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THE SEMANTIC HISTORY OF THE WORD “LOVE” IN THE RUSSIAN LITERARY LANGUAGE AS A BASIS FOR THE STUDY OF ITS CONCEPTOSPHERE

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Abstract

The article examines the semantic development of the word love in the history of the Russian literary language as a necessary foundation for the study of its conceptosphere. Since a concept is understood not merely as a linguistic unit but as a special mental-semantic formation fixed in the word and revealed through various forms of speech representation, the historical analysis of the lexeme love makes it possible to identify its cultural, spiritual, ethical, and axiological depth.

Keywords: concept, conceptosphere, love, Russian literary language, semantics, linguistic worldview, lexical meaning, cultural memory, sacrality, lexicography.

Introduction

Since a concept is not merely a linguistic unit but a special mental-semantic form fixed in the word and unfolding through different modes of speech representation, it appears necessary to turn to the history of the semantic


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formation of the word *love* in the Russian literary language. Such an approach makes it possible to consider this lexeme not only within the limits of dictionary meaning, but also as a bearer of centuries-old spiritual, cultural, and axiological experience. In this respect, particular importance belongs to the studies of I.A. Ivanova, K.A. Voylova, and T.Yu. Ivanova-Allenova, as well as to I.A. Ivanova's dissertation devoted to the concept of *love* and the peculiarities of its conceptsphere in the history of the Russian literary language.

First of all, it must be emphasized that love belongs to those notions that possess universal significance for any linguistic worldview. This is explained by the fact that this category belongs to the circle of basic emotional and axiological universals in which both the general features of human consciousness and the profound foundations of being are reflected. In this sense, love should be understood not as a private and isolated feeling, but as one of the fundamental forms of spiritual and moral self-comprehension of the individual. It is therefore legitimate to speak of the existence of the conceptsphere of the word *love* in the structure of the Russian linguistic worldview [1, p. 18]. Within such an approach, love appears as one of the central categories of linguistic consciousness, since its content is shaped not only by speech practice, but also by extra-linguistic reality itself and by the general laws governing the reflection of the world in human consciousness.

An examination of written monuments shows that in the history of the Russian language the understanding of love was initially included in an integral system of values grounded in the opposition of good and evil. Already at the early stages of Slavic literary development, love was understood not merely as a psychological experience, but also as a phenomenon of worldview, ethical, and religious significance. In the consciousness of the medieval individual, this notion was marked by internal semantic complexity and was correlated with a system of spiritual guidelines that determined ideas of what was proper and improper, true and false, high and low.

For the Old Church Slavonic linguistic tradition, the distinction between two principal forms of love – true love and false love – was of fundamental importance. True love was understood as a feeling directed toward God and as



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the foundation of the medieval moral ideal, and through this ideal, of one's attitude toward other people. False love, by contrast, was associated with sinfulness, spiritual fall, and the loss of the authentic meaning of feeling. This opposition reflected one of the most important foundations of the Russian linguistic worldview: the distinction between the heavenly and the earthly, that is, between the higher spiritual principle and the sensual-material sphere [2, p. 61]. Consequently, within medieval consciousness, love was recognized as truly valuable only insofar as it was correlated with the higher order of being and included in the sphere of the divine.

The Main Part

True love was perceived as a source of the individual's inner elevation, as a path of approaching God, and as one of the most important forms of moral perfection. This explains the existence in Old Church Slavonic of lexemes in which love expresses spiritual and social virtue: *bogolyubets* ("lover of God"), *bratolyubie* ("brotherly love"), *chadolubie* ("love for children"), and others [1, p. 57]. Such linguistic forms testify to the fact that in the medieval system of values the foreground was occupied by the human being as a spiritual and socially significant creature. In this understanding, love was not confined to the sphere of individual feeling, but was perceived as an inwardly obligatory moral state determining a person's place in the Christian hierarchy of values.

At the same time, the Old Church Slavonic tradition also recorded another understanding of love – carnal love, associated with passionate attraction, sensual desire, and bodily attachment. Yet this form of feeling was not endowed with positive value. On the contrary, it was interpreted as a deviation from true love, as its distorted manifestation, or as a loss of its elevated spiritual content. Love directed toward the earthly, bodily, and self-interested did not receive approval in linguistic consciousness and was perceived as a moral defect, which is confirmed by such word forms as *skvernolyubie* and *srebrolyubets* [1, p. 70]. Thus, already at the early stages of linguistic development, the concept of love reveals an internal semantic duality organized around the opposition between the sacred and the sinful.



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The Old Russian language, having inherited the Old Church Slavonic religious and philosophical model of love, further developed it within its own cultural space. Love in the Old Russian linguistic worldview likewise continued to be understood as a sacred essence, yet its content became more concrete in accordance with the peculiarities of Old Russian spiritual and social experience. The analysis of Old Church Slavonic and Old Russian linguistic material makes it possible to conclude that human relations in the consciousness of the Old Russian individual were understood primarily through the prism of Christian axiology, which defined the foundations of spiritual and moral life. This is what justifies characterizing Old Russian culture as a special type of “culture-faith,” within which language, moral ideas, and religious consciousness formed an internally unified and inseparable system.

In this respect, it is also revealing that in Old Russian a considerable number of verbal forms were attested that conveyed the active and volitional participation of a person in the emergence and affirmation of love: *vozlyubiti*, *vlyubiti*, *izlyubiti* [1, p. 80]. This allows one to conclude that love was understood not only as an internal state, but also as a spiritual act presupposing conscious effort of will. Therefore, in the Old Russian linguistic tradition love was understood not as an accidental emotional movement, but as a morally significant action connected with the inner activity of the individual.

Modern Russian demonstrates a different model of understanding love. Compared with the Old Russian and Church Slavonic stages, the religious and sacred fullness of this notion has been significantly weakened. Love gradually becomes a predominantly anthropocentric category, connected above all with the sphere of interpersonal relations, individual experiences, and personal preferences. According to T.Yu. Ivanova-Allenova, such semantic change is conditioned by the divergent paths of development of sacred and secular culture, as well as by the process of secularization of Russian society, which was naturally reflected in linguistic memory.

In modern linguistic consciousness, the word *love* is primarily correlated with interpersonal attachment, heartfelt inclination, friendly affection, or sensual attraction. In dictionary sources, love is defined as a feeling of deep attachment



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to someone or something, as a feeling of heartfelt inclination toward a person of the opposite sex, and also as an inner aspiration, attraction, or inclination toward a certain object. Thus, the modern understanding of love considerably expands the sphere of usage of this lexeme, including both interpersonal and broader emotional-activity meanings.

Characteristically, in modern Russian the word *love* still retains its connection with ethically positive content. It continues to be associated with ideas of benevolence, inner openness, and goodwill toward another person, which is reflected in such words as *druzhelyubie* (“friendliness”), *lyubeznost’* (“kindness, amiability”), and *lyubeznichat’* (“to behave courteously”). Alongside this, love retains its connection with the notion of good and the positive value of activity, as expressed in the word *trudolyubie* (“diligence”), as well as with the idea of cognitive interest, realized in words such as *knigolyub* (“book lover”) and *lyuboznatel’nyi* (“inquisitive”). Consequently, even under conditions of secularization, love does not completely lose its ethical basis.

At the same time, substantial changes have affected the sphere of understanding love as passion and desire. Unlike the Old Church Slavonic and Old Russian stages, modern Russian no longer preserves a direct link between love for earthly things and ideas of unrighteousness, godlessness, or violation of spiritual law. In other words, the sacred dimension in the understanding of love is considerably weakened. However, this does not mean the complete disappearance of negative semantics. It is still preserved in words such as *vlastolyubivyi* (“power-loving, ambitious”), *korystolyubie* (“self-interestedness”), and *prelyubodeyanie* (“adultery”), where love appears as excessive, distorted, or morally questionable attraction.

A fundamentally important feature of the modern stage is also the processualization of this notion. Love is increasingly understood not as an eternal and ontologically given essence, but as a state connected with inclination, enthusiasm, preference, and desire. Moreover, its semantics extends not only to the world of human relations, but also to the sphere of natural characteristics, which is manifested in words like *svetolyubivyi* (“light-loving”) and *teplyubivyi* (“heat-loving”). This testifies to the further expansion of the

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semantic volume of the word and to its inclusion in a broader circle of features characterizing the relation of a subject or object to an environment favorable to it.

Despite all these changes, one cannot assert that modern Russian has completely lost the spiritual and ethical potential of the notion of love. Although the sacred component has been weakened, the moral basis of this concept is still preserved. This explains why love in the modern linguistic system continues to be understood as a positive value, while its absence receives increasingly clear lexical fixation. If in Old Church Slavonic there is virtually only one word denoting the absence of love – *nelyub'stvo* – then in modern Russian there emerges a whole series of such formations: *nelyubimyi* (“unloved”), *nelyubov'* (“lack of love”), *nelyubeznyi* (“ungracious, unkind”). Such an expansion of the negative field is connected with the fact that love ceases to be understood as an immutable sacred given and begins to be perceived as a more mobile, changeable, and psychologically ambivalent state.

For a more precise understanding of the semantic structure of the word *love* at the modern stage, it is necessary to turn to dictionaries of different types – explanatory, synonymous, encyclopedic, and cultural. Such an approach makes it possible to identify not only the dictionary meanings of this lexeme, but also the broader circle of associative, religious, symbolic, and philosophical components that enter into its modern conceptosphere.

Thus, in D.N. Ushakov's explanatory dictionary, the word *love* is revealed through several principal lexical-semantic variants: as a feeling of attachment based on common interests and ideals; as a feeling arising from sexual attraction; as a designation of the person who evokes this feeling; and as an inclination or attraction toward a certain object, phenomenon, or occupation [1, p. 95]. Consequently, even within a single lexicographic source, love appears as a polysemantic unit uniting interpersonal, emotional, and activity-related forms of the individual's inner orientation.

The data of the dictionary of Russian synonyms substantially broadens this understanding. Love is included there in a wide series of semantically related words: attraction, fascination, attachment, inclination, passion, devotion,

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sympathy, fidelity, benevolence, and others. Such a range shows that the semantic structure of the word *love* in modern Russian is heterogeneous and internally differentiated. It encompasses diverse emotional states – from calm attachment to intense passion, from moral goodwill to strong psychological fascination. Thus, in modern linguistic consciousness love is understood as a complex spectrum of feelings and states rather than as a single and one-dimensional experience.

Particular attention should also be paid to the materials of V.I. Dal’s Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language, where the semantic content of the word *love* is revealed with particular breadth and richness. In Dal’s interpretation, to love means to experience deep attachment, varying from simple inclination to strong passion; to wish good; to give preference to someone or something according to inner attraction, often beyond the limits of strictly rational choice [2, p. 104]. Particularly significant in this interpretation are such semantic components as spontaneity, irrationality, selectivity, and free choice. Love appears here not merely as an emotional bond, but as a form of preference not always susceptible to rational explanation. That is why such subsemantic features as spontaneity, inner freedom, and profound personal directedness become актуализированы in its structure.

Alongside strictly linguistic sources, materials of a religious nature are also important for revealing the content of this notion. In the Biblical Encyclopedia, love is considered in close connection with two principal commandments – love of God and love of one’s neighbor. At the same time, love of self is also recognized as a natural feeling, though subordinated to a higher spiritual order. In this case, the hierarchical structure of love becomes especially clear: the highest form is orientation toward God, whereas love of one’s neighbor and of oneself is understood as derivative in relation to this primary foundation. Consequently, in the structure of this lexeme such components are actualized as a feeling directed toward God, a feeling directed toward another person, and a feeling directed toward oneself, all of them included in a single spiritual vertical. Such an understanding remains significant for the modern cultural context as well, since in the Russian linguistic tradition there persists a stable interest in the

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religious fullness of fundamental spiritual notions such as faith, hope, and love. This means that, despite secularization, the religious and ethical layer of the concept does not disappear completely, but continues to be preserved in collective cultural memory.


Conclusion

Thus, an appeal to historical, lexicographic, encyclopedic, and cultural sources shows that the semantic structure of the word *love* in Russian is marked by multilayeredness and internal complexity. It unites sacred, interpersonal, psychological, moral, religious, symbolic, and philosophical components. Love appears as spiritual aspiration, heartfelt attachment, passion, inclination, preference, mercy, and a universal force of union.

It is precisely this semantic multidimensionality that makes it possible to regard the conceptsphere of the word *love* as an exceptionally broad and productive space, necessary for the further analysis of its artistic realization. Therefore, an appeal to the history of the semantic development of the word *love* and to data from general linguistic, religious, and philosophical sources creates the essential theoretical basis for the subsequent study of the conceptsphere of this lexeme in the poetry of A.A. Akhmatova. Only by taking into account the historical depth, dictionary polysemy, and cultural symbolism of this notion can one fully reveal the specific features of its artistic embodiment in the poet's individual authorial world.

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