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IRONIA W SUBSTANTYWIZOWANYCH PREDYKATACH OCENY

Irony in the substantive predicatives of evaluation

Streszczenie: Artykuł jest poświęcony analizie tworzenia efektu ironicznego w substantywizowanych predykatkach oceny na poziomie kognitywnym w powieści W. Styrona 'Na pastwę płomieni'.

Słowa kluczowe:
ironia, predykat
substantywizowany,
ocena

Summary: This article deals with the analysis of creating ironic effect in the substantive predicatives of evaluation on the cognitive level in the novel **Set This House on Fire** (1959) by W. Styron.

Key words: irony,
substantive
predicative

In defining general boundaries of substantive evaluative predicative nomination we should note that such predicatives are mostly expressed by evaluative nouns and lexical units formed by means of secondary nomination (such as zoo-, phyto- and mythomorphisms) and vocatives. Besides, the structure of the predicate¹ or semi-predicate² is defined by vocatives³. That is why vocative nomination can be considered as a case of predicative evaluative nomination. Some linguists point out that additional predication appears in appositions, detached

¹ Н. Д. Аругюнова, 2003, *Предложение и его смысл: логико-семантические проблем*, Издательство Эдиториал УРСС, Москва, с.340.

² Т. А.Космеда, 2000, *Аксіологічні аспекти прагмалінгвістики: формування і розвиток категорії оцінки*, Видавництво ЛНУ імені Івана Франка, Львів, с. 18.

³ Л. П. Рыжова, 1981, *Коммуникативные функции обращения. Семантика и прагматика синтаксических единств*, Калинин, с. 82.

members of the sentence and anaphoric expressions⁴. Evaluative nouns used as subjects or objects also gain additional predicativity when accompanied by demonstrative pronouns, articles. It has been proved that the semantic structure of nominative sentences also has the category of predicativity. Such stylistic means as inverted epithet, predicative epithet and irony also belong to predicative structures. Evaluative meaning comes to the forefront in case of irony. So irony can be viewed in a broad and narrow sense. In the former case it lies in using a word with inherent positive meaning to express negative evaluation, in the latter, it is such a speech structure in which the whole utterance denoting either a positive or a neutral attitude of a speaker expresses negative evaluation⁵. It combines the image of an ideal situation formed by the literal sense of a sentence and the image of a real situation, the referent of the utterance; two situations are set in opposition by evaluative interpretation. Irony does not have a certain syntactic structure. However, being a means of evaluation, it uses a predicative structure and expresses itself in evaluative words. Words used in the opposite meaning and word combinations with contradictory semantics serve as lexico-semantic indicators of irony. Foreign linguists define *verbal irony*, created by means of language, *irony of circumstances* or *irony of situations*, *dramatic irony* – and *ironic vision* or *ironic point of view*⁶. S. I. Pokhodnia singles out two main types of irony according to the mode and conditions of its realization – a situational and an associative one. The former is an emotionally coloured type of irony based on the contrast between the situational context and the direct meaning of a word, word combination or sentence, realized by lexical and syntactic means and depending on the context within a paragraph. Quotations, repetitions and allusions are used to express associative irony. It is a hidden, subtle type of irony in which the realization of figurative meanings occurs gradually. That is why associative irony requires a megacontext⁷.

Ironic meaning can be expressed in the context of a word or a microcontext, in the context of a text fragment or a macrocontext, and in the context of the whole work or a megacontext. Moreover, indirect irony is expressed by interrogative and imperative sentences as well as declarative ones without a surface evaluative predicate. We consider that an evaluative predicate exists in any expression of irony and is represented either by a surface or deep structure.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned, vocative nomination can be looked on as a variant of predicative nomination. All the enlisted above syntactic structures can be viewed as means of expressing deep substantive predicative

⁴ А. Б. Вольф, 1983, *Проблемы текстуальной лингвистики*, Видавництво Вищої школи, Київ, с. 156.

⁵ И. В. Арнольд, 1981, *Стилистика современного английского языка*, Издательство Просвещение, Ленинград, с. 86.

⁶ R. Di Janni, 1990, *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama and the Essay*. Second Edition, New York – St Louis, pp. 34 – 36.

⁷ С. И. Походня, 1989, *Языковые виды и средства реализации иронии*. Видавництво Наукова думка, Київ, с. 63.

nomination formally equal to surface predicatives. The nouns used in such contexts represent deep substantive predicatives of evaluation or **evaluative predicatives**.

Syntactically we consider substantive predicatives of evaluation within predicatives, as well as subjects, vocative objects, appositions, detached members of the sentence, anaphoric utterances, nominative and incomplete sentences.

The substantive predicatives of evaluation, used in evaluative situations and expressing irony in addition, are subject to a general cognitive scheme of describing emotional-evaluative attitude and have an identical number of its components – **X** (the subject of evaluative attitude), **Y** (the object), **W** (a feature singled out in X which is the basis of the emotional-evaluative attitude in Y), **N** (a norm defined by the class of belonging X to the object Y). Similar opposition of dual components, a feature and a norm, can also be observed in creating evaluative semantics. However, on the cognitive level an ironic effect is mainly created because of the discrepancy in the mentioned dual components of the cognitive model (which is represented and enforced by certain stylistic means on the level of the text).

Thus on the level of the personages irony is created by means of

- 1) **the discrepancy of the surface feature of evaluation (W) and the deep one;**
- 2) **the discrepancy of the surface norm (N) and the deep one;**
- 3) **the combination of components (chiefly W, N) of different emotional-evaluative attitude variants, i. e. – social, personal, age-related, professional, – in one predicative usage;**
- 4) **the emergence of additional W, N in the process of communication** (especially in broader evaluative situations);
- 5) **the discrepancy of evaluation and linguistic personality X (the presence of W, N not characteristic of it).**

It should be marked that the given peculiarities can be combined in certain cases of using irony. On the author's level irony appears against the personage's intentions. This can be achieved by means of thematic-rhematic articulation when instead of typically rhematic way of expressing evaluation the speaker gives it in the theme.

In the novel *Set This House on Fire* we observe such cognitive peculiarities of expressing irony:

1. The discrepancy of the surface feature – W and deep W: *five stars and a big grin*⁸. Surface N, a statesman model, altogether does not exclude, yet approves of surface W – the presence of the military rank of a general (*five stars*) and leader's charisma (*a big grin* – its element), however, the indispensable deep W – a statist mode of thinking – is absent. Ironic effect is intensified because of metonymy since there is no article. We have a typical portrait of a politician.

We find another variety of irony – **the discrepancy between surface W and deep W: “*This millionaire apple farmer who guarantees them good roads and***

⁸ W. Styron, 2010, *Set This House on Fire*. Open Road Integrated Media, New York, p. 14.

miserable schools”⁹. At first sight we observe the identifying nomination which includes evaluative words (*good, miserable*) and an element of periphrasis and metonymy: *good roads* (solving the problems of transport), *miserable schools* (neglecting educational needs). The existent discrepancy between the surface and deep basis of evaluation is enforced by means of contrast in the identifying subordinate clause (*good roads :: miserable schools*), reflecting the discrepancy in N including the possibility of understanding transport problems along with the failure to comprehend educational problems. In fact deep N counterpoises this discrepancy internally or (from the point of view of X) puts the educational aspect before a transport one. This evaluation expresses the contradiction of the pragmatic and ‘lyric’ approaches.

2. *Irony is created by means of discrepancy of surface N and deep N: “Some doctor, eh?”*¹⁰. Doctor’s social N includes humanism. The doctor decides to finish off a wounded dog, but only makes its suffering worse. Doctor’s surface N is equal to N of a society, but deep N is in contradiction with it. Thus the evaluation is based on W– professional suitability, and, let us say, not personal qualities. The deep content of evaluation lies in total denial of this professional suitability. Stylistically this example of irony is created as follows. The pronoun *some*, used as an attribute to the noun denoting an exponent of a certain profession, gives positive evaluation. However, in the given utterance, evaluation changes as a result of macrocontext overlap.

In this case irony is created due to the implication of an opposite feature not included in N – the norm, in communication with a person – the norm bearer: “*Don’t you believe what they say, Mayor, peacetime Army ain’t all a bunch of bums*”¹¹. In the surface structure *ain’t all = not all (...)* are a positive fact seems to be emphasized optimistically. At the same time deep meaning of *most (...)* are is negative. Hereby NX – for the most part the fools form the army; in NY – it is intolerable.

3. *The combination of components of different emotional-evaluative attitude variants in one substantive predicative of evaluation: An expatriate, a self-confessed hater of all things American, he lived in sulky exile (...)* Rumor had it that he was aloof to the vanishing point, a locker of doors and a slammer down of windows (...). An article in the *Herald Tribune* called him “the grim young prophet of the beat generation”¹². Y1 – expresses vocation of an artist. W1 (a lack of professional suitability) is not observed, instead W2 is present – psychological/emotional instability (*a locker of doors, a slammer down of windows, a (...) hater of all things American*).

Syntactic structure of a sentence (*a hater* – in anaphora), enumeration a general form and style of a biographical excerpt turn the reader against W1, so, the effect of ‘frustrated expectations’ is added.

⁹ Ibidem, p.14.

¹⁰Ibidem, p. 351.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 435.

¹² Ibidem, pp. 372 – 373.

4. The emergence of additional W, N in the process of communication (common X)

“What happened to *flicker creeps*?” he said.

“They’re gone”.

I think he grinned. “When the old boat founders in’s the *rats* that’s first to go”¹³.

Winitial meant non-professionalism on the part of X (*flicker creeps*), W1 – the absence of necessary personal qualities, unreliability, meanness. The emotional effect is intensified by means of allusion to the proverb (*like rats leaving the sinking ship*), the function of X as the subject of evaluation passes to the linguistic personality of a nation. It gives the evaluation of the effect impartiality and objective irrevocability as it is deep, and N does not depend on its interpretation by a different person in this case.

We also observe a variety of the irony which is created by means of overlapping a positive and negative evaluation. It occurs because of replacing X and an indication of evaluation consequently: “*The universal man he thought of himself as, the bleeding equilateral triangle of a perfect human male, an aesthete who could quote you half a line from Rilke (...) and balanced himself off as the most glorious stud that ever crept between two sheets*”¹⁴. Initially X=Y, the evaluation had only positive connotation (*the universal man, the equilateral triangle of a perfect human male, an aesthete*). Ironic implication emerged in speech X1 (with specification “*he thought of himself as*”, where deep assertion would mean “*he was not what he thought of himself*”; an attributive dysphemism *bleeding*, that whittles away the effect of a stilted phrase by the contrast between the initial surface and the given deep evaluation – *an aesthete :: who could quote you half a line from Rilke*. Word combinations *too fragrant a lie*¹⁵; *a nice medium-sized lie*¹⁶ have a reverse effect. In the following example we see contrast, overlapping of the semantics of adjectives with different indications of evaluation in creating irony: “*Lincoln was a president of the U.S.A., the Great Emancipator, also something of a liar and a slob*”¹⁷. Stylistically it is represented by the contrast of evaluative adjective *great* and adjunct to it inverted epithet (*something*), introducing the seme “mediocrity”.

We find an overlap of the subjective evaluation with the social objective evaluation and a change of the initial indicator in this and the following situation: “*I could have become an abstract expressionist (...), and I’d be a bleeding Eisenhower success*”¹⁸. In the word combination *Eisenhower success* there is a surface positive sociocultural and deep professional evaluation, since according to social N success in life is an apotheosis in labour; the overlapping vulgarism *bleeding* points at the

¹³ Ibidem, 245.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 398.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 14.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p.14.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 191.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 304.

change in evaluation. Personal N looks as follows: professional success, success in life (neutral attitude), success in creativity (positive colouring). Also we see the discrepancy between the initial positive evaluation of the linguistic personality of a sceptic – X.

The functional styles are counterposed in solitary instances in terms of deep and surface evaluation: “*E x e u n t o m n e s. Exit the whole lousy bunch*”¹⁹. The first expression is neutral. However, representing the language of drama it makes a reader expect an elevated style. The second expression conveys a stylistically derogatory evaluation (*lousy bunch*). Such an unexpected transition intensifies the emotional-evaluative valency of the situation.

We observe the contrast between the surface syntactic structures and deep sense relation: *What a setup, what a perfect way to become a whiskey - head!*²⁰. The surface form of the emphatic structure *What a...!*, in conjunction with the positive connotation of the lexeme *perfect* presupposes only positive meaning, and contradicts the deep social N, disapproving of such a mode of existence.

The author’s variant of irony is a shift of the negative evaluation into the theme of an utterance. In the novel *Set This House on Fire* it is represented by few examples: *You’re going to forgive me for being a bastard*²¹ (X=Y). In general evaluative nominations make the rheme of utterances. The form of this utterance where self-appraisal is given in the theme, and unobtrusively imperative request of apology (*you are going to*) is in the rheme, indicates that X does not give much consideration to the self-appraisal. It has only a formal status of apology. Though the interlocutor might rate Y in such a way. Thus the ironic effect of the expression is created here against the speaker’s wish. It is a part of the author’s intention.

Of special interest are the ironic situations where we come across a great number of substantive predicatives of evaluation. Let us study one of them and try to find certain typical features.

“*Those horrible – those m a r m o s e t s my flesh and blood? Lady Willard, maybe? That great big rude midwestern blob of a woman with her squashed breadfruit of a face, that auxiliary Elk? (...) Shit – house mouse! What’s the matter with you! That’s the trouble with you bleeding Irish catholics. Talk about prejudice! You’re a curse and a plaque on the human race! The whole miserable lot of you! (...) You’re a bunch of superstitious, nose – picking peasants who swept down like a blight on the U. S. and A. (...) and (...) you helped turn it into the nation it became and is – an a s s h e a p of ignorance and sordid crappy materialism and ugliness! God’s own eyesore! The whole lot of you is nothing but a bunch of rummies (...) – brainless scum! (...) A whole city at the mercy of a bunch of garbage collectors and bartenders!*”²².

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 245.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 257.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 180.

²² Ibidem, p. 289.

Here X evaluates Y as a nation (on the surface) and as its middle class (deeply) on the basis of W – psychic and intellectual background taking as a basis N – universal human values. The valuation basis lies in a moral code and a limited scope of information taken from communication with few acquaintances, self-education and travelling. Taking into consideration a narrow quantity of information X gives a wider evaluation of the community, thus Y partial begins to represent Y general. X purposely lowers the evaluation and exacerbates it to grotesque. The negative life experience of X is W additional and objectively irrelevant.

The grotesque looks (*blob of a woman; breadfruit of a face*) are the basis of surface W. Herewith deep W reflects internal ugliness, since physical appearance is insignificant in a psychological profile; and caste chauvinism revealing the disposition of the society (*a bunch of superstitious, nose-picking peasants*), national and religious supremacism (*you bleeding Irish Catholics*); and national jingoism (*nothing but a bunch of rummies*). By means of including X in Y the external effect of objective evaluation is achieved and the subject's sincerity is expressed. Surface W includes the aspect of professional excellence. However, it is excess rather than a lack of it. *Garbage collectors, bartenders* represent professions having a positive or neutral connotation according to social conventions. Among people they have a negative connotation. The first one is connected with the fringes of society and the second one with encouraging addiction to alcohol. Deep W means immorality and connivance of the evil. Professional qualities are transferred into personal plane. The situation obtains an ironic colouring.

The evaluation is made on the basis of N which to a great extent depends on the religious upbringing of X, archetypal images in his subconsciousness and is proved by the sentence structure taken from ecclesiastical literature (*you are a curse and a plague on the human race; God's own eyesore*), and his philosophical background (*an assheap of sordid crappy materialism*).

To sum up, the substantive predicatives of evaluation, used in evaluative situations to express irony, are subject to a general cognitive scheme of describing emotional-evaluative attitude. In the novel *Set This House on Fire* on the cognitive level ironic effect is created due to 1) the discrepancy of the surface feature of evaluation and the deep one; 2) the discrepancy of the surface norm and the deep one; 3) the combination of components of different emotional-evaluative attitude variants, i. e. – social, personal, age-related, professional – in one predicative usage; 4) the emergence of an additional feature, norm in the process of communication (especially in broader evaluative situations); and 5) the discrepancy of evaluation and linguistic personality (the presence of a feature, norm uncharacteristic of it).

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