

THE INTERACTIONS OF LINGUISTICS WITH LITERARY SEMIOTICS

Бул макалада тил илими менен адабий семиотиканын өз ара байланышы жана алардын өзгөчөлүктөрү каралды.

В данной статье рассмотрены взаимосвязь лингвистики и семиотики и их особенности.

The interactions of Linguistics with Literary Semiotics and their peculiarities considered in this article.

Semiotics differs from linguistics in that it generalizes the definition of a sign to encompass signs in any medium or sensory modality. Thus, it broadens the range of sign systems and sign relations, and extends the definition of language in what amounts to its widest analogical or metaphorical sense. Peirce's definition of the term "semiotic" as the study of necessary features of signs also has the effect of distinguishing the discipline from linguistics as the study of contingent features that the world's languages happen to have acquired in the course of human evolution.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), the "father" of modern linguistics, proposed a dualistic notion of signs, relating the "signifier" as the form of the word or phrase uttered, to the "signified" as the mental concept. It is important to note that, according to Saussure, the sign is completely arbitrary, and i.e. there was no necessary connection between the sign and its meaning.

Semioticians classify signs or sign systems in relation to the way they are transmitted. This process of carrying meaning depends on the use of codes that may be the individual sounds or letters that humans use to form words, the body movements they make to show attitude or emotion, or even something as general as the clothes they wear. To coin a word to refer to a "thing" (see lexical words), the community must agree on a simple meaning (a denotative meaning) within their language. Nevertheless, that word can transmit that meaning only within the language's grammatical structures and codes. Codes also represent the values of the culture, and are able to add new shades of connotation to every aspect of life.

In the 1990s, linguists are more concerned about the unity of theory and practice. A sophisticated linguist will no longer state that language is a sign system par excellence. He will no longer indiscriminately relegate language to the domain of general semiotics. On the contrary, a linguist in the proper sense of the word will think of applied semiotics, considering the relationship between the science of natural human languages and the science of sign systems, and addressing the following questions:

- How much of a natural human language lends itself to semiotic interpretation?
- What are the signs and sign systems within a natural human language?
- In what way can the concepts and categories of semiotics be applied to the actual teaching of natural human languages?

Expanding the list of questions one could include the following ones:

- Are we justified in applying the semiotic methodology to literature?
- What is literary semiotics (the semiotics of literature)?

The fact that nowadays more and more English language teaching professionals insist on accuracy, literacy and norms shows convincingly that in learning the language we have to acquire more than just the sounds. We have to make conscious choice with respect to the particular variant of pronunciation we are after. In the 1980s the ELT classroom has been

unreasonably tolerant of imprecision, illiteracy and, more generally, bad English. In the 1990s, it is being rediscovered that proficiency in the use of Standard English creates favorable sign situations. Speakers of Modern Standard Literary English have more chances to be promoted in business, trade, commerce and education. Those whose English has been proverbially "branded on the tongue" have to learn to convey "cross-cultural identity" by disguising negative signs (inferior background, poor education, unrefined manners) and demonstrating, with growing confidence, the positive signs and sign systems, the ultimate aim being that of maximum intelligibility and social acceptability.

Along with the "choice" of the variant of pronunciation, one should make another distinction - between diatopic variants of the language. To illustrate the point I will adduce examples from the vocabulary. The use of "solicitor, flat, rubbish, lift, autumn, petrol" etc. "signals" that you are a British English speaker, whereas "lawyer, apartment, garbage, elevator, fall, gas" etc. convey that you are an American English speaker.¹

Differences between the two variants of English are observable in grammar, morphology, syntax and style. On a more sophisticated level of cultural awareness, we shall have to take into account the perception of the world by an American and an Englishman. Americans are generally recognized to be more outspoken and categorical, whereas the British are more tentative and roundabout. In terms of intercultural communication the following piece of instruction "Please Keep Hands Off Door" will be recognized as American, the respective understated British counterpart being "Obstructing the door causes delay and can be dangerous".

A seemingly simple instance of semiotics gradually led to wider linguodidactic and cultural contexts - pronunciation and intercultural communication. A transition of this kind, at times negated by structural semioticians, seems to be well-justified to a linguist who regards language not as an "emic" idealized abstraction, but a fully cognizable synthesis of underlying mental processes and the complexities of linguistic semasiology. Every time we apply the semiotic methodology in question to the objectively existing facts of the language we have to be aware of the continuous interaction of language and speech, language and thinking, language and literature, language and culture.

We can make another step and consider a universally-recognized, commonly-shared and conventionally-used sign system - punctuation marks.

These are "disembodied" in the sense that there is no historically or extralinguistically determined connection between what they signal and what they actually are. Punctuation marks can be used arbitrarily by whomever in writing. This is a system of very convenient, compact signs which find conventional expression both in writing and oral speech. Punctuation marks are singular in the sense that they are semiotically kept apart: the things they signal have to be clearly distinguished and differentiated. A full stop denotes the end of a sentence; a colon introduces an explanation; a semi-colon links separate ideas within a sentence. In terms of a wider cultural perspective there will be a dramatic difference between the use of punctuation marks in English and Russian. English punctuation is semantic-stylistic, whereas Russian punctuation is syntactic-grammatical.

In terms of linguistic semiotics the underlying opposition lies between the following poles: "common property" collocations vs. "private property" collocations, the former signaling the intention of the speakers to convey information or message for the purposes of communication, the latter likely signaling that speakers are intent on esthetic impact, artistic effect, rhetoric or wordplay.

Of equal interest for linguosemiotics are phraseological units like "in general," "by definition," "to take into account," "to take care of," "to be ill," "to be late" etc. They are to be used as is, with no change afflicting the registered dictionary form. Their careful reproduction in speech signals correct acceptable literary usage; violation of word order, or a change of articles or prepositions, would signal bad style, erroneous use and even illiteracy. The learner has to be aware of this system-based sign situation.

The ontology of idioms in speech is drastically different from phraseological units. Let me adduce several examples from the Longman Dictionary of English Idioms (1992): "a new broom sweeps clean" (sometimes shortened to a new broom) and "cross the tees," "have a finger in every pie" (also "with a finger in every pie"). In studying their semiotic properties, we should take into account the present-day socio-cultural tendencies in the use of idioms and attitudes to their adequate use. Adequacy in the use of idioms presupposes that speakers match the "meaning" of the idiom and the particular speech situation adapting the conventionally-shaped and registered form to a new linguistic environment. Creative and sophisticated use of idioms will signal that the speaker is well-educated, linguistically cultured, has a rare gift of the feel for the language. Banal and trite uses of idioms in their dictionary form with practically no attention to the requirements of context and situation will unfailingly signal lack of linguistic culture reflective of either inadequate education or inferior social background.

Literary semiotics is in a way distinctly different from the approaches outlined above. Discourse-oriented semiotics aims at typological investigation of narrative and has more to do with narratology, logic, cohesion and syntax, being of little practical value to students professionally concerned with literature and language studies. Structure-oriented semiotics deals with schematic synopses of literary texts and owes its present-day worldwide recognition to a Russian scholar, Vladimir Propp, who was the first to elaborate the structural approach to folklore (1928) and whose findings were later (in the 1950s) placed at the base of the structural-semiotic presentation of literary works. One should also mention learner-oriented methodologies inviting students esthetically to decompose significant utterances following the patterns worked out by Barthes, Greimas, Genette and Todorov.

If we goback to the earliest history of semiotics, we learned out that the early forms of literary semiotics grew out of formalist approaches to literature, especially Russian formalism, and structuralist linguistics, especially the Prague school. Notable early semiotic authors included Vladimir Propp, Algirdas Julius Greimas, and Viktor Shklovsky. These critics were concerned with a formal analysis of narrative forms which would resemble a literary mathematics, or at least a literary syntax, as far as possible. They proposed various formal notations for narrative components and transformations and attempted a descriptive taxonomy of existing stories along these lines.

Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (orig. Russian pub. 1928; English trans. 1958) provides an example of the formal and systematic approach. In successive chapters, Propp analyzes the characters, plot events, and other elements of traditional folktales (primarily from Russia and Eastern Europe). For each of these key components he provides a letter designation (with superscripts to designate specific subtypes). He proceeds to analyze individual tales by transposing them into this notation and then to generalize about their structure. For example: Analysis of a simple, single-move tale of class H-I, of the type: kidnapping of a person.¹³¹ A tsar, three daughters (α). The daughters go walking (β^3), overstay in the garden (δ^1). A dragon kidnaps them (A^1). A call for aid (B^1). Quest of three heroes (C^\uparrow). Three battles with the dragon (H^1-I^1), rescue of the maidens (K^4). Return (\downarrow), reward (w°).

He then gives the complete structure of this story in one line of notation, the analysis complete and ready to be compared systematically with other tales:

$$\alpha\beta^3\delta^1A^1B^1C^\uparrow H^1-I^1K^4\downarrow w^\circ$$

Later semiotic approaches to literature have often been less systematic (or, in some special cases such as Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, they have been so specifically and exhaustively systematic as to render the possibility of a complete literary semiotics doubtful). As structuralist linguistics gave way to a post-structuralist philosophy of language that denied the scientific ambitions of the general theory of signs, semiotic literary criticism became more playful and less systematic in its ambitions. Still, some authors harbor more scientific ambition for their literary schemata than others do.

Later authors in the semiotic tradition of literary criticism include Tzvetan Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Michael Riffaterre, and Umberto Eco.

Literary Semiotics brings much needed revitalization to the conservatism of modern semiotic theory. Scott Simpkins' revisionist work scrutinizes the conflicting views on sign theory to identify new areas of development in semiotic thought and practice, particularly in relation to literary theory. Focusing on the idea of semiotics as a "conversation" about sign theory and practice, Simpkins principally looks at the work of Umberto Eco, while giving secondary attention to some of semiotics' most influential commentators: including Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard, Foucault, Barthes, Kristeva, and Derrida. As an engaged interrogation of the restraints on the practice of semiotics, *Literary Semiotics* is a provocative study for semioticians, literary theorists, and scholars of cultural studies and a resource for students seeking a probing examination of the theory of signs.

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