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SEMANTIC CODES OF FOLKLORE AND MODERN FOLKLORE TEXTS

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Abstract

The study of folklore texts is always relevant due to their spiritual value and its importance as a factor in the preservation of the world cultural heritage. Folklore is a collection of texts, like history and literature. The comprehension of these texts is possible only through their integral perception and actualization as a new phenomenon of social life. The emergence of modern folklore texts, based on folklore schemes, is not applicable for the formal definition of folklore, associated with socio-economic change and the technological revolution in the field of communication. The semantic codes, as a system of all concepts of the text, are essential for their understanding. The semantic codes are realized through the signs, determined by national tradition. On the example of the texts of lullabies and family stories, the authors consider the change of semantic codes as images and fragments of the world. The semantic codes have a symbolic meaning, which remains united in their content; it describes the world in folklore and modern folklore texts. The study of semantic codes of folklore and modern folklore texts allow us to define the modern texts of folklore, which are based on the schemes of folklore in its traditional understanding. A simplified understanding of both the folklore tradition and the change of oral tradition appears in the modern post-industrial society. The authors claim that the appearance of new themes and models of textualization radically change the image of folklore texts, both in content and in formal terms.

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1. Introduction

As a historical base of world artistic culture, folklore texts still remain a sign of the national identity. The technological revolution of the 20th century led to the appearance of modern folklore texts. Modern folklore is an area of writing, and its texts develop according to the folklore schemes, but they do not match to the formal definition of the term “folklore” (Nekliudov, 1995).

2. Problem Statement

Modern folklore texts still remain an unstudied subject, and they expand in a process of development of the mass communication. Folklore and modern folklore texts as a cultural phenomenon provide particular information that is difficult to interpret, owing to the temporal distance of folklore, as well as variety of its number and forms. Semantic codes make it possible to arrange folklore and modern folklore texts both within native culture and in relation to the phenomena of other cultures.

3. Research Questions

Like history and literature, folklore is a collection of texts, the comprehension of the meaning of which is possible only under the condition of their holistic perception and actualization among traditional and new phenomena of social life. Pieces of folklore, which are differentiated by kinds and genres, and are named, are a rather conventional phenomenon, the result of the work of collectors and researchers of folklore. People, as the creators and the representatives of it, never differentiate the material they perform and their oral poetic art from the point of view of genres or any nominations of works. For instance, all the variety of epic and lyrical songs in Russian folklore (historical, ballad, rapid, drawling, etc.) is called “song”, genre varieties of fairy tales — just “fairy tales”, different types of non-fairy prose – “stories”.

Modern folklore texts while spreading widely due to the development of mass communications remain little-studied. The genres of modern folklore are variable, they are such as urban romance, chastushka, anecdote, rogue song, street folklore, verse-changed song, graffiti, motifake, depressive poem, black humor ditty, children’s folklore (spooky stories), chant, prick song.

In the folklore text there are three forms, three codes or three sides of the language:

- verbal, which is expressed by words;
- real (objective) is expressed with the use in the rite of certain objects, things;
- actional (active), which is expressed through the actions inherent in each rite.

As an object of study, modern folklore refers to the so-called culture of the third world, which is believed to be a certain distance away from the elite and patriarchal culture. Like mass culture, modern folklore is polycentric and fragmented according to the social, professional, clan and age structure of the society. Modern folklore is marginal; the basic ideological human needs are satisfied with the help of mass media and popular literature.

For our study we chose lullabies and family legends. The lullaby is one of the most ancient genres of folklore, and it is a special lyrical genre of folk poetry. Lullabies have some stylistic resemblance to the ritual genres of musical folklore, primarily to the songs of lamentation (Sumtsova, 2018).

Lullabies are a link in communication between the parent and the child, which persists in older age. Numerous American works on the so-called “foster parenting” recommend foster parents and guardians to sing lullabies to children in order to restore lost feelings of affection and general trust to the world around them.

Family traditions include stories about family members and past events related to them; moreover, they unravel family beliefs and legends, kept in families and passed through the generations (Ilyina, 2016, 2018).

Unfortunately, the preservation of family traditions and systematization of family archives is not a tradition that has become firmly established in the everyday life of the modern family. Most often families store photos, less often letters and postcards, souvenirs; with the development of technology photographs are replaced with videoclips, and it all needs to be systematized. But the main goal of working with the family archive is the interaction of family members, their joint work with documents, letters and other materials, acquaintance with stories from the life of great-grandparents and grandparents, restoring old ones or creating new family traditions which means everything that is called the race memory.

The cultural code is generally regarded as the key to understanding the unique cultural characteristics inherited from the ancestors. The cultural code defines a set of images that is associated with a set of stereotypes in the people’s mind-set. The cultural unconsciousness is what is hidden from understanding, but manifested in actions, behaviour and what determines the folk psychology (Narochnitskaya, 2013).

The plane of expression and the plane of content of cultural codes do not always stand in the same field and it means that, for example, by referring to the verbal code expressed in phraseological units, there are objective, spiritual, spatial and other cultural codes. It should be noted that between verbal and non-verbal codes there is a constant interaction, verbal language as the focus of culture absorbs many elements of objective-cultural codes. Images replace the substance of the plane of expression and from the natural form of existence are transformed into a verbal one.

Culture codes form a coordinate system that contains and sets cultural standards. It is noteworthy that the zoomorphic code constitutes a rich system of standards, which coincides in many languages: the lion is the king of animals, the fox is sly. The word “cat” means this animal as an object of the real world. Then at the level of the primary semantic code there are such concepts as “cat” (word level), “striped cat” (word combination level), “cat caught a mouse” or “cat, panther, tiger belong to the cat family” (sentence level), “The cat family is characterized ...” (text level), the data meaning - “cat”, gives a direct primary linguistic expression of the signified.

At the level of the secondary semantic code, concepts such as “black cat walks across the path in front of a person” means misfortune, “cat ran between two people,” means their quarreling, “cat that lives on its own” is used to talk about someone who lost his family ties. These expressions convey the secondary symbolic meaning of the signified.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our study is to determine the change in semantic codes, including the images and fragments of the world possessing some symbolic meaning, which remain identical in their content and describe the world in folklore and modern folklore texts in different ways, on the example of lullaby texts and family legends.

5. Research Methods

Within the framework of our research we carried out a seminal analysis, having selected 200 keywords from 100 Russian lullabies of the 18th century and 100 Russian lullabies of the late 20th and early 21st century (2 words chosen from a song) for it. Also, 100 keywords were selected from the texts of family legends recorded in literature of 18 and 19 centuries, as well as in archival materials, memoirs and family legends texts of our contemporaries (50 texts each).

Component (componential) analysis is the simplest type of lexical analysis, the task of which is to characterize the conceptual component of the word, i.e. its significatum in semantic and structural aspects. The unit of component analysis is the *seme*, the minimum, and further, indivisible component of the meaning. The minimum component is defined by researches differently: *seme*, *noema*, *piece of content level*, *semantic multiplier*, *differential feature*, *semantic element* and etc.

We carried out the component analysis in three stages:

- finding out the meaning of a word on the basis of the given explanatory dictionaries;
- the establishment of components in the content of the meaning of the word;
- the construction of formulas reflecting the structure of meanings and verification of the objectivity of the selected components of the meaning.

We will study the structure of meanings with the help of the *semes* typology, i.e. we will determine in the meaning of each word the grammeme, lexical and grammatical *semes*, *archisemes* and potential *semes*. The range of concepts to be compared to identify their component composition, we have defined *lullaby songs* as the boundary of the subject area, and these boundaries are outlined by the most common hyperonym - *songs*. The hierarchy of oppositions in the subject area of *lullaby songs* describes its internal structure, and at the same time, the composition and structure of the concept - in its place in the hierarchy of successive oppositions.

Thus, the word *cradle* in the Ozhegov and Shvedova's (1992) dictionary is defined as *a baby cot hanging or swinging on the curved legs*. The components of the content level of the word meaning are:

1. *baby*
2. *cot*
3. *hanging (cradle) (or)*
- 4-6. *swinging on the curved legs*.

Referring to the data of the explanatory dictionaries, we note that the result of the component analysis procedure depends on complete indicators, which are not always found in different sources. Thus, the interpretation of the word "*kolybel*" - *cot* in the Ushakov dictionary is defined as *a swinging*

bed for a baby; cradle; in the etymological dictionary of the Russian language by Krylov (2005) and in the dictionary of Efremova (2000) as *swinging crib for a small child (baby); cradle*.

It should be noted that the fuller the dictionary definition, the easier it is to perform a family analysis. In our case, the definitions from the dictionaries given above are quite short and of the same type, so to identify the missing semes we turned to illustrative material and examples that will allow us to restore the components of the meaning.

By combining the found meanings, we have made the definition of the word *cradle* – *a crib for a small child (baby), hanging or having a support for lateral and longitudinal swing made of wood, birch bark, metal*, and having a symbolic meaning in all cultures.

Let us consider the components of the content level of the word meaning, singled out of the resulting definition:

1. *crib*
- 2-3. *for a small child (baby)*
4. *hanging (cradle) or*
5. *having a support*
- 6-8. *for lateral and longitudinal swing*
- 9-13. *made of wood, birch bark, metal,*
- 14-16. *having a symbolic meaning in all cultures.*

Let us further consider the hierarchical typology of semes that must be reflected in the analysis procedure:

- lexical and grammatical seme – specific meaning;
- archiseme – name lexical-semantic fields – furniture;
- potential seme – the cradle of the revolution – the cradle – as the birthplace of something, to bring up since the times of the cradle – from early childhood.

Then we described the meaning of keywords as an arranged set of separate semantic components. We consider such a description of meaning to be the limit of the accuracy of a semantic description that can be achieved in a linguistic study.

6. Findings

To describe the semantic codes of folklore texts, we studied the notion of the semiotic triangle that includes a thing (referent), a word (symbol) and a thought, a concept (thought of reference) and the opposition of "the signified (a thing) – the meaning (a word)" (Semiotica, 2013). Defining semantics as relationship between language expressions and the world, and identifying the code as a set of correspondence rules between "the signified" and "the meaning", we assumed that there are two semantic codes.

The primary semantic code is a set of rules of correspondence between "a word" and "a thing" in their direct linguistic expression, as well as the correspondence in relations and the set of such relations.

The secondary semantic code is a set of rules of correspondence between "a word" and "a thing" in their symbolic linguistic expression, as well as the correspondence in relations and their combination.

Next we clarified the rules of correspondence between "a word" and "a thing".

The first rule is related to the emergence of the direct (primary code) and portable (secondary) meaning of words in the language and their fixation in the folklore texts.

The second rule states that the connotations of images and fragments of the world revealed in the texts of lullabies and family legends remain less figurative (primary code), when describing objects and phenomena of family household, and quite vivid and poetic (secondary), when describing emotions and feelings.

The third rule determines the following: the associations of respondents, after the presentation of texts containing direct meanings of words, remain similar, but they appear to be different after the presentation of texts, containing figurative meanings of words.

The texts of lullabies revealed to be based upon the rules of the secondary language code, while the texts of family traditions are based upon the rules of the primary code. In addition, we should state, that if a modern folklore text is based upon the imitation of a folklore one, some regularities of the secondary semantic code can be revealed in a modern folklore text. Speaking about marginal samples such as argot, criminal songs and texts with derogatory vocabulary, the primary semantic code can be revealed due to simplified content.

So, having carried all the appropriate analyses in the course of our research, we may state that the emergence of modern folklore texts is connected with social and economic changes as well as the technological revolution in mass communication.

7. Conclusion

Semantic codes as a system of all the meanings in the text which are significant for its interpretation as well as signs in which they can be realized, are determined by national tradition and specified by the particular situation. Seminal analysis helps to reveal an arranged set of semantic components as well as to interpret the development mechanism of polysemy of words (Sternin, 2011). In addition, seminal analysis indicates the difference in the meaning of the word in the language system and the relevant meaning of the word in speech.

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