EMPATHY IN DISCOURSE: TOWARDS AN EMBODIED COGNITIVE SEMANTICS

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This article examines an embodied cognitive semantics of empathy as a linguistic concept, exploring how discourse can be used for its analysis. Following current theoretical interpretations of empirical embodiment findings (including major schematic systems of Talmyan cognitive semantics), it will be shown that the conceptual content of empathy is spatialized in the human mind. A body of empirical evidence based on corpus research and other sources presents convincingly that spatial conceptualization and reification of empathy represented in modern English language might greatly facilitate empathic logical reasoning and understanding. The notion of reified empathy is amenable to innumerable conceptions of spatial pathways associated with a physical object or mass. Along with reification, personification of empathy provides insights into active metaphorical thinking.
Keywords: empathy, embodied cognitive semantics, conceptual metaphor, reification, personification.

Introduction

Having linguistic roots in ancient Greek, all the same the concept of empathy is of recent intellectual heritage. It has been controversial since entering the language of psychology and psychiatry. T. Lipps introduced the term "Einfühlung", writing about aesthetic appreciation and perception [1]. "Einfühlung" meant "feeling oneself into" in German, and was translated as "empathy" by E. Titchener [2]. Lipps believed that, possessing "practical empathy", people examined and contemplated an object of art or nature, projected themselves into the object, established an identification between the object and oneself, engaged in a process of inner imitation, and in this way understood and appreciated the object much better. Several years later, this definition was extended to include people. Thus, according to Lipps, proceeded by means of projection and imitation, empathy could involve either objects or persons as targets, and consisted largely of heightened understanding of the other through cue-produced shared feelings.

After the introduction of Lipps, many scholars from various fields of study showed great interest in the concept of empathy. R. T. Hogan defined it as the ability to take the intellectual or imaginative apprehension of another's condition or state of mind [3]; G. H. Mead's definition determined it as the capacity to take the role of the other and to adopt alternative perspectives visa-vis oneself [4]. It can be noticed, that these definitions added a cognitive component to the earlier affective emphasis in the form of "the ability to understand". Moreover, the notion of "identity merger" evolved into a self-other differentiation in which the empathizer temporarily took the role of the empathizee or put himself/herself in the other's place during empathic process. In other words, the empathizer tries to perceive, sense, share, and conceptualize how the empathizee is experiencing the world.

Nowadays empathy is mirrored in the multiplicity of studies in a number of different scientific and non-scientific discourses, but crucial is the idea of acquiring another person's perspective. In pragmatically oriented linguistics empathy is researched as "the point of view" in an anaphoric utterance by which a participant is bound with the event or state that he/she describes in that sentence, or the participant in the reported event whose perspective is taken by the speaker [5]. S. Kuno argues that empathy is involved in the semantics of numerous grammatical constructions and applies it to explain sentence structures [ibid]. Empathy is also identified with interactive behaviour through empathic listening [6],

realization of assessments in talk [7], paraphrasing and reflection [8], conversation analysis of social empathic interplay [9], and rejection in negotiation [10].

Thus, in linguistics empathy belongs to the domain of pragmatics, and little attention has been given to the cognitive nature of its linguistic representation. The present research is done from the perspective of cognitive semantics, which highlights **the relevance** of the article. In this regard, **the purpose** of the paper is a comprehensive analysis of an embodied cognitive semantics of empathy as a linguistic concept. Achieving this goal involves the following **tasks:** 1) to research spatial conceptualization and reification of empathy represented in English discourse; 2) to prove that along with reification, personification of empathy provides insights into active metaphorical thinking. **The object** of this study is the "empathy" lexeme in English discourse, and **the subject** – the processes of its reification and personification in human consciousness.

We have used the following **methods**: a thesaurus analysis for disclosing the contents of empathy through dictionary definitions; a discursive analysis to determine the lexical means of empathy concept in a particular linear syntagmatic environment; a conceptual analysis for exploring spatial conceptualization and reification of empathy concept in human mind; metaphor identification procedure to specify whether the word "empathy" has been metaphorically used in the contexts.

Reification of Empathy

The embodied cognitive semantics assumes that the processing of linguistic meaning essentially involves motoric, perceptual, and emotional brain regions corresponding to the contents of the words to be comprehended. If this view on linguistic meaning is applied to the conceptual content of empathy, the context dependent processes underlying empathy in discourse should be not entirely independent of processes underlying the comprehension of the word "empathy". These theoretical findings and considerations lay the ground for the current study, in which we try to analyze spatial conceptualization and reification of empathy concept in human mind.

Direct experience plays a significant role in forming human conceptual systems. Physical interaction with the world, perception of objects and their properties through human senses, and practical use of these objects in life cause the appearance of certain conceptual structures. In everyday life the individual is guided not by abstract symbols, but by natural categories containing properties which are the most relevant to everyday consciousness. Basic-level concepts, easily acquired and used by man, are directly perceived in terms of physical experience. Besides, people live and act as "naive users" of language. The boundary separating scientific and everyday concepts is extremely fluid and blurred. The conflict of conventional and scientific ideas about language is permanent, resulting in the formation of "naive world view" in the mind of a naive language user; the former is reproduced in fragments in lexical units of language as a fact of everyday consciousness.

The naive world view is crystallized in many myths, among which there are lexical objectification and a substantive nature of language – the processes of **reification**. According to L. Talmy, a verb root that lexicalizes expression of an act or activity as a temporal quantity can be associated with grammatical forms, including nominalizations, that signal a cognitive operation of reification. By the semantic effect of this operation, the referent becomes conceptualized as an object or a mass, one that can participate in many of the same actions – such as being given or gotten – as a physical quantity [11, p. 43].

In this respect, empathy is no exception. It is quite natural that like other intentional objects, empathy is subject to cognitive reification, i.e. it is modeled by a naive user (who does not do purposeful reflections on empathy) as a physical object or mass. Thus the focus of attention is not the procedural properties but the characteristics of a communicative act or activity, and empathy participates in it as physical substance (Table 1):

Table 1

I	II
An act ➔	**A reified object**
He empathized me on the situation	*He gave me an empathy word on the situation*
I was empathized by her over the phone	*I got an empathy call from her*
Activity ➔	**Reified mass**
He empathized with poor people	*He gave poor people some empathy*
I was empathized by community	*I got some empathy from community*

The **column I** represents an act in terms of an Agent (empathizer) affecting a Patient (empathizee), where the verb actualizes this act and carries the basic notion of affecting. In the **column II**, this sense becomes reconceptualized in terms of the transfer through space of a focal condensation of the action from the empathizer as Source to the empathizee as Goal, where the deverbal noun "empathy" represents this condensate as a physical object. Moreover, this paradigm of act-to-object reconceptualization has Tool as a further member. Within the action conceptualization in the **column I**, not only can the Empathizer affect the Empathizee and the Empathizee be affected by the Empathizer in the execution of an act, but the Empathizee can also execute the act independently. Relatively, in the reconceptualization under reification, not only can the Empathizer give the reified act to the Empathizee and the Empathizee get it from the Empathizer, but the Empathizee can also have the reified act independently. The examples of this viewpoint are the verbs *have* and *make* used in expressions with a deverbal noun "empathy" acting as Tool:

(1) *It is our communion with God that enables us **to have empathy**, kindness, intimacy and identification with others, which flow forth from us like rivers in an oasis* [12].

(2) *We need **to take empathy** out of the realm of psychology and not only into everyday relations but also into culture* [13].

Once reified, empathy is amenable to a great deal more conceptions of spatial manipulations and pathways associated with a physical object or mass than just the simple transfer from a giver to a receiver: it can be returned (3), exchanged (4) etc. Besides, as an object isolated and limited in its sphere, it is subject to the cognitive process of pluralization, as evidenced by the presence of its grammatical category of number (*empathy/empathies*) (5):

(3) *Recently I have experienced **a return of empathy** and resonance and subsequently an improved ability to function more normally in relationships with less anxiety* [14].

(4) *In a society full of blame, shame, and moralistic judgment, it takes practice to carve out an **exchange of empathy*** [15].

(5) *These are fragile **empathies**, too important to be either romanticized or ignored"* [12].

Still the abovementioned conceptual reification has some limitations. As an example of limitation, reified empathy can be taken or given, but it is not amenable to other actions specific to physical objects: in our case examples of empathy lexicalization have no expressions like *to throw empathy*, *to push empathy*, *to thrust empathy* etc.

3. Constituents of Reification and Personification Processes

A detailed analysis of the examples of the word "empathy" in English discourse (elicited from British National Corpus (BNC) and other electronic sources) enabled us to single out a number of conceptual metaphors as constituents of the reification process of the embodied cognitive semantics of empathy:

1) some spatial location relative to other objects:

(6) *The thin bridge of **empathy between two professional people** was abruptly dashed away* [12].

(7) *What's happening when you notice less **empathy around** you?* [16].

Having a spatial location, reified empathy can move in space, approach or distance:

(8) *Not only is the destructiveness of addictive disease replaced by the creativity of recovery but the progressive **return of** spiritual values such as faith, hope, love, trust, honesty, forgiveness, **empathy**, gratitude and the return of child-like innocence in the appreciation of the beauty of the world, make recovery synonymous with the treasure of life itself* [12].

(9) *The thin bridge of **empathy** between two professional people **abruptly dashed away*** [ibid].

2) being a precisely outlined and discrete object:

(10) ***Empathy** of course **does have limits*** [ibid].

(11) *The building **blocks of empathy**, mindfulness and compassion: paving the way with relational frame theory* [13].

Empathy as an outlined object has its size or dimensions:

(12) *Cognitive and psychodynamic psychologists who study **empathy** have focused on its psychological **dimensions** rather than on brain mechanisms* [17].

(13) *Conversely, a more positive balance of interpersonal relationships and greater religious involvement among older adults conceals about 20 percent of **the size of the age-empathy*** [18].

Having dimensions, it can change them:

(14) *Instead a special sort of **empathy grows*** [12].

(15) *It concludes that the reorientation will require strong public support for energy efficiency, appropriate action, a willingness and ability to introduce new technology on a wide scale, and **a widening empathy** with environmental concerns"* [ibid].

As a discrete object empathy can be demonstrated, described, shared, lost, and counted:

(16) ***Show empathy** by saying you understand how the other person feels and can see things from their point of view* [ibid].

(17) ***Empathy is described** in various ways and Burnard (1987a) discussing its use in psychiatric nursing quotes Carl Rogers' definition as 'a process of entering into the perceptual world of another person'* [ibid].

(18) *They **share a natural empathy** with the concerns of that class which, as we have noted, may not be redistribution towards the less well off* [ibid].

(19) *But if you prevaricate and say, 'I can't comment on this because I'm an officer of the Council,' then they think, 'Oh, God, you know, what sort of person am I talking to?' and you **lose all your empathy** and all the sympathy of the listeners, which is what you're after* [ibid].

(20) *The only way you could **count empathy** is counting the single glows and then also when you get an empathy point* [19].

Empathy can also be used as an instrument, created artificially to be the product of human activity:

(21) *It was developed by reviewing other available **empathy instruments*** [20].

(22) *Failing this, nurses can help by **using empathy**, ingenuity and miming* [12].

(23) *The general issue of reconciling with his academic interests, the feeling of social commitment to an underprivileged group with whom the researcher **has built up a strong feeling of empathy** are discussed by Labov (1982b)...* [ibid].

(24) *He prefers the charcoal drawing to the full garish canvas, and this is why, I think, the songs work so well, because, as we listen, individual responses suggest themselves to a line, or a turn of phrase, which by inference, **creates a greater sense of empathy** and involvement for the listener* [ibid].

3) the possibility of being percepted (tasted, smelled) by man:

(25) *StreetSauce: **taste** interaction and **empathy** with homeless people* [21].

(26) *Perhaps even **radiating some protective aroma of brood empathy** around herself?* [12].

Percepted empathy can be compared with:

(27) *In a later article, Burnard (1988) **compares empathy** and sympathy* [ibid].

(28) *Analysis, logic, thought processes, discussion **compared to empathy**, rapport, emotions, agreement* [ibid].

Along with reification, another kind of metaphorical conceptualization of empathy in a "naive world view" is **personification**. Personified empathy acquires anthropomorphic features and can exist, come, help, create, demand, lead to smth., influence, and even be a friend:

(29) *They will no doubt be helped in making this decision by counselling itself, and the **empathy that should exist** between counsellor and counselee* [ibid];

(30) *If we are just with the horse in an easy fashion, **empathy comes** more easily* [ibid];

(31) *Despite the essential superficiality of much of this contact, the traditional **empathy** between the nations **has assisted** the Japanese to be on good terms with a regime whose political ideology is the antithesis of their own* [ibid];

(32) *His **empathy** with the childhood world of romance and humour **creates** instantly absorbing scenes, intricate but never over-ornate. they perfectly complement the text and are resonant with neo-romantic traits, notably the twisting paths that take the eye into this other world, with pleasing and imagative effect* [ibid];

(33) *Counselling requires varied skills, and counsellors need to be able to empathise with people (which is not the same as sympathizing – **empathy requires** seeing the world from another person's point of view without judgement or criticism) and to accept their clients by suspending judgement so that people feel valued* [ibid];

(34) *This cultural **empathy** inevitably **leads to** a fusion of individual expression and tradition that is far more pronounced than that found in any other category of oriental rug* [ibid].

(35) ***Empathy** with the sadness they must feel about the problems they are facing with their child, particularly stressing the lack of a happy relationship, **can facilitate a change in attitude*** [ibid].

(36) *John relies on his television and his **empathy** machine **for company*** [ibid].

Orientational, ontological, and structural metaphors underlie all the abovementioned reification and personification processes. These metaphors facilitate our imagination, being memorable, vivid, and easy to use and understand. The inferences we draw from metaphoricity processes are influenced by the construal of empathy which is also highly metaphorical. To exemplify this thought let us take several definitions of empathy in the dictionaries. Collins English Dictionary specifies empathy as the ability to sense and understand someone else's feelings as if they were one's own (Greek **empatheia**) [22]. Here we elicit a bright realization of structural metaphor which is based on taking an item with rich structure in bodily experience (our body) as the source domain for understanding someone else (the target domain). The Oxford English Dictionary defines empathy as the power of projecting one's personality into, and so fully understanding the object of contemplation [23]. Here we notice the collaboration of orientational metaphor (the extension of INTO orientation of a non-spatial domain (personality)) with ontological metaphor (the conceptualization of personality as if it is a thing being able of projection). Thus, there is a rough correspondence between the ubiquity of metaphor in discourse and the metaphoricity of the semantic meaning.

Conclusion

Being highly metaphorical in its nature, the word "empathy" can be no less metaphorical in its pragmatic aspect. We tried to closely examine the contexts of all the examples of the word "empathy" in BNC and identified metaphors, counting their frequency. In our corpus research we used the Pragglejaz Group's "metaphor identification procedure" (MIP) which provides a set of reliable criteria for metaphor identification that researchers can use in empirical studies [24]. According to the procedure we determined whether the word "empathy" was metaphorically used in context by following a series of steps:

1. We read the entire sentence with the word "empathy" to establish a general understanding of it.

2. For each lexical unit in the sentence we checked metaphorical use: established the meaning of the lexical unit in context (i.e., how it applied to an entity, relation in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). We took into account what words were before and after the lexical unit. Then we determined if the lexical unit had a more basic current/contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be: more concrete; what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell and taste; related to bodily action; more precise (as opposed to vague); and historically older. Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meaning of the lexical unit.

3. If the lexical unit had a more basic current/contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, we decided whether the contextual meaning could be understood by comparison or contrast with the basic meaning. If yes, we marked the lexical unit as metaphorical.

Taking into account the fact that the research may not be entirely objective, being influenced by our personal implicit or explicit knowledge of metaphorical patterns, we still consider it to be able of giving the general picture of empathy metaphoricity. According to the results obtained, out of 269 examples of "empathy" usage in BNC, 174 instances occur in metaphorical contexts (65%).

Firstly, it proves the idea of G. Lakoff and M. Johnson that "most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature" [25, p. 4]. Secondly, this fact suggests the idea that there is no conflict of conventional and scientific conceptualizations of empathy – no discrepancy between its reflection in "naive world view" and its semantic meaning. Reification and personification of empathy reproduced in discourse provide insights into the richness of conventional empathic thinking which appears to be strongly metaphorical in everyday consciousness. Correlatively, scientific conceptualization of empathy dominates in the way people conceive an empathic topic and is reflected in fragments in lexical units of English language. Both of these themes contribute to the theory of embodied cognitive semantics and are consistent with the idea that people think metaphorically when they use metaphorical language.

ЕМПАТІЯ В ДИСКУРСІ: НА ШЛЯХУ ДО МАТЕРІАЛІЗОВАНОЇ КОГНІТИВНОЇ СЕМАНТИКИ

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У статті розглядається матеріалізована когнітивна семантика емпатії як лінгвістичного концепту із залученням дискурсивного аналізу. Ураховуючи сучасні теоретичні інтерпретації емпіричних даних, що репрезентують матеріалізацію семантики (у тому числі основні схематичні системи когнітивної семантики Л. Талмі), у роботі здійснено спробу довести, що в людській свідомості концептуальному змісту емпатії надається просторова форма. Емпіричний матеріал на основі корпусних даних та інших джерел переконливо доводить, що дослідження просторової концептуалізації й реіфікації емпатії в сучасній англійській мові уможливлює аналіз емпатійного логічного мислення й розуміння. Поняття реіфікованої емпатії асоціюються з незліченними концепціями просторових шляхів, пов'язаних з фізичними об'єктами або масою. Доведено, що дослідження персоніфікації емпатії також сприяє проникненню в сутність активного метафоричного мислення.
Ключові слова: емпатія, матеріалізована когнітивна семантика, концептуальна метафора, реіфікація, персоніфікація.

ЭМПАТИЯ В ДИСКУРСЕ: НА ПУТИ К МАТЕРИАЛИЗОВАННОЙ КОГНИТИВНОЙ СЕМАНТИКЕ

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В статье рассматривается материализованная когнитивная семантика эмпатии как лингвистического концепта с привлечением дискурсивного анализа. Учитывая современные теоретические интерпретации эмпирических данных, представляющих материализацию семантики (в том числе основные схематические системы когнитивной семантики Л. Талми), в работе предпринята попытка доказать, что в человеческом сознании концептуальному содержанию эмпатии предоставляется пространственная форма. Эмпирический материал на основе корпусных данных и других источников убедительно доказывает, что исследование пространственной концептуализации и реификации эмпатии в современном английском языке делает возможным анализ эмпатического логического мышления и понимания. Понятие реифицированной эмпатии ассоциируется с бесчисленными концепциями пространственных путей, связанных с физическими объектами или массой. Доказано, что исследование персонификации эмпатии также способствует проникновению в сущность активного метафорического мышления.

Ключевые слова: *эмпатия, материализованная когнитивная семантика, концептуальная метафора, реификация, персонификация.*

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