

SIGNIFICANCE OF UNITY OF LINGUISTIC LEVELS FOR TEXT COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

The presented article aims at ascertaining the importance of unity of all linguistic levels for comprehensive understanding of a text. Our research is based on analyzing tropes on different levels taking into consideration broad context as this latter plays the utmost essential role in grasping the main idea of any kind of literary work. The article tries to reveal the particular stages of the mechanism where all levels are synthesized. The highest level of synthesis, where a writer's world outlook and world image are involved, comprises morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, stylistic, symbolic and metasemiotic levels, i.e. all linguistic data. Analysis of all these levels are necessary for full comprehension of an utterance or a text, but if taken separately, neither of them is enough. The most important statement is that full and exhaustive understanding of a text can be reached by a deep dialogue between a writer and a reader where their functions are interchangeable.

Keywords: Broad context, Extralinguistic factors, Background knowledge, Understanding, Comprehension

Introduction:

The presented article aims at ascertaining the importance of unity of all linguistic levels for comprehensive understanding of a text. Our research is based on analyzing tropes on different levels taking into consideration broad context as this latter plays the utmost essential role in grasping the main idea of any kind of literary work. While noting the importance of context we have in mind that it is impossible to exactly determine the borders of broad context. Very often reading the whole text is not enough to penetrate into the depth of a writer's intention. Thus, the context should be broadened even more until the goal is achieved (full understanding of a text). This statement implies that in this case, extralinguistic factors should be involved what, on its turn, implies background knowledge. Very often, broad context is required not only for comprehending the main idea of any text, but also for understanding the implication of even a simple phrase. Though, sometimes in the latter case a word-combination (which is considered to be the narrowest context) is also enough.

As the research is based on trope analysis, it is worth mentioning that words are not "born" as tropes; it is namely the context where words become tropes; it is namely the context where words acquire stylistic and emotional colouring and also such new figurative meanings (the so called occasional meanings) which have never been and may never be fixed in the language. These figurative meanings emerge on the basis of our conceptions on the surrounding world which play the colossal role in forming new meanings based on old meanings and old contexts by adding some specific meaning in the particular situational context.

The presented research is an attempt to determine the mechanism which ensures the use of tropes or occasional word-combinations by a writer and those conditions that enable a reader to understand them adequately. Analysis of the material from literature helped us understand what stands beyond each word in any particular case and what assists the realization of a writer's intention.

Fundamental study of the materials from dictionaries and literary texts elucidated the inner complexity of morphological and semantic-functional relations existing in any collocation.

The first stage of the analysis is the **morphological level** where certain words and phrases were compared on the emic (lexicographic) and etic (text) levels. The analysis showed that there appear a lot of words which, owing to some phonological, morphological, semantic restrictions, are not fixed in dictionaries, though they are quite often met in literary works; for instance, “*Irishly*”, “*Elizabethanly*”, “*lizardly*”, “*yellowly*”, “*greenly*”, “*whitely*” and many others.

Thus, such kind of formations can quite freely be used in fiction, i.e. here we do not meet any restrictions. They are used by a writer in certain cases and for certain purposes. In other words, they often are occasional formations.

The next stage of the analysis is **syntactic level** where word-combinations are studied for the following purpose: what is the syntactic role of a modifier and modified; what is the specificity of their distribution towards an utterance. We were interested whether syntactic analysis reveals that loading which a modifier has in the utterance. In many cases particular syntagmas are quite standard and fully correspond to syntactic norms. But sometimes, rather interesting cases are revealed:

A modifier can appear as the attribute of the whole sentence. “*Definitely, she is the most beautiful lady*”. “*Eventually, we completed our work*”.

There are cases when though a modifier makes a syntagmatic bond with a verb, semantically it is related to a noun, i.e. in reality it defines not a verb, but a noun.

“*On the walls silver fish wondered profusely among plants*”.

(S. Maugham “The Razor’s Edge”)

Notwithstanding the fact that the modifier (in this particular case adverb) is grammatically connected with the verb “*wondered*”, semantically they cannot be related. It emphasizes abundance of fish.

Though syntactic level is rather important, it is not enough for revealing the semantic loading of this or that word/utterance.

The following stage of the analysis is **lexical level**. On this level, certain words are analyzed considering their nominative meaning. As usual, they are studied on both – emic and etic levels. On emic level, understanding of a word is mainly limited to denotational, referential function where correlation between a modifier and a modified is clear enough. But on the etic level, in most cases, denotational meaning is not enough to understand what this or that word/utterance expresses or means or what stands beyond it in reality. It becomes necessary to determine the signification, consider a writer's intention and world outlook. But for the abovementioned, descriptive analysis and, consequently, lexical level is not enough.

Thus, it becomes necessary to move to the higher level of semantic analysis – **stylistic level** where trope meanings predominate. Trope meaning cannot be expected on standard semantic level and its understanding requires a new mechanism. Stylistic level somehow involves **symbolic level**. It should be noted that there is a bulk of words that have fixed symbolic meanings, but in many cases even absolutely neutral words can acquire them contextually.

In literary texts, having passed the symbolic meaning, a word can acquire a new poetic shade. So, the language is enriched with trope meanings; words become emotionally

coloured and stylistically loaded. They acquire evaluation function which is one of the most important attributes of a trope.

Thus, linguistic units develop new meanings on different levels and in different contexts. Namely these new meta-meanings are studied on **metasemiotic level** where all metaphoric formations or all kinds of stylistic devices and occasional expressions appear in abundance. On this level we can meet such strange word-combinations which are absolutely not understandable on the ordinary semantic level and even seem funny on the lexical level.

Metasemiotic level is characteristic to the individual style of literary work. The whole potential of a word/utterance is revealed namely on this level, but in order to fully penetrate into a writer's intention, a reader has to consider not only linguistic, but also extralinguistic factors, such as: a writer's epoch, the epoch described in the texts, a writer's world outlook and world image, his creative peculiarities, etc. Namely background knowledge will help a reader understand a text thoroughly and reach its final intension.

Thus, the knowledge of broad context and the surrounding world is especially necessary on the mentioned level. Without considering broad context not only a whole text, but quite often even some phrases are completely vague.

Let us analyze a couple of examples:

“Janice, Irishly earnest, still grappled with the moral issue”.

(J. Updike “A Gift from the City”)

In order to understand the word-combination “*Irishly earnest*”, it is necessary to have background knowledge and know what kind of association the word “*Irish*” provokes in people for whom English language is native and which features this nation is supposed to possess. Having in mind that Longman New Universal Dictionary gives such definition of the word “*Irish*”: 1) *of Ireland or the Irish language*; 2) *amusingly illogical*, we will easily realize that namely the second figurative meaning is realized in the mentioned sentence and the underlined word-combination functions on the metasemiotic level.

“One autumn day Charles shot at a very strange bird that ran from the border of one of his uncle's fields. When he discovered what he had shot and its rarity, he was vaguely angry with himself. The bird was stuffed, and for ever after stared glassily like an octoroon turkey out of its glass case in the drawing-room at Winsyatt”.

(J. Fowles “The French Lieutenant's Woman”)

To understand this passage we should know what is meant under the word “*glassily*”, what implication it is carrying. This word acquires contextual symbolic meaning – *lifeless, speechless, stunned*. The stuffed bird was gazing at the author namely with such lackluster eyes. In the given case, even symbolic meaning and, consequently, symbolic level is not enough to understand the passage completely and exhaustively. But knowledge of the broad context and the epoch described in the novel will enable us to easily imagine the hero's inner state and fully comprehend the semantics of the utterance. The hero of the Victorian epoch is facing the serious problems due to breaking his engagement. If we take into consideration all those difficulties this fact would result in, we will easily understand the hero's nervousness and irritation. He unaccountably and instinctively kills a very rare bird and the author expresses the hero's fury as if with the fury of the dead bird which is staring with lackluster eyes. After the analysis it becomes obvious that here we deal with the writer's world outlook.

Conclusion

Thus, we tried to reveal the particular stages of the mechanism where all levels are synthesized. The highest level of synthesis, where a writer's world outlook and world image are involved, comprises morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, stylistic, symbolic and metasemiotic levels, i.e. all linguistic data. Analysis of all these levels are necessary for full

comprehension of an utterance or a text, but if taken separately, neither of them is enough. The most important statement is that full and exhaustive understanding of a text can be achieved by a deep dialogue between a writer and a reader where their functions are interchangeable.

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