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RUMOURS IN MODERN PHILOLOGY

In the late 1970s in philology rumours as a scientific object were indirectly defined by Yu. Rozhdestvensky, who spoke about them in the wide context of whispering (Rozhdestvensky, 1979). Two decades later V. Prozorov returned to this issue considering it as the promising one for complex philological disciplines: sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, studies of folklore and literature (Prozorov, 1998). Since that rumours have been studied in two directions – as a phenomenon of communication and as a marked part of the Russian language world-image. Some authors are motivated by this double interest.

In 2000s science of rumours as an integrated, communicative and textual phenomenon is divided into several research areas. First, it is the problem of defining the rumours, which are at the same time interpreted as a speech act (G. Kreydlin and M. Samokhin), a speech genre (including folklore genre of urban verbal prose) (D. Clarke; J. Langlois; I. Bessonov; I. Veselova; I. Utekhin), a communicative channel (E. Osetrova), mass communication form (T. Dolgaya), a part of a magic deceptive ritual in folk Slavic culture (S. Tolstaya), and as an “unreliable message” – an ancient tool of the psychological war (Yu. Rozhdestvensky) (in the last two cases the reference to the rumours functional is noticeable). Another stumbling block is the authorship of the relevant texts: on the one hand, they are spreading as anonymous, but on the other hand they are fed from one informational source, still hypothetical and irrelevant for most translators, but sought in the case of intentional spreading of information by a verbal communication channel. It leads to the discussion of reliability/unreliability of information and trust/distrust of the mass user – and then to the analysis of the extremely large “field” of rumours, that is cultivated not only in the field of the spoken language, but also in the media and the Internet. About the latest issue linguists often write with a notable element of estimation (Kreidlin, Samokhin, 2003; Osetrova, 2013).

In the field of linguistic semantics we are facing the necessity to identify semantic and lexical dominants for a great number of concepts that are synonymous to rumours and are in use in the Russian language – for all these whispering, news, gossip, slander, false tales, talks, etc. It cannot be said that unanimity prevails here: the authors of the project “Russian ideographic dictionary” give preference to the talks, defining its status as a leading concept created by the human mind and spirit and the highest in the hierarchy they have built.

Arguments founded by both parties may be developed much deeper by further observations of the linguistic existence of dedicated concepts and ideas. However, philology has already acquired a certain scope of knowledge based on semantic analysis of literary texts, media publications, Russian proverbs and sayings. It indicates a complex metaphor image of rumours associated in the people’s mind with the water element, snowball, rockfall and with a living creature that behaves actively and sometimes aggressively against the person itself (T. Dolgaya; E. Osetrova; E. Saiphullina).

In the list of philological works about rumours the research papers written by experts in literature are standing apart.

Rumours are the text-forming element of literary works written by Beaumarchais and Cervantes, Griboyedov and Pushkin, Bulgakov and Zoshchenko, Dombrovsky and Suvorov: the list is extended with the memoir literature and includes more than a dozen of classic and contemporary authors. But perhaps in recent years the scientific attention has been focused on Gogol works.

From the middle of the first decade of the 21st century there has been an intense interest in the theme “The rumours/gossip” in Gogol works” leading to several researches (V. Vysotskaya; P. Nikolaeva; C. Solivetti). With the reference to the early ideas of M. Bakhtin (V.N. Voloshinov) and A. Sinyavsky (A. Tertz), literature experts study rumours and gossip in the aspect of “the speech effectiveness”, which changes the heroes’ destinies in Gogol works, and also as a plot mechanism, which works in the information space of “Dead Souls” that is parallel to the chronotopos of the main action of the poem.

It is extremely significant that C. Solivetti, the author of the massive opus “Gossip as a heraldic construction (Mise en Abyeme) in “Dead Souls”, carries out a literary analysis and already at the very beginning of the paper deviates from it invading the area of communicative science and indicating how accurately the writer has recreated the structure of the oral information channel anticipating modern sociolinguistic research (Solivetti, electronic resource). In fact, we have a locked circle of problems. Rumours have been revealed as an object of observation over a hundred years ago first by history, then social psychology, have finally become the scope of application of philological efforts.

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