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INTERPRETATION POTENTIAL OF LITERARY TEXT IN THE COGNITIVE DIMENSION

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The article presents the overview of approaches to the study of the ways to represent knowledge formats in the literary text. Insights into the ways of objectivization of structured knowledge are viewed from the cognitive perspective with emphasis on the study of correlation between language and thought. The author confirms the necessity to study the means that provide textual representation of the structured system of general and socio-cultural knowledge and emphasizes the need for further development of the approach to literary text interpretation that is based on the study of complex dependencies between different models entwined in the text.

Key words: general knowledge, socio-cultural knowledge, context of interpretation, text model, objectivization.

У статті наведені узагальнені підходи до вивчення особливостей репрезентації форматів знань в художньому тексті. Закономірності текстової об'єктивації структурованих знань розглядаються з позицій когнітивного підходу з урахуванням корелятивних взаємозв'язків між мовою, культурою і пізнанням. Авторка доводить правомірність урахування прагматичного наповнення лінгвістичних засобів, задіяних в репрезентації структурованої системи загальних та соціокультурних знань в текстовому просторі, та наголошує на необхідності подальшої розробки методики інтерпретації художнього тексту, що базується на вивченні складних взаємозв'язків між різними моделями, представленими у текстовій площині.

Ключові слова: загальні знання, соціокультурні знання, інтерпретаційний контекст, текстова модель, об'єктивація.

Cognitive linguistics as a modern school of linguistic theory and practice uses a broad range of converging methods from different cognitive sciences in order to study language, conceptual systems, human cognition, and general meaning construction. According to the overview offered by G. Fauconnier, at present cognitive linguistics mainly deals with the study of the ways of structuring basic conceptual categories such as space and time, scenes and events, entities and processes, motion and location, force and causation. So, cognitive linguistics addresses the structuring of ideational and affective categories attributed to cognitive agents, such as attention and perspective, volition and intention. Moreover, in doing so, it develops a rich conception of grammar that reflects fundamental cognitive abilities: the ability to form structured conceptualizations with multiple levels of organization, to conceive a situation at varying levels of abstraction, to establish correspondences between facets of different structures, and to construe the same situation in alternate ways [5, p. 1–2].

Emerging in the 1970s, cognitive linguistics is based on the ideas worked out by Ch. Fillmore, R. Lakoff, E. Rosch [6; 8; 12]. Early theories were partly philosophical in nature [3; 10; 11], though as a linguistic theory cognitive linguistics has always been closely connected with the findings from other cognitive sciences, particularly cognitive psychology, the main assumptions of which were developed by L. Talmy [14].

Despite numerous efforts of cognitive linguists R. Jackendoff, J. Fauconnier, M. Turner, R. Lakoff to formulate major theoretical foundations of cognitive linguistics for the last few decades still it is evident

that cognitive linguistics is not so much a single closely-articulated theory as an approach that has a common set of assumptions, commitments and guiding principles, as it deals with the research of the complex relationship between human language, the mind and socio-physical experience that results in conceptualization and categorization of the reality that finds its manifestation in multilevel verbal representation of conceptual entities [4; 7; 9]. Interpretation is conceptually driven, so while perceiving any piece of information language users deal with it in a special way that is conditioned by a number of diverse factors such as expectations, beliefs, attitudes, prior knowledge, individual characteristics, emotions and other variables. It is reasonable to assume that these aspects are present in numerous social contexts, in particular in a concrete communicative situation along with the situational context of interpretation, which is the domain of manifestation of the systematized and structured knowledge.

The topicality of the research that aims to explore factors engaged in the perception, comprehension and interpretation of a literary text is predetermined by the necessity to study mechanisms of adequate decoding of multi-level meanings within the narrative continuum from the linguistic and cognitive perspectives to reveal how the semantics of the language, culture, and society contribute to the overall context and message of the literary text, it being a complex formation of different models (physical, social, and psychological world models) constructed of a set of presuppositions about different domains of reality that are the result of collective and individual conceptualization. The aim of the study of the literary text interpretation is to reveal complex dependencies between different models entwined in the text / discourse continuum. Interpretation to be relevant the approach that focuses on the research of the text / discourse is to be concerned with a number of tasks, ranging from the study of the nature of meaning, functions of language devices involved in the verbalization of conceptual content and the effect of pragmatics on the understanding of the verbally represented knowledge structures, all of which are to be integrated to ensure adequate processing of information at the multi-level organization of text semantics.

The study of language is regarded as the study of the use of language devices that are involved in the process of conveying different meanings. One of the common postulates concerning the distinction between language and speech is based upon the scope of meanings of linguistic and extra-linguistic means in the sense that when people engage in any language activity they draw unconsciously on vast cognitive and cultural resources, call up models and frames of experiences of actions, events, and situations. This way multiple connections that coordinate large arrays of information, and engage in creative mappings, transfers and elaborations are set to process textual meanings [15; 17].

Knowledge structures represented in language are either of universal or of individual character. People's understanding and processing of information is primarily determined by the general knowledge of the world, though knowledge formats are not always language based. According to P. Stockwell, the cognitive framework puts the choice of different level language means engaged in creating the literary text into a new perspective as its focus is on the study of the role of generalized structures and notions that make the conceptual basis of the narrative [13]. Due to the application of the cognitive approach the functional potential of the linguistic devices is revealed to the full.

Given the operational notions of cognitive science, which were designed to structure people's general knowledge, understanding of the nature of human cognition and communication is possible, as language users employ structures of expectations, often in the form of an abstract or generalized situation that is usually built on definite social, historical, cultural, and institutional information [2; 16; 18]. All these factors are to be explored in the perception and interpretation of any verbal message. With regard to the literary text, the aim of cognitive interpretation is to decode the multi-level meanings and patterns within its meaningful continuum to reveal how the semantics of the language, culture, history, and society contribute to the overall meaning of the text from the linguistic perspective as the domains of the text include sophisticated formations of the overlapping models of the physical

(objective) world as well as socio-cultural and psychological worlds [1]. The awareness of socio-cultural knowledge ensures adequate understanding of communication due to its inherent peculiarity of being constructed of shared presuppositions about different domains of the world, that are the result of the collective conceptualization by the language community, at times even generations are involved in the process. Within the framework for understanding there are two major approaches that can be applied: text-centered and reader-centered. It is logical to study overlapping models that lie in the area between the encoded information and the verbal textual structures that are to be decoded as it is evident that the meaning of any linguistic element as well as the combinations of elements and their links will be perceived and interpreted differently in each new act of reading and comprehension as well as in any new context [2; 13].

Except the formal interpretation that deals with explicit semantics of the literary text, for the reader cognitive processing is subjective in the sense that he assigns certain meaning to the literary discourse, based on the specific textual properties and the general knowledge of the world as well as on his aesthetic experience that includes beliefs, values, opinions, attitudes and feelings.

The interpretation process is many-sided and multi-staged, in addition to exploring the semantics of the narrative it attempts to decipher the aesthetic message any literary text conveys. This way interpretive processing concerns production and reception that are related to perception, reading, comprehension, understanding and other cognitive operations. It is impossible to deal simultaneously with all the cognitive processes that are connected with interpretation of the literary text. The semantic aspects of the literary comprehension processes make the foundation of relevant interpretation with emphasis on the study of macro-structures, that is to deal with the global level of the narrative. Evaluative and attitudinal aspects of literary text perception are the next stage as their characteristics are based on individual comprehension [2; 16].

Readers usually restore the schematic order that is stored in their general discourse knowledge, further processing of the text triggers different kinds of semantic and schematic transformations that are caused by the peculiarities of the sequences of events and actions represented in the text. So another obvious benefit of employing the principles of cognitive processing of the literary text lies in the possibility to extend the limits of its comprehension. The nature of the literary text that is characterized by a multi-level organization calls for an elaborate approach to the study of its semantics.

According to T. van Dijk's account, the non-deterministic feature of the relation between social situation and discourse is to be highlighted to emphasize that social situations influence how people speak, read, listen and understand. As societal or situational structures can only affect discourse through the mediation or the interface of the mental representations of language users, contexts are not some kinds of objective condition or direct cause, but rather subjective constructs designed and continuously updated in interaction by participants as members of groups and communities. Furthermore, context models organize the way discourse is structured and adapted to the whole communication situation in the same way as more general mental models organize how we adapt our action to the social situation and environment [2].

The concept of context models is very helpful in explaining properties of discourse that can not be explained by theories that assume that discourse is directly controlled by social situations that correlate with the world model. The notion "world model" reflects a number of characteristics and variables, such as context, connections across social, cognitive and discourse dimensions of the language proper, its functional representation in speech, and the very communication process between individuals and across social groups. Due to the complexity of the world model it is logical to maintain that both components are structured by a number of subcomponents, the range of which is predetermined by a variety of factors and parameters, all of these being interrelated and interdependent due to their crucial function of presenting diverse experiences, knowledge and information adequately so that to ensure flow of information and its relevant perception and interpretation.

Socio-cultural models contain psychological features, they include alongside the physical world two other major components – societal world and individual or personal world, which is subject to constant modification due to the changes in the amount of knowledge of the community or / and individual [1].

Obviously general knowledge organization serves a basis for adequate understanding of verbal messages within different language communities. Socio-cultural knowledge being an integral part of general knowledge system is studied primarily from two different perspectives: as a matter of language and that of thought due to its ontological status [4]. We support the view that socio-cultural knowledge is organized in sequences of prototypical events, characterized by a number of features connected directly to the nature of entities they represent. These sequences also include important information that stores knowledge and experiences encoded in a language and represented in discourse / text.

Socio-cultural knowledge is manifested in discourse / text via various linguistic means. Processing a literary text the reader makes use of the abstract model of reality, the general conceptual code, a theory of the world, that are transferred upon the literary text. This way he is involved in the complex interpretation process that predetermines the use of the mechanisms and algorithms, acquired previously in the process of experiencing the real world. Knowledge formats such as frame, script, schemata contain structures of expectations that are based on previous experiences as they are built on cultural and societal information about different actions, routines and situations. Knowledge formats standardize experiences that are imprinted in the world models as specifically systemized structures of notions commonly recognized within the language community. The structures, being either static or dynamic, are expected to be perceived in conventional ways.

Human interpretation of events and situations is conceptual, being based upon processing information that is encoded in the text / discourse. Perceiving any piece of information we deal with it in a special way that is predetermined by a number of different factors, either societal or individual, that include a system of expectations, beliefs, attitudes, prior knowledge, individual characteristics, emotions and other variables in addition to knowledge structures.

The excerpt from the story “The Intelligence Test” by M. Binchy exemplifies a number of differences in the perception of the situation by the child who is taking the test and the adults, who are there either to examine the girl’s knowledge and decide on her future schooling or to support the girl. The descriptive and narrative contexts are provided by the girl whose knowledge and abilities are being tested. The changes in the way the girl perceives the situation as well as the reactions on the part of the other participants of the situation are given in the bold type.

*It would all depend on **the test**. [...] Then they came to the identifying objects bit. They were all on cards and to be honest **it was very easy at the start**: rabbits, and house, and sunflowers, and buses, and things. And **we moved on to what might have been the slightly harder things**. Now I don’t want to get too confident but **these weren’t too bad either**. Things like a truck, or a food mixer, or a violin, or a saxophone. **But there was one I couldn’t work out at all**.*

*It was shaped like a triangle. I turned the card round for a bit until I could get a better look at it. No, I still **couldn’t see what it might be**, the drawing was very simple, too simple; there were **no real clues**. ‘I’m afraid **I have no idea**’, I said **apologetically**.*

*I **stared at the triangle until my eyes hurt**. Was this what was going to keep me out of a great school? Did this stand between me and a terrific education? Would I be back in my old school, peering and straining and missing a lot of it?*

*‘No, I’m sorry, **it really has defeated me**,’ I said to Caroline.*

‘Just guess,’ she begged.

‘Well, it is only a guess,’ I warned her.

‘That will be fine,’ she said.

*‘It could be **Cheshire**,’ I said doubtfully. ‘**A slice of Cheshire taken from the block but it might be Cheddar. I’m torn between the two of them**’.*

And then everything changed. They all seemed to be dissolving into tears and shaking each other's hands and hugging me. Caroline had as many tears on her face as Mum and Dad had. Apparently after all my nearly killing myself trying to work out what variety it was, the word 'cheese' was all they had wanted me to say. Imagine. They didn't even know what kind of cheese it was, they just wanted the word. And the fact that I thought this was too easy a question had just settled everything [19, p. 388–393].

The use of the word “test” evokes the test schema and predetermines the choice of the proper interpretation mechanism. No detailed description of the procedure of the test is necessary as the intelligence test was a standard examination used to determine the level of knowledge of school children to help decide about the appropriate school for further study.

Experiencing diverse situations people cognize the physical world and get the knowledge of its basic particularities: people, events, places, time and spatial relations, social and cultural characteristics, attributes of particular objects and situations etc. Recurrent or multiple experiences lead to generalizations and abstractions that are derived. Thus, general rules, models, structures, routines and strategies are formed to be used in the future to interpret different events and situations, psychological states and speech. Generalizations form complex systems (structures) of knowledge, one of the essential parts of which is represented by socio-cultural knowledge.

The traditional view of culture as a social institution, historically transferred system of symbols, meanings and norms that are shared by a group of people united by certain peculiarities (such as common origin, ethnical identity, social status, education, etc.) or as the customs, beliefs, art, music, literature and all the other products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time provides grounds for a new perspective of culture in terms of societally conventional patterns that are dealt with in social culture, that in its turn is defined as social behavior, featuring conventions, stereotypes and values that are shared by community members and are used for self-identification within a certain social group [16].

Socio-cultural knowledge is an essential part of general knowledge organization that provides foundations for adequate understanding of cognition predetermined by social and ethnographic peculiarities of the community. The notion “social world” reflects the importance of context, connections across social, cognitive and discourse dimensions of language and its use, and to communication between individuals or across social groups. Socio-cultural knowledge is dealt with as a matter of language and that of thought as it is through linguistic means that it is manifested in the text. To interpret socio-cultural meanings in a relevant way, linguists should take into consideration the complex relations between thought, intention, action, and performance.

The complexity of the problem of interrelations and dependencies between culture, language and cognition is conditioned by the fact that these entities accumulate a large amount of knowledge, the members of the culture or/and society acquire and share, to interpret information adequately in the context of a concrete situation in accordance with conventional routines.

As generalizations form special models of knowledge which are verbally represented in the text / discourse cooperative ventures among cognitive disciplines are essential to study conceptual structures in human cognition and the ways of their verbal manifestation in text / discourse.

To summarize, while perceiving information language users deal with it in a special way that is conditioned by expectations, beliefs, attitudes, prior knowledge, individual characteristics, emotions and other variables, connected with the knowledge of the context and the background of the communicants. Experiencing diverse situations people cognize the physical world, this way knowledge of its basic particularities are made while abstractions and generalizations are derived eventually to be used in the future to interpret events and situations, verbal messages and psychological states. Socio-cultural knowledge, organized in sequences of prototypical events and characterized

by dynamic change due to the nature and ontological status of the entities they represent, provides foundation for the mechanisms of adequate understanding of social and ethnographic peculiarities of human cognition.

Focus on the abstract model of reality, the general conceptual code, the world model encoded in the literary text facilitates comprehension and interpretation, the process predetermining the use of the mechanisms and algorithms, acquired previously in experiencing the real world.

The socio-cognitive approach to the interpretation of the textual meanings that accumulates findings and results of interdisciplinary research ensures adequate decoding of the information in the narrative as it aims at the study of a broad range of phenomena such as the nature of meaning, the role of language elements, the effect of context and pragmatics on the understanding of the verbally manifested structures.

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