

Renata Grzegorzycowa
Instytut Języka Polskiego
Uniwersytet Warszawski
ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28
00-927 Warszawa
tel.: 22 55 21 021

O dwóch typach badań semantycznych

Two types of research in semantics

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Key words: semantics; linguistic world view; cognitive linguistics

Summary

Two different approaches to semantics can be distinguished in contemporary linguistics:

(1) The traditional approach which is based on de Saussure's structuralist thought and focused on the communicative function of language. This type of research – we may identify it as the structural-functional approach – aims at delimitating (in the most precise way possible) units of language, and at describing their meanings by applying tests for implication and tests for contradiction.

(2) The second type of research conducted within the cognitive linguistics paradigm sets itself quite different goals, namely: it aims at depicting how people – by means of language (or by means of a particular language) – conceive, interpret, and conceptualize the world. This is related to the extracommunicative function of language, i.e. the cognitive function. Thus, we may call this view the cognitive-anthropological approach. This kind of studies involve the following steps:

1/ Identifying the conceptualized entity by means of the semasiological method, i.e. going from the name to the object (concept). The object is then described in the form of the so-called conceptual invariant.

2/ Analyzing the object (concept), identifying all linguistic expressions that refer to the object (concept) and to the phenomena it evokes (the so-called lexical and semantic fields) by applying the onomasiological method (going from the concept to the name).

3/ Analyzing the lexical fields (structural semantic analysis).

4/ Identifying the features associated with the object (concept), imagery, symbolics, etc., by analyzing collocations, idioms and set phrases, derivatives, proverbs, etc.

5/ Reconstructing the complete linguistic picture of the object (concept), i.e. the way(s) it is conceptualized by the people who speak a particular language.