VERBA COGITANDI IN ENGLISH: VERBS OF OPINION

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The article focuses on verba cogitandi (verbs that express our mental activity) use in English. Given that such verbs reflect the interconnected mental processes that are invisible, and their polysemantic

nature, the verbs like think, believe, guess, suppose etc. used in different contexts present certain difficulties for EFL/ESP learners. Verbs of opinion, reflecting on the inseperable relationship of all mental processes that take place in our minds, not only introduce the associated judgment, but also characterize it as the result of a certain thinking process with all its characteristics and peculiarities. The article also discusses the cases of verbs of opinion use in mental (e.g. I believe you.) and modal (e.g. I think you were going to sneak out.) meanings.

Key-words: Verba cogitandi, mental activity, mental processes, thinking, verbs of opinion, mental, modal, judgement, attitude, etc.

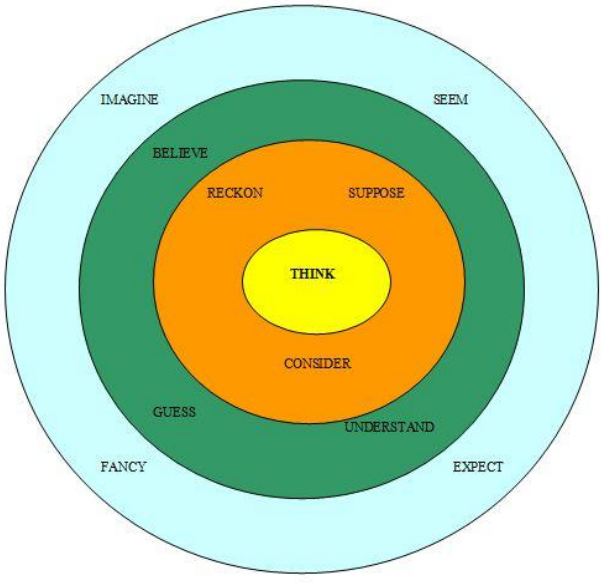
Verba cogitandi (e.g. think, believe, know, consider, guess, suppose, understand etc.), i.e. the verbs that characterize our mental activity and reflect the complex mental/psychic processes that take place in our minds, mirror the many-sided connection of our thinking processes with other aspects of human activity. This complex "association" highlights the fact that all our mental/psychic processes are closely interconnected and, consequently, cannot exist and/or function as isolated acts (except the cases of people suffering from the related brain traumas, deviations etc.). Verba cogitandi "cover" different aspects of human relations, including those of inter- and intra- personal communication. They also possess a complex semantic structure (polysemy adding to that complexity) which contributes to the difficulties in their understanding and acquisition (by language learners). This fact should be taken into consideration and addressed appropriately while working on the related EFL/ESP courses design and development. As semantically verba cogitandi cannot be directly "caught" and therefore often appear in the contexts that sound "opaque", they are not always easy to understand. Their polysemantic nature and the fact that the concepts that they reflect are rather blurry add to the associated difficulties. It "reminds" us about the fact that all mental states and processes (non-transparent ones) are closely interrelated and function in synergy. Verba cogitandi, therefore, should be examined in close interrelation and interdependence. To this end, the given research considers the cases of verba cogitandi (believe, cogitate, consider, expect, fancy, figure, find, guess, imagine, know, learn, mean, meditate, mull, ponder, realize, reckon, remember, ruminate, think, see, suppose, understand etc.) use from interdisciplinary point of view and within the groups of verbs of thinking, knowing and opinion. Based on the entries for the leading verba cogitandi considered in our study (think, consider, know) elicited from such dictionaries as Advanced Learner's Dictionary, The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, American WORDPOWER Dictionary, Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Longman Essential Activator, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, Dictionary of Contemporary English, Oxford ESL Dictionary for students of American English, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, Roget's Thesaurus online dictionary, Webster's New World's Dictionary, and Webster's New World Large Print Dictionary, the following semes in common have been identified: to use your/the mind to ..., to have/be of an opinion, to weigh something (mentally)/ evaluate/estimate, to consider/reflect/ponder/ to think about something carefully/contemplate mentally, to have ideas, words or images, knowledge and information (about/on something) in your mind etc. As a result, the following three 'focus groups' of verbs were formed, i.e. the ones of knowing, thinking, and of opinion, the latter presenting special interest for the given article.

To better understand the issues related to the verbs of opinion group, the notion/meaning of "opinion" has been looked up in different sources, based on the interdisciplinary approach (in the related philosophy, psychology and language dictionaries). "Opinion" is defined as "non-reliable", which "can admit lies" knowledge, which can be "also not true" in Philosophic Encyclopedia Dictionary [18]. Opinion is presented as "an hypothesis or proposition entertained on rational grounds but concerning which doubt can reasonably exist; a belief. (Lat. opinio, from opinor, to think)" in the Dictionary of Philosophy by Dagobert D. Runes. [9]. It is defined as "a proposition that is accepted as true without compelling grounds, therefore falling short of being a belief and far short of constituting knowledge" in the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology [10]. It is presented as acceptance of a proposition despite a lack of the conclusive evidence that would

result in certain knowledge of its truth, [17] from Latin *sentential*. In the online version of Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary [12] the following entries for "opinion" are provided: a thought or belief about something or someone; the thoughts or beliefs that a group of people have; a judgment about someone or something; a judgment made by an expert. From the etymological point of view, "opinion" is marked as "Middle English, from Old French, from Latin opīniō, opīniōn-, from opīnārī, to think", which again points to the integrated link existing between all verba cogitandi, and namely verbs of thinking, knowing, and opinion. "Opinie" is defined in DEX as "părere, judecată, idee", and in turn, „judecată" is presented as 1. facultatea de a gândi logic; raţiune, inteligenţă, gândire. 2. formă logică fundamentală exprimată printr+o propoziţie în care se afirmă sau se neagă ceva. 3. acţiunea de a judeca". [15]

Verbs of opinion should be analyzed through the prism of the peculiarities of thinking reflected in them, considering such notions as thinking, opinion, and language, intertwined and dependent on each other, highlighting the impossibility of separation/isolation of different stages of thinking process taking place in our mind. Based on the definitions of "opinion" in the language dictionaries, the most commonly met entries among others are "a belief or conclusion held with confidence but not substantiated by positive knowledge or proof"; "a judgment based on special knowledge and given by an expert/ a judgment or estimation of the merit of a person or thing"[13]; "the prevailing view"; **"**belief, feeling, view, idea, theory, notion, conviction, point of view, sentiment, viewpoint, persuasion, conjecture"; "estimation, view, impression, assessment, judgment, evaluation, conception, appraisal, considered opinion" [11]; "the attitude that you have towards something, especially your thoughts about how good it is"etc. [14]

The main parameters of the field of verbs of opinion in the given research go in line with the Gak's [6] mental field concept, where it represents the indistinct/vague field, which, however, has a rather clear nuclear, the structure of which includes the center of the field, sectors, defined by the main parameters of thinking, modifications within the sectors, nearest/closest neighbors, far neighbors. In our research the nuclear verb of the group of verbs of opinion is *think.* The verb *think* proves to be the most frequent and most often used in English which in turn comprises the majority of all verbs expressing opinion. It also has the most general meaning and at the same time conveys its various shades, and acts as the main/ central verb (nuclear) in the group of verbs of thinking in the given research. Back to the Old English, there could be traced 3 verbs (репсал, рупсап, and wenan) that can be referred to as the nuclear lexemes of the field of opinion. [7] It is interesting that the borderlines of the lexical semantic field of opinion in OE were also fuzzy/indistinct, and the lexical units that belong to the field of opinion also make a part of other fields that intersect with the field of opinion. The same situation can be tracked in ME. Another thing in common for the verbs of opinion in OE and ME is the use of the construction expressing opinion with the help of subordinate clause with 'that'. Similar to ME, in OE the nuclear elements of the OE field of opinion are the universal means of expressing various shades of opinion (like the ME think).



Schematic representation of the verbs of opinion group

As mentioned above, the mental field not only has a complex inner structure, but also intersects with other semantic fields, which reflects the direct /link/connection of thinking processes with other aspects of human activity. Considering the verbs of thinking, knowing and opinion, we

once again face the interconnections existing between the mental processes taking place in human's mind, which is reflected in language, in semantics of the verbs that belong to mental field, and particularly the relations existing between the ones of thinking, knowing and opinion. While the thought is the result of the thinking process, judgment presents its universal logical form and structural unit. In turn, judgment expressing the evaluation/ appreciation of something, attitude to somebody or something, forms someone's opinion. Thereby, *opinion* can be considered as the result of thinking process.[8] Therefore, it should also possess the main characteristics/ signs of thought, and characteristic properties of thinking. The attitude transmitted through the verbs of opinion, connects a person (as a subject of opinion) and the whole diversity of judgments/ assertions (attitudes, assessments, etc.), which can eventually become the contents of the opinion. At the same time, the logic of thinking is that each of its stages presupposes expressing opinions, reflecting the sequence of thinking operations flow, which is illustrated by the use of different verbs of opinion.

Opinion making/expressing is closely connected with the notion of *modality*, through which a speaker's attitude, judgment etc. is expressed. The type of modality which expresses the established by speaker attitude of the contents of statement to reality from the point of view of its being true or false is commonly considered to serve as the expression of epistemic possibility and demonstrates the degree of understanding the interconnections of reality on part of the speaker. Verbs of opinion can be considered to present one of the most natural language means to express epistemic modality, as they "introduce to the statement/assertion a certain subjective context, like doubt, assumption, conclusion/judgment, which characterize the attitude of the speaker to the statement made'[5]. As a result of processing such most common/frequently used verba cogitandi as *think, know, believe, understand, guess* and *consider*, based on the examples elicited from 21 fiction works of American and British writers, the total of 8, 686 cases of their use were identified, 4, 555 (52.4 %) of them being the 1st person singular ones, i.e. the so called "I" cases. Even though the number of cases of verba cogitandi used in their "direct" meaning, i.e. mental/psychic one prevails, the mentioned verba cogitandi used in "I" constructions and expressing the personages'/characters' opinion all refer to the cases of the related verbs modal use (i.e. reveal in the related contexts the speaker's state of mind or knowledge, mood, attitude, opinion, doubt, serve as epistemic markers/pragmatic particles etc.):

e.g. "I *think* that when the moon is bright a great hush falls always upon Nature, as though she was taken up in wondering at her own beauty." [1]; e.g. "…I *suppose* drug runners have family feelings too [2] Most of those cases serve to express the character's opinion:

e.g. "*I don't think* Taylor loves me anymore," Jax says. "*I think* she's got her eye on Danny, our garbage man." [3]

e.g. "**I think** that's them, Al," said Ginny suddenly.[4]

e.g. "Oh, Lord," Angie says, swamping Taylor with a hug. "I about lost my mind this time. Once he got kidnapped down to the border by some mules, and that was bad but *I think* this was worst. Sit, let me get you same pie.[3]

e.g. "*I do not think so*, because he did not recognize the Resurrection Stone he turned into a Horcrux.' [4] etc.

The exact functions expressed by verba cogitandi, related "I+ verba cogitandi" constructions can be established only as a result of thorough analysis of the contexts in which they are used. While teaching verba cogitandi, and particularly reflecting on the functions of the 1st person singular cases, we should focus on the following ones: to name a mental process of reflection, to show attitudes towards the proposition (not being a part of it), to indicate something less than a total commitment by the speaker to the truth of the proposition, to orient towards the hearer's need to be liked and approved of (e.g. positive face, hedging cases), to state the speaker's thinking/believing, to serve an interpersonal function (of politeness or of involvement, for instance), to mitigate the force of the advice given, to display the speaker's true or "fake" uncertainty, to formulate his/her opinion or guess in a less strong/direct way, to express "insecure" knowledge, to keep informal conversation, to serve general communicative needs, or

universally developed interaction purposes, to name a mental process or state of holding or supporting an opinion, based on speaker's perceptions/ impressions, as well as for the purposes of topic transition or the participation framework, as an expression of uncertainty and tentativeness and others. The exact functions expressed by this or that verba cogitandi (in "I" constructions can be established via of thorough analysis of the contexts in which they are used. We should, therefore, consider the specifics of those contexts taking into consideration the subject area (the major) of our students. It refers to selecting the teaching materials, adjusting them to the needs of our students and applying the most appropriate ways of examining the particular cases of use in various contexts, depending on the department/major of the students we teach to and the curricula developed.

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