

Linguocultural roots of comparative poetic studies: a historical perspective

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Abstract. The article delineates the sources of theoretical fundamentals of such an integrated field of study as comparative poetics that has emerged on the basis of advancements in two philological domains: comparative stylistics and comparative literary studies. It aims to reveal that overall interest to the cultural specificity of analyzed poetic material which has always been a distinguishing feature of both donor disciplines of comparative poetics.

Keywords: *comparative poetics, comparative stylistics, comparative literature, idiomatology.*

Аннотация. В статье описаны истоки теоретических основ такой интегрированной области исследований как сравнительная поэтика, которая возникла на базе достижений в двух сферах филологических изысканий: сравнительной стилистики и литературной компаративистики. Она раскрывает сравнительно-стилистические и сравнительно-литературоведческие первоисточники свойственной сравнительно-поэтическому исследованию ориентированности на лингвокультурные аспекты анализируемого поэтического текста.

Ключевые слова: сравнительная поэтика, сравнительная стилистика, литературная компаративистика, идиоматология.

Modern understanding of poetics is firmly attached to the notion of cognitive poetics – the discipline that lately attracts more and more attention of both foreign and domestic scholars [3, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15]. However, this undoubtedly promising sphere of research deals with predominantly those unique aspects of poetic texts which represent the individual world perception of the author without considering the cultural-cognitive underpinnings of the choices made by the creators of poetic works. This lacuna can be successfully covered in comparative poetic research that has been always oriented to revealing certain ethnopoetic features of literary texts under consideration.

Comparative poetics is an integrated interdisciplinary formation which draws its theoretical and methodological instruments from comparative stylistics and comparative literary studies. Although comparative stylistics is traditionally categorized as a linguistic discipline, it had initially much wider tasks and applications than those of linguistics. This circumstance can be accounted for by a special status of stylistics among many other disciplines of linguistic cycle due to its only relative correlation with language science categories.

Firstly, the very term “stylistics” has acquired two equal in rights readings. At the dawn of its existence (the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century) modern stylistics was developed to counterbalance the treatment of style as the art of writing well, often illustrated by examples drawn from classical works (this didactic approach that addresses the problems of normative literary speech continues to exist nowadays under the name of orthology). The first work of innovative kind (“Stylistique” 1905) was written by French linguist Charles Bally (1865-1947), a disciple of Ferdinand de Saussure. The novelty of Ch. Bally’s doctrine can be reduced to two crucial points: 1) his work was descriptive, not normative; 2) the author made an attempt to elaborate a stylistics of the language, not of literary works that is why he did not deal with literature. Charles Bally saw the proper object of stylistics in the expression of thoughts and feelings provided by the language and sought to establish the stylistic system of a language. Another founder of modern stylistics Austrian philologist Leo Spitzer set the aim of revealing a

correlation between the stylistic properties of a literary text and the psyche of the author. The term “style” is considered here in its aesthetic, not functional sense and the stylistics literary (belle-lettre) text (also “philological stylistics”, “literary stylistics”, “the theory of creative literature” (V. V. Vinogradov’s term), “linguopoetics” (V. P. Grigoriev’s term) is delineated as an interdisciplinary field of study on the border of linguistics and literary criticism which foregrounds the notions of individual artistic style, the image of the author, the aesthetic value of language and speech units. In its turn this kind of stylistics has fallen into three types: genetic stylistics (aimed at revealing the author’s intention through the analysis of not only the literary text but also extratextual reality – the author’s biography, his or her world view); stylistics of perception (which seeks to establish those elements of the literary text that are most relevant for the reader and to identify the reason of this relevance; represented by linguistic analysis by Lev Tscherba, stylistic analysis by Michael Riffater, stylistics of decoding by I. V. Arnold); immanent stylistics (which disengages itself from both: possible intentions of the author and the reader’s perception; it was conceived in the literary and linguistic theory known as Russian formalism and later developed in the works of “New Critics” in England and the USA, by French structuralists) [5, c.10-23].

Accordingly, there formed two kinds of stylistics: linguostylistics and stylistics of literary texts. Later, largely in consequence of this dichotomy, a twofold treatment of stylistic studies took shape in scholarly literature, it consists in a narrow and wide understanding of stylistics. According to the former, stylistics is viewed as a part of general linguistics, that is a discipline that is narrower than linguistics, and style is represented as a descriptive, differentiating, classifying category with a place on the periphery of linguistics. The latter approach describes stylistics as a discipline that has wider than linguistics scope of scholarly interest. Such wide understanding of stylistics is reinforced in semiotics where style and stylistics are not restricted to language and literature for style is viewed as a pansemiotic phenomenon that depends upon the code (for example, the code of music, painting, architecture, ballet, fashion

and so on). It is also found in cognitive stylistics that deals with the generation and perception of text as a constructive activity of a person performed on the basis of his or her knowledge of those forms and means in which human subjectivity is expressed in certain systems of values.

Secondly, the central notion of stylistics “style” is deprived of clear-cut morphological characteristics because the nature of individual-situational semantics which it implies cannot be explained solely within the framework of general linguistics. That is why, despite a long-standing tradition of studying style, nowadays there exists no generally recognized, exhaustive definition of this interdisciplinary concept. The only opinion about the essence of style which seems to be shared by a vast majority of scholars is that style represents first and foremost a certain integrity and that it is connected with the usage of language (its function) and its specific content. The basis of this integrity is found, however, in extralinguistic factors, it may be the form of vision (Velflin), artistic will (E. Riezel), psychology of personality (Fossler, L. Spitzer), psychoideology of certain social groups (Schücking, Friche). Finally, according to some authors, style and stylistics bear no relation to language and belong, for instance, to the study of human nature (Ullmann) [4, c.8-10]. Due to its complexity and multifarious character style is considered not only in those fields of research which are directly connected with linguistics (rhetoric, the philosophy of language) but also gets different treatments in a rather wide spectrum of the humanities: psychology, culturology, philosophy, sociology, social philosophy, philosophy of culture, art criticism [16].

Thirdly, any other linguistic sphere deals with a set of stable language structures marked by morphological definiteness. Thus, for instance, phonology studies vowel/consonant phonemes, syllables and syllable division, intonation patterns, word stress; grammar – morphemes, part-of-speech categorization and sentences – their structural parts, communicative types and so on; lexicology – means of word-building, words (their denotative and connotative meaning, synonyms, antonyms, paronyms, homonyms). These linguistic disciplines use substance-oriented and structure-oriented approaches to the object of research studying quite definite language units and relations between them, while stylistics resorts basically to the functional approach to the units of all the language levels (from phonological to textual) dealing with the vertical cross-section through the whole system of language.

The nature of stylistics as a sphere of research which presupposes surpassing the borders of pure linguistics has found its unambiguous expression in comparative studies. The idea about comparative study of languages dates back to the early years of the 19th century, the period of romanticism which was characterized by a keen interest for history, literature, aesthetics as well as for the issues of historical and national specificity. In the domain of linguistics such attitude to the uniqueness of national character realized in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s doctrine about the inner form as manifestation of national outlook. In the course of time there appeared a separate field of research called **idiematology** which was aimed at

studying national styles. It offered contrastive analysis of different languages and explained specific characteristics of a certain language by historical, ethnic and social factors [14, c. 14-21]. Later scholarly works written in an idiematological perspective (it is first of all the book by W. Wundt “Sprachgeschichte und Sprachpsychologie”, L., 1901) constituted basis for the theory of “external” stylistics elaborated by Ch. Bally which became a precursor to modern comparative stylistics.

According to Ch. Bally the subject of stylistics lies in those characteristics (caractères) of language that reflect psychic specificity of a certain language collective. His idea of “European stylistics” presupposes such description of “European psychic make-up” which is expected to reveal both homologous elements and discriminants in expressive systems of European languages [2, c. 41]. This angle of approach was designated external (= comparative) stylistics because those characteristics of language which it studies become especially conspicuous if you look upon the language from outside (if you are a foreigner) as native speakers find them absolutely natural and thus non-specific.

These theoretical statements found their illustration in Ch. Bally’s analysis of German-French material where language form serves a point of departure for conclusions about psychological properties of a corresponding language collective [2]. Thus Ch. Bally claims that German is more abstract than French because German abstract nouns are expressed in French in a more natural and simple way by means of verbs (comp. *die Trennung* (*parting*) versus *séparer*, a he *la séparation*). By analogy the conclusion about the German tendency to a more detailed and complete transmission of information in contrast to the French tendency to expressing only the essential is illustrated by an array of German verbs to denote different kinds of erroneous actions *sich versprechen* (*to make a mistake in speech*), *sich verschreiben* (*to make a mistake in writing*), *sich versingen* (*to make a mistake in singing*), all of which are encompassed by the French verb *se tromper* (*to make a mistake*).

Among the most fundamental grammatical-idiematological studies one should mention the book by the German philologist M. Deutschbein “Neuenglische Stilistik” (L., 1932) in which the author delineates the style of English language collective. He states that the key distinguishing characteristic of English national style is expressivity which includes energy, economy, laconism and variety. This idea is substantiated by numerous specific features of English such as: 1) denominative or converted verbs (*cook* (*n*) – *to cook* (*v*), *father* (*n*) – *to father* (*v*) and so on) that testify to language economy; 2) phrasal verbs in which the stress laid on the last element makes the action more dynamic (*to pull through* “*to gain one’s end, to have one’s way*”, “*to overcome the difficulties*”; *to put up one’s umbrella* “*to open one’s umbrella*”); 3) predominance of monosyllabic words especially of German origin – polysyllabism, according to M. Deutschbein, is felt in English as “an antistylistic phenomenon” (comp.: *house* – *residence*, *harm* – *injury*, *upper* – *superior*, *to hand* – *to deliver*, *to hide* – *to conceal*, *to find* – *to discover*); 4) disuse of adjectives, additional words of clichéd or embellishing character – the specific feature that gives a special “force of style” to

the English language. This limited use of adjectives is compensated by means of such grammatical forms as a) substantivated superlative degree with the genitive case (“*the hottest of seasons*”, “*the last of his money*”); b) genitivus definitivus (“*your fool of a husband*”, “*the devil of a toothache*”); c) hendiadys which combines two nouns and makes the use of adjectives unnecessary (*Goblets and Gold* = «golden goblets», *sanity and reason* = «*to be in one’s right mind*»); d) abstract nouns in the function of governing words (*the softness of her hair* = «*her soft hair*»); e) abstract noun in the genitive case as a determining element (*air of importance* = «*an important air*»); 5) synecdoche (*heavens* – expresses space and extent, *revenges* – expresses intensity of the feeling); 6) disuse of adverbs compensated by the verb which denotes some specific characteristics of the action (*to knock softly* – *to tap*, *to knock hard* – *to pound*, *to ask humbly* – *to beg*, *to ask emphatically* – *to demand*, *to ask authoritatively* – *to require* and so on) [12, c. 37-52].

The first major scholarly work under the title “Comparative stylistics” by Canadian linguists Jean- Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet (1958, Paris) [18] which was also one of the first fundamental studies in linguistic theory of translation, ushered in the tradition of identifying comparative stylistics with translatology. It is obvious already from the subtitle of the book that its subject matter is treated per se as the theory of translation called “comparative stylistics” – *Stylistique comparée du français et l’anglais. Methode de traduction*.

In their book J.- P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet challenge the treatment of translation as a special art which presupposes that it has inevitably be performed by intuition. They insist on the necessity to reveal the reasons of conscious and unconscious choices made by the translator and believe that such research should be conducted on the basis of modern achievements in the realm of linguistic science. Among the underlying scholarly doctrines of this study one should mention Ch. Bally’s theory about internal and external stylistics as well as idiomatological works. According to Bally internal stylistics deals with cognitive (= intellectual) and affective (= emotive) elements of language whereas external (= comparative) stylistics studies expressive means of two or more languages in a comparative perspective. The authors analyze the correlations of French and English which constitute the basis of the process of translation. They consider three aspects of comparative analysis: 1) analysis of lexical units; 2) analysis of the order of lexical units (= syntactical structures); 3) analysis of semantic organization of two texts in the compared languages (their tonality, the development of thought, the structure of paragraphs and so on).

J.- P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet maintain that the basic difference between French and English lies in the fact that English words more often reflect the plane of reality (these are concrete and motivated words-images) while French words tend to reflect a conceptual aspect (they can be described as abstract and non-motivated words-signs). Hence many differences follow: for instance, differences in the volume of meaning (which cause the necessity of concretization or generalization while translating) and differences in affective meanings (intensity, ease, refinement and so on). Transpositions or substitutions of parts of speech while translating are caused by dissimilar

tendencies existing in French and English. Thus, 1) French is more nominal in its nature, English is more verbal (comp.: *to resign* – *donner sa demission*); 2) word order in English presents real location of objects more clearly than word order in French – which entails transpositions while translating (comp.: *He gazed out of the open door into the garden*. *Il a regarde dans le jardin par la partie ouverte*. – means vs result); 3) English is more elliptical than French that is why link words are frequently substituted by meaning-bearing words. Analyzing the correlation of word order in the original and target text the authors reveal differences in the disposition of ideas within the framework of the utterance. According J.- P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet it shows specific psychological features of two nations, for example, the tendency of English to animism, subjective reflection of a situation.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that although the second, linguistic-typological trend of comparative stylistics is focused predominantly on a unidisciplinary (linguistic proper) approach to the analyzed texts, an **idiomatological** tendency has developed here as well, in consequence to the postulates of Charles Bally’s school [13].

Speaking of the theoretical framework of comparative literature that generated comparative poetic research, one should mention that although the term “comparative poetics” was offered by Martin Haupt in the middle of the 19th century, it obtains its full value only during the second period in the development of comparative literature when the so-called historical-genetic comparative studies gave way to aesthetic-theoretical, formal or poetical comparative literature. At this stage the analysis of documented literary contacts is substituted by the study of typological analogies or correspondences in the movement of national literatures [11, c. 20]. The initial establishment of comparative poetics as a part of the general apparatus of philological categories is connected with the name of Alexander Veselovsky, who in 1887 put forward his vision of comparative literary studies which should be not only a comparative history of literatures but also a comparative poetics i.e. a comparative theory of literatures. Such a seamless unity of the history of literature and poetics was called historical poetics whose subject, according to A. Veselovsky, consists in studying the evolution of the ways and means of artistic expression and their socio-historical functioning [17].

Simultaneously with A. Veselovsky these issues were being considered by A. Potebnya, the latter, however, was guided by the principles of psychological approach to the problem. In contrast to Veselovsky, he did not pay so much attention to the genesis of poetic genres, plot motives and the characters of personages, but strived to reveal the specificity of national-historical interpretation given to the most widespread poetic images. Consequently, it is possible to state, that the main task of A. Potebnya’s works on comparative poetics consisted in investigating the so-called ethnopoetic and, as a matter of fact, **cultural** aspect of a literary image [1, c.7].

Later the integration of comparative studies with the history of literature conditioned by an active and fruitful development of Anglo-American school of “new criticism”, as well as structural-semiotic methods, made it

possible to view comparative literary studies as comparative poetics – the study of poetic forms, genres and styles in their development. The same idea is supported by one of the leaders of reception aesthetics school G.-R. Jauss who empathizes the necessity to work out the theory of comparative poetics, rhetoric and aesthetics. At Budapest conference on comparative studies in 1962 the subject of comparative poetics was defined as interpreting the theory of genres, stylistics, metrics and comparative translation [9].

The above-described reference of comparative poetic research to a rather wide field of philological studies makes it hard to give a satisfactory, clear-cut definition to the term “comparative poetics” whereas nowadays there exist numerous spheres that may fall under the category of comparative poetic analysis. Thus, the notion “comparative poetics” tend to encompass comparative stylistics, comparative literature, the theory of poetic style

and poetics. The same lack of certainty characterizes the definition of the term “poetic form” which is traditionally used to denote the sum total of formal modalities that influence the reader and that can be both unique and recurrent, individual and categorical. However, irrespective of approaches applied by scholars, on the one hand, comparative poetics remains an integral part of comparative literature, while, on the other hand, a comparative analysis of identical expressive means used in different languages has to be inevitably “doubled” within the framework of comparative **stylistics** [10, c. 57].

Thus, it seems logical to conclude that linguistic and cultural issues have always been considered an essential part of comparative stylistic studies as well as of a theoretic-aesthetical (poetical or formal) trend in comparative literature, and, accordingly, they appear to play a significant role in comparative poetic research.

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