

Linguo-Cognitive Analysis of the Concept *God* (on the Basis of J. Fowles' Philosophical Essay "The Aristos")

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Abstract

The article aims at disclosing the concept *God* in J. Fowles philosophical essay "The Aristos" as well as defining linguistic means of its actualization. The key concept or concepts of a narrative, storing the main idea of the text actually reveal the author's individual world perception, highlighting those aspects of the concept that the author sees or would like the reader to focus his/her attention on. Proceeding from this point the investigation of a narrative disclosing its key concepts via conceptual metaphor opens great perspectives for understanding the author's unique world perception, sometimes, contradicting the universal understanding of the concept.

Key words: actualization, concept, conceptual metaphor, God, world perception.

Introduction

For the last decades metaphor has been and still is in the centre of attention of different disciplines. If in the times of Aristotle metaphor was considered a rhetorical, poetic device, today it is equally actual in Philosophy, Psychology, Cognitive Sciences, Culture, Art and, of course, Linguistics. Metaphor is investigated in the perspectives of Cognitive Linguistics. Cognitive aspect of the metaphor lies in the fact that it reflects the results of the world cognition. "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson 2003:5). Here it should be mentioned that "the systematicity not only allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another, but also it hides other aspects of the concept" (ibid:10). Thus, a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on the other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor. This aspect of metaphor makes it a very strong tool for thought, reasoning and action, employed in different types of discourse.

Cognitive Stylistics or Poetics, a comparatively young branch of Cognitive Linguistics, is one of the rigorous spheres of current interdisciplinary study of literature, linguistics and cognitive science. The focal point of Cognitive Stylistics lies in examining literary/non-literary texts on the basis of conceptual metaphor, observing its interaction within the text as a whole. If traditional Stylistics is focused on linguistic aspects of a text, Cognitive Stylistics studies the author's idiolect and how it is perceived by the reader. It studies the influence of foregrounding on the reader's mind. "What is new about Cognitive Stylistics is the way in which linguistic analysis is systematically based on theories that relate linguistic choices to cognitive structures and processes. This provides more systematic and explicit accounts of the relationship between texts on the hand and responses and interpretations on the other" (Semino & Culpeper 2002: Foreword).

The Role of Viewpoint in Text Interpretation

In fictional text conceptual information plays a crucial role. The key concept or concepts of a literary text, storing the main idea of the text actually reveal the author's individual world perception highlighting those aspects of the concept that the author sees or would like the reader to focus his/her attention on. Hence, the investigation of a literary text disclosing its key concepts via conceptual metaphor or metaphors opens great perspectives for understanding the author's unique world perception, sometimes, contradicting the universal understanding of that concept. B. Dansyngier and E. Sweetser argue that "many metaphors rely on experiential viewpoint" (Dansyngier & Sweetser 2014:212). It follows that interpretation of the author's concepts implies decoding of the author's viewpoint. This, undoubtedly, brings up the question of the reader's own thesaurus (knowledge, opinions, beliefs), which can vary from one reader to another. On the one hand the reader tries to interpret the author's viewpoint, on the other hand the reader himself is an active participant in the process of decoding, inputting his/her own viewpoints in it. As a result, a concept is viewed from the writer's and reader's collaborative understanding based on their experiential viewpoints. Consequently, different readers' interpretations may differ. However, here it is appropriate to cite M. Riffaterre's words "the text is constructed in such a way that it can control its own decoding" (Riffaterre 1983:6). In other words there is a control over the process of decoding by way of selecting such kind of linguistic and extra-linguistic means which not only direct the reader's proper understanding of the text but also limit the interpretation freedom.

Conceptual Analysis of the Text

To reveal conceptual information there have been suggested different methods of conceptual analysis. Currently there exist the following methods of conceptual analysis: conceptual analysis of the text based on psycholinguistic associative experiment (L. Babenko & U. Kazarin), content analysis, conceptual metaphoric models (G. Lakoff & M. Johnson), scripts (R. Schank & P. Abelson), frame semantics (Ch. Fillmore), cognitive prototypes (E. Rosh), gestalt analysis (L. Cherneyko). To choose this or that method of analysis depends on the investigator's aim. The article suggests investigating literal or non-literal texts employing combined method of conceptual analysis, namely, conceptual metaphoric models, gestalt analysis and conceptual analysis of the text based on psycholinguistic associative experiment which presupposes finding out the key words of the concept, describing the semantic space of the concept, taking into account their syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations with the concept, conducting multilevel analysis of the concept: semantic, syntactic, stylistic. The overall description of the concept via conceptual metaphor will, undoubtedly, disclose the author's individual world perception, the encoded information entailing great amount of conceptual information. The following example will illustrate how to conduct multilevel conceptual analysis of the text employing combined methods of analysis.

The Concept *God* in J. Fowles' Philosophical Conception

J. Fowles, being an outstanding postmodern English writer and philosopher, is undoubtedly one of the writers in the world literature whose views and ideas outstand in their originality, touching upon such universal issues as: God, freedom, death, life, love, wealth and so on.

In the given article an attempt is undertaken to define means of actualization of the concept *God* via conceptual metaphor in J. Fowles' philosophical essay "The Aristos".

'God' is a situation. Not a power, or a being, or an influence. Not a 'he' or a 'she', but an 'it'. Not entity or non-entity, but the situation in which there can be both entity and non-entity (Aristos:22).

The concept *God* is disclosed via conceptual metaphor *God is a situation*. It is noteworthy to mention that in the passage the noun **God** is used in inverted

commas, most likely to mark it out, to delimit it from all its common understandings and from all human associations. However, not only God but personal pronouns **he, she and it** are used in inverted commas. In the writer's world perception *God* is of neutral gender or rather something having no gender. Here of special importance is the use of such a small lexical element as the indefinite article, which accumulates a certain amount of the conceptual information. Being used with personal pronouns it indicates uncertainty, indefiniteness (**Not a 'he' or a 'she', but an 'it'**) which is also connected with the concept *God*. It is defined as something uncertain. Due to the negative parallel constructions and parcellation the author's subjective understanding of the concept is verbalized.

Not a 'he' or a 'she', but an 'it'.

Not entity or non-entity, but the situation in which there can be both entity and non – entity.

As it can be seen all the semantic units are negated and detached by full points. Here the particle **not** comes forward as the actualizer of the conceptual information. However, only from the first glance it seems that particle *not* negates such substances as **power, being, influence, entity and non-entity**. Negating them separately, the author emphasizes the aggregate of all those components in the concept "God". The repetition of the particle **not** on the one hand intensifies all the negated lexemes, on the other hand due to the conjunction **but** it unites them all within the notion of God. Thus God is both power and influence, both entity and non-entity. It follows that God is a situation where both entity and non-entity exist.

The ubiquitous absence of 'God' in ordinary life is this sense of non-existing, of mystery, of incalculable potentiality; this eternal doubt that hovers between the thing in itself and our perception of it, this dimension in and by which all other dimensions exist. The white paper that contains a drawing, the space that contains a building; the silence that contains a sonata; the passage of time that prevents a sensation or object continuing forever: all these are 'God'.

(ibid: 27)

In his further ponderings the author reaches the deepest layers of the concept by means of oxymoron **ubiquitous absence** which actualizes the conceptual information. Two contrasting substances: *ubiquitous* and *absence* submerge into

one notion - God. It is the ‘absence’ which exists everywhere: the white paper that contains a drawing, the space that contains a building; the silence that contains a sonata; the passage of time that prevents a sensation or object continuing forever. In other words, by being absent God is present everywhere. The conceptual information is actualized by means of epiphora and parallel constructions, where the key word is the verb **contain**. The latter is repeated three times emphasizing its semantic significance. The notion of God contains everything, even what is unseen or incomprehensible to human reason. Hence, semantically contrasting words **absent** and **present** are the cores of the conceptual information.

J. Fowles gradually discloses the deepest layers of the concept *God*. God is a situation where it is present at the same time being absent. Consequently, God is a mystery.

*Thus is ‘God’ present by being absent in every thing and every moment. It is the dark core, the mystery, the being-not-being of even the simplest objects. Mystery or unknowing is **energy**. As soon as a mystery is explained, it ceases to be a source of energy. If we question deep enough there comes a point we dam the river, but we dam the spring at our peril. In fact since ‘God’ is unknowable, we cannot dam the spring of basic existential mystery. ‘God’ is the energy of all questions and questions, so the ultimate source of action and volition.*

(ibid)

The whole passage can be expressed by means of the following logically complementary conceptual metaphors: **God is a mystery. Mystery is energy. God is the energy of all questions and questions.** God is a mystery and everything connected with it is energy. This follows the idea that God is energy, power as it is unknowable. One idea supplements the other one. The conceptual core is the noun **energy**. At first God was defined as something uncertain (**an it**), gradually the semantic layers of the concept are revealed and in climax definiteness is achieved. If in the beginning the actualizer of the concept “God” was an indefinite article, in the end it gives its way to the definite article (‘God’ is **the** energy of all questions and questions, so **the** ultimate source of action and volition). The repetition of the definite article confirms the idea stated above. It becomes obvious that the gradation is based on the articles (indefinite and definite) and repetition. Thus God

is a situation, a mystery and the energy of all questions and the ultimate source of action and volition.

In another part of the text J. Fowles discloses the concept “God” citing S. Augustine’s words:

LVII. The sage says, I do nothing and the people change of themselves. I prefer stillness and the people correct themselves. I do not intervene and the people prosper themselves. (ibid:23)

Here the conceptual information is disclosed via a syntactical parallelism expressed by the compound sentences. The indicator of the concept “God” is the personal pronoun **I**. The author focuses the reader’s attention on the functional side of the concept. The alternations of the negative and positive statements speak of themselves. Despite the negation the result is positive in the end. Hence, God is almighty being passive.

*I do nothing and the people change of themselves.
I prefer stillness and the people correct themselves.
I do not intervene and the people prosper themselves.*

In another part the positive statements are followed by the negative ones, once again the result is positive. Here the personal pronoun **I** is replaced by the personal pronoun **it**.

LI. It gives the myriads life and yet claims no possession; it benefits them yet asks for no thanks; it looks after them yet exercises no authority. (ibid)

X. Can you love the people and govern the state without resorting to action? (ibid)

The concept *God* is fully disclosed in the climax via a rhetorical question where the key word is the negative preposition **without**. Who can love and govern without resorting to concrete actions? Actually the rhetorical question is a philosophical generalization, more exactly, generalization and confirmation of all above mentioned conceptions: ‘*God*’ is a situation where both entity and non-entity

exist; 'God' is present everywhere by being absent, 'God' interferes in everything by non-interference, loves and governs without resorting to actions.

Conclusion

Thus, linguo-cognitive analysis of the concept shows that the means of actualization of the concept at the same time become means of the actualization of the conceptual metaphor. The concept “God” in J. Fowles’ philosophical essay “Aristos” is actualized mainly by linguistic means (definite and indefinite articles, negative particle), stylistic devices (oxymoron, parallel constructions, epiphora, parcellation) and extra-linguistic means (inverted commas). The core of the concept make up the lexemes: energy and mystery. For the author God is, first of all, a mystery, thus, a source of energy. Consequently, the gestalts of the abstract noun “god” are mystery and energy. The multilevel analysis of the concept allows the reader to see the hidden sides of the concept which are significant from the author's point of view. In other words, it demonstrates the author's subjective evaluation of the objective reality.

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Աստված հասկացույթի լեզվաճանաչողական վերլուծություն (Ջ. Ֆաուլզի «Արիստոս» փիլիսոփայական էսսեի հիման վրա)

Սույն հոդվածի նպատակն է՝ ուսումնասիրել Աստված հասկացույթը և դրա առկայացման միջոցները Ջ. Ֆաուլզի «Արիստոս» փիլիսոփայական էսսեի հիման վրա: Ստեղծագործության առանցքային հասկացույթը կամ հասկա-

ցույթները, պարունակելով ստեղծագործության հիմնական գաղափարը, իրականում արտահայտում են հեղինակի անհատական և ինքնատիպ աշխարհընկալումը՝ ընդգծելով հասկացույթի այն կողմերը, որոնք հեղինակը տեսնում է կամ, որոնց վրա վերջինս ցանկանում է ընթերցողի ուշադրությունը հրավիրել: Հասկացույթի ուսումնասիրությունը ճանաչողական փոխաբերության միջոցով մեծ հեռանկարներ է բացում հեղինակի յուրօրինակ աշխարհընկալման ուսումնասիրության համար, որը, երբեմն, կարող է հակասել տվյալ հասկացույթի համընդհանուր ընկալմանը: