

## Speech, pragmatics and creativity

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Speech as «habla» or «parola» is directly apprehended and «pragmatic», because the relation between the underlying system and the users of language is manifest, whenever something is said or written, i.e. when a «*proizvedenije reči*» is produced to suit a particular purpose. But the process cannot be equated with the transmission of a code-based message. It is therefore natural that the simplistic dichotomous approach should have been relinquished in favour of a trichotomous one — system, norm, and speech (-event) (*sistema, norma, habla*)<sup>1</sup>.

«Pragmatics» is still often thought of as on a par with «semantics» and «syntactics». This however, is not the case: semantics and syntactics belong to the «emic» level while pragmatics is basically «etic». This distinction is important because the individual status and requirements of different speakers/writers differ widely. Their familiarity with the linguistic norm is also far from uniform. But does this mean that all uses of language are «creative», that all speech and writing is a creative individual process?

W. VON HUMBOLDT and A. A. POTEBN'A would probably have answered this question in the affirmative. According to Potebn'a<sup>2</sup> every word of the language is possessed of an «outer» form (*vn'ešn'aja forma*), a «meaning» (*soderžanije*) and an «inner» form (*vnutrenn'aja forma*), the latter appearing as its «etymological meaning» responsible for the way the «actual» meaning of the word is expressed. POTEBN'A's firm belief was that a word has much in common with a work of literature. The latter can also be analysed into three constituent parts: 1) the «outer» form (*zvukovaja, vn'ešn'aja forma*), 2) the «inner» form («*obraz*») and 3) the «meaning»

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<sup>1</sup> See: COSERIU (1952). A. I. SMIRNITSKIJ'S trichotomy is «*jazyk – reč – sverxjazykovej ostatok*» («language» – «speech» – «supralinguistic residue» – O.A., V.Z.) (SMIRNITSKIJ 1954).

<sup>2</sup> POTEBN'A (1863).

(message, or «idea»). In the course of time a word may cease to be «imaginative», or poetic. It can however become poetic again in certain contexts and situations, especially in verbal art. Incidentally, these ideas are an antidote to some of the current mechanistic attitudes and approaches.

Equating the content of words with that of works of verbal art is much too sweeping: POTEBN'A's generalisations, are, certainly, not applicable to all registers of speech, to the infinity of pragmatic situations. The true nature of language in its relation to speech can be realized only if the difference between 1) intellective and 2) «imaginative» («poetic») communication is fully vindicated<sup>3</sup>. This dichotomy underlies all linguostylistic research at the English Department of the Moscow State University<sup>4</sup>. It is the predominance of the one or the other of the two registers that enables us to decide what kind of text we are dealing with in each particular case.

We are now coming to one of the more important points we intend to make. The fact is that an individual's ontogenetic linguistic development depends on his ability to learn, while proficiency only comes with practice. Thus, when a child learns to speak he does it by associating all the variety of phenomena of real life with a certain set of sound-complexes. In the course of time the latter become firmly rooted in his consciousness as «names» for the «objects» (including processes and situations).

This, however, is achieved by trial and error (especially when it is not merely a question of inventories of linguistic units, but also one of stringing them together) in emulation of what he actually hears. When he goes wrong—and he keeps going wrong—he is not merely corrected, but also not infrequently made fun of. Otherwise stated, up to a certain age all attempts on the part of the child at «individual creativity» result in collections of «false etymologies» and laughable morphologic monsters. These are systematically corrected — when not warded off by emulating one's betters within a given set of pragmatic situations.

Very much the same applies to the learning of foreign languages which also consists in the speaker's reproducing ready-made phrases as already existing responses to situations. People should be warned against trying to «create» sentences in a foreign language. As a rule, we turn to a foreign language to satisfy our need for intercultural intellective communication, by analogy with the child who uses language when he requires communication with his elders. It follows that the first step is dexterity in handling language as a means of straightforward communication, while the non-expert user of natural human speech is bound to confine himself to a *repetition* of already existing phrases and constructions.

<sup>3</sup> V. V. VINOGRADOV speaks of the two basic functions of speech on which his theory of «functional styles» (funkcional'nyje stili) /registers is based: the «intellective (referential)» function and the «imaginative (poetic)» one (funkcija soobščeniija - funkcija vozdeistvija). See: VINOGRADOV (1963:6).

<sup>4</sup> Cf., for example, AKHMANOVA, IDZELIS (1978); ČAKOVSKAJA (1978).

As far as the written form of speech is concerned the «norms» and constraints imposed upon speech production (*proizvedenija reči*) are even more rigorous<sup>5</sup>. To write fluently and correctly is a very difficult task, proficiency being acquired only by close study of «model» texts.

What has been said so far is in keeping with Professor COSERIU's classification: *sistema, norma, habla* (or «*parola*»). The division is trichotomous because speech (as *habla*) is not directly amenable to «*langue*» as the underlying semiotic system (*sistema*). There is always the *norm* with its social and historical connotations. The actual use of language is thus restricted by different and often coexistent norms, which are selected to suit the given pragmatic requirements.

Above, foreigners and children were brought together because both are assumed to adhere closely to certain well-defined norms (not «rules» or precepts, but actual stretches of normalized speech<sup>6</sup>). A normal child would avoid saying anything that is not generally accepted in his family — his particular linguistic «universe». The same refers to adults learning a foreign language. They will get nowhere unless they begin by making up their mind about the choice of a «norm», i.e. a kind of language they will try to make their own<sup>7</sup>.

The kind of English which has been normalized by the English Department of Moscow University is best suited for intercultural intellectual communication. The English language (*sistema*) underlies the different «*proizvedenija reči*» (*habla*) within the limits of a given social norm — the register in question, the «*norma sociale*». The way every one of the members of the Department realizes the socially accepted norm is his individual norm (*norma individuale*)<sup>8</sup>.

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We shall assume that in so far as intellectual communication is concerned the involved problems in hand have been clarified to a very considerable extent. We shall now turn to the third of our items — «creativity», which was excluded from the above.

It is common knowledge that even «scientific» texts are not always completely manageable, and sometimes refuse to lend themselves to nor-

<sup>5</sup> FILIN (1979).

<sup>6</sup> We are painfully trying to avoid so often misused metalinguistic expression («rules», «precepts») now in common use. What we are talking about is the particular linguistic *norm* a child grows up within.

<sup>7</sup> The theory and practice of LSP (language for special purposes) is now part of the extremely interesting and valuable new journal *Fachsprache (Internationale Zeitschrift für Fachsprachenforschung)* published in Vienna.

<sup>8</sup> See: COSERIU (1969:251). A complete description of the principles and methods as well as plentiful textual exemplification of the register in question is found in: AKHMANOVA, IDZELIS (1978).

malization<sup>9</sup>. If that is the case, what, then, of the imaginative (poetic) register? Can we speak of a poetic norm, prescribe certain forms of expression to the imaginative writer, in general, the poet, in particular?

Could we conjecture that there was a time when the dichotomy «intellective vs. imaginative (poetic)» did not exist? At the dawn of humanity charms and incantations may have predominated. But what of the present state of affairs when intellective use of language is clearly distinguished from the imaginative one?

It may be assumed that primitive incantations were repeated and shared by pagan priests with the rest of the speech community. Today poetic creativity is in the hands of a special professional class of people. All the rest of the speech community, those who use speech to pass on information, begin by learning to appreciate the results of linguistic creativity, to see the difference between information proper and the aesthetic impact of verbal art.

Unfortunately, we are often led to believe that creativity presupposes complete abandonment of the very idea of norm, that creativity implies complete originality, totally unpredictable choice of words, unusual constructions<sup>10</sup>. But should one accept this approach as poetic creativity proper?

To answer this question the investigation of imaginative writing should include both the linguostylistic and the linguopoetic approaches, that is: 1) detailed analysis of texts (as texts) on the semantic and metasemiotic levels and 2) *global* analysis of structure, imagery, symbolism, etc. As far as the lexis is concerned one of the most promising lines of investigation appears to be the «polyphony»<sup>11</sup> of words. It is usually assumed that a polysemantic word realizes only one of its meanings in contexts of intellective communication. This, however, is not the case when we deal with

<sup>9</sup> For examples of this kind one can be referred to: ČAKOVSKAJA (1978). This can also be proved by comparing the language of: AKHMANOVA, IDZELIS (1978) (see above) — with that of: AKHMANOVA (1977). The latter is much more «individual» and «creative».

<sup>10</sup> Instances of this kind of approach could be adduced by the thousand. It will suffice to quote from E. E. CUMMINGS' poem:

anyone lived in a pretty how town  
(with up so floating many bells down)  
spring summer autumn winter  
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men (both little and small)  
cared for anyone not at all  
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same  
sun moon stars rain.

<sup>11</sup> «Polyphony» is a musical term which has been applied in literary-critical studies (see, for instance, BAXTIN 1972). When we use it in our linguopoetic investigation of words we mean *simultaneous* realization of different meanings, shades of meanings and associations of a word in every particular context.

verbal art, where the writer's aim is to try and realize simultaneously different semantic and stylistic potentialities of the words he uses.

That is one of the reasons why poetic (literary) translation presents such a tremendous problem. By comparing Hamlet's soliloquy «To be or not to be ...» with its 23 Russian translations it is easy to see that the word «time» («whips and scorns of time»), for example, is interpretable as «vrem'a», «vek», «sovremennost'», «svet», «žizn'», «mnogije gody», «sud'ba», «bližnije», «l'udskaja tolpa»<sup>12</sup> without ever attaining complete semantic and stylistic adequacy.

Very much has already been said about non-trivial or «creative» combination of words. Only an imaginative writer could think of sequences like the «whips and scorns of time», «to shuffle off this mortal coil», «the native hue of resolution», «the pale cast of thought», etc. which, in turn, are practically untranslatable as such into any other language. Creative use of language also implies prosody, rhythm and overall syntactic structure.

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<sup>12</sup> A detailed analysis of the soliloquy and its Russian translations can be found in: AKHMANOVA, ZADORNOVA (1976).

