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Towards Reception Semantics. A Few Theses and Antitheses

The central frame of reference of this paper will be the claim made by Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska that a literary work is a superutterance, that is a multiutterential utterance which is subject to the conditions of any utterance and at the same time transcends and modifies them. On the other hand, we cannot fully accept the point made by Okopień-Sławińska when defining the category of meaning: "The semantics of utterance reception is not identical with the semantics of utterance and entails a different research apparatus". Although this statement reflects one of the fundamental viewpoints of literary studies, i.e. the perspective of receiver and reception, the thesis itself as well as the methodology which accepts it and makes it the basis of the analysis of the above categories appear questionable.

We suggest that the latter of the two claims should be rephrased so that it is brought into line with superutterance semantics. Thus reception semantics and encoding semantics are not identical but interdependently correlated. What is more, it is impossible to analyze separately the two meaning perspectives without reducing semantic patterns in the area of this "multiutterential utterance". "The research apparatus" of both semantic fields, the encoding and the reception, must be the same. This is the first and the fundamental thesis of the paper; it will be the basis of the following considerations, which should verify it.

Viewing a literary work as a superutterance has the theoretical consequence of posing the question about the status of the speech acts of the characters and of the narrator. What emerges are problems of the relations between the discourse of the author and that of others, represented speech, the structure of direct speech, indirect speech and free indirect speech. The whole issue has been analyzed from many different angles and research viewpoints, though this

work has somewhat decreased in the recent years. In the area of literary studies the problem has been interpreted in terms of the text theory.

If the structure of represented discourse is to be set within the superutterance the old hypotheses inspired by the text theory need to be translated into the speech act theory. However, it is not just a matter of applying different terms. What is more important is to alter the view of the relation of represented discourse and change the status of the author's discourse and its structure. It is also essential to replace the category of the literary text as uniting the work by means of encoding semantics with the concept of superutterance which enriches the work with reception semantics.

While continuing her reflection on speech acts, Okopień-Sławińska brings out their communicative aspect so as to put in that context her own communicative theory of utterance.

To say something is to perform a speech act which is constituted by three partitive acts: locution, illocution and perlocution. "The meaning that can be ascribed to locution is that of an organized sequence of signs when considered irrespective of its communicative setting or when it simply does not take part in communication, belongs to nobody and has no referential force."

Interpreted in this way in Okopień-Sławińska's communicative theory, Austin's category of locution assumes the status of the first "stage of semantic realization of discourse". The locutionary content is formed by the illocutionary meaning, which we believe has a pragmatic nature and shapes the image of the speaker and the receiver. On the other hand, "the perlocutionary meaning emerges as a result of the clash of the locutionary and illocutionary meanings of the utterance with the unknown of the reception".

The above evaluation of Austin's speech acts makes us realize the existence of a certain barrier in the research on speech acts. This barrier results from accepting a model of communication which markedly separates the act of encoding from that of reception.

The weakest link in the speech act theory, as Dorothea Franck points out, appears in the area where it borders on the problems of reception. Removing "the contextual features" from the study of speech acts makes them lose their dynamic nature. It takes out of the researcher's perspective "the local conversational *status quo* before and after the utterance in question". The dynamic status of the utterance calls for a two-level analysis: "a) what it does to the previous utterance, and b) how it changes the context for the following one". Dr Franck deplores the fact that in the speech act theory communicating is

viewed as a particular type of interaction, one in which “two or more speakers mutually address some speech acts to each other (...).”

We believe it is possible to overcome the limitations of the speech act theory by means of Bakhtin’s theory of utterance. Metalinguistics is an area which explores dialogic relations. Yet its object is not dialogue which tends to be construed as a direct sequence of responses, as conversation. Metalinguistics

(...)studies the word (...) not in a “text” excised from dialogic interaction, but precisely within the sphere of dialogic interaction itself, that is in that sphere where discourse lives an authentic life. (...) The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of these contexts into which it has entered .

(...) His (a member of a speaking collective’s) own thought finds the word already inhibited. Therefore the orientation of a word among words, the varying perception of another’s word and the various means for reacting to it, are perhaps the most fundamental problems for the metalinguistic study (...).

The metalinguistic perspective makes the limitations of the speech act theory seem particularly clear. The Bakhtin conception shows the reflections in the word of “these contexts into which it has entered”. This is a semantic phenomenon which is not some minor language reflex, but the essential communicative dimension of discourse.

Sending a message is usually taken to be an activity separate from reception, and dialogue is seen as interaction in which interlocutors perform speech acts “one after another”, whereas Bakhtin seeks to analyze that area of language communication in which the two activities overlap. According to him the central link in the communicative process lies where sending a message testifies to the active reception of speech acts.

The choice of the range of research suggested by Bakhtin is deeply motivated by the practice of speech. The thesis which he often repeats is: “I live in a world of other’s words. And my life is an orientation in this world, a reaction to other’s words (...).” “The speaker is not the Biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time.”

The speaker is not Adam and his utterance, also in the locution stage, cannot be treated as nobody's or "considered irrespective of its communicative setting". The metalinguistic perspective sheds some new light on the questions of perlocutionary meaning. "The unknown of the reception" assumes a visible form: the adopted utterance structures the adopting utterance.

Following Bakhtin's suggestion, we are treating reception as an intralinguistic phenomenon which, underlined by the structure of utterance, reports at least to some minimal degree the structure of a represented utterance. Translating the category of reception in this interpretation into the area of the speech acts theory, we would like to point out that the phenomena considered could be jointly classified as those of "interiorized perlocution".

The Bakhtin conception enriches the speech act theory with "the contextual features" which Franck called for, understood both horizontally - in the utterance's dialogic relation to the utterance which does not have to precede it - and vertically, which is the case of particular interest to us. The vertical dimension emerges when an utterance is projected onto a different communicative level, i.e. when a character's discourse is received through the narrator's utterance.

In the proposed perspective of reception semantics, what moves to the focus of our examination is illocutionary meaning, which in accordance with Okoń-Sławińska's interpretation conveys the communicative aim of the utterance.

The illocutionary, pragmatic status of characters' speech acts is completely neutralized in the study of structures of represented speech. The widely applied term "represented speech" can be argued to reflect the essential aspect of the interpretation of those structures. Not only does it presuppose the anteriority of the reported utterance but also its objectivization, the eradication of subjectivity. In order to underline that feature we shall make use of the terms that John Lyons employs - those of "utterance-signal" and "utterance-act". The former is described by Lyons as "vocal signals" in terms of "product of that behaviour", as "a piece of behaviour". He contrasts them with the concept of utterance-act meant to be "a certain element of behaviour".

Various interpretations of both indirect speech and free indirect discourse reduce represented speech to the level of a product of behaviour, ascribing to it the status of an utterance-signal. This tendency, which was already quite pronounced when semanticists were only beginning to realize the full importance of the above structures, prevails in most contemporary analyses. It is particularly conspicuous in the text theory.

The status of represented speech viewed as a product of behaviour has been unequivocally defined by Wojciech Górný. His results have been repeatedly quoted by Maria Renata Mayenowa. Górný emphasizes the fact that the case of represented discourse involves “not an activity but the result of an activity”. “The introducing text” assumes a metalinguistic character in relation to “the represented expression” and reveals the iconicity of quoting. It is consistently interpreted as an icon of behaviour, an information-signal, a symptom of external semiotic systems reconstructed by the reader.

The basic status of represented discourse, the fact that it represents language behaviour, is disregarded. All represented speech is reduced to the locution level, its communicative intention being neutralized. “From our point of view the text is incoherent if we interpret it on the level of the speaker’s communicative intentions.”

The perspective of “the textual being of the work” aimed at highlighting coherence patterns levels down the heterogeneity and multifunctionality of speech acts. The importance of the introduction-representation relation is reversed. The introducing text is brought to the fore while represented discourse recedes into the background. The change in the hierarchy seems to be at odds both with the intuitive feeling and with the traditional interpretations of the phenomena in question.

The reason behind the reversal is to be found in the acceptance of the thesis which the text theory puts at the basis of its own methodology: that of the superordinate structure of “the monologic background” of every text, including literary text. That is the thesis which gives coherence to the work by means of encoding semantics.

The involvement of meaning patterns of the work in the semantics of the literary evolution is one of the main issues of historical poetics. We would suggest a look at the superutterance in this perspective. We would like to refer to the fascinatingly bold conception of Jerzy Ziomek. He prompts us

to envisage the literary evolution (...) as three oscillations which do not necessarily overlap symmetrically. The first oscillation (of long duration) indicates the connections of a given literature with its original cultural background, which is its Mediterranean heritage. The second (medium) oscillation corrects the first one in so far as it conveys the rhythm of change closer to the social base (...). The third oscillation (short and circumstantial) is most difficult to

treat systematically. The important thing is to learn to think about history, which occurs in different rhythms: from the nearly still time to dramatic changes.

We would be most interested in that still time, Braudel's "long duration", which in Ziomek's interpretation gains the status of "universal and permanent properties being part of the great Mediterranean heritage". Is that rhythm reflected in the communicative structure of a literary work?

The category of the will of reception, "the will of the actual receiver, his will to receive discourse" has been invoked by Edward Balcerzan. We are convinced that his appeal for a reliable reading bears a close affinity to the nearly still time of literary history. It can be seen as a pact accepted by both sides of the literary act of communication. Without this pact no play of literary "necessities and possibilities" would be possible. This essential agreement is the condition *sine qua non* of literary communication and provides the basis for all other agreements which build up on top of it in the form of changing literary conventions.

We interpret Culler's postulate of naturalizing literature as the necessity of referring to that agreement, which, unlike the conventions, does not entail "*vraisemblable*", for in the long duration of the great heritage it is treated as natural. This obviousness makes the agreement transparent and imperceptible to the same degree as the slowest rhythm of culture in which we are all immersed is imperceptible to us.

Let us try to define this pact taking the writer's viewpoint:

"Reader, you know that I have no intention of deceiving you. I am speaking (writing) to you so that the effort which you are putting into reading my work will not be wasted. On the contrary, I wish our cooperation, whose fundamental rule of a reliable reading would you kindly recognize as indispensable, to prove to your advantage."

The postulate of a reliable reading, which is a transplantation of the Grice Supermaxim into the body of literature, is phrased, just as the cooperation principle, in the language of the pragmatic philosophical tradition. It sounds deeply inadequate in the sphere of art. Nevertheless, this language enables us to represent what is the fundamental rule of literary communication in a neutral conceptual framework.

Transported into the area of literature and involving the active participation of both the speaker and the reader, the Grice Supermaxim can only be accepted when we pose the question of how it becomes apparent in the message itself.

Is there a pattern in a literary work to which the status of conversational implicature could be ascribed?

We are referring to the perspective indicated earlier in order to introduce it into the area of narrative work. Reception semantics enables us to represent the relation between the narrator's utterance and a character's utterance in a way that is different from the previous suggestions. It will not be a metatextual relation which transposes a variety of utterances onto a uniform level of text cohesion (Mayenowa). Nor will it be a state of tension between the two spheres of the text, each of which realizes contrasting semantic values that are defined on the basis of different grammatical and stylistic levels (Doležď).

W.N.Voloshinov discovered the following regularity in the structure of indirect speech:

The analytic tendency of indirect speech appears primarily in the fact that, unless they become evident in the content rather than in the form of utterances, no emotional and affective elements of speech pass in the same shape into indirect speech. They are transferred from the form of speech to its content and only in this shape are they introduced into a reported structure or are even shifted to the main clause as comments on the qualification of the speech-introducing verb.

The reception of represented discourse in a reported structure demonstrates its own analytic status by splitting up "sentences used to perform illocutionary acts" into "the content-indicating device" and "the function-indicating device":

The function-indicating device shows how the proposition is to be taken, or, to put it in another way, what illocutionary force the utterance is to have, that is what illocutionary act the speaker is performing in the utterance of the sentence. Function-indicating devices in English include word order, stress, intonation contour, punctuation (...).

John R.Scarle points out that there should be "some syntactic analogue" of his distinction, and draws attention to "certain recent developments in transformational grammar(...)". Unfortunately, he does not make this point any clearer.

The analytic tendency discovered by Voloshinov proves the existence of that "syntactic equivalent". In reported structure there occurs, apart from the differentiation indicated above, the phenomenon of transposing the functional

element, which is expressed in direct speech through function indexes, into the content area. Consequently, the illocutionary act taking place in represented speech is named. The operation of stylistic processing indispensable for the translation of one "structure of representing discourse to another" is a further argument for accepting the underlying thesis of the present paper: semantic patterns of speech reception are an essential criterion which cannot be disregarded in the analysis of speech acts themselves.

By connecting reception semantics with encoding semantics into a methodological whole, the perspective of the superutterance reveals the necessity of viewing what is traditionally termed "represented discourse" as "forms of representing speech" in which "the underlying and constant tendencies of the active reception of represented discourse are reflected".

The dimension of interaction which is constant and independent of the changes of literary conventions, the cooperation between the narrative act and the speech acts of the characters is also apparent in the structure of direct speech. It should be reminded that Austin did not limit the concept of a speech act to verbal communication but also used it to cover all non-linguistic communicative behaviour.

The process of reception of paralinguistic elements that are realized in the characters' speech is born out by the narrator's utterance. The narrator is the first active receiver of kinesic (gestural and mimical) as well as proxemic phenomena that occur in a character's utterance. Giving an account of the behaviour accompanying the characters' discourse, the narrator assumes the role of a partner in dialogue. He takes over the area of the speaker's paralinguistic activities and enters into a direct personal relationship with him. While listening to the conversation, he receives its suprasegmental and paralexical elements and when seeing the speakers, he notes the auxiliary (kinesic and proxemic) speech codes. Identified with the directly personal and communicative sphere in the dialogue, the narrator directs his activity as a receiver to the one who is speaking. The fact that reception is active is demonstrated by the information being part of the narration that "quotes" the characters' paralinguistic behaviour.

The active reception of represented discourse which takes place in each of the above structures reveals a slightly different aspect of the reported speech act, while above all pointing to its illocutionary status. The reception of direct speech in the narrator's discourse supplies evidence of its status as a spoken utterance. This reception uncovers those paralinguistic elements that accom-

pany verbal communication. In this way it provides an overall picture of the character's speech act as a communicative act whose illocutionary intention can lie in the non-verbal sphere.

By splitting up a reported utterance into the content index and function index the structure of indirect speech proves its speech act status and by transposing the functional element into the content sphere it underlines its illocutionary meaning.

The way in which the illocutionary meaning of speech acts operates is shown most clearly in the free indirect speech structure. The illocutionary apparatus of the reported utterance (syntax, accent, intonation) is taken over by the reporting utterance, or conversely. The reception of a given utterance designed in its meaning "is confirmed in its illocutionary assumptions" in the utterance shaped by it, which thus gains the perlocutionary status.

The phenomenon of interiorized perlocution manifested by forms of representing speech reveals the vertical dimension of the communicative structure of the narrative work: the reception perspective makes evident the irreducibility of the semantics of a literary work in relation to the questions of literary communication levels.

Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska derives the thesis of the hierarchical nature of the speaker-receiver relation within a literary utterance from the way in which the latter functions in the area of thematized and implied information. She views "the system of signals correcting and evaluating particular pieces of information" which is built into the communicative structure of the work in terms of conflict. What she means is the clash between thematized pieces of information (from different text levels) or between thematized and implied information.

Implied information as a vehicle of sociological and psychological data hidden in the speaker's discourse assumes the status of symptomatic information, i.e. that "which, though put there by the speaker himself, has not been intentionally selected for transmission by him". It is informative, "meaningful to the receiver", but not communicative; it does not convey the speaker's meaning. The reconstruction of implied information is therefore not affected by the communicative intention of the speaker's utterance and is independent of the factor which is the central stage of discourse-making, i.e. of illocutionary meaning.

Viewed in the Grice perspective, implied information is a special case of conventional implicature, which, as we remember, results from the belief in

the common knowledge of the convention or stereotype implied by the utterance. Grice ascribes a different status to conversational implicature: it conveys the meaning of the speaker, who, while breaking one of the auxiliary maxims, follows the general Cooperation Principle. Thus the basis of conversational implicature are not linguistic conventions but some general features of verbal activities.

In our opinion the literary equivalent of conversational implicature are forms of representing speech which we interpret within the superutterance framework. The perspective of reception semantics reveals the general characteristics of the characters' verbal activities. Those characteristics are irreducible to sociological language stereotypes. Our interpretation brings to light the status of reported utterances as speech acts and focuses our attention on the speaker's illocutionary meaning that conveys the communicative aim of the utterance.

According to the suggested interpretation, conversational implicature does not occur outside literary discourse. It is one of those properties of the superutterance by means of which it transcends the conditions which obtain for all utterances. It is the property which enables us to oppose the principle of communicative cooperation to the rule of the conflict involved in the hierarchical structure of communicative levels of the narrative work.

We treat the semantic construction of represented speech expressed by the concept of conversational implicature as the intraliterary appeal for "the will of reception". This will is the sign of the pact conditioning a reliable reading and a reflection of "the nearly still time" of the literary evolution present in a work.

trans. by Tomasz Płonka