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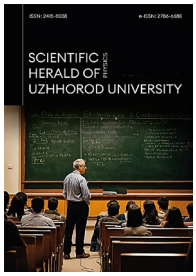

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Using semantic paradigms as tools for foreign language teaching: theory and practice

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Abstract

Relevance. The relevance of the aforementioned study topic is motivated by the progressive activity of mankind in terms of the development of the information society, the growing demand for foreign language skills and the problem of learning a foreign language, as the large amount of information that needs to be assimilated certainly slows down this process.

Purpose. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of using semantic paradigms as tools for foreign language teaching; the existing developments that have been used to date and the results of their use.

Methodology. The methodological approach is based on an analytical study of the use of semantic paradigms (examples are given of the use of semantic frequency dictionaries to increase the efficiency and speed of learning a foreign language) as tools for foreign language learning.

Results. The main results that were obtained during the study can be considered: the evaluation of the effectiveness of the introduction of semantic paradigms and interaction with native speakers in the context of foreign language learning, the prospects of semantic paradigms in foreign language teaching among higher education representatives, along with the formed conclusions on how the use of semantic paradigms affects the quality of acquired knowledge.

Conclusions. The results of this scientific research, as well as the conclusions formulated during its conduct, are of the greatest importance for people who pursue the goal of learning a foreign language for personal and professional purposes and for foreign language teachers who may use effective, non-traditional teaching methods in their practice. Furthermore, psychologists whose work centres on science and theory can broaden the scope of their studies on the example of this investigation.

Keywords: semantic paradigm; information community; semantic frequency dictionary; semantics, education.

Introduction

There are a number of valid arguments for exploring the use of non-standard methods in learning a foreign language. Firstly, it has to do with the fact that humanity today rightfully acquires the status of an information society. An informational society is one in which people spend a considerable amount of time mastering, accumulating, processing and storing heterogeneous information [1; 2] It is worth noting that such a society has a characteristic feature – the speed of the above transactions with such an object as information. Consequently, in order to learn and process information in a foreign language quickly, it is necessary to master it, at least in the branch under study. The speed at which it is learned affects the effectiveness of the human activity. Secondly, traditional methods of learning a foreign

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language are outdated today, this is due to a decrease in a person's ability to concentrate on one type of activity for a long period of time, and therefore researchers should shift their focus to the search for innovative teaching methods, which rightfully includes the use of semantic paradigms. Thirdly, in the process of learning a foreign language, assume, along with the use of non-standard methods, the issue of introducing the person who is focused on this activity to the foreign language environment is overlooked [3; 4].

As part of the theoretical study, it is necessary to determine the concepts of "semantics" and "semantic paradigm". Semantics, in its standard interpretation, is a branch of linguistics that studies the semantic content of units of a certain language. Here, the emphasis is on meaning and meaningfulness. Semantic paradigms, in turn, are system relations of words that are based on similarity or semantic proximity: synonyms, antonyms or the semantic field [5-7]. Although the branch was developed in the framework of the efforts of language scientists, at the beginning of the twentieth century it was psychologists who developed semantics, trying to connect words to human mental activity and to the meanings given to them. It is worth noting that psychologists are actively involved in issues related to the study of foreign languages and foreign language abilities. Thus, both the methods of teaching students in schools and higher educational institutions and the presence of individual inclinations in the process of learning languages were studied [8; 9]. The study showed a need for a reorientation of foreign language teaching: from the typical, self-study books replicated in millions of copies, to the methods used in most educational institutions. However, no specific methodologies for reorienting teaching have been established in the current investigation; the perspectives for optimisation have mainly concerned the personality of the teacher in the educational institutions [10; 11]. Thus, the purpose of the study was formulated: to examine the effectiveness of the use of semantic paradigms as a means of teaching a foreign language; to evaluate existing methods that are used today and the results of their use.

The process of learning a foreign language is quite time-consuming. Among other things, motivation plays an important role in this matter. If one encounters a succession of difficulties on the journey of learning a foreign language, their motivation will gradually wane. This is also related to the need to optimise the learning process. The use of semantic paradigms is quite effective considering that some foreign words carry multiple meanings, which can slow down the natural learning process [12-14]. It has also been found that the more often a word appears in sources, the more necessary it is for study. In order to optimise the learning of a foreign language in the context of the topic under study, a semantic frequency dictionary is used [15]. Frequency dictionaries include words that are recorded in the texts studied, and the semantic frequency dictionaries register the semantics of their input units. The main advantage of such lists is their convenience: a person studying a foreign language (in this case, English) chooses the relevant words and the corresponding meaning, depending on the purpose of learning. The theoretical significance of this study lies in its findings, which are to be used by psychologists, foreign language teachers, etc. This study is of practical importance for the Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking population of Kazakhstan, as it analyses the application of semantic paradigms abroad.

Materials and Methods

The methodological approach is based on an analytical study of the use of semantic paradigms in the context of learning a foreign language, assessing the need to optimise existing methods and forms of foreign language acquisition, and analysing the use of semantic frequency dictionaries in language acquisition. This investigation includes an assessment of the current stage of development of modern society and its interaction with information; interpretation of concepts related to semantic paradigm; evaluation of the use of semantic frequency dictionaries in optimising the study of foreign languages (mainly English). This research has been conducted on a previously established foundation of theory, which can serve as qualitative support for further investigation on this topic. The theoretical basis of the study consists of the works of Kazakh and foreign psychologists, which represent different branches of psychology, thus, allowing the topic to be explored from fundamentally different angles. The studies of psychologists have concerned issues of personal meanings and the acquisition of foreign languages.

The study was carried out in three stages. The first stage involved gathering theoretical information, i.e., forming a theoretical basis. The first stage of the investigation assessed the current state of society in terms of information processing and perception and analysed the effectiveness of existing forms of foreign language learning. The fundamental issues that can be addressed in optimising the learning and self-learning processes have been formulated. These issues relate primarily to the transience of the modern world. Today, every sphere of human activity requires a quick and yet high-quality absorption of information. It has been concluded that it is almost impossible to achieve this goal if there are no updates in the training system. This is where the process of learning activities needs to be initiated since the demands of any kind of human employment require a prompt response, which can and should be shaped through the process of self-learning. As far as existing forms of foreign language teaching are concerned, it is safe to call them obsolete because the traditional form is based on the capacity of human mechanical memory and focuses on memorising the necessary words. Such an approach, arguably, should be changed since people have different goals in the process of learning a foreign language In a higher education institution, it is not possible to individualise the learning process to this extent because of the considerable workload of the teaching staff, a large number of students and, of course, the paperwork, which takes up much of the practical activity of the educator. For this reason, the use of a semantic paradigm will be more relevant than ever as it meets the goal of individualisation and could help teachers use foreign semantic frequency dictionaries to enhance the effectiveness of teaching by selecting the most frequent meanings for popular words.

The second stage of the study focused around the key concepts that were introduced. Interpretation of basic concepts is the main step towards understanding the

essence of using semantic paradigms in the context of foreign language learning. Besides, the experience of using semantic frequency dictionaries in the process of the acquisition of a foreign language was analysed, and examples of the most information-significant dictionaries were given. The analysis of the use of the latter made it possible to assess the effectiveness and necessity of introducing such forms of training and self-learning. In the final stage, the final conclusions were formed, which are the summation of the study. The block of conclusions concerns the final assessment of the need to optimise traditional methods of learning foreign languages, the confirmation of the true value of using semantics in learning foreign languages and the evaluation of foreign experiences in the optimisation. The findings can undoubtedly serve as a powerful foundation for further studies, as they will allow scientists to assess the state of the study on the subject, evaluate the prospects of semantic paradigms in the context of educational activities, and analyse the experience of foreign colleagues.

Results and Discussion

In the first phase of this research work, certain postulates around the given topic were formed. Modern society is an information society. The vast majority of today's people are digitalised, having been in the array of information practically since birth. This means that a person must meet the demands of the outside world: be able to promptly absorb and process incoming information, reprocess and store it. The aforementioned requirements are presented not only to individuals but also to whole systems that are formed in society. In the context of this study, it is reasonable to focus on those systems that concern education [16; 17]. After all, foreign language teaching is mainly provided by educational institutions with the appropriate licence. This system is also inherently rigid and resistant to innovation, which leads to incompatibility with the requirements of the outside world. In fact, the question to reflect on now is why modern society is like this, and why any change is still hard to come by. In every structure where people are concentrated, their nervous system plays an important role. The human nervous system has the ability to form sufficiently strong neural connections, and although one of its major properties is comparative plasticity, it will retain a previously formed action stereotype for as long as possible [18-20]. However, it is worth noting that the modern man will not progress if he does not change his habits, his skills for the better. It is fair to note that a person's openness to change is a step in evolution [1; 21].

The use of semantic paradigms in the process of learning a foreign language and in the educational process, in general, has psychological roots. The branch of psychology that studies the psychological characteristics of the educational process is called educational psychology. This section deals with the role of the individual in the process of learning and skills, the specifics of the educational process from a psychological point of view, etc. In fact, the use of the achievements of psychology in the process of knowledge acquisition has a significant role to play in making it much easier to understand the mechanisms of internalisation of information, concentration and perception of the necessary information. All of the above is of particular importance in the process of learning a foreign language because a person gets acquainted with words and their meanings that are completely foreign to them, one also has to work on the correct interpretation, pronunciation, sentence construction and understanding of the foreign language speakers. Using educational psychology in this process will help to facilitate the process of rethinking the language being learned. In the context of this study, the use of semantic paradigms in foreign language learning is explored. Semantics has its origins in linguistics, but in psychology, it has developed into psychosemantics. The concept of psychosemantics reflects its role in the process of learning not only a foreign language but also education in general. Thus, psychosemantics is a branch of psychology that studies the principles of functioning and formation of a personal system of meanings, which is developed in the processes of thinking, memorising and perceiving [7; 8; 22].

The previously mentioned processes are actively involved in the process of acquiring new knowledge. This branch of psychology also studies how people perceive and understand signs, phrases and symbols, and how they understand and use them in their thinking. The main objective of psychosemantics is to investigate and reconstruct the structures of a person's subjective experience (which are not always manifested externally) in the form of systems of meanings and senses, which form the basis of a person's world image. Each individual has a different thought-forming system, which this branch of psychology studies. The central postulate of psychosemantics is that each person is an individual with their own perceptions and meanings. That is why the process of (self-)learning a foreign language should not be built around a traditional approach that relies on conventional assumptions about how people absorb information.

Based on the main methods used in psychosemantics (associative experiment, concept formation method and classification method), it can be concluded that everything depends on the unique connotations that people give to everything that surrounds them. When acquiring a new language, one masters a previously formed system of meanings for the mother tongue or the language one speaks well enough (it cannot be said that one speaks the mother tongue fluently, as speaking it does not necessarily imply knowing all its properties). The study of a foreign language is based around the acquisition of speaking and grammar skills. All of which, initially, comes down to learning new words. Before saying something, one goes through a process of reflection on what is to be verbalised. And fortunately, this is something one can do effortlessly in their mother tongue. In a situation where a person tries to learn a new word in a foreign language, they have to perform a lot of operations, starting from searching for its correct meaning, memorising, comprehending and verbalising it [6; 23]. In order to rationally evaluate all the advantages of using semantic paradigms in learning a foreign language, it is necessary to operate with knowledge of what concepts psychosemantics possess.

In terms of understanding the benefits of psychosemantics, the scientific circle assumes that the individual tends to give meaning to everything that is

meaningful and happens around them. Thus, this brings us to the first concept of psychosemantics - meaning. It is commonly accepted that "meaning" in psychosemantics is a generalised model of an object in a person's mind [24]. A word is not only meant to point to a particular object, it also forms a whole range of associations and connections. Correspondingly, the whole cascade of images stems from it. It is only natural that a semantic space is composed of images. Another concept of psychosemantics is categorisation, which reflects the process of assigning images to a particular category. Notably, humans do this through virtually all conscious and unconscious activities, including sleep. The process of categorisation consists of ascribing equivalence to phenomena and objects, grouping people or objects into classes [25]. In the process of learning a foreign language, the problem of categorisation surfaces, as it is a problem of understanding. This nuance traditionally arises because a letter is better understood in a word and its meaning in a sentence, the essence of which is embedded in the text. It makes sense why it is so difficult for people to perceive and learn foreign languages, for a letter is unknown and thus not perceived correctly in a word, and its meaning is all the more difficult to grasp in a sentence. As for the text, there is hardly any point in discussing it. The problem of categorisation is considered as the inclusion of a stimulus in the internal context.

The context is a separate issue and it is precisely related to the word. In the traditional paradigm of foreign language teaching, it is commonly assumed that a word is a foundation for the construction of an utterance through grammar. It was already mentioned above that one endows each word with subjective meaning. A question then, of course, arises as to how we understand each other [10; 11]. The key is that the meaning of a word is not static; it can be relatively constant and variable. The permanent part tends to activate when there are no other contexts. For example, when being asked to close a window in a room where one is at a given point in time, the window and the context are clearly identifiable. From this, it becomes clear why people in the process of learning a foreign language first make attempts at consecutive translation. Assuming that in order to say something in the target language, people first imagine what they want to say in their native language, and only then translate. This is precisely because words that are new to a person have not yet acquired their meaning and their individual significance in the inner world of the individual. Another problem is that a foreign-language word has several meanings in different spheres of its application, but more on that later.

Foreign-language words consisting only of their outer shell and the dictionary "meaning" attached to them in the form of a translation into the native language are unfortunately not "viable", because one then "sinks" into the native language every time it takes to construct meaning and give it a form of utterance [26; 27]. Another catch of the traditional approach in the process of (self-)learning a foreign language is having to use rote memorisation in order to finally learn the wicked words and master the language to perfection. However, in practice, this leads only to the formation of "steroid words", that remain in memory for some time, but have never acquired their meaning in the mind of a particular person. Here, It is crucial to consider the goal the person is pursuing, if that goal is to memorise words, then the method will work and justify itself completely. The translation methods of learning and memorising words that exist in practice also permanently bind the foreign language learnt to the mother tongue. However, this method can only be used as the first step in learning a foreign language. Another myth operated by the traditional foreign language learning approach concerns grammar. It is commonly thought that it is the "skeleton" of an utterance on which words are based. It was once assumed that people come into the real world with a "built-in" grammar. However, today scientists have come to the final conclusion that thinking is primary: the development of thinking provokes the formation of language. Ultimately, grammar provides only an abstract description of the interaction options of contexts that are associated with words [14; 28].

Everything stated above raises the question of why, with the current traditional system of teaching foreign languages, there are still people who have been able to master it perfectly. In reality, everything is brilliantly simple. Those people did not waste their time memorising single words, they memorised words in context. Through this style of learning, they gradually built up a system of contexts that interacted with each other and then independently combined into statements without resorting to translation. Translation is quite a time-consuming and resource-intensive operation. A separate topic for discussion is what is used not only by the traditional teaching system, but also by private teachers: memorising phrases and sentences, listening to music and audiobooks. However, it is simply not possible for us to hold unstructured information in minds, it has to be meaningful. The other side of using such methods is incorrect language learning, a person builds his own grammar and pronunciation, which native speakers are not able to understand in the process of interpersonal interaction [29]. The process of learning a foreign language is individual because the language consists of contexts, based on life experiences. This is why people do not remember well what is boring to them. This implies that learning a language must have a specific purpose and the meanings of the words to be learned must be related to the sphere in which it is to be used. It is possible to select learning materials individually, to use subjectively relevant material (this is the only way to "convince" the mind to memorise a word with its meaning), and study words in context.

In the context of using the semantic paradigm in the process of learning a foreign language, it is very important to mention the use of semantic frequency dictionaries. It should be noted that they are applied in the process of learning English. Communicative competence is the ability to reproduce and understand a large number of sentences using learned rules. The current stage of society development can be called the globalisation stage, which means the active and progressive development and strengthening of cultural and economic ties between developed countries [30]. It is this fact that has led to increased activity, need and demand for the study of foreign languages. The language barrier inhibits many processes in society because without good communication, there will be no trade, exchange of experiences and so on.

Certainly, in today's higher and secondary vocational education institutions, there is a place for language learning. In addition, today students are taught two foreign languages at once, and even have a choice on which language to learn, which creates a "lively" interest in the learning process. Learning a foreign language is, inevitably, a demanding and time-consuming process, where motivation is just as important. Psychologists agree that intrinsic motivation is of the highest quality because it reflects the subject's genuine interest, inner readiness for new knowledge, and relies not on external approval or encouragement, but on desire [6; 31]. In the initial stage of language learning, a large amount of unnecessary vocabulary slows down the learning process. A frequency dictionary allows to optimise and facilitate the language acquisition experience. It includes word combinations and word forms, which are registered by the compiler, as well as a reference to their frequency of use in texts. They serve as a guide for teachers in the selection of teaching material, in particular vocabulary, both narrowly focused and basic. Very often a person pursues learning a foreign language for professional purposes, and this is where the added value of using such word lists is noted.

A person who has taken up studying a foreign language or a teacher at an institution of higher education will independently compile a minimum of frequent terminology required for learning, using special computer programmes or ready-made dictionaries. In addition to vocabulary, a person/teacher should take into account the need to develop communicative competence. Today, international experience is available for public access, since frequency dictionaries for these purposes have already been created. A prominent example of such is Word Frequencies in Written and Spoken English, which includes a variety of words, providing information on both speech and writing. A distinctive feature of this book is that it explains the significant difference in the meanings of words in spoken and written language. The use of such frequency dictionaries will significantly improve and speed up the process of selecting lexical material for classes. A Frequency Dictionary of Contemporary American English: Word Sketches, Collocates, and Thematic Lists [31] is a corpus-based dictionary of contemporary American English that contains information on the differences between British English and American English. The above-mentioned materials enable people to learn the necessary foreign language on their own. The authors believe that such dictionaries significantly enhance the cognitive activities of students and modernise the work of teachers. The main difference between a semantic frequency dictionary and a frequency dictionary is that the semantics of the input units of words are registered in them.

The relevance of comprehending the mechanisms of language functioning and the regularities of its study is the source of new ideas, approaches and concepts arising and developing in all areas of research the object of which is language phenomena [2]. The multidimensional representation of the phenomenon of speech communication is based on this principle. Scholars are unanimous in saying that the present age is characterised by a considerable expansion of views on the essence of language and the processes of language learning. Languages develop and define thinking as such, and is the material substance by which it is possible to decipher thought as a product of intellectual activity [32]. Also, learning a foreign language offers further opportunities to assimilate the mechanisms of such interpretation by comparing the linguistic symbolism of the mother tongue and the foreign language. In other words, learning a foreign language carries with it the development of an individual's active ability to perform, control, and improve the already complex process of transforming thought into speech. The fundamentality of a foreign language is true, but society is not always aware of the reason for the apparent rise in the status of the subject in the academic community and society. Awareness of the above fact opens up opportunities for improving the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Scientific circles agree on the need to actively incorporate the achievements of psychology and educational psychology into the study and teaching of foreign languages. Although, traditional forms of education cannot be abolished altogether, as they can be improved and adapted to the modern realities and requirements of the outside world. Semantic paradigms cycle around the meanings that fill the entire external world of a person and, consequently, the internal world [21]. This fact cannot be ignored based on the achievements of science in matters of thinking and learning.

Conclusions

In the course of the investigation, the following fundamental conclusions were established. Modern society can rightfully be called informational. This is the case with the changing number of demands on modern people regarding the perception, processing and storage of information. As information abounds in a globalised society, the requirements for human thought processes are changing. From now on, efforts to perceive information must be changed from mechanical memorisation of an array of information to the process of conscious comprehension of the necessary knowledge. In today's society, foreign language skills are highly valued. The process of language learning is quite time-consuming, which is why the traditional memorisation-based format of it needs to be changed today. The motivation of the individual plays a major role, and intrinsic motivation is considered to be of higher priority. Modern psychological science has many ramifications. One of them is considered to be the psychology of education, psychosemantics. The use of basic psychology in the process of learning a foreign language has been shown to increase its effectiveness.

The use of semantic paradigms in the process of learning a foreign language optimises not only the speed, but also the quality of the knowledge obtained. This happens because the learning process is no longer centred around rote memorisation. A person initially follows the individual goals of learning a foreign language and chooses the words and their meanings (using semantic frequency dictionaries) that are useful to them in the long run. At the same time, a distinction is made between the target language and the mother tongue. It has been proven that attempts to mentally "bind" words from the foreign language being studied to words from the mother tongue, permanently and inseparably connect the two languages.

As a result, the person translates the words in their head every time, so there is no process of interiorisation of the incoming information. The materials of this study may be useful for professors, private foreign language teachers who are trying to adapt to innovations in educational activities or specialists who monitor the quality of education. Moreover, these results can also be used by people who have decided to learn the language independently. During the investigation, a number of new issues surfaced that require additional study. Further studies are called for regarding the varieties of psychosemantic paradigms in foreign language acquisition beyond the currently existing semantic frequency dictionaries.

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Conflict of Interest
None.

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Використання семантичних парадигм як інструментарію викладання іноземних мов: теорія і практика

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Анотація

Актуальність. Актуальність вищезазначеної теми дослідження мотивована прогресивною діяльністю людства в умовах розвитку інформаційного суспільства, зростаючим попитом на знання іноземної мови та проблемою вивчення іноземної мови, оскільки великий обсяг інформації, який необхідно засвоїти, безумовно, уповільнює цей процес.

Мета. Метою даного дослідження є оцінка ефективності використання семантичних парадигм як інструменту навчання іноземної мови; існуючі розробки, які використовувалися на сьогоднішній день, та результати їх використання.

Методологія. Методологічний підхід ґрунтується на аналітичному дослідженні використання семантичних парадигм (наведено приклади використання семантичних частотних словників для підвищення ефективності та швидкості вивчення іноземної мови) як інструментів навчання іноземної мови.

Результати. Основними результатами, які були отримані в ході дослідження, можна вважати: оцінку ефективності впровадження семантичних парадигм та взаємодії з носіями мови в контексті вивчення іноземної мови, перспективність використання семантичних парадигм у викладанні іноземної мови серед представників вищої школи, а також сформовані висновки щодо того, як використання семантичних парадигм впливає на якість засвоєння знань.

Висновки. Результати даного наукового дослідження, а також висновки, сформульовані в ході його проведення, мають найбільше значення для людей, які переслідують мету вивчення іноземної мови для особистих і професійних цілей, а також для викладачів іноземних мов, які можуть використовувати ефективні, нетрадиційні методи навчання у своїй практиці. Крім того, психологи, чия робота зосереджена на науці та теорії, можуть розширити сферу своїх досліджень на прикладі цього дослідження.

Ключові слова: семантична парадигма; інформаційна спільнота; семантичний частотний словник; семантика, освіта.