

FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE¹ AS A CONCEPT AND AS AN OBJECT OF INVESTIGATION

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Ever since functional linguistics was defined as an "approach to language means, ..., investigating how language is used, what are the purposes that language serves us, and how we are able to achieve these purposes..." [Halliday, 1973, p. 7], any research within this frame has seemed unthinkable without the concept of the function of language, the more so that English functional linguistics denounces the classical language-speech dichotomy of descriptive linguistics and its respective categorization [Halliday, 1973, p. 67].

Not all what has been known as functional linguistics, however, envisages linguistic studies based initially on the theory of functions of language. It is the use of the term function in a considerable variety of meanings that gave rise to the name of functional linguistics. As Vedenina [Веденина, 1978, с. 74–75] has shown in her extensive article, what most representatives of glossematics, descriptive, generative and mathematical linguistics consider under the term *function* and *functional* are basically various relations among linguistic units and their modifications. Moreover, these terms thus retain aspects of meaning common in the related disciplines (semiotics, mathematics and others). The present paper is concerned with the function of language in English and Russian linguistics that encompasses it as a major concept in linguistic theory and research.

As has been mentioned, the term function may and actually has had various interpretations depending on the framework of the linguist. The function of language, however, is a somewhat limiting and, to a certain degree, self-explanatory concept and therefore may have fewer interpretations. The function of language

¹ *The function of language* is the usual term among authors writing in English. *The function of speech* is much rarer [Graff, 1932, p. 87; Charleston, 1960, p. 6; Hymes, 1961, pp. 55–83 and others] and its use is definitely motivated only by some authors [Malinowski, 1936, p. 314; Halliday, 1976, p. 30, 229]. Acknowledging her affiliations with English studies at Moscow University, the author of the present paper finds it relevant to refer, in this connection, to Professor Akhmanova [Ахманова, 1966, с. 162–164] who argued the importance of distinguishing functions of speech and not functions of language which was only right as far as the distinction of language and speech is concerned. Disregarding this distinction as theoretically irrelevant, the use of the term *the function of speech* would mean only concrete uses and not typical goals which are reflected in the system of language as meaning potential.

being essential in the present argument, viz. in the approach to the function of language as an object of investigation that encompasses research theory, the definition of the function of language needs be considered here.

Not all linguists who wrote extensively of the functions of language have given definitions of this concept. Professor Jakobson, for example, [Jakobson, 1966, p. 357] who introduced a frequently quoted scheme of the six functions of language (the referential f., the emotive f., the conative f., the phatic f., the meta-lingual f., and the poetic f.) has not given a definition of the function of language. In his conception, the function of language seems to be a dominant manifestation of a definite factor in communication (the context, the addresser, the addressee, the contact, the code, and the message) and thus respectively modified verbal expression.

Outlining theoretical prerequisites of functional styles, the Russian linguist Vinogradov considered three major functions (ф. общения, ф. сообщения и ф. воздействия) [Виноградов, 1963, с. 6] and qualified them as social functions without further defining them. In his conception of the theory of poetry, Academician Vinogradov [Виноградов, 1963, с. 130] referred to the poetic function in Jakobson's understanding and indicated its affiliations with Russian formalism of the twenties.

Professor Akhmanova [Ахманова и др., 1966, с. 163] who adopted and originally interpreted Jakobson's scheme defined the function of language as "a generalized manifestation of the various elements and aspects of language depending on their purport, application and usage" [Ахманова, 1966а, с. 507].

The English linguist Halliday, for example, is the author who has not only outlined very definitely the goals of functional linguistics, but also developed an integrated theory of the functions of language and applied it in linguistic research [Halliday, 1973, pp. 9–44, 103–140; Halliday, 1976, pp. 3–35]. *En bloc* definition of the function of language has not been given by Halliday, either. Having asked the question straight as to what is meant by the function of language, Halliday considers the role of the function of language in realistic uses and in language system, together with its fundamental role in linguistic theory and concludes with an enumeration of major functions he identifies in language (the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual) [Halliday, 1976, pp. 9, 17–25]. Still, in Halliday's conception, functions of language are the goals language serves² which, however, should not be equated with 'uses of language'.

² Cf., for example, p. 86 above. Cf. also: "The internal structure of language is not arbitrary but involves a positive reflection of the functions that language has evolved to serve in the life of social man" [Halliday, 1976, p. 25]. Generalizing still further in Halliday's integrated theory of language, functions of language may be regarded as generalized "categories of 'content substance' that the adult use of language requires" [Halliday, 1976, p. 31].

Many more linguists [Bühler, 1934, esp. pp. 24 – 33; Malinowski, 1936, p. 310 ff.; Sapir, 1969, p. 135 ff.; Strang, 1962, p. 10 ff.; Herzler, 1965, esp. pp. 39 – 55; Dixon, 1965, p. 87 ff.; Crystal, 1968, p. 30 ff. and others] wrote about functions of language before and after Halliday without defining this concept or giving its linguistic motivation³. Yet the several names mentioned above may suffice because the inventories of the functions of language, especially those given by American authors, seem to be fairly superficial and mechanistic as viewed from Halliday's intergrated theory of the functions of language, language system, meaning and style.

Though the term and the concept of the function of language has been frequent in functional and descriptive linguistics of the 20th century, accomplished theories or research projects based on this concept are practically non-existent [cf. Halliday, 1976, p. 26], except the fundamental works by Halliday (1973, 1976) and partly that by Jakobson (1966). The important relation between functions of language and functional styles indicated, yet finally considered optional by Academician Vinogradov himself [Виноградов, 1963, с. 5 – 7], has not received further development until a recent work by Shmel'ov [Шмелев, 1977, с. 41, 52]. The relation between functions of language, on the one hand, and texts, not functional styles (see p. 90 below), as their actual manifestations, on the other, is a relation which projects prospective research (see p. 91 ff. below) and therefore deserves attention.

Concluding the outline of approaches to the function of language in search of clues for prospective research, it might be mentioned that the leading linguistic journals of the Soviet Union, „Вопросы языкознания“ and „Филологические науки“, of the last decade (1969 – 1979) have published only four papers [Арутюнова, 1973, Сыроваткин, 1973, Веденина, 1978, Слюсарева, 1979] bearing some relation to the function of language. None of these papers envisages prospective theories, however, some paying only lip-service to this concept. It is only the paper by Arut'unova who has presented results of a consistent research in Russian semantics and that by Sl'usareva who has given a reasonable evaluation of the metalingual function of language in conclusion that deserve attention from the point of view of the argument of the present paper.

Curiously enough, some functions of language have been favoured with greater attention than others in works on general linguistics or general studies of English. Aiming at no theoretical accomplishment whatsoever, many authors contemplated the referential function (Jakobson's term) or: the communicative function (Akhmanova), especially in studies of the language of science [Ахманова, 1974, с. 7; Глушко, 1978, с. 9; Laguna, 1927; Graff, 1932; Black, 1949; Bally, 1952;

³ Some authors, indeed, gave inventories of the uses of language, substituting these for functions on the basis of erroneous analogy pointed out by Halliday. Cf., for example, Wallwork (1969, p. 12).

Hymes, 1961; Dean, Bryson, 1965; Payne, 1965; Mounin, 1967, to mention but a few].

Further, authors of numerous and extensive studies of literary texts dealt partly or solely with the poetic function, in Jakobson's understanding, and the textual function, in Halliday's conception, often without admitting or being aware of it. Therefore these works [Brown, 1958; Chatman, 1965; Davy, 1965; Chatman, Levin, 1967; Fraser, 1970; Harding, 1976 and many many more] contributed to literary studies rather than linguistic theory.

The metalingual and the emotive functions receiving critical treatment [Слюсарева, 1979, с. 76; Halliday, 1976, p. 27] and investigation [Akhmanova, 1977; Чаковская, 1977] virtually in equal shares, countless authors happened to make a mentioning of the phatic function. The mentioning, however, has usually been limited to a description of the effects of *en rapport* [Sapir, 1969, p. 141; Laguna, 1927, p. 244 and others], sharing [Firth, 1964, p. 112 ff. and others], sociable noises [Boulton, 1959, p. 4; Francis, 1966, p. 45], social conversation and social talk [Borchers, Wise, 1947, p. 308; Laguna, 1927, p. 278 ff.; Pollock, Sheridan, 1955, p. 215 ff.; Sondel, 1964, p. 40 ff.; Abercrombie, 1965, p. 57 ff.; Potter, 1968, pp. 138 – 139; Schievella, 1968, pp. 58 – 62; Doughty, 1971, p. 225 ff., p. 286 and others], small talk [Znaniiecki, 1936, p. 526 ff.; Holloway, 1951, p. 53; Lee, 1941, pp. 59 – 61; Sapir, 1969, p. 141; Goodman, 1971, pp. 7, 56 – 57, and others] or, simply, conversation [Abercrombie, 1956, pp. 57 – 69 and many others]. Some authors took up with Malinowski's phatic communion [Lee, 1941, p. 216 ff.; Lewis, 1947, p. 102, Gardiner, 1951, p. 46; Hockett, 1958, p. 585; Charleston, 1960, p. 43 ff.; Weinreich, 1963, p. 147; Darbyshire, 1967, p. 25; Waldron, 1967, p. 50 ff.; Wagner, 1968, pp. 98 – 115; Murray, 1969, pp. 19 – 27; Wallwork, 1969, p. 3 ff.; Nash, 1971, pp. 57 – 75; Pride, 1971, pp. 288 – 289; Fowler, 1974, p. 225 ff., p. 250 ff.; Stork, Widdowson, 1968, p. 153 ff., and others], yet dismissed the question with scarce comments, a couple of usual illustrations (Good morning! Nice day, isn't it? etc.) or a mere reference. This gave an impression that the phenomenon of the phatic function was too interesting to be missed altogether and too trivial or too complex to be investigated.

The function of language has rarely been contemplated as an object of investigation. There are very few works which attempt to deal with it [Драздаускене, 1970, Чаковская, 1977]. Is it at all possible to investigate it as an object, if the function of language is a definite purport or goal, presumably reflected in the system of language and its meaning potential? Indeed, the goal can hardly be treated as an object. However, even being aware of the integrity of functions of language in speech acts and of their simultaneous interdependence, one has to admit that some texts indicate the dominance of one or two functions over the others which meanwhile remain supplementary or latent. Disregarding the manifestation of the

latent functions for the sake of mere division of labour and assuming that the error of proximity would be minor and unimportant, it might be claimed that a function of language can be investigated as an object.

It has to be emphasized at this point that the important relation here is between the function of language and relevant texts, not functional styles or other categories of speech events (cf. p. 88 above). The relation of functions of language and functional styles has been traditionally mentioned in Russian linguistics and linguistic stylistics with reference to Academician Vinogradov's work. It must be mentioned that this is an original aspect of Russian linguistics and deserves a major digression in the present paper, the more so that the influence of Vinogradov's views on functional styles was ever so conspicuous in Soviet stylistics of foreign languages.

Originally developed and referred to even by foreign authors as a representative phenomenon [Enkvist, 1974, pp. 55–56], Soviet linguistic stylistics of foreign languages [Galperin, 1977; Riesel, Schendels, 1975; Морен, Тетеревникова, 1970] centered on functional styles. Though, at the basis, functional styles have been typified from relevant texts, by its conceptual meaning functional style was a technical category of the language system [cf. Enkvist, 1974, p. 53 ff.]. According to Academician Vinogradov, functional style is a subsystem in the general system of language [Виноградов, 1963, с. 201]. Professor Galperin finds that the functional style is both "a system of interrelated language means which serves a definite aim in communication" [Galperin, 1977, pp. 32–33] and "a patterned variety of literary text characterized by the greater or lesser typification of its constituents, supraphrasal units (SPU), in which the choice and arrangement of interdependent and interwoven language media are calculated to secure the purport of the communication" [Galperin, 1977, p. 249].

Defining functional style in either of the two ways and considering its place in theory, one has to admit that the consecutive relation 'function of language → functional style' maintains one general and fairly abstract notion dependent on the other abstract notion. Furthermore, it obscures objective relations indispensable for research purposes [cf. Enkvist, 1974, p. 56 ff.].

Being a dependent feature of the system of language, the functional style cannot be viewed and treated as an independent phenomenon comprising texts as objects of investigation. The matter is that, being derived from texts, on the one hand, and dependent on texts, on the other, the functional style is an accomplished category, describing rather than containing and therefore cannot be a prospective category in field research.

It might be pointed out that major authors [Будагов, 1954, с. 65; Разинкина, 1978, с. 5–7 and even Шмелев, 1977, с. 47–49] have been innocent of this fallacy. It is only graduation and post-graduate papers that display a fair amount of ignorance concerning the complexity of relations in linguistic stylistics in their

titles [cf.: The Use of Parenthesis in Functional Styles. Stylistic Devices in Functional Styles, etc.].

If, in a consistent approach, the functional style could be interpreted in terms of semantics, the relation 'function of language → functional style' might be seen as somewhat analogous to Halliday's open-ended theoretical consideration of the function of language as a category of meaning potential in the system of language. Without this kind of interpretation, the relation between functions of language and functional styles offers no clue for further development of linguistic theory and comes to be referred to for the sake of reference [cf. Глушко, 1978, с. 9–11]. Thus, it has to be reiterated that it is the function of language that is a major category in a prospective research project.

To take up with what we have left at on p. 90 and to restate the problem of the investigation of the function of language, is to point out its bearing on linguistic stylistics. Functional approach to language having developed, it was generally estimated as a tremendous increase of works in stylistics. Indeed, usage and meaning being the corner-stones of linguistic stylistics [cf.: Halliday, 1973, p. 110], functional analysis considerably stimulated works in this field, and, being one of the basic concepts in functional linguistics, the function of language has come to be a major concept in linguistic stylistics [cf.: Halliday, 1973, p. 104]. In stylistics, too (cf. pp. 88–89 above), the function of language in very many cases has remained but an abstract concept having little integration in theory and exercising no modification in the treatment of the object of research. Even those treatises and manuals the authors of which [Turner, 1973, pp. 203–226; Арнольд, 1973, с. 7–8 and others] found it relevant to discuss the question of functions of language at some length, generally with reference to Jakobson's conception, dismissed it in further consideration.

To support the validity of the present argument concerning investigation of the function of language, it might be relevant to review a research project, *The Phatic Function as Linguistic Evidence*, with issues both in general linguistics and linguistic stylistics. Thus, the phatic function (Jakobson) or, in a sense, the interpersonal function (Halliday) has been studied [Драздаускене, 1970, 1974; Drazdauskienė, 1979, 1981] in small talk, general conversation, letters, essays, treatises and other texts with the result of discovering its typical linguistic features (stereotypical usage, linear syntax, lexical and prosodical overstatement and essentially subjective motivation).

Completing linguistic study of the phatic function at some point and considering its typical verbal expression and recurrent units (stereotypes), the analyst consecutively extends the question as to the categories of meaning in stereotypical usage which (concern, involvement, attention, compliments, non-committal comments, etc.) are derived from both the meaning of recurrent stereotypes and ultimate extralinguistic prerequisites of communication process and are sociolin-

guistic categories in effect. This question settled, linguistic features of the interrelating functions in the same texts are considered and clues for counter arguments and further research derived. Thus, research data confirming stereotypical usage in the phatic function is verified in the referential (ideational) function in English and applied as testimony in linguistic theory, language learning and teaching [Drazdauskienė, 1979, 1980]. Tested, however, for the referential function, this evidence is found insufficient because one has to admit that not all usage, even in the phatic function, is stereotypical. Thus, this very testimony stimulates a question as to what is beyond stereotypical usage in the phatic and, over and above, in the referential function. Should it be answered, and it may, taking up an investigation in terms of semantic universals in texts related both to the referential and the phatic functions as dominant (publications for tourists, travel guides and journals, propaganda publications, etc.), data for quite a consistent theory of the nature of language and regularities of usage for the language of investigation may be attained. A certain amount of subjective judgement in the selection of texts for investigation might be removed and consistency increased by reference to the context of situation [cf.: Firth, 1957; Halliday, 1976; also Enkvist, 1974]. Thus investigation of the function of language in relation to relevant texts is based on the correlation between the abstract and concrete concept, exposes objective relations (cf. p. 90 above) and provides clues for motivated empirical research.

The function of language as an object of investigation may be treated in two ways, viz. as a goal in communication and as a category of meaning. In the simplest conception, the function of language is investigated in relevant texts with the result of discovering typical macro-linguistic units and interpreting them in terms of meaning, i. e. sociolinguistic categories (cf. p. 91 above). Thus, the function of language itself comes to be treated as a kind of a category of meaning. Further, the sociolinguistic categories of meaning pertaining to macro-linguistic units within the text can be further developed into respective linguistic categories of meaning (linear relations: transitive, intransitive, reflexive; reciprocal relations: attributive, causal and others; denotation, designation, connotation, etc.) in the sentence and made use of in theoretical and applied work.

In its development, the research in question is much in accord with Halliday's work on the relation of functions of language as meaning potential in language system, treated as a fundamental relation in his theory [Halliday, 1973, 1976]. Started in 1968 and derived originally from empirical study of adult language in general and conversation, in particular, and from the function of language in Akhmanova's and Jakobson's conception, the research project considered in the present paper seems all the more credible and promising in view of the analogy in approaches in it and in Halliday's work derived initially from a different conception and observations on child language.

Summing up the above considerations, it remains to be said that, starting with the concept of the function of language, no research can be circular, committed to sterilized micro concepts and relations in language and done for its own sake which are major causes of moderate knowledge that numerous works on language give in the age of information explosion. Centering on the study of the function of language, one can hope to derive information for an evaluation of verbal and mental phenomena, for its application in language teaching and linguistic theory, as well as enlightenment rather than explosion.

KALBOS FUNKCIJOS SĄVOKA IR TYRINĖJIMAS

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Reziumė

Straipsnyje apžvelgiama kalbos funkcijos sąvoka funkcinėje ir deskriptyvinėje lingvistikoje ir keliamas klausimas apie kalbos funkcijos tyrinėjimo tikslingumą ir realias galimybes. Tvirtinama, kad kalbos funkcijų tyrinėjimai negausūs, kad kalbos funkcijos tyrimas realiai įmanomas ir patikimas; apžvelgiamos projekto apie fatinės kalbos funkcijos tyrinėjimą problemos, nuoseklumas ir duomenys, taikytini bendrojoje kalbotyroje, stilistikoje ir kalbų mokymui. Tyrinėjant kalbos funkciją, lingvistinė medžiaga analizuojama remiantis maksimaliomis semantinėmis kategorijomis, kurios įgalina realiai aiškinti kalbos prigimtį ir optimaliai pasinaudoti tyrimo duomenimis kalbos teorijoje ir kalbų mokymo praktikoje.

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