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Sociolect text as a form of subculture communication

Abstract

The article deals with the issues of linguistic and sociolinguistic analyses of literary texts marked by subcultural connotative meaning. The paper focuses on the methodological possibilities of classifying texts according to their sociolinguistic properties and explores the relationship between language, culture and text.

Finding the criteria for classifying texts continues to be an important research problem for text typology, in spite of a considerable number of models, theories and patterns aimed at systemizing texts into different text types, text classes, styles, genres, etc. Within Russian linguistic tradition research has mainly been focused on the analysis of functional and stylistic features of texts. The functional perspective, shaped primarily within the Prague school, and the theory of functional styles (K. Havránek, M. Jelinek) were further consolidated by influential Russian scholars, such as V. V. Vinogradov, M. Bakhtin, I. Galperin, who worked on elaboration of functional-stylistic classification of texts. The latter, for instance, differentiated five functional styles of English (the publicistic, newspaper, scientific prose, belles-lettres styles and the style of official documents) [Galperin, 1981: 228–292]. This approach was further reinterpreted by a new generation of scholars concerned to apply the “functional-stylistic” approach for classifying texts for translation needs. Thus, V. S. Vinogradov distinguished conversational, official, public-informative, scientific, fictional, religious texts [Vinogradov, 2004: 16–17]). However, the approach to texts categorization may

be different. For example, V. Chernyavskaya states that it is possible to classify texts based on their “inductive-empirical status” or according to the character of cognitive operations necessary for text structuring. The latter approach makes it possible to distinguish descriptive, narrative, argumentative, instructive types of texts [Chernyavskaya, 2009: 58]. Functional approach to texts classification aids much in gaining a certain understanding of stylistic and functional differences between texts at the same time it does not take into account the social nature of texts. The present study, in contrast, focuses on methodological possibilities of classifying texts according to their sociolinguistic properties and explores the relations of a text to the socio-cultural context.

In linguistics, the notion of a text is traditionally understood as a succession of verbal signs characterized by such principles as cohesion and coherence. Cultural turn in linguistic studies emphasized a cumulative function among other properties of text constituting its textuality. Yu. M. Lotman states that a text is as a complex heterogenic formation, aimed at not only fulfilling the function of a message from the bearer of information to the audience, but also providing the function of a “collective cultural memory”. According to the scholar, in this function a text “plays the role of mediator, helping to reorganize the personality of the reader and change its structural self-orientation and the extent of its links with metacultural constructions”. Finally, the cumulative function of a text makes it a “fullfledged participant of a communicative act”, a substitute for the overall cultural context [Lotman, 2010 (a): 79]. Thus, we conclude that a text is a form of communication, the immediate constituents of which are language and culture. Being “woven” from language units of different levels a text is inseparably connected with the language, as only in the text language units can realize their meanings. On the other hand, a text is an embodiment of culture, which, if to use Lotman’s terminology, is nothing more than an “aggregate of texts” [Lotman, 2010 (b): 18]. In other words, language serves as a material basis of a text, while culture is responsible for the subject matter or conceptual aspects of a text. Thus, besides the direct language meaning every text contains a kind of a cultural code, which makes it possible to classify texts according to their affiliation with a certain culture (sub-culture).

While creating or perceiving a text, man transmits, receives and retains a special artistic form of information, which cannot be isolated from the content of the text. The

language of any text turns into a message, which carries certain information. When a writer chooses the language in which he intends to address his reader, he always does this intentionally implying a certain epoch, a certain people, or a certain culture. The language of a literary text cannot be identified with the natural language; it becomes a social dialect, a 'sociolect' revealing a particular structure of a certain culture or a subculture. Thus, while receiving a text one does not only have to decipher the message, but must also determine the 'language' in which the text was encoded.

A sociolect text is understood as a form of communication used by the author to transmit the specificity of described culture, or subculture by means of accumulating language means characteristic for this or that social group. The notion of a sociolect implies the employment of non-standard lexical and phraseological means of expression and certain deviations from the norm in the spheres of grammar and phonetics. However, for all that the notion of a sociolect should not be perceived as a communicative unit overloaded with designations of realities, peculiar for a certain professional or social community. For example, a well-known novel by T. R. Smith *The Secret Speech* can hardly be referred to as a camp sociolect text, in spite of its being overloaded with the Russian camp speech (ex.: Not only is she vory, she's a leader. She no longer goes by the name Anisya. Her klikukha is Fraera [Smith, 2010: 214]). Though the author uses numerous cases of transliteration of Russian camp jargon, it becomes clear that his main intention was to create a special mood, to add a specific flavor to his story, to make it sound exotic, unusual and even weird in order to stir his readers' curiosity. His use of camp lexicon was essentially pragmatic, as he needed his characters to give a convincing picture of being a part of the criminal world in Soviet times. Camp speech in T. R. Smith's novel functions as a kind of a décor for the scene, the same way as a well-known "Nadsat" mode of speech worked in Anthony Burgess' novel *A Clockwork Orange*.

The connection between the sociolect text and the reality, which it reflects, is much deeper and more complicated. If to accept the opinion of those linguists who suggest that every culture forms its own symbolic language, then we may suggest that every sub-culture creates its own sociolect, nominating means of which bear additional subcultural semantics. In other words, the same way as the national language can be viewed as the plaster cast of the national culture, the sociolect can be viewed as the cast of the subculture within which it came into being.

It is important to take into account the sociolect nature of the text while translating it into a foreign language. The analysis of the translations of the Gulag Archipelago by A. I. Solzhenitsyn into English showed that the use of English analogies in the translation process of the specific Soviet prison camp speech did not always provide an adequate result. Certain inconsistencies are found even in the translation of many Russian words that may not even belong to the so-called camp jargon, but that have a special connotation peculiar to camp conditions. Such words as barrack, hospital, bathhouse, compound, etc., fully convey the denotative component of the meaning of their Russian equivalents. At the same time, one should not forget that these lexemes are used not in their traditional meaning, but denote the objects, which have very little in common with their counterparts in usual life. These words constitute the body of the camp sociolect and though they are not referred to non-equivalent lexemes, they are still marked by the presence of the subcultural component in their meaning.

Thus, we conclude that the specificity of sociolect texts influences the translation strategy. The target text must preserve the sociolect property of the source text. The receiver of the translation must be convinced to perceive it according not to his familiar canons, but to adopt the way of communication chosen by the author of the source text.

Heterogeneous nature of the national culture predetermines the existence of different subcultures within it. This, in its turn, serves as a foundation for developing of certain sociolects, the specific nature of which finds its expression in the sociolect texts.

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