# The Definition of "Concept" in Cognitive Linguistics

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**Abstract**. *This article presents general information about the concept in cognitive linguistics. Concepts are considered key phenomena in cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, linguistic conceptology, and other linguistic disciplines within the anthropocentric paradigm. A concept is defined as a mental structure that reflects the interrelationships of language, thought, and culture. It plays a vital role in the organization of knowledge, the categorization of information, and communication processes.*

**Key words**: *concept, dictionary meaning, cognitive linguistics, a mental formation, sensorimotor interactions, metaphorical extensions, conceptual metaphors, the cognitive concept, the linguacultural concept.*

In cognitive linguistics, the notion of a *concept* is central to understanding how language reflects and shapes human thought. Unlike traditional linguistic approaches that often treat meaning as an abstract and static component of language, cognitive linguistics views meaning as fundamentally grounded in human cognition, perception, and experience. A *concept*, therefore, represents a mental structure that organizes our knowledge and enables us to interpret and interact with the world through language.

Cognitive linguistics emerged in the late 20th century through the work of scholars such as George Lakoff, Ronald Langacker, and Leonard Talmy. These theorists proposed that linguistic meaning is not separate from general cognitive processes. From this perspective, *concepts* are not purely linguistic entities; rather, they are mental representations that underline our ability to categorize, reason, and communicate.

The notion of "concept" was first mentioned in the article "Concept and word" by A.S. Askoldov-Alekseyev in 1928. The scientist asserts that "a concept is a mental formation that replaces in the process of thought an indefinite number of objects of the same kind" [1, p. 269].

D.S. Likhachev believes that a concept exists separately for each primary dictionary meaning of a word. The scholar believes that it results from the collision of a word's dictionary meaning with a person's personal experience. "The broader and richer a person's experience, the broader and richer the concept's potential" [2, p. 281]. According to the researcher, a concept is significantly broader than the meaning of a word. The set of concepts, according to the academician, constitutes the conceptual sphere of a particular nation.

A *concept* in cognitive linguistics can be defined as a **mental unit of knowledge that structures human experience and provides the basis for linguistic meaning**. Concepts are dynamic, embodied, and context-dependent, reflecting the way humans perceive and interact with their physical and social environments.

One of the core principles of cognitive linguistics is that concepts are *embodied*—they arise from bodily experiences and sensorimotor interactions with the world. For example, the concept of *up* is

grounded in our physical experience of vertical orientation (e.g., standing up, lifting objects). This embodied experience gives rise to metaphorical extensions such as *"prices went up"* or *"she is feeling up today."*

Concepts organize our experiences into categories. Cognitive linguists emphasize that categorization is not based on rigid boundaries but on *prototypes*—typical or ideal examples of a category. For instance, the concept *bird* is typically represented by species like robins or sparrows, while penguins or ostriches are less prototypical members. This prototype-based model reflects the flexible and graded nature of human conceptualization.

Cognitive linguists believe that any language is a system of concepts through which native speakers can interpret and classify information. According to Ye.S. Kubryakova, a concept is a mental unit of consciousness and an information structure that reflects a person's knowledge and experience [3, p. 90]. The scientist admits that concepts arise as a result of structuring information about objects and their properties of the objective and imaginary world.

Concepts are interconnected through larger mental structures known as *schemas or frames.* These structures organize related concepts and provide contextual meaning. For example, the *restaurant schema* includes concepts such as *waiter*, *menu*, *ordering*, and *paying the bill*, which together form a coherent conceptual frame.

Recently, there has been a tendency to distinguish between the cognitive concept and the linguacultural concept.For example, G.G. Slyshkin believes that "for a cognitivist, each word corresponds to its own concept; for a linguaculturalist, the names of concepts are a limited number of culturally significant units (concepts are only abstract entities)" [4, p. 22].

Ye.V. Babayeva believes that the linguacultural concept is the structure of consciousness in which social values are embedded. Value is always at the center of the linguacultural concept. In cognitive linguistics, special attention is paid to the types of concepts, their systemic organization, and interrelations. Linguacultural studies seeks to establish the value orientations of society [5, pp. 110–111].

Thus, it is the value aspect of a cultural concept that distinguishes it from a cognitive concept. Cognitive linguistics seeks to identify types of concepts: schema, frame, scenario, etc. The result of linguacultural research are dictionaries of concepts—the fundamental concepts of culture [6]. V.I. Karasik gives a description of such dictionaries in the article "Ethnospecific concepts" [7, pp. 84–93].

Cognitive linguistics also emphasizes that much of our conceptual system is metaphorical. *Conceptual metaphors* map knowledge from one domain (the *source domain*) onto another (the *target domain*). For example, the metaphor *"time is money"* structures our understanding of time in terms of economic value. Similarly, *metonymy* allows us to use one element of a conceptual domain to stand for another (e.g., *"The White House announced..."* to mean *the U.S. government*).

V.I. Karasik suggests considering the cultural concept as a multidimensional semantic formation, in which conceptual, figurative, and value aspects are distinguished. The conceptual side of a concept is the linguistic fixation of the concept, its designation, description, attribute structure, definition, comparative characteristics of a given concept in relation to a particular series of concepts.The figurative aspect is the visual, auditory, tactile, and gustatory characteristics of objects, phenomena, and events that are reflected in our consciousness in one form or another. The value aspect of the concept characterizes the importance of this formation, both for the individual and for the collective [8, p. 154].

Language serves as a window into the conceptual system of the mind. Words, phrases, and grammatical structures encode and express underlying concepts. However, linguistic expressions do

not merely label pre-existing concepts—they actively shape and refine them. In cognitive linguistics, a *concept* is not simply a dictionary-like definition or a static mental image. It is a dynamic, embodied, and culturally influenced structure that organizes human experience and provides the foundation for meaning. Concepts link cognition and language, demonstrating that to understand how people speak is to understand how they think, perceive, and make sense of their world. Through the study of concepts, cognitive linguistics reveals the deeply human nature of language as a reflection of mind and experience.

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