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VERBALIZING EXTINCTION IN BBC NEWS TEXTS: CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH

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The article reveals a constructionist aspect of verbalizing extinction in BBC news texts.

The **aim** of the research, which studies BBC news texts about the endangered species, is to analyse nominals naming extinction as a communicative and sociocultural phenomenon resting on the principles of Construction Grammar about linguistic form and linguistic meaning.

Intelligence is based on the fact that Internet discourse as the most effective type of discourse triggered much scientific interest in the field of Internet linguistics. The article studies BBC news texts that dwell on the issues of environmental protection from the perspective of the species under threat of extinction. According to construction grammar the given form and meaning are not independent of each other being inseparably interconnected. Thus, grammarians assume that a language system is based on constructions, which form complex overlapping grammar patterns. Constructions exist as prefabricated linguistic units entrenched in human's mind ready to be contextually used in certain communicative situations.

Research **methods** comprise random sampling to determine units representing the process of extinction; discourse analysis to demonstrate verbalizing extinction in Internet news discourse; contextual analysis to focus on distribution and combinability of the nominals denoting extinction.

Results. The research results in distinguishing immediate, modified and extended extinction-constructions from the syntagmatic viewpoint. The constructions were classified in accordance with key extinction factors. Thus, we introduced constructions to denote groups of species under threat, level and stage of wipe out, human activity influencing the wipe out. Additionally, we singled out elements, which manifested extra qualitative and quantitative characteristics of extinction, and suggested collocation models to represent the aspects of extinction.

Conclusions propose a detailed classification of constructions under study, enabling a linguist to follow the trends in semantic change of the nominative units denoting extinction, i.e. their functional potential.

Key words: Internet news discourse, construction grammar, immediate construction, modified construction, extended construction.

ЛІНГВАЛЬНЕ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕННЯ ВИМИРАННЯ ВИДІВ У НОВИНИХ ТЕКСТАХ АНГЛОМОВНОГО САЙТУ БІ-БІ-СІ: КОНСТРУКЦІЙНИЙ АСПЕКТ

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Статтю присвячено встановленню конструкційного аспекту лінгвального представлення вимирання видів у новинних текстах англomовного сайту Бі-Бі-Сі.

Метою дослідження постає вивчення мовного представлення процесу вимирання як комунікативного й соціокультурного феномену з опертям на положення конструкційної граматики.

Розвідка має підґрунтям те, що інтернет-дискурс як нове комунікативне середовище дає поштовх численним напрямом мовознавчих досліджень у царині інтернет-лінгвістики, спонукаючи, зокрема, до розгляду англомовних медіатекстів сайту Бі-Бі-Сі, сконцентрованих на висвітленні актуальних проблем зміни світової екосистеми та захисту навколишнього середовища в ракурсі вимирання видів. Згідно з конструктивною граматику мовна форма та мовне значення представляють не окремі незалежні рівні, а існують у взаємопов'язаності та взаємозалежності. Потрактування наявного зв'язку форми й значення виявляється у сприйнятті мови як набору конструкцій і граматичних схем, які утворюють системи та накладаються й доповнюють одна одну. Існуючи у вигляді збірних мовних одиниць, конструкції вкорінені в людську свідомість як структури, готові до контекстуально зумовленого використання у відповідних комунікативних ситуаціях.

Методи. Дослідницькі методи, використані у статті, передбачають довільну вибірку матеріалу для виокремлення одиниць на позначення процесу вимирання, метод дискурс-аналізу, спрямований на вивчення втілення ідеї вимирання в англомовному новинному інтернет-дискурсі, та контекстуальний аналіз задля виявлення розміщення, сполучуваності й функціонування номінацій на позначення вимирання залежно від контексту.

Результати. Здобутки проведеної розвідки дають змогу синтагматично встановити безпосередні, модифіковані та розширені конструкції на позначення вимирання. Наведені різновиди конструкцій класифіковано відповідно до ключових факторів вимирання. Виокремлено конструкції на позначення груп вимираючих видів, рівня загрози, стадій знищення, ролі людини у процесі вимирання. У складі конструкцій вирізнено елементи вербалізації додаткових кількісно-якісних ознак вимирання. Запропоновано моделі сполучуваності на позначення аспектів зникнення видів.

Підсумком дослідження є створена детальна класифікація конструкцій, що дає змогу простежити тенденції руху семантики мовних одиниць на позначення вимирання в різних контекстах як їхній функціональний ресурс.

Ключові слова: новинний інтернет-дискурс, конструкційна граMATика, безпосередня конструкція, модифікована конструкція, розширена конструкція.

1. Introduction

Language as a means of human cognition and reasoning aims for reflecting objective reality, and thus, the knowledge of the world finds its mediate representation in language. The latter allows quick and effective expression, and provides a well developed means of encoding and externalizing our thoughts and transmitting complex and subtle ideas (Evans, 2006: 6). Being a continuously developing field of language use, whilst covering all spheres of human activity, Internet news discourse as a dominating type of media discourse is focused mainly on producing certain effects on the recipient via nominative units at every level of a news text (Nabok, 2019: 150). Thus, nomination can be viewed as a process of forming notions of extralinguistic reality with the help of words, word-combinations, phraseological units and sentences. Every new phenomenon in society and human activity in general, which is of any significance for communication, is reflected in vocabulary. Nowadays there is a huge interest in climate science and increased public awareness of climate change and environmental issues resulting in three linguistic units – “climate strike”, “climate emergency” and “upcycling” – getting entry into Collins, Oxford and Cambridge dictionaries respectively. Thus, the necessity to study nominative units naming extinction of various species used in the news to form a new media reality while transferring ideas to mass audience is highly topical. A new linguistic unit singled out by modern researchers is constructions viewed as certain pairings of form, meaning and function (Goldberg, 2006: 5), including morphemes, words, idioms, partially lexically filled and fully general linguistic patterns (Gisborne, 2011: 167). Constructions are prefabricated linguistic units requiring minimal modification to be used in speech (Dąbrowska, 2010: 203). They are entrenched in human's mind (Radden, 2007: 28) and stored in a ready-made form due to a high frequency of repetition (Zeschel, 2009: 187), allowing us to apply our knowledge to new situations (Goldberg, 2019: 2).

The paper *aims* to study linguistic nomination of the process of extinction. The work is intended to solve the following *tasks*: 1) to describe types of constructions used for nomination; 2) to classify extinction-constructions with regard to the named phenomena; 3) to represent models of denoting various aspects of extinction. The aim and tasks of the study presuppose the following *methods* of the research: the method of random sampling so as to single out units denoting extinction; discourse analysis to study the implementation of extinction idea in English Internet news discourse; methods of contextual analysis so as to reveal the combinability and distribution of the units under study in different contexts.

There exist several classifications of constructions depending on the criteria used: thematic, encompassing spheres of life constructions designate, paradigmatic, concerning different levels of meaning generalization, and syntagmatic, focusing on their linear expansion (Potapenko, 2017: 175; Talavira, 2017: 102). Syntagmatically, constructions fall into immediate, modified and extended. Immediate constructions consist of a word with dependent units joined on the left, e. g., *on the verge of extinction*, or on the right, e. g. *extinction crisis*. Immediate modified constructions admit additional elements, cf. *at risk of extinction* vs *at high risk of extinction*. Extended constructions combine two or more immediate ones, e. g.:

(1) *Twenty one bee species in Northern Ireland are at risk of extinction unless action is taken* (www.bbc.com, 16.10.2019).

In the cited example the immediate construction *at risk of extinction* is extended by units *twenty one bee species*, naming the representatives, and *in Northern Ireland* specifying the place where dying out is likely to happen.

2. Immediate extinction-constructions

BBC news texts provide a rich choice of immediate constructions used to indicate the basic phenomena of species disappearance, namely their classes, level and stage of wipe out, human activity influencing the wipe out.

Focusing on the extinction groups is typical of many news as reporters are to inform what exactly species is on the brink of dying out. We single out nominal and preposition constructions. The former represent classes of species, e. g. *mammal extinction*, *bird extinction*; their particular representatives, e. g. *cheetah extinction*, *coffee species extinction*; separate groups of animals, e. g. *herbivore extinctions*. Prepositional constructions differ in syntactical combination

of elements. In (2) the construction *extinctions among African carnivores* identifies the group of animals suffering from dying out (*carnivores*) and is modified by the adjective *African* representing the region:

(2) *We know there are also major extinctions among African carnivores at this time <...>* (www.bbc.com, 22.11.2018).

The level of extinction is reflected by various immediate constructions in which the adjective specifies the scale of species dying-out. Thus, there can be two levels singled out: low and high. **Low scale** extinction is characterized by not visible and thus not recognized, drop in species population, e. g. *silent extinction*. **High scale** extinction is reflected by adjectives indicating dying out that is almost certain to happen, e. g. *imminent extinction*, or concerns a huge number of representatives, e. g. *widespread extinctions, mass extinction, catastrophic extinction*. For instance, the construction *imminent extinction* in (3) represents impending wipe out for the species underscored by the unit *raising fears* representing high concern of activists:

(3) *This small, isolated population of orca has never produced offspring since studies began, raising fears that it faces imminent extinction* (www.bbc.com, 28.01.2015).

Verbal immediate constructions indicate the fact that some species doesn't exist anymore, reflecting **the stage of extinction**, namely initial, intermediate, and final.

Initial stage of extinction is expressed by constructions designating that the process in biodiversity has already started but the situation can be changed if proper actions are taken, e.g. *slide towards extinction, head towards extinction*. It should be noted that this stage also comprises attributive constructions, e. g. *vulnerable to extinction, be threatened with extinction*, or prepositional units, e. g. *under threat of extinction, at risk of extinction*. In (4) the construction *vulnerable to extinction* designates the beginning of species (*the horse chestnut*) disappearance underscored by the predicate in the present tense (*is classified*):

(4) *Ravaged by moths and disease, the horse chestnut is now classified as vulnerable to extinction* (www.bbc.com, 27.09.2019).

Intermediate stage of extinction is expressed by constructions highlighting that the phenomenon of dying out is noted in particular areas and both the risks and the amount of disappearing species are officially registered, e. g. *face extinction, go extinct*. In (5) the construction *facing extinction* indicates the threat of wipe out in the UK for the animals (*a quarter of mammals*):

(5) *More than a quarter of mammals are facing extinction, according to a detailed and devastating report <...>* (www.bbc.com, 03.10.2019).

Final stage of extinction reflects irreversible process of wiping out and is designated by constructions of two types: nominal and verbal. Nominal immediate constructions reflect that species are at the point of disappearing, e. g. *on the edge of extinction, on the verge of the extinction, on the cusp of extinction*. In (6) the construction *on the brink of extinction* indicates the fact that species are very close to dying out and the absolute participle complex *fewer than a thousand individuals left* specifies how dangerous the situation is:

(6) *<...> they identified at least 515 species that are on the brink of extinction, with fewer than a thousand individuals left* (www.bbc.com, 02.06.2020).

Verbal immediate constructions reflect the impossibility to find species representatives as they no longer exist, e. g. *be extinct, disappear completely, be lost, die out, fade out*. In (7) the predicate *could wipe out* outrepresents a possibility of species (*Anglesey's red squirrel*) complete destruction:

(7) *There are fears a deadly virus could wipe out Anglesey's red squirrel population "in a matter of months"* (www.bbc.com, 16.12.2017).

Besides, immediate constructions highlight **human activity** aimed for coping with extinction. As a result, news texts contain units describing the general situation with species disappearance, e. g. *extinction threat, extinction list*; indicating human impact on the wipe out, e. g. *poach to extinction, drive to extinction*; or representing actions taken by activists to overcome the plight, e. g. *prevent from extinction, write of extinction, resist extinction*. In (8) the construction *the extinction crisis* designates emergency in the environment underscored by the predicate *is fueling*:

(8) *<...> climate change is fueling the extinction crisis in ways that are difficult to predict* (www.bbc.com, 28.12.2019).

3. Modified extinction-constructions

The structure of modified units under study is transformed due to additional elements encompassing adjectives, adverbs or numerals.

Adjectives specify the quality of extinction, its irreversible character, e. g. *faces impending extinction*, temporal characteristics, e. g. *new extinction phase, prevent further extinctions*, changes in the species disappearance, e. g. *under increasing threat of extinction*, location or territory, e. g. *American parrot extinction, African mammal extinction*. In (9) the modified unit *faces "imminent extinction"* underscores the idea of dying out close in time:

(9) *Rare Mexican porpoise faces "imminent extinction"* (www.bbc.com, 16.05.2017).

Adverbs highlight intensity of the environmental crisis, e. g. *extremely vulnerable to extinction*, or degree of risks species run, e. g. *very high extinction risk*. The modified construction *highly threatened with extinction* underscores the level of wipe out when disappearance is unavoidable in (10):

(10) *<...> the very tiniest ones are also highly threatened with extinction* (www.bbc.com, 19.09.2017).

Numerals in the structure of modified constructions reflect the numerical order of the wipe out, e. g. *sixth mass extinction, the first mammalian extinction*.

4. Extended extinction-constructions

Extended constructions describing different aspects of species extinction consist of the previously mentioned modified constructions and component's that include the units under study into the context (Talavira, 2019: 130).

Extended elements can be added both on the left and on the right. Left-hand combinability is carried out by verbs stating the fact of extinction, e. g. *there is impending extinction, undergo mass extinction*; emphasizing people's awareness of the issue,

e. g. *highlighted the very high extinction risk, confirms extinction, reveal a disturbingly high level of extinction*; actions taken by environmentalists, e. g. *is listed as globally vulnerable to extinction, put on official extinction list*. Nominal left-hand components extend constructions representing species under risk, e. g. *puffin facing extinction*.

As for right-hand extending elements, they can be quite numerous. Extended constructions indicate reasons for wipe out, e. g. *vulnerable to extinction because of declines in numbers, on the brink of extinction due to their specific habitat of hot caves*. Extending elements denote the place of extinction, e. g. *threatened with extinction on the island of Ireland; went extinct in Africa*; or its temporal characteristics, e. g. *extinction process kicks in over a million years; avoid extinction in the wild in the coming years*. Besides, extending elements represent the source of information, e. g. *threatened with extinction, according to research*.

5. Conclusions

Due to the impending situation in the environment, extinction-constructions are widely used in BBC news articles. The units under study fall into three groups depending on the linear arrangement in the text: immediate, modified and extended. Immediate constructions, consisting of two or three components, denote classes of species or their representatives, level and stage of wipe out, human activity influencing the dying out. Modified constructions can include adjectives, adverbs and numerals into the structure of immediate units. Extended constructions, combining several immediate ones, enlarge the utterance with the components representing people's awareness of the issue and actions taken by them, reasons, time and place of extinction, the source of information concerning the problem. Further study can go in two directions: on the one hand, other types of constructions can be classified and, on the other hand, author's style can be researched with the aim to single out constructions creating certain effects on the public opinion concerning the issue of dying out.

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