Linguocognitive foundations of teaching English negation

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Лингвокогнитивные основы обучения отрицанию в английском языке

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Abstract. Negation is a fundamental category in English that permeates the entire structure of the language. Learning negation is an important aspect of comprehensive language acquisition. We substantiate the possibility of teaching negation on a linguocognitive basis using principles and practices obtained in the framework of cognitive linguistics. Insight into the wide range of language means of expressing negation and its functional characteristics in English are provided. Apart from that, the structure of the semantic category of negation, its prototypical core, and the near and far periphery are described. Each of the functional characteristics of negation – absence, inconsistency, negative assessment, negative communicative reaction – is examined in detail. We provide examples of activities aimed at teaching the aforementioned functions of negation and peculiar properties of such teaching. Apart from that, it analyzes the advantages of the linguocognitive approach to teaching each of the functional characteristics of negation, as well as the cognitive mechanisms underlying them. We consider the possible difficulties of teaching negation and proposes ways to overcome them. It provides evidence for the high integrative and explicative potential of the linguocognitive approach to teaching negation in English which helps to combine the successful principles and methods proposed in both the traditional approach and the communicative language teaching.

Keywords: negation; the category of negation; linguocognitive approach; cognitive linguistics; linguodidactics; communicative language teaching

Аннотация. Отрицание является основополагающей категорией английского языка и пронизывает всю его структуру. Обучение отрицанию является важным аспектом всестороннего освоения языка. Обоснована возможность такого обучения на лингвокогнитивной основе с привлечением принципов и сведений, полученных в рамках когнитивной лингвистики. Продемонстрирован широкий спектр языковых средств выражения отрицания и его функциональных характеристик в английском языке. Описана структура смысловой категории отрицания, ее прототипическое ядро, ближняя и дальняя периферия. Детально рассмотрена каждая из функциональных характеристик отрицания: выражение отсутствия, несоответствия, отрицательной оценки, отрицательной коммуникативной реакции. Приведены примеры заданий на преподавание вышеупомянутых функций отрицания и очерчены особенности такого обучения. Проанализированы достоинства лингвокогнитивного подхода к обучению каждой из функциональных характеристик отрицания, а также когнитивные механизмы,

лежащие в их основе. Продемонстрированы возможные трудности на пути преподавания отрицания и предложены пути их преодоления. Доказан высокий интегративный и экспликативный потенциал лингвокогнитивного подхода к обучению отрицанию в английском языке, способный объединить успешные принципы и методы, предложенные как в рамках традиционного, так и коммуникативно-ориентированного обучения.

Ключевые слова: отрицание; категория отрицания; лингвокогнитивный подход; когнитивная лингвистика; лингводидактика; коммуникативно-ориентированное обучение

Finding ways to optimize communicative language teaching (CLT), namely the teaching of English, is becoming an important task in linguodidactics. One of the promising areas of such optimization, – is the integration of cognitive linguistics (CL) into the structure of English language teaching (ELT) which has proven its effectiveness in practice. Teaching English on a linguocognitive basis (LCB) allows us to solve a number of issues with the framework of the traditional approach to ELT [1–3]. The communicative orientation of modern ELT predetermines the need for a special emphasis on the communicative success of students. This is impossible without due attention to negation, one of the most important and integral elements of communication. In communication, negation expresses various negative communicative reactions such as disagreement, rejection, contestation, correction, prohibition, and others. The expression of these reactions requires special tact and flexibility. This is impossible without the working knowledge of the many ways language expresses negation [4, p. 45-46]. In addition to the aforementioned negative communicative reactions, English negation also expresses other negative meanings, such as absence, discrepancy, and negative evaluation [5, p. 10-11; 6, p. 16]. The adequate use of all these aspects of negation is important in communication and for the professional competence of future philologists, foreign language teachers, and translators.

Speaking about the features of the category of negation in English, we should note its complexity and multidimensionality, emphasized by a number of philosophers [7; 8, p. 103-320] and linguists [9–11] who conducted research in this area. Negation permeates the entire fabric of the language, and along with affirmation, it is a fundamentally important component of any linguistic and even extra-linguistic communication of information. The complexity of negation is reflected in a wide range of the linguistic means of its expression [6, p. 16]. At the language level, negation is not limited to the negative particles *no* and *not*. It possesses many other means of transmitting negative meanings, among which, in addition to the aforementioned particles, it is possible to single out negative affixes (*un-; in-; dis-; mis-; -less*, etc.), negative pronouns (*neither; nobody; nothing; no one*), negative adverbs (*never; nowhere; nonetheless*), and negative conjunctions (*neither ... nor; not as ... as; no sooner ... than; unless*). Apart from that, negation is expressed through phraseological and idiomatic means, often expressing negative meanings implicitly and requiring a definitional analysis (for example, *hold one's hands – to do nothing; a gone case – something hopeless; Hobson's choice – no choice at all; castles in Spain – possessions that have no real existence*)[1]. The implicit expression of negation is not limited to phraseological and idiomatic expressions, also including lexical means, primarily having to do with negative evaluations (*bad – not good; ugly – not favored visually*), as well as prepositions of negative semantics (*without; out of; off*) and a number of other linguistic and extralinguistic means [4, p. 46-47].

The aforementioned combination of linguistic means of expressing negation is crucial for mastering English. Although at lower levels of language proficiency such a mastery may be limited to the passive use of the broad spectrum of linguistic means bearing negative meanings, – that is, only focusing on adequate perception and understanding, at higher levels of competence, the active use of various language means related to negation is a must. This is required for maintaining flexibility, adapting to the interlocutor, and using of various communication strate-

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[1] Dictionary of Phrase and Fable. Brockhampton Reference Series. L.: Caxton Publishing, 1995.

gies to achieve communicative success. On the contrary, communicative failures my occur as a result of insufficient flexibility due to the students' lack of awareness of the wide range of language means which convey negative meanings, misconception of the communicative situation, and inadequate choice of language means of expressing negation. For example, the negative communicative reaction of refusal, expressed by the negative particle *no* in a speech act like "*Do you want this burger? – No.*" often turns out to be too direct, – it can offend the interlocutor, and, as a result, it may lead to a communicative failure. On the contrary, the use of a more indirect and ambiguous wording of negative semantics such as "*Maybe later*" to express refusal softens the categoricalness of the remarks and helps maintain the dialogue. Thus, it seems that the comprehensive teaching of negation both in terms of its different functional characteristics (expression of absence, discrepancy, negative evaluation, and negative communicative reactions) and various language means of its expression becomes an important aspect of an all-sided and balanced ELT.

Considering the features of teaching negation on a LCB, we should dwell in more detail on the structure of the semantic category of negation and its cognitive representation. From the standpoint of CL, the mere presence of a wide range of heterogeneous means of expressing negation is not yet sufficient to form the corresponding category. Such a category implies the existence of a conceptual basis, which, in the case of the category of negation, is the concept of negation [6, p. 15]. According to a number of studies in CL devoted to this issue [5; 6; 12–14], negation, in full concordance with the principle of categorical organization, proposed by E. Rosch [15, p. 194-197], is a complex category organized in accordance with the prototypical principle, and has the corresponding concept at its basis. Depending on the number of prototypical features it possesses, an element of the category of negation gravitates either to the central position in its structure (if there is the maximum set of such features), or to the periphery if there is only one prototypical feature. In addition to primariness of expression of negative meanings, dependent character, and stylistic unlimitedness, such prototypical features include expressing various functions of negation: absence, discre-

pancy, negative communicative reaction, and negative evaluation.

Studies of the category of negation and the features of how language expresses negative meanings, carried out in the framework of CL [5; 6, p. 13-14], reveal the prototypical character of the negative particles *no* and *not* as a means of expressing negation. Negative affixes (*un-; in-; dis-; mis-; -less;* etc.), pronouns (*nobody; nothing; no one; neither* etc.), and adverbs (*never; nowhere; nonetheless* etc.), despite certain restrictions, have sufficient ability to express a wide range of negative functions, thus forming the core of the category of negation. Thereafter, the near periphery of this category includes prepositions and postpositions with negative semantics (*beyond; without; above; out* etc.), syntactic (*neither ... nor; no sooner ... than; not as ... as; less ... as* etc.), lexical (*phantom; fake; deter* etc.), phraseological and idiomatic (*a gone case; to knock off; to hold one's hands; castles in Spain* etc.) means of expressing negative meanings. Non-essential linguistic units for expressing negation form the far periphery of the category of negation by creating transition zones with the categories of approximation (*nearly; hardly; scarcely; seldom,* etc.), quantitiveness (*deficiency; little; few; short; low* etc.), and modality (*crazy; absurd; crackpot; hyena* etc.).

The aforesaid confirms the complex phenomenon of negation in English, which, thus, implies the need to train students to use various language means of expressing negation at different stages of English language acquisition (ELA). For example, K.H. Folse rightly notes that for the students who are still at the early stages of ELA it seems pedagogically expedient to focus mostly on teaching them how to use negative particles *no* and *not*, including opposing negative sentences with affirmative ones [16, p. 322]. As these basic linguistic means of expressing negative meanings are mastered, and as students' linguistic competence grows, it becomes possible to move to teaching other, less universal means of conveying negative meanings. Ultimately, students should master the entire range of linguistic means of expressing negation. One of the possible approaches to teaching negation includes a step-by-step method: as the most universal means of expressing negation are mastered at the active level (active use), students simultaneously are exposed to the next, more complex and less universal group of means

at the passive level (adequate perception and understanding). When students reach the necessary level of proficiency, they transition to the active development of the means that had been taught at the passive level in the previous stage, and the students are exposed to the next group of language means at the passive level. Thus, on the one hand, such training fully complies with the "from simple to complex" and "from maximum efficiency to maximum flexibility" principles and on the other hand, the entire totality of language's means of expressing negative meanings is covered. It seems that such a scheme of teaching negation can be most effective within the framework of an intensive course dedicated to teaching negation; however, if appropriately adjusted, this approach is also applicable in standard ELT curriculum.

It is worth noting that the above-mentioned scheme is closely related to the principle of prototypical organization of linguistic means of expressing negation described above within the framework of the corresponding category, proposed by CL. Indeed, such a teaching of negation goes from the most universal means, having the greatest number of prototypical characteristics, to the linguistic means having the least amount of universality and prototypicality. Despite the fact that the teaching according to this principle was initially offered within the framework of the traditional approach, the explanation of this principle was given by CL on account of the description of the entire complex structure of the category of negation, which reveals the actual explicative potential of the linguistic-cognitive approach to ELT. However, familiarizing students with all its functional characteristics and the features of their implementation in the language is an equally important aspect of teaching negation. As noted above, thanks to studies conducted from a linguistic-cognitive standpoint [5; 6, p. 13], it is now possible to identify such functions of negation as the expression of absence, discrepancy, negative communicative reaction and negative evaluation. Let us dwell on each of these functions and the features of teaching them in more detail.

Considering such a function of negation as an expression of absence, it is worth noting that on the one hand it may seem difficult to consider that what is "not even there". At the same time, both negation as a whole and the possibility of its expression in one way or another are present in every major language, and the dependent nature along with the contextual conditionality of negation [6, p. 14] allow us to associate it with the corresponding context. Indeed, for students who start learning a foreign language the very possibility of using negation is not especially difficult, because negation as such is inherent to human thinking and all major languages. What is difficult here, rather, is the attempt to transfer the logic of the native language into the language studied, in our case, English. Folse lists a wide range of typical errors occurring in native speakers of various languages who are just beginning to master negation [16, p. 324-325], and most of their mistakes are caused by interference of their native language.

Returning to the cognitive features of the forming and conveying the meaning of absence, it should be noted that these features are closely related to the cognitive mechanism of profiling, which foregrounds the missing element against the background of the corresponding stereotypical knowledge [17, pp. 439-442]. For greater clarity, let us consider the following examples:

1) There are **no** books on the table.

2) The books are **not** on the table.

The first example implies expression of absence, which, however, relies on the speaker's stereotyped knowledge that books should have been there at all. Indeed, comparing the first example with the second, we can see how priority and emphasis shifts from the expression of absence (*there are no books*) to conveying the meaning of discrepancy to the expected (*the books are not on the table*). The complex and multidimensional nature of negation, evident from the examples, is due to its relativity and dependence on positive knowledge. This happens when on the one hand the absence of an object is profiled, and on the other, – the discrepancy of the described state of things to the stereotyped knowledge. Thus, the analysis of the features of linguistic negation and related cognitive mechanisms helps students fully understand the material under discussion. This demonstrates the explicative nature of teaching negation on a LCB. Through understanding the very essence of the phenomenon of negation and the peculiarities of the formation of negative meaning at the mental, semantic, and linguistic levels, students will be better able to learn the material. Apart from that, it helps them form the basic skills of scientific analysis and independent work, which

are impossible without a comprehensive logical understanding of the studied phenomena.

Speaking about the linguodidactic aspect of the negative meanings of absence and discrepancy, it is important to note that teaching them should be organically woven into the structure of communicative language learning (CLL). It may well be combined with introducing students to other language phenomena or with activating the material they have already learned. For example, as E.P. Kofman astutely observed, in some cases, negation is closely related to such an important aspect of the English as intonation [13, p. 48]. Indeed, teaching negation combined with a focus on intonation may open new prospects in both students' rational understanding of the cognitive mechanisms underlying the formation of negative meanings and in understanding the importance of emphasis within sentence structure. For example, let us consider the following statement:

I didn't mean you should eat that apple.

Depending on the emphasis, the meaning of the sentence and the associated negative meaning can significantly change, which, in turn, implies many variations for interpreting the statement depending on the intonation:

1) ***I*** *didn't mean you should eat that apple (Someone else said that, not me);*

2) *I **didn't** mean you should eat that apple (Emphasis on denial saying that);*

3) *I didn't **mean** you should eat that apple (I might have said that, but I did not actually mean it);*

4) *I didn't mean **you** should eat that apple (Someone else was supposed to eat it);*

5) *I didn't mean you **should** eat that apple (There are no options, you must eat it; or, on the contrary, you should not eat it);*

6) *I didn't mean you should **eat** that apple (You should throw it away);*

7) *I didn't mean you should eat **that** apple (You should eat another apple);*

8) *I didn't mean you should eat that **apple** (You should eat another food item out there).*

The various readings of the same sentence and its analysis performed by students may be a promising version of an activity aimed at teaching both negation and intonation. Apart from focus on negation and intonation proper, this activity also demonstrates how negation is context-dependent. It is worth noting the high explicative value of the given example in terms of

its connection to the cognitive mechanism of profiling. By shifting the emphasis from one part of the sentence to another, we model the way profiling highlights one aspect or another of the corresponding frame on the conceptual level. In the aforementioned example, the frame corresponds to the sentence and, to a certain extent, the context, whereas the profiled element corresponds to the part of the sentence highlighted intonationally. Thus, using this analogy, it is possible to teach negation and intonation, and incorporate the cognitive foundations of these phenomena. This will help students better understand the very essence of the formation of negative meanings and the mental processes that determine them.

Speaking about teaching English to university students, it is worth noting the importance of shifting the emphasis from memorizing and repeating material to its rational understanding. Repetition and drills are effective in teaching elementary and middle school students, whereas for university-level students it is important to raise their rational awareness of language phenomena, the peculiarities of their usage, and the reasons that cause them. It is also important to expose students to the cognitive mechanisms underlying the formation of meanings. The awareness of these mechanisms can explain a wide range of phenomena, the irregularities of that cannot be elucidated logically in the framework of the traditional approach to ELT, but can be explained using the results of research in CL. Certain successful examples using cognitive linguistics for teaching English prepositions and modal verbs were provided by experimental studies carried out by M.J. Falck [2] and A. Tyler [3]. These experiments proved the high explicative potential of CL in the cases where the traditional approach to teaching could not offer a satisfactory rational explanation of the above-mentioned language phenomena.

It should be noted that in addition to the aforementioned functional characteristics such as the expression of absence and discrepancy, the expression of a negative communicative reaction becomes another significant function of negation. Its importance is explained by its focus on communication, which is the basis of CLT. M. Giovanelli suggests a promising methodology for teaching negative communicative reactions on a LCB using the example of the communicative reaction of prohibition. In his

monograph, he proposes teaching this communicative reaction by visualizing its meaning and the cognitive mechanisms underlying it with body language, facial expressions, and student movements in the classroom [18, p. 56]. Giovanelli aims at incorporating the principles and methods of cognitive science into ELT and relies on the method of kinegrams, introduced by J.-R. Lapaire [19]. Here are some examples of such a visualization of the negative communicative reaction of prohibition, proposed by Giovanelli:

– *You can't go there*: one student is trying to move forward, while the other holds their hand, thus prohibiting action;

– *I'm not sure you can go there*: while one student is moving forward, the other throws up their hands, thereby expressing doubt about the correctness of the decision of the first student;

– *You are not allowed here*: one student is trying to enter the door, while the other is blocking it, thus preventing the first student from entering;

– *You can't sit down here*: one student is trying to sit at the table, while another, already sitting there puts their hand forward in a prohibitive gesture [18, p. 56-59].

The given examples clearly demonstrate the promising technique of teaching negative communicative reactions proposed by M. Giovanelli. This approach avoids instruction in the students' native language in full accordance with the principles of CLT. Apart from that, it helps students consciously perceive the material under discussion thus making connections between the thought process and motor activity that helps them to better memorize the material [20]. In addition, this approach has considerable flexibility and modifiability, which also helps to increase the interactivity of the lesson and students' motivation. This is in perfect accord with the student-centrism, postulated by CLT. The use of body language allows students to model the meaning of language expressions and visualize the cognitive mechanisms that underlie them. Among other things, using authentic gestures as a learning methodology allows students to organically learn non-verbal communication typical of the English-speaking world. This example supports the idea that the comprehensive nature of teaching English on a LCB basis improves many important aspects of ELT.

Continuing with the last of the aforementioned functional characteristics, negative assessment, it is important to emphasize its connection to euphemization. Indeed, negation is often used to transform lexical units or expressions bearing a negative connotation into more neutral ones [21, p. 127-128; 22, p. 26-28; 23, p. 121]. This is done by transforming the implicit negative component of meaning into an explicit one and is often to be found in politically correct language, especially in such aspects as the nomination of:

– physical and mental deficiencies (*learning **dis**abled – retarded; **not** favorable visually – ugly; motivationally **dis**advantaged – lazy; **un**schooled – stupid*);

– medical conditions (***im**mobilized patients – paralyzed patients; **un**responsive patients – patients in coma; **de**vocalization – vocal cords excising; chemically **in**convenienced – drunk; **dis**order – illness*);

– economic and social status (*economically **dis**advantaged, economically **un**privileged – poor; home**less** person – tramp*);

– military-related topics (***non**-national-security-related spending – war spending; **mi**suse of artillery – bombardment; **in**operative combat personnel – body count*) [22; 24; 25].

As we can see from these examples, negation plays an important role in politically correct language. The explicit negative meaning in these examples is mostly conveyed through negative affixes and particles. Moreover, CL provides necessary tools for analyzing the conceptual mechanisms, underlying such euphemization. Those mechanisms include generalization of conceptual content and deprofiling, but are not limited to them [21, p. 128]. Exposing students of philology and linguistics to those conceptual foundations of euphemization and negation is an important aspect of their comprehensive training. Apart from that, this aspect of negation is especially important for international students when they prepare to continue their education abroad, attend a summer school, apply for an exchange program or work in English-speaking countries of the inner circle[2] [26]. Exposure to

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[2] According to the Three-Circle model of world Englishes, the countries of the Inner Circle are norm-providing and include UK, USA, Australia, etc. The Outer Circle countries, including India, Singapore, the Phillipines, etc. are norm-developing, whereas the countries belonging to the Expanding Circle are norm-dependent. They include countries like China, Russia, Brazil etc. In the

euphemisms and a politically correct language is important since those phenomena have become an integral part of the discourse in the aforementioned countries. Indeed, such euphemization makes it possible to smooth out unpleasant and even insulting expressions, emphasize the dignity of other individuals, and facilitate reference to a person belonging to another ethnic, social, or age group. By helping avoid undesirable implications and discriminatory contexts, it facilitates communication and reduces the risk of communicative failure. Native speakers of English are accustomed to using politically correct language and expect international students to use tactful formulae and expressions. At the same time, insufficient exposure of students to this important aspect of English can adversely affect the productivity and success of interaction with native English speakers. Students, not having sufficient training and experience in using a politically correct language, may find themselves in a difficult communicative situation. Moreover, realizing that they cannot adequately use politically correct language, students may become discouraged from "unnecessary" communication to avoid communicative failure. To prevent that, students should be taught how to use euphemisms and negation as their crucial component.

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countries of the Inner Circle English is the native language, in the Outer Circle it is an important second language, whereas in the Expanding Circle it is taught as a foreign language.

In summary, it should be noted that the heterogeneity of negation in English determines the differences in teaching its different functions. For example, teaching ways of expressing absence and discrepancy was successfully carried out within pre-CLT approaches. However, such aspects of negation as negative evaluation, connected to the euphemistic function of negation and to negative communicative reactions, are primarily focused on communication and benefit from CLT. The productive combination of the principles and methods of pre-CLT and CLT approaches to teaching negation is possible with the help of CL, which describes in detail the features of the semantic category of negation and the cognitive basis for its formation. This category is organized according to the prototypical principle, introduced in cognitive psychology. The category of negation is based on the concept of negation, and the transmission of negative meanings is due to cognitive mechanisms of profiling, negative comparison, and a number of others [6, p. 15-16]. Thus, teaching negation on a LCB basis becomes a factor in linking the successful methods of teaching negation proposed in pre-CLT and CLT. Such a unifying function of CL is based on its description of the functional characteristics of negation and the justification for combining linguistic means expressing negative meanings into a single category. This illustrates the high explicative and integrative potential of CL in teaching English.

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