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The evolution of the concept DEMOCRACY in American poetry

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Abstract. The article examines the cognitive and pragmatic potential of nominative linguistic units within poetic discourse. It is proved that word-combinations represent the elements of cultural-historical continuum of a linguistic community on a text level. The research is carried out within the analysis of the American poems (XIX - XXI cent.). The method of cognitive discourse analysis helps to interpret the knowledge behind the meaning of linguistic units. The diachronic scope of the study is a basis for the comparative analysis of the representation of the concept DEMOCRACY in the American poetic works of different epochs.

Keywords: cognitive discourse analysis, concept, cultural continuum, nominative linguistic units, poetic discourse.

1. Introduction.

The research within cognitive linguistics presupposes the analysis of linguistic units from the point of view of their cultural relevance. Such approach implies the fact that culturally significant information is encoded into the meaning of linguistic units and is realized in the context of a whole poetic work. Therefore, the conducted research is aimed at the revelation of extra-linguistic knowledge behind the form and meaning of linguistic units in a poetic discourse.

The article is based on the analysis of nominative linguistic units that realize their cultural and pragmatic potential in certain historical contexts. Traditionally, the attention has been drawn to the analysis of phraseological units, but this research is based on the study of the representation of culturally and historically significant information on the level of word-combinations, endowed with connotative meaning.

The method of lexical-semantic analysis (aimed at the revelation of the main means of conceptual sphere representation on the level of nominative linguistic units); discourse analysis (presupposes the investigation of the cognitive-pragmatic meaning of linguistic units in the context of a whole poetic text); the method of cognitive analysis (based on the determination of cultural knowledge in the meaning of word-combinations in a poetic text) serve as the methodological basis of the research. The diachronic approach to the study provides the possibility to trace the changes that occur in the semantics of the linguistic units analyzed, taking into account authors' intentions and historical-cultural prerequisites of a poem creation.

2. Practical aspects of the concept analysis

The American poetic discourse of the XIX - XXI centuries becomes the object of the investigation and serves the basis for the representation of the American conceptual picture of the world. The conducted research concentrates on the concept DEMOCRACY, which is one of the basic for the American society.

2.1. Conceptual analysis of the XIX cent. American poetry

In the poetic works of the XIX century the following components of the concept DEMOCRACY can be distinguished: UNITY, JUSTICE and EQUALITY. This fact demonstrates that in the XIX century the notion of democracy was associated with the basic values of the American society. The stylistically marked word-combinations stress upon the existence of a united country, consisting of separate states; its nature, blessed by God

(*transcendental union*); the eternal union of the citizens of America (*endless Nationality*):

I will plant *companionship thick* as trees along all the rivers of America,
and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies;
I will make *inseparable cities*, with their arms about each other's necks...

W. Whitman "A Song" [5]

The metaphor *companionship thick* shows the continuity of the US territories (*inseparable cities*) and the unity of the citizens (*their arms about each other's necks*). The method of syntactic parallelism, the repetition of the lexeme *all* in particular (*along all the rivers of / America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over / the prairies*), emphasizes the idea of the unity of the whole country, which is realized on the level of the place name *America* and other words denoting geographical objects (*rivers, great lakes, prairies*). The XIX century was the time of internecine quarreling on the US territories, so the idea of unity between the rival states was of pivotal importance, proclaimed in poetic works.

The same topic is presented in the poem "One Song, America, Before I Go" by W. Whitman [6]:

ONE song, *America*, before I go,
I'd sing, o'er all the rest, with trumpet sound,
For thee – the Future.
I'd sow a seed for thee of *endless Nationality*;
I'd fashion thy *Ensemble, including Body and Soul*;
I'd show, away ahead, thy *real Union*, and how it may be accomplish'd...

The place name *America* embodies the whole united country. It is proved on the text level by such word-combinations as *endless Nationality* and *real Union*. The lexeme *endless* shows the permanence of the union of the American nation in present and future (*I'd sing... / For thee – the Future*). The adjective *real* stresses the necessity to draw the society together in spiritual and material aspects (*Ensemble, including Body and Soul*).

Moreover, in the poetic works of the XIX century America is represented as a prosperous and flourishing country, a shelter for the deprived, where there is no place for misery and injustice:

Theirs is a *pure republic*, wild, yet strong,
A '*fierce democracie*,' where all are true
To what themselves have voted—right or wrong—
And to their *laws denominated blue*;
(If red, they might to *Draco's code* belong,)
A vestal state, which power could not subdue...

F.-G. Halleck "Connecticut" [2]

The word-combination *pure republic* represents the reality of the USA in the XIX century. Republic as a form of state governing, when all the highest organs of power are elected or formed by national representative institutions, and all the citizens are endowed with personal and political rights, is characteristic for America. In the process of the creation of the Declaration of Independence, monarchy was defined as inappropriate and tyrannical for the formation of a new state. That is why the French Republicanism, described thoroughly in the works of the French liberal leaders, came to the forefront. In such a way, America became the federal republic. This fact is reflected in the word-combination *fierce democracie*, in which the main idea is emphasized by the use of the French words. The word-combination *pure republic* expresses the special understanding of the notion “republic” by J. Madison and Th. Jefferson, who used it as a synonym for “democracy”.

The word-combinations *laws denominated blue* and *Draco's code* represent the basic principles of the American law system. *Blue Laws* are defined as laws that restrict or ban certain types of secular Sunday activities, e.g. shopping. Even today some states (*Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey*) are governed by such laws, forbidding alcohol or car sales on weekends. These laws were created in the Connecticut puritan colonies, whose principles became fundamental in the process of the USA development.

The word-combination *Draco's code* points at another source of the American law system formation. Draco laws are the first written code of rules created by the first legislator of Athens in Ancient Greece. The code is known for its exceedingly cruel punishments. One could be sentenced to execution not only for murder, but also for misdemeanors. In such a way, the intolerance of the Americans towards the law breach, and the superiority of law in the system of state governing are established on the text level.

The same idea is demonstrated in the poem “Sumner” by J. Whittier [8]:

...Beyond the dust and smoke he saw
The sheaves of Freedom's large increase,
The holy fanes of *equal law*,
The *New Jerusalem of peace*...

The stanza mentioned above reveals tight associations between the notion of law and such American values as freedom (*Freedom's large increase*) and peace (*New Jerusalem of peace*). The superiority of law is regarded as the prerequisite of order and mutual respect in a society, as well as the movement from the state of degradation (*the dust and smoke*). The realization of a connection between law and religion is typical for the American society. From this perspective, the use of the place name *New Jerusalem* is aimed at the representation of the main tendencies of the US development by means of the creation of strong associations with the biblical town. As it is generally known, New Jerusalem, mentioned in the Old Testament, is a place where people live with God, being not knowledgeable of disgrace and injustice.

The XIX century is also known as a period of the establishment of the democratic principles on the US territories, including those affected by slavery:

...That the roused spirits of Democracy
May leave to *freer States* the same wide door
Through which thy *slave-cursed Texas* entered in,
From out the blood and fire, the wrong and sin,
Of the stormed city and the ghastly plain,
Beat by hot hail, and wet with bloody rain,
The myriad-handed pioneer may pour,
And the *wild West* with the *roused North* combine
And heave the engineer of evil with his mine...

J. Whittier “To a Southern Statesman” [9]

The northern states are considered the source of democracy in America, since their development was determined by such values as freedom and equality. The differences in the systems of governance in the northern and southern states are represented on the level of the following word-combinations: *freer States*; *roused North* vs. *slave-cursed Texas*; *the wild West*. The author differentiates between freedom as a democratic ideal of the American society (*roused spirits of Democracy, freer States*), and slavery – curse of the past (*slave-cursed Texas, the wrong and sin, engineer of evil*). Slavery is considered to be the source of chaos (*wild West*), violence (*the blood and fire*) and war (*the stormed city, Beat by hot hail, wet with bloody rain*), and the American nation has to find its way out of such a state.

The place names *West* and *North* perform the function of identification, since they determine the role of the northern states in the process of the US development, taking into account their industrial significance and active opposition to slavery; informative function of acknowledging readers with the main events in the American history; evaluative function of distinguishing enslaved and free territories.

The notion of equality is often represented by the lexemes *equal, Equality, white and black*:

...They are rising, – all are rising,
The *black and white together!*
O brave men and fair women!
It comes of hate and scorning:
Shall the dark faces only
Be turned to morning?..

J. Whittier “Howard At Atlanta” [7]

The equality of white and black population is realized in the word-combination *black and white together*. The antithesis *dark faces* vs. *morning* in the phrase *Shall the dark faces only / Be turned to morning* foresees bright future for all shifts of the American society.

As the conducted research shows, the concept DEMOCRACY in the American poetic works of the XIX century is represented through the notions of unity, justice and equality that fully reflect the social and historical processes in the American society of those times, the establishment of the main principles of the political, judicial and value systems in particular.

2.2. Conceptual analysis of the XX - XXI cent. American poetry

At the beginning of the new XX century the perception of the notion of democracy changed and got new facets. On the contrary to the previous century, it acquired rather negative meaning, which is explicitly demonstrated in the poem of L. Hughes “Democracy” [4]:

Democracy will not come
Today, this year
Nor ever
Through compromise and fear...
I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

The notions of democracy and freedom are closely intertwined as they symbolize the basic values of the American society. Nevertheless, the author points out that they are impossible to be achieved at the moment when the country is governed by compromise and fear. This idea has a very strong social background since certain classes of the American society, African-Americans in particular, did not have equal rights with white population in the 1900's. Moreover, such values as freedom and democracy appear to be sheer promises that will not be fulfilled by the authorities (*tomorrow's bread*). The last lines of the poem prove this idea and express author's doubts about the existence of democracy in the world.

The similar point of view is expressed in the poem written by E. Hemingway "To Good Guys Dead" [3]:

They sucked us in;
King and country,
Christ Almighty
And the rest.
Patriotism,
Democracy,
Honor –
Words and phrases,
They either bitched or killed us.

The disenchantment in the ideals of the American society is revealed in one of Hemingway's war poems. The author stresses upon the fact that the country is not able to defend its people, but it is aimed at the usage of all their resources and abilities (*They sucked us in... They either bitched or killed us*). At the same time, such notions as patriotism, democracy and honor are simple words used to manipulate people in order to achieve certain goals.

Such disillusionment, however, is not all-embracing:
It's coming through a hole in the air...
From the wars against disorder...
Democracy is coming to the U.S.A...
It's coming from the sorrow in the street,
the holy places where the races meet...
From the wells of disappointment
where the women kneel to pray
for the grace of God in the desert here
and the desert far away:
Democracy is coming to the U.S.A...

L. Cohen "Democracy" [1]

That author expresses a hope that America can change for the better as it is a very powerful state. That is why the principles of democracy deserve to be fought for. Moreover, in the context of the whole poem the notion of democracy is closely associated with religious values of the American society. In such a way, L. Cohen shows that the moral principles laid down in the past support the development of modern values, and the country has a chance to evolve in a right direction.

3. Conclusions

The conducted research proves that the concept DEMOCRACY is one of the basic in the American society. However, the analysis of the XIX – XXI cent. poems reveals the changes in its perception by the American community. The prominence of the concept DEMOCRACY in the XIX century is presented on the level of its component parts (unity, justice and equality) that are considered the main prerequisites of the US development. Nevertheless, the attitude to the notion of democracy becomes more complicated with the time. The XX century brings the understanding of democracy as of menace and dictatorship, and the government is regarded as such that is unable to defend its people and provide them with equal rights. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the American poets of the XIX – XXI centuries continue to believe in a better future for their country. Therefore, the perception of the basic notions by a linguistic community depends greatly on historic and social prerequisites of the country development and is changed with time.

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Гач Н.О. Эволюция концепта ДЕМОКРАТИЯ в американской поэзии

Аннотация. В статье исследуется когнитивный и прагматический потенциал номинативных лингвистических единиц в поэтическом дискурсе. Предполагается, что словосочетания представляют элементы культурно-исторического континуума языкового сообщества на уровне текста. Исследование проводится на материале американских стихов (XIX – XXI ст.). Метод когнитивного анализа поэтического дискурса помогает интерпретировать знания, которые скрываются за смыслом лингвистических единиц. Диахронический аспект исследования является основой для сравнительного анализа репрезентации концепта ДЕМОКРАТИЯ в американских поэтических произведениях разных эпох.

Ключевые слова: когнитивный анализ дискурса, концепт, культурный континуум, номинативные лингвистические единицы, поэтический дискурс