

Abstract Concepts and Abstract Nouns – Conceptual Reification in Abstract Language

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The subject of this article is the problematic status of abstract nouns in cognitive linguistics, resulting from their seeming lack of defined schematic content. Due to this lack of schematic structure, accounting for their conceptual representation is made additionally difficult. The project undertaken has four main objectives:

- to present recent developments in the description of nominals,
- to make an attempt at clarifying the terminology used in cognitive linguistics literature, in order to allow a precise formulation of emergent research questions and to eliminate terminological confusion. (The potential for terminological inconsistencies comes from the use of terms, *reification* and *objectification* in literature notably in the work of Langacker and Szwedek).
- to highlight problem areas in early and modern approaches to nominals, relating specifically to abstract nouns, such as *fear*, *advertising*, or *luck*;
- finally, to propose solutions to these problems which would fit within the commitments of the cognitive approach (chiefly the broad commitment to building a theory of meaning that would be psychologically plausible).

Thus, the present article should be seen as a voice in an ongoing discussion on the status of nouns in language and the conceptual role of nominalized concepts. Consequently, I am going to discuss selected traditional and more recent approaches to defining and classifying nouns, such as Jespersen's classification – from the perspective of grammar, understood as syntax and semantics, Lyons's classification – a semantically-oriented approach, Bauer and Szymanek – word-formation and morphology, and Quirk – a predominantly syntax-oriented approach). In the discussion, I plan to identify certain key problems either voiced by these authors or evident in their approach to nouns. Subsequently, I will cover the solutions to some of these problems provided within the paradigm of cognitive linguistics (notably by Langacker and Szwedek). This will serve as the basis for posing further research questions and hypotheses; answers to which are, in my view, central to providing a coherent description of abstract nouns.

The main research questions are:

- how arbitrary is the division between **living beings and plants** as one category and **things** as another (as evident in the examples provided 2.2, after Jespersen)?
- what is the dividing line between abstract and concrete nouns. Can it be reduced to abstract and concrete usages of nouns, or is there a more clear dividing criterion (cf. the example of *we trapped a bear* vs. *bear-trapping* discussed in section 2.3, following the discussion of Lyons's classification).
- since more schematic concepts are less specific (less detail is present), what is the mechanism deciding which parts of structure are used and which are not in expressions involving a highly schematic, highly abstract concept like *luck*.