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Ugliness as a Prototype Category: Cognitive-and-Semantic Analysis

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Abstract. The study proposes a cognitive-and-semantic approach to the study of the category ‘urodstvo’ (‘ugliness’). This approach allowed, using a component analysis of the meanings of words — denote main lexical representatives of the category of ugliness in the Russian language, and establish a set of features of the category relevant to the basic level. Several prototypical features of ugliness have been identified: ‘the carrier of the feature is a living organism (human, animal, plant)’; ‘abnormality in the structure’; ‘innate abnormality’; ‘its physical (anatomical) character’. An exemplary representative of a category has all the prototypical features in contrast to non-exemplary representatives. Blurring of prototypical features in non-ideal representatives of the category is carried out in the process of development and expansion of the semantics of the words *urodstvo* (‘ugliness’), *bezobraziye* (‘deformity’), *nekrassivost’* (‘unattractiveness’) in Russian.

Keywords: ugliness, prototype, component analysis, categorization, deformity, unattractiveness

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Уродство как прототипическая категория: когнитивно-семантический анализ

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Аннотация. Предложен когнитивно-семантический подход к исследованию категории *уродство*. Этот подход позволил, используя компонентный анализ значений слов — основных лексических репрезентантов категории уродства в русском языке, установить комплекс релевантных для базисного уровня признаков категории. Прототипических признаков *уродства* выявлено несколько: ‘носитель признака — это живой организм (человек, животное, растение)’; ‘аномальность в строении’; ‘врожденность аномалии’; ‘физический (анатомический) характер уродства’. Идеальный представитель категории обладает всеми прототипическими признаками, в отличие от необразцовых, неидеальных представителей. Размывание прототипических признаков у неидеальных представителей категории осуществляется в процессе развития и расширения семантики слов *уродство*, *безобразие*, *некрасивость* в русском языке.

Ключевые слова: уродство, прототип, компонентный анализ, категоризация, безобразие, некрасивость

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Introduction

Anthropologists, philosophers, linguists, literary critics, writers and theologians have been long interested in the issue of ugliness. However, there are few works devoted to the study of this phenomenon. This is what the Italian culturologist Umberto Eco says, “While in almost every century philosophers and artists recorded their ideas about beauty, important texts about the concept of ugliness make up only a handful, one of which is the book by Karl Rosenkrantz (1853) “Aesthetics of Disgrace”” [1]. And then he points to the permanence of the antithesis of two concepts — ugliness and beauty: “Ugliness has always been a backdrop for

beauty — “Beauty and the Beast” took many forms. This means that once you’ve established a beauty criterion, the corresponding ugliness criterion always seems to occur automatically” [1].

Linguists face the problem of verbalizing the concept of ugliness in the minds of speakers of a particular culture, identifying its universal and culturally specific features. The concept of beauty in Russian and other languages belongs to many studies that relate to the cognitive-and-semantic aspect of this phenomenon. So, the concept of ‘*krasota*’ (‘beauty’) in Russian, English, and German is studied in dissertations by Yu.V. Meshcheryakova [2]; N.V. Letunovskaya [3]; Yu.V. Klintsova [4]; I.O. Okuneva [5]; etc., in articles by V.Z. Demyankov [6]; M.L. Kovshova [7]; O.N. Tarasenko [8], etc. In several works, the concept of ‘*krasota*’ (‘beauty’) is considered in relation to the concept of ‘*bezobraziye*’ (‘deformity’) [9; 10]. M. Akosheva, K. Rakhimzhanov study the standards of beauty and ugliness fixed in the Russian language picture of the world [11]. In 2004, the research group “Logical Analysis of Language” published a collection of articles edited by N.D. Arutyunova, which analyzed the conceptual fields of the beautiful and the ugly [12]. There are very few special works dealing with the problem of reflecting ugliness/deformity in language. We’d like to name the work by N.V. Popova, which considers *bezobraziye* (‘deformity’), as a lexical-semantic field consisting of microfields [13]. Thus, until now, from a linguistic point of view the concept of ugliness remains practically undeveloped.

The article sets out the task of cognitive-and-semantic study of the category ‘*urodstvo*’ (‘ugliness’) in Russian based on the theory of prototypes. In cognitive terms, ‘*urodstvo*’ is a significant part of the conceptual picture of the world, reflected in language. In axiological terms, the concept ‘ugliness’ belongs to negative assessment categories and enters into the opposition with a positive assessment concept ‘*krasota*’ (‘beauty’).

While characterizing the aesthetic assessment, T.V. Pisanova says that “as a rule, aesthetic assessment is turned to a norm that has an anthropological justification, i.e., it is explained by the ancestral nature of man, his psycho-physiological characteristics. The discrepancy of innate and social standard characteristics of the person with norm is marked by negative esthetic assessment: the aberration is semantically designated as something ugly, deformative, unattractive” [14. P. 108]. So the author defines ugliness, deformity as a deviation from the norm, and beauty is the norm. N.V. Popova speaks of the dialectical relationship of these phenomena, “As a dialectical contradiction, the concepts of beauty and ugliness reveal the opposite sides that are in eternal struggle” [10. P. 61].

From a cognitive point of view, in prototype theory categorization occurs at several levels. In search of a prototype E. Rosch, C.B. Mervis, W.D. Gray, D.M. Johnson, and P. Boyes-Braem noted that “three levels of Abstraction are needed: a basic level [such as hammer], a superordinate [such as tool], and subordinates into which the basic level can be further subdivided [such as claw

hammer and ball-peen hammer]” [15. P. 389]. The ancestral categories ‘animal’, ‘fruit’ and ‘bird’ belong to the highest level; species categories ‘dog’, ‘apple’ and ‘sparrow’ — to the base level; ‘dachshund’, ‘aport’ and ‘field sparrow’ — to the subordinate ones. The prototype, that is, the exemplary representative of the category is a categorical relation to common properties, so it is important to determine the degree of generalization that these properties receive in the prototype and what prototype should be in the ideal representation. The category is built hierarchically according to the gradation of common characteristics that some studied complex of objects possesses by definition. In the pyramid of concepts constructed in this way, placement under the category is accomplished by increasing Abstraction. At the top of the pyramid, the concept is extremely generalized, and instead of the initially tangible complex, we get a scheme, that is, an Abstract concept.

Which is why the most important level of categorization is the basic one, at which the category still has a visual diagram with a mental correlate in the form of a representation: “In general, the basic level of Abstraction in a taxonomy is the level at which categories carry the most information, possess the highest cue validity, and are, thus, the most differentiated from one another” [15. P. 383]. This level corresponds to the level of sensory experience, at which a person forms basic knowledge about things around him. J. Lakoff emphasizes the maximum concentration at the basic level of human-relevant properties of things denoted by words, “It is at this level of experience that we clearly distinguish tigers from elephants, chairs from tables, roses from daffodils, asparagus from broccoli, copper from zinc, etc. One level down and things get much more difficult. It is much more difficult to distinguish one species of giraffe from another than it is to distinguish a giraffe from an elephant. Our gestalt perception capacity at a basic level is not easily — equipped to make sharp distinctions at such lower levels” [16. P. 351].

Thus, we will try to present the category of ugliness at the base level as a set of human-relevant features, build a prototype of ugliness as an exemplary representative of the category and identify less exemplary representatives of the category with fewer relevant properties.

Research methods

In our work we use a componential analysis of the dictionary definitions of the main lexical units expressing the concept ‘urodstvo’ (‘ugliness’) in the dictionaries of the Russian language edited by D.N. Ushakov¹, edited by A.P. Evgenieva² and

¹ Ushakov, D.N. (1935–1940). *Explanatory dictionary of the Russian language*. Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia, OGIZ. URL: <http://feb-web.ru/feb/ushakov/default.asp?feb/ushakov/us0.html> (accessed: 04/12/2023). (In Russ.).

² Evgenieva, A.P. (Ed.) (1999). *Dictionary of the Russian language*. In 4 volumes. Moscow: Russian language; Polygraphic resources. URL: <http://feb-web.ru/feb/mas> (accessed: 04/12/2023). (In Russ.).

in the dictionary by T.F. Efremova³. Using this method, we will identify the main prototypical features of ugliness recorded in the consciousness of native speakers of the Russian language. The componential analysis method was first applied to vocabulary, which includes the kinship terms in different tribes [see: 17; 18]. I.V. Arnold proposes to use the componential analysis of form lexical groups, based on dictionary definitions which will be shown next [19. P. 51]. In our analysis, we rely on D. Bolinger's seme classification, identifying categorical semes, semantic markers, and distinguishers [20. P. 200–234]. Categorical semes contain an indication of generalized properties, semantic markers indicate the features common to a class of lexical units, and distinguishes, individualizes a denotatum. The largest components of the meaning are categorical semes — substantivity for nouns, indication features for adjectives, etc. In addition to the mandatory hierarchical set of semes, optional semes are revealed in the lexical meaning: potential, connotative [19]. Additional implicit meanings, superimposed on explicit meanings, are capable to convey large amounts of information. Implications materialize in comparisons, metaphors, idioms, certain types of syntactic constructions. The meanings of a polysemantic word do not remain unchanged. The appearance of a new meaning in one word inevitably entails changes in other words associated with it, since everything is interconnected in the lexico-semantic system [21]. As a result, the relationship between the meanings of the word changes: the primary meanings of some words are replaced by figurative ones; the meanings of individual words, which are currently perceived as figurative, may turn out to be primary from a historical point of view.

The hierarchy of semes in the meaning of words corresponds to the level, hierarchical principle of the formation of language categories in the theory of prototypes, which we spoke about above. It was this prototypical approach that N.N. Boldyrev spoke about when he formulated the leading principle of the formation of language categories as the principle of relative similarity [22. P. 89–91]. With it, words are combined as members of one grouping on the basis of relative similarity that is, differing only in the degree of possession of prototypical properties. Therefore, definitional analysis makes it possible to compare the meanings of the main verbal representatives of the category of ugliness, to identify its core and peripheral features, and to determine the prototypical properties of ugliness. Peripheral features are manifested in metaphorical and metonymic usage, in idioms, in context [23]. In other words, this approach will make it possible to carry out a comprehensive cognitive-and-semantic analysis of the category under consideration and, based on the data of the component analysis of words representing the concept of ugliness, to identify representatives of the category — exemplary and non-exemplary.

³ Efremova, T.F. (2006). *Modern explanatory dictionary of the Russian language*. In 3 vols. Moscow: AST. URL: <https://www.efremova.info> (accessed: 04/16/2023). (In Russ.).

Results and discussion

In Russian the main verbal representatives of the category of ugliness are the words *urodstvo* ('ugliness'), *bezobraziye* ('deformity'), *nekrassivost'* ('unattractiveness').

The noun *urodstvo* ('ugliness') is derived from the verb *urodit'sya* ('to be born') in the Russian language. "In Russian, the verb *urodit'sya* does not have a negative characteristic. In cultural tradition, ugliness, as well as beauty, receives a sacred sanction. In some West Slavic languages, *uroda* means 'beauty.' Both — beauty and ugliness are "God's gifts and God's punishment" [24. P. 209–230]. In the minds of the Slavs, the unity of the sacred and the ordinary which is manifested in the semantics of language units, is emphasized by T.E. Vladimirova, "<...> borrowing Indo-European origins, the Slavs did not inherit the division of the language into ordinary and sacred, thereby contributing to a holistic worldview and closer interaction" [25. P. 299]. In Orthodox Christian traditions, physical inferiority is not condemned, but on the contrary, it is believed that an ugly person is marked by God, is closer to him, and, accordingly, he should be respected.

In the Russian culture, there is a concept 'yurodivyi' ('whacky') which is etymologically connected with words *urodlivyi* ('ugly'), *urodstvo* ('ugliness'), *urodit'sya* ('to be born'). It has an archaic meaning: "a blessed, ascetic madman or who has taken pretended to be a madman, who, according to religious people, has the gift of divination. *Since the fifteenth year, he has become known as whacky who walks barefoot in winter and summer, visits monasteries, gives images to those whom he loves, and speaks mysterious words that taken as predictions.* L. Tolstoy, *Childhood*"⁴.

The sacrality of ugliness as a physical damage is noted in the "Historical and Etymological Dictionary" which refers to the etymological relationship of the words *kaleka* (meaning 'cripple') and *kalika* (meaning 'wanderer, pilgrim, tramp')⁵.

The definitional analysis of the word *urodstvo* ('ugliness') indicates its ambiguity. It has 3 meanings, i.e. three lexico-semantic variants (hereinafter LSV). The componential analysis of the meanings of the word *urodstvo* ('ugliness') as the main lexical representative of the category is shown in table 1.

Another common lexical means of expressing the category *urodstvo* ('ugliness') in Russian is noun *bezobraziye* ('deformity'). It is also ambiguous; and again it has 3 meanings. Dictionaries often define it through the word *ugliness*. Etymologically, the word *bez-obraz-iyе* ('deformity') goes back to the word *obraz* in the meaning "face, cheek, look, picture, icon", the prefix *bez-* means absent. Thus, the word means "absence of a face, look, image" [13. P. 46], in other words, the absence of an appearance corresponding to generally accepted ideas and norms.

⁴ Evgenieva, A.P. (Ed.) (1999). *Dictionary of the Russian language*. In 4 vols. Moscow: Russian language; Polygraphic resources. URL: <http://feb-web.ru/feb/mas> (accessed: 04/12/2023). (In Russ.).

⁵ Chernykh, P.Ya. (2002). *Historical and etymological dictionary of the modern Russian language*. In 2 vols. Moscow: Russian language. (In Russ.).

Table 1

The Componential analysis of the polysemic word *urodstvo* ('ugliness')

LSV	Meaning/Semes	Categorical seme	Marker	Distinguisher
1	Congenital physical deficiency, abnormality in the structure of the body	1. objectness 2. living organism [human, animal, plant]	3. congenital 4. physical	5. abnormality, disturbance in the structure 6. differing from others of the same type
2	Deformity, ugliness, ugly appearance	1. objectness 2. human/ animal	3. physical 4. external, visually perceived	5. violating norms/standards of ordinary appearance
3	Something ridiculous, disgusting, repulsive, abnormal	1. objectness	2. thing 3. concept	4. abnormal look 5. evoking feeling of disgust

Source: authors' study

A componential analysis of the polysemic word *bezobraziye* ('deformity') is presented in table 2 below.

Table 2

Componential analysis of the polysemic word *bezobraziye* ('deformity')

LSV	Meaning / Semes	Categorical seme	Marker	Distinguisher
1	Extremely ugly appearance; ugliness	1. objectness	2. appearance	3. violating norms/standards of ordinary appearance 4. at extreme degree
2	Outrageous, disgusting phenomenon	1. objectness	2. phenomenon / act	3. violating accepted norms 4. causing disturbance, indignation / disgust
3	Exclamation expressing indignation ugly act	1. objectness	2. emotion 3. extreme degree	4. disturbance, indignation / disgust

Source: authors' study

The word *nekrasivost'* ('unattractiveness') is in synonymous relations with the word *urodstvo* ('ugliness'). In dictionaries, this noun is defined as a property by the adjective *nekrasivyi* ('ugly'), which has several meanings: "1. Characterized by incorrect outlines, lack of harmony of paints, tones, lines, etc., unattractive in appearance. 2. Dishonest, unscrupulous, reprehensible"⁶. In addition, another meaning takes place in the dictionary by D.N. Ushakov: "making an unpleasant impression"⁷.

⁶ Evgenieva, A.P. (Ed.) (1999). *Dictionary of the Russian language*. In 4 vols. Moscow: Russian language; Polygraphic resources. URL: <http://feb-web.ru/feb/mas> (accessed: 04/12/2023). (In Russ.).

⁷ Ushakov, D.N. (1935–1940). *Explanatory dictionary of the Russian language*. Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia, OGIZ. URL: <http://feb-web.ru/feb/ushakov/default.asp?/feb/ushakov/us0.html> (accessed: 04/12/2023). (In Russ.).

Thus, the word *nekrasivost'* ('unattractiveness') also refers to polysemantic ones and has three LSVs. Its componential analysis is shown in table 3.

Table 3

Componential analysis of the polysemic word *nekrasivost'* ('unattractiveness')

LSV	Meaning / Semes	Categorical seme	Marker	Distinguisher
1.	Characterized by incorrect outlines, lack of harmony of paints, tones, lines, etc., unattractive in appearance	1. objectness	2. appearance	3. misalignment of outlines 4. absence of paint / line harmony
2.	Producing an unpleasant impression	1. objectness	2. emotional impression	3. evocative dislike/ unpleasant feeling
3.	Dishonesty, reprehension	1. objectness	2. ethical concept	3. violation of generally accepted ethical standards

Source: authors' study

The categorical seme 'substantivity' in the meaning of the words *urodstvo* ('ugliness'), *bezobraziye* ('deformity'), *nekrassivost'* ('unattractiveness') means attribution to the class of noun names. Markers and distinguishers are more essential for determining semantic features of ugliness. The semantic properties of the category of ugliness, their hierarchy and interdependence can be presented in table 4.

Table 4

Semantic properties of the words *urodstvo* ('ugliness'), *bezobraziye* ('deformity'), *nekrassivost'* ('unattractiveness')

Violation of norms, deviation from the stereotype (congenital/acquired)					
Man is the subject of emotions	Appearance			Inner / mental world	
	Man as an object	Animal, plant	Artifacts	Man as an object	
				Concepts	Behavior

Source: authors' study

Table 4 shows that the main differentiating property of the concept of ugliness is 'violation of norms, deviation from the stereotype'. It was revealed as a result of a component analysis of lexemes *urodstvo* ('ugliness'), *bezobraziye* ('deformity'), *nekrassivost'* ('unattractiveness'). Next in terms of importance are the markers 'man as a subject', 'appearance' and 'inner world'. Further, semes characterize the object — the carrier of ugliness: 'human', 'animal / plant', 'artifacts', 'mental concepts' and 'behavior'. The seme 'man', as is shown in the diagram, can act as an object — a carrier of features of ugliness and a subject experiencing negative emotions when

perceiving ugly objects, phenomena [26. P. 140–141]. The seme ‘person-subject of emotional perception’ is singled out in the lexical-semantic variants of all words *urodstvo* (‘ugliness’), *bezobraziye* (‘deformity’), *nekrassivost’* (‘unattractiveness’) that express native speakers’ idea of ugliness. The prototype of ugliness has the following properties: it refers to living beings — man, animals, and plants; anomaly, or a violation in the structure of the body; congenital abnormality; the physical nature of the deviation from the norm.

We can say that an exemplary representative, or prototype of deformity, is a person with a congenital physical defect of the structure, for example, with a hump, with a shortened leg, with abnormally low or, conversely, abnormally high height, with a large birthmark in a prominent place, with ‘*volch’ya past’*’ (‘cleft palate’), ‘*zayach’ya guba’*’ (‘cleft lip’), etc. [see: 27]. Thus, the prototype has the following properties relevant for the category ‘ugliness’:

- 1) a living organism — a person;
- 2) an anomaly in the structure of the body;
- 3) congenital anomaly;
- 4) the physical [anatomical] nature of the anomaly.

When choosing a prototype, such representatives of the category have the advantage, which have categorical properties to the highest degree. For example, in Russian they are verbalized in the following lexemes: *gorbun* (‘hunchback’), *gorbatyi* (‘humpbacked’), *karlik* (‘dwarf’), *liliput* (‘lilliputian’), *velikan* (‘giant’), *khromonozhka* (‘lame’), *khromec* (‘lame’), *khromoi* (‘lame’), *kosobokii* (‘lopsided’). Sometimes a congenital anomaly is specified in a descriptive expression: *chelovek s zayach’ei guboi / s volch’ei past’yu / s rodimym pyatnom* (‘a person with a cleft lip / with a cleft palate / with a birthmark’), etc. It is important to emphasize that these deviations must be accessible to visual perception, for example, a mole, birthmark or wart must be large enough and be visible — on the face, for example. The ideal representatives of the prototype of deformity also include a functional anomaly, for example, impaired hearing, speech, and vision. Hence the following representatives of the prototype appear: *gluhoi* (‘deaf’), *nemoi* (‘mute’), *gluhonemoi* (‘deaf-mute’), *slepoi* (‘blind’), *slepec* (‘blind’), *kosoglazyi* (‘cross-eyed’), *kosoi* (‘cross-eyed’).

A less ideal representative of the category is a person or animal that has received an anomaly in appearance as a result of illness, injury or other circumstances, since they lack a prototypical sign — innateness. They are verbalized in lexemes *odnogonogii* (‘one-legged’), *beznogii* (‘legless’), *odnorukii* (‘one-armed’), *bezrukii* (‘armless’), *odnoglazyi* (‘one-eyed’), *odnouhii* (‘one-eared’), *bezuhi* (‘earless’), *bespalyi* (‘fingerless’), *trekhpalyi* (‘three-fingered’). Some of them are formed using the numeral *odin* (‘one, single’) if the anatomical norm is pairing in the structure of the body, for example, a person should have two legs, two arms, two eyes, two ears (*odn-onogii* ‘one-legged’, *odn-orukii* ‘one-armed’, *odn-oglazy* ‘one-eyed’, *odn-ouhii* ‘one-eared’). The other part of the representatives is formed using the prefix *bez-*, meaning an anomaly — the complete absence of anatomical organs (*bez-nogii*

‘legless’, *bez-rukii* ‘armless’, *bez-uhii* ‘earless’, *bes-palyi* ‘fingerless’). Regarding the number of fingers on the hand or foot, it can be stated that the absence of one, two, three or more fingers refers to the signs of non-exemplary representatives of the prototype of deformity, since it does not have the property of innateness.

At the same time, an extra finger on the hand — the sixth (*shestipalyi* ‘six-fingered’) is a typical exemplary case of the prototype of deformity, since it has a sign of innateness. In the profane consciousness of native speakers of the Russian language, the six-fingered hand or foot of a child is considered a sign of connection with evil spirits. “Six-fingeredness in traditional culture is a marker — along with other signs — an indicator of belonging to the world of the supernatural and / or the ability to make contact with this world” [28. P. 41]. E.E. Levkievskaya also writes about this: “Mythological characters often have an abnormal number of fingers” [29. P. 616].

Even further from the prototype of ugliness as an ideal representative of the category are artifacts that do not correspond to normative ideas and are characterized by a person as ugly or unattractive, for example: *urodlivyi dom* (‘ugly house’), *bezobraznoe kreslo* (‘ugly chair’), *nekrasivoe plat’e* (‘ugly dress’). They lack several basic prototypical properties: they are not a living organism; the anomaly is not congenital. Ugly or unattractive social phenomena, human actions can also be defined as non-ideal representatives of the category, since they refer to mental objects that have non-physical innate disorders: *nekrasivyi postupok* (‘ugly act’), *bezobraznoe povedenie* (‘ugly behavior’), *urodlivoe social’noe yavlenie* (‘ugly social phenomenon’). The appearance of non-exemplary representatives of the category of ugliness is associated with the historical development of social consciousness, changes in social norms, which are reflected in linguistic categorization and blurring of prototypical properties.

In particular, the metaphorical or metonymic expansion of the meanings of words, the emergence of new meanings in them contribute to a change in the category by including in it various non-exemplary representatives that differ from the prototype. So, ugliness characterizes not only living organisms, but also artifacts, mental representations, human behavior. Deformity has ceased to be only a physical, anatomical external character, accessible to visual perception, but has become mental, spiritual, moral. It is no longer necessarily congenital, but may be acquired as a result of diseases, injuries, etc. Only such a prototypical sign as an anomaly, or a violation of norms and stereotypes, remains unchanged.

Conclusions

The category of ugliness in Russian culture is sacred, conveying Orthodox Christian ideas about the connection between ugliness and divine destiny. The result of our study is a cognitive-and-semantic representation of the category of ugliness in the Russian language as a prototype, i.e., a set of the most important properties

that are relevant to native speakers. To solve this problem, a set of methods was applied: a component analysis of the lexical representatives of the category in the Russian language — the words *urodstvo* ('ugliness'), *bezobraziye* ('deformity'), *nekrassivost'* ('unattractiveness') based on their dictionary definitions; comparative analysis of the results of component analysis; construction of a prototype of ugliness as a bundle of the most important primary features; establishment of a sample category and its non-exemplary representatives based on the concept of E. Roche's prototypes.

Non-ideal representatives of the concept of ugliness were formed in the minds of native speakers of language and culture in the process of development and changes in social norms and stereotypes. These changes were reflected in the language: in the expansion of the meanings of words expressing the concept of ugliness, towards an increase in the types of object of ugliness, the spread of anomaly to the mental sphere, etc. In other words, in metaphorical, metonymic changes in the meanings of the words *urodstvo*, *bezobraziye*, *nekrassivost'*, fixed in dictionaries, there was a tendency to destroy the original ideal model — the prototype of ugliness.

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