

The Poetic Linguistic Non-Standardness and Meaning Construction: Semantic Aspects of the Associative Theory of Linguistic Creativity

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Abstract. *The paper focuses on the role of verbal associations in non-conventional meaning construction. The Associative Theory of Linguistic Creativity is put forward as an attempt to explain the dynamic process of meaning construction in cases of deliberate language nonconformity in poetry. Linguistic creativity of the poet is regarded as de-canonized speech practice, i. e. the deliberate violation of language norm and convention aimed at producing some pragmatic effects. The poet's lingua-creative innovations and modifications are described in this paper as prompts for the reader's novel and unique conceptualization. The reader's construction of meaning of the poet's linguistic non-standardness is analyzed as re-processing of formal and semantic aspects of linguistic units and modeling of specific associative context of word functioning. Transformations of the word's associative potential as the prime mover of verbal routine transfigurations are analyzed with regard to the semantic contribution of coresense and consense properties of linguistic units. To illustrate linguistic and conceptual associative transformations, the authors inspect the meaning construction of nonce-words in Lyn Hejinian's poems. It is demonstrated how the reader processes schematic semantic content and detailed semantic content employing the mechanisms of associative contrast. The complicated relations between non-standard linguistic form, its semantic subject matter and conceptual content are explained from the perspective of associative shifting which broadens the semantic potential of the word and results in developing a sophisticated network of unique conceptual packets of new, emergent meaning.*

Key words: *meaning construction, linguistic non-standardness, the associative potential, verbal associative context.*

Although linguistic creativity is studied in multitude of forms and in a wide array of humanities and social sciences, the phenomenon is not clearly definable. The notion of linguistic creativity embraces the aspects of linguistic productivity, novelty, unexpectedness and deliberate nonconformity as manifestation of the language user's creative thinking. Traditionally following Chomskyan viewpoint, theories of linguistic creativity highlight the productive potential as an essential property of language in which the speaker's creativity resides: "it (language) provides the means for expressing indefinitely many thoughts and for reacting appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations" (Chomsky, 1965, p. 6). The general understanding of linguistic creativity as "the use of language and discourse in specific ways to foreground personalized expressive meanings beyond the literal proposition-based information" (Maynard, 2007, p. 4) provides the research framework for analyzing a broad range of instances including speech play (Sherzer, 2002), humorous and ironic creativity (Coulson, 2001; Ritchie, 2005), discursive creativity (Maynard, 2007), conceptual and linguistic creativity in children (Cacciary et al., 1997), etc. The current paper regards linguistic creativity as de-canonized speech practice, i. e. the deliberate violation of language norm and usus aimed at producing some pragmatic effects. Numerous examples of linguistic nonconformity can be derived from experimental avant-garde poetry, whose semantic complexity is grounded in the poet's desire to find

new expressive means by deviating from an accepted linguistic convention. Russian linguistic poetics has long followed traditions of language non-standardness research rooted in the works of Russian Formalists (e. g. Jakobson, 1981) describing Futurists' language experimenting in terms of creative intentionality and metalinguistic reflection. The focus of the current study is on analyzing the dynamic process of meaning construction for cases of deliberate language nonconformity in poetry, e. g. poetic nonce-words, foregrounded semantic syncretism, lexical combinability violations, morphological deviations, etc. The poet's lingua-creative innovations and modifications are described in this paper as prompts for the reader's novel and unique conceptualization.

Theoretical Background of the Study: Non-conventional meaning construction Current cognitive semantic theories approach human communication as the process relying on two important components of cognitive network: the meaning construction system and the meaning prompting system (Kecskes, 2008, p. 386). "Linguistic forms prompt for the construction of meanings. The problem is that they do not have a one-to-one relationship. Meaning is incomparably richer than the form of language" (Kecskes, 2008, p. 386). There are several currently developing theories describing conceptual nature of lexical meaning and the process of linguistic construal: the Conceptual Integration theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002), the theory of Lexical Concepts and Cognitive Models (Evans 2010), the Dynamic Model of Meaning (Kecskes, 2008). These works differ in how they account for the nature of conceptual structures and processes proposed for language; but they attempt to explain how the conceptual system and linguistic system interact in producing meaning. The general premise behind these semantic theories is that the dynamic process of meaning construction is regarded "an online mental activity whereby speech participants create meaning in every communicative act on the basis of underspecified linguistic units" (Radden et al., 2007, p. 3). The poet's creative modifications enhance underspecification of linguistic units, which manifests itself in different ways, e. g. as implicitness, indeterminacy, incompatibility (Radden et al., 2007, p. 5-9) and triggers non-conventional meaning production in the reader's perceiving mind. To derive the novel unique meaning prompted by language poetic trans-forms, in processing poetic underspecification the reader relies on (1) the core coded meanings of linguistic units and items, i. e. conventionally fixed semantic attributes irrespective of the unit's givenness in the context ("coresense" (Kecskes, 2008, p. 393-395)), or the variations of coded meanings, most frequently and ready-made retrievable for the given language user ("salient meanings" (Giora, 1997)); and (2) contextual meaning values of linguistic units in an actual situational context – "consense" (Kecskes, 2008, p. 395-396). How are coresense and consense properties of linguistic units converted into mental representations meaningful for the reader processing the poet's non-standard verbalizing? We argue that non-conventional meaning construction in poetry reading resides on the mechanism of association shifts at the levels of internal and external semantic relations of linguistic units. Depending on the type of the poet's language modification, various syntagmatic, paradigmatic and epigrammatic relations of lexemes, grammemes, morphemes, phonemes and graphemes are re-processed by the reader. This reprocessing results in forming a new, unusual way of conceptualizing objects meant by the poet.

The associative theory of linguistic creativity and its application for analyzing the non-conventional meaning construction. The associative theory of creativity (Mednick, 1962) states that creative people have flatter associative hierarchies and can more fluently retrieve associative elements for combining them to form creative ideas. The current updates of the theory highlight that creativity is related to a more effective way of accessing associative memory (Benedek and Neubauer, 2013). It was also shown that creativity is related to higher evaluation of concept relatedness (Rossman and Fink, 2010) and relies on highly adaptive executive functioning (Benedek and Neubauer, 2013). Linguistic creativity of the poetry reader takes place under loosely predetermined conditions: uncommonness of language expression governs generation of uncommon conceptual associations; underspecification of linguistic units and multiplicity/obscurity of the poetic text organization aggravate association divergence. The associative theory of language play (Gridina, 1996) argues that meaning construction in producing and comprehending instances of deliberate verbal modifications and manipulations appears to be the process of modeling specific associative context of word functioning. The key concept of this theory is the notion of 'the associative potential of the word' –

the theoretical construct, which is due to explain the variety of associative shifts in verbal foregrounding (Gridina, 1996, p. 33). The notion of the associative potential originates from the idea that every aspect of formal and semantic word structure bears the potential for speech actualization of non-contextual and contextual associations. The associative potential of the word comprises the areas of (1) non-contextual associative relations, i. e. conventional intra-verbal associations (pairing of form and content) inside the semantic structure of one linguistic unit (links ‘signifier \longleftrightarrow signified’) and inter-verbal associations between two or more units in lexically fixed constructions; (2) contextual associative relations, i. e. verbal associative links salient in the actual situational context. Thus, speech play is realization of the word’s associative potential with intent to shift stereotyped verbal associative links (Gridina, 1996, p. 35). The poet’s creative intent to de-automatize text comprehension requires transforming of associative stereotypes of linguistic units’ perception. The speech producer employs a number of operational mechanisms in violating formal and semantic rules of language units’ functioning. The associative theory of linguistic creativity describes different types of lingua-creative operational mechanisms focusing the addressee’s attention on the definite aspect of the linguistic unit’s form and/or content in experimental conditions of modeling its de-stereotyped perception (Gridina, 1996, p. 64-68): (1) mechanisms of the linguistic unit’s production, i. e. creative modification of conventional nominative techniques and onomasiological models; (2) mechanisms of the linguistic unit’s usage, i. e. non-conventional lexical actualization, modification of semantic, syntactic and pragmatic parameters; (3) mechanisms of formal-semantic variation based on the linguistic sign asymmetry, i. e. alterations in lexico-semantic structure of the word and/or its morpho-derivational structure. The recent updates of the associative theory of linguistic creativity (Gridina, 2015; Ustinova, 2014) consider the nonconventional meaning construction from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Transformations of the word’s associative potential as the prime mover of verbal routine transfigurations are analyzed with regard to (1) the semantic contribution of coresense and consense properties of linguistic units; (2) access to the conceptual content provided by non-conventionally formed or used linguistic units; (3) semantic super-compositionality and emergency in poetic speech processing. As far as the semantic input generated by coresense and consense is concerned, the prompts for conceptualization provided by the poet’s language innovations are ambiguous, so the reader has more freedom of choice in imposing his / her personal interpretation on potentially meaningful stimuli. Poetry is lingua-centric discourse. It highlights impulses, latencies, potentialities within the linguistic system and upgrades normative procedures of linguistic code functioning in speech communication. Thus, the reader’s attention is always focused on the unusual language forms in poetry. Being a unique instantiation of a lexical concept any usage of a given linguistic form prompts for unique conceptualization (Evans, 2010). Linguistic content associated with language forms relates to specific areas of conceptual content. According to Kecskes, coresense is the word’s meaning value independent of any situational context impact (Kecskes, 2012). “Coresense is abstracted from prior contextual occurrences of a word. It is neither conceptual nor lexical, but the interface between the two linguistic and conceptual levels” (Kecskes, 2012, p. 393). Coresense contributes to structuring conceptual content by outlining the most accessible knowledge areas. As far as poetic trans-forms are concerned, their non-standard word-specific semantic properties trigger a variety of verbal associations. The associative theory of linguistic creativity draws on double nature of verbal association: its reference to meaningful relationships coined by linguistic system itself and meaningful relationships within conceptual knowledge framework (Gridina, 1996, p. 36). In the situation of foregrounded poetic underspecification while construing the meaning of poetic trans-forms, the reader takes into account coresense properties of linguistic units. Graded salience hypothesis (Giora, 2003) claims the priority of salient meanings in speech processing, i. e. most familiar, frequent, predictable meanings coded in the mental lexicon of the individual. The associative stereotypes of word perception are broken in nonconventional meaning construction. Salient meanings implement shifts in linguistic associations designing the ground for unusual meaningful connections in the conceptual system. Some poet’s linguistic trans-forms can be semanticized without any situational context. The rich conceptual content of such creative innovations is mostly form-dependent. On the other hand, contextual interpretation provides necessary specifications of coresense. Contextual associative shifts organize a broader conceptual network of meaningful knots prompted by the linguistic form, which enhances

the semantic potential of the poet's innovations. To illustrate linguistic and conceptual associative transformations, let us consider the meaning construction of poetic nonce-words. In Lyn Hejinian's "The Guard" (Hejinian, 19842) and "Redo" (Hejinian, 19841) there are a number of novel language forms derived by means of affixation (un- + root + -like): uncarlike, unstationlike, unrumorlike, unsurflike, unrecipelike. Constructing the meaning of these innovations, the reader processes semantic content of two types: (1) the schematic content associated with the morphemes un- ('negative', 'opposite', 'a reversal of state') and - like ('resembling or similar to'); (2) the rich, detailed content associated with root-morphemes -car-, -station-, -rumor-, etc. The semantic structure of the poet's creative innovations provides the necessary architecture for the novel conceptual representation. Here the lexico-conceptual composition as the meaning construction operation employs the mechanisms of associative contrast. The meanings of morphemes -car-, -station-, -rumor-, etc. salient for each reading individual are reprocessed by means of disanalogy. For example, the lexical concept [RUMOR] activates cognitive models STORY IN GENERAL CIRCULATION and UNCERTAINTY. Intralinguistic associations stimulate selection of aspects within the semantic structure of the morpheme —rumor- suitable for antithesizing ('unlike rumor'). For different readers the set of such aspects is unique depending on their individual thesaurus and individual differences in language ability, e. g. 'evidence', 'certainty', 'quietness', 'truth', 'silence', etc. Thus, the novel form unrumorlike provides new conceptual content through activating the cognitive model and ascribing it a range of attributes relating to the qualities of being 'dissimilar to rumor'. The association shifts arising in the given situational context specify the message:

of Vuillard, so undying in disorder is order.

Windows closed on wind in rows.

Night lights, unrumorlike, the reserve

for events. All day our postures were the same (L. Hejinian 'The Guard'). The connotations constituting the periphery of semantic structures of the words night, light, reserve, events (e. g. night – 'refraining from activity; obscurity'; light – 'turn on; guide'; reserve – 'safety; future'; event – 'outcome') generate unusual conflux of conceptual associations. Under such contextual conditions attributes of the cognitive model UNRUMORLIKE relating to 'temporal stillness' and 'potentiality' are being accessed. It is important to note that the meaning of the nonce-word and the situational context are co-constructed simultaneously: attributes of the activated cognitive model are specified while processing the context; cognitive model specification evokes new understanding of the context. The associative contrast as the mechanism of the associative potential transformation appears to be context forming in this poem: the reader reprocesses gradable and complementary antonymous relations conveyed by denotational or connotational sememes: dying (death) vs. undying (life); disorder vs. order; night (dark) vs. light; reserve (sustained activity) vs. event (action, experience). From the cognitive viewpoint, transformations of the word's associative potential affect the non-conventional meaning construction in the following ways:

- Divergent thinking of the reader generating a wide range of solutions in resolving linguistic underspecification and poetic ambiguity is stimulated.
- Associative shifts broaden the semantic potential of the word (i. e. the cognitive models profile potentially accessible via the lexical concept) by means of (a) supplying new attributes to the cognitive models of knowledge representation and (b) utilizing remote associations between the activated cognitive models. This semantic extension results in developing a sophisticated network of unique conceptual packets of new, emergent meaning.
- The reader acquires novel linguistic knowledge recognizing diversity of language categories, language relations and acceptable means of verbalizing and novel ontological knowledge since linguistic nonstandardness causes defamiliarization of objects and phenomena signified, increases the difficulty of their perception and results in unusual mental representations.

The associative theory of linguistic creativity presents an approach to studying deliberate linguistic nonstandardness via transformations of associative perception stereotypes. Such approach calls

attention to the associative strategy of producing and comprehending deliberate language innovations and deviations. An associative strategy of linguistic creativity demands from the addressee to combine divergent aspects of old/assimilated knowledge on the associative basis into new associative systems meeting conditions of non-standard language functioning. We argue that lingua-creative meaning construction is determined by two dialectically operating factors: foregrounding of stereotypic parameters pre-designed by the language system and actualized contravention of language system and *usus* stereotypes. The language user producing or comprehending deliberate linguistic anomalies is semantically flexible enough to grasp the paradox between linguistic normativity and potential possibilities of norm violating and to construct the novel meaning making use of this paradox. Processive creativity of the reader interpreting multi-meaningful poetic utterance is directed by (1) linguistic mechanisms used by the poet for de-canonizing linguistic units' form and function and (2) constructive principles of the poet's modeling of the verbal associative context (associative juxtaposition, associative imitation associative inference, associative clash, etc).

These assumptions have meaningful implications for theoretical frameworks of lingua-creative cognition. By examining complex sensemaking in the poetry reader's interpretative activity, there are many opportunities to investigate the non-conventional meaning construction as a creative thinking process. The associative theory of linguistic creativity puts into new perspective the analysis of complicated relations between non-standard linguistic form, its semantic subject matter and conceptual content. The theory gives adequate explanation to verbal association shifts prompting for novel conceptual associations resulting in unique mental representations.

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