LEXICAL AND SEMANTIC MEANS OF ‘SPACE’ CONCEPT EXPRESSION IN TH. DREISER’S ‘THE FINANCIER’

У даній статті йдеться про різноманітність і стилістичне богатство лексично-семантичних одиниць, що мають потенціал вираження просторових відносин у рамках літературного дискурсу. Проаналізовано результати проведених досліджень (на прикладі «Фінансиста» Т. Драйзера).

Ключові слова: простір, концепт «простір», просторові відношення.

В даній статті розглядається мноагранне і стилістичне богатство лексично-семантичних одиниць, існуючих можливостей вираження просторових відносин в рамках літературного дискурсу. Проаналізовано результати проведених досліджень (на прикладі «Фінансиста» Т. Драйзера).

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This article deals with the variety and stylistic richness of lexical and semantic units that have potential in expressing spatial relations within literary discourse. The results of conducted research are analyzed (on the basis of Th. Dreiser’s ‘The Financier’).

Key words: space, concept ‘space’, spatial relations.

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In cognitive linguistics the experiential and bodily basis of human categories are presupposed: our apprehension of the body in space gives rise to a set of image schemas that lie behind the extended uses of the spatial prepositions, and that are the source of numerous spatial metaphors. Such famous linguists as G. Lakoff, R. Langacker, G. Talmy, E. Sweetser have dealt with the concept of ‘space’. ‘Space’ can be understood as ‘form of observation, perception of the appearance of things, basic factor of higher empiric experience’ [3, p. 129] and is the category with the help of which form of things and event existance is marked reflecting their coexistance.

‘Concept’ is an operational unit of cognitive linguistics (semantics, to be more exact) which represents encoding of various conceptualizations of human experience in language [1, p. 27]. Each concept has its core and periphery.

So, the aim of this very article is to point out the periphery of ‘space’ concept expressed in peculiar stylistic devices based on the material of the novel «The Financier».

The «Trilogy of Desire» is itself a spatial three-part novel – a story that has strong interconnection of two basic concepts of cognitive linguistics – ‘time’ and ‘space’.

‘Time’ is captured in its several measures:
- from the point of view of a historical epoch (wars, industrial development, etc.);
- from the point of view of one person’s life up to the end (including all the periods of his childhood, adolescence and ‘dawn’);
- from the point of view of human relations (especially those of man and woman) and moral norms and values accepted in the society at that time.

It should be also mentioned here that the author’s style has its own peculiarities, including the following specifics:
- ilaconism; 2. precise descriptions; 3. personification of nature (almost every description of city, street, etc. contains some comparison to a man, with common features, even habits depicted); 4. description of characters and appearances in rough strikes but with peculiar attention to small characteristic details («speaking details»); 5. lack of deep psychological analysis of characters and motives of their behaviour, exact deeds and actions.

When working with Dreiser’s trilogy, we picked up the first novel – «The Financier», published in 1912 and dedicated to the Philadelphian period of the main hero’s life.

Within cognitive linguistics ‘space’ concept has its core presented basically with nouns: place, spot, area, region, zone, location, territory [3] and periphery finding its implementation in various stylistic devices.

Thus, having analysed the text of this book, we got the following general statistics:
- the word ‘place’ is used 150 times;
- the word ‘area’ is used only 6 times;
- the word ‘zone’ is used only 2 times;
- the word ‘region’ comes across only 4 times;
- the word ‘spot’ is also used 4 times;
- the word ‘site’ is used 34 times;
- the word ‘location’ is mentioned only 2 times;
- the word ‘territory’ is met in the text for 7 times.

If to take into consideration the fact that the novel consists of total amount of 196,680 words, it means that rare occuring of most of the above mentioned words causes special interest, as well as too frequent use of the word ‘place’. Let’s consider particular situations when this very word is used. We will try to provide some exact examples and simultaneously divide them into the groups of meanings they refer to in each particular case.

1) «…fell heir to the place vacated by the promoted teller» [4, p. 3] – this is very characteristic of Dreiser’s style – to use the word ‘place’ in the meaning of a ‘post’, ‘job’, ‘position’. Thus, 50 times out of these 150 mentions of ‘place’ are those regarding the meaning of some job.

2) «…Buttonwood Street, where he spent the first ten years of his life, was a lovely place for a boy to live.» [4, p. 9]

«I tell you, Henry, you have a rather nice place here.» [4, p. 13]

«I’ve seen their place.» [4, p. 23] – all these are examples of ‘place’ in the meaning of home, the place where people live. These occupy another 40 times out of 150.


4) expressions «in the first place», «in the second place», «in the next place». «take place», «in one’s places»;

5) verbs: ‘replace’, ‘place’.

We should also mention here that spatiality is represented in the text with the help of various colorific lexical units as well as comparative constructions, like simile, when Dreiser depicted powerful political and financial leaders in the middle of an economic crisis: «It was a time when all the little rats and mice were scurrying to cover because of the presence of a great, fiery-eyed public cat somewhere in the dark, and only the older and wiser rats were able to act» [4, p. 277].

Another example of a bright simile helping to create the feeling of spatiality: «Great lawyers were merely great unscrupulous subtleties, like himself, sitting back in dark, close-woven lairs like spiders and awaiting the approach of unwary human flies» [4, p. 335].

One more example of simile (together with litotes which is underlined in the text), this time depicting Frank: «It was a powerful mind, turning, like a vast searchlight, a glittering ray into many a dark corner; but it was not sufficiently disinterested to search the ultimate dark» [4, p. 456].

In any literary work there can be as many ‘spaces’ as the author considers appropirate to create. For Dreiser realistic manner of narration is characteristic. Very seldom he glorifies and vividly depicts nature, it is more typical for him to provide descriptions of buildings. But in this very example, in order to create a picture of something a bit mysterious, dark and frightening, he turns to non-typical description, using spatial prefix ‘super-’, while ‘glowing’ and ‘feebly’ also add to the common picture of some mysterious evening: «The whole building was wrapped in a smooth, light-colored stone, which on a snowy night like this, with the few lamps that were used in it glowing feebly in the dark, presented an very, fantastic, almost supernatural appearance» [4, p. 379].

Another peculiar thing about Dreiser’s style is that he normally uses the word ‘dark’ (which we consider as one of those contributing both to the concepts of ‘space’ and ‘time’) when providing the description of someone’s appearance. Or turns to the word ‘dark’ when he writes about darkness. Thus, ‘dark’ as a noun is used 25 times in the whole text while ‘dark’ as an adjective appears for 34 times.

One more characteristic peculiarity of Dreiser’s author style is that in his novels he makes a ‘speaking background’ with the help of peculiar details (heavy rain, strong wind, grey sky, etc.) – like musical and video background in a film when they need
to prepare the audience for the upcoming tragedy or to express some terrible grief / sorrow of the main hero: «It was a rough and bloody night when Cowperwood started for this institution under duress. The wind was driving the snow before it in curious, interesting whirls» [4, p. 379].

The same situation is in the following example, when it comes to the tragedy connected with Aileen and her decision to make an escape from parents’ house. In addition to the ‘speaking background’ we observe here vivid lexical units contributing a lot to the spatiality of the scene: «She stole downstairs and out into the vestibule, opening the outer door and looking out into the street. The lamps were already flaring in the dark, and a cool wind was blowing. Her portmanteau was heavy, but she was quite strong. She walked briskly to the corner, which was some fifty feet away, and turned south, walking rather nervously and irritably, for this was a new experience for her, and it all seemed so undignified, so unlike anything she was accustomed to doing. She put her bag down on a street corner, finally, to rest» [4, p. 386].

The above mentioned abstract deserves more considerate analysis as it is extremely rich in colorific lexical units engaged into spatial relations formation. Here, in this very abstract, we proceed from one mental space to another, through a number of locations: downstairs → out into the vestibule → (outer) door → into the street → the street corner. This is the order of the set of locations changing quickly before our eyes, creating each time a particular new space.

One more important thing in this abstract are verbs. Verbs contribute not only to the spatiality relations but also to the dynamics of the scene showing the change of the narration tempo: from slow → to pause → to rapid → to pause. In terms of the verbs from the abstract it looks like this: stole downstairs → stole out → opened the door (pause) → looked out (continuing the pause) → walked briskly (fifty feet away) → turned south → walked rather nervously and irritably (changing the tempo from ‘briskly’ to a bit slower one – ‘nervously’) → put her bag down on a street corner (final stop for the episode).

The dynamics of this episode has been chosen very properly: interchange of the tempo contributed a lot not only to the development of ‘space’ concept but also to the reflection of the inner state of Aileen, her feelings and hesitation. Thus, the verb ‘stole’ in the meaning of a movement (not activity, the action of real illegal taking of one’s possessions) is a brilliant word to emphasize both the way the heroine felt and the way she escaped and the process of this escape. This paragraph is also very remarkable owing to the oppositions presented in it: «…Her portmanteau was heavy, but she was quite strong.» and one more: «…this was a new experience for her, and it all seemed so undignified.» We observe the opposition of ‘heavy – strong’ and ‘new – undignified’, both making the picture described brighter.

‘Space’ concept can be also represented by repetition used to achieve dramatic effect: «They drove rapidly to within a few doors of the place, where a second detective on guard across the street approached. Butler and Alderson descended from the vehicle, and together they approached the doors» [4, p. 299].

In the above mentioned paragraph Dreiser also uses high-style semantically coloured lexical units to show dissonance, sharp contrast between low, immoral activity taking place and solemnity of the people involved into the process of spying: «descended from the vehicle».

The depiction of Aileen’s portrait is also based on the usage of spatiality via simile: «chair floated like an aureole about her head» and colourful epithets: «She had such lovely smooth arms, a full, luxuriously tapering throat and neck; her golden-red hair floated like an aureole about her head, and her large eyes sparkled. The wondrous vigor of a full womanhood was hers – errant, ill-balanced, romantic, but exquisite…» [4, p. 300].

The next paragraph we have picked up is filled with spatiality concept expression means: «He delighted to return to his wife in the evenings, leaving the crowded downtown section where traffic clammed and men hurried. Here he could feel that he was well-stationed and physically happy in life. The thought of the dinner-table with candles upon it (his idea); the thought of Lillian in a trailing gown of pale-blue or green silk – he liked her in those colors; the thought of a large fireplace flaming with solid lengths of cord-wood, and Lillian snuggling in his arms, gripped his immature imagination. As has been said before, he cared nothing for books, but life, pictures, trees, physical contact – these, in spite of his shrewd and already gripping financial calculations, held him.» [4, p. 64].

So, the above mentioned paragraph contains strong opposition of, at least, four spaces:

- crowded downtown ↔ peaceful home (we may also say ‘there’ ↔ ‘here’);
- traffic clammed and men hurried ↔ dinner-table with candles & a large fireplace flaming with solid lengths of cord-wood & Lillian snuggling in his arms;
- books ↔ life, pictures, trees, physical contact;
- life, pictures, trees, physical contact ↔ shrewd and already gripping financial calculations.

This abstract is also rich in epithets: ‘well-stationed’, ‘a trailing gown’, ‘immature imagination’, ‘shrewd and already gripping financial calculations’. It is also remarkable that such a ‘pastoral’ picture is strengthened with the comment on Frank’s favourite colours at home: «…the thought of Lillian in a trailing gown of pale-blue or green silk – he liked her in those colors. It is well-known, ‘pale-blue’ and ‘green’ are calm colours, non-aggressive, not irritating the eye.

To conclude, we should say that spatiality in Th. Dreiser’s «The Financier» is very restricted: every space met has its limits, most of spatial descriptions deal with people and buildings, nature is described in rough, non-touching manner. Quite often space exists in the opposition: one space counteracts with another. Stylistic devices contributing to the concept of space are very rare, with epithets and simile prevailing.

References: