

COGNITIVE APPROACH TO LITERARY TEXT INTERPRETATION

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У статті йдеться про досвід інтерпретації короткого англomовного оповідання з урахуванням базових положень фреймової семантики. Актуальність обраної тематики визначається загальною спрямованістю сучасних лінгвістичних досліджень на розгляд особливостей репрезентації знань у мові, а також за допомогою мови й тексту. Дослідження тексту крізь призму основних типів його розуміння орієнтується на положення когнітивної семантики, згідно з якими зміст усього тексту або його фрагмента не може бути зведений до об'єктивної характеристики об'єктів текстової дійсності, тому що один і той самий об'єкт, залежно від знань і намірів автора, може бути описаний як за допомогою різноманітних мовних форм, так й у різному ракурсі авторського бачення світу.

Ключові слова: художній текст, семантичне розуміння, когнітивне розуміння, смислове розуміння, фрейм, семантика, інтерпретація, наміри автора, реакції читача.

В статье рассматривается опыт интерпретации короткого англоязычного рассказа с учетом базовых положений фреймовой семантики. Актуальность выбранной тематики определяется общей направленностью современных лингвистических исследований на рассмотрение особенностей репрезентации знаний в языке, а также с помощью языка и текста. Исследование текста сквозь призму основных типов его понимания ориентируется на положения когнитивной семантики, согласно которым содержание всего текста или его фрагмента не может быть сведено к объективной характеристике объектов текстовой действительности, так как один и тот же объект, в зависимости от знаний и намерений автора, может быть описан как с помощью различных языковых форм, так и в разном ракурсе авторского видения мира.

Ключевые слова: художественный текст, семантическое понимание, когнитивное понимание, смысловое понимание, фрейм, семантика, интерпретация, намерения автора, реакции читателя.

The article focuses on a short story interpretation based on key postulates of frame semantics. Topicality of the research is determined by a general tendency of modern linguistics to analyze how knowledge is represented in text. The study of text within main types of understanding is based on fundamentals of cognitive semantics, according to which contents of text or its fragment differs from objective characterization of textual reality, because the same object, depending on the author's general knowledge and intentions can be described with the help of various linguistic forms and in different perspectives reflecting the author's world outlook.

Key words: literary text, semantic understanding, cognitive understanding, sense-extracting understanding, frame, semantics, interpretation, author's intentions, reader's reactions.

In various approaches to text decoding since the ancient times linguists have been trying to most fundamentally differentiate between 'explanation' and 'understanding', 'cause' and 'meaning', or 'meaning' and 'sense' [21, p. 11]. Text becomes an intermediary between the writer with his/her cognitive, social, psychological, cultural characteristics, background knowledge and the reader whose rational and emotional (based on the emotional significance of the information for his/her life experience) attitude to the world is influenced by the textual reality. Thus, topicality of the research is determined by the fact that certain parts of text (textual elements, components, fragments, segments, situations, etc.) become marked for the reader. The aim of the article is to analyze ways of forecasting the impact of textual elements on the readers' perception of the textual world. Its tasks are to highlight

how the meaning of a textual segment correlates with the sense ascribed in the process of its recognizing, comprehending, understanding and interpreting. Prospects are to value textual reality in terms of semantic and cognitive approaches and pinpoint the complexity of the interface between people, their language, and the knowledge implemented in literary text.

There exist a variety attempts to define the concept of literary understanding, or text comprehension [1, p. 11; 10; 11, p. 186; 123; 25, p. 27; 26, p. 34, and others.]. The concept itself has a dual nature as, on the one hand, it is universal, being “a power of judgment” [Kant, cit. at 22, p. 14] and at the same time it is unique as a way of co-experiential and co-thinking attitude towards the world in general: for the world has the will and the mind exists in the first place [24, p. 42]. The theory and art of understanding are the focus of hermeneutic approach which places interpretation of meaning at the center of linguistic inquiry. The tradition of biblical and literary interpretation stemming from W. Dilthey [17], H. G. Gadamer [18] and other German thinkers touches upon a number of universal questions about objectivity / subjectivity, difference in formalistic and historical-cultural approaches, as well as relationship between the author’s intentions and the reader’s (interpreter’s) perception and interpretation of textual world. In this perspective text is considered to be an imprint of objective reality that reflects the author’s world outlook and projects one of probable realities for the reader (interpreter). In terms of philological hermeneutics textual reality can be decoded within at least three types of text comprehension: semantic, cognitive and sense-extracting [4, p. 23]. The first type happens while processing the meaning (explicit and implicit) of textual units, when units contextually enrich or change their meaning(s). Cognitive understanding occurs when the meaning(s) actualized by textual units accentuate (a) certain bit(s) of information. Sense-extracting understanding (literary interpretation / Verstehen) is built on the ‘disobjectification’ of the subjective reality. It gets actualized when some abstract notions, such as the reality of consciousness, feelings, will, etc. are being used in text. The three types of understanding can be applied to literary text processing owing to the differences between types of human experience fixed in the language in forms of iconic images, objective situations and subjective views [3, p. 21; 6, p. 154], and correspond to three types of situations presented in text: verbal images, iconic-like objective situations, subjective impressions, perceptions and feelings.

The principles of assembling and accumulating meanings actualized by textual elements into one totally comprehensible meaning are also researched by frame semantics. ‘Homo loquens’ seems unable to understand the meaning of any word without proper background knowledge – the essential knowledge that helps decode the meaning of a lexical unit and attribute sense to it [20, p. 32]. An independent structure for organization of human knowledge and experience about a stereotypic situation is defined as frame within a linguo-cognitive approach [6, p. 154; 9, p. 6; 13, p. 29; 14, p. 55; 16, p. 3]. It is considered the basis for defining concepts in a linguo-cultural approach [2, p. 20; 5, p. 45; 15, p. 78]. It is a constituent of gestalt theory for the followers of a linguo-psychological approach [19, p. 73]. Frame comprises data about essential, typical and possible for representing a stereotypic situation [7, p. 18] including verbal and extra-verbal information relevant to a word [12, p. 27]. It organizes human behavior and allows the addressee to correctly interpret it in connection with the categories of stereotypic / non-stereotypic situations.

Literary text being an imprint of human culture and experience serves as a certain socio-code of historical, cultural, religious, etc. character. Thus, it represents the reality and its fragments, interpreting the state of a certain society element as well as its verbal and cultural contacts. The object-centric frame (*Such, Someone Existing, Does something, Here and Now*) [8, p. 16] allows the reader to analyze and interpret textual semantics in terms of the in-text knowledge. The slot *Someone Existing* serves as a generating information link, due to which three other basic slots are developed: 1) the slot *Such* exposes physical, psychological, mental and other characteristics of the protagonist; 2) the slot *Does something* represents the textual event(s); 3) the slot *Here and Now* pinpoints the spacio-temporal characteristics of the textual reality.

In terms of understanding theory semantic comprehension is based on the experience of verbal knowledge and memory, cognitive understanding is built on the knowledge from experience, and sense-extracting understanding comes from the knowledge of experiences. Accordingly, in semantic understanding the meaning and sense overlap; in cognitive understanding the reflection of real-life situations result in the actualization of sense; in sense-extracting understanding is built on the reflection of situations related to the subjective reality [3, p. 15–18]. The latter type of understanding plays the most significant role in the art of communication. Owing to this it becomes possible not only to understand the factual information of the text, but also ‘recognize meaningful experiences’ implemented in it. However, the role of the other two types of textual understanding (semantic and cognitive) should not be underestimated.

Ch. Fillmore wrote that meanings are relativized to scenes [14, p. 62]. According to this statement meanings have internal structure which is determined relative to a background frame or a scene. This illustrates Ch. Fillmore’s use of the term ‘frame’ as an idealization of a coherent individualized perception, memory, experience, action, or object [16, p. 79]. In an attempt to correlate the basic postulates of frame semantics with philological hermeneutics one should assume that if semantic understanding depends on the coordination of perceptual signals (based on associations), decoding (of an elementary sign situation), and reflection on memorized experience (internal lexicon) [cf. 4, p. 34], then either separate slot of the conventional object-centric frame (*Such, Someone Existing, Does something, Here and Now*) can comprise a certain bit of knowledge, the micro-component, the same highlighted so that it appeals to the reader’s linguistic experience and provokes his/her reaction to it. There can be several factors that help the reader recognize a certain discrepancy in the language sign: 1) ‘provocative’ semantics of a language unit, its connotation (e.g. *a child – a kid*); 2) unconventionally used iconic images (e.g. *a monster* to name a child); 3) an intended non-accuracy (on various language levels) in using a language sign (e.g. *‘I’m lovin’ it’* – the slogan of MacDonald’s).

In terms of text analysis the aim of semantic comprehension is to recognize a sign, a situation, a signal that will further lead to significant events. Thus, the initial paragraph of a well-known story *Charles* by Sh. Jackson becomes semantically and cognitively charged as it demonstrates how the event is being described:

e. g. *The day my son Laurie started kindergarten he renounced corduroy overall with bibs and began wearing blue jeans with a belt; I watched him go off the first morning with the older girl next door, seeing clearly that an era of my life ended, my sweet-voiced nursery-school tot replaced by a long-trousered, swaggering character who forgot to stop at the corner and wave good-bye to me* (27, p. 93).

As we can see the slot *Here and Now* is represented by two lexical units. The first one ‘*The day my son Laurie started kindergarten*’ becomes foregrounded due to the usage of the definite article at the very beginning of the story (*in media res*). The significance of the date is emphasized by the second temporal marker ‘*an era of my life ended*’. The meanings of the words ‘era’ (*a period of time considered as being of a distinctive character; epoch*) and ‘end’ (*to bring or come to a finish; to die*) imply the significance of the day. The slot *Someone Existing* (*tot replaced by a long-trousered, swaggering character* – the narrator is naming her son Laurie ‘a tot’ and ‘a character’) serves as a generating information link, due to which three other basic slots are developed: 1) the dominant slot is specified by nominations *tot* (*a young child; toddler*) versus *character* (*the combination of traits and qualities distinguishing the individual nature of a person*); 2) the slot *Such* is filled with two compound adjectives the meanings of which owing to the contrast contextually form antitheses (*my sweet-voiced nursery-school – long-trousered, swaggering*); 3) the slot *Does something* represents the textual event that becomes significant to the narrator of the story (*who forgot to stop at the corner and wave good-bye to me*). Due to the underlined textual elements the passage becomes marked and serves as a sign or signal for unexpectedness of upcoming events.

As every word is significant reservoir of knowledge [23, p. 25], the purpose of cognitive understanding is to estimate the content of a particular textual fragment by ‘removing’ from it knowledge about the world. The reader processes the implemented textual knowledge while fitting it into his/her system of concepts, beliefs, and values and in this way forms an attitude to what is said in the text. Traditionally, textual situations reflect the structure and diversity of situations of the objective reality [11, p. 183]. General knowledge of the author and the reader of and about prototypical situations helps the addresser make use of cognitive information (beliefs, opinions, attitudes, motivations, and so forth) [6, p. 155–156] and appeal to the reader via explicit and implicit (by comparison, association, parallel images) situations. Still the information is compressed as the situation itself makes it clear whether something described is right or wrong, positive or negative, etc.

For instance, in the story mentioned above a set of situations about bad behavior of a boy named Charles is given. They expose the knowledge in such a way that all the slots of the frame become blended, adding supplementary details to the dominant slot *Does something*.

e. g. *The next day Laurie remarked at lunch, as soon as he sat down, “Well, Charles was bad again today.” He grinned enormously and said, “Today Charles hit the teacher.” (27, p. 94); Wednesday and Thursday were routine: Charles yelled during the story hour and hit a boy in the stomach and made him cry. On Friday Charles stayed after school again, and so did all the other children (27, p. 94).*

The sense-extracting understanding is targeted at deciphering the subjective evaluation of the reality (the author’s outlook) implemented in text. It implies the restoration of the author’s cognitive activity [4, p. 58]. Thus, in the process of sense-extracting understanding the reader has an opportunity not only to get an idea of the author’s worldview reflected in the text, but also presumably establish a rapport (empathy) with the author, in other words to accept his / her experience/perception of objective reality. At the level of sense-extracting understanding the reader is supposed 1) to recognize meaningful linguistic resources of the text (semantic understanding), 2) to distinguish (a) prototypical situation(s) actualized in the text (cognitive understanding), and 3) to discover (see the sense) of hidden or deep meanings that verbalize artistic exploration of reality. So, some textual components that outline the key message of literary text acquire informative and emotional significance. Meanwhile, their semantics within a particular text is enriched owing to additional meanings attained in the context. The object-centre frame is perceived by the reader as a symbol, the components of which are closely united by the general idea and a result become amalgamated. The slots Such, Someone Existing, Does something, Here and Now perceived as a holistic structure explicate a certain notion, for example, of an uncontrollable child: *[Fresh/ {Naughty} {Disobedient}] [Charles] [Hits/Kicks/ Yells/ {Misbehaves}] [Wednesday/ Thursday/Friday/ Routine {Always}]*. So the name ‘Charles’ becomes a symbol of a rude, naughty and misbehaving person.

e. g. *“It’ll be all right,” my husband said reassuringly. “Bound to be people like Charles in the world. Might as well meet them now as later” (27, p. 94).*

With the third week of kindergarten Charles was an institution in our family: the baby was being a Charles when she cried all afternoon: Laurie did a Charles when he filled his wagon full of mud and pulled it through the kitchen; even my husband, when he caught his elbow in the telephone cord and pulled telephone, ash tray, and a bowl of flowers off the table, said, after the first minute, “Looks like Charles” (27, p. 94).

In the process of reading a story an addresser is being led to believe that there is a boy in the kindergarten whose name is Charles and who keeps misbehaving. Still, certain textual markers point at semantic and cognitive discrepancies and misappropriations within the events of textual reality. For example, due to semantic understanding the slot *Someone Existing* is filled with the notions *‘the front door slamming’, the voice suddenly become raucous shouting*” (27, p. 93). Owing to these textual elements, the behavior of the protagonist (Laurie) that is not explicitly

discussed is being foregrounded. The changes in the boy become more obvious by the situations with the slot *Does Something*, which are deciphered via cognitive understanding that help the reader recognize patterns of Laurie's bad behavior: “*spilled his baby sister's milk*” (27, p. 93); “*regarded his father coldly*” (27, p. 93); “*addressing his bread and butter*”; “*he began to laugh insanely*” (27, p. 94); “*Everyone stayed with him (Charles after school as punishment)*” (27, p. 94); *she (the teacher) said primly* (27, p. 95) and others. As a result, the content of the final paragraph where Laurie's mother gets to know that there is no boy named Charles in the kindergarten acquires a symbolic meaning. The story with an open end can be definitely completed with the help of sense-extracting understanding: it is Laurie who keeps misbehaving and telling tales about a Charles.

e.g. “*Yes,*” *I said, laughing, “you must have your hands full in that kindergarten with Charles.”* “Charles?” she said. “We don't have any Charles in the kindergarten” (27, p. 95).

To summarize, the study of text from semantic and cognitive perspectives deals with the peculiarities of the text-represented knowledge, processing of which is correlated with a whole spectrum of human knowledge. Contextual meanings of textual components is or becomes significant due to semantic understanding; cognitive understanding of the textual reality helps correlate situations actualized in a literary text with general knowledge of the world and its realia. In the result of sense-extracting understanding deep, hidden meanings are recognized and decoded. They reflect the author's intentions, attitude and feelings and are supposedly aimed at appealing to the reader's beliefs and target at causing his/her reactions to the textual reality. In terms of frame semantics textual elements can be viewed as cognitively charged textual components that reflect knowledge embodied in literary text. The knowledge of the language and in the language are implemented in textual components that fill in the slots of a conventional frame; the knowledge of situations typical for the real world is reflected in the textual components that comprise a blended frame; and the knowledge about symbols in a textual reality is actualized through the textual elements that constitute an amalgamated frame. The three types of understanding (semantic, cognitive and sense-extracting) are aimed at deciphering the author's knowledge and intentions that are directly expressed or implied in text. Certain textual components that are heterogeneous due to their semiotic, cognitive, semantic, formal and functional features stimulate readers' reactions and/or cause their attitude towards the events, protagonists or phenomena described in literary text.

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