

## Word Polyphony in English and French (*A Comparative Study*)

The understanding of a literary work first and foremost depends on the understanding of words or, to be more exact, literary words. The expressive strength of literary words is a very important element in the process of literary communication.

In poetical works words are said to acquire new significance, sometimes an entirely new meaning. This meaning may not even be recorded in the dictionaries. It remains as if it were on the outskirts of the language. But this elusive meaning is essential in a particular context and is used to convey the author's ideas with poetic precision.

The expressive-emotional overtones which words acquire in a literary context avail the reader of the opportunity to grasp more than the eye instantly catches, to get more additional information (of aesthetic character) without increasing the message proper. Thus the word in a literary work is a unit of expressive impact.

In order to reveal the expressive-emotional overtones a philological investigation of texts should be carried out within the scope of philological hermeneutics. The latter is aimed at revealing the essence of verbal art, penetrating into its linguopoetic nature, promoting the complicated problem of understanding. The combined application of linguostylistic and linguopoetic analyses leads to the adequate understanding of the aesthetic value of a work of verbal art.

The most important parameters of linguopoetic analysis are the thematic content, the global vertical context, the character of word-combinations, the use of idiomatic phraseology, the "voice" of the author or the personages. One of the indispensable elements of linguopoetic creativity is polyphony which is considered to be a purely linguopoetic device.

The phenomenon of the so-called polyphony of word has not once been in the center of investigation of different scholars. By polyphony the simultaneous realization of different meanings, shades of meanings, connotations and associations that are closely interconnected and intertwined in the semantic globality of the word is meant.

The choice of the term "polyphony" to characterize the globality of the literary word is believed to be most successful, as it also reflects the ability of the word "to sound" variously in a literary context. By 'sounding' not only the actual utterance of words (in the phonetic sense of the word) is meant but also their ability to evoke different thoughts and demand various explanations, interpretations. In a literary text words become polyphonic due to their poetic meaning.

Our task in the present study is to present a comparative study of the above mentioned phenomenon in English and French.

Let us first consider a passage taken from "The Alexandria Quartet" by Lawrence Durrell:

*"The city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our **memory**. Why must I return to it night after night, writing here by the fire of carpb-wood while the Aegean wind clutches at this island house, clutching and releasing it, bending back the cypress.es like bows? Have I not said enough about Alexandria? Am I to be reinfected once more by the dream of it and the **memory** of its inhabitants? Dreams I had thought safely locked up in paper, confided to the strong-rooms of **memory**! You will think I am indulging myself. It is not so. A single chance factor has altered everything, has turned me back upon my tracks. A **mem-ory** which catches sight of itself in a mirror".*

("Balthazar", p. 209)

The corresponding translation in French goes as follows:

*La ville, demi rêvée (combien réelle cependant), commence et s'achève en nous, prend racine dans les recoins de notre **mémoire**. Pourquoi faut-il que j'y retourne nuit après nuit, s'agrippe à cette maison, s'acharne sur elle un instant, puis relache son étreinte et s'en va ployer en arc l'échine des cyprès de l'île? N'en ai-je pas assez dit sur Alexandria? Vais-je me laisser à nouveau contaminer par le rêve de cette ville et par le **souvenir** de ses habitants? Des rêves que je croyais avoir mis en lieu sur le papier, confiés au secret des chambres fortes de la **mémoire**! Vous allez penser que je me complais à ces évocations. Il n'en est rien. Une seule intervention du hasard a tout remis en question et m'oblige à revenir sur mes pas. Un **souvenir** qui s'aperçoit dans un miroir.*

("Balthazar", p. 236)

Semantic analysis allows us to grasp the meanings of the words as emic units. The whole passage is a bunch of striking metaphors, similes and epithets which play a significant role in creating the personified picture of a real city: *"The city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our memory,* (metaphor) *The Aegean wind clutches at this island house, clutching and releasing it, bending back the cypresses like bows?* (metaphor) *Am I to be reinfected once more by the dream of it and the memory of its inhabitants?* (metaphor) *Dreams I had thought safely locked up in paper; confided to the strong-rooms of memory!* (epithet) *A memory which catches sight of itself in a mirror. "* (metaphor) The use of all the metaphoric expressions is of aesthetic importance and value.

The rhythmical background of the passage is created by the alliteration of the sounds [s, m, r, k, l, p] which increases the poetic orientation of the words and word combinations *memory, mirror, cypresses, papers, strong-rooms of memory, clutching and releasing.*

Of significant value here is the word "memory" which is displayed in the passage several times in different stylistic devices. The emic level provides the following meanings recorded in the dictionary:

1. the power, act or process of recalling to mind;
2. commemoration or remembrance (e.g. *in memory of his father*);
3. the length of time over which remembering extends (a happening within the memory of living men).

As we can see in the passage above the word actualizes only one of the meanings at a time. For instance, in the phrase *rooted, lodged in our memory* the first meaning, namely *the power, act or process of recalling to mind*, is actualized (cf. French *mémoire*); in *the memory of its inhabitants* the second meaning, namely *commemoration or remembrance*, is actualized (cf. French *souvenir*); in the phrase *the strong-rooms of memory* the first meaning is actualized (cf. French *mémoire*). The comparative analysis also proves the actualization of one meaning at a time. As we can clearly see the meanings are split in French.

As far as the last sentence of the passage *a memory which catches sight of itself in a mirror* is concerned it becomes difficult to state exactly which meaning is actualized. The metaphoric usage of the word causes an ambiguity of meanings and we can say that both meanings, namely *the memory of an individual and the commemoration of an event* can equally be actualized here, which proves the actualization of the polyphony of the word.

By applying the method of narrow philological context we come to the conclusion that the frequent use of the word *memory* in metaphorical expressions is by no means accidental. The author wants to revive the heroes in his memory some of whom are already dead.

*"I had set myself the task of trying to recover them in words, reinstate them in memory, allot to each his or her position in my time. Selfishly. And with that writing complete, I felt that I had turned a key upon the doll's house of our actions. Indeed I saw my lovers no longer as living people but as coloured transfers of the mind; inhabiting my papers now, no longer the city, like tapestry figures. "*

The word *memory* is used many times in different metaphorical expressions throughout the whole chapter. It becomes a key-word for the whole work thus adding to the inner semantic globality of the word '*memory*'. Let us consider a few uses below:

*"The deep still river of her heart hoarded its images, ever reflecting them in the racing current, letting them sink deeper into memory than most of us can. "*  
(metaphor)

("Balthazar", p. 241)

*"I cannot say that I forgot the city, but I let the memory of it sleep. Yet of course, it was always there, as it always will be, hanging in the mind like mirage which travellers so often see. "* (metaphor, simile)

("Balthazar", p. 211)

*"I must set it all down in cold black and white, until such time as the memory and impulse of is spent. "* (metaphor)

("Balthazar", p. 217)

It is worth mentioning that the combination of the words *memory* and *mirror* also contributes to the polyphonic actualization. The author suggests that his work is the mirror which reflects his own memories. Consequently the word *memory* is personified here: he is in love with his own memories - the sweet memories of an unforgotten city.

The alliteration of the sounds [m, r, s] provides for the phonetic aspect of the phenomenon.

At the same time the case is different in the passage in French. As we have already stated, the meanings here are split. Thus, the emic level does not provide the necessary preconditions for the polyphonic actualization of the word in French. As far as polyphony is considered to be a purely specheological phenomenon we found it necessary to consult the dictionary of French quotations to see how the previous metaphoric usages of the words *memoir* and *souvenir* contribute to the actualization of polyphony.

The *Nouveau Dictionnaire de Citations Francoises* provides a set of metaphoric usages of the words *memoir* and *souvenir* in the works of outstanding French authors. Here are some to cite a few:

1. *La mémoire est dans le cœur; car, quand elle ne nous vient point de cet endroit, nous n'en avons pas plus que des lièvres. (The memory is inside the heart; when it is not coming from the bottom of the latter it's very short.)*

(Marquise De Sevigne)

2. *Le génie se sert donc de la mémoire, comme d'un vase où il met en réserve les idées [...] il en tire ce qu'il y a mis, et n'en peut tirer autre chose. (The memory is like a vase where geniuses put their ideas [...] you take out what you have put and nothing more.)*

(A. Felibient)

3. *Le cœur est la source de la mémoire. (The heart is the source of memory.)*

(Abbe De Saint-Cyran)

4. *Et ces vieux souvenirs dorment au fond de nous. (These old memories sleeping deep inside us.)*

(A. De Lamartine)

5. *C'est toi qui dors dans l'ombre o sacré souvenir! (It's you sleeping in the shade, oh sacred memory!)*

(V. Hugo)

6. *Comme le souvenir est voisin du remords! (The memory is next to remorse)*

(V.Hugo)

The examples adduced above illustrate the inner globality of the words in French.

Concluding from the analysis carried out in the research we see that the comparative analysis of the polyphony of the word can contribute to revealing the actualization of the latter. At the same time, the actualization in one language does not claim the equal actualization in the other as it should be preconditioned by the emic and/or ethic levels of the given language.

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