

The Cognitive and Structural Aspects of the Language and Discourse

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The concept and the language conscience: the structure of the concept BEAUTY (красота) manifested in the modern English language and discourse*

The language conscience (LC) of a person is the most important but at the same time – the most abstract component of the language personality, which contains, besides the LC:

1) the *language capacity* understood as a natural ability to learn to engage in conversation;

2) the *communication need*, i.e. the necessity to interact with speech partners;

3) the *communicative competence* as a well-shaped skill to carry out communication of various kinds and in various spheres in order to achieve the communicative goal in an optimum way;

4) the *speech behavior* as a both conscious and subconscious set of actions showing the person's character and mode of life in the process of that person's communicative activity [4: 9].

The LC represents the dynamically functioning mental space of an individual and conditions the peculiarities of his or her speech behavior. The mental content of a native-speaker's language conscience does not remain unchanged because the language conscience itself, being in the state of reactive and proactive development, permanently changes, and this fact is represented in the discourse [1].

The mental space of a language personality is essentially a set of *concepts* and similar knowledge structures (frames, cognitive categories, etc.), bound by the associative mechanisms of a personal and universal character. In terms of the linguistic and cognitive approach, the concept is considered as *the mental percept representation of the real and / or imaginary world* [1:176].

According to V.I. Karasik, one of the key components of the concept is its *value content*, which determines the magnitude and the general importance of a given concept both for the collective and the individual mentality [5: 77]. In other words, the important, infelt, false or true information which a certain individual has about a certain object or fragment of the world is contained in the concept. However, besides the meaning content, the concept as a complex mental structure includes other components, among which we can ascertain:

- *the national / cultural element* – determined by the person's life in a certain cultural environment;
- *the social element* – conditioned by the social status of the language personality;
- *the intimately personal element* – formed under the influence of the individual peculiarities of the person [6: 42].

In this article we intend to argue that any adequate

description of a concept cannot be given without considering each of the above components, including the account of the communicant's gender. This factor lies at the crossroads of the personal and social characteristics of the language personality's LC. In S.G. Vorkachev's opinion, the gender variation of language concepts "reflects the cultural and world-view compartmentalization of society" and presents "a linguaculturally significant fact" [2: 107].

So the objects and fragments of the surrounding world determined by us are fixed in our conscience in the form of certain elements of the mental system – concepts, which in their turn are coded by linguistic signs in the discourse activity. It can be concluded from what has been said so far that concepts are ideal signs of material objects, while linguistic units are the signs of concepts, i.e. the signs of signs [8]. Therefore, concepts mediate the link between objects of reality and linguistic signs.

However, there are no strict correspondences between the elements of the three sets (the set of objects, the set of concepts and the set of linguistic signs). There can be several "angles" at which this or that object can be viewed, and consequently various concepts of the same object can be developed from those angles. On the other hand, several objects (or their certain parts) can at once be the source for the formation of one concept. The necessary requirement in this connection will be the isomorphism of certain characteristics of these objects. Furthermore, one and the same concept can be verbalized by different linguistic means and, vice versa, one linguistic sign can code (from the speaker's view-point) and activate (from the standpoint of the listener) in the conscience of a language personality more than one concept, which once more emphasizes the systemic character of human mentality [1].

Thus, it does not seem practical to suggest the relation "*one object – one concept – one linguistic sign*", their one-to-one dependence.

It is noteworthy that the mental space of a language personality is a structured sphere. This is determined by the fact that the mental representations of the outside world, the mental models comprised in the LC of an individual are discrete and ordered due to the existence of ties and relations of interdependence and inter-activation between them [1]. Thus seems quite reasonable to model the mental space of a language personality in the form of a structure.

Structurally, the concept consists of separate, but at the same time "soldered together sections, or fields"

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[1: 214]. This allows to conclude that the concept is not a monolithic, static formation. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari are right in characterizing concepts as “the fragmented but at the same time integral entities”, marking their dialectic nature – a unity of fields, with each field standing out as a significant component [3]. Thanks to the presence of associative links between concepts and their fields, as well as between the fields of one concept, the activation one of them could set other fields (or concepts) in an active state, along the conceptual entity that was directly represented by a linguistic sign [1: 217]. Thus, the fields of a concept are not equivalent in salience. At every concrete moment of time they are characterized by a fluctuating rate of activation.

From what was said above it is clear that the conceptual sphere of a person is characterized by a dynamic structure and diffusion of its components. The relations between concepts and their fields differ in character. Separate concepts may cross, overlap in certain fields, in the latter case specifying, or even reiterating the content of each other. Besides, the fields of different concepts may contradict one another, i.e. be mutually exclusive, one field may generate other conceptual fields, which puts them on different hierarchical levels [1: 216-217].

The integrity of a concept in terms of trigger-activation of its fields can be explained by the presence of associative links between concepts and concept fields. Since these elements can be singled out and activated in a chain-like step-by-step sequence we would argue that the basis of an *integrated* understanding of concepts should be the notion of the “*intentionality focus*” of a language personality [1: 220]. The mobile point of intentionality focus determines, firstly, at what angle we perceive this or that object or fragment of the outside world, secondly, with which linguistic sign we correlate the relevant concept (or its field) and, finally, which fragment(s) of the listener’s concept sphere is activated as a result of the interpretation of the speaker’s message communicated to him. Accordingly, it seems quite reasonable to hypothesize the existence of *three* different intentionality focuses, the focus of the formation, verbal representation and interpretation of the concept [1: 226]. It is

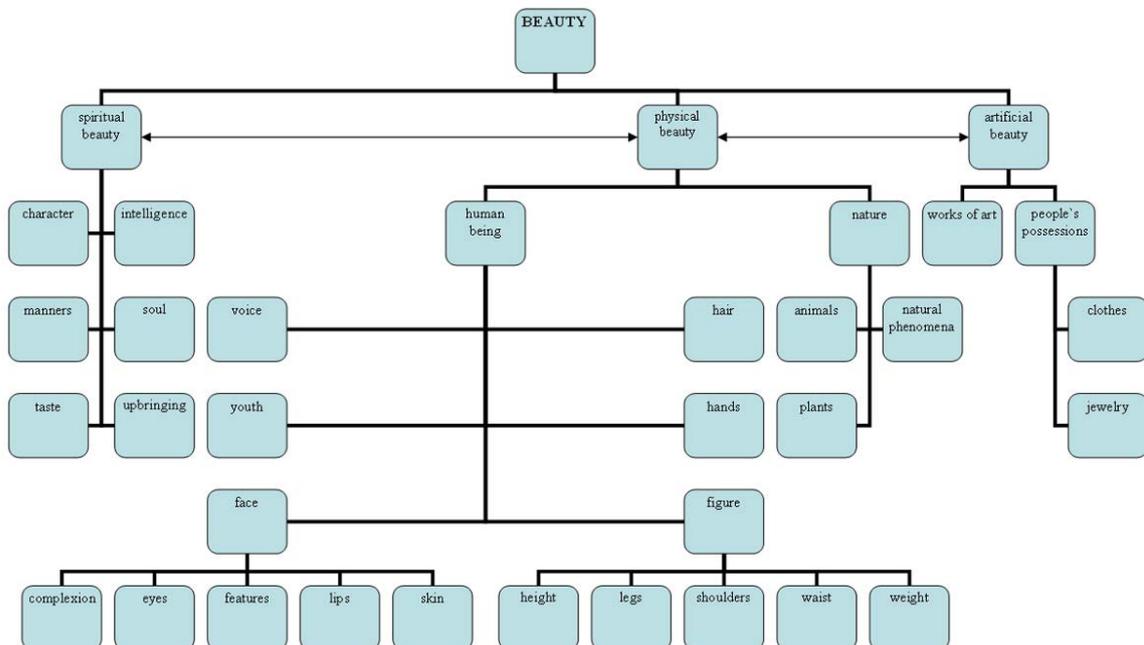
evident that the first two focuses characterize the personality of the speaker, whereas the third one describes the language personality of the listener. The use of the notion of intentionality focus in conceptual analysis clearly accentuates the role of a language personality in the process of the formation, verbalization and interpretation of concepts, once more putting the personalities of the speaker and the listener in the center of discourse activity.

Such an approach to a language personality’s concept sphere dynamics allows to point out and research the influence of the personal and socially determined characteristics of communicants on how the discourse activity progresses. More precisely, the varying features of a language personality are directly reflected in the structure and the patterns of the linguistic representation of one or another fragment of the concept sphere.

It is no surprise, therefore, that gender as an integral characteristic of any person performing a certain discourse activity is reflected in the processes of concept formation, verbalization and interpretation. According to S.G. Vorkachev, “the cognitive structures underlying various linguistic units are gender-marked and not identical to each other in male and female conscience” [2: 106]. It’s obvious that the gender specifics of the language representation of a concept can be the object of a full-scale research.

The concept BEAUTY is manifested in discourse with the help of a limited number of means of verbalization – words and word combinations serving to express an aesthetic evaluation, the speaker’s appreciation of beauty. Accordingly, we base our approach to the study of the language representation of the concept BEAUTY on the assumption that the peculiarities of the representation of this mental unit are reflected in the so called “evaluative communication”, the analysis of which allows us to determine the structural elements of the concept under consideration. Studies of evaluative communication demonstrate that belles-lettres texts are the primary sphere where our concept receives its lexical representation [see, for instance, 7: 122].

Our analysis of discourse contexts allows to model and present the structure of the concept BEAUTY in the form of the following schematic model.



Let us consider the above scheme in some detail. Structuring the concept under discussion, we single out its three interconnected macro-fields: *physical beauty*, *spiritual beauty*, *artificial beauty*. Each of these macro-fields is characterized by a set of sub-structural mental elements, containing stochastic information about the qualities (things, parts, etc.) that most often become the object of positive assessment. This information about every object of assessment presents a separate conceptual micro-field, which is integrated into the general structure as a compound of the concept BEAUTY.

Our reference to the notion “*physical beauty*” is not accidental because the adjective *physical* is supposed to have a two fold interpretation: 1. *body not mind – related to someone’s body rather than their mind or soul*; 2. *natural – related to or following natural laws* [18]. Thus the notion “*physical beauty*” in its first meaning correlates with the notion “*spiritual beauty*”, because people’s outside appearance, as well as their moral qualities can be positively estimated. The second meaning accentuates the opposition *natural – artificial* so it seems reasonable to introduce a third component into the concept structure which we have termed *artificial beauty*. This division reflects the fact that not only natural phenomena, such as animals and plants, but also the so-called artifacts – objects which are the results of human creative activity (welfare items, clothes, decorations, works of art, etc.) – can be the object of appreciation. Below we suggest some examples of the verbalization of the concept BEAUTY, in which the above-mentioned macro-fields are activated:

Physical beauty

(1) The view was framed by *two tall black cypresses*, and all round us on the terrace *the orange trees in full flower* exhaled their heady perfume... «*How beautiful nature is*, my God, the scenery one has to play in!» [11: 109].

The given fragment demonstrates a typically woman-like emotive positive speech reaction to a definite situation taking place in the surrounding world. The exclamatory sentence beginning with the words “*How beautiful nature is!*” intensified by the exclamation “*My God!*” is a typical marker of emotionality in this case. The noun “*nature*”, due to its relatively broad and – to a certain point – abstract semantics, is the central “limitative” verbalizer restricting a definite sphere of the concept BEAUTY entitled to language representation in this particular case. The concept is activated by the adjective “*beautiful*”, only in the form of the field “*natural beauty*”.

(2) There was *the magnificent cedar* in the garden, and its dark branches were silhouetted against the starry sky. *The sea*, almost at our feet, *was marvelously still* [11: 114].

In (2) the evaluative component of the semantics of the utterance is expressed lexically, by the adjective *magnificent* and the adverb *marvelously*.

Artificial beauty

Within this field of the concept under discussion, the object of estimation often is:

- *clothes*:

(3) Our suits are an easy product to sell, Mr. Darling, we have *a handsome, custom-made garment* [15: 125].

(4) My child! *The hat is yours. It’s made for you*... I have never seen you *look such a picture* (Mansfield, 42).

(5) She was taken with his... *well-cut clothes* [11: 54].

(6) She was *the most beautiful thing* he had ever seen. He remembered *the dress* she wore; it was her wedding dress, and he said *she looked like a lily of the valley* [11: 123].

- *decorations*:

(7) She wore *a string of huge pearls*, a number of *expensive-looking rings*, and on her left arm *diamond and emerald bracelets* from the wrist to the elbow... On her raven-black hair was a *thin circlet of diamonds*. *She could not have looked more splendid* if she had been going to a ball at Stafford House in the old days [11: 105].

(8) He’d given her *a very handsome string of pearls* [11: 118].

- *works of art, literature*:

(9) It’s *the most beautifully written book* he’s ever read [11: 96].

(10) La Falterona’s *voice* ... was *exquisite* in its quality, mellow and crystalline; and she sang with wonderful emotion, so tenderly, with such tragic, *beautiful anguish* that my heart melted within me [11: 121].

Our analysis shows that from the standpoint of the gender aspect in the representation of the concept BEAUTY, the most interesting aspect of its structure is the opposition *physical beauty – spiritual beauty* directly activating those fields of our concept which are correlated with the individual as a representative of a certain gender.

It is common knowledge that the looks of a person are more often estimated from the view-point of the canons of beauty. In the English-speaking mentality there appears to be a distinct opposition of the beauty of women and men. However, the examples we have analyzed show that there are some universal components of beauty in the concept sphere of this linguistic community. For example, the outside beauty of men and women alike presupposes youth:

(11) He was *quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable* and to crown the whole, he meant to be at the next assembly with a large party [14: 8].

(12) She was *young and beautiful*. She could never have been pretty with anything but the *prettiness of youth* [12: 10].

It is quite obvious that if the dependence “BEAUTY [+] ← youth [+]” is not observed and this intra-concept link is broken. The concept BEAUTY can still be activated but this time in terms of a denial statement. The fact that the loss of youth supposes the fading of beauty is emphasized by the use of perfect verb-forms in (13) and (16) and the implicit (14) and explicit (15) negations of beauty characteristics:

(13) My dear, you flatter me. I certainly *have had my share of beauty*, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has grown-up daughters, she ought to give up thinking her own beauty. *In such cases a woman has not often much beauty to think of* [14: 13].

(14) Oh, my dear, I am *a middle-aged gentleman*. In another two or three years I shall just be *a fat old party* [11: 45].

(15) She reminded her that *she would not be any longer so pretty in a year or two* and that young girls were coming just all the time [12:22].

(16) *She had long lost the blue-eyed, flower-like charm*... she was still at forty-three a comely and faithful companion... [9: 56].

As our sampling also shows, certain parts of the body often become the object of appreciation. Let us consider the following examples:

1. *Face (eyes, lips, features, complexion, skin)*:

(17) Arshust smiled and when he smiled *his face was rather beautiful* [9: 43].

(18) Arshurst... did not listen, thinking of the *girl’s*

face. It had been exactly like looking at a flower or some other *pretty sight in Nature* [9: 65].

(18) is especially demonstrative from the standpoint of the gender aspect of evaluative communication. We have found that a figurative comparison in which, as a rule, the object of positive estimation is compared with flowers, stars, animals, or divine beings, is very often used as a stylistic means by men in evaluative communication:

(19) She was *like a wild flower. A creature it did you good to look at!* [9: 66].

(20) Darling, *you're wonderful and you're as beautiful as a Greek god!* [12: 58].

a) Very often *eyes* attract the attention both of men and women:

(21) Among such was a fellow with a short beard coming from Morocco. This person was lean and brown, *his eyes were extremely clear*, he held himself very straight and looked fit to jump over the moon [9: 43].

(22) He looked at her *shining eyes* [13: 65].

(23) And the two men stared at her, thinking perhaps, that with *her cornflower-blue eyes*...she looked unsuited to the matter in hand [9: 12].

(24) His eyes were almost black...; they were curious but not very pleasant eyes. [12: 27].

(25) Ashurst...with *large remote grey eyes* which sometimes filled with meaning and *became almost beautiful* [9: 59].

(26) Her *fine black eyes* were never still and this was the most noticeable thing about her [9:59].

(27) She flashed a look of her *magnificent black eyes* at Peter [10: 43].

(28) Her *grey eyes were the wonder-dewy as if opened for the first time that day* [9: 64].

The latter example is especially interesting because, in spite of the fact that in the semantics of the adjectives "grey" and "wonder-dewy" the same «attractive» is not explicit, the reader is still able to catch the positive aesthetic estimation expressed by the speaker. This effect is achieved with the help of the explicit comparison *as if opened for the first time*. Any neutral or positive event taking place for the first time, has a special value and attractiveness (the first swallow, the first spring flower, first love, etc).

b) To estimate the beauty of *lips* is common to men:

(29) Her *lips were full and marvelously soft* [10: 34].

(30) Her *lips were vividly scarlet* [11: 106].

(31) All praise her gray eyes, and *the soft, round under lip which promises gayety* [10: 49].

(31) She gave a *brilliant smile* of hers [11: 118].

On the other hand, women more often describe *the smile, teeth, or the shape of the mouth*:

(32) He gave her *faint fascinating smile* [10: 71].

(33) It was with a *pleasant, courteous smile* that he shook hands with them (the guests) [11: 34].

(34) It gave her a queer sensation to see him open his red mouth and bare his *white teeth* as he ate [11: 28].

(35) With his straight, delicate nose, his fine brow and *well-shaped mouth* he ought to have been good-looking. But surprisingly enough he was not [12: 27].

(36) On the stage she was a beautiful woman and even in privet life, notwithstanding her big nose, *large mouth* and fleshy face, a good-looking one [13: 9].

The two examples (35) and (36) clearly demonstrate the fact that general positive evaluation of the outer appearance is structured not only with the account of the attractive-

ness of its separate components, that is, the whole in this case is not equal to the sum of its constituents. It is obvious that the subjective factor, such as a personal attitude to the object of evaluation, his or her moral qualities, plays a fairly decisive role in describing the outward appearance of a well-known person. This once again proves the fact that the conceptual macro-spheres «*physical beauty*» and «*spiritual beauty*» are in the state of constant interaction and interdependence.

c) *Facial features*:

(37) She was pretty, in a quiet way, with *delicate features* [11: 18].

(38) He was dark and clean-shaven, with very *regular, clear-cut features ...* [12: 27].

(39) Why, there isn't one woman in ten thousand with *features as regular as hers* [15: 18].

Our analysis testifies to the fact that the features of a woman's face in the English discourse are most often characterized with the help of such lexemes as: *regular, delicate, exquisite, fine*; when it comes to a man's features – *regular, clear-cut, large*.

The use of the hyperbolized expression "there isn't one woman in ten thousand" in the latter example sustains the pattern we have pointed out: *the monosemy of evaluative utterances, along with the strictly determined measure of the intensity in the imputable positive feature is peculiar to the discourse of men*. The gender-specific analysis of the modern English discourse shows that the usage of the superlative degree of adjectives is an extremely popular BEAUTY verbalization device for men:

(40) She was *the most beautiful thing* he had ever seen [11: 41].

(41) She's *the best wife a man ever had* [11: 243].

Women, on the contrary, prefer to implement a fuzzy feature gradation scale, where the boundaries between the different degrees of the same feature or the border-line between different features seems to be unclear: "his face was *rather beautiful*", "grey eyes became *almost beautiful*".

Therefore we would argue that the process of attributing a certain feature to the object differs with men and women in the aspect of the exact (absolute) or relative intensity degree of the predicated feature.

2. *Hair is traditionally considered to be an attribute of a woman's beauty*:

(42) *Her dark hair was glossy* [15: 295].

(43) Mary had never seen her when her hair was not immaculate. She had *magnificent blond hair*, in profusion [15:45].

(44) Louise had looked wonderful. She'd washed her hair in the afternoon and it had been very *soft and light*...[15: 123].

(45) He saw her, how pretty she was, the *rough blonde hair*, the large, inquiring eyes and the bright mouth [15: 109].

However, our material demonstrates that hair can be the object of appreciation in men too. In this case a clean and tidy hair style is especially stressed:

(46) His hair now was always *sleek* [15: 67].

(47) He had *shining black hair* [11: 100].

3. *Figure (height, weight, legs, waist, etc)*:

According to the results of Yu.V. Mescherekova's experimental analysis, a beautiful woman in the English language conscience possesses the following characteristics: 1) slim, good figure, skinny (not too thin); 2) tall, medium-tall, not too tall; 3) nice legs; 4) wide hips;

5) round and firm breasts [7: 113]. It is confirmed by the examples of our discourse corpus:

(48) You've got *exquisite legs*, so long and shape-ly and I never ceased to be surprised at them [10: 54].

(49) The girls have most *excellent legs* [11: 32].

(50) And the two men stared at her thinking that with her... *slenderness*... she looked unsuited to the matter I had [11: 35].

(51) She was a *tallish woman*, taller than Kitty [12: 23].

The image of a handsome young man implies such characteristics as: 1) strength; 2) a tall figure, more than 180 cm height; 3) an athletic, well-built, muscular body, not too muscular and massive, with broad shoulders and chest [7: 114];

(52) We all like to look at *hot builders*, don't we? [17: 25].

(53) He was so *muscular*, he seemed so intend on what he was doing, so intensely himself [11: 28].

4. *Voice can also be the object of positive estimation*, and, consequently, this micro-field can quite rightfully be singled out in the structure of the concept under consideration:

(54) Of course no one could deny that Dorothy Townsend had *a pleasant voice* [12: 11].

(55) She was taken with *his good looks, his voice* ... [11: 78].

(56) *Her voice was still lovely* [10: 70].

Of course, examples can be given where the outward appearance is described as a complex:

(57) She was a tallish woman, taller than Kitty, neither stout nor thin, with a good deal of pale brown hair... her features were good enough without being remarkable and her blue eyes were cold. She had a skin that you would never look twice and no color in her cheeks [12: 10].

Let us now take a closer look at the conceptual macro-field "*spiritual beauty*". As we have indicated before it is opposed to the macro-field "*physical beauty*". The confirmation of this may be found in English proverbs and sayings: *Good fame is better than a good face; Handsome is as handsome does* and in some examples from the modern English belles-lettres texts:

(58) Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she's not half so *handsome* as Jane, nor half so *good-humored* as Lydia [14: 14].

The analysis of the corpus of discourse contexts we have accumulated allows us to determine the following components (micro-fields) of the conceptual macro-field "*spiritual beauty*":

1. *character*:

(59) She is *gentle as a dove*, and *a miracle of unselfishness*: she is *frank* and *loyal* [11: 116].

2. *soul*:

(60) She was ... *willful* and with a quick temper, but *magnanimous* [11: 8].

(61) He had that same *nobility of soul* that I saw in my mind's eye [15: 45].

3. *intelligence*:

(62) He was a funny gentleman, he made us laugh. I think he is *very clever* [11: 43].

4. *manners*:

(63) He had *excellent manners* with women [15: 15].

(64) Of course he didn't care for her; she bored him to death. But he was *a gentleman* [12: 10].

5. *taste*:

(65) Mrs. *Albert Forrester's taste was so perfect*, she so inevitably admired the right thing and made the just observation about it, that sometimes you almost gasped for air [15:47].

It is not surprising that while estimating someone's outward appearance, the speaker oftentimes relates it with the presence / absence of inner (spiritual) beauty in the object of estimation. We attribute this characteristic mostly to women:

(66) Mr. Bingley was *good-looking* and *gentlemanlike* he had *a pleasant countenance* and *easy, unaffected manners* [14: 8].

It is demonstrative that when indicating a woman's beauty men quite seldom verbally appreciate their character, behavior, actions, intellectual qualities, etc:

(67) What right had Stella with her *fair, shy beauty* to make him know for certain that he would never marry Megan [9: 122].

(68) You have come back and if you don't mind my saying anything so objectionable *you've come back prettier than ever* [12: 245].

This remark, along with the above considerations, allows us to conclude that the compliment-making strategies of men are often aimed at the activation of the macro-field "*physical beauty*". That probably means that the presence of outward beauty is a priority for women (from men's point of view), whereas in the language conscience of women the activation of the macro-field "*physical beauty*" leads in many cases to the activation of the macro-field "*spiritual beauty*", i.e. the moral profile of a man is no less important for women than his attractiveness on the outside. Therefore we can state that the verbalization regularities of the concept BEAUTY are characterized by significant gender specificity. The verbalization of the macro-field "*physical beauty*" in the structure of the concept under discussion is typical in the male discourse, whilst women prefer the verbalization of two macro-fields: "*physical beauty*" and "*spiritual beauty*".

Concluding our discussion we would like to draw the reader's attention once again to some key ideas that we have been trying to put across throughout this article. The concept BEAUTY has a certain structural form presented by the unity of its macro-fields: "*physical beauty*", "*spiritual beauty*", "*artificial beauty*", each of which in its turn breaks down into a number of micro-fields. While determining the peculiarities of the language representation of our concept, we have ascertained that the object of contemplation and esthetic evaluation may be represented by a wide array of objects and events of the surrounding world, which testifies to the complexity and diversity of the content of the analyzed concept. The gender specificity of the language representation of the concept BEAUTY is reflected in the process of evaluative communication (discourse), and is manifested in the compliment is the most significant unit of such discourse. The analysis of compliment-making by speakers belonging to different sexes allows us to reduce the points of contact, as well as the contrastive characteristics of male and female beauty in the English language conscience.

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