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Perfect forms in Russian and English linguistic view of the world in an ethnocultural context

Abstract

The present paper is devoted to the consideration of such grammatical phenomenon as perfect forms in Russian and English linguistic views of the world. The notion "linguistic view of the world" is defined in the paper in the context of cognitive linguistics. Many researchers note that a person studying a particular national language is imposed a particular view of the world typical for this very nation. They believe that it is necessary to study a grammatical structure of the language in an ethnocultural aspect. It is difficult for the Russian native speaker to understand the English perfect on the basis of his thoughts of grammar and to find its equivalent in Russian. The problem lies in the lack of congruency between English and Russian grammar. Consequently, the Russian and English grammars look at the world differently. Therefore, the objective of our paper is to highlight ethnic specificity of perfect forms and their functioning in English and Russian. The problem of perfect tenses in the English language attracts the attention of linguists by its uniqueness, diversity of forms and their meanings. Undoubtedly, it is really difficult to explain the semantics of the perfect forms. As many linguists point out, the English perfect is a special form of representation of information, the most humanized of all verbal forms. Besides, it gives the sentence some hidden potential. In the semantics of perfect forms the main role belongs to the speaker. We believe that the perfect is a cognitive element forming a special concept in the consciousness of English native speakers.

Keywords: linguistic view of the world, perfect forms, ethnoculture, mentality, linguistic model of time

Introduction

The end of the 20th century was denoted by the increased interest in a language as an anthropocentric system and the aim of its study is a "thinking-in-words" activity of a person. Many years of linguistic research contributed to the development of such sciences as linguocultural science, cognitive linguistics, ethnolinguistics, the theory of intercultural communication, and communication ethnography. These sciences are interrelated and aimed at revealing national and idioethnic specifics of this or that language in comparison with the other languages and cultures on the concrete linguistic and cultural material. There exists a statement that speech

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behavior has got a national-cultural basis. As many linguists state, linguistic habits are in close contact with the habits of behavior and communication that are typical in each culture.

This cognitive paradigm is a new field of linguistic science. According to Kubryakova, cognitive research analyzes the themes that were always interesting for our linguistics: language and thinking, the main functions of the language, the role of a man in a language and the role of a language to a man (Kubryakova, 2004, p. 11). The main interest in cognitive linguistics is in the semantic-cognitive field. It researches the lexical and grammatical semantics of a language as a means of access to the content of concepts and their modeling from the semantics of language to a sphere of concepts.

The model of the world in each culture is based on a complex range of universal concepts and cultural constants – space, time, quantity, cause, fate, number, the relation of a part to a whole, etc. As some linguists suggest, concept is a semantic unit, denoted by a linguocultural specific and characterizing the bearers of each particular ethnoculture. The concept, reflecting the ethnic view of the world, marks the ethnic linguistic view of the world and is a brick for building a house of existence. With the same range of universal concepts, each nation has got its own particular interrelations between these concepts. This difference makes the basis of a national view and evaluation of the world. But there also exist specific, ethnocentric concepts, connected with this ethnos (Maslova, 2005, p. 36).

The interrelation of a language and a culture is in the center of analyses of a linguistic world conceptualization that is understood as a unity of thoughts about the world, the particular method of reality conceptualization, existing in a usual consciousness of a particular language society (Maslova, 2001, p. 64).

In the present paper we make an attempt to consider perfect forms, taking into account the ethnospecifics of their use and functioning in English in comparison to Russian. An ethnocultural context is a complex phenomenon having an interrelation of culture and personality in its content.

Linguistic view of the world: general remarks

In each particular national language there exists a reflection of real life (part of which is a human being) caused by cultural, ethnolinguistic, psycholinguistic, historical and other factors. A person studying a particular national language is imposed with a particular view of the world typical for this very nation. It is considered that every national language has its own linguistic view of the world. Nowadays this problem has become the most current for research in the sphere of linguistic study. The denotation of the linguistic view of the world is one of the most fundamental in modern linguistics. It reflects the peculiarities of a person and of his way of life, the main conditions of his living. The most detailed description of the view of the world is its understanding as a prototype of the world existing in a person's consciousness. Therefore, the linguistic view of the world is a totality of embedded linguistic units representing national images of the reality in a particular period of its development and it is expressed in a series of meanings of

language signs – linguistic division of the world, linguistic order of objects and phenomena, information of the world, found in system meanings of the words (Popova & Sternin, 2007, p. 54). The view of the world is seen by a person after having communicated with his surroundings. The linguistic view of the world is a commonly accepted conception of reality, a definitely understood method of the view of life and understanding of life, existing in a language. The linguistic view of the world is an image of everything existing as a single and varied world. This image was created by the historical experience of people and it works with the help of different linguistic means. This image has its own structure and linguistic relations between its parts, representing firstly a person, his materialistic and spiritual life and secondly it represents everything that surrounds him: space and time, living and non-living nature, myths and society.

Many researchers believe that it is necessary to study a grammatical structure of the language in an ethnocultural aspect. Mozhaiskova notes that modern cultural anthropology states that languages are not only devices for a description of events. The structure of a language contains a cultural code, defining the method of the world outlook of this particular nation and its grammar contains detailed images of the social way of life, defining people's thinking and behavior (Mozhaiskova, 2001, p. 400).

The linguistic behavior is mostly explained by conventions of grammatical and lexical meanings of the national language. Accordingly, numerous scientific works devoted to various concepts and studies state that a nation's meaningful outlook of the world is fixed in the language's lexical system and grammatical structure which can be described through the term grammatical world conceptualization. The fruitfulness of studying this aspect of the outer world image is caused by the fact that grammar, having more stability (in comparison to a lexical system) fixes in our mind what is, for this very nation, the most typical image of the world. The grammatical meanings of the language units divide the world with the help of grammatical categories. Undoubtedly, various types of grammatical categories such as the category of number, case, tenses, voices and others can strongly influence people's behavior.

It is necessary to say that the features of national consciousness, experience and culture fixed in the grammatical structure of a language are not often realized by the native speakers. Consequently, the difficulties in revealing the interconnection of ethnical mentality and grammar appear. However, it is the grammar of the language that remains an unconscious philosophy of the group (Gurevich, 2001).

Many factors, such as geography, climate, environmental conditions, history, social organization, religion, traditions and way of life play an important role in the process of formation of an ethnical mentality. Some researchers say that the Russian linguistic consciousness is characterized by so called flat-country thinking meaning great space, Russia's huge territory and its lack of strong borders. This lack of strong borders and limits relate both to space and time. Orthodox culture is oriented on eternity, that causes a lack of developed time perspective and time evaluation. The future must be similar to the present in its main characteristics, the most generalized events from the past with global meaning for eternity are remembered (Kasyanova,

2003, pp. 102–103). The opposite situation can be found in the culture of the West. The versatility of natural phenomenon, abundance of seas and mountains have created an image of limits or of a border and strong accurateness in western culture have caused an analytical consciousness (Klyuchevsky, 1987, p. 87). It is worth noting that the dominant idea in Russian culture is faded borders, aiming at eternity and in western culture it is strong bordering, and a detailed image of time order.

Perfect forms and their ethnic specificity

The perfect quite often occurs in different languages of the world. It goes without saying that there exist many languages without the perfect, but its wide occurrence in other languages proves the fact that a specially expressed result of the action is needed for communication. The perfect exists in all modern Germanic and Roman groups of languages and also in Mari, Turkic and others. The perfect is also used in ancient languages – Latin and Greek. It was also used in ancient Russian, but it has become out-of-date. There is no perfect in modern Russian. The use of times in speech within the time system of the English verb is caused by native speakers' knowledge of the world situation and characteristics of events. The choice of a particular time is first of all dictated by the fact that the moment of making an action is or is not expressed. If it is expressed, it is then important how so. It is widely known that foreigners, especially Russians have difficulties studying English. It is not easy for them to distinguish between actions as facts in the past (Past Simple) and actions as results in the present (Present Perfect). Consequently, in order to introduce a particular action with a particular person in the English speech correctly, the speaker must be able to compare the correct verbal form with the information about the person's activity, his place in history and his years of life. The influence of the cognitive factor on the choice of the grammatical form should not be understood from the determinative point of view. The idea is not in a strict rule, but in the correct use of this or that form in a balance with this or that context in this or that real speech situation.

The situation may appear in a language that you need to express an action previous to another action that happened in the past and the first action had been finished before the second one (Serebrennikov, 1988, p. 50). What is a motive of such a need in English and other languages? The perfect form that always expresses the finished action is a useful means of expressing an action finished before another action in the past. Only this can explain the fact of a coexistence between the perfect and plusquamperfect that we can see in different world languages. There is no perfect in modern Russian and for that reason Russians can hardly understand it. The Russian native speaker tries to understand the English perfect on the basis of his thoughts of grammar and to find its equivalent in Russian. But there is no such equivalent. English grammar does not coincide with the Russian one, as the English and Russian lexical systems do not coincide either. The Dutch linguist O. Jespersen in his book The Philosophy of Grammar explains that the verb does not have the category of time in many languages (Jespersen, 1968). In other words, it cannot express time. In other languages verbs can express not only the fact that the action

was in the past but also if that time reference is close to or far from the present moment. These differences are not accidental because the grammar structure of a language is not a number of accidental rules, but a grammatical view of the world. Consequently, the grammars of Russian and English look at the world differently. For example, it is not understandable for a native English speaker that a table can be of masculine gender and a bed can be feminine. A table for him is neither he nor she because nouns in English have no gender. The category of gender exists in modern English in a minimal range that is enough for understanding a reality. But Russian disposed of the perfect long ago and with this grammatical form Russian has lost the grammatical view of the world that allowed Russians to understand the perfect of other nations. The Russian native speaker has certain difficulties with understanding the perfect because Russian grammar perceives and understands time differently.

In modern Russian the grammatical past and future can exist only relative to the present moment – the so called moment of speech as a constant zero point of grammatical time. In English the moment of speech can also be taken as a zero point. There is the past and future in relation to this point. But the point itself does not necessarily coincide with the moment of speech. This point is dynamical. It can be removed from the moment of speech and become a conditional moment in relation to which there is conditional past and conditional present. Besides, the real past and real future also exist. Time is valued in two categories from two points of view. In view of this, in English grammar there exist terms Future-in the-Past (one and the same event is in the past from the point of view of the moment of speech and it is future from the point of view of the conditional moment in the past) and before Past, unimaginable in the grammatical structure of Russian. But in Russian grammar there are no special means to specially describe this moment. The future from the point of view of the past moment does not differ in Russian grammar from the Future from the point of view of the moment of speech. In the English dual system of time there are special means to describe the event "the friends will come" both from the point of view of the moment of speech and from that of the past moment:

Mary thought her friends would come next week.

The same is true in the before past. In Russian we say:

The boy had dinner after he did his homework.

There are two moments in this sentence from which the time is measured: (the moment of speech) and the moment in the past. It is all the same for the Russian language that the event had dinner is a past event in relation to the moment of speech and to the event had done his homework. It is important for the English language to describe this event from two points of view, because from the point of view of the English grammar, this event takes place in two times at once: in the past in relation to the moment of speech and in the past in relation to the event had done his homework. The English language has the means for expressing these details:

The boy had dinner after he had done his homework.

It is in such dual time system that the perfect can exist. This is its habitat and we must understand it.

The aspect-tense system of the English language can be introduced as a chronotypical model where the tense and space relations are closely connected. Additionally, they are a form of expressing and constructing consciousness and a cultural experience of the nation thinking in and speaking this language. From this point of view the perfect, tenses are combined in this group not for the indication of completion but for personal importance, human individuality and opposition to something endless, eternal and typical. For example, the present perfect introduces some event as a point, which is of great value for something. Due to the close connection of consciousness with language, the results of man's understanding of time are expressed in the linguistic model of time introduced in a totality of the following linguistic categories: verb tense forms, word meanings with temporal colouring (day, morning, night, year, month), adjectives and adverbs with temporal meaning (former, previous, last, future, recent) (Maslova, 2005, p. 69).

Universal ways of understanding time are by divisions of the day into hours, light and dark parts of the day and seasons in different cultures. For example, it is necessary to notice, that for the English native speaker a part of time called this morning begins from midnight and ends before lunch that is at 1 p.m. Then a part of time this afternoon begins that continues till the end of the working day that is at 5p.m. That is why if they talk, for example, at 10 a.m. it is better to say: Peter has called two times this morning already, using the Present Perfect. This grammatical form underlines that the action took place in present time, because 10 a.m. covers the range this morning. If they speak about this event at 3 p.m. they should use the indefinite: Peter called two times this morning**.** Accordingly, in this way the degree of remoteness of speech time from the present moment is taken into account in the English linguistic view of the world (Veyhman, 2002, p. 64).

The English perfect is a special form of the representation of information, the most humanized of all verbal forms, giving the sentence some hidden potential. It is known from the linguistic practice that no sentence can be made of perfect forms only, because the perfect itself cannot make up a content of speech. The content that the perfect, as inserted in the sentence, is always an addition to the main one. It highlights the one most important and underlines one of the main components of a phrase. It has a sort of background character, a hidden sense that the speaker involves in the sentence according to his intentions and his wish to express his feelings and aims better. It is necessary to note that in their semantics perfect forms allocate the main role to the speaker. Undoubtedly, perfect forms have a pragmatic communicational status because they are always oriented on speech contact, on getting a definite reaction from the listener through a particular personal representation of information by the speaker.

The methods used

In the present paper the theoretical and methodological basis consists of the ideas and results of research of Russian and foreign scientists, representatives of

cognitive linguistics, ethnolinguistics, the theory of intercultural communication and communication ethnography, investigating the most diverse manifestations of perfect forms from material of various languages. In this study we used the general scientific methods such as descriptive and analytical method, which involves observation and analysis of perfect forms, contextual and comparative methods which makes it possible to compare the specifics of the use and semantics of the perfect in English and Russian in an ethnocultural aspect.

Conclusions and implications for future studies

It is reasonable to suppose that the problem of perfect tenses in English attracts the attention of linguists due to its uniqueness, discrepancy of the grammatical phenomena itself, diversity of forms and their meanings. It is really difficult to explain the semantics of the perfect forms both as a whole and as separate items. The evidence of this is the existence of g many theories of the perfect relating it either to a grammatical category of time or that of aspect or the two combined. The fruitful development of cognitive linguistics nowadays lets scientists search for a solution to this problem in this field of research. In relation to this, an attempt is being made to represent the perfect as a cognitive sign forming a special concept in the consciousness of native speakers of English.

Our research allows us to make a conclusion that characteristics of the national consciousness and behavior find their reflection both in vocabulary and grammar. Thus, by having explored the perfect, we can demonstrate an understanding of the dual grammatical time without suspecting it. Consequently, we have not only touched upon the English view of the world but also that of the world of our ancestors because, as was said earlier, the Russian language was once a language with a perfect form. Owing to the arguing nature of many of the questions concerning the perfect, it is difficult to consider them answered. The evolution of these forms continues for the reason that the language is constantly changing because of many factors. In modern, international English there is a trend of replacing perfect forms for that of the present simple tense (I have this book since…, rather than I have had this book since…), or past simple (Did you ask Joe? rather than Have you asked Joe?), which will actually result in the simplification of speech. But what will be the cognitive-pragmatic sense of replacing the perfect for the past simple tense? Will such cognitive signs as the perfect disappear from the English linguistic view of the world? Linguists should answer these and many other questions in the process of studying perfect forms in the upcoming future. In conclusion, we may state that the theoretical grounds provided in the present article constitute an excellent foundation for further studies of the problem of the English perfect. Such research will certainly make a contribution to the development of the linguistic-cultural study, cognitive linguistics and in solving problems connected with intercultural communication.

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