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CRITICISM DISCOURSE ON SOVIET FINE ARTS**

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the content and functioning of the multi-level event category in the English-language art criticism discourse on Soviet fine arts of the Thaw period. The onset of this period is defined as a significant event in the formation of the socio-political structure of the state, which affected the development of art and culture in the Soviet Union. Exhibitions held and outstanding works of artists created within a certain socio-political context are considered as events. The latter directly affects the formation of a set of cognitive, professional and general knowledge that underlies understanding of the event and determines the choice of linguistic means of its objectification. The factors affecting the foreign art historian's understanding of the event when an art work is created and exhibited help identify the conditions and motives for interpretation of Soviet art by representatives of another culture. The opinions of English experts about Soviet art indicate that interpretation of art events, to a certain extent, reflects their understanding of the political structure of the state, the socio-cognitive processes underlying the artist's work, as well as their understanding of the concepts of Soviet culture. Linguistic analysis reveals the poly-aspect and multi-level nature of the event category, in which the previous level can trigger the appearance of the next one. A special type of event can be identified – event-trigger, which manifests itself as an external stimulus for different responses of the recipient and for triggering new events.

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1. Introduction

The paper considers the specifics of the linguistic representation of the event category on the example of the English art texts about exhibitions of Soviet artists during the Thaw period.

The event concept is currently of interest to Russian and foreign researchers in various fields, which is quite natural, since the life of an individual and society is full of events that are reflected in the linguistic worldview of society and the culture bearer. Event concepts make up the worldview and are reflected in the language as a universal sign-oriented system.

The philosophical, psychological, cultural and linguo-cognitive aspects of event interpretation have long been studied and are associated with the names of such prominent scientists as (Barabanschikov, 2008; Demyankov, 2017; Kolesov, 2008; Rudnev, 2007; Tenny & Pustejovsky, 2000; Zabolotkina, 2017; Zucchi, 2015), and many others. Pragma-cognitive studies of texts of various genres aimed to study the socio-cultural, emotional-evaluative, axiological patterns of the linguistic representation of event concepts identify and describe the speech-thinking and communicative activity of an individual who cognizes and, therefore, interprets the facts of life, which make up a changeable kaleidoscope of the event-based worldview.

Art, as an integral part of spiritual and material culture, models the image of the surrounding reality and reflects its changes, and the artist, as a master, creates his works as a message to society to address his understanding of what is happening to the recipient, who is an observer, interpreter, initiator or participant in the event-based worldview. Due to this, the art history discourse that decodes and interprets the language of art occupies a significant place in the linguistic and existential space of the individual and society, and the art historian, as a mediator, broadcasts creative ideas of the artist, determines the place of the individual in the eventful time continuum, and assesses his role in the formation of the culture and art of the nation.

The artist creates works of art to represent his sign-oriented interpretation of eventful images accompanied by the author's assessment, which the observer can share or deny. The art historian in his discourse offers professional understanding of what he sees (what the master broadcasts to the audience) and individual perception and transfer of the eventful space.

The specifics of perception of the facts and objects of Soviet art by a foreign art historian, which is associated with his belonging to a different culture and socio-political formation, has a significant impact on his interpretation of all levels of the event category. The interpretation of the Soviet art events by English experts is associated with a cognitive context, which implies the general and professional knowledge of art historians about the features of formation of cross-cultural relations between the Soviet state and Western countries (Petukhova et al., 2021). The cognitive context is understood as "models of culturally conditioned, canonized knowledge, which is general for at least part of the speaking community" (Boldyrev, 2019, p. 21). Thus, the cognitive context is an important factor for the choice of linguistic means by an expert that objectify the event interpretation result.

2. Problem Statement

The event concept and its role in the history and culture of society, as well as its representation in the linguistic worldview, should be studied with regard to the poly-structured model of the event

functioning, its conceptual and ideal representation in the nation mentality and the levels of its sign-oriented manifestations in language and art. According to sociological, linguo-philosophical and geopolitical studies, the event as an indicator of significant transformations that occur in society is manifested through the formation of a special eventful situation, including participants performing an action, the action itself, and subsequent procedural changes observed in the surrounding world. It is distinguished by the multi-level and poly-aspect nature of its manifestation, which is explicitly represented in the linguistic space of society and is open for analysis.

In the study, the event is considered as a multi-level category, which is nominated by sign-oriented systems of spatial and mental organizations. The event is interpreted as the major way of perception, understanding and verbal embodiment of ideas about the world. Due to this, the participants of the event use both verbal and non-verbal resources for multimodal event modeling (Iriskhanova & Prokofyeva, 2021). First, events initially characterize the geopolitical structure and development of society, which can be exemplified by historical events that occur in the non-linguistic space. Second, the actual change of paradigms in the development of the cognitive-information space of society can be attributed to the category of events. We are talking about new trends and directions in science and art, which is evidenced by outstanding, eventful discoveries or works that are in demand and recognized by society, such as paintings, or theoretical developments that contribute to a new stage of cognitive paradigm formation in science or art (Khomyakova et al., 2019). Third, the event represented by a sign-oriented system can be associated, for example, with historical narratives in fiction or epoch paintings that reflect events in the life of society and can affect its development. Public representations of works of art are of interest, which include significant exhibitions where artists present their works.

The eventful nature of such situations associated with the works of individual masters or art history schools and trends is obvious and has a significant impact on the development of intercultural contacts in art and culture. At the same time, the significance of some exhibitions, as evidenced by historical experience, can be enhanced by a number of factors, including the geopolitical situation in the country and abroad, the place and time of the event, and the name, fame, cultural affiliation and political worldview of artists.

3. Research Questions

The authors of the paper are focused on interpretation of the events accompanying the activities of artists during the Thaw period in the Soviet Union in the texts of English art historians. In this regard, of interest is the analysis of the expert language, his assessment of the exhibited works of art, and his understanding of the eventful situation, when the representation of the works of artists takes place.

- i. Does the choice of language means indicate understanding of the event and its multi-level structure by the art historian?
- ii. Does the analysis of the art historian language reveal the specifics of the interpretation of the facts and objects of Soviet art during the Thaw period by foreign experts?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the specifics of functioning and content of the *event* category in the texts of foreign art historians, who are recipients and interpreters of works and facts of Soviet art during the Thaw period, as well as to analyze the discursive specifics of the linguistic representation of this category.

5. Research Methods

The study employed a number of relevant linguistic methods, including a discursive analysis of the language of the art history text and a contextual, cognitive-interpretive and semantic analysis in order to comprehensively explore the linguistic representation of the *event* category in accordance with the requirements of the modern linguistic paradigm.

6. Findings

The Thaw period, as a special stage in the development of the Soviet Union during the post-Stalinist period, was obviously an important event in the process of establishing the socio-political structure of the state. The Thaw period affected the development of art and culture in general is reflected in the works of artists, sculptors and architects, which opened up new perspectives and opportunities for self-representation in the middle of the last century that caused discussions and controversy in the artistic world. The Thaw period as an event is reflected in the exhibitions dedicated to the art works or the themes of their works. An outstanding achievement of the artist, which affects the development of art within the specified sociopolitical context, can also be considered as an event.

The variety of meanings of an event occurring in a certain space-time continuum and under its impact is fully revealed in the art history discourse, the author of which offers the reader his own understanding and interpretation of the event. It is known that the art history discourse aims to reveal the intention of the master and interpret his intentions within a certain socio-cultural context. The analysis shows that the interpretation of works of art by an expert, who is a bearer of cultural values different from those of the artist himself and carries out his activities within the cognitive context developed in his mind.

Consider a number of examples that illustrate the multi-level interpretation of events in the English-language art criticism discourse on the Thaw period.

"Thaw" as an event.

With the Soviet Pavilion of the 1962 Venice Art Biennale, the Thaw era made its entrance onto the international scene. Artists from different generations and Soviet republics were entrusted to illustrate "the deeply human dimension of Soviet art" (Bertele, 2017).

The above fragment indicates that the onset of the Thaw period in the Soviet Union, which was manifested in art and cultural works of the 50s and 60s, was noted by Western art historians. They interpret this stage as a period of special humanitarian scope in the development of Soviet art, and the onset of the "thaw" was considered as a factor of event significance in the international arena.

The comments that show the eventful nature of the Thaw period and the works created during this period accompanied foreign exhibitions of works of Soviet art and individual works of Soviet masters. This was confirmed by the response of foreign art historians to the canvases by T. Salakhov, G. Korzhev and V. Popkov, who worked in the new style of the so-called severe romanticism, which were presented in the Soviet pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1962. The painting *The Builders of Bratsk* by V. Popkov occupied a special place in terms of the manner of execution and themes due to the originality of the genre. The painting was created after visiting the construction of the Bratsk hydroelectric power station in Siberia, which was an important event for formation of a young artist that contributed to his creative development. The following example illustrates the interpretation of an inspirational trip by the artist as an event.

An inspiring fact of reality as an event-trigger (what was seen caused creation of the canvas).

The painting *The Builders of Bratsk* was inspired by Popov's 1960 visit to the construction site of the Bratsk hydroelectric power station in Siberia – one of the privileged destinations of the expeditions promoted by the authorities to young artists in search of inspiration (Bertele, 2017).

The art historian reports that the stay in Bratsk and the visit to the impressive Bratsk hydroelectric power station, which construction became a landmark in the development of Soviet industry, was eventful for the artist V. Popkov, which is evidenced by his painting that attracted the attention of experts at the Venice Biennale. The work of art embodied through cognitive processes of perception and interpretation in the master's mind followed by the embodiment on the canvas, a real event was transformed into an art event. Consider an example illustrating this affirmation.

Artistic image as an event.

...The Builders of Bratsk, an epic contemporary masterpiece, in which heroism no longer in patriotic feats but rather in harsh reality of the Soviet byt [everyday life] (Bertele, 2017).

The masterpiece created by the artist demonstrates the eventfulness of what was happening in distant Siberia, which is concentrated in the plot depicted, conveying boundless expanses of the taiga, the harsh beauty of builders, the power and might of man over the nature, and forms in the viewer an idea of such artistic concepts as HEROISM, COURAGE, and CRAFTSMANSHIP.

The appearance of the painting by V. Popkov during the Thaw period at the Biennale, as well as its recognition abroad as an epic masterpiece, testifies to the eventual significance of the artist's success and the important event that took place in Russian art.

In December 1962, a few months after the exhibition in Italy, another significant event in the art world took place in the Moscow Manege. On December 1, the exhibition dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Moscow branch of the Union of Artists of the USSR was organized by Ely Bielutin, who continued the traditions of the Russian avant-garde of the early 20th century. The head of state N.S. Khrushchev was not versed in modern painting and not prepared for the plots and technique of the works presented at the exposition. Thus, he sharply and rudely criticized the paintings by A. Drevin, V. Tatlin and R. Falk, which approached the end of the Thaw period and became an event of exceptional significance for both foreign and Soviet artists, as notes the Italian art critic Matteo Bertele. Consider the following example that illustrates his interpretation of the political response to the exhibition as an event-trigger for change in the relationship between the state and the arts.

Response to the exhibition as an event-marker of social and political changes.

*The exhibition (the 1962 Venice Art Biennale) took place just a few months before **the Moscow Manege Exhibition of December 1962, which prompted Khrushchev's notoriously reaction and the first stop to Soviet cultural détente*** (Bertele, 2017).

A specific external stimulus for this response of the head of state was the still life "Potato" by Robert Falk, a Soviet painter, who combines Russian modernism and avant-garde. This still life painting created in 1955 was first presented at the exhibition in the Manege only in 1962, where members of the Politburo, opponents of de-Stalinization, drew the attention of N.S. Khrushchev to this painting. Having provoked his anger, they provoked, as the art historian S. Reid notes, the appearance of the so-called Manege Affair, which approached the end of the Thaw period. Consequently, the response of the Soviet leader, which is interpreted by the expert as an event, was provoked by the image on the canvas. Thus, the following example demonstrates the interpretation of the moment of meeting with a work of art that is ambiguous for the recipient as an event.

Watching an ambiguous artistic canvas as an event.

*That opponents of de-Stalinization such as Serov **could count on this painting to trigger Khrushchev's anger** suggest that, at this juncture in 1962 when it was first publicly exhibited, **the painting was not so innocent** as its humble subject matter and quiet, unassertive manner might indicate* (Reid, 2017).

Although R. Falk created "Potato" as an example of post-impressionism by analogy with the works by Cezanne and Matisse, it should be noted that the still life genre was not popular in the Soviet Union due to the inability to reflect the dynamics of the country development.

***Socialist realism required artists to paint a moment that implied a trajectory from past to radiant future.** And to indicate that progress was achieved thanks to the leader, the party, collectivization, and socialist industry* (Reid, 2017).

N.S. Khrushchev, who was not versed in art, considered Falk's work anti-people, primitive and contrary to the ideas of socialist realism. However, a simple plot of the still life had a much deeper subtext aimed to reveal hardships of the life of common people, and the poverty and hunger they endure, which gave the canvas an eventful value revealing real problems in the Thaw period.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the *event* as a multi-level category is represented at the linguistic level in the English art history text on Soviet fine arts. Analysis of the foreign expert language and his assessment of the eventful significance of exhibitions and historical periods as the socio-cultural and political context shows the effect of the latter on the creation and perception of the artist's works and understanding of the eventful situation by the art historian, which reveals significant aspects and levels of Soviet art interpretation by foreign experts.

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