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THE SEMANTICS OF *DESIRE*. AN AXIOLOGICAL-COGNITIVE ACCOUNT[1]

The following article is intended to analyse the nature of the foundations of the semantic make-up of *desire* from the cognitive-axiological perspective. The author of the article will predominantly focus on the cognitive-semantic approach (see Langacker 1987; Lakoff 1987; Krzeszowski 1997) as a theoretical framework for the analysis of *desire.* Along the lines of the cognitive study, an attempt will be made to postulate the cognitive-axiological basis on which the semantics of *desire* is built.

In section 1 of the article I will try to investigate the semantic pole of *desire* as a nominal predication*,* incorporating Profile/Base dichotomy (Langacker:1987) into the mainstream of the analysis. The discussion will relate to the cognitive aspect of SOURCE – PATH – GOAL schemata – the notion well elaborated upon by Krzeszowski (1997) – to finally contribute to the conclusions about cognitive foundations of the meaning of *desire*.

The following step (section 2) will be taken to analyse the concept from the axiological point of view. Again, the analysis will be carried out in connection with Krzeszowski's (op. cit.) insightful remarks about the nature of the preconceptual complex image schema of the SOURCE – PATH – GOAL type; this time from the viewpoint of the axiological determinants ingrained into its make-up.

The study will be supported by the results of the research designed to elicit the actual value parameter of the semantics of *desire*.

Finally, at the end of this paper, I will provide some final remarks related to the subject matter of the analysis.

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[1] The following article is an extended summary of one of the parts of the M.A. thesis written by Marek Kuźniak (2000) and defended at the University of Wrocław the same year.

1. Profile/Base dichotomy and its relevance in describing cognitive basis of the semantic structure of *desire*

Prior to beginning our analysis of *desire* as a nominal predication, one should explain a few handful terms that will be used in the analysis. After Langacker (1987:183), we define nominal predication as *designating thing – the definition of thing being abstract*. According to him '*thing*' makes reference not to physical objects but rather to cognitive events. *A symbolic structure whose semantic pole designates a thing is categorised as a noun* (ibid.).

'*Base*' will refer to the scope of predication whereas '*profile*'[2] is the special prominence of the designated element or the designatum of a predication area (ibid.).

For the needs of the analysis of the concept of *desire*, the scope of the terminology presented above needs to be slightly extended to encapsulate the abstract dimension of the concept. In Langacker's words (1987:207) *desire* would be assigned the label of a nominal concept which is defined *in terms of a process that functions as its base [...]. A process predication describes the evolution of a configuration through conceived time; it is resolvable into an ordered sequence of component states whose temporal distribution is continuous. [...] These entities are interconnected because they are scanned continuously and sequentially through processing time*. Enriching the above considerations with the recent findings made by Krzeszowski (1997:153–7), we discover unusual correlations and consequence within the cognitive foundations of the semantic make-up of *desire*, to be illuminated further in this section. Krzeszowski (ibid.) claims that *many concepts are structured by clusters of preconceptual image schemata* that he defines after Johnson (1987:xxxvi) as *recurring patterns involved in human bodily movement, manipulation of objects and perceptual interactions*. If we agree after Krzeszowski (1997:153) that certain clusters of schemata function as source domains in defining target concepts, and admit the existence of a SOURCE – PATH – GOAL schemata as a building-block of a target concept JOURNEY, the consequence for the analysis of *desire* is straightforward. Remembering the role of language data in the cognitive-semantic analysis, let's take as examples the following Polish and English expressions (taken from CCED, RTEWP, KFDPE, SWB, PSPA, SJP):

DESIRE IS JOURNEY
- Zawsze *dążył*[3] do zaszczytów i władzy. ((He) always aimed for honours and power).
- *Zmierzaliśmy* szczęśliwie do celu, który sobie wyznaczyliśmy. ((We) aimed luckily towards goal that (we) set ourselves).

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[2] More information about profiling to be found in Grzegorczykowa (1998:9–17).

[3] Most of the translations are lexical-morphemic, which renders the majority of the bracketed English sentences grammatically or semantically deviant.

- Wielu ludzi *ubiega się* dziś o posady i nagrody. (Many people run themselves for posts and prizes today).
- *Zabiegał* o jej względy. ((He) ran after her favours).
- *Stanęliśmy* u celu. ((We) stopped at destination).
- *Doszliśmy* do dobrobytu. ((We) came to welfare).
- Wreszcie po dwóch godzinach podróży, *osiągnęliśmy* cel. (At least after two hours of journey (we) reached destination).
- These are the objectives which businesses seek to *pursue*.
- The *drift* towards house ownership continues.
- He did not really *go out of his way* to help me.
- I thought of *going in for* teaching.
- Mc Govern's *run* for presidency.

The above examples in their semantics refer to a kind of journey that we undergo in an attempt at attaining a certain specific point. We may further conclude after Krzeszowski (ibid.) that this kind of journey has a mental representation of the SOURCE – PATH – GOAL type. Volitional factor involved then in the process of journey entitles us to perceive holistically JOURNEY as DESIRE. *Desire* is then tentatively claimed to comprise as the basis of its semantic structure the most schematic conceptualisation of the SOURCE – PATH – GOAL type. The significance of this schemata in terms of its entrenchment in our daily experience is found to be clearly stated by Turner (1994:91–107):

> *Consider our capacity to use the image schema of a path from a source to a goal. We use this image schema to attribute meaning to many things from the street we live on to the direction of an argument. A human being who lacked this image-schema of SOURCE – PATH – GOAL would be so incapacitated as to seem fundamentally deficient.*

Coming back to the earlier signalled convergence between Langacker's (1987) considerations on the abstract nouns and the just presented statements about *desire*, Langacker's (op. cit.) '*Base'* for abstract concept finds it correlative in the process (SOURCE – PATH – GOAL), in terms of which we primarily conceive of *desire*. *An ordered sequence of component states* viewed temporally will be realised in terms of the stages: SOURCE – PATH – GOAL. '*Profile*' correlates to one of the stages that is given special prominence. Hence the difference in highlighting a particular stage triggers the scale of the degree of prototypicality within the semantic structure of the concept. For the time being, it should be enough for us to hypothesise that the most frequently highlit stage in conceptualising *desire* is the last GOAL domain.[4] Thus, one may witness coherent interrelations between Langacker's (1987) definition of abstract nouns and its cognitive application as the basis of the semantic structure of *desire*.

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[4] More evidence of this type of profiling to be found in Kuźniak (2000:Chapter 2).

What is even more intriguing, our perception of *desire* in terms of JOURNEY has its further cognitive back-up. Lakoff (1995:220) claims, for instance, that *various aspects of event structure, including notions like states, changes, processes, actions, causes, purposes and means are conceptualised via metaphor in terms of space, motion, and force [...]. Causes are forces, means are paths, purposes are destinations*. In this perspective, *desire*, arising from the preconceptual image schemata of SOURCE – PATH – GOAL type, receives another sound basis, this time in its grounding within cognitively real event structure metaphor.
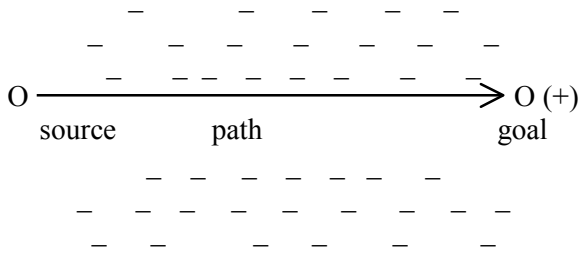
2. Towards describing axiological foundations of the semantic structure of *desire*

The consistencies presented in the previous section do not end up within the cognitive domain of conceptual representation. Also, on the level of axiological domain some well evidenced correlations can be discerned, this time between the axiological value built in the semantic structure of the concept and our own evaluations of *desire* as supported by the language corpus research results. As already mentioned *desire* has the intrinsic schematic conceptual representation in terms of SOURCE – PATH – GOAL. Krzeszowski's (1997:110) preconceptual image schemata are claimed to exhibit the plus-minus scale imposed on it.

> *The scale schema,* continues Krzeszowski (1997:111), *is present in all axiologically enhanced preconceptual image schemata and experienced primarily in the bodily experience of distance, size and weight. [...] In this way the scale schema is present in our daily experience of comparison. The axiological charge of a particular linguistic expression is also motivated in the same way, inasmuch as they arise from axiologically enhanced preconceptual image schemata in which the axiological parameter is motivated by our bodily experience and reinforced by various social and cultural experiences. Therefore, experiential grounding can be shown to motivate the axiological charge of linguistic expressions.*

Eventually, Krzeszowski (1997) discusses the axiological parameter within the SOURCE – PATH – GOAL schemata. This is important since we have so far concluded that this type of schemata constitutes the very foundation of the semantic structure of *desire*. It is therefore the matter of consistency that the axiological parameter of the SOURCE – PATH – GOAL schemata constitutes the value parameter of the concept of *desire* viewed holistically. Krzeszowski (1997:124) states that *the schema underlies the abstract, positively valued concept <purpose> which is grounded in our experience of reaching a goal*. For Krzeszowski (ibid.), firstly and most importantly, the PLUS pole of the scale schema is centred at the goal, the MINUS pole being diffused indefinitely elsewhere, as in Figure 1:

Fig.1

As already suggested the most prototypical profiling of the concept of *desire* relates to the last GOAL stage domain of its semantic basis. If the concept GOAL is charged positively, the evidence being the dictionary definitions of goal (RHDL and WBED in Krzeszowski 1997:125): *A thing for which effort is made; thing wanted; or something intended or desired to be attained by one's efforts, purpose; displaying positive connotations;* or in a sentence *The goal of his ambitions was to be a great doctor*, then one may tentatively hypothesise that *desire* in its entirety will manifest the correlative axiological value. Take the following examples:

DESIRE IS UP

- He is standing for office. (CCED)
- I always believed he was making up to me because of my money. (CCED)
- Wielu ludzi pragnie piąć się na wyższe stanowiska. (Many desire to climb up higher posts today).

According to Krzeszowski (1997:112) among various preconceptual image schemata, there is the orientational one of the UP-DOWN type whereby the UP orientation is assigned (+) value and the DOWN (-). If *desire* as the concept is in fact associated with the orientation UP, it follows that it is, as a whole, perceived positively. Whether this is really the case, one needs to support the argument on the basis of the research results.

2.1. Eliciting the axiological charge of the concept of *desire*

Below I present the results of the research authorised by Krzeszowski (1997:177), whose idea was to count 'positive' and 'negative' contexts in which *desire* appears in standard monolingual dictionaries. The purpose of the technique is to scrutinise the actual value parameter underlying the semantics of *desire* along the lines discussed by Krzeszowski (op. cit.).

The following is a set of 63 sentences taken from several monolingual dictionaries alongside which I provide introspective judgements whether the sentences appear in positive, neutral or negative contexts.

Key: (+) – positive
        (–) – negative
        (0) – neutral

1) LDCE:
- I desire happiness.(+)
- I desire to be happy.(+)
- The Queen desires that you should come at once.(0)
- Give our guests whatever they desire.(0)

2) LLCE:
- These good ideas have had several desirable results.(+)
- For this job, it is desirable to know French.(+)

3) OALDCE:
- She has not much desire for wealth.(+)
- He works hard from a desire to become rich.(+)
- He spoke about his country's desire for friendly relations.(+)
- I hope you will get all your heart's desires.(0)
- We all desire happiness and wealth.(+)
- Our rooms at the hotel were all that could be desired.(+)
- What do you desire me to do?(0)
- It is desired that this rule should be brought to the attention of the staff.(+)

4) CCED:
- I had a strong desire to help and care for people.(+)
- They seem to have lost their desire for life.(+)
- She had remarried and desired a child with her new husband.(+)
- He desired me to inform her that he had made a peace with God.(+)
- You may find that just threatening this course of action will produce the desirable effect.(0)
- His warnings have provoked the desired result.(–)
- Additional courses may be taken if desired.(+)
- Teenage sex, for instance, may come not out of genuine desire but from a need to get love.(+)
- The selection of TV programmes, especially at the weekend leaves a lot to be desired.(0)

5) LDCE:
- We must take into account the desires of our members.(0)
- The two ladies spoke of their desires for improved relations.(+)
- A desire for success.(+)
- We are all desirous of better international relations.(+)

6) LLA:

- The treatment is designed to reduce the individual's desire for alcohol.(–)
- His friendliness was due in part to his desire for comfort and protection.(+)
- The producers of goods and services aim to satisfy the consumer's desires.(+)
- This type of advertisement plays on people's powerful desire for luxury and status in society.(+)
- He told us that his greatest desire was to prevent the outbreak of a Third World War.(+)
- Tolstoy had an overwhelming desire that his books should reach even the humblest people.(+)
- I don't miss the sea and I have no desire to live near it again.(–)

7) NLWEDEL:
- This was done at his desire.(0)
- Desirable property.(+)
- Desirable qualities.(+)

8) OED:
- Her open eyes desire the truth.(+)
- Don't all men desire happiness.(+)
- They don't desire to bring down their theory to the level of their practice.(–)
- Do we indeed desire the dead should be near us?(+)
- Every estate desireth after good.(+)
- There may be kinds of Mise, and every one of them desireth a particular tractate.(0)
- I move that his Highness's advice may be desired in it.(+)
- I had spared thee, but thou desiredst my death.(–)
- He desired never hear anything of me.(–)
- We desire it may be read in English for we don't understand Law-Latin.(+)
- I humbly doe desire your Grace of pardon.(+)
- He desires me to dine with him again on Sunday.(0)
- Lady Wealthy desired the steward to give her twelve guineas.(0)
- To certify the peaceableness and to desire them to peaceableness.(+)
- At last, the long desired day appeared.(+)
- The Grecians being desirous of learning.(+)
- They that have a desirous mind of amendment.(+)
- Man is not only desirous, but ambitious too, of happiness.(+)
- He is desirous to save himself from death.(+)
- We never find ourselves so desirous to finish, as in the latter part of our work.(+)
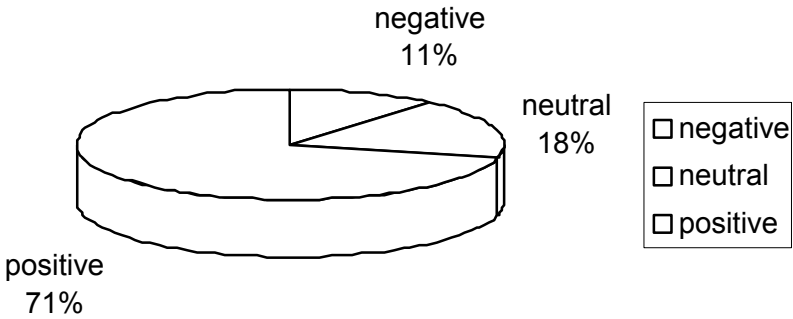- Alas note well thy desirous vanitie.(–)

9) RHDEL:
- The mayor desires your presence at the next meeting.(+)
- A desire for fame.(+)

- The chef added stock until the sauce reached the desired consistency.(+)
- Desirous of high political office.(+)

Results in percentage of the actual value parameter of *desire*:

Fig.2

negative
11%

neutral
18%

positive
71%

☐ negative
☐ neutral
☐ positive

3. Some final remarks

The results of the research presented above have provided us with a reliable evidence that in the majority of cases *desire* is tentatively positioned on the positive end on the plus-minus scale schema and therefore can be suggested to generally display a positive axiological charge on the positive-negative continuum scale. This fact is consistently reflected in the internal semantic structure of the concept whereby SOURCE – PATH – GOAL constituting the cognitive foundations of *desire* exhibits the correlative positive valuation. The appearance of evaluation other than positive corroborates the radial nature of the semantic structure whereby positively charged judgements constitute the prototypical instances of *desire,* and the remaining evaluations the less prototypical ones. Thus, besides the aforementioned cognitive basis, axiological information is seen to be equally significant in establishing the introspectively grounded model of the semantic structure of *desire.*

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Dictionaries

CCED	–	Collins Cobuild English Dictionary
KFDPE	–	The Kościuszko Foundation Dictionary Polish-English
LDCE	–	Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English
LLA	–	Longman Language Activator
LLCE	–	Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English
NLWEDEL	–	The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the English Language
OALDCE	–	Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English
OED	–	The Oxford English Dictionary
PSPA	–	Podręczny słownik polsko-angielski
RHDEL	–	Random House Dictionary of the English Language
RTEWP	–	Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases
SJP	–	Słownik języka polskiego
SWB	–	Słownik wyrazów bliskoznacznych
WBED	–	World Book Encyclopaedic Dictionary