

Semantics and Style

MILOSAV Ž. ČARKIĆ
(Belgrade)

In the broadest sense semantics as the study of meaning investigates all concepts that mean something, all concepts that convey something – it imparts their specific sense, substance, essence. In linguistic terms, on the basis of empirical investigation of the structure and function of signs in natural languages, semantics sheds light on the relationships between them and the concepts they designate. Meaning as the object of semantics represents a highly complex and diversified subject, also covering some elements of pragmatics. Owing to its heterogeneity, apart from semantics and pragmatics the problem of meaning is also treated by philosophy, psychology, semiotics, anthropology and other disciplines. Observed from the modern linguistics standpoint, meaning is investigated by combining different perspectives and orientations.

An opinion entrenched in language study is that lexemes have meanings (Palmer 1981: 28-29). The notion of *having meaning* brings lexical form into various direct or indirect relations with a certain segment of extralinguistic reality. In that relation of lexemes with extralinguistic phenomena, several types of meaning are realized in terms of language structure and function. The structure includes: *lexical meaning*, primarily concerning lexemes, lexical affixes and idioms; *grammatical meaning*, conditioned by grammatical categories – primary (noun, verb, adverb, pronoun etc.) and secondary (gender, number, case – in the context of nouns); *sentence meaning*, which includes syntactic units, primarily the sentence. The function includes: *descriptive meaning*, arising from the fact that the function of language is to express some content, to describe external reality or some state of affairs independent of the communicator; *associative meaning*, arising from the fact that language also serves to express internal reality or some state of affairs which depends on the communicator, being connected with his emotional state.

Associative meaning includes several related meanings, three of which are dominant: *stylistic*, *expressive* and *connotative*. *Stylistic meaning* stems from the fact that the language system is stratified in the functional sense, producing different variations based on a special selection and organization of language units. According to Halliday's proposal (Halliday 1964: 77), these variations can be classified into two primary groups. In the first group they are more directly related to the communicator, revealing their geographic origin (dialect), social status (sociolect) and the temporal dimension (chronolect). In the second group, they are more closely connected with the communicative situation, revealing the theme of communication (the subject register), the relationship between the communicators (the medium register). The first group causes the formation of *idiolects*, or the formation of a complete set of units and rules within an individual's language system, whereas the other group influences the emergence of *idiolects* and determines the *register*, namely the selection of language units and rules from within an individual's language system.

Each of these groups, as well as both together, in language use both by an individual and by the total language community, can be defined as *style* in a broader sense (Crystal 1987: 66). Style variations affect all language levels, however, we are primarily interested in content-related aspects, where style is manifested in the form of *stylistic meaning*. Stylistic meaning gives very important information about the communicators and the communicative situation (Crystal, Davy 1969: 81-82). *Expressive meaning* is a reflection of various characteristics of the communicators, resulting in their attitudes, moods, relation towards communicators and towards the subject of communication. According to Leech this meaning contributes to expressing a positively or negatively marked value judgement – aesthetic, moral, ethical etc. (Leech 1969: 84). *Connotative meaning* is a result of subjective reactions to objective reality, most often conditioned by the communicator's individual or collective experience, but also the relation of certain lexemes to certain phenomena and concepts. This meaning is emotive.

Literal and figurative meanings are especially important elements of semantics. As regards *literal meaning*, it is essential for the given lexeme. However, one should bear in mind the element of *lexical ambiguity*, "a very common phenomenon in the lexicon of all languages, reflecting in the existence of more than one interpretation of the form, function and contents of individual language units" (Prčić 1997: 25). According to Lyons, there are two factors producing lexical ambiguity: the first – complete and partial homonymy, and the second – polysemy (Lyons 1977: 550). *Homonymy* directly connects identical lexical forms with different me-

anings. The concept of *complete homonymy* implies the equivalence of both the graphic and phonological elements (such homonymy is not realized in standard Serbian language), whereas *partial homonymy* indicates the equivalence of only one formal element: either phonological (*Ружа* : *ружа*¹) or graphic (*град* : *град*²) with obligatory semantic disparity. As opposed to that, *polysemy* signifies the ambiguity of the content, referring to the presence of more than one meaning within a single lexical form. Such an occurrence is represented in the dictionary of a natural language by one entry with two or more meanings associated with it.

A meaning arising from the basic meaning through metaphor or metonymy is called *figurative meaning*. Like associative meaning, figurative meaning represents a peripheral component of lexical meaning. This meaning, if metaphoric, arises on the basis of similarity between two different entities. The basis of *metaphoric* meaning is its systemic unpredictability, as it is realized through only one lexeme in a language. Apresjan therefore classifies this meaning into *irregular polysemy* (Apresjan 1974: 16). Figurative meaning in its *metonymic* form derives from a characteristic property, common to two different but related entities. The basis of this kind of figurative meaning is determined by its systemic predictability, as *metonymic meaning* occurs in different lexemes in a language, following a recognizable pattern. Therefore Apresjan classifies this meaning into *regular polysemy* (Apresjan 1974: 16).

The next semantic distinction occurs in the *language context* in which lexemes realize one of their meanings. It is manifested on two language planes: the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic. However, the language context is only part of *the extralinguistic context*, namely “a web of general and specific spatial, temporal, social, individual, as well as the general cultural factors, which contribute to establishing and realizing communication” (Prčić 1997: 27). Outside a context a lexeme has an insufficiently specific meaning (Zgusta 1971: 47), and it can exhibit innumerable semantic nuances, and interpretations as well. Thus it is through the language context that we can resolve the problem of lexical polysemy and homonymy, as the meaning is specified. This occurrence indicates the existence of *systemic meaning*,

1 *Ружа* – a proper noun in the feminine gender; *ружа* – a decorative garden plant, a cultivated wild thorny plant from the family of roses with sweet-smelling flowers in different colours – *Rosa* (Симић: 2005).

2 *град* – a large, well-developed human settlement, usually the administrative, commercial and cultural centre of a larger area, town; *град* – beads of ice formed in higher atmosphere layers which fall on the ground, hail (Симић: 2005).

whereby a lexeme is included into the semantic system of a language, and *textual meaning*, whereby it realizes one of its potential meanings. The language context in which lexemes occur lies within a text as a sequence of sentences making up a semantic and intonation whole. The sum of one lexeme's textual meanings represents its general, abstract, systemic meaning.

It is a well-known fact that individual meanings can cause emotional reactions in the person the message is intended for (Nida 1975: 18). This fact especially applies to associative meaning, which enhances descriptive meaning with its expressive or connotative potential. We can add possible creativity of the encoder who, through their deliberate choice of lexemes and their encoding, can achieve various communication effects in the message recipient. These effects are of special interest to *stylistics* which "focuses on variations in language use, usually, though not exclusively, with special emphasis on the most deliberate and the most complex ways of using language in literature" (Turner 1973: 7). Stylistics, like linguistics, deals with the same language levels: the phonological, the morphological, the syntactic, the semantic level – but contrary to linguistics, stylistics does not describe the complete inventory of a language system, but tries to systematise the conscious and unconscious uses of that inventory, focussed on achieving certain effects. With this in mind, we could identify the *intended meaning*, which the message encoder wants to convey, with a potential communicative effect – and the *interpreted meaning*, which the decoder interprets in receiving the message, with the accompanying communicative effect. All the differences between these two types of meaning are of interest to stylistics, while semantics as science deals with the idealised situation, in which the intended and interpreted meanings are identical.

Even though they are apparently independent and incompatible, we can say that the meaning distinctions (*lexical – sentential, descriptive – associative, literal – figurative, systemic – textual, intended – interpreted*) are closely interdependent, and often interwoven, even overlapping within a single lexical unit. On that plane it is possible to classify language material into (1) *general lexemes*, associatively unmarked, with a general (descriptive, literal, systemic) meaning, of a wider scope of use and of high frequency, and into (2) *specialized lexemes*, associatively marked, with unusual (connotative, figurative, contextual) meanings, of a narrower scope of use and lower frequency; the former lexemes exhibit a high degree of probability and predictability of occurrence in a given communicative situation, while the latter have a low degree of probability and predictability of occurrence in a given communicative situation; the former lexemes, as it were, belong to the system of natural language, while the latter belong in the system of poetic language – the for-

mer are stylistically unmarked, the latter stylistically marked. We can therefore say, finally, that semantics studies regulatory meaning in language, including systemic stylistic meaning.

It is well-known that language is not homogeneous in concrete realization, but exhibits different types of stratification, where each lexeme, each structure belongs to one situation of a language, to a particular zone of speech: (1) territorial (dialects, vernaculars, provincial idioms etc.); (2) social (sociolects: jargons, argots, the language of urban communities, the language of rural communities etc.); (3) gender-related (male and female); (4) age-related (children's speech, the speech of young people, the speech of adults, elderly people etc.); (5) functional (literary, scholarly/scientific, administrative, journalistic, colloquial) and (6) individual (individual idioms – idiolects) (Tošović 1988: 21). This diversity of uses of a common language leads to the emergence of most diverse individual styles which display, along with systemic language (semantic) phenomena, non-systemic, unpredictable language (semantic) phenomena, "which would be most aptly called idiosyncratic phenomena" (Prčić 1997: 33).

The meaning of the concept of style has been determined according to various criteria which have changed significantly through history. In ancient times style was considered as part of a work of art. In the twentieth century, when modern stylistics was established, there was a flood of various conceptions of style. However, there are three basic approaches to defining and exploring style: the general artistic, literary and linguistic. Depending on the position from which style is observed, most diverse interpretations and definitions are offered. All these interpretations of style not only demonstrate that it possesses its own existential character relative to the historical context, but also reveal it as something special and inimitable in language realization, in any form of expression. Without delving into a discussion on many theories on the nature of style, its genesis and outer forms, we have tried, from the standpoint of language and literary studies, to shed light on this concept and offer its definition, in the general, linguistic and literary sense. In general terms style signifies the outer appearance (form) and the inner contents (structure) of any phenomenon; in linguistic terms style stands for a particular selection and manner of use of language relative to the norm; in literary terms style represents the selection and way of using language, conditional on the chosen poetic form, relative to the established linguistic and literary norm.

Linguistics has two objects: style as multifariousness of language or speech, and the style of a literary work or the totality of an author's literary production. As early as ancient times writers, orators and students realized that the use of language

material depends on the conditions, character, subject and purpose of writing. It is therefore that language material used to be evaluated not only according to grammatical rules, but also depending on communicative needs. The relation of verbal expression and thought, in which language material acts as a means of expression, resulted in the attitude, in language studies, of style as a linguistic category which is expressed in compliance with the nature of the language sign, namely through the relation established between the signifier and the signified. By exploring the structural and functional properties of signs making up verbal structures, as well as their interrelationships and transformations not only in constituting a context but in the process of communication, individual aspects of the sign have been identified: the *semantic* (symmetric and asymmetric relations between the signifier and the signified), the *syntactic* (the relationship of signs within the system), the *pragmatic* (the relation between the signs and the person using them) and the *aesthetic* (the relation between a sign in language and in poetic use). A language sign in complete isolation, when not used, has the stylistic value zero, as the signifier and the signified are in a state of complete inactivity. Only in use, in context, a sign comes to be the focus of the signifier and the signified's activity, leading to establishing their interrelation, from which arises the stylistics of any signifying unit, including language signs. In linguistics style does not only stand for a reflection of the concrete realization of a sign, but a dynamic employment of the formal abstractions of the signifier and the signified – two distinct aspects, which as a stylistic means can realize all its potentials. Thus the notion of style in linguistics faces language reality as such, the inexhaustible potentials of its realization, and all individual creative actualizations of the spoken or the written word.

For determining the essence of style as accurately as possible, scholars should embark on investigating the semiotic structure of language signs within all the areas of human life and activity (in context and independently of context), where one should bear in mind that signs constitute all structural forms of a context (everything functions only in context), and that their position determines numerous processes taking part in contexts. Therefore, when discussing style in language and literature, one should recognize the meaning of the words and their use in language and literature, the meaning of the words outside the context, their etymological or figurative meanings, different kinds of connotation (expressive, evocative, projective), the inner form of language, the relationship between sound and meaning, the relationship between phonetic and semantic elements, the relation of the sound substance to the signified object, the relation of language to the human spirit, the relation of language to forms of thought, the relationship of expression and con-

tent, the relationship of meaning and the signified function etc. One should actually pay attention to the semiological processes comprising the signifier and the signified: the relationship of the signifier and the signified, a shift in the relation between the signifier and the signified, the association realized between the signifier and the signified content; the bipolarity of the sign, the symmetric dualism of the sign, sign linearity, sign arbitrariness, the sign as a multilayered phenomenon, the sign's semiological field, the sign's semiological space, the condition of the sign when inactive and in action, the development of the sign, the identification of the sign etc., constituting a detailed account of the sign's nature, the sign's structure, the sign's function. Following this research it is possible to discuss more reliably and comprehensively the concept of style in language and literature, and in all verbal semiological systems.

Nowadays style in the most general sense stands for any organized and closed system of means of expression (words, colours, tones, lines etc.). It is therefore discussed not only relating to literature, but also in relation to painting, music, architecture. Extending its meaning with the passage of time, style has come to be identified with the concept of manner, and has been associated with manner in general. Style belongs to distinctive categories of any kind of outer form, whereby that outer form is distinguished from others, regardless of whether they belong to the same, or to different categories. The generality of style results from disregarding certain individual phenomena, the universality of which is considered only in the context of established indeterminacy. Thus style emerges as the outer form, as the inner content and structure of everything related to man and his activities. The individuality of style is achieved by insisting on distinctions between individual phenomena and on their unique authenticity. It is therefore an essential aspect of any individually experienced reality. If there were no style, every phenomenon would lose its distinctiveness and become part of a formless mass, in which everything individual would amount to the general. Thus style appears as a constant, positive or negative qualitative supplement. Every phenomenon includes a certain style, the quality of which is expressed as an aesthetic value. Two phenomena are separate exactly owing to what distinguishes them, to their uniqueness and distinctiveness, which represents the manner of their actualisation, the true essence of style.

The functional stratification of language results in several functional styles, both in oral and written discourse. Functional stylistics issues were raised in the *Theses of the Prague Linguistic Circle* (Mathesius 1967). Later these problems were most thoroughly tackled by the Russian school of functional stylistics: there

the functional styles were defined and typologically distinguished. In describing the functional styles (*the journalistic, administrative, scientific, colloquial, literary*), the contrasts between them are most often highlighted. The most complete definition of functional stylistics has been offered by M. Kožina: functional stylistics investigates the laws of language functioning depending on communicative tasks in this or that sphere of communication, primarily the specific features and the systematic nature of functional styles and other functional stylistic distinctions – *sub-style, genre-related, situational* etc. (Кожина 1995: 17). The subject of functional stylistics is exploring the use and the functioning of language, and not its structure: not linguistic means of expression as such, but the principles of their selection and combination, conditional on extralinguistic factors, and the speech organization emerging as a result of that. It follows from this that functional stylistics is part of linguostylistics, investigating the laws of language functioning in different areas of its use, corresponding to various human activities. Besides that, this discipline deals with the system of spoken language, placing it within functional styles, with the norm and selection of linguistic means of expression depending on communicative forms and conditions (Чаркић 2002: 129).

The style most significant for our theme of all the functional styles is literary style which differs from other functional styles in many specific features. Thus literary style is distinct to a certain degree from all the other functional styles. However, in some aspects, connected with the history of genres, the language of literature departs from the norm and legitimately employs obsolete language resources, primarily lexical: *historicisms* and *archaisms*. Exceeding the bounds of the modern norm, it is not only directed to the past of language, its history, but, what is more important, the language of literature also looks into the future. It is well-known that an author (a poet as well) creating a literary work employs expressions not present in the modern language, not even in its history: these are *neologisms*, understood in the broadest sense. In some other cases an author (a prose writer or a poet) makes use of language potentials, creating new words: *potentialisms* and *occasionalisms*.

It is beyond doubt that in the system of functional styles the language of literature (literary style) holds a special position. If scientific, administrative, journalistic styles represent forms of standard language, its differential values, then literary style represents the most complete expression not only of the standard language, but of national language in its entirety. The aesthetic-communicative function of literary style is associated with a distinctive way of expressing ideas, which sets this style conspicuously apart from all the other functional styles. In no other style does mutuality, with all language resources, reach such depth and is expressed in such

multifarious forms, as in the case of literary style. The scientific, journalistic, or administrative style do not manifest so widely and comprehensively all structural sides of language: the vocabulary in all its richness and semantic differences, with all the central and figurative word meanings, their grammatical structure, syntactic peculiarities, with all vocabulary types, with the stylistic structure not only including the stylistic aspect of language but whole fragments of different functional styles. An author, especially a poet, uses words from different spheres with complete liberty. As opposed to other styles, literary style makes ample use of language resources from colloquial style (elements with neutral stylistic properties: neutral language, dialects, jargons, professionalisms etc.). Literary style employs as its material a whole national language with all the wealth of meaningful and expressive resources, with all its stylistic potentials.

Even though it is at first sight very difficult or all but impossible to establish a connection between the two concepts of *semantics* and *style*, a more thorough analysis of all the elements constituting the two concepts can reveal that, besides irreconcilable differences, they have a lot in common. One should bear in mind, on the one hand, that semantics is a special branch of linguistics, devoted to investigating the semantic plane of language structure, mainly in its synchronic aspect, and that it is focussed on the empirical study of the meanings of signs and utterances in natural languages, namely the relationship between them and the concepts they signify. In addition, owing to the incentive from transformational-generative grammar, modern semantics is dealing with the key theoretical issues concerning general principles of the semantic organization of language, including the issues of universal semantic units and categories. On the other hand, style is the manner of realization (actualisation) of the language system which clearly exhibits individual traits in pronunciation (phonetics), in the choice of words (lexis), in combining words (syntax). An individual realization of language is the most complete when an individual creates his own type of language, by repeating, in a way unique to him, selections of optional features of the general language, taking from it what is the most appropriate expression for conveying his own thoughts, feelings or moods to other members of the same language community. An individual (a speaker or an author) expresses through his language himself as a social being, his attitude to the subject he is talking (or writing) about, and his relation to those to whom he is addressing his statement.

These and all the other definitions of style and semantics presented so far only dissociate these two concepts. We have already pointed out that semantics as the study of meaning includes the study of several kinds of meaning: *lexical meaning*,

grammatical meaning, sentential meaning, descriptive meaning and associative meaning. However, when the analyses proposed so far are supplemented by additional aspects, semantics and style can be easily connected. This connection reflects the causal relationship grounded in the semantic dimension of language. All these meanings, except the associative meaning, have a systematized character, they are governed by a norm, subject to certain objectivisation (subjectivism is excluded) – which means that they include strictly definable parameters as their basic components. As regards *associative meaning*, dominated by the *stylistic, expressive and connotative* meanings, it is difficult to determine in certain components, being in principle latent, concealed, not subject to a strict norm, and excessively subjective as it serves for portraying internal reality or a certain state of affairs depending on the communicator and his current emotional state. On this semantic plane style and semantics are interlocked, and overlap to a certain degree. Thus *style*, as the principal generator of these three meanings, is directly related to *semantics*. The relationship of *style* and *semantics* is a causal relationship: *style* is the cause (the generator of meaning), *semantics* is the effect (the interpreter of meaning).

As regards style one should bear in mind that we are discussing literary style. All the other styles, to a certain respect apart from colloquial style, are realized within the norm of the standard national language. Literary style includes some elements not related to the norm of the standard language. The language of literature is therefore characterised by various stylistic nuances, by its multi-stylistic nature. Literary style differs from other functional styles in its four features: (1) it affects not only thoughts but also emotions and moods, it has an aesthetic effect on the reader; (2) it possesses the freedom of choice of language resources; (3) it makes abundant use of words with indirect (connotative) meanings; (4) it constantly employs expressive figures. In literary style thoughts and feelings are conveyed through diverse forms of expression, laying a strong emphasis on a certain object or phenomenon. The creator's (writer's or poet's) tendency towards concretization, emotionality, by giving greater and more profound significance to the poetic image leads to changes in word meanings. Through a literary work language becomes transformed, from a common means of human communication into a new language, realised as an expression of deep human emotions and insights. In poetic language (the language of poetry and prose, but much more the language of poetry) language form is imbued with semantics, it acquires meaning it does not normally have in natural language. For instance, phonemes (sounds) in natural language have a distinctive function, they introduce meaning differences into words, but have no me-

aning of their own. However, phonemes (sounds) in poetic language can assume a semantic function, signifying diverse phenomena, feelings, emotions. These meanings, of course, have a symbolic, occasional character emerging from the given context, and are strictly related to the context – without it they are practically inexistent. In addition, all associative meanings which can be very far between, and are at times very difficult to discover, are part of the meaning of a poetic work. Thus, various meanings of language form, the meanings of the form and structure of a verbal work of art, occasional meanings, associative meanings, and many other meanings resulting from the subjective experience of the creator or speaker, as well as the meanings of his subjective relationship to the language form and norm, belong to purely stylistic meanings which are not objective, canonized – and are not included in the register of meanings dealt with in semantics. But when, by virtue of constant existence, they acquire the status of generality, and become part of the general norm, part of the general meaning – they enter the scope of meanings that semantics as the study of meaning deals with. This process of the creation, continued existence of a meaning and its subjection to a norm goes on constantly – and style, namely literary style, becomes a generator, producer of new meanings which through steadier use become part of the stylistic norm, and in turn the general linguistic norm, investigated by semantics in the form of norm-governed meaning.

Literature

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Semantics and Style

In this paper the author is trying to define the notions of *semantics* and *style* more accurately, and to establish a connection between them even though at first glance they are incompatible. *Semantics* as the study of meaning in linguistic terms according to empirical research into the structure and function of signs in natural languages reveals relations between them and the concepts they designate. Thus, in the context of structure, it explores *lexical meaning*, *grammatical meaning*, *sentential meaning*, and with respect to function *descriptive meaning* and *associative meaning*. Associative meaning covers several related types of meaning, dominated by the following three: *stylistic*, *expressive* and *connotative*. On this semantic plane *style* and *semantics* intersect, and partially overlap. Thus *style*, as the main generator of these three types of meaning, is directly correlated with *semantics*. *Style* and *semantics* are in a causal relationship: *style* is the cause (the generator of meaning), *semantics* the effect (the interpreter of meaning).

Keywords: *semantics, style, lexical meaning, grammatical meaning, sentential meaning, descriptive meaning, associative meaning (stylistic, expressive and connotative), literal meaning, figurative meaning (metaphoric, metonymic), intended meaning, interpreted meaning.*