Artistic Concept in the Cognitive Perspective

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Abstract

The present article aims at studying the phenomenon of artistic concept by providing a detailed analysis of linguistic choices and patterns in the text with a systematic consideration of the mental processes and representations that are involved in the process of interpretation. The tools provided by the recent developments in cognitive approach are applied to enlarge the scope of studies in artistic concepts in general and also to highlight the major features that make the artistic concept distinct from the general cultural concepts. The practical study is based on *alienation* – one of the key concepts exploited in the contemporary literature.

Key words: artistic concept, subjective-evaluative component, cognitive approach, container schema.

Introduction

Language is endowed with cognitive functions and is not only a means of accumulating information, but also a crucial player in the formation and spreading knowldege. Thus, language is not only a material for linguistic study but an important tool to create new knowledge. Whorf argued that each language refers to an infinite variety of experiences with a finite array of formal categories (both lexical and grammatical) by trouping experiences together as analogically "the same" for the purposes of speech (Whorf 1956).

Any piece of literature embodies the author's individual authorial way of world perception, and the literature turns into a private case of conceptualization. The author creates not only a new word but also a new meaning, resulting from a unique way of thinking and explicating various associative links. The recognition of the associative character of speech-creating activity has brought forth the neccessity to study langauge in close connection with thinking, culture, individual language picture of the world, etc. Hence the literary text is studied on the level of various cognitive processes reflecting the peculiarities of the understanding of the world.

The above mentioned comes to prove that the study of the cognitive mechanisms of nomination can not only assist in defining the new meaning, but also study the cognitive structures underlying nomination. Thus, this development in the cognitive sciences has brought about new defition for "language creativity", which can be explained as a process of emergence of new cognitive structures and their realization via language (Ogneva 2013; Tarasova 2012).

Artistic Concept – Basic Component of the Authorial Style

In most studies involving the cognitive aspect of language creation, the central category of research is the individual authorial (artistic) concept, which defines the author's individual world picture.

There is still no universally accepted definition of the term concept. If we turn to the most common dictionary definition it is "*an idea of how something is, or how something should be done*" (6), which explicitly suggests the involvement of a thinking person, which in its turn brings to the forefront the idea of subjectiveness.

However, it is obvious that the dictionary definition can be justified as long as the individual concepts are concerned. In contrast to individual concept, the individual artistic concept embodies the author's knowledge and his own way of interpreting the objective reality. It acquires artistic features in the context of a literary work.

According to L.V. Miller artistic concept is defined as "a product of complex mental activities, belonging not only to the individual consciousness, but the psychological and mental spheres of a certain ethnic cultural community", or as "universal artistic experience, recorded in the cultural memory and the ability to act as a building material in the formation of new artistic meanings (Miller 2003:41-42). According to another widely acclaimed definition "individual artistic concept is a unit of the writer's consciousness, represented in the text and reflecting the authorial understanding of the world" (Bespalova 2002).

Individual artistic concepts should not be confused with general cultural concepts. The term individual concept has been introduced for the study of literary texts. It is only the author and the process of text creation that reform individual concepts into authorial ones. Authorial concept is a unit of poetic world picture and it condences authorial knowledge about the world (Bespalova 2002). Authorial concept is the unit of the author's consciousness which is realized in the text and expresses authorial comprehension of the essence of things and phenomena. It is built on individual knowledge. Authorial concept carries cultural component

common to all people sharing that culture, but its specificity lies in the **subjective-evaluative** component, which generates as a result of the creator's creative-interpretive activities. Due to this feature the meaning of the concept gets enriched, and both the content and the volume undergo changes.

By individual concept we mean a multi-dimensional mental product formed by various methods of categorization, which is verbalized in a variety of forms. In this paper we will primarily consider the concept as a unit of an authorial concept sphere realized in either a single or a series of works by the writer.

The system of individual concepts forms the concept sphere of the text. Of course, concept, existing in individual consciousness cannot be equated to the mechanical amount of concepts. The structure is determined by individual laws which are closely related to individual, linguistic, pragmatic and cultural factors. One conceptual sphere can be combined with another.

There exists a huge number of ways of the linguistic representation of concepts in a literary text. Concepts as mental products create a complex unity, that is why it seems natural to underline its structural character and differenciate various types of concepts within the structure and find out how the structure correlates with other conceptual structures.

Artistic concepts are endowed with an ***emotional component*** and carry the element of ***aesthetic evaluation.*** In the typology of concepts we can find how the mental structure and language layers are interrelated and this feature allows to enlarge the boundaries of the study of artistic concepts which presently is basically confined to the lexical level only.

A Case Study of the Authorial Concept in the Light of Cognitive Approach

There arise questions concerning the individual concept being equal to the author's intention or not, or can the intention be remodeled completely? Intention of course exists only in the mental world of the author, and as such is not explicitly expressed. Consequently, the authorial concepts cannot be clearly identified and described. However, what the combination of traditional and cognitive means of analyses seeks for is the wider possibility to look at the language phenomena and come as close to the authorial intention as possible.

Hence, in this part of the work an attempt will be made to analyze the authorial individual concept with the application of the toolkit provided by recent developments in the cognitive study of literary texts. The application of the cognitive dimension to a traditional stylistic analysis will augment the stylistic

analysis and justify the possibilities for the two approaches to go hand in hand in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the text.

To demonstrate how the tools of the cognitive approach can help in disclosing the nature of authorial concepts we will turn to the study of the means of representing the concept of alienation in contemporary fiction.

By and large, *alienation* has been one of the central concepts in literature since the Modernist period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but it was a dominant topic of post-modern fiction and is still widely referred to in contemporary literature. *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines *alienation* as "the state of feeling estranged or separated from one's milieu, work, products of work, or self" (7). *Alienation* involves the state of being detached, separated or estranged from closer connections, including family members and a loved one, also from religious institutions or even from the God.

Due to its depth the concept *alienation* functions as a narrative construct of the contemporary fiction and as such it is subject to coanalysis from the point of view of its representation. *Alienation* is one of the dominant concepts in A.L. Kennedy's fiction, particularly in the collection of stories *What Becomes*, where it enriches due to such sub-concepts as *powerlessness, meaninglessness and isolation*, which impart to the concept additional volume and depth.

To demonstrate the case, the following passage will be discussed, allowing us to observe the ways the concept is materialized:

> "…He truly detested his **travelling bag**. *This evening it would be waiting inside his hotel room,* **crouching by his bed like the guard dog in an unfamiliar house**. *It always was by his bed, no matter where he was sleeping, neatly packed for when he'd have to leave, fill it with his time and carry it in the way he'd enjoy being carried, being lifted over every obstacle".*   (p. 6)

The effect of the passage is achieved by a cluster of images describing the protagonist and his travelling bag that he detests (*crouching like the guard dog, fill it with time, being lifted over every obstacle*). From the cognitive point of view the effect of the passage rests on the key image of *the travelling bag* and the role it has in the protagonist's life. The passage concentrates on the perception of the period in the protagonist's life in which the need of stability and belonging to somewhere comes to be a crucial point. The travelling bag

stands for the protagonist's life of loss and defeat, constant change and lack of his own place.

It can be concluded that the author models the concept of alienation on a *container* schema or a metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson classify the container schema as part of ontological metaphors, which "appears through human experiences with physical objects (especially the body) and facilitates the way of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances" (Lakoff, Johnson 2003:26). The container in the above mentioned passage is the *bag*, which encases the state of alienation the protagonist is experiencing under the load of the recent loss of a dearest one.

In all cases discussed in the paper the protagonist's microcosm is encased and provokes the image of a *container* where the lack of communication has estranged all the relations with the outer space. This is especially made evident in the scene where the protagonist is in the cinema (*"a whole cinema of his own - the kind of thing a child might imagine, might enjoy",* p. 4) where he was all by himself and it gave him the feeling of privacy and belonging to himself for a short while.

However, in the ensuing analysis we observe the development of the container schema in the opposite direction; the loneliness becomes irritating and the privacy is broken:

> *Frank being alone in a cinema, that was all right – alone in a muddle of people in a cinema – that was all right…Silly to think that way, but he did. For a moment.*
> **Then he focused on being irritated, his nice privacy broken when it had extended so very far by now***…*
> *[I]t was fine though. Nobody joined him".*   (p. 5)

The tantalizing feeling of being trapped in a container is realized also via the parallel between the cinema and the airport: "*huge **glass and metal** tower, looked like a part of an airport*". (p. 3)

The glass and the metal stand for the barriers of misunderstandings that the huge modern buildings, lacking any architectural aesthetics, create for people.

Container schema can be considered a general mode of the writer's presentation of her conceptual universe and the latter can be further observed in the following excerpts:

> "*Four seats across and then the aisle and then another four and that was it. The room wasn't much broader than his lounge and **it put Frank in mind of a bus, some kind of wide, slow vehicle, sliding off towards destinations it left undisclosed**.*"   (p.4)

The parallel between the two schemas – *the cinema and the bus* in the above presented excerpts – is the implicit representation of Frank's isolated life, involving slow and unwilling moves forward.

Given for a slight overemphasis, the passage may also be taken as a metaphor of the writer's work in which she is obsessed with the search for the fullness of meaning in the materiality of the world. The latter can be justified via another container schema:

> "*We are not all connected. We are **bags of skin**. We are all separate bags of thinking skin"*.   (p. 54)

The identity mapping between *we and bag* is no accident. Here, the inside of the container (*the bag of skin,* intensified by the parallel construction and modified by pre-position epithets *separate and thinking*) is more directly associated with the concept *alienation.* In this excerpt, the subjective-evaluative component of the concept is most obvious, since in the ending of the story the author offers no means of escape; the state of being confined to the container allows no possibility to find any meaning in the human existance.

It follows from the above presented analysis that the key images of the container (*bag, cinema, bus),* also two more cases of container schemas, *wallet and Flotation Tank,* which have not been included in the present paper evoke the imminent absence of human connections, distortion, fragmented vision of the reality through the container, separation from the society, which by and large contribute to human alienation.

Conclusion

Artistic concepts, the products of the authorial world picture, are the structural base of the text on which the text ideology and the authorial intention rest. To reaveal the artisitic concept and to construct the authorial model of conceptualization of reality it is suggested to enlarge the scope of analysis by complementing the traditional stylistic analysis with cognitive approach. The case

study of the concept *alienation* in the article demostrates that the analysis on the cognitive base is insightful, shedding a new light on understanding the mechanisms of authorial conceptualization of reality.

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**Գեղարվեստական հասկացույթի քննությունը
ճանաչողաբանության դիտակետից**

Աշխատանքում քննության է երթարկվում գեղարվեստական հասկացույթը՝
լեզվական միջոցների ընտրության և տեքստի կերտման ընթացքում մենթալ
գործընթացների համակցում վերլուծությամբ: Ճանաչողաբանության ոլորտում
վերջին շրջանի գործնական բնույթի ձեռքբերումները կիրառված են՝ ընդլայ-
նելու գեղարվեստական հասկացույթի ուսումնասիրության շրջանակները և
առանձնացնելու այն կարևոր գծերը, որոնք առկա են գեղարվեստական և
մշակութային հասկացույթների միջև: Գործնական քննությունը կատարված է
ժամանակակից գրականության մեջ լայն շրջանառություն ունեցող *օրարվա-
ծություն* հասկացույթի ուսումնասիրության հիման վրա: