART for the driver and architect, respectively. For the child, age, community contact, and dependence on a parent result in a verbal interpretation variable within the domain of FEELINGS and EMOTIONS. Consequently, the word "university" activates different interpretations based on sociological variables, as seen with the driver, architect, and child, who each interpret the word differently.

On one hand, the word "university" provides access to collective knowledge shared by most English speakers: an institution for higher learning with various departments. This represents the General Verbal Interpretation Variable activated when speaking English.

The study of personal mental models, which has been a major focus of mainstream cognitive psychology, reveals that these models are constructed by individuals from different sociocultural backgrounds based on their unique life experiences. These models reflect their sociocultural understanding of the world. For example, a taxi driver might see a university as a place to stop the car (4), while a child might view it as a source of income to meet basic needs (5):

The road is blocked. You can get off at the University.

Mom will earn enough money at the University to buy me a toy

In our previous work, we proposed that language speakers engage in three fundamental processes: selection, classification, and evaluation, which collectively constitute what has recently been termed "the interpretive function" (Boldyrev, 2012). Generally, interpretation involves activating part of the semantic potential (cognitive model profile) accessed through each lexical concept (Evans, 2009: 25). For example, when discussing careers in medicine, one might choose terms like doctor, nurse, physician, or surgeon based on their knowledge of the medical field. Furthermore, individuals can classify professionals into specific categories, such as dentists, cardiologists, pediatricians, and various types of nurses (e.g., Registered Practical Nurses, Registered Nurses, Nurse Practitioners).

Evaluation encompasses a wide range of assessments and value judgments, as seen in contexts like "I am the wife of Doctor Smith who cured you of pneumonia last year," where positive evaluation and identification of the doctor occur.

In this article, the General Verbal Interpretation Variable is conceptualized as a structure representing knowledge of the world as conveyed through language. Different languages embody different forms of knowledge. For example, English distinguishes between "fingers" and "toes" as separate words, whereas Russian uses "palcy" for both, distinguishing between upper and lower limbs depending on context (e.g., palcy nog vs. palcy ruk). The General Verbal Interpretation Variable tends to unify speakers of a language, while the Sociocultural Verbal Interpretation Variable highlights differences in how speakers interpret the world, reflecting sociocultural experiences in terms of selection, classification, and evaluation.

Speakers identify themselves culturally (British, American, Russian) not solely based on their language use but on shared knowledge represented through language. The Sociocultural Verbal Interpretation Variable distinguishes native speakers from non-native speakers and individuals within the same linguistic community who represent different social groups (e.g., age groups) in contexts such as mobile or social media communication.

The empirical findings highlight that language variation hinges on the knowledge held by its speakers. On one hand, it reflects what speakers collectively accept in processes of understanding and interpretation. On the other hand, language variation triggers personal mental models through which speakers interpret the world, shaped by diverse sociocultural backgrounds stemming from unique life experiences. The results of the study are encapsulated by two types of verbal interpretation variables: General verbal interpretation and Sociocultural verbal interpretation variables. These findings contribute to interdisciplinary research that underscores the pivotal role of language in human life. This study proposes that a sociocultural approach to language variation should be theorized in terms of these variables, revealing practical and theoretical distinctions despite some foundational similarities. The concept of language variation is posited as a two-dimensional unity encompassing both General and Sociocultural verbal interpretation variables, offering a complementary perspective to the traditional view of language as a sociocultural phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

Our research demonstrates that speakers employ diverse linguistic resources in communication, each reflecting underlying knowledge structures. We adopt the cognitive paradigm as foundational for studying language variation for two principal reasons: it provides a cohesive and interdisciplinary approach to fundamental linguistic phenomena, and it has been influential in analyzing language across various domains over the past few decades, particularly in interpretive studies of language.

The interpretive function of language recognizes language variation as manifested through linguistic means in a dual manner. Speakers within the same linguistic community share collective knowledge of the world represented through language, which informs their sociocultural identities. Additionally, there exist mental structures—meta-concepts—that frame a broader interpretive context of knowledge profiled by Cognitive-Discursive Interpretant (CDI) analysis. These structures influence language variation and reflect speakers as individuals with distinct Sociocultural verbal interpretation variables.

This approach offers valuable insights into the connection between language use and personal identity. Methodologically, the analytical process elucidates how meta-concepts manage language variation within different sociocultural contexts.

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