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CONCEPT IN HUMANITIES: FROM LINGUISTICS TO FOLKLORE STUDIES

Summary. The article explores the concept as a key category of contemporary humanities, emphasizing its fundamental significance in the analysis of language, culture, and folklore. The authors justify the relevance of an interdisciplinary approach to studying the concept, integrating the methodological foundations of cognitive linguistics, cultural studies, philosophy of language, folklore studies, and narratology. The concept is defined as a mental formation shaped by individual and cultural experience, performing cognitive, communicative, and axiological functions, and acting as a mediator between linguistic form and mental content.

The focus is placed on the analysis of the concept within folklore tradition, where it manifests through the interaction of sign, image, and symbol. It is emphasized that folklore texts represent the deep meanings of collective consciousness, which can be effectively interpreted through conceptual analysis. The paper examines the works of leading scholars in the field – Y. Bartmiński, A. Wierzbicka, O. Selivanova, Zh. Krasnobaieva-Chorna, R. Langacker, G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, C. Jung, C. Lévi-Strauss, A. Dundes, S. Thompson, and others. Their research highlights how concepts structure speech, form the ethnic worldview, organize narrative, and shape the semantic horizons of folklore texts.

Special attention is paid to how conceptual analysis can be used to explore symbolism, archetypes, rituals, binary oppositions, and other structural elements of folklore. The study demonstrates that concepts not only reflect collective mentality but also shape the narrative and axiological basis of national culture. Thus, the concept serves as a universal analytical tool that bridges the individual and collective, the linguistic and extralinguistic, the rational and the mythological. The article deepens the understanding of conceptual analysis in folklore studies and contributes to the development of the humanities in an integrative dimension.

Key words: concept, folklore, cognitive linguistics, narrative, metaphor, mentality, national identity.

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КОНЦЕПТ У ГУМАНІТАРНИХ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯХ: ВІД ЛІНГВІСТИКИ ДО ФОЛЬКЛОРИСТИКИ

Анотація. У статті розглянуто концепт як ключову категорію сучасного гуманітарного знання, що має надзвичайно важливе значення для аналізу мови, культури та фольклору. Автори обґрунтовують доцільність застосування міждисциплінарного підходу до вивчення концепту у взаємодії з методологічними засадами когнітивної лінгвістики, культурології, філософії мови, фольклористики та наратології. Вони наголошують, що концепт є сформованим на основі культурного й індивідуального досвіду людини ментальним утворенням, яке виконує когнітивну, комунікативну, ціннісну функції та слугує посередником між мовною формою й ментальним змістом.

У центрі уваги – аналіз концепту в контексті фольклорної традиції, де він виявляє себе через поєднання знака, образу та символу. Наголошено, що фольклорний текст репрезентує глибинні смисли колективної свідомості, які можуть бути ефективно інтерпретовані саме через концептуальний підхід. У роботі розглянуто праці провідних дослідників про поняття концепту: Є. Бартмінського, А. Вежбицької, О. Селіванової, Ж. Краснобаєвої-Чорної, Р. Ленгекера, Дж. Лакоффа, М. Джонсона, К. Юнга, К. Леві-Стросса, А. Дандеса, С. Томпсона та інших. Їхні напрацювання дозволяють побачити, як концепти структурують мовлення, формують етнічну картину світу, організовують наратив і визначають смислові горизонти фольклорного тексту.

Особливу увагу приділено тому, як за допомогою концептуального аналізу можна досліджувати символику, архетипи, ритуали, бінарні опозиції та інші структурні елементи фольклору. Показано, що концепти не лише відображають колективну ментальність, а й формують наративну й аксіологічну базу національної ідентичності. Концепт, отже, – це універсальний аналітичний інструмент, що допомагає поєднати індивідуальний і колективний досвід, мовне і позовне, раціональне і міфологічне. Стаття спрямована на поглиблення розуміння можливостей концептуального аналізу у фольклористичних дослідженнях і сприяє розвитку гуманітарної науки в інтегративному ключі.

Ключові слова: концепт, фольклор, когнітивна лінгвістика, наратив, метафора, ментальність, національна ідентичність.

Problem statement. A prominent feature of contemporary folkloristics is its openness to methods applied in other fields of the humanities. Such an approach has long been inherent to Ukrainian scholarship. For instance, Ivan Franko stated: “Like nature, science is always the one

common, indivisible, and inseparable. Everything in it is interconnected; it is a chain with all the links tightly joined together” (Franko 1986, pp. 34–35). Today, ongoing processes of integration are underway among various humanitarian disciplines, and new approaches are emerging.

Very often, folkloristics borrows the methodological foundation of linguistics for its own research. Since the mid-twentieth century, linguistics has been considered as akin to mathematics among the humanities. The linguistic methodology and conceptual apparatus operated by linguists have also proven beneficial for our study.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The term “concept” is actively employed in modern linguistics; however, there is still no universally accepted definition of it, as several ways of understanding and interpreting the notion exist. The concept is a term used by various disciplines in the humanities, including cultural studies, cognitive linguistics, literary theory, and other related fields. The visions of the concept that are of particular interest to us are perceptible in the works of Jerzy Bartmiński, Anna Wierzbicka, Iryna Holubovska, Svitlana Zhabotynska, Vitalii Zhaivoronok, Vitalii Kononenko, Zhanna Krasnobaieva-Chorna, Petro Matskiv, Oleksandr Potebnia, Olena Selivanova, Mariia Skab, Karen Risager, Larry Trask, Ray Jackendoff, Robert McCrae, Paul Costa Jr., Ralph Piedmont, Ronald Langacker, and others.

The purpose of the article is to demonstrate which essential features of the “concept” notion determine its high research potential for application in contemporary folkloristic studies.

Article objectives:

1. To analyze the methodological approaches to the study of the concept within the framework of cognitive linguistics.
2. To examine the specific features of researching concepts in folklore and cultural anthropology through sign, image, symbol, archetypes, and binary oppositions.
3. To justify the research potential of conceptual analysis for interpreting collective mentality and national identity within the folkloric tradition.

Presentation of the material. The concept is a mental unit, an element of consciousness that serves as an intermediary between culture and language. It is precisely within consciousness that cultural information enters, is filtered, processed, systematized, and fixed in the form of a concept, which is responsible for selecting the linguistic means of conveying information in a specific communicative situation to achieve a concrete communicative goal. The concept is

a cognitive structure that reflects the perception and understanding of the world. It arises through the classification, organization, associations, and interconnections of ideas and objects. Concepts may be universal or specific to particular cultures. The meaning of a word, on the other hand, pertains to language and is determined by the usage to convey a particular sense or information. The meaning of a word is expressed through lexical-semantic characteristics and may be general or specific depending on the context of use. Although concepts and word meanings are related, they reflect different aspects of linguistic and cognitive functioning. Concepts shape the perception of the world, while word meaning relates to its linguistic use (Vilchynska, 2009).

Due to their specific characteristics, concepts play a significant role in shaping national identity. A comparable approach to interpreting the essence of the concept is held by the German researcher Monika Schwarz, who emphasizes that concepts are mental units whose function lies in preserving knowledge about the world. Concepts not only facilitate the storage of knowledge economically, but also enable the processing of subjective experiences by categorizing information into classes based on specific features (Schwarz, 1996, p. 55).

The combination of sign, image, and symbol generates the notion of a concept and its understanding. It is important to distinguish between the concept and the meaning of a word, since the “concept” is the result of cognitive activity, while meaning pertains to language (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980; Selivanova, 2006; Wierzbicka, 1992; Wierzbicka, 1997). The concept is a cognitive construct that reflects the way we perceive and understand the world. It is the result of cognitive activity, which includes classification, organization, associations, and interconnections between ideas and objects. Concepts may be universal (presented in many cultures) or culturally specific (peculiar only to a certain group of people or a particular culture) (Wierzbicka, 1997; Vilchynska, 2009).

The meaning of a word pertains to language and is defined by the mode of its use to convey a particular meaning or information. It consists of lexical-semantic characteristics that reflect its semantic value in speech. Meaning may be general or specific, depending on the context or use

(Wierzbicka, 1992). Although concepts and word meanings are interconnected, they represent different aspects of linguistic and cognitive functioning. Concepts determine our mode of perceiving the world, while word meanings relate to their semantic use in speech.

Anna Wierzbicka views the concept as the center of an entire complex of cultural values expressed in everyday conversations, revealing the specific features of a given culture (Wierzbicka, 1992).

Tetiana Vilchynska defines the concept as “a mental formation in the individual consciousness of speakers, projected onto the culture of society. Concepts, reflecting human knowledge and experience within a certain structured integrity – the conceptosphere – are units of the linguistic-conceptual worldview characterized by the unity of linguistic, conceptual, and axiological aspects” (Vilchynska, 2009, p. 25). Hence, it is the reproduction of an individual’s worldview formed based on the person’s acquired experience.

Jerzy Bartmiński emphasizes that “profiling is a subjective (thus, having its own subject) linguistic-conceptual operation, which consists in a particular formation of the image of an object by interpreting it in specific aspects (subcategories, facets), such as, for example, origin, qualities, appearance, functions, events, experiences, etc., within a certain type of knowledge and according to the requirements of a defined perspective” (Bartmiński, 1993, p. 212). The author uses the term “*profiling*” to define the creation of a portrait of an object. The researcher asserts that this process occurs within the social consciousness and is therefore stable and conventionalized (Bartmiński, Niebrzegowska, 1998).

Zhanna Krasnobaieva-Chorna considers the concept as “a multidimensional formation characterized by the following differential features: link to language, thinking, memory, and psyche, <...> codification in sensuous-imagistic representations, reflection of mental reality, and performing the cognitive function, functions of preserving knowledge about the world, structuring knowledge, and orienting oneself in the world” (Krasnobaieva-Chorna, p. 41).

Olena Selivanova interprets this term as “an informational cognitive structure of consciousness, organized in a specific way and embedded in a collective or individual system of

concepts” (Selivanova, 2006, p. 417). The term *concept* corresponds to the idea of meanings that a person uses in the processes of thinking, which, further, reflect the scope of knowledge and experience, the results of human activity, and the cognitive processes related to the outside world. The researcher notes that an individual’s experience shapes the concepts in their consciousness.

Theoretical positions of Ronald Langacker, a prominent researcher in cognitive linguistics, have proven significant for our study. His works focus on the understanding of concepts and the structure of language. One of Langacker’s major contributions is the theory of cognitive grammar development. He acknowledges that language reflects cognitive structures and how information is categorized in human reasoning. He considers language as a system of conceptual spaces, where linguistic units represent concepts and their interrelation. Ronald Langacker’s research contributes to deepening the understanding of the role of concepts and the structure of language in thinking and world perception.

He has made a significant contribution to the field of cognitive linguistics, helping to broaden our understanding of language as a reflection of cognitive processes. In his research, Ronald Langacker states that people operate with whole images rather than with individual semantic features when interpreting a concept (Langacker, 1998, p. 14).

Of particular interest is the perspective on cognitive linguistics and the philosophy of language presented by Ray Jackendoff. His research has made significant contributions to the understanding of concepts and the structure of language. One of the most substantial is his work on the cognitive grammar theory. He devised the “conceptual semantics” conception, which reflects the interrelationship between language, thought, and conceptual structures. According to his theory, language reflects our cognitive representations and conceptual categories, and speech serves as a means of expressing these concepts. “To study the semantics of natural language is to study cognitive psychology” sounds like a rallying cry straight from cognitive linguistics, but, as is often the case in science, similarity quickly begins to be seen as foundational, and differences emerge as distinctions – the question is how to proceed from there (Jackendoff, 1997, pp. 93–129).

Jackendoff also studied the concepts of mental space and spatial orientation in language. He examined how language conveys understanding of spatial relations and perception of space. His research includes analysis of the role of orientation systems such as “up–down,” “front–back,” “left–right” in expressing concepts. This approach is relevant to folklorists, as it describes binary oppositions that are fundamental in folk culture. Ray Jackendoff’s research helps to deepen our understanding of the nature of language, thought, and concepts. His theoretical approaches and empirical research have had a significant impact on cognitive linguistics and philosophy of language.

George Lakoff’s cognitive theory of metaphor is also valuable for understanding the substance of the “concept” notion. Lakoff profoundly explored various aspects of cognitive linguistics and the influence of concepts on speech and thinking. His works are an important contribution to understanding cognitive processes and the interrelation between language and thought: “The source domain in the cognitive theory of metaphor represents a generalization of a person’s practical life experience in the world. Knowledge in the source domain is organized in the form of image schemas – relatively simple cognitive structures that are constantly reproduced in the process of physical interaction with reality” (Lakoff, 1987, p. 267).

George Lakoff has also made a significant contribution to the field of conceptual metaphor theory. Together with Mark Johnson, in the book *Metaphors We Live By*, they confirmed that metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but fundamental mechanisms of thought. Lakoff explained how metaphors create conceptual frameworks that shape our perception and understanding of the world. He studied the metaphorical expression of various concepts, including emotions, time, understanding, morality, and others (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980).

Moreover, Lakoff developed the theory of conceptual frames, which encompasses both words and phrases, as well as entire systems of representations that influence our perception and interpretation of reality. He examined how these frames are operated to conceptualize certain phenomena and how they influence our thinking and language (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980).

Overall, George Lakoff’s research in the field of conceptual semantics and metaphor has made a significant contribution to our understanding of language, thought, and world perception. His works have had a profound impact on cognitive linguistics, opening new horizons for the study of linguistic expression and cognitive processes.

The research papers of Mark Johnson, George Lakoff’s co-author, are also noteworthy. As mentioned above, Mark Johnson worked on the theory of conceptual metaphor. In the book *Metaphors We Live By*, Johnson and Lakoff consider metaphors as a fundamental mechanism of thinking and a way of expressing concepts. Johnson contributes to the understanding of the body as a basic source of metaphorical expression, emphasizing the importance of bodily experience in shaping our representations and linguistic expression.

Johnson studies the role of perception and cognitive processes in speech. He analyzes how our perception of the world influences the formation of linguistic concepts and expressions. He examines the role of spatial orientation, movement, and other bodily experiences in creating linguistic images and concepts.

Moreover, Johnson explores the role of metaphor in philosophy and ethics. He considers how metaphors affect our moral understanding and moral decision-making. He develops the concepts of “moral imagery” and “embodied morality,” demonstrating how our bodily experiences influence our moral beliefs and choices.

Mark Johnson’s research in the field of concept and metaphor broadens our understanding of language, thought, and world perception. He draws attention to the importance of bodily experience and conceptual thinking in shaping our representations and expressions. His works have a significant impact on cognitive linguistics, the philosophy of language, and related fields of study. The researcher states: “Metaphorical structures are pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. The regular system of concepts into which we embed our thinking and behavior is based on essential metaphoricality.” (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980).

The conceptual approach is also noticeable in European and American anthropology and folkloristics. The works of Carl Gustav Jung, the

classic of archetypal theory, can be considered as a forerunner of the conceptual method in folkloristics. The scientist demonstrated the connection between subconscious images (archetypes) and texts generated by archaic forms of culture, such as myth and fairy tale. He examined the importance of symbolism in the individual and collective unconscious in the collective research *Man and His Symbols*. The author used examples from folklore and mythology to explain archetypal symbols and their significance in psychological evolution (Jung, 1968).

In the study *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Carl Jung described the collective unconscious and its influence on symbolism found in the folklore and mythology of various cultures. He analyzed archetypes that manifest through conceptual aspects in folkloric narratives and symbols. "There are strong reasons to suppose that archetypes are unconscious images of the instincts themselves, in other words, that they are patterns of instinctual behavior" (Jung, 1981).

The classical studies of the renowned French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss made a significant contribution to the study of concepts in folklore. The researcher considered folklore as a critical element of cultural expression and examined it from the perspective of conceptual structures and symbols. In his work *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss developed the concept of structural anthropology and applied it to the analysis of folkloric material. He discovered that folklore reflects structures of thought, symmetry, and oppositions that embody universal aspects of the human mind (Lévi-Strauss, 2008).

The book *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology* focuses on the analysis of mythological narratives and symbols. The researcher considers mythology as an expression of the conceptual aspects of culture, exploring the opposition between raw and cooked food as a symbolic code. If the culture has to be truly itself and produce something, both culture and its representatives must be convinced of their own identity and even, to some extent, of their superiority over others; only under conditions of insufficient communication can it produce anything at all" (Lévi-Strauss, 1969).

Claude Lévi-Strauss's research makes a significant contribution to the understanding of concepts in folklore and their role in shaping cultural

systems. He used a structural approach to analyze symbolism, mythology, and rituals, revealing both universal and culturally specific aspects of folklore. His works have further influenced the development of folkloristics and anthropology, opening new pathways for the study of concepts in folklore.

American folklorist Alan Dundes continued the work of his colleagues. In particular, he introduced the contextual approach in folklore studies. He stated that folklore is a part not only of the past, but also of the present. Therefore, he shed light on the connection between folklore, thinking, and language – and thus to its conceptual study. In the essay collection *Analytic Essays in Folklore*, Dundes analyzed the conceptual aspects of various branches of folkloric tradition, including mythology, folktales, jokes, and rituals. As a result, he revealed the meaning and interpretation of concepts within folkloric texts (Dundes, 1979).

The idea of studying folklore in relation to its connection with mentality through the concept category has many followers. First and foremost, we should mention the name of Hungarian-American folklorist Linda Dégh. In her book *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre*, Dégh examines the relationship between legends and beliefs in folklore. She analyzes how concepts of ideology, religion, and worldview are reflected in legends and their influence on dissemination and perception (Dégh, 2006).

American ethnomusicologist and folklorist Alan Lomax studied concepts in folk musical folklore. He researched the folklore and musical traditions of various cultures, paying particular attention to the fact that it is the concept that serves as the fundamental element shaping and transmitting cultural values. Lomax mainly focused on how concepts in folk songs reflect cultural characteristics. He examined how musical style and the lyrics of folk songs reflect cultural notions, values, and worldviews. In his monograph *Folk Song and Folklore*, the author explores the interrelation between folk songs and folklore in general. He investigates how concepts conveyed through folk songs reflect the cultural, historical, and social aspects of community life. "I saw that the work of the folklorist is to build a bridge between people who have no voice and the great world of communication" (Lomax, 1978).

Linda Hutcheon is a renowned Canadian literary scholar and cultural theorist who has studied concepts in folklore and their role in the formation and interpretation of folk works. Her research focuses on the connection between folklore, identity, and culture.

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon explores the concept of adaptation in literature and folklore. She examines what conceptual changes occur during the transformation of folk works into literary adaptations and how these changes reflect cultural shifts and identity (Hutcheon, 2012).

Conclusions. The notion of “concept,” having originated in linguistic studies, has been successfully applied by scholars in other fields of the humanities, since the category of concept explains the interconnection between human language, culture, and thought. As evident from the foregoing, the essential features of the concept confer high research potential for its application in contemporary folkloristic studies. The results of our research demonstrate that the con-

cept, as an interdisciplinary category, facilitates a deeper understanding of the connection between the mental structures of culture and their verbal embodiment in folkloric texts. Within the framework of conceptual analysis, folklore is considered not only a form of folk art but also a complex cognitive-semantic system that represents the collective experiences, values, and ideas of a community.

Further research may focus on a deeper investigation of individual folklore genres within the conceptual paradigm, as well as the study of new forms of folklore in digital spaces. In addition, an important direction involves studying conceptual models in a comparative intercultural context, which would allow for the identification of both universal and unique features of mentality reflected in folklore. The introduction of cognitive and narratological approaches to the analysis of folklore will foster a deeper theoretical understanding of folkloric knowledge within the context of contemporary scientific paradigms.

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