

## INTERPRETATION OF FICTION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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The subject of this article is adaptation of texts of songs in the foreign language teaching. There are some exercises for training comprehension of the multi-layered fiction.

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Conference participant

The study of a piece of art is a fascinating and useful work; it brings an aesthetic pleasure, the joy of learning, and helps to become familiar with high cultural values created by mankind.

After listening to a song in a foreign language for the first time, we evaluate its melody, the style of performance and the performer himself/herself. The performer who is a face of the song often is the first to attract our attention; then we might turn to the other songs performed by him/her. Studying the text of the song is often akin to archaeological excavations. Scrutinizing it layer-by-layer, we find more and more of interesting, important and valuable elements.

Stratification of a piece of art is one of the main provisions of the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden, who in his "Studies in Aesthetics" (1962) outlined the following layers of verbal, musical and graphic art works: a) a particular sound formation, the sound of the word; b) the meaning of the word or the meaning of language units of higher tiers - sentence, paragraph c) that what is told about in an art work - the subject depicted in it as a whole or in its individual parts, and d) one or another form, which visibly presents the subject of the work<sup>1</sup>. A song, also has an auditory subject and an auditory form.

Usually, the first perception has an external nature. At first, we realize that we face a work consisting of sounds, a melody and a voice. But after that, we hear the words, phrases, and understand the meaning. Text's material plane becomes «transparent», and we perceive the content and meaning.

The idea of «transparency» is a conventional symbol taken from the phenomenology of E. Husserl, who

noted that when perceiving an external subject, we do not feel, but are going through it, and, turning to the content, we begin to perceive it, and the outer side of the subject leaves our attention<sup>2</sup>.

Appeal to a particular artistic text aims at getting to know the meaning. French philosopher M. Merleau-Ponty said that when we start reading some author, we associate a «standard» meaning with his words. But gradually, the speech that we perceive begins to take over the language, and the words begin to take on a new meaning. Speech, free from the sense, contained in individual words, is called by a philosopher a genuine and a creative one. This means that we understand the author, and the meanings of words have been established in our minds. The reader masters the meaning and can now think beyond authors' ideas.<sup>3</sup>

The work on the song does not give an impression of work as such. The song is a social activity aimed at receiving pleasure. Such pleasure combines several functions: didactic, cultural and a game one. Song is a great authentic document and an evidence of country's culture and lifestyle. Modern song reflects all concerns of our society and transfers today's values. It removes the fear of the unknown represented by a foreign language, because it delivers the music, rhythm and melody. This is the best way to remove the wall that separates the student and the teacher. A song lives and changes. You can study the songs of different styles - rock, jazz, rap, blues, techno, i.e. those that young people like, and the nostalgia for the classical song can be satisfied by the proposal to work with the song which the teacher likes.

The aim of this work is to draw attention to the song as an opportunity to get acquainted not only with the

author and the performer, but also to listen to the beautiful good-sounding music, get to know the song culture of the country ensuring students understand this oral document, and teach students to provide arguments when discussing the plot of songs.

The article deals with different types of work with the song, such as:

- Pre-text, i.e., assignments anticipating the work with text (generating interest)
- Text, i.e., assignments related to the work with the text (comprehension of what had been heard)
- Post-text, i.e., productive and speech work associated with the semantic content (reflection after listening)

Below we will look at some examples in detail.

**Pre-text assignments** are aimed at the removal of linguistic and semantic difficulties in understanding of the text, as well as forming the skills and abilities to work independently with the information (materials). Pre-text assignments will help students develop the skills, which are necessary to extract information. Such skills include the understanding of the lexical meaning of words and phrases, the ability to determine the contextual meaning of linguistic units, associate the meaning of word with the topic, recognize the grammatical form of the word in a sentence, understand the general meaning of a syntactic construction of a sentence, etc. First pre-text assignments allow students creating their own glossary to the text, which they will use along with a dictionary when reading. Compilation of the glossary, on the one hand, helps to learn how to work with the dictionary, and on the other hand, helps to better memorize the words. Pre-text assignments can be performed both at home before reading

<sup>1</sup> Y.S. Stepanov. In a three-dimension space of the language. Semiotic problems of linguistics, philosophy and art. – M.: Science. – 1985 – P.125 2

<sup>2</sup> Same. – P. 209.

<sup>3</sup> Same. – P. 212.

the text, and in class. Below are some examples of such exercises:

- *Show on the map the cities or countries of the subjects that are mentioned in the song.*

- *Single out new words and explain their meaning using a descriptive method or illustrations.*

- *If names of professions are concerned, students have to single them out from the text and find out what the representatives of the professions do, prepare a mixed list of professions and verbs explaining what they do, while the other students will have to combine them and, based on the content and understanding, find the verbs in this or another tense.*

- *Write on the board or on a sheet of paper the words which are abbreviated, difficult to pronounce, or words with changed emphasis and find them when listening to the song for the first time.*

- *The students may be asked to write out the words which are not clear to them in a way they hear them. For this assignment, the text of the song shall be prepared by the teacher who shall skip certain words or leave the gaps in the text.*

- *Introduce new words into phrases. Speak them out.*

These new language units are introduced into the lexical minimum and should be given with the subsequent introduction to speech that ensures a greater frequency of their use and creates the best conditions for memorizing.

For example, before listening to the song by Joe Dassin's "Les Champs-Elysées", we found this famous avenue on the map of Paris, followed it from where it starts, noting the memorable places it passes through, to where it ends. We also found associations with the Palace of the President of the French Republic, a parade of troops and the Arc de Triomphe, the name of perfume by Guerlain, and looked through the pictures of the famous avenue, which is a face of the French capital.

Here is another example. Before the introduction of the names of the days of the week, the students were offered to listen to the song "Sabato sera" ("Saturday night") in Italian. The text of the song had gaps in places where the singer said the days of the week, and students were

given the assignment to write the words they hear. Then these words were written on the board for review. At the same time, an interrogative construction on the subject was introduced. New vocabulary easily came into use because each lesson began with the question: "What day of the week is today?". A merry tune and a text, which was easy to perceive and pronounce, helped to memorize the vocabulary.

Let's move on to the next type of exercises.

**Text assignments** have a prognostic nature. They will help to be oriented in the semantic organization of the text. The text is to be read with a goal of a complete and accurate understanding, and the subsequent use of the information for different types of oral statements. Exercises are given to recognize the new vocabulary in the text. For the main part, these are the exercises to develop language guesses on certain pillars of understanding, which is the most important mechanism for reading.

So, when listening to the song "Mamma Maria" in Italian, the students were offered the text of this song along with the assignment to work on it independently using special icons:

- + new words
- information that contradicts my knowledge
- √ familiar word
- ? I would like to clarify

Let's give here only one couplet for an illustration:

Un gatto bianco con gli occhi blu;  
Un vecchio vaso alla TV; Nell'aria il fumo delle candele; Due guance rosse rosse come mele.

Translation in English:

A white cat with blue eyes; An old vase on the TV; Candle smoke is in the air;

Two cheeks are red as apples.

Each student worked independently. The "search" work was complete within 5-6 minutes, and all students started a discussion. The teacher asked the following questions:

1. In which cases did you put "√"? The students then named the words with this icon, e.g. bianco, blu, TV, vecchio, due and provided the translation. The words spoken out by the students were

introduced earlier so that the students were familiar with them.

2. In which cases did you put " - "? These icons were rare, however, one female student mentioned the word "rosse" saying that she knew this word but the song has a different ending. Another student said right away that this is a plural form of an adjective of feminine gender. In such a manner, the students were teaching one another as there are students of different levels in the group, and the teacher was just making sure if the information was correct.

3. In which cases did you put " ? ", what exactly would you like to clarify? The students called out the words "nell'aria, vaso, fumo"; when pronouncing these words, they made associations with the words which they know in English, e.g. "aria", in Russian - "vase", in Italian - the verb "fumare". Thus, the students proposed the translations for this word and clarified the meanings.

4. There were only new words left which were provided with translation.

Thus, there was an important motivational work to find the well-known words, which helped to avoid stress related to new words. After this, together with the teacher, they spoke out all the words, read the entire text of the song and, at the first hearing, began to sing along with the singer.

**Post-text assignments** are mainly productive and speech activities, aimed at the generation of connected speech of any kind, including the speech associated with a specific style, genre, and the development of professional communication skills through independent work on the text and independent reading. The following types of assignments can be proposed:

- *Identify the main focus of the song, its meaning, and the main idea.*
- *Track how the events develop based on the content.*
- *Identify the characters or the subjects of action.*
- *Propose to write their own vision of the end of the song, discuss the resonance for the listeners or readers, and solicit the views of students on the issues raised in the art work.*
- *Talk about the performer, authors, and style.*

– Propose to play, theaterize a song using only gestures and facial expressions, come up with ideas of costumes, decoration, create a video, etc.

Let's take for example a song after the poetry of Boris Vian "Le Déserteur" ("The Deserter"). The song appeared in the midst of the French-Algerian War, and the author, like many of his contemporaries, did not want to die on a foreign soil for alien interests. The teacher invited students to answer a series of questions on content. Here are some of them:

1. In the text, locate the arguments that the author uses in support of the reluctance to go to war:

*Je ne suis pas sur terre pour tuer des pauvres gens; J'ai vu mourir mon père, J'ai vu partir mes frères et pleurer mes enfants; Ma mère a tant souffert; Elle est dedans sa tombe; On m'a volé ma femme, On m'a volé mon âme et tout mon cher passé* (I'm on this earth not to kill the poor people; I saw how my father died, I saw my brothers go and my children cry; my mother was so miserable, and now she's in the grave; I was robbed of my wife, I was robbed my soul and my dear past).

2. What is the author of the song going to do?

*Je fermerai ma porte; J'irai sur les chemins; Je mandierai ma vie sur les routes de France de Bretagne en Provence; Et je dirai aux gens: Refusez d'obéir, refusez de la faire, n'allez pas à la guerre* (I will shut my door, and I will wander on the roads; and I will beg on the roads of France from Brittany to Provence, I will tell people: refuse to obey, do not go to war).

3. Will the author oppose the authorities?

*Si vous me poursuivez prévenez vos gendarmes que je n'aurai pas d'armes* (if you chase me, tell your gendarmes, I have no weapons).

4. Does the author understand that it is dangerous to be a deserter?

*Si vous me poursuivez prévenez vos gendarmes que je n'aurai pas d'armes et qu'il pourront tirer* (If you chase me, your gendarmes can shoot).

5. What is the nature of this song?

*Je n'ai pas d'armes; Je ne suis pas sur terre pour tuer pauvres gens* (pacifist: I have no weapons, I am on this earth not to kill poor people).

Even the precise rhythm of this song's jazz melody - calm and unhurried – goes along with its theme. Weary voice of the performer makes it incredibly soulful, touching and calls to protect the author. The song shows the fate of not only one person, but also of the contemporaries, as well as many opponents of the war and violence.

Post-text assignments, on the one hand, control the understanding of the text, on the other; prepare the students to present the text material in the form of various types of monologic speeches, as well as a thematic discussion of the text and the problems associated with the subject, mentioned in it. These assignments are to be performed in class. Post-text exercises that control the comprehension of the material read provide different types of checks: from finding in the text the answers to the questions posed to students' own interpretation of the semantic content of the text. According to this, the task is a differentiated learning of different kinds of reading. The system of post-text assignments is based on the characteristics of a level of understanding of voice messages (in our case – of the print text) laid down by I.Y.Zimnyaya<sup>4</sup>. Understanding is considered from the perspective of the depth of penetration into the semantic content of the text. There are four levels of understanding. The first level is characterized by the common, superficial understanding: it is an understanding of what the text says. The second level is characterized by a basic understanding of the text: it is an understanding of what the text says. The third level is determined by an understanding of what means are used to reveal the content of the text.

The fourth level, the highest one, is characterized by understanding the basic sense, the main idea of the text, of what that the author wanted to say. It is this level which the post-text assignments correspond to.

Understanding comes as individual reaction depending on the cognitive

abilities of an individual. The ability to understand literary texts, understand other people and oneself, according to A. A. Brudny, is "at the heart of the existence of human consciousness... Understanding is plural, it exists in many versions, each of which represents a particular facet of the objective reality. The relationship of an individual being and generally significant facts is expressed in understanding."<sup>5</sup>

Through a song, we open an endless variety of people, human relations, ways of communicating in different times and epochs. This multimedia work allows using multimedia, literary text, and a special press (newspaper or magazine articles), the Internet, television clips, records on a tape or a compact disc, karaoke, games, picture, and photos ... The students can use the range of sources and do it easily, without coercion, which makes the relationship between the student and the teacher more accessible, easier, closer and clearer. New kind of relationship appears between them, which contributes to a positive climate in the classroom, and thus facilitates the communicative competence and intercultural exchange, which ultimately leads to the enrichment of all participants of the learning process.

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