



THE THEMATIC FIELD WITH THE FEATURE “DEVIATION FROM THE NORM” IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

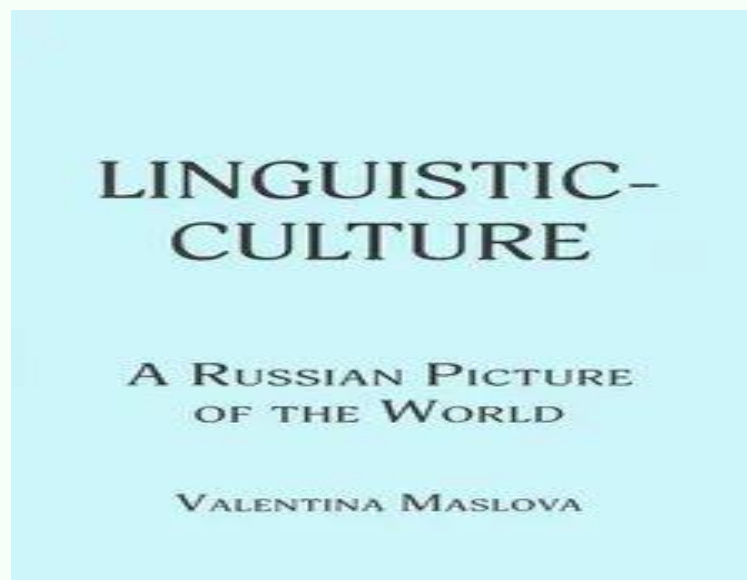
The article examines the thematic field with the feature “deviation from the norm” in the Russian language as an important component of the lexical-semantic system. It represents a structured set of evaluative lexical units reflecting cultural values, social expectations, and collective notions of normality. The analysis shows that deviation from the norm is conceptualized through metaphor, expressive word-formation, and evaluative semantics. The main lexical-semantic groups, their negative connotation, and pragmatic orientation are identified.

Keywords: Deviation from the norm, thematic field, evaluative lexicon, semantic analysis, Russian language, cultural values, metaphor, word-formation, pragmatics, axiology.

Introduction

In modern linguistic studies, which are increasingly oriented toward the analysis of semantic structures and mechanisms of meaning formation, special and growing attention is being paid to the semantic organization of language as a whole and to the specific ways in which individual linguistic units reflect, encode and transmit various social, cultural, ideological and evaluative norms prevailing in a given linguistic community. One of the particularly significant and richly represented semantic domains in this respect is the broad thematic field defined by the central feature “deviation from the norm.” This field unites a wide range of lexical units that express various forms and degrees of abnormality, excess, deficiency, violation, transgression, nonconformity, anomaly or departure from socially, culturally or ethically accepted standards and expectations. In the Russian language such lexical units occupy an important and active position: they play a crucial role in shaping and conveying evaluative meaning, in expressing

axiological attitudes, in marking speaker's emotional stance and in performing various pragmatic functions within discourse [Apresyan, 2000, p. 178]. The very concept of "norm" in language is not merely a formal or structural category; it is deeply and inseparably connected with cultural stereotypes, ethical standards, moral imperatives, collective linguistic consciousness, social conventions and historically shaped ideas about what is considered "proper," "acceptable," "usual," "correct" or "desirable" within a particular culture. Accordingly, any deviation from this norm — whether deliberate or unintentional, minor or radical — tends to be linguistically marked in a very distinct way. Such units almost invariably acquire additional expressive, emotive, stylistic, ironic, pejorative, hyperbolic or otherwise intensified coloring, which distinguishes them from neutral vocabulary and makes them powerful tools for evaluation, characterization, persuasion and emotional impact. The systematic study of this thematic field therefore opens up broad possibilities for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the complex and multifaceted interaction between language, culture, value systems, social norms and individual as well as collective evaluative attitudes [Maslova, 2001, p. 94].



The aim of this article is to carry out a detailed analysis of the structure and semantic features of the thematic field characterized by the feature "deviation from the norm" in the contemporary Russian language, as well as to identify and describe its main lexical constituents, semantic subfields, paradigmatic and

syntagmatic relations, and principal functional characteristics in various types of discourse. The research focuses on revealing how this semantic domain is organized internally, what types of deviation it covers (quantitative, qualitative, moral, social, physical, behavioral, etc.), and how the corresponding lexical units function as carriers of evaluation, expressivity and cultural meaning in modern Russian speech.



METHODS

The present study employs a comprehensive set of interrelated methods specifically selected for the systematic investigation of the semantic organization and functional characteristics of the thematic field characterized by the feature “deviation from the norm” in the Russian language. The core methodological toolkit includes methods of semantic analysis, componential (or feature) analysis, and thematic field modeling. Semantic analysis was applied to reveal the overall meaning structure of the field, to identify its semantic boundaries, to determine the dominant and peripheral senses, as well as to trace the mechanisms of semantic derivation, metaphorization, pejoration and amelioration within the given thematic domain. Componential analysis was used to decompose the meanings of individual lexical units into minimal distinctive semantic features (semes), to establish the invariant core of the field and to classify the lexical items according to the type and degree of deviation they express (quantitative excess/deficiency, qualitative anomaly, moral transgression, social nonconformity, physical abnormality, etc.). This method allowed for a precise



differentiation between closely related lexemes and for revealing hierarchical relations within subgroups of the field. Thematic field modeling served as the integrative method that enabled the construction of a structured model of the field as a whole: its nuclear, near-nuclear and peripheral zones; paradigmatic (synonymous, antonymous, hyponymic) and syntagmatic relations among its constituents; as well as the main axes of semantic opposition that organize the internal structure of the field. The lexical material for the analysis was carefully selected from several complementary sources in order to ensure representativeness and breadth of coverage:

- authoritative explanatory dictionaries of the modern Russian language (primarily the Большой академический словарь русского языка, Толковый словарь русского языка под ред. С. А. Кузнецова, Словарь современного русского литературного языка, а также словари синонимов, антонимов и фразеологических словарей);
- works of fiction (prose and drama of the 19th–21st centuries, where evaluative and expressive language is particularly rich and contextually motivated);
- specialized linguistic studies and monographs devoted to the problems of linguistic evaluation, axiology, normativity, emotivity and stylistic markedness in Russian.

Contextual analysis was systematically applied to determine the actual pragmatic and stylistic functions performed by lexical units of the thematic field in real speech situations. This method made it possible to establish how these units function in different types of discourse (artistic, journalistic, colloquial, scientific), what illocutionary force they carry, how they contribute to the creation of irony, sarcasm, condemnation, exaggeration or mitigation, and how their evaluative potential changes depending on the situational and sociocultural context. The methodological framework of the research is solidly based on the theory of lexical-semantic fields (in the tradition of J. Trier, G. Ipsen, and their development in Russian linguistics) and on the axiological approach to language analysis. The axiological approach treats linguistic meaning not as an isolated phenomenon, but in close and constant relation to cultural values, ethical standards, social norms, collective attitudes and individual value orientations of language speakers. Within this framework, the thematic field “deviation from the norm” is considered as a linguistically objectified zone of axiological tension,

where violations of norms become a powerful source of expressivity, evaluation and cultural commentary [Karasik, 2004, p. 112]. The combination of the listed methods in their logical sequence and mutual complementarity ensured a multi-level, systematic and comprehensive study of both the structural-semantic organization of the thematic field and its functional-pragmatic potential in contemporary Russian language usage.



RESULTS

The detailed analysis conducted within the framework of the study demonstrates that the thematic field characterized by the feature “deviation from the norm” in the contemporary Russian language constitutes a highly structured, internally differentiated and semantically rich domain. This field is not a loose collection of isolated lexemes, but a complex and interconnected system that includes several distinct yet closely interrelated lexical-semantic groups. Each of these groups reflects a particular type or aspect of deviation from socially, culturally, ethically or physically accepted norms, thereby covering a broad spectrum of evaluative meanings and pragmatic functions.

Among the most prominent and systematically represented subgroups are the following:

- the group expressing moral deviation, which includes lexemes denoting profound ethical violations, immorality, baseness or wickedness (such as негодяй, подлец, мерзавец, подонок and similar units). These words serve as direct



linguistic markers of strong moral condemnation and are frequently used to express categorical negative evaluation of a person's character or actions;

- the group reflecting behavioral deviation, encompassing units that characterize rude, impolite, tactless or socially unacceptable manners of conduct (for example, хам, грубиян, нахал, наглец, развязный). Lexemes of this type highlight violations of etiquette, norms of interpersonal communication and rules of social interaction;

- the group associated with intellectual deviation, which comprises words denoting various forms of mental deficiency, foolishness, irrationality or loss of reason (глупец, дурак, идиот, безумец, сумасшедший). These units often carry both descriptive and sharply evaluative components, combining reference to cognitive inadequacy with emotional disapproval or ridicule;

- the group denoting physical or physiological deviation, which includes lexemes referring to bodily defects, deformities, illnesses or anomalies perceived as deviations from the norm of health and physical perfection (калека, урод, уродец, инвалид in certain contexts, выродок). In many cases, such units acquire additional negative evaluative connotations due to cultural attitudes toward physical difference [Ozhegov, 2010, p. 356]. Lexical units belonging to this thematic field are predominantly — and in the overwhelming majority of cases — evaluative in nature. They almost invariably possess pronounced negative connotations, which constitute an integral and often dominant component of their semantic structure. The evaluative meaning is typically built around semantic components of disapproval, condemnation, contempt, irony, sarcasm, moral indignation or emotional rejection. These connotative layers are so strong that in many contexts they overshadow the purely denotative (descriptive) content of the word, turning it primarily into an instrument of axiological characterization and pragmatic impact. Furthermore, many of the lexical units within the field emerge and develop through mechanisms of metaphorical transfer. The most productive source domains for such metaphorization are those of illness, physical disorder, chaos, dirt, biological abnormality and mechanical breakdown. Metaphorical mapping from these domains onto the sphere of human character, behavior or intellect allows speakers to express abstract deviations in more vivid, emotionally charged and culturally resonant terms. This process not only enriches the expressive potential of the language but also reveals deep cultural associations



between physical “defect” and moral or intellectual “defect” [Shakhovsky, 2008, p. 203]. It has also been established that the expression of deviation from the norm is frequently intensified and made more explicit through active word-formation mechanisms, which serve as important means of enhancing evaluative meaning and emotional expressivity. Among the most productive affixes and patterns are:

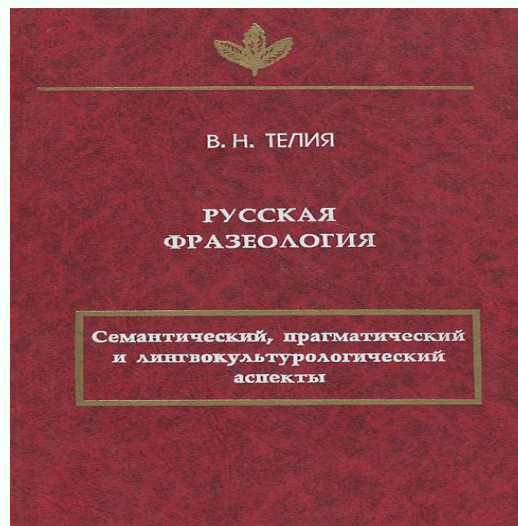
- suffixation with intensifying or pejorative suffixes such as -ищ- (e.g., дурачище, безобразище), -уг- / -уг- (e.g., хамуга, подлец-уг), -от- (e.g., глупота, уродство);
- prefixation with elements that indicate excess, insufficiency or reversal, such as пере- (переборщить, перегибать), недо- (недоумок, недочеловек), из- / с- (изверг, сволочь), вы- (выродок, выродиться). These derivational means not only create new lexical items but also systematically reinforce the negative evaluative component, making the expression of deviation more emphatic, emotionally saturated and stylistically marked [Vinogradov, 1980, p. 241].

Overall, the results of the analysis confirm that the thematic field “deviation from the norm” in Russian represents a dynamically organized axiological zone of language, where lexical means serve as powerful tools for expressing social control, moral judgment, emotional attitude and cultural worldview. The identified subgroups, dominant evaluative orientation, metaphorical mechanisms and word-formation patterns collectively demonstrate the high degree of linguistic elaboration of this semantic domain and its central role in the evaluative system of the Russian language.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study convincingly confirm and allow for a more nuanced formulation of the conclusion that the thematic field characterized by the feature “deviation from the norm” in the Russian language reflects not only purely linguistic regularities and semantic structures, but also — and to a very significant extent — deeply embedded cultural norms, value orientations, ethical standards and collective ideas about what constitutes “proper,” “acceptable” or “normal” behavior, appearance and character within the Russian linguistic worldview. This field thus serves as a vivid linguistic mirror of the axiological system of Russian culture, where the very act of naming and categorizing deviations becomes a way of implicitly affirming and reinforcing the boundaries of the norm itself. The

exceptionally high degree of expressiveness, emotivity and stylistic markedness typically associated with the lexical units of this field clearly indicates their strong pragmatic orientation: these words are rarely used in a purely descriptive, neutral manner; instead, they almost invariably carry an illocutionary force aimed at influencing the addressee, evoking an emotional response, expressing disapproval or condemnation, and ultimately contributing to the regulation of social behavior through verbal means [Wierzbicka, 1997, p. 66]. Compared to neutral or descriptively oriented lexical items, words denoting various forms of deviation from the norm exhibit a markedly higher degree of context-dependence and situational sensitivity.



Their actual meaning, evaluative force, degree of pejoration or irony, as well as their overall pragmatic effect are heavily determined by the specific communicative situation, the social roles of the participants, the degree of (in)formality of the discourse, the presence or absence of shared cultural background, and even the immediate preceding and following context. In many cases, the same lexeme can shift from mild irony or playful teasing in an informal friendly conversation to sharp condemnation, insult or moral outrage in a more serious or conflict-laden interaction. This heightened contextual sensitivity underscores the fact that these units function not merely as labels for certain states or qualities, but as powerful communicative signals that reveal the speaker's emotional involvement, explicit or implicit social judgment, ideological positioning, attitude toward the referent and toward the addressee, and often also the speaker's own alignment with (or distance from) prevailing cultural norms



[Sternin, 2001, p. 89]. Thus, the thematic field under consideration operates as a highly effective linguistic mechanism for evaluating reality, for constructing and maintaining social order through language, and for reinforcing culturally accepted norms by systematically contrasting them with their opposites — i.e., with various forms of deviation, anomaly, transgression or nonconformity. Through the frequent and expressively charged use of such lexical units speakers not only describe deviations but actively perform acts of evaluation: they draw attention to boundary violations, signal disapproval or rejection, remind others (and themselves) of the existence of the norm, and thereby contribute to its symbolic reproduction and strengthening in everyday linguistic practice. In this sense, the field “deviation from the norm” can be regarded as a linguistically objectified zone of cultural tension and axiological control, where language actively participates in the processes of socialization, moral regulation and identity construction within Russian-speaking communities. The results also highlight the close interconnection between linguistic expression and cultural worldview: the ways in which deviations are lexicalized, metaphorized, intensified through word-formation or pragmatically exploited in discourse reveal much about the priorities, taboos, anxieties and value hierarchies characteristic of contemporary Russian culture. This makes further cross-cultural comparison of analogous thematic fields in other languages a promising direction for revealing both universal mechanisms of axiological categorization and culture-specific features of norm-deviation opposition.

CONCLUSION

The thematic field characterized by the feature “deviation from the norm” occupies a significant and well-defined place in the lexical-semantic system of the contemporary Russian language. It constitutes a structured, internally organized and dynamically functioning set of predominantly evaluative lexical units that serve as a linguistic reflection of deeply rooted cultural values, socially accepted expectations, ethical standards, and collective notions of what is considered “normal,” “proper,” “acceptable” or “desirable” in Russian culture. Through these units the language not only names various forms of anomaly or nonconformity but also actively participates in the processes of social control, moral regulation, and axiological categorization of reality. The study demonstrates that deviation



from the norm is linguistically conceptualized and expressed through a variety of interrelated mechanisms: metaphorical transfer (especially from the domains of physical illness, disorder, dirt, chaos or mechanical breakdown to the sphere of moral, intellectual or behavioral qualities), highly productive expressive word-formation processes (intensifying suffixes and prefixes that enhance negative evaluation), and richly developed evaluative semantics (which consistently foreground components of disapproval, condemnation, irony, contempt or emotional rejection). These mechanisms ensure that the field remains one of the most expressively charged and pragmatically potent zones of the Russian lexicon, allowing speakers to perform complex acts of judgment, emotional signaling and cultural boundary maintenance in everyday and artistic discourse alike. Further research in this area holds considerable promise and may productively focus on several directions: first, a comparative cross-linguistic analysis of analogous thematic fields in other languages in order to identify universal patterns of norm-deviation conceptualization as well as culture-specific features of their lexicalization and evaluation; second, a diachronic investigation into the historical development of this thematic field in Russian, tracing changes in its composition, semantic shifts, metaphorical sources and evaluative intensity across different periods of the language; third, an examination of its functioning in specialized discourses (political, journalistic, legal, medical, etc.) and in conditions of language contact or digital communication, where new forms of expressing deviation may emerge under the influence of globalization and internet culture.

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