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Frame Semantics and Text Interpretation

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The paper focuses on the nature of lexical meaning in terms of frame semantics on text level. We propose that the notion of frame can be used to reveal the cognitive structure of the text. The aim of this paper is to show how the frame semantics theory can be applied to the analysis of the realization of the concept depending on the interrelation of deep and surface structures of the text.

Keywords: Concept, frame, meaning, text interpretation, cognitive structure.

1. Frame semantics as the basis for text interpretation

Before getting down to the analysis of the text it is necessary to dwell upon the theoretical basis of the suggested ideas in interpreting the language material, the process of interpreting itself being the cognitive activity (Demjankov, 2010). A very fruitful understanding of frame for text interpretation was proposed by Ch. Fillmore in 1976 when he stated “the ultimate correct theory will have to provide for the ways in which the interpreter of a text acts creatively to build a detailed model of the text, it will have to show how specific lexical items in specific grammatical relation to each other <...> constrain the way in which the creative structuring takes place, and will have to show <...> how individual lexical items can bring along with them fairly large pre-packaged complex frames” (Fillmore, 1976: 29).

The above cited proposition does not run counter to the statement of another prominent

scholar M. Minsky who in his work “A Framework for Representing Knowledge” in Part 2.3 “Meaning Structure of a Discourse” ascertained that “the frames associated with word senses, be they noun, verb or whatever, are surely centers for the concentrated representation of vital knowledge about how different things are related, how they are used, and how they transform one another” (Minsky, 1974). Consider also the following assumption: “every language phenomenon requires consideration “on the borderline of cognition and communication”, and discourse first of all is defined as both mental and speech activity” (Kubryakova, Aleksandrova, 2008).

Among a wide range of approaches to frame which have been discussed in detail in linguistic papers I wish to single out the one put forward by E. S. Kubryakova, who defines frame as a cognitive map of a word reflecting the variety of contexts the word can be used in (Kubryakova,

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1991). This approach to frame seems to allow to reveal the cognitive structure of the text and interpret the author's message more adequately. The cognitive structure of the text is perceived here as the interrelation between deep and surface structures of the text closely connected with the linguodynamics of its inner life (Turayeva, 1986; Levitskiy, 2006).

Thus, proceeding from the assumption that frame is a cognitive map of the word, including all possible contextual transformations of the word meaning, determined both by language and cultural experience of the speaker (writer), we suggest to consider the dynamic variability of the initial cognitive structure of the text, depending on the foregrounding of different elements of the frame based on the semantic structure of the word.

2. The actualization of the concept of innocence on text level

The actualization of the concept "innocence" is considered in the novel "The Quiet American" written by a well-known British writer of the XX century Graham Greene.

The novel was published in 1955. The writer deeply concerned with political and social issues spotlights the US foreign policy. This topic is still a burning issue today. The author brings home to the reader the details of the situation in Vietnam and the first attempts of the USA to promote its interests in this country.

One of the main characters – the representative of the Economic Aid Mission of the American Embassy in Saigon – Alden Pyle, a well-educated and respectable young American full of hopes, is described in the novel in contrast to vicious and cynical American correspondents and officials of the Economic Aid Mission. Pyle sincerely believes that Vietnam must win independence, and he is involved in the unfolding events completely unaware of the true essence of

what is actually going on. Everything he knows about this war is taken from the books and lectures of a scholar named York Harding who claims that what the East needs is a Third Force. The author states that Pyle's fate is predetermined by the fact that he becomes involved in the war blindly fulfilling the US high mission which, as he believes, is aimed at the liberation of Vietnam. But everything he does turns out to be quite the contrary – he sends to death innocent Vietnamese civilians: women, elderly people and children. He is just a convenient weapon in the hands of the American political system which is trying to take control of Vietnam under the mask of alleged democracy. This is the "high mission" of the USA Pyle believes in.

The concept of innocence is realized by the polysemantic word "innocent" which is of particular significance in the characterization of the main personage of the novel. It accompanies the image of Pyle throughout the whole book. First it is used in its primary meaning – "harmless" – at the beginning of the novel when Fowler, a British correspondent, recollects his first meeting with Pyle. Here the young American is represented as a man full of hopes who has just arrived in Vietnam with good intentions. As the plot unfolds, the concept "innocence" undergoes transformations due to the actualization of various elements of the frame which reflect situations associated with other meanings of this word inherent in its semantic structure in the form of secondary meanings which are foregrounded depending on the context.

The word "innocence" generally implying "inexperience" and "purity" changes the meaning from "harmlessness" to the notion of "naivety" and "ignorance" threatening surrounding people, as it characterizes the person who influenced by false ideas does not realize what he is doing. He is always under protection of the mask of good intentions and lofty motives. Fowler calls

Pyle “innocent” saying that he is a man who is guided by “lofty motives” even when he commits crime. Pyle is blind and naive, unable to see and understand life. Finally, Fowler comes to the conclusion that Pyle is too “innocent” to live; he is unable to understand the true state of things he absorbed from the lectures and books of York Harding.

Notice the transformation of the concept of innocence as the novel unfolds. In the following fragment Pyle is characterized as “innocent” in the sense of being young, chaste and inexperienced:

Why does one want to tease the innocent? Perhaps only ten days ago he had been walking back across the Common in Boston. His arms full of the books he had been reading in advance on the Far East and the problems of China. He did not even hear what I said; he was absorbed already in the dilemmas of Democracy and the responsibilities of the West; he was determined – I learnt that very soon – to do good, not to any individual person but to a country, a continent, a world. Well, he was in his element now with the whole universe to improve (Greene: 18)

Pyle is sincerely convinced that he is one of the few whose aim is to put into practice the “high mission” which the USA is doing for the world. He has the whole world to change for the better. Thus, in this fragment of the novel the following meaning of the word “innocent” is foregrounded, the one realizing the concept of an ignorant, inexperienced, naive person calling for protection. Further, in another context we observe the transformation of the primary cognitive structure in the direction from positive (harmless) to negative (silly):

They killed him because he was too innocent to live. He was young and ignorant and silly and he got involved. He had no more of a notion than any of you what the whole affair's about, and you gave him money and York Harding's books on

the East and said, "Go ahead, win the East for Democracy" (Greene: 31).

The correlation of the new context with the primary cognitive structure by means of associative links with the words “young”, “silly” and “ignorant” creates a new image of Pyle. Now the other qualities are brought into focus than in the previous cognitive structure. Such a transformation of the image takes place due to the regular association between the concepts of innocence and youth. It is common knowledge that young people are apt to make mistakes, doubt, and idealize reality. Young people are inclined to admire someone who serves for them a perfect example to follow. The name of York Harding occurs several times in the novel as a person who is to blame for misleading young people by false ideas. In the given context the name sounds like an accusation, because this character is represented as the image of the whole system which imposes its will on Pyle, making him “innocent” in absolutely different sense. This context reveals the following elements of the concept of innocence: “inexperienced” and “ignorant”. Pyle is not the only young man, who gets involved in the alleged democratic policy of the USA blindly and thoughtlessly, guided by the phrases “soldier of democracy”, “red menace”. He commits evil under the mask of goodness and becomes a weapon in the hands of his idol. Wealthy America, sure of its superiority intends to “americanize” the whole world by imposing its values and creating the image of “true” Americans who, according to G. Greene, are not able to think independently and critically, they are devoid of individuality. Pyle’s judgments are limited within the scope of the ideas expressed in York Harding’s books.

The development of the primary cognitive structure from positive to negative can be traced in the following passage realizing another element of the frame:

I stopped our trishaw outside the Chalet and said to Phuong: "Go in find a table. I had better look after Pyle". That was my first instinct – to protect him. It never occurred to me that there was greater need to protect myself. Innocence always calls mutely for protection when it would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it: innocence is like dumb leper who lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm (Greene: 37).

In the given extract the word “innocence” is used in the meaning of “menace”. It is represented as a dangerous weapon in the hands of a person, who is not aware of the consequences of his deeds. The primary cognitive model becomes less important ousted into the background by a new situation depicted by the author.

The most negative component of this concept is “insanity” which is foregrounded in the frame by the situation describing the explosion in the square organized by Pyle, where innocent people become the main victims. But Pyle worries only

national democratic front?” – thinks Fowler with bitterness and makes the final decision:

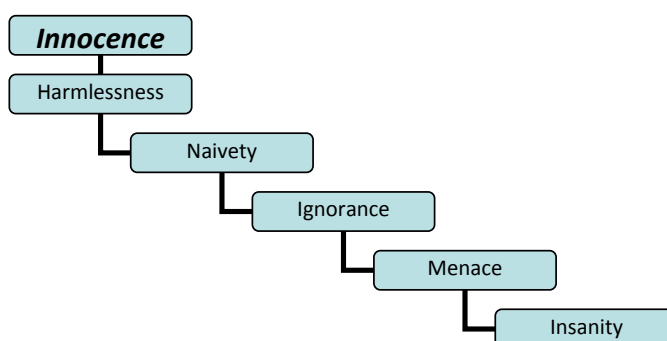
“What’s the good? He’ll always be innocent, you can’t blame the innocent, they are always guiltless. All you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity” (Greene: 163).

The painful relations between Fowler and Pyle come to an end when after a long hesitation Fowler sends Pyle to death. Fowler, an atheist, cites the first lines of the Gospel:

“God save us always ... from the innocent and the good” (Greene: 20).

Although Pyle was doomed to death because of all evil he brought to innocent people while carrying out a “high mission” in Vietnam, Fowler will be pursued by remorse for the rest of his life.

The following figure illustrates the actualization of the concept of innocence due to the dynamic development of the cognitive structure of the novel:



about the blood on his shoes. The sight of a woman covering what was left of her baby with a hat and a legless torso does not produce any impression on him, the only thing he cares for is that there are no casualties among Americans as they have been warned beforehand to leave this place as well as Phuong.

“How many dead colonels justify a child’s or a trishaw-driver’s death, when you are building a

Conclusion

The analysis of the actualization of the concept “innocence” in terms of the frame semantics in its linguistic representation on the text level manifests the complexity of the conceptual system shaping personality. Thus, various elements of the frame can be foregrounded depending on the context realizing the cognitive structure of the text.

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Фреймовая семантика и интерпретация текста

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В статье исследуется природа лексического значения с точки зрения фреймовой семантики на уровне текста. Фреймовый метод применяется как средство выявления когнитивной структуры текста.

Ключевые слова: концепт, фрейм, значение, интерпретация текста, когнитивная структура.
