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A Literary "Picture of the World" as a Criticism of Society in Slovenian Biedermeier Literature

Abstract

The relationship between developments in a "real" society and the portrayal of this society in literature can be studied by analyzing the linguistic picture of the world using the componential analysis method. The concept of the linguistic picture of the world has been developed by various interdisciplinary directions in Europe and the US, relying on the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who conceived of language as a specific manifestation of culture. The linguistic picture of the world is an interpretation, conceptualization, and presentation of the world conveyed through language. A componential analysis was conducted to compare the semantic components of the concept of early-nineteenth-century society and the components of the same concept in a literary work of the Slovenian Biedermeier (i.e., the first original Slovenian narrative). The results of this analysis showed differences in the concept's content that can be identified as criticism of the real society and an alternative reading option.

Key words: Slovenian literature, picture of the world, componential analysis, Janez Cigler, Biedermeier

Introduction

The second half of the nineteenth century—or the period from the 1848 March Revolution in the Austrian Empire to the end of the century or the end of the First World War—is one of the key periods in the development of Slovenian national literature. Even though what is now ethnic Slovenian territory continued to be part of the Austrian Empire after the Springtime of Nations, the intense development of Slovenian national literature was

reinforced by the prospect of a Slovenian national movement. However, the foundations of this development already extend to the last decades of the eighteenth century. In a relatively short time from then until the mid-nineteenth century, several social and administrative changes took place that were also reflected in Slovenian literature. These changes began in the 1770s with the introduction and enforcement of the Enlightenment reforms under Maria Theresa and Joseph II, which came to a standstill by the end of the century, but they nonetheless had an important impact on the development of the education system and literacy. This was followed by the Napoleonic Wars and a short period of French rule under the Illyrian Provinces (1809–1815). The 1815 Congress of Vienna reestablished the old social order, which was, however, inevitably affected by the developments and changes over the preceding decades.

During the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century, Slovenian literature still largely developed under the distinct influence of the German-speaking literary environment, but at the same time, it already revealed signs of an emerging original literature with increasing national characteristics. The translations and adaptations of German literary works introduced various narrative genres to the Slovenian literary system, such as hagiographies, meditative prose, plays, and poetry. Translations were increasingly distinctively and intensively becoming a vehicle for the planned development of Slovenian national literature and culture, and they thus became an indicator of differentiation and liberation from the dominant German literature (Žejn 2021).

Partly following the model of narrative prose translated from German, the Slovenian writer Janez Cigler published the first original Slovenian narrative, *Sreča v nesreči* (A Fortune in Misfortune), in 1836. This work is used here to illustrate the relation between the actual social and political developments during the first decades of the nineteenth century on the one hand and the portrayal or "picture" of the society in which this narrative is set on the other. A comparison is made by adapting the method of componential analysis, or by analyzing the relationship between the literary "picture of the world" and the extra-literary social "picture of the world" that the depicted literary world refers to. This concept or method was developed in similar variants by various interdisciplinary fields of study that introduced adapted linguistic concepts especially to ethnological and anthropological research.

The linguistic-cultural picture of the world

The flow of ideas that led to the development of the concept of a linguistic picture of the world were triggered after 1800 by Wilhelm von Humboldt, who claimed that language was not merely a means of exchange for the purpose of communication, but instead a specific manifestation of culture and a means that establishes and reveals human experience (Basilius 1952: 97). According to Humboldt, a typical *Weltansicht* or world view is embedded in every language. In the first half of the twentieth century, Humboldt's ideas were adopted and further developed by the neo-Humboldtians,[1] also by relying on Saussure's structuralism and the structuralist whole-to-part relationship (Basilius 1952: 100). By introducing the concept of the linguistic picture of the world, the neo-Humboldtians highlighted the fact that any language, and specifically a native language, is a repository of cognitive content. Humboldt's ideas were also adopted by American anthropology and anthropological linguistics, represented by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, and later by Russian and Polish ethnolinguistics; in relation to cognitive linguistics, the Polish ethnolinguistics also did this in the form of cognitive ethnolinguistics. Of note is also the agreement between the concept of the linguistic picture of the world and the theory of conceptual metaphor as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (Gicala 2013: 65; Abdullayeva et al. 2020: 17).

In the twentieth century, the concept of the linguistic picture of the world was thus developed in similar, but nonetheless specific, versions by various schools and movements (Głaz et al. 2013: 12–15), and especially in Polish ethnolinguistics the linguistic picture became the main subject of research. According to Bartimiński, the founder and leading researcher of the Lublin ethnolinguistic school, the linguistic, or linguistic-cultural,[2] picture of the world is encoded in the language of a specific (linguistic) community. The picture of the world encoded in language is not a mere reflection of the real, existing world but, in its essence, it is already an interpretation of reality or of the world and the people and things in it (Bartimiński 2009/2012: 23). Postovalova (1988: 14, cited in Alefirenko & Stebunova 2013: 1) describes the picture of the world as imagining "pos-

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[1] During the 1930s, the German neo-Humboldtian movement was characterized by nationalist tendencies, which were primarily expressed in the works of Leo Weisgerber, a German linguist, one of the leading German semantics specialists and lexicologists, and a political official under Nazism (Uhlik 2008: 77).

[2] By extending the concept of a linguistic picture of the world with the concept of a linguistic-cultural picture of the world, twenty-first-century research in this area seeks to underline the fact that equal attention is dedicated to culture and the language that structures and expresses the culture (Głaz et al. 2013: 17).

sible worlds" and as the ultimate result of a process that ranges from perceiving and beholding the world, learning, conceptualizing, interpreting, reflecting, and displaying it to dwelling in it.[3] Even though the view of the world is always "someone's" view at first (Gicala 2013: 65), it is only the integration of the various traces of human interaction with objective reality that forms a comprehensive picture of the world (Alefirenko & Stebunova 2015: 1).

By studying the linguistic picture of the world, it is possible to identify linguistic mechanisms and stereotypes that show how the members of a community think about reality or a specific fragment of it (Piekarczyk 2013: 245). It can be studied via the linguistic system, such as by analyzing the signifier in relation to the signified, at the level of metaphors, derivatives, collocations, and phraseologies. Language is studied within its broadest context and in relation to culture and group mentality, beliefs, and behavior (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2013: 201).

Componential analysis of concepts and their content

Humboldt already positioned language between objective reality and its conceptualization, according to which language reveals the beliefs and values of a culture that is structured into concepts (Basilius 1952: 100, 104). Along similar lines, according to the neo-Humboldtians, the lexical structure and syntactic organization of a language establish a pattern of how reality is structured, which makes it possible to use linguistic analysis to determine the semantic fields that the language structures when describing reality (Pajdzińska 2013: 42).

Since the 1950s, under the influence of structural linguistics, various anthropological, culturological, and cognitivist research paradigms have been developing methods for studying the linguistic picture of the world via semantic research. All these directions have emphasized the primacy of human experience in its relational or relative aspect. To elucidate the interpretation of the linguistic picture of the world, Polish ethnolinguistics introduced a cognitive definition of lexemes and higher linguistic units. A cognitive definition adds to and expands the dictionary definition, and it examines how a language speaker sees reality, how a language contains social and cultural knowledge, and how it evaluates and categorizes it (Bielak 2013: 215). According to cognitive linguistics and anthropology, a comprehensive systematic description of a language is possible by introducing concepts or "conceptual semantics," based on which the linguistic picture of the world is accessible through conceptual content and the way

[3] For certain other definitions of the linguistic picture of the world, see Abdullayeva et al. 2020: 16.

this content is composed or expressed. Componential analysis can be used to define how speakers perceive and conceptualize society.[4]

The first step of componential analysis entails defining the basic concepts (e.g., death, love, kinship, or animals), in various research paradigms also referred to as "semantic domains" (Nida 1979), the "semantic or conceptual universe" (Goodenough 1956), or the "semantic field" (neo-Humboldtians), which are structured by the language of a specific community. The concepts cannot be captured in a universal nomenclature or taxonomy system set in advance. In addition, their scope differs from one community to the other, although some basic components are common to all cultures (Nida 1979: 176).[5]

What is key for the content analysis of concepts is that they are formed by individual components. In a language, these include words, word combinations, phrasemes, sentences, or the entire lexicon, and their various combinations, contexts, and semantics, which are introduced into "language templates" (Abdullayeva et al. 2020: 17). The groups of components making up individual concepts may share the same meaning in some instances or have a different one in others (Nida 1979: 176). When conducting the analysis, the components that can be ranked under the same concept are attributed shared meanings, as well as contrastive or distinctive meanings. This attribution does not proceed from the lexical unit itself, but from the relation to the meaning of other components within the same concept in the same text, which means that the meaning is conceptualized in relational terms. The semantic features of components can have positive or negative values (Belfahri 2013: 294). For example, to define *father*, this word must be compared to words from the same semantic domain or the same concept, which can be defined as 'kinship', and its essence should be defined in terms of how it differs from the other components within the same concept (e.g., *mother*, *daughter*, *son*, etc.). The same component can be ranked under several different concepts.

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[4] The componential analysis model relies on analogies with relations between allophones and phones, in which the context is important for understanding the meaning of a phoneme, and on findings about the invariable and variable components of the phonological system (cf. Goodenboorg 1956).

[5] Since the 1980s, an automatic semantic text analysis system has been developed as part of the digital humanities, which, just like componential analysis, is based on conceptual systematization of the entire lexicon, including the synsemantic one, taking into account the relationships and incorporating negative or positive evaluation. The UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS) has been created as a basis for these types of automatic analyses. This is a list of twenty-one semantic categories with a total of over four hundred subcategories (see https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/usas/), under which the entire lexicon of a language can be classified.

By analyzing the components of a concept, it is possible to describe the way individual concepts are presented (Caughey 1972: 631–633) or the cognitive nature of a concept (Abdullayeva et al. 2020: 17). A definition of components within a concept and their semantic interactions makes it possible to identify meanings that are absent at the surface level (Belfahri 2013: 299), whereby it is also necessary to take into account metaphorical expansions of meaning that are based on substitute components and/or reinterpreted primary components (e.g., *father* in the phrase *father of the nation* or *father* as 'God'; Nida 1979: 35).

The concept of the linguistic and cultural picture of the world in literary texts

From ethnolinguistics, ethnosemantics, cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, and similar research paradigms, the idea of the linguistic picture of the world and the method for studying it were also introduced to other disciplines, such as historiography (cf. Caughey 1972) and literary research. The potential adaptation of the analysis of the picture of the world to a literary work relies on the analogy between the picture of the world as an interpretation of reality and authors' picture of the world verbalized in their literary works (Abdullayeva et al. 2020: 15), in which they use linguistic devices to communicate the perception, ideas, and interpretation of the world. A literary text is conceived as a non-standard linguistic picture of the world or an author's picture of the world (Gicala 2013: 64) because it is possible to derive the author's views from it (Danaher 2010: 27). The picture of the world in literary texts is an integration of individual pictures of the world of the characters appearing in the text; the author uses the characters to create a fictional community that interprets the world through language, and the narrator communicates it to the reader (Alefirenko & Stebunova 2015: 1).

Because the starting point of research on the world picture is studying, through the analysis of concepts, the specific national and cultural characteristics interpreted through the medium of a national or community language, literary analyses often include comparisons between the original and its translation, which seek to show how the interpretation of the picture of the world has been transferred from one language or culture to another; for example, English translations of poetry by the Polish author Wisława Szymborska (cf. Gicala 2013) or essays by the Czech playwright, essayist, and politician Václav Havel (cf. Danaher 2013). The analysis of the world picture in literary texts usually focuses on a work or oeuvre of a selected author and is often limited to one or a few selected concepts (cf. Danaher 2010). In turn, more extensive projects seek to capture the author's picture

of the world as broadly as possible from several aspects through analysis (cf. Abdullayeva et al. 2020). According to researchers involved in an extensive study of the picture of the world in the poetry of the Kazakh author Mashkhur Zhusup Kopeev, in their works of art poets and writers create a unique picture of the world, which often represents the thoughts, ideas, and atmosphere of their time (Abdullayeva et al. 2020: 19).

In line with the application of the analysis of the linguistic picture of the world in a literary work, an example of a Slovenian narrative from the first half of the nineteenth century is used below to observe the reflection of ideas and atmosphere of that period in Slovenian literature. The comparison is made based on analyzing the content or components of a selected concept, which can also be referred to as "sociopolitical situation." The selected narrative literary work is conceived as a signifier of the true, extraliterary social reality (the signified), and based on the results possible interpretations of the literary text are defined in the segment of literature's embeddedness in the broader social developments. The analysis is preceded by a presentation of the work itself and the features of the literary style or genre (i.e., Biedermeier literature) it belongs to.

Biedermeier literature

Biedermeier literature (especially narrative prose) began to develop in the German-speaking environment after 1815, during what is historically known as the Restoration or the pre-March period. Its most distinctive characteristic is that it did not appear as a mainstream literary movement, but as a subsystem on the margin of mainstream literary movements. The content-related and conceptual models of Biedermeier literature can be traced back to the second half of the eighteenth century; specifically, to German philanthropist education, which, based on the principle of the Enlightenment-oriented children's education by example, stimulated the development of stories with a moral lesson. Biedermeier literature adopted, expanded, and literarized this genre in the nineteenth century, harmonizing the Enlightenment literary patterns with Catholicism by introducing a reformed tradition of Baroque pietism (Pech 1990: 142–143). The introduction of compulsory education[6] for the lower classes of the population provided a strong impetus for the development of Biedermeier literature.

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[6] Considering the historical context in which the need arose for reading material to educate children and the "common folk," Biedermeier literature can be viewed as literature addressing two groups of readers: adults and children or teenagers. It was only later, in the second half of the nineteenth century that a distinction between the children's and youth literature system and the adult literature system was introduced in Slovenian literary studies (Žejn 2021).

Janez Cigler and his literary works

The authors of Biedermeier literature were mainly priests, including Janez Cigler, the author of *Sreča v nesreči*, as a rare or even the only representative of this movement in Slovenian literature. Cigler (1792–1869) served as a prison chaplain at Ljubljana Castle for nine years. The prisoners there also included the Italian Carbonari, with whom he maintained close contact (he was said to supply books to them), which attracted the scrutiny of the authorities. Cigler's first published works included books with prayers, hymns, moral lessons, and reflections, which were predominantly translations from German. He also contributed several poems to the almanac *Kranjska čbelica* (1831 and 1832), but he never achieved any significant success as a poet. He became best known as a prose writer: in addition to *Sreča v nesreči*, which was reprinted twice in a short time (in 1838 and 1840) and sold out, he also published two longer narratives in the 1860s, which follow the model of his first narrative work, but they were not as successful. The writer and author of one of the first Slovenian literary programs in the mid-nineteenth century, Fran Levstik, was the first to draw attention to the importance of *Sreča v nesreči* in Slovenian literary history, presenting it as a content-based model of a direction in Slovenian narrative prose.

Cigler is believed to have partly modeled his narrative on the works of Christoph Schmid (Kmecl 1974: 98), one of the main representatives of the German Biedermeier and the most frequently translated author into Slovenian in the first half of the nineteenth century. Clearly, Cigler also used the works of other authors of this genre as a model, creating a Slovenian version of Biedermeier literature.

Components of the concept of society in the picture of the world of *Sreča v nesreči* and in the picture of the world of the real society

Sreča v nesreči is set in the time after the Napoleonic Wars and is composed of stories of the members of the Svetin family (the father, mother, and twin sons). In the beginning, soon after the children are born, the family is separated, only to unite again in the last chapter. While separated from her family, the mother starts working as a maid for a modest and honest countess, and her two sons are climbing the social ladder. One climbs to the highest position in the church hierarchy, the other becomes a successful merchant, and the father becomes the right hand of an important French general, whose life he saves.

At least at first glance, the story seems simple and naive, and the narrative techniques remain simple and schematized; the time sequence logic

is problematic in several places. The narrator portrays a family idyll, in which the parents are model spouses and set an example of how to follow Christian values, and both children are obedient to their parents and other adults they encounter on their way to success. The relationships in the family are harmonious. All four members of the family are placed on the positive side, and the characters they meet through their life stories are set on one of the extreme sides of the world: either positive or negative. The picture of the world or society in which they are set is compatible with the harmonious picture of their family. Sooner or later, every negative character acknowledges and admits his or her bad deeds; good is rewarded and bad is punished. The obstacles the main characters encounter on their way to a happy end are overcome through happy coincidences or even miracles, when a situation already seems hopeless. The main values in this world include trust in God, loyalty to the emperor, the curiosity of boys, and the obedience of girls. All the characters in the story accept these values and the idyllic reality of the world they live in without questions and doubts, and they are happy with their status and relationships in this conflict-free picture. Even though the social ascent of both the Svetin children in *Sreča v nesreči* already heralds a new social order, which was already anticipated before the Napoleonic Wars and was established more rapidly after 1848, in line with the Biedermeier picture of the world, this conflict is not problematized, but instead harmoniously placed within the whole. The essential components of the concept of society in this literary work as established through the analysis of its story and discourse can be summarized as elements of *harmony*, *idyll*, *idyllic resignation*, and *self-satisfaction*, as well as the *fantastic* and the *miraculous*.

The entire story, including its surreal and fantastic elements, are set in the author's empirical everyday reality or recent past. Historical events, such as the Napoleonic Wars at the beginning of the story, which force the father to leave his family, and real places ranging from Ljubljana (today's capital of Slovenia) to other European cities and even Africa and the Americas can be identified from the narrative's chronotype. *Sreča v nesreči* undoubtedly refers to the extraliterary social reality of the specific historical period of the first decades of the nineteenth century. Specifically, this was the Restoration or pre-March period from the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 to the bourgeois revolution of 1848. The Congress of Vienna after these wars strove to enforce the principle of restoring the political and social relations from before the wars or the end of the eighteenth century and to restrict the liberal and national movements of that time. At least at first glance, the reestablishment of the old order brought back peace, harmony, idyll, and calmness. However, the impact of changes that had taken place in society, politics, and the economy in all that time could no

longer be denied. This contradiction between returning to the old system and change caused internal chasms that gradually surfaced and escalated in the revolutionary year of 1848. The components *harmony* and *idyll*, which can be used to define the content of the concept of real society, partially overlap with the semantic components of this concept in the literary text *Sreča v nesreči*, but with a notable difference: in real society these components carry the connotation of being illusory, which is expressed through the content of the components *change*, *old and new*, and *schism*. These components do not coincide with the components *miraculous* and *fantastic* in the work *Sreča v nesreči*.

The differences in the components of the concepts of society between the picture of the world in *Sreča v nesreči* and the real world the former refers to can be interpreted based on the idea of German Biedermeier literature. According to research (Wild 1990: 44; Pech 1990: 141–142; Ewers 1990: 101), the depictions of idylls in literary narratives did not necessarily serve to validate and substantiate the apparent idyll that the restoration-inclined Austrian authorities sought to establish by imitating the system from before the Napoleonic Wars. On the contrary, in Biedermeier literature, harmony, idyll, and consonance in combination with the fantastic and miraculous are covert depictions of the actual picture of the schism in the real, extraliterary world. Through a metaphorical expansion of meaning, it is the fantastic and miraculous elements, which literary characters seemingly accept as unproblematic, that reveal the illusion of harmony. The fictitiousness of harmony is expressed through the fictitiousness of the developments, with which the real atmosphere is portrayed.

Conclusions

The narrative *Sreča v nesreči* can be read and understood in various ways. It can be read merely as an entertaining, even naive, and, first and foremost, idyllic and instructive story about a Slovenian family intended for the children and teenagers of the time when it was created. At the same time, this idyll allows escapism, or literary escape from the feeling of being trapped, which is triggered by the covert tension between the old and new world.

The results of the componential analysis, which compared the concept of society during the first half of the nineteenth century with the depiction or interpretation of society in the narrative, revealed the possibility of an alternative reading, according to which a covert criticism of the contemporary social reality can be identified in the narrative. From this perspective, the great success of *Sreča v nesreči* could be attributed to its socially critical topicality, whereas Cigler's other two narrative works, which he wrote

based on the same genre pattern approximately thirty years later and which were not as successful, were already too far from the spirit of the time and culture they interpret.

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