Evaluation through Morphology: A Cognitive Perspective

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In this paper I address the evaluational potential of morphology by showing how semantic changes originate in conceptual processes that exploit morphological forms to express evaluative meanings. In attempting to provide an account of this issue I present a cognitively-based theory of morphological representation. I also situate my theory within a general context of cognitive linguistics. I present an account of morphological concept, model the process of morphological representation, single out the factors, influencing the process of forming sense when analyzing morphological representation. I illustrate all my theoretical assumptions on the basis of the category of degree in English. Finally I lay special emphasis on the fact that the possibility of morphological forms to express evaluative meanings is caused by conceptual processes which underlie the morphological representation.

Keywords: morphology, morphological representation, morphological concept, evaluation, cognitive mechanism

1. Introduction

The present article proposes a cognitive explanation of evaluational morphology by examining how semantic changes originate in conceptual processes that exploit morphological forms to express evaluative meanings. Accordingly it consists of several parts.

Firstly I briefly comment on the issue relating to methodology in cognitive linguistics and making it possible to investigate evaluation in morphology. The subject of the second part is morphological representation of conceptual content. My approach is theoretical rather than empirical because it involves a demonstration of the fairly plausible claim that morphological representation relies on general principles and mechanisms of human cognition. The next part explores in more detail conceptual and linguistic processes that manage evaluation in morphology.

2. Methodology

First of all I am going to provide an overview of the guiding assumptions to examine the problem of evaluation in morphology.

As it is widely assumed in cognitive linguistics, language is an instrument for organizing, processing and conveying information. Thus the central idea is that language forms an integral part of human cognition. That's why it offers a window into cognitive function, providing insights into the nature, structure and organization of thoughts and ideas. Language is assumed to reflect patterns of thought, certain fundamental properties and design features of the human mind. It follows from this assumption that language structure cannot be studied without taking into account its cognitive basis.

The next assumption is closely connected with the previous one. Conceptual and semantic levels are not identical but exist in constant interaction. As a result of this differentiation, concepts are independent of language. In its turn it proves that thought is possible without language. Interaction between these two levels results in that semantics having two directions: towards the conceptual system and towards the language system and thus it performs the role of interface between a language and a conceptual system (see Taylor 1995).

The human conceptual level is a single level of mental representation onto which and from which all peripheral information is mapped (see Jackendoff 1984). This level also serves as a universal basis of a language system (see Boldyrev 1994). Boldyrev stresses the fact that a conceptual level provides systematization, choice and combinability of linguistic signs to express certain thoughts and interpret them to understand different texts. The conceptual level is not only the system of concepts, conceptual groups and classes but it is also the level of categorical meanings and senses. The importance of categorical senses is that they (but not single concepts) form a basis for grammatical (and also morphological) categories.

Linguistic meaning is conceptual by nature. In accordance with this assumption, linguistic meaning is treated as an interpretation within the framework of a conceptual system as a whole (see Paviljonis 1983).

A concept is dynamic and non-verbal by nature. It has a flexible structure, which, being in constant development, represents the results of a human cognition and is used in the process of speech-producing activity. It is necessary to stress the fact that not all the concepts have linguistic representation (verbalized). It allows basis to distinguish between verbalized and non-verbalized conceptual content and consequently between a concept as a mental unit, existing as a non-structured gestalt before its verbalization and a concept as a verbalized unit.

From this I then argue that a concept exists in two modes: as a knowledge unit and as a knowledge structure, indexed in linguistic forms (see also Kubryakova 2007). Figure 1. illustrates this idea.

Conceptualization and categorization as basic processes of cognition are dynamic by nature. In accordance with this assumption, conceptualization and categorization are interpreted both as a process and as a result of the

cognitive processing of information by a person. I treat these facts as support for my analysis.

Human knowledge differs in accordance with its reference and mode of representation. Correspondingly I distinguish: knowledge of the world (encyclopedic knowledge) VS linguistic knowledge as its part; collective knowledge VS individual knowledge; objective (rational) knowledge VS evaluative (appraisal) knowledge. Language as a cognitive capability of a person performs the central role in processing, storing and conveying knowledge: both objective knowledge of the world and appraisal knowledge. The analysis of different types of knowledge is of fundamental importance to the characterization of the problem under discussion.

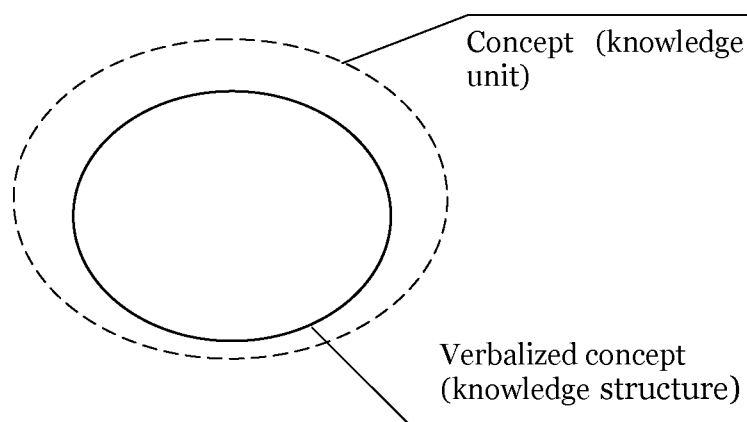Concept (knowledge unit)

Verbalized concept (knowledge structure)

Figure 1. Two modes of concept

Linguistic knowledge is conventional, it is a group knowledge. Individual knowledge is a certain configuration of collective knowledge from the point of view of its scope, content and interpretation. With the above generalities in mind I will first turn to some general issues regarding the process of morphological representation.

3. Morphology from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

In this part I address the morphology from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

3.1 Basic Theoretical Constructs

From a cognitive viewpoint morphology is argued to be treated in terms of *morphological representation* and *morphological concept*, which I develop within the framework of a theory of morphological representation.[i] Morphological representation presupposes a categorical way of structuring conceptual content through morphological categories and forms. It is generally agreed that the same experience may be conceptualized by speakers

in different ways. Morphological categories in their turn conceptualize or construe the experience of the speaker in the world in certain ways. This appears to be very much in line with the central hypothesis of cognitive semantics that much of language – in particular grammatical inflections and constructions – can be described as encoding different conceptualizations of experience (Clausner and Croft 1999).

The most basic theoretical construct of morphological representation is a morphological concept. The latter is defined as a knowledge format represented by morphological categories and forms, on the one hand, and as a concept making a basis for morphological categories and realized in a discourse in the form of concrete grammatical meanings (e.g. grammatical tense, number, mood, etc.), on the other. Taken together, morphological concepts make a cognitive basis for a morphological representation in a language.

After briefly presenting the main constructs, now let's see how morphological representation is carried out (as we have worked it out in our theory).

3.2 The Process of Morphological Representation

Here I would like to investigate the process of morphological representation itself. I will therefore start by examining the stages of this process in more detail in order to gain a deeper insight into morphological representation. Next I will undertake an examination of what the specific cognitive operations are that are responsible for the avenues morphological representation takes. Conventionally, it experiences some stages. The first stage of morphological representation is connected with the formation of morphological concepts.

In the following section I will describe how morphological concepts are formed. Our hypothesis is that they are formed on the basis of the concepts which already exist in the conceptual system. These concepts (primary ones) have an important and salient position in the conceptual system, they determine the existence of the latter. In cognitive linguistics tradition they are usually termed fundamental concepts. This idea is strongly supported by prominent linguists such as Lakoff, Jackendoff, Talmy, and Kubryakova. These are such concepts as TIME, QUANTITY, SPACE, RELATION, etc.

I suggest that the cognitive mechanism which serves to form morphological concepts is that of abstraction. Under its influence the most generalized characteristics in the structure of primary concept are abstracted from the concrete ones and create a new concept (morphological concept). The latter may be treated as a secondary concept in this case. As sketched in Figure 2 it is embedded into the structure of the primary concept. As a result, characteristics, which are the most important for the language, are encoded.

Accordingly, the content of morphological concepts is highly abstract. It results in generalized character of grammatical meanings conveyed by morphological forms. Morphological concepts can be treated as classifying ones because they are oriented to the language system but not the world around us, coding the way the language maps the world. It gives the right to

assume that morphology conceptualizes linguistic knowledge.

It is interesting to note that there is no an ambiguous definite correlation between a fundamental concept and a morphological concept. One fundamental concept may cause appearance to more than one morphological concept. E.g., fundamental concept QUANTITY gives rise to morphological concepts NUMBER and MEASURE OF PROPERTY. On the basis of the fundamental concept TIME two morphological concepts, TENSE and ASPECT, are formed. An instance of such correlation is shown abstractly in Figure 3. This very moment explains the existence of aspect-tense system in English.
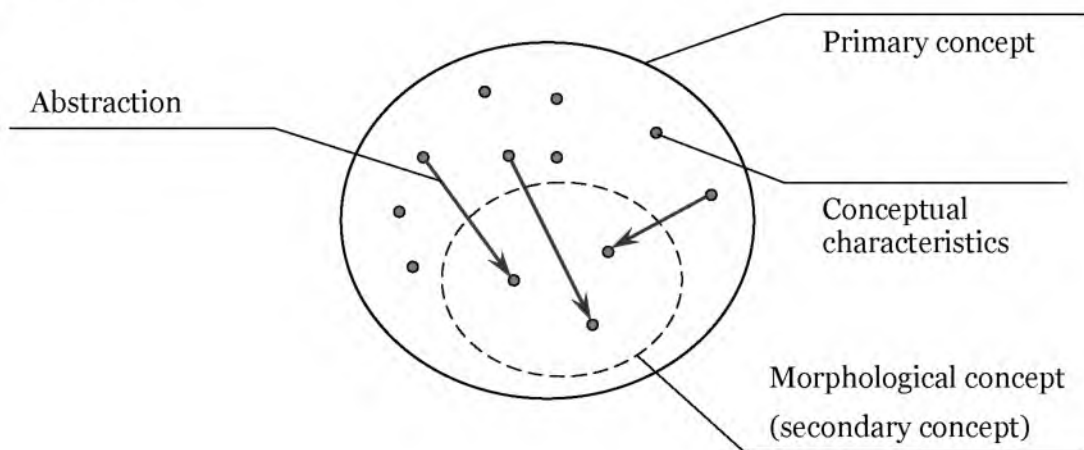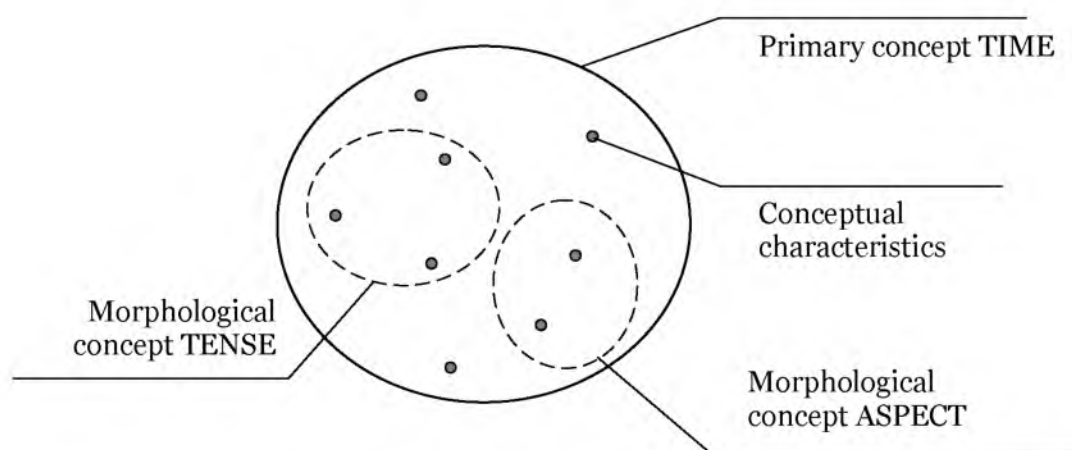
Figure 2. Formation of morphological concepts

Figure 3. Correlation between primary and morphological concepts

From this I then conclude that the process of forming morphological concept

is based on a reorganization at conceptual level with the help of such cognitive mechanism as abstraction. This mechanism of human cognition is used to modify the concept already existing in the conceptual system and create a new one, linguistic by nature, a morphological concept. And the way this is done is reflected at the linguistic level. Being rather abstract by nature a morphological concept presents gestalt itself, generalized and abstract conceptual characteristics of which demand further concretization. The latter becomes possible only in interaction with different linguistic factors in the process of morphological representation. So far we have established that the essence of morphological concept is that being represented morphologically its content is revealed in interaction with other factors in the process of morphological representation.

On the second stage (Figure 4) morphological forms activate the main characteristics in the content of morphological concepts. As a result, generalized morphological senses are formed. Because of their generalized character these senses require further concretization. Evans and Green propose that elements of grammatical subsystem perform a structuring function providing schematic meaning (Evans and Green 2006: 21).
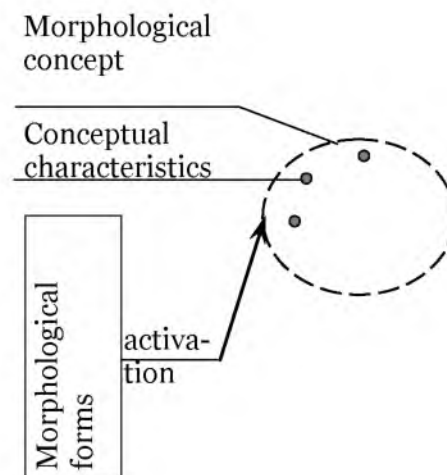

Figure 4. The second stage of morphological representation

Here we come to the description of the next stage of morphological representation, which is connected with the concretization of generalized senses. This concretization is revealed on the sentence-utterance level in interaction with linguistic factors. Here I must identify the factors that influence or may be even determine the process of forming sense when we analyze morphological representation. Below I will take a look at three such factors:

- semantic
- syntactic
- contextual.

As the most central factor I would like to suggest a semantic one. It

presupposes taking into consideration the semantics of lexical units that take on this or that morphological category. As it is known, in real functioning the possibility of the words to take on this or that morphological category depends on their semantics. E.g., only qualitative adjectives are used in superlative and comparative degrees, only concrete nouns take on the category of number. The next two factors playing a role in concretization of generalized morphological senses are syntactic and contextual. The syntactic one is connected with the syntactic structure of the sentence, the contextual – with the context of the whole sentence.

The necessity of taking into consideration such factors is explained by the fact that the process of sense formation is always integrative. This general idea appears to be very much in line with prof. Boldyrev's factors of functional categorization and the idea of integrity worked out in the functional and semiological approach (Boldyrev 1995). And I consider integrative principle to be a central principle of morphological representation.

Being activated, the morphological concept, in its turn, activates a primary concept. In the content of the latter, under the influence of the linguistic factors already mentioned, additional characteristics are profiled. In some cases linguistic factors may also activate some adjoining concepts. These processes are shown in Figure 5.
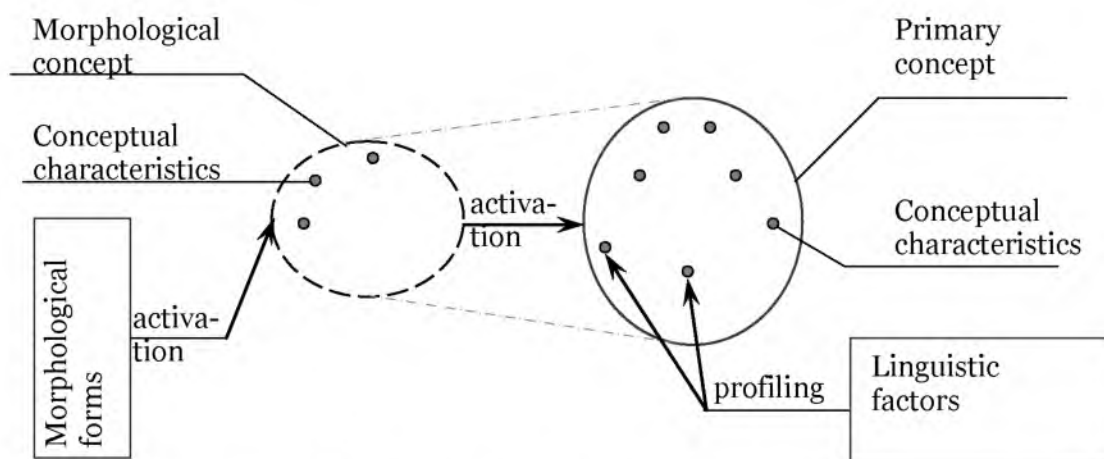

Figure 5. The third stage of morphological representation.

The final stage is connected with the configuration of the conceptual content. It means that activated characteristics of the morphological concept in combination with the profiled characteristics of the primary concept finally result in the formation of concrete lexico-grammatical senses which are revealed in the process of communication. Figure 6 summarizes our evidence regarding formation of lexico-grammatical senses in the process of morphological representation.

Now we can illustrate the theoretical ideas which have just been worked out.
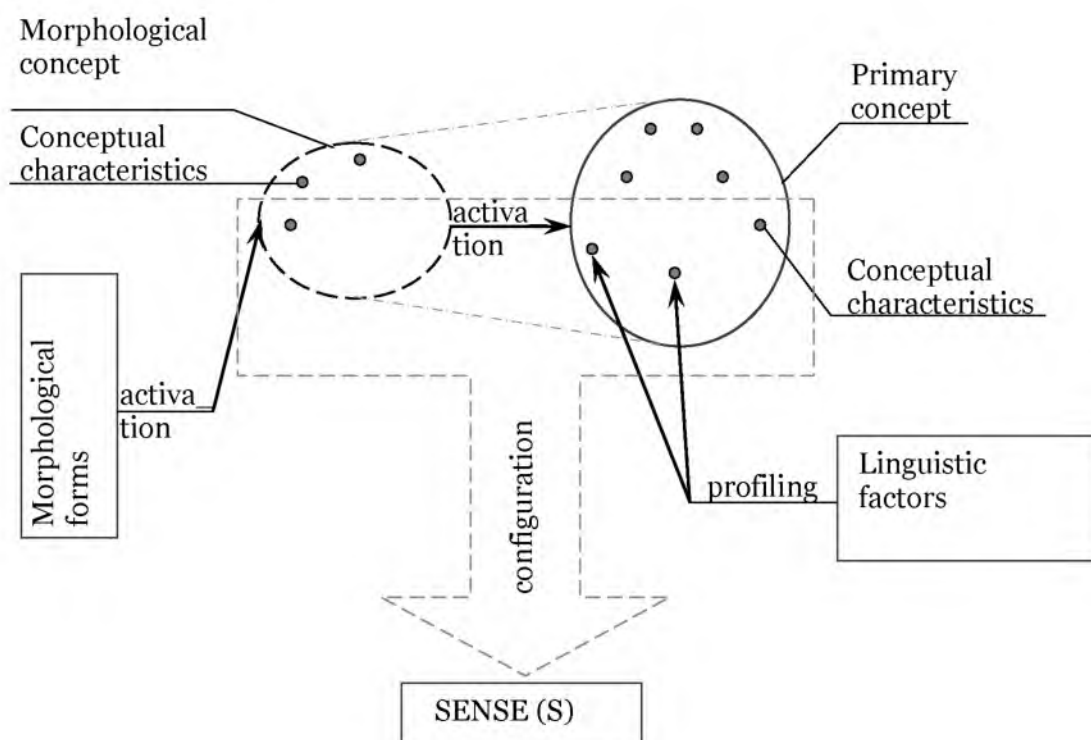
Morphological
concept

Conceptual
characteristics

Primary
concept

activa
tion

Conceptual
characteristics

Morphological
forms

activa
tion

configuration

profiling

Linguistic
factors

SENSE (S)

Figure 6. Formation of lexico-grammatical senses.

3.1 The category of degrees of comparison in the perspective of morphological representation

Here I'll analyze the morphological category of degrees of comparison in the perspective of morphological representation. On the first stage the morphological concept MEASURE OF PROPERTY is formed. It's formed on the basis of the primary concept QUANTITY from which characteristic "non-indiscrecity" is abstracted. This characteristic causes the appearance of morphological concept MEASURE OF PROPERTY and is revealed in its characteristics: "the higher degree of property's intensity" and "the highest degree of property's intensity". Further I am going to analyze the process on the basis of superlative forms only.

On the second stage superlatives activate morphological concept MEASURE OF PROPERTY and such characteristic in its structure as "the highest degree of property's intensity". As a result the corresponding morphological sense "the highest degree of property's intensity" is formed. Being rather generalized, it requires concretization that is achieved by using of semantic and contextual factors in the process of communication. As a result the following lexico-grammatical senses are formed:

a) Degree of property of an object is compared with more than one object of the same group.
b) The object possessing the highest degree of property is singled out of all

objects of a certain class.

c) An object is singled out of the group of objects possessing the highest degree of property.

MEASURE OF PROPERTY

QUANTITY

Conceptual characteristics

Conceptual characteristics

the highest degree of properties intensity

Superlatives

activa-tion

configuration

COMPARISON

activa-tion
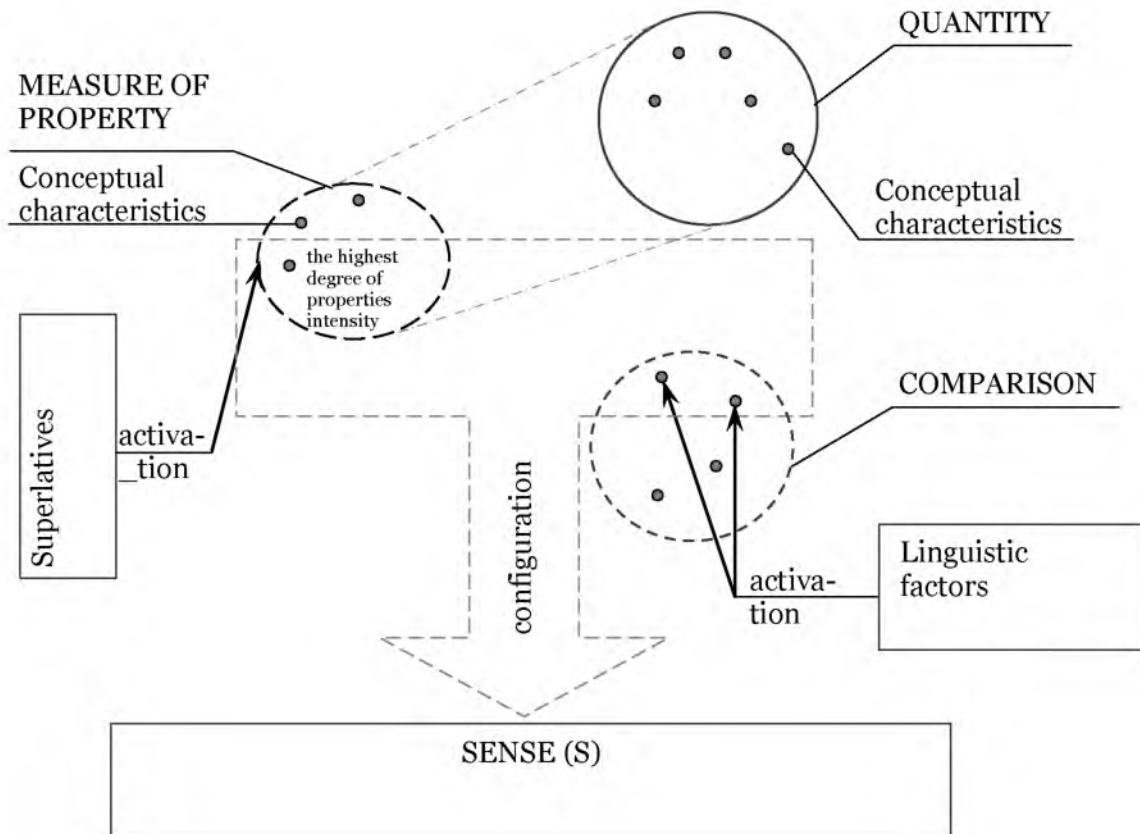
Linguistic factors

SENSE (S)

Figure 7. The process of forming lexico-grammatical sense on the basis of the superlative forms.

Now I'm going to analyze the formation of these senses in details. When forming the sense "degree of property of an object is compared with more than one object of the same group", the superlatives activate morphological concept MEASURE OF PROPERTY and the characteristic "the highest degree of property's intensity" in its content. This leads to the formation of generalized morphological sense "the highest degree of property's intensity". Then the latter is concretized under the influence of semantic and contextual factors. These factors activate the concept COMPARISON and profile the characteristic "contrasting" in its content. The combination of two characteristics: "the highest degree of property's intensity" and "contrasting" in the process of configuration forms the analyzed sense. This process is illustrated by the following examples and presented in figure 8:

(1) The others are very much admired too, but I believe Isabella is **the handsomest**.

(2) I found that by far **the most difficult** thing, to begin with, was to realize that "feeling" is just another form of perception.
(3) This is **the most uncompromising** circumstance, the strongest presumption against him.
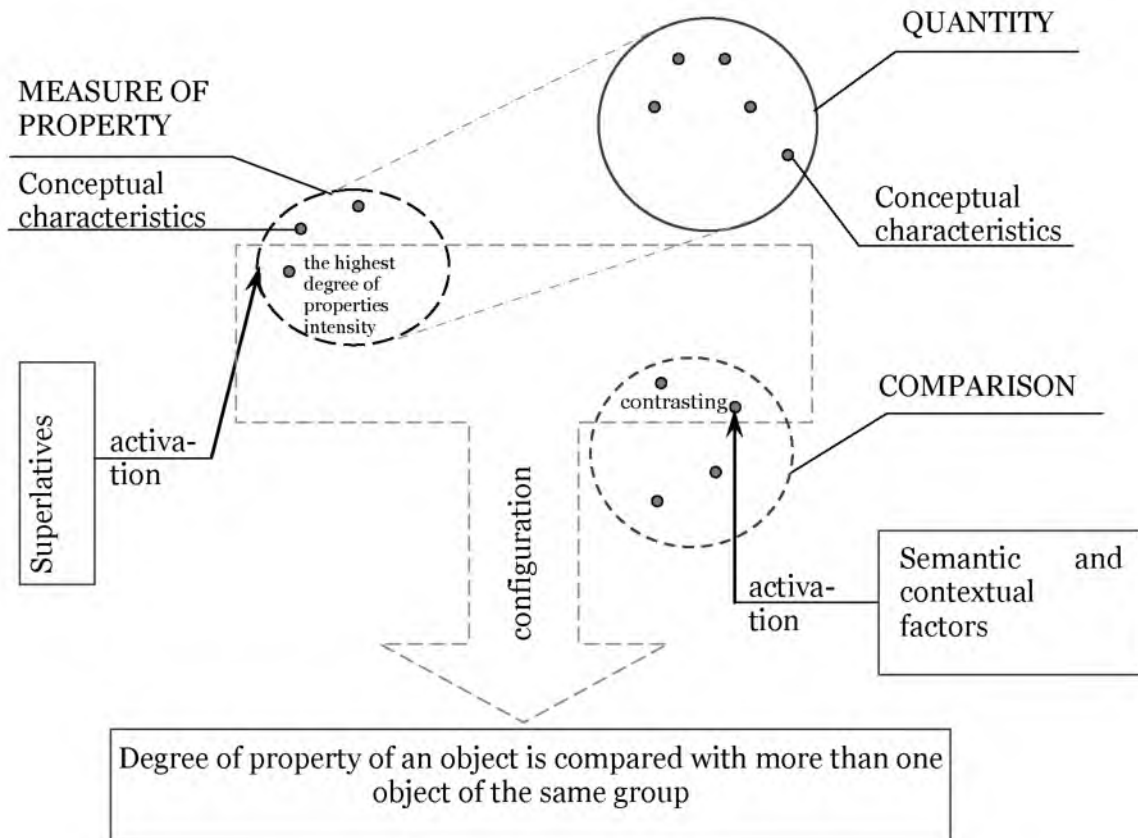

Figure 8. Formation of the sense "Degree of property of an object is compared with more than one object of the same group"

When forming the sense "the object possessing the highest degree of property is singled out of all objects of a certain class", the superlatives activate morphological concept MEASURE OF PROPERTY and the characteristic "the highest degree of property's intensity" in its content. This leads to the formation of generalized morphological sense "the highest degree of property's intensity". Then the latter is concretized under the influence of semantic and contextual factors. The latter presupposes combinations referring to the whole class (*of all, among all*), restrictive attributive clauses (*I've ever seen, imagined*), prepositional groups with *in (in the world, in the room, in the whole office)*, restricting the number of objects, possessing the highest degree of property, in the sentence. Let's consider the following examples:

(4) It was **the strangest face** <u>in the world</u>.
(5) I was going to dance with **the prettiest girl** <u>in the room</u>.

The prepositional groups (*in the world, in the room*) activate the concept COMPARISON and such characteristics in its structure as "singling out" and "opposition". In combination with the characteristic "the highest degree of property's intensity" they create configuration of conceptual content and form the sense "the object possessing the highest degree of property is singled out of all objects of a certain class". Figure 9 illustrates the process described
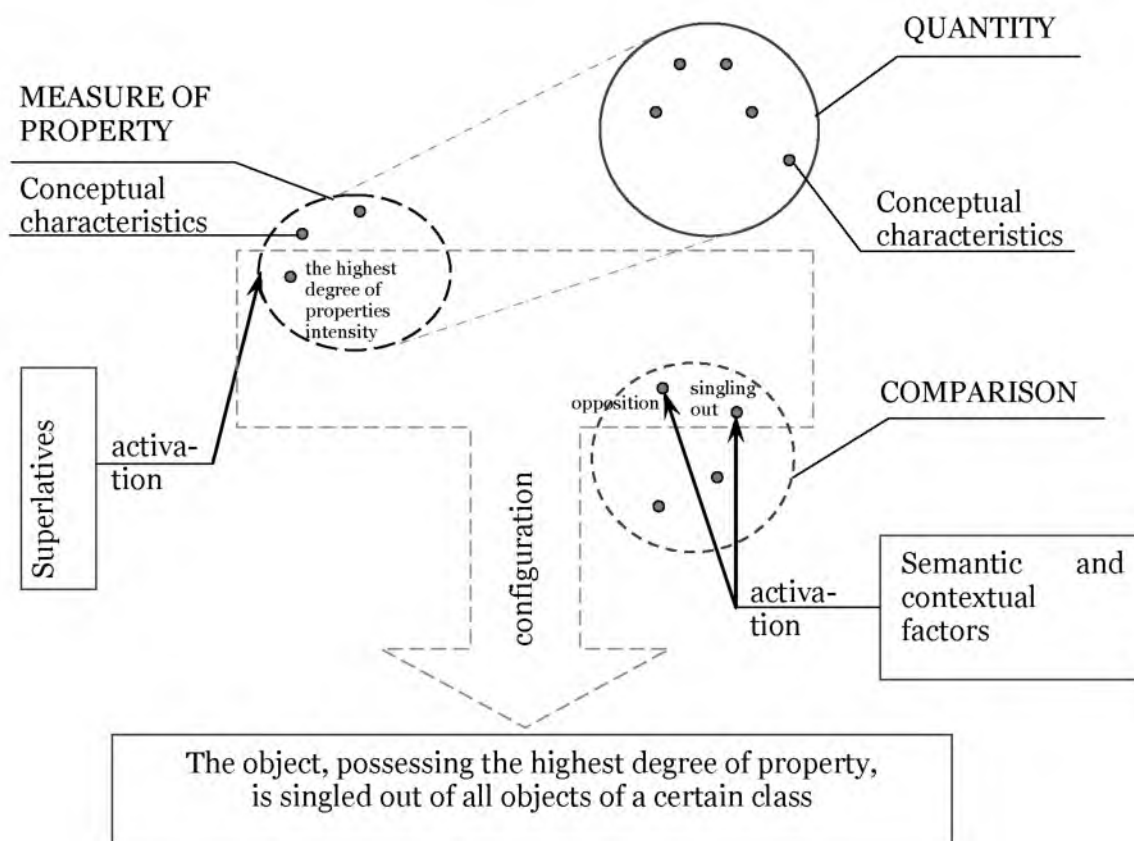

Figure 9. Formation of the sense "the object, possessing the highest degree of property, is singled out of all objects of a certain class".

When forming the sense "an object is singled out of the group of objects possessing the highest degree of property", the superlatives activate morphological concept MEASURE OF PROPERTY and the characteristic "the highest degree of property's intensity" in its content. This leads to the formation of generalized morphological sense "the highest degree of property's intensity". Then the latter is concretized under the influence of semantic and contextual factors. The latter presupposes the usage of the superlative form in the construction *one of the … Npl*. Let's consider the following examples:

(6)   He was <u>one of the</u> **greatest** living <u>authorities</u> upon the subject.
(7)   It is <u>one of the</u> **finest** old <u>places</u> in England.

The construction mentioned activates the concept COMPARISON and such characteristic in its structure as "singling out". In combination with the characteristic "the highest degree of property's intensity" they create configuration of conceptual content and form the sense "an object is singled out of the group of objects possessing the highest degree of property". Figure 10 illustrates the process described.
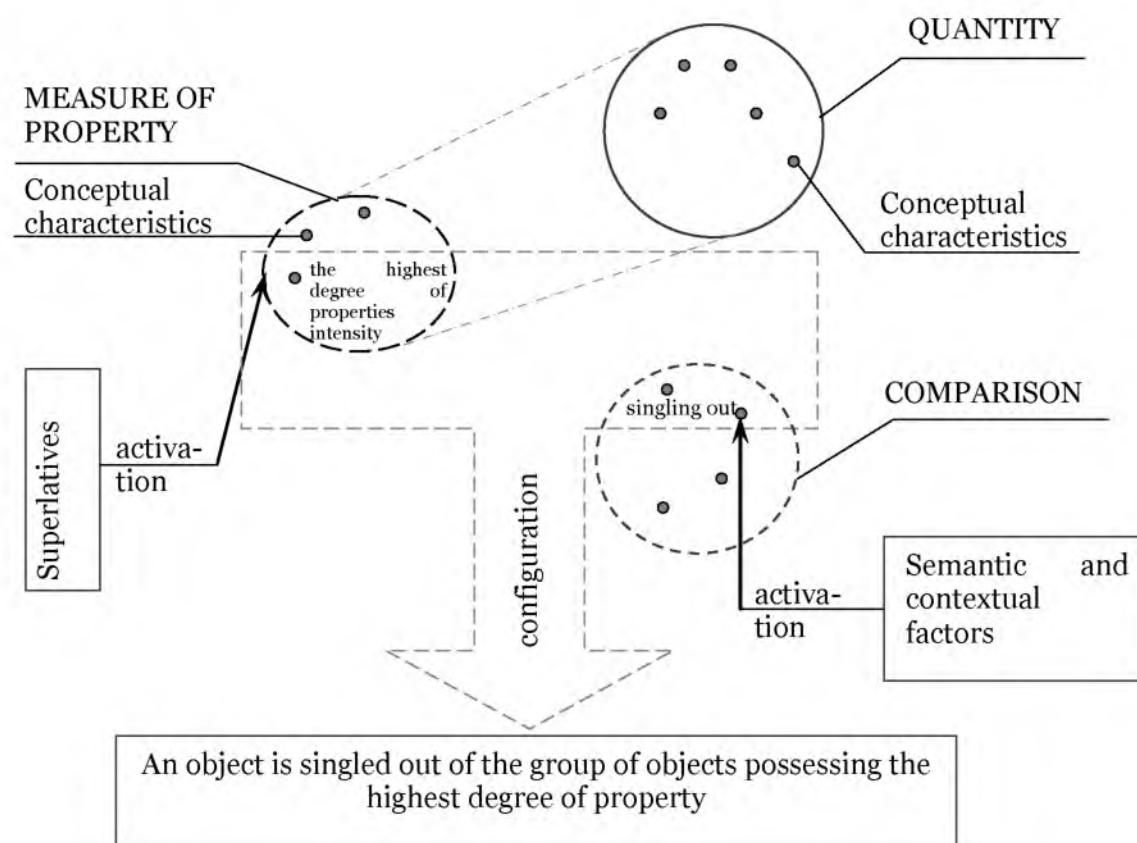

Figure 10. Formation of the sense "an object is singled out of the group of objects possessing the highest degree of property"

Having considered how morphological representation is carried out, it's time to analyze the processes which manage the evaluative potential of morphology.

4. Morphology and Evaluation

As has been demonstrated, morphological forms and categories code (represent) collective, universal knowledge which is conventional and linguistic by nature. Therefore their semantics is based on a stable conceptual content which represent the most important concepts which are basic or fundamental for the conceptual system as a whole. Nevertheless it is possible for morphological forms to express emotional-evaluative meanings. The process of emotional evaluation in morphology is connected with the non-prototypical usage of some morphological forms. I mean the following cases:

non-prototypical usage of morphological forms of superlatives (*a most attractive girl* or *a most famous book*) and progressive forms of the verbs (*She is always grumbling*).

Evaluation in general and in morphology in particular draws on a linguistic construal of the world which uses differentiation between collective and individual knowledge and experience (see Boldyrev 2000). Emotional evaluation is thus a certain reaction to objects and events that affect a speaker's world in the ways that appear important. Given its subjective nature, emotional evaluation exploits a personal scale of values; it is connected with psychology of human perception of concrete things and phenomena.To illustrate this idea consider the following examples:

(8) First class is **the** most expensive way to travel.
(9) This is **a** most wonderful picture.

In prototypical usage of the superlative (*the most expensive*), it is asserted that no other way of travelling is as expensive as this one. A speaker relies on conventional knowledge about ways of travelling. By contrast, in the second case the superlative form *(most wonderful)* is used evaluatively, a speaker generally emphasizes a high degree of a quality. The picture is conceptualized as very (absolutely) wonderful. While there may be other wonderful pictures, these are not considered. The speaker relies on his individual knowledge about the picture's quality and expresses a personal emotional-evaluative attitude. Now let's consider how this process is managed at both conceptual and linguistic levels.

Conceptually, it is an emotional-evaluative configuration of collective knowledge that results in transition to the sphere of individual knowledge and leads to an individual appraisal of actions, situations or objects (inanimate or animate). The phrase *a most + Adj.* is used to express a very high degree of a property, without implying any comparison. From a cognitive point of view it's connected with the defocusing of the idea of comparison. On a linguistic level the use of the indefinite article appears to play an important role in this. So we consider **defocusing** as a cognitive mechanism, and an indefinite article as a linguistic mechanism determining the emotional-evaluative construal of an object.

In most of such cases the idea of a speaker's personal attitude based on his individual knowledge is underlined with the help of such expressions as *I consider, I'm sure, I find that, you really are*. Examples, illustrating this idea, are provided below.

(10) **I'm sure** he must be a most liberal-minded man.
(11) **I consider** it a most arbitrary proceeding.
(12) **You really are** a most stubborn young woman.
(13) **I find that,** from start to finish, a most incredible contribution.

Primary concept

Morphological concept

Conceptual characteristics

the highest degree of properties intensity

Comparison

Morphological forms

activa-tion

defocusing

configuration

Linguistic factors

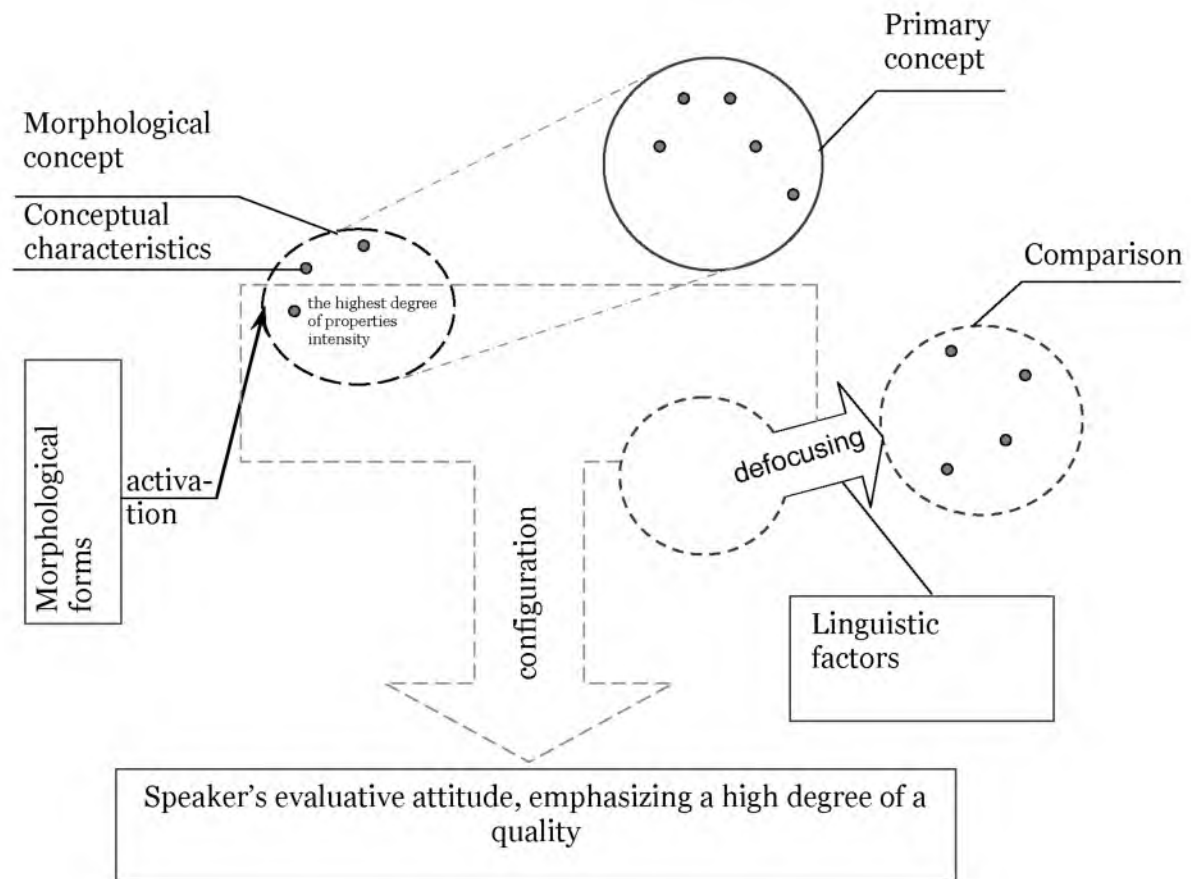Speaker's evaluative attitude, emphasizing a high degree of a quality

Figure 11. Formation of evaluative senses

Another form expressing emotional-evaluative attitude is that to the action. Have a look at the examples like:

(14) I'm always losing my keys. She is always grumbling.

A speaker expresses an emotional-evaluative attitude to continually-repeated action that happens often but is unplanned. This attitude is expressed through his/her criticism and the negative perception of the action characteristic of a certain person within a certain period of time which provoke certain emotions (impatience, irritation, disapproval, etc., all of which are based only on his/her own knowledge and experience. Let's compare the following examples:

(15) I**'m meeting** Alice at the station.
(16) When Alice comes, I **always meet** her at the station.
(17) I**'m always meeting** Alan in the supermarket.

The first two examples illustrate a planned action. In contrast, the action in the third case is unplanned.

On a systemic level progressive forms describe an ongoing experience. The action is taking place at the moment, and at some point this activity will come to an end. As Langacker considers, the meaning of the progressive participle

morpheme lies in its restriction of the sequence of events that make up a process to just the 'middle' stages, there by construing it as an ongoing event (see Langacker 1991).

On a conceptual level, it is a configuration of conventional knowledge that forms the bases of progressive semantics (actions going on at a certain moment or at the moment of speaking) into individual construal of the situation which repeats too frequently and provokes certain emotions and evaluations in the speaker.

Linguistic mechanism of identifying the evaluative attitude in this case is the usage of adverbs of frequency such as: *always, constantly, continually, forever, perpetually and repeatedly* in combination with progressive form, which are not typical for it on the systemic level.

In sum, this discussion of evaluation in morphology illustrates that evaluation and appraisal penetrate all levels of the language and this fact is managed conceptually.

5. Conclusion

In this article I have presented an overview of morphology in a cognitive perspective. In my approach I have laid special emphasis on the fact that the possibility for morphological forms to express evaluative meanings is caused by conceptual processes which underlie the morphological representation as a categorical way of structuring conceptual content. This analysis of evaluative potential of morphology has allowed us to account for some properties of morphological categories using the theory of morphological representation developed in cognitive linguistics.

Notes

[i]   In my monograph "Morphological concepts" I have proposed a model of morphology on cognitive grounds, which predicts that morphological representation primarily develops as the result of cognitive and linguistic processes which reflect an emergent common conceptualization within a shared cognitive model in a speech community.

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