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MEANING – SENSE – CONCEPT

Abstract

The paper discusses “meaning”, “sense”, “concept” which are crucial for understanding of poetry. The usage of these notions allows to research poetry from the position of mind-language-culture approach. Some questions of sense features are discussed. The author tries to find out an answer to these questions. As an example is R.M.Rilke’s concept “Gott” in the cycle “The Book of Hours” (“Das Stunden-Buch”).

Key words

Concept, “Das Stunden-Buch”, “Gott”, meaning, poetry, poetic word, R.M. Rilke, sense

The idea of relation between language and mind is not new and not modern. This issue was brought up in the 19th century by W. Humboldt and his follower A. Potebnya. Humboldt considered language in close relation with mind and perception, A. Potebnya connected language and psychological processes: apperception and association. These ideas were forgotten in linguistics for a long time, but they were studied by other disciplines.

After the cognitive turn in linguistics it becomes possible to study the literature and poetry in its relation to mind, cognition and perception too. The first level of human cognition - cognition of objective reality – is represented in language partially. The next level is represented in culture – human reconsiders their experience and represents it with symbols. Writers and poets reflect and reconsider world, experience and language subjectively, imaginatively and creatively. The German philosopher E. Cassirer wrote about this: “The poet and the painter are like ...the perpetual image maker. Instead of conceiving being as what it is, both deceive us with illusions of being “(Cassirer, 1961: 79). It leads to creation of a new world view: “every great lyricist gives us known edge of a new feeling for the world. He shows us life and reality in a form in which we feel we have never

known it before” (Cassirer, 1961: 85). Thus, poetic world reflection is more than mere world cognition: it is its next, higher, level. Poetry is reflection on world by means language and on language.

The main goal of linguistic studies of poetry is poetic word that is more than mere combination of sound, material stuff, and meaning. Words in poetry create a special poetic world different from reality. Poets represent reality rethought in their works or create a new reality. Thus, poetry is a special poetic world. In the poetic world words can have many references that are not possible in reality. This possibility is created by collocations of words in rhymes. The unusual collocations of words create “images”. For a long time the notion “image” was used by literary researchers to show the existing combination of words and perception, feelings and other non-linguistic phenomena. The cognitive turn in linguistics replaced the notion “image” from Russian linguistics studies of poetry and literature with the notion “concept”. Concept becomes the mental unity of a poetic world that allows us to combine language, cognition, system of beliefs, and culture. It is expressed by usual words but exists in somebody’s mind, world’s world view. The access to the author’s world view or his poetic world can be opened by means of word as its material realization.

I believe it is crucial for study of poetic world to distinguish between two notions “sense” and “meaning”. Meaning is a common content of word fixed in dictionaries. In linguistics the notion “sense” seems quite ambiguous. This phenomenon was elaborated by analytic philosophers (G. Frege, L. Wittgenstein, B. Russell) and phenomenologist (E. Husserl, M. Heidegger) etc.

Sense is connected with sentences and text in most cases. I discuss “sense» of word because it emerges in a sentence and text where word can change its dictionary meaning, and can be opposite to this meaning.

Many opinions on this phenomenon I divide into two parts:

- 1) sense as a part of meaning existing as a possibility that can be realized in context;

2) sense as another entity depending on meaning, emergent in context and not existent beyond it.

The notion seems to be ambiguous because of some antagonisms. The Russian linguist A. Novikov investigating text semantics and its formalization marked, separated out some antagonisms in sense features (Novikov, 1999). Some of them are the following:

1. Sense as a result of text understanding is based on linguistic means and in its turn as a result it can infuse understanding of this means.

2. Precision of understanding is provided by means of sense, but at the same time sense is changeable. How is it possible to get unambiguous understanding by means of changeable sense?

3. On the one hand sense is revealed in text; on the other hand understanding consists in attribution of sense to text.

4. If sense is attributed to text it means there is a set of senses in one's memory, and understanding consists only in actualization of proper sense in this particular text. At the same time it is necessary for sense to be found.

5. Sense belongs to consciousness, at the same time it is characterized as not enough comprehended. Could it mean that sense belongs both to consciousness, and also to sub consciousness?

6. Sense is a result of understanding, at the same time understanding is supposed to be based on sense which is considered to be as a tool of understanding.

I suggest distinguishing two forms of sense: global sense and occasional sense. The first type is given to us; the second one emerges by understanding. Global sense is a "sense-result", it exists in collaborative mind, and it is objective and can be unconscious. The second one is a "sense-tool", it is the occasional sense, it depends on context and situation, and it is an individual, subjective sense. In understanding these senses infuse each other: they interact and transform each other in order to produce new senses: the global sense under the influence of the occasional sense can be reconsidered and in this case the occasional sense also changes. Therefore, we can both attribute sense to a text and find it out. This pro-

cess is similar to a helix, each new turn of which extends sense. Thus, the number of senses constantly increases.

I suggest the following understanding of these notions: **meaning** – is a common, usual content that native speakers connect with a particular sound. Meaning is a static structure fixed by linguists. **Sense** – is an occasional, depending on context content that is ascribed to this word each time it is expressed. The poetic world consists of poetic concepts expressed by poetic words, sense is a dynamic structure. The static and dynamic features are combined in concept. **Concept** – is a word sense, but usual and global, because it can be expressed by different words and, thus, it is not connected with a particular word, and is determined by culture. This relation to culture is one of its main characteristics of concept. As a mental unit it can be translated into other languages. Concept that exists in mind and is expressed in language is a mediator between a collaborative and an individual mind. Concept provides connection between the society and an individual.

Let me to illustrate the relation between meaning, sense and concept using the analysis of the “Book of Hours” (“Das Stunden-Buch”) of the Austrian poet R.M.Rilke. The central concept of this cycle is “Gott” (“God”) represented by both the direct nomination and many metaphors.

This concept consists of two parts: the stable and the dynamic one. The stable part is based on the meaning of this lexeme and the common Christian cultural concept “Gott” (“God”): “1. (im Monotheismus, bes. im Christentum) höchstes übernatürliches Wesen, das als Schöpfer Ursache allen Naturgeschehens ist, das Schicksal der Menschen lenkt, Richter über ihr sittliches Verhalten u. ihr Heilsbringer ist. 2. (im Polytheismus) kultisch verehrtes übermenschliches Wesen als personal gedachte Naturkraft, sittliche Macht” (Duden) (the sole Supreme Being, eternal, spiritual, and transcendent, who is the Creator and ruler of all and is infinite in all attributes; the object of worship in monotheistic religions (Collins)). The first meaning of the word is represented in the following collocations:

God as the creator (*die Natur, die du vergänglich schufst; du uns begannst; du tiefe Kraft, die immer leiser mit mir schafft*).

God as the eternal Being (*du Ewiger; dich Ewiger aus Ebenmaß; du bist von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit; schreibt von deiner Ewigkeit; die Zeit heißt anders als du*).

God as the Ruler of all (*deine Kraft steigt unsern Sinnen das Gesetz zu geben; deine stumme Kraft; in der Krone deiner Kraft; du zwingst mich, Herr; Gott befahl mir*).

The dynamic part is based on the poet's rethinking of the cultural Christian concept, on its subjective understanding and on the second polytheistic meaning of the lexeme partially. It is embodied in unusual striking impressive metaphors:

God as a song (*du Lied, das wir mit jedem Schweigen sangen; du bist die Silbe im Gesange; Gott, der Reim, rauscht in meinem Ohr*).

God is close to human (*Nachbar; Eingeweihter; Gott geht mit jedem; Gott spricht zu jedem*).

God is dark and deep (*in deine werdenden Tiefen zu tauchen; du bist der Tiefste, welcher ragte; deine Tiefen steigen an mir vorbei*).

God as a beggar (*der Bittende; der fortgeworfene Leprose; der tiefste Mittellose; der Bettler mit verborgenem Gesicht; der Armut große Rose; der leise Heimatlose; du bist so arm*).

God as a cathedral (*du Dom; du hohes Mittelschiff; du bist das Kloster zu den Wundenmalen*).

The Rilke's poetic concept emerges from many elementary primary senses through the whole cycle. The poetic word "Gott" and its metaphorical synonyms have some senses extended and confirmed with each next word in the cycle. As result we have the concept composed of many different senses at the end of the cycle.

This analysis of senses allows interpreting Rilke's understanding of god. The stable part of concept is provided by the meaning of lexeme determined by Christian culture. This meaning is proofed by the lexeme "Gott" and its common synonyms: *Gott, Herr, Allmächtiger, Ewiger etc.* Rilke shares this understanding with his readers; it allows him to be understood.

The dynamic part consists of individual senses and is expressed by many metaphors: *Ding der Dinge; Dom; der Arme; der raunende Verrußte; der Bauer mit dem Barte; der Bettler; der Reim etc.* This creativity and imagination represent Rilke's point of view of God.

God is supernatural spiritual eternal being created the world a human, he rules everything. He belongs not to church, he belongs to people because he is poor, he works hard, he is close to people but they should find him out like a treasure, people work on him like on a cathedral. He is not a perfect being; he makes himself perfect in people.

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