

UNIVERSALS IN LITERARY SEMIOTICS*
ON LINGUISTIC FUNCTIONS RELATED TO THE TEXT

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The main purpose of this paper is to discuss the functions pertaining to a literary text and their universal application. Jakobson's wellknown model of the functions of language in verbal communication ("Linguistics and poetics", 1960) is critically reexamined and a modified model to meet the needs of literary text is tentatively proposed.

Of all functions the per-textual function -or else the "poetic" (Jakobson 1960) or "meta-semiotic" (Akhmanova 1976) function- is discussed in some detail. This is the *par excellence* literary function, which focuses on the linguistic structure of the message. The constituents of this function are: (i) selections and/or deviations from the conventional code of a natural language, (ii) establishment of syntagmatic combinations, based mainly on (iii) linguistic parallelism, constructions of "equivalences" (Jakobson) of similar or contrastive linguistic entities on all levels. These are universal constituents which differ typologically among natural languages.

Literature, as the manifestation of the technique and art of discourse, lends itself to the study of the basic functions of language in terms of a hierarchy that emphasizes the function of the message. Jakobson's term for this function is poetic¹, whereas Akhmanova² proposes the term *metasemiotic*, thus emphasizing its semiotic dimension.

In this paper I shall refer to the basic functions of verbal communication as described in Jakobson (1960) and will examine how these functions may be formulated in literary semiotics, centered round the text. Finally, I shall discuss the

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¹ Jakobson 1960, 356

² Akhmanova 1976, 49

poetic –or, in my terminology, *per-textual*–function. My aim will be to show the universal character of these functions and, in particular, of the linguistic mechanisms that constitute the per-textual function.

I. On Jakobson's model of communicative functions

In his classic treatise "Linguistics and Poetics" Jakobson specifies six factors, that define six corresponding functions of verbal communication. The basic factors are: *addresser*, *addressee*, *context* (or reference), *message*, *contact* and *code*. The corresponding functions, recognized by Jakobson are: the *emotive* and *conative* functions, the *referential*, *poetic*, *phatic* and *metalingual* functions. On the relation between factors and functions and their contribution to communication Jakobson claims (1960, 353) that "the diversity lies not in a monopoly of some one of these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions. The verbal structure of a message depends primarily on the predominant function".

Bühler's old tripartite diagram of communication (*who - what - to whom*) is enriched by Jakobson's three factors-functions: *how - with what - "phatic expressions"*, in other words the message related to the poetic function, the code related to the metalingual function, and the contact related to the phatic function³.

To the extent that Jakobson's model is relevant to our subject, we can make the following comments:

(i) On the whole, the communicative significance of the six functions is not equally acknowledged. For example, the *phatic function* in ordinary forms of communication cannot be of equal importance with the referential function... In contrast to the others this function has a potential – not obligatory – character. In particular, while no form of communication can be conceived of without *what*, that is, without the referential function, in a great number of forms of communication the phatic function may or may not occur. That this function receives equal treatment with the others, can be explained only in terms of an attempt for completeness of the general framework.

(ii) The *metalingual function* also presents some problems. It is beyond doubt that the code or the language used in a particular form of communication is linguistically controlled or often commented upon during the communication process. However, on the one hand this function partly overlaps with the phatic function – Jakobson himself classifies parenthetical questions of the type "Are you listening?" as an example of the phatic function. On the other hand, if we restrict the meaning of the metalingual function only to its purely metalingual content – i.e. to the verbal commenta-

³ A. Stich (1973) proposes one more function, which he calls "persuasive functional style (PFS)" or, generally, "influencing function". This is considered to be but one of "other stylistic functions" (p. 67) and is included within the general function of speech. Actually it is defined as "a complex function in that it combines the conative, emotive and phatic functions of speech". The co-function (in a hierarchical order) of more than one functions, already suggested by Jakobson, is made by Stich to "a complex function".

tion of the linguistic content – then in Jakobson’s model there is essentially no particular autonomous function referring to code itself.

Thus, although reference is made to code, Jakobson’s model does not provide for the factor of *system*, that is, the structure of a natural language, whether we conceive it as a system of rules or (more statically) as a system of structural patterns (that is as “linguistic competence” or as “langue”), since – let us repeat it – the corresponding linguistic function in Jakobson is restricted to its metalingual manifestation.

(iii) Jakobson’s model is not completely worked out, which is to be expected in a treatise which only describes the functions of verbal communication and then concentrates on the poetic function, which is Jakobson’s dominant theme.

Thus, the relation between the metalingual and the poetic function is not clearly specified. For, it cannot be interpreted simply as a relation between the code and the message, as it might be assumed at first glance. Equally unclear is the relation between the referential and the poetic function, which is of primary importance in literary semiotics (here I mean the wellknown relation between ‘form’ and ‘content’). On the whole, the interrelations of the functions in the communicative act are not described, nor is the meaning of the particular functions precisely delimited, whereas, strangely enough, the marginal elements of each function receive more attention.

Nevertheless, Jakobson’s communicative model adequately describes communication and is of special interest, since it is the first time that an attempt is made to account for the form of communication that is known as *the art of discourse* or *literature* or *literary semiotics*. One of Jakobson’s primary concerns is the poetic function, based on the message.

II. *A tentative model of verbal communication, seen within the frame of Literary Semiotics*

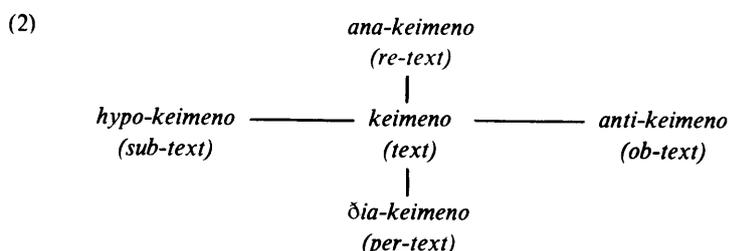
In the area of literary semiotics any description of the functions of literary communication must focus on the text. The *message* is necessarily expressed through the form and the structure of a text (be it prose or poetry), which, of course, may display varying degrees of complexity: It may have more than one meanings or be ambiguous, thus offering various possibilities of approach (interpretation and understanding). This property requires of every model of literary communication, that makes any claims on adequacy, to be based on the notion of the text. We shall now tentatively propose a model as a general framework for this kind of description. (We shall also make an attempt at unifying the relevant terminology):

$$(1) \quad \begin{array}{ccccc} \textit{hypo-keimeno} & \text{---} & \textit{keimeno} & \text{---} & \textit{anti-keimeno} \\ \text{("sub-text")} & & \text{(text)} & & \text{("ob-text")} \end{array}$$

The *text* (or *κείμενο*, to use an ancient Greek term) as the basis of literary communication is considered as a complex and complicated whole. The text unifies the *what* with the *how*, the *reference* (or *content*) with the *form*. The text is the result of

pairing off a particular *theme* (reference) and *rheme*⁴ (message) which, for methodological reasons, may be differentiated in the analysis / interpretation of the text, but not in its creation.

A text, however, cannot be conceived without two complementary factors: Hypo-keimenon and antikeimenon. *Hypo-keimeno* (or *sub-text* after *sub-ject*) is the creator of the text, the starting point of communication. *Anti-keimeno* (or *ob-text* after *ob-ject*) is the receiver of the text, its goal⁵. Thus the proposed takes the following form:



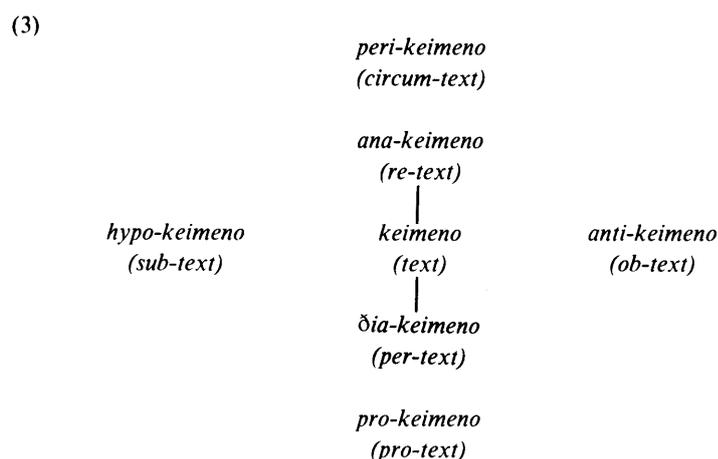
Two more factors are indispensable in the creation of the text: *pro-keimeno* (pro-text) and *peri-keimeno* (circum-text). The term *pro-keimeno* (always in the framework of a unifying terminology) characterizes the material that is *pre*-supposed for the structure and the specific form of any text; it is the code. In our diagram the code is placed outside the per-text (the verbally structured message), because the code covers of course a much wider scope, and constitutes the mechanism that will be used in order to create the per-text.

A text moreover cannot exist on its own, independently of some extralinguistic or intralinguistic environment, that is independently of the *pragmatics of discourse*. Whatever surrounds the text, reveals its particular dimensions and specifies its interpretation is the *peri-keimeno*, the contextual conditions of its creation and interpretation. Apart from the text, these conditions are also related both to the hypo-keimenon and the anti-keimenon and, of course, to the specific pro-keimenon.

⁴ The term *rheme* is, I think, preferable to the term *message* because the message cannot be restricted only to verbal expression to the exclusion of content which is intuitively considered as the most essential constituent of the text. Moreover, in search of a unifying terminology, based on the central notion of the text, the theme (the reference) may be termed as *anakeimenon (re-text)* and the rheme may be termed as *\delta iakeimenon (per-text)*. The term *re-text* designates the reference text, as reference in general, whereas the term *per-text* is used to describe "the text *per*/through which the message (based on the code) is realised". Naturally these are clearly conventional terms and can only be considered as an attempt at creating a unifying terminology interrelated with the text which, of course, cannot be dissociated from some degree of affectation.

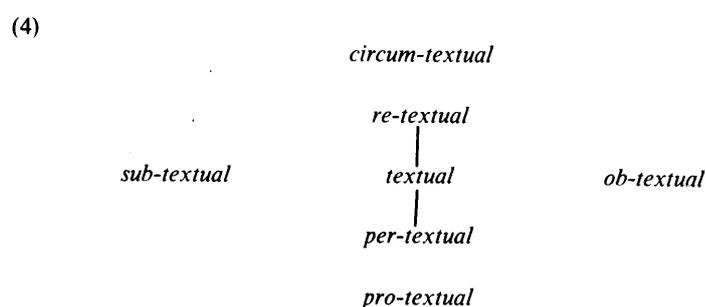
⁵ The terms *hypo-keimenon* and *anti-keimenon* have been chosen on purpose in order to denote their *close* interdependence with the *keimenon* (text), which is the central core of communication.

Thus the final model presents the following picture:



The proposed model differs from Jakobson's in some essential respects such as the very notion of the text, which is rather weak and fragmentarily conceived in Jakobson's analysis. Also the meaning of the pro-text and its relation to the text, and specifically to the per-text are not sufficiently treated as such in Jakobson's analysis. Furthermore the notion of the circum-text is absent from Jakobson's model, whereas it is particularly important in ours, since the role of con-text is considered by us crucial for the interpretation and understanding of a text. Finally, the constituents of the phatic function could be classified within the function of the circum-text, whenever they appear in the text.

We can now proceed to the functions that correspond to the factors of literary semiotics and specify them as follows: The *textual* function constitutes the basis of the proposed model, it is distinguished into the *re-textual* and the *per-textual* functions. The *sub-textual* and the *ob-textual* functions are related to the hypo-keimeno and the anti-keimeno respectively. The *pro-textual* and the *circum-textual* functions refer to the protext (code) and the circumtext (context) respectively. The interrelationships of the functions in question can be easily seen in the following diagram:



Having thus formulated a model of the factors and functions that we have been discussing, we shall make a general observation in relation to their universality. Both the constituent factors and the corresponding functions, that we have specified, appear to have *universal validity* not only in literary semiotics, but in verbal communication as well. They constitute general categories of communication – and of literary communication that interests us here –, which are *typologically* differentiated in different languages, but also within the same language or even in the works of the same writer. We are referring here to the vast differentiation of the linguistic form that a literary text may have, whether it is poetry or prose, depending on the aim of the text (the anti-keimenon), on the various circum-textual conditions or on differences that are displayed in the structure of the code (the pro-textual function), after we have taken into consideration the differences existing between natural languages as well as in the use of language(s) by individual users.

Finally, the structure of the functions and the factors of literary semiotics are not only universal, but also have an overall application. Moreover, all the functions that we have specified co-occur in every form of written communication, a text. The importance of each one of them for the text varies, but their co-occurrence is presupposed. The textual function in particular is determinative, whereas all other functions emerge from and are marked out by it to a larger or smaller degree.

III. *The per-textual (poetic) function*

The per-textual function, displays universal characteristics regarding its constituents. The per-textual function determines the final form of the text, its particular aspect, and personal character through which all other functions are used, filtered and reflected.

In the whole process of literary semiotics this is the most creative function of all⁶. The language game, played on the level of per-textual function, results in the formulation of what we call *style*, to the extent that it could permit to identify the per-textual (or poetic) function with the *stylistic function*. Generally speaking, the final linguistic form of a literary text cannot be distinguished from its style⁷.

The per-textual function is realized in three interrelated processes⁸. These are:

⁶ In this respect, the term *poetics*, which is otherwise unclear and ambiguous, may be justified. Thus, as Jakobson correctly observes, the reference of this term should not be restricted to poetry or even to the whole of literary production, but should be related to every form of verbal communication.

⁷ We shall not be concerned here with analysing problems of style. Suffice it to say that research in this field has considerably been advanced in systematic, theoretical and practical, treatments of such problems.

⁸ Here it is adopted, in general, Jakobson's (1960) view of the essence, the constituents and the analysability of the "poetic" function. Against Jakobson's views there have been stated several critical comments and cautions, both by literary scholars as well as by linguists. One could, among others, mention the names of Riffaterre, Wellek, Levin, Guiraud and recently, of P. Werth (1976).

(i) The process of *selection* and *deviation* from the linguistic code. These are universal linguistic processes, inherent to the protextual function of language which indicates the transition from linguistic competence to linguistic performance.

(ii) The process of the transition from the *paradigmatic* to the *syntagmatic* level of language. The elements that are selected or created (in the form of innovations or deviations from the conventional code of language) are linked and interrelated with others; they constitute new combinations of existing elements. Thus, existing syntagmatic relations are applied in a different/novel way or new ones are created.

(iii) Both selections/deviations and syntagmatic combinations are manifested in elements that constitute relations of *similarity* and *contrast*. They establish ranges of parallel or equivalent elements (Jakobson calls them 'equivalences'), that is, combinations of two or more constituents that are similar or contrast phonologically, morphologically, etc.

In particular, we can make the following observations in relation to these three factors that govern the per-textual (or stylistic) function:

First of all, what differentiates the literary language –exceptions aside– is the markedly *intentional* character of the choices that the creator makes. Even more characteristic and linguistically significant are the *deviations* from the established linguistic conventions that determine the overall code, i.e. every natural language.

The wider these deviations are in a literary work, the more markedly characteristic and personal is the writer's linguistic expression, the writer's style. It is significant that the quality and the higher frequency of the deviations is a considerable factor to characterize and distinguish the language used in poetry from that used in prose (although there are important examples to the contrary). The processes of selections and deviations are universal. In fact they are the primarily universal characteristics of literary semiotics. The violation of the restrictive conventions of the code is a necessary form or freedom for the writer and a creative source in language.

The creation of ranges of similarities or contrasts can also be considered a universal function. What is at issue here, is the mechanisms of pairing off the elements that contribute to stylistic results, particularly as deviations from the conventional

Werth has, particularly, attempted to show that Jakobson's analytical approach is highly subjective, to the extent that his descriptive statements and evaluations as to the structural properties of certain features and configurations (like parallelism etc.) of the literary text should be considered *ad hoc*. The appropriate statistical, psychological and semantic information for such evaluations on a certain text are not yet, according to Werth, available. Therefore such analytical approaches cannot be successful.

Yet Werth's critical remarks are not rid of inconsistencies. He suffers from overgeneralizations which lead him to the other extreme. He nearly claims that every literary analysis should be anticipated by particular statistical, psychological and semantic information in order to be valid! What's more, he seems to support - and presuppose - that there exist constant norms for every possible analysis, but he fails to explain what such norms should look like. Most literary stylists, however, would doubt the definition, the limits and the very existence of such norms. In whole Werth's approach lacks the methodological objectivity, for which he accuses Jakobson, not always without good reasons.

- 1) *ákra siopí*: relation between a modifying adjective and a noun;
ákra=μεγάλη “great” (σιωπή)
- 2) *ákra tu táfu*: intensification of the adjective: *ákra tu táfu* = ἀκρότατη
 “very great” (cf. ἄρρωστος τοῦ θανάτου “very ill”)
- 3) *tu táfu siopí*: metonymic relation of modification; *tu táfu siopí* = νεκρική
 σιωπή “deadly silence”

The multisignificant relation illustrates the variety of relations that may be created in the syntagmatic correlation of paradigmatically selected elements while moving from the pro-text to the per-text. These relations are typologically formulated by the particular structure of each language, the selections to be made as well as possible deviations permitted in it.

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