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## THE FOLK MEDICINE CONCEPT IN VERNACULAR ENGLISH OF THE XIX CENTURY

### Abstract

The research is devoted to studying the Folk Medicine concept in English based on British ethnographic and folklore materials, as well as dictionaries of dialects published in the XIX and early XX centuries. The work aims to analyse the Folk Medicine concept and its representation as a component of the folk world picture, verbalised in that time's medical language, the core of which is a set of folk nominations used to denote folk names of diseases associated with ancient medical practices. On the periphery, folk texts represent superstitions as necessary constituents of folk medical practices connected with the mentioned nominal units. A comprehensive methodology of conceptual analysis allowed identifying the basic ideas about Folk Medicine. Based on the statement that the meaningful component of the Folk Medicine concept is realised in the folk consciousness, the key verbalised nominations' definitions denoting the disease names, and their compatibility with adjectives and verbs, were analysed. The influence of medical rites and rituals on the semantics of lexical units was proved. The analysis identified the basic semantic features of the Folk Medicine concept, including ethnonymic, colourative, anthroponymic, mythological, spatial and temporal components.

*Keywords:* Folk Medicine, vernacular English, concept, cultural concepts, cognitive activity, folk names of diseases, superstition.

### Introduction

The term concept, widely used in modern linguistics, was borrowed from the mathematical logic terminological apparatus. Aristotle (2020)

gives the first definition of the concept.

The Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics (1999) presents the correlation between the terms of notion (Lat. *notion*) and the terms of *concept* or *idea*. The latter is defined as

sets that can be either extensional through the objects inventory that falls under a particular concept or intentional through their specific components indication. The current equating notion with meaning or with Frege's sense rests upon an intentional definition of notion. Terms represent concepts or notions. Other definitions of the term *concept*, presented in different English-language sources, are as follows: '*the idea underlying a whole class of things*', '*generally accepted opinion, point of view*', '*someone's idea of how something is, or should be done*' (Slater, 2000).

The words *notion* and *concept* are similar in their dictionary definition. Due to its Latin origin, as demonstrated above, the concept is linked as a paired term to a *notion*. However, the '*concept*' as a term has a broader meaning of a mental formation, in which the conceptual, figurative and value dimensions are distinguished (Carston, 2018). It is evident that the *notion* reflects the most general and significant (logically constructive) features of a specific object or phenomenon, whereas the *concept* may reflect one or more, not necessarily essential, features of the last (Galotti, 2017). Therefore, the '*concept*' is a rational, logically meaningful unit: it arises from the objects and phenomena, understanding primary selection and their essential features resulting in the gradual rejection of individual or secondary characteristics (Stanovich, West, & Toplak, 2016).

In modern linguistics theory, there are several approaches to the study of the concepts. The most significant ones are as indicated below:

- a psychological approach: the representatives of this approach believe that the emergence of the concept should be seen in the correlation of the dictionary meaning with personal and national experience (Askoldov-Alekseyev, 1928; Radzievska, 2010; Selivanova, 2000; Maslach & Leiter, 2016);
- a philosophical one: researchers consider concepts as the leading national mentality units represented in the language (Kolesov & Pimenova, 2012);

- a cultural approach: the concept is regarded as the main link of culture in the person's mental world (Maslova, 2001; Palchevska, 2006);
- an integrational one: scholars view the concept as a multidimensional, culturally significant formation that has a speech expression (Slyshkin, 2000; Vorkachev, 2001);
- a cognitive approach: The researchers discuss the possibility of penetrating through the various knowledge structures forms with the language comprehension help and describe the existing dependencies between them and the language (Durkin, Toseeb, Botting, Pickles, & Conti-Ramsden, 2017; Duff & Tomblin, 2018). Some cognitive scientists present the frame as a concept manifestation (Uberman, 2018a).

Various linguistic schools, including the representatives of the Western ones, focus on the concept study of the connection between language and cognitive structures of consciousness context. According to Blank (1999), the concept denotes knowledge about the reality object, transformed into its idealised knowledge. The lexical meaning is represented as a unit of conceptual structure, the result of *idealisation*, or the conceptualisation of a specific situation (Blank, 1999). The concept is a mental formation with a material basis, an ideal character, and a significant generalisation degree of abstraction (Panashenko & Dmytriiev, 2016; Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Shepard & Cooper, 1986). Thus, it is viewed as a set of all operational consciousness knowledge units' collections, including notions, representations, images, and others (Knapp & Knapp-Potthoff, 1987). Underhill (2015) considers that, on the one hand, the concept denotes a linguistic unit, whereas, on the other hand, it presents the memory and brain language unit. The scientist notes that this is both a word and its meaning, idea, external and internal form, notion, and cognitive structure, covered by the language sign (Underhill, 2015).

Hampton (2017) argues that concepts can be combined and are really fuzzy prototypes. The

researcher highlights a Comprehensive Prototype Model that combines prototypical concepts. In this case, concepts are considered to consist of frame formations and contain features and properties typical of the concept (for instance, *colour* = [*red, orange*]). In human perception, some properties of the concept are gradually lost, while new properties that appear can also be added to the frame composition due to the new knowledge about the world emergence or the need to eliminate the incompatibility between the two concepts (Hampton, 2017). Therefore, Hampton (2017) indicates the concept has a labile nature.

Moreover, other scientists hold the same view. For example, the significance of the prototype image for the concept formation is justified (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014). According to Uberman (2018b), there is an intermediate link between the real world and the concept of denotation.

Denotation, as opposed to the referent (a reality object), comprises information about the objects represented by the given name class. Based on this information, an object that does not exist in the world but exists as a prototype (typical image) is formed. This object is not a real-world object, but it is endowed with typical features of the realities' set that it designates and is determined by the reality properties. According to Trémault (2020), a prototypical image or a gestalt structure is formed. The gestalt structure shows what is categorised as a typical image in speech consciousness.

A prototypical image is a category reference samples representation, whereas a typical image is a specific reality object formed on a prototype basis representation. Gestalt structure samples of processes represent the true world perception and arise from the predicative-attribute compatibility of the name. The concept contains a notion that is the categorical and taxonomic knowledge representation regarding a real-world object, though it is not limited to it. Moreover, it includes this cultural representation of a property's variety of objects or phenomena referred to as typical images. With the help of information that depicts a

typical or prototypical image, the concept and conditions of its relation to the reflected object are formed (Huang, Karpathy, Khosla, Bernstein, Berg, & Fei-Fei, 2015; Luchy, 2009). The categorisation process takes place using a typical image (prototype). Therefore, it is evident that the concept denotes knowledge about the actual object, turned into idealised knowledge about it. The concept comprises the encyclopedic information and figurative schemes or gestalt structures in the collective unconscious through the prism of which one or another reality object may be perceived.

#### The Concept in Ethnolinguistics and Cultural Linguistics

In studying Folk Medicine as a conceptual formation, it is important to analyse the language-cultural society cognitive activity and the language units in their relationship with the subject area, which has developed historically in combination with the socio-cultural field.

As noted above, the concept denotes knowledge about the object of reality, turned into idealised knowledge about the object. In this sense, lexical meaning is a conceptual structure unit, the result of *idealisation* or *conceptualisation* of a certain reality situation (Blank, 1999). Conceptualisation is the process of the ideal object formation based on the knowledge of the actual object. Thus, it is possible to identify the linguistic and cultural concepts (Blank, 1999). The cultural concept is a culturally marked verbalised meaning represented in terms of expression by a number of its language implementations that form the corresponding lexical and semantic paradigm. The content plan of a linguistic and cultural concept includes at least two sets of semantic features. Firstly, it comprises the semes common to all its language implementations, which fasten the lexical-semantic paradigm and form its conceptual or prototypical basis. Secondly, it includes semantic features typical of at least part of its implementations, marked by cultural and linguistic, ethnosemantic specifics and associated

with the native speakers' or national language personality mentality.

Cognitive and linguocultural approaches differ in their vectors concerning the individual. The cognitive concept is the direction from individual consciousness to culture, whereas the linguocultural concept is the direction from culture to individual consciousness. This difference can be compared to generative and interpretative communication models. However, it should be noted that the separation of movement from the outside and movement inside is just a research method. In reality, movement is a holistic, multi-dimensional process (Wierzbicka, 1996).

The linguistic and cultural approach consists in studying cultural concepts from their value component viewpoint. The values determining people's behaviour are an important part of the world language picture (Glaz, Donaher, & Łozowski, 2013).

In this article, specific emphasis is made on an ethnolinguistic approach that involves the study of all language layers, including phraseological units, which reflect the cultural tradition of its speakers and influence the world picture formation. Representatives of the ethnolinguistic approach use the term *ethnoconcept*, which is understood as an ethnically oriented concept as a unit of ethnic culture in which the semantics of the word correlates with the experience of a particular ethnic group (Hanulíková, 2017; Labenko, 2018). Concepts form a certain cultural layer that serves as an intermediary between a person and the world.

The concept includes not only the general idea of a phenomenon in a particular epoch understanding but also etymological characteristics that allow understanding how the general idea is conceived in a number of specific, individual phenomena. The conceptual and semantic structures may develop in the range from the genotype to the stereotype. Bartmiński, the Lublin Ethnolinguistic School founder, presents one of the most fundamental stereotype interpretations. The researcher considers the latter as the subjective knowledge embodied in a particular social

frame defining how it looks, how it works, how people treat it, how it is enshrined in language, and how it is accessible through language (Bartmiński, 1986; 2019); stable in culture and language characteristics of the subjects, correlated with the names; subjectively deterministic subject understanding that coexists in descriptive and evaluative characteristics that result from the reality interpretation within the socially elaborated cognitive models (Bartmiński, 1986).

Therefore, in this article, the concept is viewed as a collection of all operational consciousness knowledge units: images, concepts, object representations or real-world phenomena, containing not only information about the displayed objects but also structures that exist in the collective unconscious, through the prism of which a particular reality object is perceived. It also reflects the variety of associative relationships with other concepts. Moreover, the concept is an ethno-culturally marked meaning verbalisation represented in terms of expression by a number of its language implementations, forming a corresponding lexical-semantic and cognitive structure.

#### The Folk Medicine Concept Representation in Ethnographic Sources

The first reports about folk medicine were focused on medical activities, beliefs, magical actions, and herbal treatment. The first works were a kind of small-scale studies published in various ethnographic collections or a variety of local press.

*Folk-medicine; A Chapter in the History of Culture* (1883) by Black and Scot is one of the books comprising different conspiracies, traditional habits, and customs for the health preservation and disease treatment practised in the XIX century or earlier in the United Kingdom and abroad. This work first attempts to classify diseases' explanations and causes and demonstrate their folklore background (Black & Scot, 1883).

Wright's *Rustic Speech and Folklore* (1913) contains a series of studies devoted to folk and

dialect medical vocabulary. The author analyses vernacular disease names, nominations representing painful conditions, as well as spells and magic actions related to the people's and animals' diseases.

The periodical *County Folk-Lore*, published by the Folklore Society in the late XIX and early XX century, examines medical advisers, folk and dialect vocabulary, medical folklore, and the beliefs connected with medical practices in different areas of Great Britain (*County Folk-Lore*, 1901; *County Folk-Lore*, 1903; *County Folk-Lore*, 1908).

Therefore, it is possible to argue that the majority of research in the folk medicine field of the second half of the XIX and the early XX century was fragmentary, related to the materials from specific small regions' descriptions and was mostly simple data fixation without any detailed analysis and comparison. Much factual material was collected, but unfortunately, there were not many review papers on this topic. Folk medicine was considered part of the ethnographic material and, therefore, was not explicitly studied. It is worth noting that the studies of language material mainly began in the XX century.

#### Adjectival and Verbal Compatibility of the Concept Verbalisers

The English lexemes *disease* and *sickness* have mainly their attributive compatibility. Such phrases cover a wide range of qualitative characteristics. In this case, it is possible to distinguish certain disease verbalisers' compatibility semantic models. In English, many units nominating diseases have a national colouring. As a result of such semantic connections, phraseological categories that acquire negative meaning are formed, and the last implement their semantic content in the context of *their own* or *someone else's* distribution.

Phrases with the ethnonymic component indicate a disease spread by representatives of a particular nation or a specific disease area. Thus, the phrases *French Disease* and *Gallic Disease* are

used to denote syphilis. In French, syphilis is nominated as *mal Napolitain* (*Neapolitan disease*), *le mal de Naples* (*disease of Naples*) (Brissaud, 1888). The phrase *the English Disease* is used to refer to children's rickets: *The English Disease is the Dutch name for rickets or weakness of the ankles that children are sometimes afflicted with* (Palmer, 1882). Children's disease rickets was first discovered in 17<sup>th</sup> century England. In the Danish language, there is a juxtaposition of *Engelsche-ziekte* (literally *English disease*) with the meaning rickets, weakness of the ankles in childhood. According to certain assumptions, the nomination developed from *enkel-niekte* (literally *ankle disease*), which then developed into *engel-ziekte* and later into *Engelsche-ziekte* (Palmer, 1882). *English sweat* or *English sweating sickness* (*sudor anglicus sweating sickness*) is a disease of unknown origin with a very high mortality rate. The following disease broke out several times in Europe (primarily in Tudor England) between 1485 and 1551. It should be noted that it does not exist in natural conditions.

In the ethnographic collection "*Leans' collection*", *the Devonshire man's disease* is mentioned: *Many people this quarter should be troubled with, who, being asked how he did, replied: "Che's not zick nor che's not well: she can eat and drink most woundily, but che cannot work."* (Lean, 1903).

There is also a collocations group motivated by the colour component, where the latter usually indicates the external manifestations of the disease. Thus, *the yellow disease*, *the yellow sickness* or *jaundice*, is a disease that was diagnosed based on skin yellowing. Other names are *gulsa*, *jaundice*: *Gulsa-whelk, the garden snail. Gulsa, or the yellow disease, was treated with oil obtained from the gulsa whelk or garden snail* (Wright, 1898/1905).

One of the names for the blood disease anaemia was *green sickness*. Initially, it was believed that the disease's main symptom is an unhealthy craving for junk food, and the name comes from the Scottish *wexh green* or *grene* (*to aspire*): e.g. *gyrnan, to yearn, georn, desirous*. Other sources,

including Johnson's Dictionary, or Francis Grose's Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, differentiate the disease as a *disease of maids* or *virgin's disease*. In addition to *green sickness*, the condition was also known as *morbus virgineus* (*virgin's disease*) or *febris amatoria* (*lover's fever*). The *green sickness* was defined as: *The disease of maids occasioned by celibacy*. In this case, it seems appropriate to use the adjective *green* as the intensifier of *pale*. The scientific name of the disease is *chlorosis*, from the Greek *chloros* (*green*). However, in Wales, the disease is known as *glaswst*, from *glas* meaning *green* or *pale* (Palmer, 1882).

Disease verbalisers can be combined with nominations that contain an indication of a person. In this case, newly formed collocations reveal the disease's relationship to a certain population group. For example, a *disease of infants* and *infant-disease* rickets. It was believed that this disease affects the children of the poor (Ihde, 1974). *The new disease. – There is a disease of infants, and an infant disease, having scarcely as yet got a proper name in Latin, called the Rickets; wherein the head waxeth too great, whilst the legs and lower parts wain too little* (Palmer, 1882).

The disease called *the disease of women* is known in the UK as such, which arose due to supernatural beings' irrational actions. It was believed that people could not spin a black yarn in the night because the evil eye is transmitted through black threads, which is confirmed by a curse: *The disease of women who wind black thread at night be upon you*. The root of this superstition lies in the belief that black threads can disappear at night or be picked up by fairies and thrown back only in the morning (Magnus, 1908).

In folk language, hysteria is known as *the disease of the Mother* (*mother's disease*), *the widow's disease* (*widow's disease*), *the vapours*, *the hysterjcks*, or *the disease of the Womb*. It was believed that only women who do not have sexual relations could be affected by this disease: *It was termed, indifferently, the vapours "the hys-*

*terjcks" the disease of the Womb, or the disease of the Mother* (Booth, 1835).

Kidney stones were called *the student's disease: The student's disease – the stone. The stone was never heard of in England until hops and beer made therewith (about the year 1516) began to be commonly used*. Students have always been considered drunkards, which explains the nomination emergence because, as ethnographic sources rightly point out, the disease had not existed in England before the beer spread (Lean, 1903).

The name *MacDonald's disease* or *lung disease* is motivated by the belief in the miraculous power of the MacDonalds family representatives, who allegedly could cure the disease with the help of spells with any payment made: *It is called the MacDonald's disease because there are particular tribes of MacDonalds who are believed to cure it with the charms of their touch and the use of a certain set of words. There must be no fee given of any kind* (Wright, 1898/1905).

The mythological nominations of *the elf disease* and *the devil-sickness* are motivated by the beliefs in supernatural forces. The *evil eye* in English was called *elf-disease* because it was believed that elves send such a disease: *Books only as evil sorcery against the name which charms are given; as there are also against elves, against elf-disease, and for an elf-shot* (Payne, 1904). The disease when a person is believed to be possessed by demons was called *devil-sickness: For witlessness, that is, for devil-sickness (demoniacal possession), take from the body of the same wort mandragora by weight of three pennies, administer to drink in warm water, as he may find most convenient; soon he will be healed* (Payne, 1904).

Mythological representations of the supernatural power of *hungry grass* are represented in the phrase *hungry disease: If one treads on hungry grass, which is said to grow up where persons dining in a field have not thrown some of the fragments to the fairies, he will be seized with what the Irish call fear gartha or fair gmiha, hungry disease* (Wright, 1898/1905). The *hungry*

grass (*féar gortach* is another name for *fairy grass*) was mentioned in Irish beliefs. A person who gets to the plots where such grass grows begins to suffer from endless insatiability. It is believed that this herb appears in those places where the body that has not received remittal is buried. According to other superstitions, this grass is planted by fairies.

The *scorbut* component indicating *scurvy* marks the phrase *scorbutic diseases: Skaefa-kal, an Icelandic name for the plant cochlearia, which grows on rocky sea-shores, as if from sharfr, a cormorant (Shetland, soarf. Soot, scart), is a corruption of scurvy-grass, it being a cure for scorbutic diseases* (Palmer, 1882).

Furthermore, a group of phraseological units implement the state of being connected to specific diseases and organs semantics. For example, pulmonological diseases are called *lung diseases: I with only say that for lung disease, which corresponds more to pulmonary consumption than to pneumonia, there is a copious collection of recipes, mainly of herbal remedies, some of them containing a definitive list of ingredients* (Payne, 1904).

At the intersection of the Folk Medicine concept sphere and space, there are specific nominations that are most often used for the euphemising purpose. Thus, epilepsy is called the *outside disease* and smallpox – *the good woman: Smallpox was called the good woman. "Epilepsy" an outside disease* (Campbell, 1900).

Leprosy is euphemistically called *the rough disease: A word meaning the rough disease is translated by Mr Cockayne "leprosy"; but I think it is not certain that this disease was meant* (Payne, 1904).

The nomination *theor disease* is used to denote a pimple on the eye: *As a specific of an Anglo-Saxon prescription, take the following, which is good for Theor disease* (Payne, 1904). The lexeme *theor* is translated from Saxon as *dry*.

Some names of diseases metaphorise concepts from the temporal sphere. For instance, the fever can be called *a spring disease* because, most often, such diseases occur in spring: *They*

*are good for headache and eye-troubles, for temptations of the fiend, for night visitors (goblins), and for spring disease (ague), and for nightmare, and fascination for, and for evil incantations* (Payne, 1904).

Verbal compatibility of the Folk Medicine concept verbalisers is much less common in vernacular English. Often, these categories demonstrate the personification of the disease and implement the semantics of the violent action. The disease can both affect a person and depart from it: *At Porfrane, County Dublin, there is a well called "The Chink Well," which is covered by saltwater yet always remains fresh and pure at high tide. Anyone seeking a cure should leave a piece of bread on the brink of the well, and if this is carried away by the next tide, the disease will also depart along with it* (Wilde, 2000).

The use of the verbs denoting state is also characteristic of the English folk language world picture: *to be elf-shot with any sudden disease: When a cow happened to be seized with any sudden disease: she was said to be elf-shot with any sudden disease, and it was reckoned as much as her life was not worth to her dad with the bluebonnet* (Wright, 1898/1905).

Different non-traditional medical practices were used as a particular treatment method in folk medicine. They included various magical actions: *Not only are charms and incantations employed for cursing disease, but they are also used to induce disease and death, in the form of maledictions and curses, and in the name of the Evil One* (Wilde, 2000). For example, in England, an illustrative practice existed of burying a disease: *The falling sickness is buried forever in that spot, never rising up again while the ashes and the iron remain untouched* (Wilde, 2000).

The disease can also be *overcome, taken away, or driven away* with the help of certain magical artefacts, as in the belief about nails as a remedy for epilepsy: *Lupton says: "Three nails made in the vigil of the nativity of St. John Baptist, called Midsommer Eve, and driven in so deep that they cannot be seen, in the place where the party doth fall that hath the falling sickness,*

and naming the said parties name while it is doing, doth keep the disease away. He says on the same page (Wilde, 2000). The semantics of water is also present in English: *An instance of making the disease pass into running water is the following curious prescription for some skin diseases* (Payne, 1904). Phrases transmit the semantics of care, cultivation, and growth of the disease with the verb to develop and *breed*: *An strive to bring me to my grave. We breed in hurries here; I shall breed you nought but bother. I hully thought he was breeding the fever when its teeth [the baby] were breeding* (Wright, 1898/1905).

In the compatibility process, the same nominal unit can acquire many different figurative and phraseologically related meanings since any object has many features, qualities and connections, and each feature can become the figurative meaning basis.

### Conclusion

A comprehensive study of the ethnic concept of Folk Medicine is not presented in the modern scientific paradigm of general linguistics. Therefore, the relevance of the following research is specified by the need to analyse the linguocultural concept of Folk Medicine in the anthropocentric spirit based on the recent achievements of ethnolinguistics. Overall, the ways of metaphorization and conceptualisation of the Folk Medicine concept verbalizers insufficient in English have been done based on vocabulary definitions and folklore ethnographic sources. The term 'concept' is determined as a knowledge set of all operational consciousness units: images, notions, or ideas about the object. It is a culturally marked verbalised meaning, a stereotype of culture that appears in terms of linguistic implementations, which form the corresponding lexical-semantic and cognitive structure. Therefore, it can be postulated that attributive phrases with the words denoting different diseases can be marked with ethnonymic, colourative, anthroponymic, mythological, spatial and temporal components. The attributive compatibility of disease verbalisers'

lexemes is closely related to the features of the prototypical disease: the features of the prototypical disease are objectified in stable phrases that act as nominative units, in which the attribute nominates the prototype feature. It can be noted that the verbal collocations with the words denoting diseases are implemented in categories with the course, treatment and defeat of the disease semantics. The message formed by adding verbs to the disease verbalisers is mainly metaphorical, often reflecting the folk medicine practices.

The article opens up prospects for further study of concepts in English and other ethnocultures. A more detailed study of the relationship between the Folk Medicine concept and other concepts will provide data that will form the basis for describing different mythopoetic spheres.

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