THE CONCEPT-SPHERE “GAME” IN THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FICTION TEXT

Game is an important cultural phenomenon, whose impact on social life and personal development cannot be overestimated. The topic of the game is the basis for the plot and problem formation in many fiction works. The article aims to identify and analyse the structure of the concept-sphere “game” in texts by American writers who reflected this phenomenon in their works. The research tasks are to reveal the micro-contexts referring to the game and to describe the nucleus, the co-nuclear area, the near periphery and the further periphery of the concept-sphere. This article is the first to examine the cognitive-propositional structure of the concept-sphere “game” in the texts under analysis. As a result the analysis of each constituent of the concept-sphere is conducted. The nucleus is presented by the cognitive-propositional structure, including the subject, the predicate, the reason, the purpose, the result, the consequence and the locative of the game. The co-nuclear zone is formed by lexical representations, revealing the contents of the above-mentioned components. The near periphery includes artistic images of the game. The further periphery reflects social and cultural aspects of the game and the personal attitude of the characters to this phenomenon. The research combines linguistic and literary approaches. The basic method is conceptual analysis, a combination of various techniques used to analyse concepts. The descriptive method and the method of contextual analysis are also applied. The latter enables to investigate the concept-sphere “game” on all levels of the text structure as well as to consider the message of the analysed works.

Keywords: concept, concept-sphere game, cognitive-propositional structure, ethnocultural specificity, perceptual ambivalence.

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КОНЦЕПТОСФЕРА “GAME” В АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОМ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОМ ТЕКСТЕ

Игра представляет собой важный общекультурный феномен, влияние которого как на жизнь общества, так и на развитие отдельной личности трудно переоценить. Тема игры стала основой для формирования сюжета и проблематики множества художественных произведений. Целью настоящего исследования является выявление и анализ структуры концептосферы “game” в произведениях американских писателей, отразивших данное явление в своем творчестве. Задачи исследования — выделить микроконтексты, содержащие упоминание игровой деятельности, и на их основе последовательно описать ядро, приядерную
зону, ближайшую и дальнейшую периферии концептосферы. В статье впервые описывается когнитивно-пропозициональная структура концептосферы “game” в проанализированных текстах. В результате проведен анализ каждой составляющей структуры концептосферы. Ядро концептосферы представлено ее когнитивно-пропозициональной структурой, включающей субъект, предикат, причину, цель, результат, следствие (проявление) и локатив игры. Прияральная зона формируется лексическими репрезентациями, раскрывающими содержание вышеуказанных компонентов когнитивно-пропозициональной структуры. Ближайшая периферия включает образные представления игры, а дальнейшая периферия отражает субъектно-модальные смыслы, а именно, связанные с игрой социально-культурные аспекты и личное отношение к игре персонажей проанализированных произведений. Исследование сочетает лингвистический и литературо-теоретический подходы. В качестве основного метода исследования избран концептуальный анализ, представляющий собой совокупность разнообразных приемов, используемых при анализе концептов. Также используются описательный метод и метод контекстуального анализа. Последний позволяет рассмотреть объективацию концептосферы “game” на всех уровнях текстовой организации и, кроме того, глубже осознать идейное содержание анализируемых произведений.

Ключевые слова: концепт, концептосфера game, когнитивно-пропозициональная структура, этнокультурная специфика, амбивалентность восприятия.

Introduction

Conceptual research remains a topical tendency in modern linguistics due to the fact that it allows to show the features of mentality of an ethnos, whose language is being investigated, as well as particular features of the semantics of the lexical units under study, representing a concept. It can also be helpful in distinguishing and investigating the universal intercultural concepts. A. Wierzbicka points out: “In fact, there is no conflict between an interest in linguistic and conceptual universals on the one hand and an interest in the diversity of language-and-culture systems on the other. On the contrary, to achieve their purpose, these two interests must go hand in hand” [Wierzbicka, 1997, p. 23].

N. N. Boldyrev defines cognitive semantics as a multilevel theory of meaning, “whose specificity lies in the fact that the meanings of language units are analysed in the context of all human knowledge and experience, not only in the context of language knowledge” [Boldyrev, 2014, p. 33].

I. V. Arnold points out the importance of taking into account the factors “which characterize the meaning of a word as a linguistic and nationally specific category in contrast to the notion as a logical and international category” [Arnold, 2012, p. 51].
V. Ja. Shabes notes that the integral system of knowledge about the world, understood as a cognitive component, in the process of speech and thinking activity is formalized verbally through separate fragments — communicative units [Shabes, 1989].

Besides, the conceptual approach is often used in the analysis of a fiction text, as it enables deeper understanding of the message of the literary work and the author’s perception of the phenomenon corresponding to the analysed concept. In its turn, a literary text can be considered to be one of the means that convey a concept. R. Jackendoff mentions: “On the other hand, a concept is spoken of as an entity within one’s head, a private entity, a product of the imagination that can be conveyed to others only by means of language, gesture, drawing, or some other imperfect means of communication” [Jackendoff, 1992, p. 22].

This article aims to investigate the structure of the concept-sphere “game” in the texts by American writers who reflected this phenomenon in their works. Game is one of the universal intercultural phenomena. J. Huizinga mentions that most areas of human culture, such as mythology, religion, literature, music, philosophy and even war are essentially games [Huizinga, 1997]. That is why game has quite naturally become the topic and provided the basis for the plot and problem formation of many fiction works. This confirms the relevance of the study. The research tasks are to reveal the micro-contexts referring to the game and to describe the nucleus, the co-nuclear area, the near periphery and the further periphery of the concept-sphere.

The research of linguistic objectification of the phenomenon of game can hardly be considered to be an absolutely new idea. There are quite a few research papers concerning this problem. However, most of them are dedicated to identifying the aspects of game in the structure of the literary works and the creative style typical of a particular author or literary tradition. For example, Z. M. Chemodurova points out, that at present the increasing interest in the semantics of game on the whole and in the language game in particular takes place in linguistic research [Chemodurova, 2017].

Some works analyse the linguistic representation of the game, but the materials used are phraseological units, dictionary definitions of lexemes that denote concepts related to the phenomenon of game, and excerpts from media texts. Thus, N. I. Svistunova makes an attempt of systematic analysis of the above-mentioned concept and its actualization in modern English on the material of newspaper articles and etymological dictionaries [Svistunova, 2004].
Methods and material

The basic method of the presented research paper is conceptual analysis. However, it is important to mention, that conceptual analysis includes a combination of various techniques used to analyse concepts. The descriptive method and the method of contextual analysis are also applied. The latter enables to consider the concept-sphere “game” on all levels of text structure, including words and word combinations, sentences and supraphrasal units as well as to understand the message of the works under analysis. The factual material includes various text fragments referring to the game activities. The sources were selected from the books of fiction by American authors who reflected the phenomenon of game in their works. We did not aim to select the works of a particular genre or literary tradition, the choice was made primarily on the basis of the prominence of the analysed concept-sphere for the plot and problem formation in the texts under analysis. The volume of the texts analysed is 766 pages, and 35 text fragments were selected.

Results and Discussion

There are many methods of analysing artistic concepts. L. G. Babenko and Ju. V. Kazarin offer an algorithm of conceptual analysis of a fiction text, including the selection of pre-textual presuppositions, analysis of the semantics of the title, identification of keywords of the text through psycholinguistic experiment, determination of the lexical representative of the textual concept, analysis of the lexical composition of the text, description of the text concept-sphere and modelling the structure of the concept-sphere [Babenko, Kazarin, 2005]. We will focus on the last point of this algorithm, and in the present research we understand the concept-sphere as the totality of all cases of objectification of a concept at all levels of the text under analysis.

According to the above-mentioned authors, the structure of the concept-sphere includes the nucleus, presented by a basic cognitive and propositional structure, the co-nuclear zone, consisting of basic lexical representations, the nearest periphery, represented by image associations and the further periphery, uniting the subjective-modal meanings [Babenko, Kazarin, 2005].

The following quote presents a more detailed description of the structure of the concept: “Concept is a set of cognitive attributes, hierarchically organized according to the principle of the concept field, taking into account their cognitive significance and functional orientation, so in the
structure of the concept field the following elements are distinguished: the nucleus — the main basic cognitive attribute, that performs the function of categorization and relates the concept to a particular category; the co-nuclear zone, which includes the cognitive attributes serving as a specification of the basic attribute, carried out by certain parameters, due to the type of the expressed category; the near periphery, which includes, on the basis of the mechanism of mental integration, combined cognitive attributes that intersect with other mental spaces; the further periphery, which contains the cognitive attributes of pragmatic nature — evaluative, associative-imaginative, and modal” [Babenko, Babenko, 2019, p. 136].

The nucleus and the co-nuclear zone

Due to the analysis of text fragments containing references to game activities, we can reveal the structure of the concept-sphere “game” in the texts of the analysed works and to present it in the form of a concept field. The nucleus of the concept-sphere “game” in our case is presented by its cognitive and propositional structure: the subject of the game — the predicate of the game — the reason of the game — the purpose of the game — the result of the game — the consequence (manifestation) of the game — the locative of the game.

The co-nuclear zone is formed by lexical representations of the aforementioned components of the cognitive-propositional structure of the concept.

1) The subject of the game is a person performing the game activity, in our case the character of the work under analysis: Waverly, Suyuan, etc. (“The Joy Luck Club” by A. Tan), Holden Caulfield (“The Catcher in the Rye” by J. D. Salinger), Joe (“The Game” by J. London), Alton and his uncle (“The Cardturner” by L. Sachar). However, the game can be presented not only from the point of view of a participant, but also from the position of an observer.

2) The predicate can be considered as the features characterizing the game as a phenomenon in general, or describing a particular game.

The lexeme “game” in English is polysemantic, but the following meaning is especially important:

game (noun): 1. a competitive encounter between individuals or groups carried on for amusement, exercise, or in pursuit of a prize [Merriam Webster Dictionary].

According to this definition, “game” means an activity the purpose of which is pleasure, practicing some skill or receiving a reward. The texts
under analysis do not provide the definition of “game”, but the following examples partially reflect the mentioned characteristics.

“The Joy Luck Club”
“We had to concentrate on our game, and think of nothing else but adding to our happiness through winning” [Tan, 2008, p. 5].
“And this gift gave me a wonderful confidence. I loved to win” [Ibid., p. 42].

“The Catcher in the Rye”
The word combination “bashing each other all over the place”, creating an image of rough physical confrontation, reflects the characteristic feature of competitive sports games: “You could see the whole field from there, and you could see the two teams bashing each other all over the place” [Salinger, 1968, p. 28].

“The Game”
“In such cases he played the Game, and the goal of the Game was to down an antagonist and keep that antagonist down for a space of ten seconds” [London, 2005, p. 13].

3) The reason and purpose of the game in some cases can coincide, because the game, being an essentially free and voluntary activity, may not have any purpose except for the very inducement to play, but people also play for reward, self-fulfillment, establishment and development of personal relationships. At the same time, the game has a tendency to become a kind of social tradition, but even in this case it often pursues these goals, although the motivation to play in this case will be not pleasure, but the desire to avoid social censure.

4) The result of the game sometimes coincides with the goal, but the game may lead to unexpected consequences for the participants. Thus, the result of the game may be a financial reward:
“We added just a little, so you can go Hong Kong, take train to Shanghai, see your sisters” [Tan, 2008, p. 12].
The following micro-context shows that teaching the other person to play contributes to the development of friendship:
“I improved her game immensely, though. I am a very good golfer” [Salinger, 1968, p. 93].

Besides, the game can lead to personal transformation of the subject and change his life attitude:
“I’ve made a resolution that I will no longer let Cliff or anyone else manipulate me. Life will deal me many different hands, some good, some bad (maybe they’ve already been dealt), but from here on in, I’ll be turning my own cards” [Sachar, 2010, p. 315].
5) The consequence (manifestation) of the game is expressed through the description of the emotional state of the participants of the game during the game process or the subject’s emotions related to the game. Thus, the game gives joy and self-confidence, especially in case of winning:

“We had to concentrate on our game, and think of nothing else but adding to our happiness through winning” [Tan, 2008, p. 5].

“And this gift gave me a wonderful confidence. I loved to win” [Ibid., p. 42].

However, the opposite situation, when the game is perceived as a boring and meaningless action, is also possible:

“He was telling her about some pro football game he’d seen that afternoon. He gave her any single goddam play in the whole game — I’m not kidding. He was the most boring guy I ever listened to” [Salinger, 1968, p. 100].

In some cases, the game occupies an extremely important place in the subject’s life and causes such a strong emotional response that it becomes impossible to express feelings verbally: “He lacked speech-expression. He expressed himself with his hands, at his work, and with his body and the play of his muscles in the squared ring; but to tell with his own lips the charm of the squared ring was beyond him” [London, 2005, p. 1].

The game helps to keep the will to live to one of the characters of the novel “The Cardturner”. Lester Trapp is seriously ill and lives only for the sake of bridge:

“There’s a different kind of will, the will to live. Gloria was probably right when she said the nationals had been keeping Trapp alive” [Sachar, 2010, p. 210].

6) The locative of the game is expressed through the description of the organization of the game space.

“When I played, I didn’t see the person sitting opposite me. I only saw the black and white chessmen on the board” [Tan, 2008, p. 37].

“You could see the whole field from there, and you could see the two teams bashing each other all over the place” [Salinger, 1968, p. 28].

“As he described the moment of moments to her, on his inward vision were lined the tottering man, the lights, the shouting house…” [London, 2005, p. 2].

“Three rows of square tables. Eight tables per row. Four chairs at each table. Computer printouts posted on the walls” [Sachar, 2010, p. 18].
The near periphery

The near periphery of the concept-sphere is represented by figurative associations. In the novel “The Joy Luck Club” the game is associated with magic and mystery, available to very few people:

“A light wind blew past my ears, whispering secrets only I could hear” [Tan, 2008, p. 37].

“I realized I could no longer see the secret weapons of each chessman, or the magic in every square” [Ibid., p. 43].

Subsequently, after a quarrel with her mother, the game is associated by the heroine with conflict and confrontation: “In my head I saw a chess-board. The player opposite me had eyes like angry black holes in her face” [Ibid., p. 42].

As for mah-jong, this game becomes the symbol of generational bonding: “My father has asked me to be the fourth player at the Joy Luck Club. I am replacing my mother, whose seat at the mah jong table has been empty since she died two months ago” [Ibid., p. 2].

In the novel “The Catcher in the Rye” the game is associated with deception and hypocrisy. The micro-context below provides the description of the Pencey School advertisement, which the protagonist believes to be untrue: “The advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hot-shot guy on a horse jumping over a fence. Like as if all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time. I never even once saw a horse anywhere near the place” [Salinger, 1968, p. 28].

The game can also be presented as an unjust, but inevitable law of social interaction, and this law is based on imposed rules:

“Life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules” [Ibid., p. 33].

In J. London’s story “The Game” Genevieve “perceives the game not merely as a dangerous phenomenon, but as a hostile living being, an insidious and cruel adversary who seeks to deceive her away from her lover” [Satina, 2020, p. 111].

“She revolted instinctively against this Game which drew him away from her, robbed her of part of him” [London, 2005, p. 4].

Joe also feels this confrontation: “He saw only the antagonism between the concrete, flesh-and-blood Genevieve and the great, abstract, living Game” [Ibid.].

After Joe’s death, Genevieve realizes that she has never come in first place for her lover: “Although the Game required Joe to take constant risks and exorbitant efforts, and eventually took his very life, his heart belonged to the Game only” [Satina, 2020, p. 112].
In the novel “The Cardturner” the nearest periphery is represented by the following text fragments. After his uncle’s death, Alton imagines him sitting at the bridge table and announcing “pass”: “He reaches into the bidding box, removes a pass card, and places it on the table. Then he slowly vanishes” [Sachar, 2010, p. 210].

According to bridge rules, the term “pass” “means a refuse from assignment on a given betting round or from participation in a draw on a given hand” [Bridge Rules]. It is worth mentioning that the meaning of “to pass away” (to die) correlates with the meaning of this term expressing the intention to pause in the game [Satina, 2019].

A similar example is related to the episode when Alton’s girlfriend and game companion uses a trick unexpected for the opponents, and that method enables the friends to finish the game successfully. Alton explains the mentioned event by the work of the subconscious [Ibid]. The following quotation shows the connection between consciousness and subconsciousness, denoted by the lexeme “bridge”, homonymic to the name of the game: “Her anger formed a connection between her conscious and subconscious minds, a bridge, if you will” [Sachar, 2010, p. 161].

In this case, the game helps to reveal a person’s intellectual abilities.

Besides, Alton often compares mastering bridge with learning other games (football, chess, bingo), as well as with other activities (poetry, learning foreign languages). These comparisons give visibility and make the subject more understandable for the reader [Satina, 2019]. Alton points out that in bridge it is not necessary to memorize when every particular technique is used, because each player’s action is conditioned by the previous one, and it makes the game process similar to learning the lyrics of a song, when one remembers the work as a whole rather than each individual word [Satina, 2020].

“I don’t think he purposely set out to memorize every three of spades or seven of clubs. I think it’s more like the way you or I memorize the song lyrics” [Sachar, 2010, p. 135].

**The further periphery**

The further periphery is represented by subjective-modal meanings, expressing the attitude to the game process from the point of view of its participants or observers. Moreover, it reveals the ethnocultural aspects of the analysed concept-sphere, showing the importance of both sports and board games in everyday life of American society.
Thus, to the heroines of the novel “The Joy Luck Club” the game helps to distract from everyday life, and success in the game contributes to self-confidence.

“We had to concentrate on our game, and think of nothing else but adding to our happiness through winning” [Tan, 2008, p. 5].

“And this gift gave me a wonderful confidence. I loved to win” [Ibid., p. 42].

Interest in the game can become a basis for development of friendship [Satina, 2020], also game is able to unite the community or at least formally maintain the traditions established in the team.

“He was quite interested in tennis, and so was I. He told me he went to the Nationals at Forest Hills every summer, and I told him I did too, and then we talked about certain hot-shot tennis players for quite a while” [Salinger, 1968, p. 124].

“The game with Saxon Hall was supposed to be a very big deal around Pencey” [Ibid., p. 28].

However, the protagonist of the novel “The Catcher in the Rye” has ambivalent attitude to sports games, and the following quotes illustrate his perception of games as the embodiment of other people’s stupidity and narrow-mindedness [Satina, 2020].

“He was telling her about some pro football game he’d seen that afternoon. He gave her any single goddam play in the whole game — I’m not kidding. He was the most boring guy I ever listened to” [Salinger, 1968, p. 100].

“And you have to keep making believe you give a damn if the football team loses, and all you do is talk about girls and liquor and sex all day, and everybody stick together in these little dirty goddam cliques. The guys that are on the basketball team stick together, the Catholics stick together, the goddam intellectuals stick together, the guys that play bridge stick together” [Ibid., p. 140–141].

For the protagonist of J.London’s story “The Game”, boxing (this sport is referred to as the Game) is the most important thing in his life, competing even with his love for Genevieve.

“He saw only the antagonism between the concrete, flesh-and-blood Genevieve and the great, abstract, living Game” [London, 2005, p. 3].

“The Cardturner”

It is worth mentioning that L. Sachar was inspired to create this work by his fondness for bridge: “Still, I really love the game…” [Sachar, 2010].

Nevertheless, the characters’ attitude toward bridge is contradictory and can change over the course of the narrative. When Alton gets to know the game, bridge seems to him old-fashioned, ridiculous and boring:
“I knew bridge was a card game, but that was about it. It seemed dull and old-fashioned” [Sachar, 2010, p. 17].

At the same time, Alton admits that before the invention of computer games, bridge could be quite an exciting activity [Satina, 2020].

“Maybe, at one time, bridge might have been some people’s idea of fun, but that was before computers and video-games” [Sachar, 2010, p. 17].

However, the young man starts feeling curious: “Probably, the game, which is so fascinating for people, cannot help but be special in some respect” [Satina, 2020, p. 128].

“Even though I didn’t understand what they were talking about, I think that was my first inkling that bridge wasn’t just a simple game, and that there maybe was something extraordinary about my uncle” [Sachar, 2010, p. 27].

As for Alton’s uncle, bridge is not just a favorite pastime for him, the game helps him to overcome the disease and supports the will to live [Satina, 2020, p. 128].

“There’s a different kind of will, the will to live. Gloria was probably right when she said the nationals had been keeping Trapp alive” [Sachar, 2010, p. 210].

The following text fragments characterize bridge as an important activity for which one can put off other plans [Satina, 2020].

“That’s more important” [Sachar, 2010, p. 18].

“Trapp’s tournament means a lot more than some stupid party” [Ibid.].

Conclusion

The concept-sphere “game”, objectified in the analysed works of fiction, is a complex multilevel formation. Its nucleus is presented by the cognitive-propositional structure, defining the main aspects of the interaction between Game and Person. The co-nuclear zone is formed by lexical representations, revealing the above-mentioned components of the nucleus. The near periphery is formed by figurative associations, for example, the game is presented as an illustration of deceit and hypocrisy or as an image of a rival.

The subjective-modal meanings constitute the further periphery of the concept-sphere “game” and are characterized by certain ambivalence, conditioned by the peculiarities of the message and the plot of the works under analysis. The game can be a personal choice or a social tradition, and in this respect the further periphery reveals the ethnocultural specificity of the analysed concept-sphere. In some cases the game contributes to the formation and development of personality, strengthening family
and friendly relations (“The Cardturner”, “The Joy Luck Club”), but the
game can also lead to the separation of people and the conflict between a
person and society (“Catcher in the Rye”, “The Game”).

Of course, this study, being restricted by the volume of the four texts
under analysis, does not reveal the whole range of aspects of the contents
of the analysed concept-sphere. As a research perspective it is possible
to suggest investigating the concept-sphere of gambling, as the games of
chance have their own specific features, and the concept-sphere of com-
puter games in the texts of fiction.

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