

ORGANIZING FUNCTION OF EPITHET IN THE SYSTEM OF TROPES

(problems of presentation in teaching english stylistics)

In the process of studying various tropes in Modern English scholars inevitably pay attention to the systematic character of this field. One is tempted to ask what forms the nucleus of the system of tropes and what makes up the peripheral zones.

In this connection, the diachronic aspect of tropes and the question about the hypothetical “prototype” that served as a source for the creation of the great variety of tropes existing in modern English are of the utmost interest. According to some linguists, the part of the prototrope was played by metonymy (especially by synecdoche as its variety) since it is based on the associative contiguity of the context (situation) and the referent. For instance, P. Todorov believes that the doubling of synecdoche results in metaphor [7]. This view is shared by A. Henry who defines metaphor as double metonymy [6].

From our point of view, however, metonymy (including synecdoche) cannot be regarded as a source prototrope. It goes without saying that the main function of metonymy is identifying things, but not characterizing them. Metonymy is the least expressive of all tropes.

There are good reasons to believe that the function of the prototrope was fulfilled by epithet, the trope which emphatically expresses some quality, property or feature of persons, things, phenomena, etc. It is common knowledge that any concept (the highest form of reflecting the reality in human mentality), which has its material form of linguistic expression, develops due to discovering qualities, properties and features of various things and phenomena. Genetically the attribute is primary as regard the predicative. N.D. Arutyunova maintains that the predicative relations “appear on the basis of attributive relations and on the strictly syntagmatic plane come to the latter” [1]. What is more, the epithet, as we are going to prove hereafter can be regarded as an organizing centre of the system of tropes.

Strange as it may seem, recently the epithet has been neglected in special literature. For instance, it is not even mentioned among the tropes in one of the new manuals in English stylistics [3]. Very often the epithet is misrepresented or mixed up with other tropes [4; 5].

We consider it necessary for students of English to get an adequate understanding of this major trope. First of all, they should be taught how to classify the vast variety of epithets both as to their trope essence and structural patterns. In the classification of epithets we are going to present they are divided into two large groups: **usually-associated** epithets (constant and descriptive-estimative), e.g. *the wide sea, merry England, a mysterious smile, a tiresome job, etc.*: and **occasionally-associated epithets**.

It is very important to realize that the latter are the result of interlacing the field of epithet with the field of other tropes:

A. Field of likening

1. Comparative epithets

- a) direct: *apple-red cheeks (cheeks are red like apples); a pancake-like face (a face is like a pancake);*
- b) indirect: *ape-like arms* (⁺ *arms are like an ape*); *a cow-like look (a look like that of a cow).*

2. Metaphoric epithets, e.g. *the biting wind, a handsome sum of money, red-eyed locomotives, etc.*

3. Litotic / hyperbolic epithets, e.g. *a pocket-size woman, a pint-sized boy, a mammoth meeting, etc.*

B. Field of contiguity

1. Metonymical epithets, e.g. *her yelling face, love-shy fingers, clamouring atmosphere, etc.*

2. Periphrastical epithets (often euphemistic): *her interesting condition, their blanked-blank country, the blooming fool.*

C. Field of contrast

1. Ironical epithets, e.g. *the sweet smile of an alligator, a nice, smile, European-style war, etc.*

2. **Oxymoronic epithets**, e.g. *his ugly pleasant face, acid-sweet smile, dwarf-like skyscrapers, etc.*

As we see, occasionally-associated epithets interlace with tropes of other field and can be transformed into them. It testifies to the fact that the epithet should be considered as an organizing of the of the system of tropes.

It is very important to acquaint the students with the variety of structural patterns of compound epithets in English. As a rule, they are most vivid and expressive.

The following nine patterns are the frequent:

1. **N + -like**: *a flower-like girl, a goal-like beard, a pear-like figure, etc.*

2. **N + PII**: *pig-faced dukes, a fish-eyed clerk, a hawk-eyed cop, etc.*

3. **N + PI**: *a money-grubbing town, a heart-rending sob, corn-drinking recklessness, etc.*

4. **N + A**: *the bottle-green sky, duck-white clouds, the lead-heavy night, etc.*

5. **N + N**: *his oat-straw hair, a lobster-supper dream, the apple-blossom colouring, etc.*

6. **A + N**: *the blue-bowl sky, a strong-arm copper, her old-lady mannerisms, etc.*

7. **A + A**: *an electric-blue lightning, pale-lilac shadows, bricky-dry throats, etc.*

8. **A + PI**: *a ferrety-looking youngster, a vindictive-looking eagle, a low-burning intoxication, etc.*

9. **A + PII**: *a deep-seated distrust, the best-hated man, an ill-omened talk, etc.*

In the terms of wordbuilding compound epithets can be classified as: neutral (juxtapositional), e.g. *steel-blue sky*; syntactic, e.g. *marbles-in-mouth type of speech*; phrase-integrated [2, p. 234-239], e.g. *make-everybody-happy routines*.

Occasional epithets may have the structure of an integrated sentence: *I'll-take-anything attitude, get-on-with-it-quickly atmosphere*.

Semantic features and the stylistic status of compound epithets should be studied in interrelation with their structural patterns. The degree of expressiveness of the epithet depends on the degree of heterogeneity of the components in the epithet configuration: the greater is the gap between the semantic fields to which the components belong, the higher is the artistic value of the epithet.

We believe that a thorough investigation of epithets can assist learners of English in awareness of language use. It will heighten students' sensitivity to stylistic features of the texts they read and interpret, and, which is very important, will make their speech more vivid, colourful and expressive.

LITERATURE:

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