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EKPHRASIS IN COGNITIVE-COMMUNICATIVE INTERPRETATION

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Abstract

This article presents ekphrasis as a process of multilevel intersemiotic transposition, i.e. verbal interpretation of any nonverbal systems into verbal artistic creation. The article also focuses on the classification of different types of ekphrasis and its interpretative function in the linguocognitive process of the cognitive-communicative interpretation of the literary text. From the point of view of semiotics, ekphrasis is a process of intersemiotic transposition, which presupposes verbal interpretation of nonverbal systems of musical and visual texts providing the attempt of isomorphic presentation of different languages of culture united anthropocentrically. Special attention is given to psychological ekphrasis which focuses on the process and result of influence of visual texts upon listeners. In this type of ekphrasis, the accent is transferred from the description of the text to its subjective multimodal interpretation. It involves the usage of the third type of conceptual derivation with the actualization of interconceptual interrelation between different spheres of knowledge with the usage of phonological, morphological and semantic models of language representation. Thus, ekphrasis nowadays is regarded as part of the linguocognitive process based on new principles of interpretation. Interpretation is treated as a mental process aimed at decoding implicit meanings lying under explicit ones. Interpretation is inseparable from human mentality being a means of world perception and evaluation with the help of the language.

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1. Introduction

Literature always exists in social, cultural or political context. Literary context is coordinated vertically and horizontally with other humanitarian and artistic spheres of human activity, i.e. theatre, painting, philosophy, cinematography, etc. “In reality art always speaks many languages. These languages are interrelated and interpreted partially or completely. It is the possibility of isomorphic interpretation that requires great tension thus creating the situation of sense explosion. The impossibility of monosemantic transposition of the language of poetry to the language of painting or the languages of theatre and cinematography is the source of multimodality” (Lotman, 2016, p. 63). There exist different models of interrelation of literature with other spheres of art which cause sense explosion. Ekphrasis is an example of such a model of sense explosion as a result of interrelation of literature and painting or literature and music. It is suggested to treat ekphrasis as substitution of one art by means of another, as transfer or transposition of any continuity (painting, music, theatre) into discrete objects (Gautier, 2002). It is multiple intersemiotic transformation as the process of the dynamic art discourse within intercultural and interlingual communication (Tretyakov, 2009).

Nowadays ekphrasis is a part of linguocognitive processes revealing new principles of interpretation. Interpretation is treated as a mental activity aimed at deciphering implicit connotations under explicit meanings, revealing hidden stages of explicit meaning (Ricoeur, 1995). Interpretation is a part of human consciousness manifesting itself in perception and evaluation of the world and the language system. The language reflects the world ontology and human consciousness being a part of it (Boldyrev, 2014).

1.1. Ekphrasis as a process of intersemiotic transposition

Ekphrasis or ecphrasis, comes from Greek for the description of a work of art produced as a rhetorical exercise, often used in the adjectival form **ekphrastic**, is a vivid, often dramatic, verbal description of a visual work of art, either real or imagined. In ancient times, it referred to a description of any thing, person, or experience. The word comes from the Greek *έκεκ* and *φράσις*phrasis, 'out' and 'speak' respectively, and the verb *έκφράζειν* ekphrázein, “to proclaim or call an inanimate object by name” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekphrasis>). In the dictionary of modern notions and terms it is defined as an allusion to a well-known picture in emotive prose being treated as a variety of reminiscences.

The content and function of ekphrasis in the text of emotive prose makes it possible to treat it as a literary reminiscence. The main point of literary reminiscence is making the text polysemantic and polymodal in its space extension. Reminiscences introduce the multiplicity of new meanings making it possible to say much in a few words. To reveal reminiscences and citations is necessary for better understanding of the author’s message and for deciphering his/her implications which sound meaningless and mysterious. In linguistics, various allusions and reminiscences are referred to the notion of intertextuality (Julia Kristeva’s term) or the concept of dialogism according to Bakhtin’s (2017) theory claiming that dialogue lies at the basis of any art as a spiritual contact between the author, the reader and the writer and his predecessors and contemporaries.

Intertextuality is a code of culture as a system of traditional human values, both material and spiritual ones (Kuzmina, 2011). The study of peculiar interrelation of different semiotic spheres of culture and language is closely connected with the issue of intersemiotic transposition, introduced by R. Jakobson, and is treated as transference from one system of signs into another one or as intercode interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal ones (Jakobson, 1978). The conceptual essence of this process lies in the transfer of the conceptual contents of signs of one system into another one including various modifications (generalization and specialization or the actualization of conceptual components).

From the semiotic point of view, ekphrasis is the process of intersemiotic transposition, i.e. verbal representation of nonverbal systems. The possibility of verbalization of musical and visual texts is provided by representation of “gestures” of music or painting connected with bodily changes in space. In different languages of culture we find isomorphic rhetorical figures connected with a human body (Brazgovskaya, 2015).

Ekphrasis as a category which realizes the transfer of specific features of art into verbal texts is also treated as the process of foregrounding and interpretation of the dominant expressive means of the original into the ekphrastic texts (Tretyakov, 2009).

1.2. Classification of different types of ekphrasis

From the point of view of text representation, types of ekphrasis are subdivided into complete ones in which uninterrupted description prevails in the text and discrete ones being interrupted by narrative pieces in the text. From the point of view of visual information quantity and variety, ekphrasis is subdivided into monoekphrasis and multiekphrasis. Monoekphrasis presents the description of one visual text or picture (usually attributed to the author or the title). Multiekphrasis comprises a description of visual motifs of a number of works of the author, school, trend which create the united model (Yatsenko, 2017). A variety of multiekphrasis is technical ekphrasis based upon the whole ethos, ideology or declaration of the artistic trend, school or the painter. According to Lann, technical ekphrasis being part of literary work depends upon the artistic aims of the writer and its conceptual essence is not influenced by any transposition (Lann, 2002).

1.3. Interpretative ekphrasis

Interpretative ekphrasis is aimed at revealing contextual symbolic imagery of the work of art based upon some elements of visualization. In the interpretative ekphrasis it is more essential to provide a detailed explanation of the visual object. Thus, the interpretation of the main symbolic meaning of the painting in the text of emotive prose creates the so called ekphrasis illusion focusing not on the picture but upon the addressee’s impression (Taylor, 2018).

Ekphrasis might be based upon the description of a sculpture or landscape or portrait visualization. In Russia, a portrait-ekphrasis appeared in N.V. Gogol’s “Portrait” (1834) being an imaginary portrait of the old moneylender created by the writer and bringing misfortunes to the owners of the portrait. Due to the additional contextual meaning the functions of ekphrasis in emotive prose are quite varied. All the author’s ideas are accumulated making a kind of convergence of both psychological and interpretative contents and not influenced by the transfer of the form (Lann, 2002).

1.4. Psychological ekphrasis

Psychological ekphrasis reflects the process and result of the influence of the visual text upon the addressee focusing upon his impression. In this type of descriptive ekphrasis subjective impression of the addressee is foregrounded over its description. As far as the context is concerned, ekphrases are subdivided into **descriptive and interpretative** ones according to the author's dominant preferences. This classification paradigm is based upon Ancient Greek, Roman, biblical and Byzantine traditions.

Ekphrastic poetry flourished in the Romantic era and among the pre-Raphaelite poets. A major poem of English Romanticism *Ode on a Grecian Urn* by John Keats provides an example of the artistic potential of ekphrasis. The entire poem is a description of a piece of pottery that the narrator finds immensely evocative. Felicia Hemans made extensive use of ekphrasis, as did Letitia Elizabeth Landon, especially in her *Poetical Sketches of Modern Pictures*. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "double-works" exemplify the use of the genre by an artist to enhance his visual and literary art. Rossetti also ekphrased a number of paintings by other artists, generally from the Italian Renaissance, such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekphrasis>).

The Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky employed ekphrasis most notably in his novel *The Idiot*. In this novel, the protagonist, Prince Myshkin, sees a painting of a dead Christ in the house of Rogozhin that has a profound effect on him. Later in the novel, another character, Hippolite, describes the painting at much length depicting the image of Christ as one of brutal realism that lacks any beauty or sense of the divine. Rogozhin, who is himself the owner of the painting, at one moment says that the painting has the power to take away a man's faith, a comment that Dostoyevsky himself made to his wife Anna upon seeing the actual painting the novel is based on, *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* by Hans Holbein. The painting was seen shortly before Dostoyevsky began the novel. Though this is the major instance of ekphrasis in the novel, and the one which has the most thematic importance to the story as a whole, other instances can be spotted when Prince Myshkin sees a painting of a Swiss landscape that reminds him of a view he saw while at a sanatorium in Switzerland, and also when he first sees the face of his beloved, Nastasya, in the form of a painted portrait. At one point in the novel, Nastasya, too, describes a painting of Christ, her own imaginary work that portrays Christ with a child, an image which naturally evokes comparison between the image of the dead Christ (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekphrasis>).

It is the example of psychological interpretative ekphrasis, as the writer's personal subjective impression of the image of Christ created by the painter and transferred to the hero's feelings prevails over its description. The Silver Age is the epoch of ekphrasis heyday. It is the period of modernism searching new forms of art and their interrelation in painting, music, poetry and theatre due to the possibility of different arts to recreate real life.

2. Problem Statement

From the semiotic point of view, ekphrasis is the process of intersemiotic transposition, i.e. verbal representation of nonverbal systems. The possibility of verbalization of musical and visual texts is provided by representation of "gestures" of music or painting connected with bodily changes in space. **The conceptual problem of ekphrasis** lies in the transfer of the conceptual contents of signs of one

system into another one, which requires various modifications (generalization and specialization or the actualization of conceptual components), being the main purpose of our study.

3. Research Questions

The main aim of our research is to trace the process of verbal representation of non-verbal systems, to analyse complex convergence and multimodal interpretation of verbal and nonverbal planes typical of ekphrasis. These problems are analyzed with the help of W. Blake's poem *Auguries of Innocence*. The first lines of the poem raise the philosophical problems of interrelation of the Earth and Heaven, Infinity and a Moment:

*To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour* (Blake, 2009).

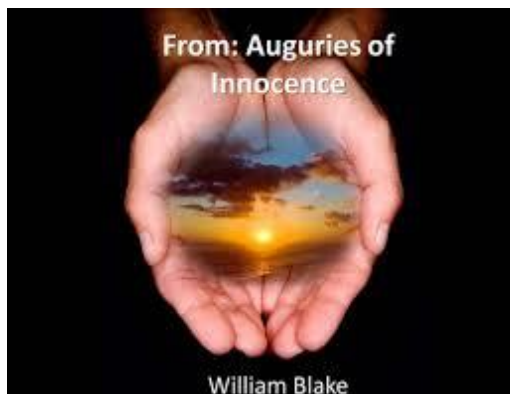


Figure 01. From *Auguries of Innocence*

Blake's (2009) literary activity is a brilliant example of synthesis of philosophy, poetry and painting, reflecting the poet and philosopher's spiritual tortures. His *Songs of Innocence and Experience* is an attempt to reveal two opposite states of human soul, all the vicissitudes of the human spirit. The earthly life in Blake's philosophy is the **problem of transition from Eternity and to Eternity**. This Christian credo is aimed to achieve an ideal spiritual harmony in earthly existence.

According to his philosophy, it is possible to make life ideal if it is not "spiritually burdened". The World is thought over as perfect but the human spirit is burdened by lies and pretence, thus the Poet and Prophet's purpose is to show the way towards the freedom of the spirit. Genuine spirituality according to Blake is in Nature, and his *Auguries of Innocence* praise the beauty of earthly life profaned but not killed. He claims that all that is alive is sacred and that earthly life is self-sufficient and valuable.

4. Purpose of the Study

Ekphrasis as a category realizes the transfer of specific features of art into verbal texts and **our purpose** is to trace different processes of foregrounding and interpretation of the dominant expressive means of the original into the ekphrastic texts with the help of various research methods.

5. Research Methods

The verbal representation of the author's message is achieved with the help of linguostylistic and linguocognitive analyses employing expressive means and stylistic devices, linguocognitive, metaphorical, metonymical and metaphonymic models being united into the cognitive-associated scheme (CAS).

6. Findings

In the first quatrain, Blake (2009) proclaims the necessity of Nature and Spirit unity, depicting an instance as part of Eternity, a wild flower as part of Heaven. The metaphonymy model "Part – Whole" (nature-world, eternity) dominates in the first part of the poem and verbalizes the conceptual sphere of the Universe consisting of instances, grains of sand, wild flowers and human beings, thus comprising the metonymical and metaphorical blending (Fig.1).

Metonymy is regarded as one of the most important cognitive principles of forming mental and grammatical categories. According to this cognitive principle, any aspect of reality, any part of it is interconnected as a part and a whole. Thus, a plant is imprinted in a leaf, a grain and a root (Kubryakova, 1999).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) define the metonymical cognitive model as a structure, the components of which are based on contiguity and substitution. This model comprises the interrelation of frames conventionally representing events in human consciousness. The metonymical cognitive model of the event is a structure in which a subframe represents a frame through the cognitive process of foregrounding or mental actualization of this subframe in the background of the whole frame. This model is a subframe to nominate the event as the main subject of thinking (event as a target). The whole metonymical model subframe-frame is realized in a number of special models being different in the terminal types and comprising the foregrounded subframe as reason/source – event/ target.

According to Blake's (2009) philosophy, any pain or harm inflicted on any living being in nature causes destruction and disaster. Living beings in the world of nature (a robin, a dove, a pigeon, a dog, a horse, a lamb, a moth, a butterfly, a wolf, a lion, a deer, an owl, a bat), imprisoned and abused by Man and society, misbalance the harmony of the world, cause misfortunes, catastrophes, ruin, bloodshed, bring discord in the society, disbelief, horror, loss of love and beloved, cause the wrath of Heaven.

Metaphorical models representing the opposition of Nature and human society break the ecological balance and moral laws, which only proves and stresses the necessity of Nature and human society unity. The author deliberately exaggerates and intensifies all the misfortunes caused by the cruel treatment of any living being down to a moth and a mosquito using hyperbole, antithesis and parallelism in the syntactical structure of the poem (Fig. 02).

*A robin redbreast in a cage
Puts all Heaven in a rage.
A dove-house fill'd with doves and pigeons
Shudders Hell thro' all its regions.
A dog starv'd at his master's gate*

*Predicts the ruin of the State.
A horse misus'd upon the road
Calls to Heaven for human blood.
The lamb misus'd breeds public strife,
And yet forgives the butcher's knife.
Kill not the moth nor butterfly,
For the Last Judgement draweth nigh* (Blake, 2009, p. 14).



Figure 02. The Last Judgement (from Blake's paintings)

The last part of the poem proclaims the necessity to follow the moral imperative of the society bringing harmony, love, the interrelation of joy and sorrow, daylight and darkness of night, the human and the spiritual. Blake (2009) condemns evil, slander and envy; he creates bright contrasting images of evil and virtue, the associative chain of oppositions of evil and virtue, light and darkness. The moral and ecological imperatives are not in opposition, they form a general conceptual space, or a general conceptual sphere (Fig. 02).

The lexical thesaurus of this poem comprises the complexes of concepts of Nature and World, Hell and Heaven, Eternity and Infinity in hyponymic relations of inclusion with the help of microconcepts of captivity, hunger, cruelty, causing pain, wounds and death in the world of nature (to birds, animals, insects) as antithesis to microconcepts of Heaven's wrath, the States' ruin, the sunrise darkening, deprivation of love, discords in society, grief, destruction and curse of Heaven.

This antithesis is based upon the processes of semantic derivation, semantic shifts and metaphorical usage of the majority of words in the semantic groups mentioned above. They symbolically predict the ruin of mankind and the whole universe as a result of breaking the ecological / moral imperative which proclaims the harmony of man, society and nature, according to biblical commandments of respect and worship of labour, art, virtue and condemnation of wars and hostility. "The lamb misus'd breeds public strife, / and yet forgives the butcher's knife". "The beggar's dog and widow's cat, / Feed them and thou wilt grow fat" (Blake, 2009, p. 47).

Thus, the cognitive-associative scheme (CAS) of Blake's (2009) imperatives can be represented through the following linguocognitive metaphorical models:

CAS of Nature: World: Universe: Paradise: Hell

1. Captivity, oppression, cruelty to Nature and its inhabitants :: Heavens' wrath, grief, destruction, death of mankind, Hell

2. Mockery, doubt, disbelief :: Curse, ruin for mankind and states

3. Violation of animals :: The loss of human love

4. The child's tear :: Condemnation and death

5. Poverty, prostitution, lechery :: The ruin of nations and states

6. Light/Darkness :: Joy/Grief

This cognitive-associative scheme helps to reconstruct a complex anthropocentric image of the world with the help of transposition (interpretation), conceptual integration of visual metaphorical images (*A robin redbreast in a cage/ Puts all Heaven in a rage*), tactile images (*Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand*), complex interrelation and convergence of the images of nature and their personification in the personality of the poet and a painter conveying his thoughts and feelings (*A horse misus'd upon the road /Calls to Heaven for human blood*), his basic philosophy.

Blake's (2009) ideals were based on the internal Harmony and Spirituality deprived of everything material and opposed to everything carnal. These ideals found no response in his time but were later developed by the Romantic movement of pre-Raphaelites who proclaimed returning to Nature and praising its philosophical and aesthetic value. They opened the beauty of wild nature to the society, portrayed it with great love and authenticity. They tried to reach harmony between nature and Man, claiming that nature is beautiful and Man is also beautiful when he is an inseparable part of nature.

7. Conclusion

Thus, in the process of ekphrastic interpretation of a work of art language units fulfil not only the informative function but also the communicative, pragmatic, nominative and expressive functions. Language as one of the modes of cognition makes it possible to enrich ekphrastic texts with a multitude of verbal and non-verbal planes in different processes of convergence, implication and irradiation.

The image transfer is based on opposition and metaphoric presentation of the text which provide the most important conditions of the intersemiotic process of translation and ekphrasis formation.

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