

From the Inner Form of a Term towards its Aesthetic Meaning

based on A.P. Chekhov's short story "Typhus"



Sevda Christova was born in 1956. She graduated from Veliko Tarnovo University "Cyril and Methodius" in Russian Philology. At present she teaches Russian at the Higher Institute of Medicine in Varna. She does contrastive study of Russian and Bulgarian medical terminology.

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This paper is an attempt to investigate how a given term is perceived in another functional style. The place of the term *typhus* in Chekhov's short story of the same name is being considered as well as the relation between its inner form and connotation on the one hand and the narration of the story on the other.

(Author)

As a reflection of a fragment of the material world each piece of literature contains in itself the result of the subjective choice of indications for this fragment. Further possibilities in the cognitive process may be granted to the medical doctor-writer. The medical terms used in the text he creates are the most natural yet the outermost manifestation of his view of man. Having that in mind we may try to determine precisely which part of one term, in our case the term *typhus* in Chekhov's story of the same name, is part of the narration and which acquires aesthetic value.

The term *typhus* (Gr. 'typhus' = smoke, fume, clouding of the mind) is defined in Arnaudov's Dictionary (1) as "indication for feverish infectious diseases taking course mainly with heavy disorders of the mind". In Old Greek the verb meaning 'to fill with smoke' has a figurative meaning of 'to blind, to madden'. The meaning 'clouding of the mind' is not basic for the disease typhus and does not appear in its contemporary definition, but it is characteristic for the stage of aggravation. As the semantic characteristics of one unit are quite numerous, the choice of some of them is a condition for the building of any structure (2). Thus one of the non-basic meanings of the Old Greek word for smoke and the non-basic (for the disease) meaning of 'clouding of the mind' occur to be a suitable center for naming the concept in one situation, while on another they are a center for shifting from its essence, from the sphere of the purely physiological towards the relation between the physiological and the psychic. Having in mind Chekhov's knowledge of the terminology concerned and his thorough attention to the word, we can consider the inner form of 'fume, smoke' of the term *typhus* and especially the metaphoric meaning of the word as notions highlighted by the author. The almost identical description of *typhus* in the later story *Prelate* confirms this suggestion. The incense smoke in the church and the fog of the spring evening in *Prelate* just like the pipe smoke of the Chukhonetz and the night fog in *Typhus*

add to the sensation of clouding the heroes' minds.

If the set of meanings, named by terms and described with the peculiarities of the scientific style, represents the contents of the term *typhus*, then the choice of a part of these meanings and their characterization through the author's language seek the suggestion of the author's idea. The presence of the term is not so much its being used twice as is the presentation of a part of its connotation in another form. Besides the peculiarities of style this form is achieved due to the possibility of the author's choosing the necessary symptoms, of shifting of their center, thus subordinating them to the new context.

The second instance for using the term is related not only to the designated phenomenon, but also to the story characters. It carries the stamp of their point of view and exerts influence through this subjective modality. It may be referred to the subjectivity in which, according to Kolshansky, "the role of the subject is reduced only to a choice of some or other real qualities but not to their immanent subjective construction" (4). In this application of the term, other qualities are actualized which generate the feeling of incompleteness in the meaning of the term in this context. The incompleteness is manifested in the unawareness of the central nucleus of semantic meanings, in the existence of variant meanings accessible to a certain social stratum, and in the emotional attitude towards the word. A supplementary evaluational-semantic meaning is perceived as being realised in the context.

Exploring the situational development Chekhov uses the figurativeness of the inner form of the term in the approach to the idea of change in the hero's way of thinking.

References

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