

Stylistic Semantics or Semantic Stylistics?: Contrastive Aspect

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The purpose of this study is to highlight certain aspects of usage of lexical items that are of interest for both linguistic semantics and stylistics. Our claim is that there is a certain domain of usage of linguistic signs, particularly lexical items, that is determined by both the linguistic mentality of a given community of speakers and the structure of the language in question. Contrastive analysis of these phenomena will not only serve the applied linguistic purposes, for example, those of teaching foreign languages, it will also help to bring to the fore the peculiarities of both languages under consideration.

Linguistic semantics, as a branch of linguistics, is not just a study of meaning, but the study of meaning as represented by linguistic signs, i.e. morphemes, lexical items, syntactic structures, etc. Thus the domain of this linguistic discipline encompasses the correlation between form and content of linguistic signs, means of expressing meanings by units of the symbolic levels of the language structure, cognitive processes underlying the use of linguistic signs, various ways of expressing the same idea within a language, as well as those determined by the peculiarities of the structure of two or more languages.

Even this preliminary definition of the subject matter of semantic studies enables us to acknowledge that the object of stylistic explorations and that of linguistic semantics overlap in many cases, which is, probably, due to the fact that both disciplines originated within traditional rhetoric. In fact, nobody contradicts the partial unity of their objects of investigation, but the correlation between the subject

matter of linguistic semantics and that of stylistics is far from being clear-cut, or rather there are borderline cases.

It is worth mentioning in this connection that the conceptual apparatus of stylistic analysis seems to be heterogeneous. In addition to the so-called “emotive component of meaning” or “stylistic colouring”, which have never been rigorously defined in special literature, a number of categories are indiscriminately incorporated into the conceptual apparatus of stylistic analysis. Thus concepts of the componential analysis of meaning, categories of structural syntax, as well as those of literary and semiotic analysis of fiction, are freely made use of in research works that are supposed to be conducted within the framework of stylistics.

Moreover, there is a certain domain of usage of linguistic signs, lexical items in particular, which, until recently, has been ignored by both semanticists and linguists specializing in stylistic analysis. To cite but one example, the combinability of attributively used lexical items may be considered. For example, a native speaker of Russian would rather say *высокая каменная стена* than * *каменная высокая стена*. Thus the general rule may be formulated in the following way: adjective₁ (ONE-DIMENSIONAL SPATIAL PROPERTY) + adjective₂ (MATERIAL) + noun (PHYSICAL OBJECT). What is meant here is: adjectives denoting spatial properties of a physical object and the material this object is made of, are arranged in a certain sequence. In case of pre-positive attributive use, adjective₂, i.e. the adjective that denotes the material, immediately precedes the noun, and adjective₁, the one denoting height, length, etc., precedes adjective₂.

The change in the order of pre-positive attributes is however possible, especially when the whole complex expression is used metaphorically. In such cases specific organization of utterance in the plane of functional perspective, which presupposes peculiar intonational pattern, may be expected, e.g.: *Каменная, высокая стена разделяет нас*.

It is noteworthy that this kind of change in the order of attributes is absolutely impossible in English, compare: *a high stone wall* – **a stone high wall*. Probably, it can be explained by the uncertain status of *stone*-type lexical items. They can be, and are, treated either as adjectival conversives of corresponding nouns, or as attributively used nouns. Thus, whereas in English this rule of sequencing pre-positive attributes is inviolable, in Russian the order of attributes may be changed to produce a certain semantic effect, which is obviously of interest for stylistic analysis.

Similarly, it can be noted that adjectives, denoting multidimensional spatial properties of a physical object, precede attributively used colour terms. This kind

of sequencing may be represented in the following way: adjective₁ (MULTI-DIMENSIONAL SPATIAL PROPERTY) + adjective₂ (COLOUR) + noun (PHYSICAL OBJECT). Compare: *a big black box* – **a black big box*.

It is very important to realize that the afore-mentioned peculiarities of sequencing pre-positive attributes are the most evident examples of subconsciously used rules of semantic valency, that have not been systematically described, particularly from the viewpoint of contrastive analysis. A question arises in this connection: why have linguistic phenomena of this kind been ignored by linguists whose primary concern is the description of semantic properties of language and their pragmatic effects?

This state of affairs has not come into being by chance. It was engineered by the main trends in the development of both linguistic disciplines over the past three decades. Since the beginning of 1960s generative models of language became predominant in the study of meaning: first interpretive semantics appeared (Katz, Fodor 1963; Chomsky 1965; Katz 1972; etc.), then it gave way to generative semantics (Fillmore 1968; Chafe 1970; McCawley 1974; etc.). It is noteworthy that both trends of generativism presupposed the opposition of syntax and semantics.

One of the basic organizing assumptions of generative models in semantics was the compositional structure of meaning. The next assumption was the universal nature of semantic features. Thus it was claimed that the semantic structure of all languages could be described in terms of universal semantic components, just like in terms of distinctive features in phonology one may account for the speech sounds of any natural language.

Moreover, due to the fact that generative semanticists were greatly influenced by logical analysis of meaning, the problems of truth conditions, syntheticity, analytical truth and the like, happened to be in the focus of semantic analysis in linguistics.

Eventually idioethnic differences in the semantic structure of particular languages fell victim to the tendency to descriptive universalism, whereas the variety of conceptual domains, associated with linguistic signs, and determined by social, psychological, cultural and historical factors, were exempt from the analysis.

It is unfair to say that the drawbacks of generative models went unnoticed. For example, D. Bolinger (1965: 567), in his critical remarks on Katz-Fodor (1963) semantic model, has noted that a semantic theory, that makes no attempt to account for the process of metaphorical invention, as well as to describe the internal interdependence between the existing senses of polysemous lexical items, is inadequate. According to R. Kempson (1975: 31) a semantic theory, that uses the

concept of semantic component as a theoretical construct and does not attempt to explain the relation between the abstract symbols of language and external world, “is merely playing academic parlour games”.

Nevertheless, most of the criticism was intended not to undermine the general principles of generative approach, but rather to elaborate on them, to patch up the most conspicuous loopholes in the current theories of meaning.

Obviously, semantic analysis of this kind was of little interest for stylistics. It is only natural that specialists in style turned to further explorations in the theory of functional styles and text analysis. It is no secret that for the last 30 years stylistics mostly developed within the framework of text linguistics, that presupposes the study of language in action, at the expense of so-called stylistics of resources, primarily intended to describe the expressive means of language as a system. For instance, it was somewhat covertly assumed that nothing new could be done in the theory of tropes and figures of speech in general.

So, on the one hand, lack of new ideas and creative insights regarding figures of speech and other linguistic phenomena, traditionally dealt with in the theory of style, was noticeable. On the other hand, text-linguistic categories were incorporated into stylistic analysis and formed an indispensable part of the conceptual apparatus of this linguistic discipline. Thus according to G. Leech and M. Short (1981: 75-79) cohesion and context, alongside with figures of speech, lexical and grammatical categories, are major parameters of fictional prose.

In linguistic semantics the situation changed in the middle of 1980s when the major principles of cognitive approach to the study of language were finally formulated by G. Lakoff (1987), R. Langacker (1987), A. Wierzbicka (1988) and others. Within the cognitive-linguistic approach the traditional, or rather eternal problems of semantics and stylistics, i.e. metaphor, metonymy, idiomaticity and polysemy, have been revived and reconsidered.

It is obvious that the problems of metaphorical and metonymic mappings as links between people's conceptualization of experience and everyday, as well as poetic, use of language, described in cognitive semantics (Lakoff, Turner 1989; Kwiatkowska 1990; etc.), are of primary importance for stylistic analysis. But we have every right to assume that the interpretation of idiomaticity and polysemy within this approach may also have a great impact on the state of the art in stylistics.

In generative models it was claimed that idioms function as “ready-made blocks”. Once they had metaphorical origins, but having lost their metaphorical nature over time, now exist as frozen metaphors, i.e. non-compositional expressions, because their figurative meanings are not functions of the meanings of their

constituent parts (Chomsky 1965; Fraser 1970; Makkai 1972; etc.). Thus the major concern of generativists was to develop a variety of formal devices that could predict the syntactic behaviour of idiomatic expressions (e.g., see: Chafe 1970), in the first place, to account for some of the transformational deficiencies of idioms within a formal theory of grammar.

On the contrary, cognitive approach assumes that meanings of many idioms are partially motivated by speakers' knowledge of the concepts to which idioms refer, on the one hand, and that contextual appropriateness of idioms can be explained by the conceptual links between an idiom and a given situational context, on the other (Gibbs 1990). Hence cognitive semanticists have studied mental images that motivate the figurative meanings of idioms. For instance, according to G. Lakoff (1987) equation of anger to heat in many idioms is motivated by the common folk theory that the physiological effects of this emotion are: increased body heat, increased internal pressure and general state of agitation.

This approach to idioms appears to be of unquestionable interest for stylistics, for it provides an opportunity to study the functions of idiomatic expressions in various types of texts as a conventional form of conceptualization of experience, that plays a certain role in the conceptual and narrative structure of a given text. It seems reasonable to assume that the most important for the purposes of stylistic analysis are cases when the idiom is modified to cause a certain pragmatic effect. What is meant here can be referred to as "deconventionalization" of the idiom, i.e. when an idiomatic expression is used in an inappropriate situational or linguistic context and/or contrary to the conceptual structures it normally refers to.

Another achievement of cognitive approach to the study of meaning is rediscovery of the problem of polysemy. Though it is claimed that "cognitive semantics does not have an adequate theory of polysemy ... that defines the distinction between various polysemy tests and, more generally, that identifies the various factors that may influence judgements of polysemy" (Geeraerts 1992: 230), this trend has made a considerable headway in the study of the structure of polysemy and provided an adequate conceptual apparatus for the description of prototypical effects caused by that structure.

A. Lehrer (1990) challenges the viewpoint that polysemy can be predicted on the basis of general principles. Her claim is that although there is much regularity, polysemy gaps and unpredictable senses are common, some of which can be accounted for by principles of conventionality, avoidance of ambiguity, cultural needs, etc.

That point needs to be clarified. Empirical evidence shows that, though polysemy is of idioethnic nature, this semantic phenomenon manifests universal rules of

cognitive processes. On the other hand, the actual manifestations of these processes may be determined by extra-linguistic factors, as well as the structure of the language under consideration. The interaction of pre-mentioned factors is one of the sources of conventional imagery, characteristic of a particular language. Thus polysemy is motivated and in this sense predictable. Another thing is that the causes of polysemy are not always clear in some cases, for instance, when we study the lexicon of past eras.

Moreover, the most vivid examples of seemingly unpredictable polysemy may be found when we analyse the lexis of a language whose cultural background is entirely different from that of our own. Thus in Azeri (or Azerbaijani - a turcic language spoken in the Azerbaijan Republic) the verb *oxumag* has three senses: 1) 'read'; 2) 'learn, study'; 3) 'singing'. The association between reading and learning is clear enough, but the link between these two and singing is not so apparent. Understanding the structure of polysemy in this case implies taking into consideration the cultural and historical background of the linguistic community, primarily the way the educational system was organized in the past, the content of education, reading techniques practiced at the time, etc.

Cognitive semantics provides an opportunity to account for stylistically relevant prototypical effects caused by polysemy of lexical items. Of particular interest in this connection is the comparison between lexical items whose primary meanings refer to the same denotatum, whereas their metaphorical extensions and usage in comparative constructions are associated with different conceptual domains. The pairs of Russian words, whose primary meanings denote the same animal, may serve as a good example of this phenomenon; *лошадь - конь*; *осел - ишак*; *собака - пес*; etc. These pairs of lexical items are characterized by the same semantic features in terms of componential analysis, but they display certain semantic properties that can hardly be represented by the componential approach.

Let us consider two words, *осел* and *ишак*, which were first analysed by Y. Apresyan (1974), the former being the basic term, whereas the latter lexical item is borrowed from turcic languages. The primary meanings of both words denote a donkey, but are characterized by the difference in meaning, which is traditionally referred to as "connotations", "stylistic shades of meaning", etc. The difference reveals itself in their metaphorical extensions, when referring to human beings, as well as in the meanings of lexical items derived from, or motivated by, the metaphorical senses. The word *осел* is associated with stubbornness and stupidity, e.g. *ослиное упрямство*: whereas *ишак* presupposes doing a lot of presumably

uninteresting work. Compare: *ишачить* 'to work too much', *ишачья работа* 'difficult, boring work'.

Unlike Russian, there is only one word in Azeri, *esäk*, used to denote the animal, and this lexeme is primarily associated with stupidity and to some extent stubbornness. *Esäk kimi* 'like a donkey' presupposes the evaluation of one's intelligence and stubbornness. It is interesting to note that in English it is the mule that is considered stubborn (cf. *mulish, mulishness*), whereas the donkey appears to be a hard-working animal (cf.: *donkey work*).

In summation, it is very important to realize that the aforementioned phenomena of semantic valency, metaphorical and metonymic mappings, idiomaticity and polysemy, characterize the lexical semantic system of a particular language. These language-specific parameters form what is referred to as "conventional imagery" (Langacker 1987), "naive picture of the world" (Apresyan 1974), "linguistic mentality" (Potcheptsov 1990), etc. Whatever the terminology, this is one of the main characteristics of any language, that encompasses idioethnic features of lexical meanings and, alongside with universal features, determines the usage of lexical items.

Recent developments in theoretical semantics are of primary importance for stylistics, because there is a possibility not only to successfully incorporate their results and conceptual apparatus into stylistic analysis, but to carry out stylistic-semantic interdisciplinary studies.

The subject matter of stylistic semantics (or semantic stylistics) should form the study of usage of the constituents of the semantic structure, which is determined by both the linguistic mentality and the structure of language in general. Of particular significance in this connection is the intentional wrong usage aimed at causing semantic effects that are pragmatically relevant. Whether this sphere of linguistic studies will be considered a problem domain, or a new branch of linguistics, is of little importance now.

Stylistic semantics should account for the phenomena of metaphor, metonymy, idiomaticity, polysemy, semantic valency, the discrepancies between folk and scientific taxonomies, as well as language-specific prototypical effects caused by their use in actual communication. This approach also presupposes the study of the contribution of linguistic mentality to the cognitive and narrative structure of the text.

The contrastive study of these phenomena will not only reveal the universal and idioethnic features of linguistic mentality of both languages, it will also highlight the peculiarities of each of them.

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Стилистическая семантика или семантическая стилистика?

Цель данного исследования составляет рассмотрение некоторых аспектов парадигматической организации и функционирования лексических единиц, представляющих равный интерес как для теоретической семантики, так и для стилистики. Исходным положением настоящей работы является представление о том, что речепотребление словесных знаков детерминировано языковой ментальностью данного языкового сообщества и структурными особенностями языка.

Анализ динамики развития семантики и стилистики показывает, что возникновение когнитивной семантики, пришедшей на смену генеративным моделям создает определенные предпосылки для проведения междисциплинарных исследований семантико-стилистического характера. Рассмотренные примеры английского, русского и азербайджанского языков свидетельствуют, что разрабатываемый в когнитивной семантике понятийный аппарат для описания метафоризации, метонимизации, идиоматики и полисемии представляет несомненный интерес для разработки проблем стилистики ресурсов и связи с его ориентацией на отображение свойств, характерных для данного конкретного языка.

Предмет стилистической семантики (или семантической стилистики) составит описание функционирования языковой ментальности данного социума, проявляющейся в специфических особенностях метафорических и метонимических переносов, полисемии и идиоматики, обусловленных ими прототипических эффектах, а также влияния языковой ментальности на динамику развития когнитивной и нарративной структуры текста.

Конфронтативные исследования в данной области будут способствовать решению не только прикладных задач в сфере лексикографии и методики преподавания иностранных языков, но и максимально полному раскрытию особенностей организации и функционирования плана содержания сопоставляемых языков.