

Semantics and Modality of “Strange” (Based on Mystical-Fantastic Russian, English and Spanish Novels)

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Abstract. The aim of the study is to present semantic diversity of an adjective “strange” in Russian, English and Spanish literary texts. All context examples are taken from world-known mystical-fantastic novels (“Altist Danilov” by V. Orlov, “Falling Angel” by W. Hjortsberg, and “The Club Dumas” by A. Pérez-Reverte) in order to demonstrate individual author’s style in conveying religious concept such as demon and its attributes through different cultures. Using the method of comparative analysis and specific identification the authors describe three aspects of adjective definition – gnoseological, emotional-axiological and orthological. The paper confirms that attributive features of main characters in all literary texts can be depicted through one single adjective, its synonyms and its collocations. Moreover, description of demonic personages mostly depends on quality adjectives having selected by a creator of a literary text. The practical value of the study is that research findings can be used in future investigations on the modality and semantics of other adjectives belonging to the same semantic group.

1 Introduction

When studying the fantastic in its various incarnations, associated with deviations from the norm, with different kinds of weirdness, it is advisable to refer to the category of modality. The author’s attitude to reality, “postulated as the main sign of modality” [1], can refer to any utterance, especially to one that is included in the literary text. Means of expression in literary writing are, as it is well known, various grammatical, syntactic, compositional, stylistic and other means and techniques in which modality is the category that determines the essence of the communicative process. Many researchers also define modality as an expression of reality/unreality of utterance (see Barkhudarov, 1973; Zolotova, 1962; etc.), while highlighting its two aspects: objective-modal and subjective-modal. N.Yu. Shvedova explains that when differentiating the modality into two types, one should take into account the fact that the objective-modal meaning can express the “nature of the relationship reported to reality” [2], while “subjectively modal meaning, on the contrary, can be” expressed by the speaker’s attitude to the information reported [2], i.e. the latter is realized, for example, by word order, repetitions, introductory words and sentences. The word meaning is also very important because the outer world presented in lexical meaning of a foreign word helps to get some knowledge, a bright image of a new object without direct acquaintance with it [3].

As for the text modality, we note that it is realized in the character of the main characters, “in a kind of

distribution of predicative and relational segments of the statements, the actualization of individual parts of the text” [1]. Regarding fiction, conductors of modality are text fragments rich with specific vocabulary expressing the author’s personal attitude to the image and its evaluation, revealing to the reader the writer’s worldview. Thus, constantly repeating, for example, one of the stylistic devices (epithet, contrast, comparison), the author “characterizes some phenomenon, event, the personality of the hero and indirectly reveals thanks to this his personal relation to them” [1], realizing the content-conceptual information. However, in the content-factual information, modality is also implied, which can be expressed in the description of the situation and background events – weather, symbolic phenomena. We emphasize that “modality coefficient” (the term of I.R. Galperin) varies throughout the entire semantic space of the text, expressing both pragmatic attitudes and the relationship between the two types of information [1], which is confirmed by our observations. Therefore, the text modality is found when the recipient is able to determine a common thematic field – a group of epithets, comparisons, to fix the predominance of certain key dominants of the text. In a fiction novel we are talking in this case about the lexical-semantic field of demonological vocabulary. Lexemes can be located distant to each other in the space of the whole text or concentrated in conceptually significant fragments, characterizing the individual style of the author and helping to reveal his communicative intention. The physical structuring of the surrounding world is

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represented by the structure of the objects and events themselves and their interrelations, as well as the structure of society and its basic characteristics, also it imposes its own specific perception and language representation of the human world [4].

2 Methods

The study was conducted at the lexical and stylistic levels. Firstly, we determine a basic contextual method in an extended linguocultural comprehension expressed in Russian, English and Spanish. Secondly, we use the technique of semantic-stylistic analysis of the word allowing one 1) to reveal estimating characteristics of components and 2) to demonstrate their functions in examples from literary text by specific identification method.

3 Results, and Discussion

It should be noted that the estimated-characterizing meaning of the adjective “strange” is very diverse, because the degree of conformity/discrepancy of reality is due to the text semantics of the *strange*. According to N. D. Arutyunova, the modality of the strange is determined by the fact that it “is understood as a deviation from the norm that does not coincide with the antinorm. It is obscure, incomprehensible, opaque, inconceivable” [5]. In its turn, according to the author’s definition, the norm is “the central and the most important reference point, in relation to which the normal state of the world is a kind of drawing connecting references of parametric meanings but not these meanings themselves” [6]. Consequently the modality of the *strange* can be defined as “the relation to the violation of the stereotype that caused a person’s psychophysical reaction” [7].

Let us emphasize that, pragmatically, deviation from the usual normative is usually associated with a negative assessment, which is more relevant to everything strange, unaccustomed. From this perspective, it is necessary to take into account the axiomatic principles of the universe, which allow us to divide the world into “one’s own” and “another’s”, into the oppositions “we” – “they” [8], “good” and “evil”, “divine” and “demonic”. Scientists note that modality of *strange* actualizes a wide range of emotions, feelings, human states, often of a contradictory nature. Thus there are three aspects in the semantic space of *strange*. They are gnoseological (inconceivable, fantastic, mystical, unexplainable), emotional-axiological (wonderful, unaccustomed, unusual) and orthologous (new, other) [8].

To study the specifics of the implementation of these aspects in the novels we are considering and to define the text semantics of *strange*, we apply to its etymology and synonymic links as the starting point for identifying the functional specifics of the contexts that reveal the author’s individual understanding of *strange* particularly marking the author’s understanding of fantastic.

3.1 Etymology and semantics of “странный (strange)/ strange/ extraño (strange)”

Thus, the Russian lexeme *странный* (strange) comes from the noun *сторона* (side), which came from Proto-Slavic *storna* with the meaning of “spreading, laying out”, from which, among other things Old Russian word *сторона* (side) and Old Slavic *страна* (country) occurred [9]. In English the lexeme *strange* came from Old French in the form of *estrange* formed from the Latin *extraneus* with the meaning “external, strange” [10]. In modern Spanish, the word *extraño* of Old Spanish origin in the form of *estranno*, which like in English came from Latin in the form of *extrāneus* with the meaning “strange, singular” gradually transformed into the modern form [11]. At this stage, we observe the commonality of semes in the English and Spanish linguocultures, that is Latin origin and similar to the modern meaning. Old Russian form actualized space semantics.

3.2 Paradigmatic relations of “странный (strange)/ strange/ extraño (strange)”

In pragmatic terms we are interested in synonyms of the lexeme *странный/strange/extraño* in considered linguocultures and, accordingly, in the studied literary texts. Thus, in the dictionary by N.M. Abramov, we find only three synonymous units to *strange*. They are “unusual, wonderful, frabjous” [12]. Dictionary by V.I. Dahl gives a broad synonymic row: “unusual, extraordinary, wonderful, amazing, unprecedented, or rarely seen, extreme, out of the ordinary, exceptional, very remarkable, worthy of special attention”, etc. [13], the units of which testify to the loss of the seme of space.

There are 10 lexemes to English adjective *strange* as the dominant of the row in the Oxford dictionary of synonyms and antonyms (2007). They are *unusual, odd, curious, peculiar, weird, funny, bizarre, uncanny, anomalous, fishy* [14]. One should pay attention to the fact that in English linguoculture in contrast to Russian one, there are also negative interpretations of *strange*.

The Collins English Dictionary (2006) contains the following interpretations of *strange*: 1) *odd, unusual, or extraordinary in appearance, effect, manner etc.; peculiar*; 2) *not known, seen, or experienced before*; 3) *not easily explained a strange phenomenon*; 4) *inexperienced (in) or unaccustomed*; 5) *alien, foreign*; 6) *shy, distant, reserved* [15].

As you can see there are synonyms *odd, unusual, peculiar* in the interpretations. They are semantically related to the lexeme *strange* and can be considered as similar in semantics. The lexem *weird* refers more to the colloquial, informal style as it has a more negative connotation: *very strange; bizarre* [15].

In the Spanish linguoculture, *strange* is *extraño*. The dictionary of synonyms of the Spanish language contains 7 similar in meaning lexemes. They are *raro* (rare), *chocante* (inappropriate), *insólito* (unusual), *excepcional* (special), *misterioso* (mysterious), *singular* (uncommon), *sorprendente* (wonderful) [16]. As in the English linguoculture, there is a negative meaning in the Spanish

linguoculture, not so peculiar to the Russian language. The comprehensive Russian-Spanish dictionary edited by H.J. Turover (2004) complements the synonymic row with 3 more word forms. They are *extrambótico* (extravagant), *estrafalario* (flighty), *ideático* (comical) [17]. Here the emphasis is made to a more limited use, mostly in colloquial speech. The meanings of *extraño* in defining dictionary by B.P. Narumov (2005) are 1) *extraneous, alien; outsider; outlandish* 2) *rare, unusual; strange* [17].

Analysis of synonyms of *strange* and its meanings in three linguocultures revealed common features. Thus, first, interpretations of the lexeme clearly shows the universality of meaning. It is *unusual, peculiar, comical, alien*. Secondly, the richness of synonymous means that show a diverse cultural fund and pragmatic relevance of deviations from the normative picture of the world native to all three linguocultures where the evaluative and qualificative meaning of deviation from the norm can be expressed, as we wrote earlier, from different points of view. They are gnoseological (mystical), emotional and axiological (unusual) and orthologous (other). The negative vector of understanding of the meaning of *strange* is characteristic for the English and Spanish linguocultures and is not fully peculiar for the Russian one.

4 Results

4.1 Russian literary contexts

With the help of specific identification method it has been identified 55-times-using of a word “strange” in a novel “Altist Danilov” by V. Orlov. Such semantically similar units as *особенный* (particular), *удивительный* (wonderful), *необычный* (*необыкновенный*) (unusual (uncommon)) and *чудной* (comical) were the most frequent.

According to the three forecited modal aspects of the semantics of *strange* we divided the pragmatically meaningful uses of this word form into three groups. To the first group, a gnoseological one, with meaning *unknowable, fantastic, unexplainable*, we attributed the following context describing the strangeness of the demonological world and its attributes:

Из ребра Кармадона торчал странный прут, словно обломок шпаги, он качался, издавая тонкий, ухающий звук. (A strange rod protruded from the feather of Carmadon like a fragment of a sword. It swayed issuing a thin, sighing sound) [18].

In this context, *strange* is an attribute of the demonological character of Carmadon in the meaning of *fantastic*. The author cites such individual synonymous interpretations of *strange* as *thin* and *sighing* that determines the fact that a creature has a rod as something inexplicable and the sounds it produces as unreal. This can be considered as evidence of the author’s subjective modality in relation to the described objects and demonological characters.

The second aspect of the meaning of *странный*

(strange) that is emotional-axiological one implying such characteristics as *необычный* (unusual), *дивный* (marvelous), *непривычный* (unaccustomed), *чудной* (odd) is realized in the novel more often than the first aspect. Emotional-axiological aspect is realized directly in contexts related to the demonological world as, for example, in the following fragment: *Странный набор... – Стало быть, ты плохо знаешь меня, коли считаешь, что странный...* (A strange selection... - So you do not know me well, if you think that it’s strange...) [18].

The dialogue takes place between Danilov and his ex-wife, where he is surprised by the presence of portraits of famous women in the ex-wife’s room. For a demon, unlike ordinary people, this is an unaccustomed situation. *Странный* (strange) is also used as an attributive adjective with the meaning of *необычный* (unusual), *чудный* (wonderful) in such combinations as *странный звук* (strange sound), *странное письмо* (strange letter).

The third aspect of *странный* (strange) is orthological implying meanings *новый* (new), *иной* (other), *чужой* (alien), *другой* (different). It is mostly noted in description of a person’s character and his behavior reflecting qualities and emotional-psychological experiences of a person [8]:

Странный ты человек, Данилов! Они его и не предсказывают (You are a strange man, Danilov! They do not predict it) [18].

Странный он какой-то, – подумал Данилов, – вечно был живой, беспечный, просто попрыгун, а тут... Стало быть, и на бессмертных действуют годы! (He is a strange one, thought Danilov, he was always alive, careless, just a fidget, but now... So, the immortals are also subject to years!) [18].

Both pragmatically meaningful contexts refer to the description of strange behavior of demonological characters. In the first context this is himself Danilov, in the second one this is Carmadon. In both cases, *странный* (strange) has such meanings as *иной* (other), *другой* (different), *обладающий новыми качествами* (having new properties). The second context contains author’s antonyms of *странный* (strange). They are *живой* (lively), *беспечный* (careless). Therefore similar synonyms are implicated. They are *вялый* (listless), *ответственный* (responsible).

Thus, the author’s individual sense of *странный* (strange) is the fact that the demon has such human qualities as apathy, concentration that usually are not peculiar to the immortals (demons). This is emphasized by the contrast that determines the dynamics in the demonological character’s behavior.

Thus, the semantics and modality of *странный* (strange) in the Russian literary text is represented by all three aspects, but the emotional-axiological component can be considered as priority. It is realized by a large number of synonyms expressing this meaning, as generally accepted (*удивительный*, (amazing), *необыкновенный* (extraordinary), *чудный* (wonderful), *особенный* (special), *невиданный* (unprecedented)), as author’s, revealing pragmatics of *странный* (strange) only in the space of the novel (*смирный* (humble), *могущественный* (powerful), *скандальный*

(scandalous)).

4.2 English literary contexts

Let us turn further to the text semantics of the adjective *strange* in American novel «Falling Angel» by W. Hjortsberg. Continuous sampling method shows that such synonymous nominations as *unusual*, *odd*, *curious*, *peculiar*, *weird* are the most frequent. It is significant that the word *strange* was found in the text space only once in the description of Johnny Favorit and realized all three aspects of the semantics of *strange*. These aspects are gnoseological with the meaning of *mystical*, emotional-axiological with the meaning of *weird* and orthological meaning *other*. This fact is confirmed at the level of the semantic space of the whole novel:

He was always into something strange [19].

From the author's point of view Johnny's oddity is in that fact that he was not like ordinary people but he was always extremely lucky possessed a mysterious talent and had a propensity for sacrifice, devil worship.

However, it is noted that there are 6 uses of the noun *stranger* in the text of the novel. This noun is a derivative from *strange* with the meaning "a person whom one does not know or with whom one is not familiar" [OD], expressing the orthological aspect of the semantics of *strange*, for example, in the following contexts:

The only fans Johnny had were strangers [19].

I reached up and explored my features. Nothing felt familiar. It was a stranger's face [19].

In the above contexts the noun *stranger* has such meaning as "alien, stranger, a strange" and fulfills both nominative and attractive, expressive functions. In the latter context, "the author's wandering around the denotation" [20] is confirmed by the lexical item *familiar* in the negative sense, which also has similar functions.

As the analysis has shown, all contexts with the lexical item *strange* (*stranger*) describe the main character Johnny. Thereby the author imports his personal relationship to this character – Liebling is not like anyone else, he is alien to all, no one has ever been able to understand him and accept, he is an alien and a stranger in society. There is no context describing the strangeness of Lucifer, as the devil is represented in the usual way. He has all the traditional signs (the ability to disappear, manipulate people, the ability to persuade, etc.).

The next in frequency of use is *odd* (5 phrases), the contexts of which express the emotional-axiological aspect of the semantics of *strange* possessing the greatest pragmatic potential:

Her name was painted on the door in gold letters, and beneath it an odd symbol which looked like the letter M with an upturned arrow as a tail [19].

I stared at this odd woman in black and felt invisible fear – tentacles encircle my heart [19].

The above contexts describe the girlfriend of Johnny, Margaret, who also had odd behavior and was a fan of satanic rituals, which made her, along with Liebling, strange in the eyes of ordinary people. Semantics of *odd* implies uniqueness, strangeness. In other contexts *odd* combines with the following denotations, describing them

as something strange, out of the ordinary. These denotations are *woman*, *way*, *souls*, *look*. Here *odd* fulfills a characterological function in combination with *woman*, attractive and expressive-aesthetic ones in other contexts.

Therefore, the semantics and modality of *strange* in the American novel is represented mainly by emotional-axiological and orthological aspects of meaning. Herewith the estimated synonyms *odd* and *weird* are dominant. The gnoseological aspect is revealed in the nuclear word *strange*, where the limits between all three aspects are blurred and not clearly defined.

4.3 Spanish literary contexts

In distinction from the English text, in the Spanish novel "El Club Dumas" by A. Pérez-Reverte the lexeme *extraño* occurs in 17 contexts. However, in "demonic contexts" it is noted only once in description of the demonological character, expressing the gnoseological aspect of semantics of *strange*:

Increíblemente serena, a su mido con naturalidad su extraño papel en el relato, incluso había en su expresión una lealtad desconcertante, inexplicable_ (Incredibly calm, taking into account her strange role in the whole story, her face radiated inexplicable loyalty and calmness) [21].

In the description of Irene, the lexeme *extraño* is an attribute to the word *papel* (role), realizing the meanings *extraordinary*, *inexplicable*, which is confirmed by the use of the word *inexplicable*. The author's synonyms can include *serena* (calm), since Irene differs from all participants by her tranquility in the cycle of the dangerous events. An important pragmatic context, revealing the text semantics of the lexeme from the point of view of gnoseological aspect is the following fragment:

No es tan mal sitio, despues de todo... Aquí arriba, con ese extraño mundo irreal a nuestros pies... (It's not such a bad place, after all... Here at the top, with this strange unreal world at our feet...) [21].

According to the explanatory dictionaries, the adjective *raro* is an equivalent synonym for *extraño*, but in addition to the meanings *unusual*, *amazing*, it has such meanings as *rare*, *unique* and combines mainly with denotates denoting paper products and valuables. Taking into account the fact that the novel "El Club Dumas" is devoted to searching for the ancient book on the demonology "The Ninth Gate" frequent use of this qualitative adjective (20 times) is justified and, as it is shown below in contexts, it often occurs in such appropriate combinations as: *libros raros* (rare books) и *ejemplares raros* (rare specimens):

Borja coincidía con la Enciclopedia de impresores y libros raros y curiosos, de Crozet (Borja consulted the encyclopedia of printers and books, rare and interesting, such as Crozet) [21].

Here *raro* (rare) realizes the emotional-axiological aspect of the meaning of *strange* with the attractive and evaluative functions. The use of *raro* (rare) as an adverb with the meaning "unaccustomed, unusual", also expressing the emotional-axiological aspect of the meaning of *strange* and having similar functions is fixed

in the text of the novel.

As the analysis has shown, in the semantic space of the investigated novel emotional-axiological aspect of the text semantics of *strange* is demonstrated more than others as in the Spanish linguoculture as in the American novel. The gnoseological aspect is shown less and an orthological aspect is noted in a single case. Individual author's synonyms of *strange* in description of an enamoured devil (*athletic, flexible, calm, young*), intensified by intensifiers make the image of the female demonological character specific, different from all and deviating from the stereotyped idea of Satan.

All the highlighted aspects of semantics and modality of *strange* in the three linguocultures are clearly shown in the table.

Table 1. Frequently used actualization of semantics "strange" in literary texts.

Semantic aspects	Gnoseological	Emotional-axiological	Orthological
Russian literary text	21	52	6
English literary text	2	8	10
Spanish literary text	26	50	1
Total	49	110	17

According to the table, the semantics of *strange* is more clearly realized through the emotional-axiological aspect of meaning – 110 uses; second best is the gnoseological aspect (49 uses) which is more typical for the Russian and the Spanish novels. The third aspect of the meaning of the *strange* that is orthological one (17 uses) is manifested less clearly as against the first two ones but is predominant in the American work. As for the individual author's feature words in all three novels each aspect is represented in a different ratio. Gnoseological aspect (4 uses) is typical for "Altist Danilov", emotional-axiological one (6 uses) is typical for "The Club Dumas" and almost equally orthological (1 use) and gnoseological (2 uses) are shown in the "Falling Angel".

5 Conclusion

Thus, as the analysis has shown, the literary interpretation of *strange* as a deviation from the norm is distinguished with individual author's understanding. High density of the synonymic row (up to 10 units) is common to all linguocultures. In the Russian novel, the strangeness of the demon Danilov is shown in contrast to the world of people with the presence of human qualities in the character of the protagonist, which are unusual for representatives of the other world and absolutely ordinary on earth. In the American novel, Lucifer is depicted in the usual way with all the attributes of the devil. His actions and behavior do not seem special to the author and the reader while protagonist Johnny Liebling desires to be

like Satan, stands out for his "oddity" and differs from his environment (surroundings). The Spanish novel destroys the stereotypical idea of the devil. The main demonological character is a young woman who has unusual spiritual qualities and stands out against the background of all the heroes of the novel with "too and too much" attractive appearance and extraordinary tranquility.

Disclosure statements

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