

FICTIONAL TEXT AS A CULTURAL UNIT

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of fictional texts as vital cultural units that both reflect and shape the values, beliefs, and social norms of the societies from which they emerge. Fictional narratives serve as repositories of cultural knowledge, offering insights into collective identities, historical contexts, and ideological frameworks. The study examines how fictional texts function as mediums for cultural expression and transmission, bridging past and present, and facilitating intercultural understanding. The article also discusses the role of fiction in preserving cultural heritage and influencing societal change, emphasizing its significance in the ongoing dialogue between tradition and innovation. Through interdisciplinary analysis, the article highlights the importance of fictional texts as dynamic cultural artifacts that contribute to the continuous construction and negotiation of cultural identity.

Keywords: Fictional text, culture, literary text, cultural values, notion, national vision, society.

Introduction

The nature of fictional text has always caused many discussions. Numerous researchers were made by famous philologists (B. A. Larin, R. Jacobson, I. R. Galperin, V. V. Vinogradov) and the basic notions of fiction such as imagery, emotiveness, implicitness, ambiguity, associative potential, creativity, semantic complexity were discussed in their works. From their point of view, fictional text is a particular type of communication based on both the author and reader's communicative activity. I.R. Galperin indicates the following features of this text-type:

1. genuine, not trite imagery achieved by means of stylistic devices;
2. the use of words in contextual, and very often in more than one dictionary meaning;
3. the vocabulary which reflects to a greater or lesser degree the author's personal evaluation of things and phenomena;
4. a peculiar individual selection of vocabulary and syntax, a kind of lexical and syntactical idiosyncrasy (Гальперин И.Р. Текст как объект лингвистического исследования. –М.: Наука, 1981).

One major feature of the literary text is its structure. There are different approaches to the problem of the text structure. According to Turaeva's point of view, there are the surface layer and deep layer (Turaeva 1986). The surface layer is considered to shape the structure and the content, while deep layer of the text includes the author's outlook, his individual world picture, moral values, beliefs and aesthetic views. That is why the deep layer impacts the reader.

M. P. Brandes suggests literary text levels such as compositional, emotive, psychological (M. P. Brandes 1971). Z. L. Khovanskaya speaks of a three-level structure which includes aesthetic, compositional and linguistic (Z. L. Khovanskaya 1975).

From the position of cultural studies some authors speak of the cultural level of the literary text. This view is very important with regard to the literary text. According to Maslova, the literary text is regarded as a main means of studying culture as a source of cultural knowledge and information (Maslova 2007). Any literary text can reflect individual and national experience and knowledge about ethnography, history, national mentality, etc. Furthermore, the literary text expresses intellectual, spiritual spheres of human life. Linguocultural studies deal with the following types of cultural values (N. Ph. Aliferenko):

- vital: life, health, living, environment;
- social: social status, profession, wealth, sexual equality, tolerance;
- political: freedom, democracy, lawfulness, peace;
- religious: God, faith, sacred laws, salvation, blessing;
- moral: goodness, kindness, friendship, honour, love, decency;
- aesthetic: beauty, ideal, harmony, lifestyle.

The literary text includes culture relevant language units-linguoculturemes. Linguoculturemes convey cultural information. They are presented by realia, myths, images, beliefs, customs and traditions (Ashurova D. U. Text Stylistics 2012) Linguoculturemes can be expressed by nominations of meals, clothes, holidays, traditions, customs, sport, etc.

Very important observations show that one of the most important features of the fictional text is its aesthetic function. That means that it is closely connected with human, his mentality, moral values, activity and culture. Any literary text is a product of the social, cultural, and intellectual context. Thus, fictional text can reflect cultural aspect.

We fully support the view that texts are directly related to culture and penetrated by a multitude of cultural codes. They accumulate and store information about history, ethnography, national psychology, etc., and pass it on from generation to generation (Maslova, 2007). From this standpoint text analysis is aimed to disclose cultural information, to study the peculiar features of national mentality, to define culture relevant language means used in the text. Relationships between language and culture are most clearly seen in fictional texts. It is accounted for by the fact that a fictional text by its very nature is one of the forms of culture. It is a fictional text that first and foremost transmits

sociocultural, aesthetic, emotional and evaluative information. It should be noted that cultural information encoded in the text is of a gradual character because different texts are characterized by different degrees of culture-relevant information. Most interesting are the texts reflecting intellectual, spiritual spheres of human life. In this respect nationally specific texts, where objective characteristics of reality are interlaced with national views and personal appraisals are of special attention. Interpretation of such texts requires linguocultural competence, that is the knowledge of national cultural values and priorities (Ashurova D.U., Text Linguistics, 2011:85). The following passage from Gary Shteyngart's "The Russian Debutante's Handbook" is illustrative in this respect:

In the basement, surrounded by plaster dust and loose electrical wires, the doctor had tried to recreate for himself the rickety village izba where he had spent his childhood: coarse off-white panels listing the walls were supposed to bring to mind the Russian birch; a set of unfinished wooden chairs gathered around a three-legged kitchen table bespoke an admirable poverty.

The text presents the description of national vision of a Russian house in XIX-XX centuries. The author stresses national symbols such as Russian birch, Russian house – izba and describes an ordinary atmosphere which was inherent to that rural period. But like any dwelling, no matter how simple, it provided much more than shelter. Rituals, customs, and beliefs, as well as the sometimes elaborate decoration of the izba reflected the many meanings and functions its inhabitants attached to it. It is associated with traditional rural life and it remains part of the cultural landscape.

Another example is also by the same author G. Shteyngart "Absurdistan":

...my childhood Cheburashka doll. Cheburashka, a star of Soviet children's television, a cuddly asexual brown creature with his dreams of joining the Young Pioneers and building a House of Friendship for all the lonely animals in town, analyzed me with his enormous liquid eye.

Cheburashka is an iconic Russian classic cartoon character who later became a popular character in Russian jokes. This personage exists in Russia and reflects cultural value (as Matryoshka).

The same cultural features are seen in Jenny Colgan's novels. One of them is "Christmas at the Cupcake Café":

This December, Issy will have to rely on all her reserves of courage, good nature and cinnamon, to make sure everyone has a merry Christmas, one way or another. . . with Christmas cupcake recipes and seasonal sugar-fuelled fun.

The text presents the situation describing the national vision of the typical English Christmas table. It is seen in the description of the lunch with a detailed enumeration of meals (cinnamon, Christmas cupcake). Another example proving that Christmas has a special role among English traditions is "A Christmas Carol" by Ch. Dickens:

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovelful of chestnuts on the fire.

Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass, -- two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle. These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and crackled noisily. Then Bob proposed: -"A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!" Which all the family re-echoed. "God bless us every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all. He sat very close to his father's side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him. "My dear," said Bob, "the children! Christmas day.

Conclusion

Having analyzed the fictional texts above, we can conclude that the fictional text can present the situation happening in a specific time and place. The detailed description of the event reveals the life of people of different social status and their adherence to traditions. Some words in the text can bear a symbolic meaning and refer to culture specific units.

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