
AESTHETIC ASPECT OF ROMAN JAKOBSON'S COMMUNICATION THEORY

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Abstract

The theoretical study presents roots of Jakobson's communication theory in the aesthetic context. The authors present Jakobson's theory of communication signs, structural and functional communicational factors, as well as the individual components of communication situation. Except for the core theoretical communicological texts of Jakobson they also come out from the conclusions of Jakobson's linguistic analyses of avant-garde literary texts, aimed at its poetic function and they present the essence of Roman Jakobson's aesthetic views. Based on the theorist, literature launches into the world a new convention of the sign utilization, the artistic sign is used in a new and innovative way, so the relationship between the signifier and the signified is created differently than in the everyday use. According to Jakobson just the overmentioned innovativeness played the aesthetic function in the avant-garde art, especially when the permanent changes of the artistic code contributed to a dynamic development of avant-garde streams in the early 20th century. As Jakobson showed himself, not only in his writings about Russian and Czech avant-garde, but also in various linguistic theses, bound with separate linguistic groupings, that were relentlessly created in places his work, he focused mainly to level, scale or scope of expression, which immensely in his interpretation meant the avant-garde element. Not semantic meaning of words have in literature the poetic significance, but elementary component of the word, a phoneme, without any semantic relation.

Keywords: Jakobson, linguistics, communication model, functions of communication, poetic function

1. Introduction

Modern theory of communication and media arose in the course of the twentieth century as a reflection of everyday media and mass media practice, and furthermore the processes in other social life areas served for a number of theorists they as a source of inspiration or a starting point for the media research processes. In the media studies were equally applied theoretical conclusions of

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the other scientific disciplines, which brought the systemic theoretical and methodological base in the initially empirically evolving quantitative media research and research of media practice.

Russian and American theorist Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) is one of the scientists, who created the influential theoretical concept of the sign analysis, as a tool for the media texts interpretation. Roman Osipovič Jakobson belongs to the most important and potentially the most influential scientific persons of the twentieth century, mainly viewing the scope of his cognitive scale, precise formulations of theoretical conclusions. He could be ranked among the scientists, who through his work and scientific principles contributed to total shifting of Humanities and Social sciences paradigm in the twentieth century. He strongly contributed to the development of many fundamental scientific concepts – Theory of communication, Linguistics, Theory of literature, Folklore studies, Ethnography, Anthropology and Theory of culture. He belongs among the founders of the poetic language theory not only in the Russian formal school, but also in the theory of poetic language at all. Formerly linguistic and structural studies of practical and poetic language in common communication situation were later elaborated by Jakobson into the coherent semiotic concept of the communicative situation analysis, with its agents and communication functions. In the research of linguistic, artistic and cultural cases he was consistently applying the approach based on interdisciplinarity and binary thinking. “He is close to pluralistic investigative methods, especially the interdisciplinary methods. His views of the most fundamental linguistic questions often gravitate to almost anthropological interpretations.” [1]

Jakobson’s human destiny and his theoretical development can be associated with almost every major political, theoretical and artistic movements of the previous century. In 1920, he left Russia as the Soviet diplomat to Czechoslovakia, and in 1926 he, together with the Czech theorist V. Mathesius, founded Prague linguistic circle. Jakobson’s scientific results from this period ushered in his later wide international acceptance in the scientific community. Later, as a Czechoslovak citizen, he ran away to Scandinavia, prior to the occupation of Czechoslovakia, and finally through Denmark, Sweden and Norway he fled to the United States, where he lived until his death. Gradually he worked in the new homeland at Columbia University, Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

W.A. Koch divides scientific development of Roman Jakobson into four phases: a) formalistic phase (1914-1920), b) structuralist phase (1920-1939), c) semiotic phase (1939-1949) and d) interdisciplinary phase (1949-1982) [2].

2. Jakobson’s theory of communication

Jakobson’s communication model and its functions are the not only possible theoretical approaches to media texts analysis. Thanks to Jakobson, who studied language in its full richness of features, the media theory and practice knows the functions of communication, functions of language. In his

communication theory he applies to semiotic roots, while he understood semiotics universally as the theory of language signs, such as the theory for all kinds of language utilization [3]. In the work *Linguistics and Poetics*, published in 1960, Jakobson introduced his comprehensive communicological concept. The whole text tends to allocate and justify the poetic function in communication performance within the linguistic context but did not strive to create it as his priority. The communication model served him only as a means of other linguistic phenomena defining - style and poeticity - the poetic function.

When drawing up the theoretical model of communication situation, its elements and linguistic relations, Jakobson came out from German psycholinguist K. Buehler's theoretical communication model which was complemented by three other constitutive agents of verbal communication. According to the original model of K. Buehler, language of communicative situation has three functions. Expressive function, which is associated with a speaking person or posting, serves and gives the speaker chance to express his or her own attitude to the subject of communication. Another function is the appellative function, which characterizes relationship to a listener or an addressee where through the communicative situation the speaker tries to influence his attitudes or behaviour. The last is a showing function or reference function, which draws attention to the linguistic speech, in fact to reality, the phenomena and objects that the communicative situation describes. Considering this model, known as the Model-Organon, Jakobson formulated generally accepted theoretical solution to the communicative situation. Jakobson's communication model is a typical linear model of communication focused on **structural and functional factors of communication**. Jakobson's often cited work *Linguistics and Poetics*, deals with poetry as an integral part of linguistics, wherein he distinguishes six components of communication like the inseparable parts of any interactive and intentional linguistic expressing or communicative situation. Context, channel or contact and code were added to the Buehler's factors of communication. Jakobson's communication model is defined by two axes: axis expedient-communicate, and percipient-person-context-contact code. The first represents the **process of communication**; the other is the **axis of communication conditions**. The absence of any of them causes communication disfunction or reduced saturation of information communication.

Each code in communication is by Jakobson associated with a number of features represented in the system of linguistic communication where utilization of the code reflects the intention, focus of the expedient and the percipient in the communicative situation. Jakobson's research of the aesthetic aspects and poetic function of texts contributed to creation of the semiotic theoretic model of communication, which distinguishes six functions of speech. Buehler's model of communication was widened by Jakobson's poetic, phatic and meta-language functions. German theorist H. Schmid [4] emphasizes, that J. Mukarovsky in 1941 theoretically earmarked the aesthetic function of communication. While Jakobson functionally interprets the poetic function as one of the six aspects of

communication, Mukarovsky understands the aesthetic function from anthropological point of view as the expression of one of the four fundamental relations of a man to the world.

Cognitive function, that can be called reference or information one, orientates communication to the form and style of communicate. The aim of such oriented communication is the exchange of information. Cognitive function in communication is associated with the context and the way of communicate using in the examined context. **Poetic function**, which can be quite inaccurately called as **formal function**, guides the author's communication to the form, communicate appearance. It is associated with communicates and focuses attention to the expedient, but especially the percipient of the communicate itself without any specific purposes and because of himself or herself. The communicator is in such communication the aim by itself. For example, specific feature of a poetic text is the poetic function. The poetic function is autonomous in the poetic text so it is reflected in the dialectic relationship of significance and meaning of poetic words in the functional context. Just it, in the context of the dialogue, draws attention of the expedient and the percipient to communicate itself, to its form because of itself. The poetic function temporarily cancels reference links of the communicate and reality, it strengthens its sign, semiotic, and intentional meanings. According to Jakobson himself "it reinforces tangibility of signs, deepens fundamental dichotomy of the sign and the object" [3, p. 81]. **Emotional or expressive function** orientates communication to the speaker, it expresses the state in which the expedient is and what the speaker has with the communicated subject. **Conative, appellative or manipulative function** orientates communication to the addressee. Expedient, according to Jakobson, tries to influence the addressee, appeals to conduction or manipulation of some acts. **Phatic function**, also called the contact function, focuses on communication channel of communication, strengthens social ties especially due to the communication itself. The last, **meta-linguistic function** is bound with interpretation. It focuses on **communication to the communication code**, verifies its functionality and acceptability of communication between the parties.

The mentioned communication functions do not represent six successive phases of speech, communication; they are the results of excellent theoretical reflection of the author, additional analysis of language communication skills. The paradigm of functions is government by selection, appropriate speech appears in appropriate specific functions typical for specific speech acts, dominated can be poetic function in poetry, informative function in scientific text and so on.

3. Aesthetic aspects of Jakobson's communication model

Phenomenological aesthetics, structuralist aesthetics, hermeneutical aesthetics, semiotic aesthetics, Anglo-American New Criticism, reception aesthetics, Marxist aesthetics, pragmatic aesthetics and deconstructionist aesthetics are considered basic streams and concepts of the aesthetic thought

development in the twentieth century. We believe that, in the area of aesthetic theory, contribution of Russian formal school is being underestimated, even they brought radical changes in the paradigm and formed theoretical base for more modern aesthetic concepts, not only in the area of linguistics, but also in the area of aesthetic theory. It helped to overcome the level of theoretical and methodological basis, in many cases undoubtedly bound with Kant's aesthetic theory. The Russian formal school representatives broke up with the speculative method of artistic-theoretical reflection and interpretation of artistic works of the nineteenth century. They broke up with Hegel's concept of art interpretation and to the theory of aesthetics; so they re-injected thoughts of I. Kant about the importance of art work forms as well as the importance of a subject in its interpretation. As literary scholars and linguists, they focused their attention to the speech, its form and function in the work of art and to functional differences during their application. Theoretical analysis of situational and functional differences in general application of a sign, and specifically application of the linguistic sign and the roles of speech in media – these are in our opinion the up-to-date benefits of Russian formalists in the modern aesthetics.

Since the very beginning of the twentieth century Russian formal school theorists gradually found many followers, for example: Umberto Eco, Jürgen Link, Rolf Parra, Frantisek Mika, Zdenek Mathauser, etc. The aesthetic thinking of the twentieth century, within its theoretical concepts reflected just via the Russian formal school representatives, and in addition to traditional art also reflected discourse of a new phenomena, which was determined by human everyday experience. Everydayness and trivialness became central topics of the twentieth century art. Roman Jakobson, central personality of Russian formal school, was therefore accepted the major theorist of the twentieth century aesthetic thought.

The early works and activities of Jakobson, in Moscow Linguistic Circle and in Saint Petersburg's OPOJAZ (*Obshchestvo Izucheniia Poeticheskogo Yazyka*, Society for the Study of Poetic Language), vanguarded more on his theoretical approaching. Jakobson's starting point of avant-garde poetry was his personal youth experience, interest in avant-autonomous expression of artistic sign did not cease to fascinate him during his lifetime. The characteristic feature of artistic avant-garde of the early twentieth century was rupture of art with the world of seen or heard reality, refusal of artistic sign interconnection with a term, an ideologue, a theologian. Avant-garde artistic movements, from the new century beginning, rapidly absorbed new fast-emerging philosophical schools of thought than the scientific community. Jakobson was mostly influenced by the generation of the world and Russian artists born in the 80s of 19th century: Spanish painter Pablo Picasso (1881), Irish writer James Joyce (1882), French painter and sculptor Georges Braques (1882), Russian composer Igor Stravinsky (1882), French architect of Swiss origin Le Corbusier (1887), in Russia it was painter Kazimir Malevich (1878) and experimental poets Velimir Khlebnikov (1885) and Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893). Jakobson's solidarity with painters,

writers, musicians was not constituted only through the out-sympathy of the young theoretician with modern art works of his generation representatives.

Modern, which significantly influenced cultural life of 20th century, namely intuitively revealed inspiration and methodological resources of the **modern boring world** with its scientific and technological civilization. Avant-gardists found a new answer to the question of nature and importance of elements, bearing the semantic function in the spatial configurations in general, but also in the language (in poetry). They were not interested in genesis, but in relations, not mechanical causality, but function and internal logic of things and processes. Finally, the well-known and often quoted statement of G. Braque “I do not believe in things, I only believe in their mutual relations” could be for R. Jakobson at least as inspiring as the motto of Ferdinand de Saussure that “language is a form, not a substance...” [5] Looking for the elements bearing socially formed meanings, creating their interrelations which defined particular systems, that was de Saussure’s message which was further developed in Roman Jakobson’s theory and in his all scientific life.

During the life in Russia, Jakobson began his research on language functions and their expressions in specific speeches. He analyzed literary works of symbolists and futurists in the context of a word as a literary sign. In particular, for futurists the word became the value itself. Poets not only rejected ideological functions of words and poetic texts, but also communication function of word in poetry. Futurists V. Khlebnikov and V. Mayakovsky, with their ambition to create a new art, separated aesthetic function in art and promoted it to the role of the literary text dominant. Research of the trans-mental language - *zaumnej reci* of the both poets – that brought Jakobson to entirely new view of the literature essence began to apply linguistic viewing of poetry and poetic language. Jakobson’s concept of literature theory started to emerge in the formalist phase of his scientific work and can be summarized into an axiom, published later: **Poetry is the language in its aesthetic function**: subject of the literature study is not literature, but literalness, i.e. literary and artistic qualities of work [3].

This type of scientific approach created not only a new field of linguistics, poetics, but significantly contributed to the birth of avant-garde position in aesthetic theory. Jakobson was not lonely in former Russia with this new theoretical view of literature. Russian avant-garde artistic process positively influenced formation and development of major theoretical group, which was named **Russian formal school**. The school was a free grouping of Russian linguists and literary scholars, among them belonged except R. Jakobson also V. Sklovskij, B. Ejchenbaum, P. Bogatyrev, J. Tynjanov, V. Propp, N. Trubetzkoy and many others. Literary scholars, among the formal theorists, focused on self-sufficient word in poetry and did not take into account the non-literary factors, such as literary environment and socio-historical context. The aesthetic value of the word roots in itself, its aesthetic function, artistness and literalness do not arise from the relation to reality or extrareality, but it roots from the poetic work. The literature was accepted as the real linguistic phenomenon; therefore they

were focused on linguistics. Linguists from Russian formal schools were in turn inspired by de Saussure's structural linguistics, and therefore they perceived dichotomy of practical and poetic language as the evidence of functional linguistic theory, based on different ways of speech. They investigated distinctive components of language forms and via their conclusions they created phonology for modern linguistics.

The scope and focus of our text does not allow us to give the complex view of the Russian formal school importance for aesthetic thinking. Importance of their contribution belongs to formal aesthetic theory of early twentieth century. Linguistic interpretation of avant-garde literature and its formal aggression brought important concept to the theory of aesthetics - **autonomy of the artistic language**. Poetic language was liberated from its servicing to information function, which manifests itself in varying grades and intensity of practical language use. When interpreting literary texts they abstracted from external factors and social art determinants. They were interested in material and technical form of the artwork. They wonder, how the work of art is created, composed, but they do not care what the art work says. They were fascinated by the word analysis, its form, rhyme in the poem, sounds in the verse. In the process of aesthetic perception of art they supported efforts to see things differently so they composed the peculiarity method. In this type of aesthetic perception is important form, shape, look of a work of art. For that type of aesthetic perception is important form, shape and visualization of the work of art. That is the source for naming the group of theorists - Russian formal school.

Despite the name, they had nothing to do with the 19 century formalism. Jakobson emphasizes the word value, as the perceived symbol and the inseparable connection of the word with future time. Creative strength of the sign anticipates, predicts future. Therefore Jakobson finds identification with the vision of the poet V. Khlebnikov: "I do understand that the environment of formation is future, there goes the wind, sent by the word gods" [6].

In 1920 Jakobson left to Czechoslovakia, where he worked for nineteen years. At the very beginning of his Czech stay (Prague, Brno) he published perhaps the most important works for the aesthetic theory. The work *On Realism in Art* (1921) was later translated into 13 languages. During the same year, Jakobson published theoretically ever-lasting and often cited work *Novejšaja Russkaja Poezija* (Newer Russian Poetry), which was devoted to V. Khlebnikov, his most beloved poet. Except for Russian literature study, he also studied Czech literature, and in 1923 he published a fundamental work *O češskom stiche* (Czech Prosody). During his Czech period he continued his active cultural, artistic and scientific life. Together with V. Mathesius they founded Prague Linguistic Circle in 1926, where he continued research of linguistic structures in poetry with several Czech artists and theorists. Through the conception of **art as a structure** he contributed to development of Czech structuralism.

The literary-scientific and literary-artistic production of the Prague circle was bound with Jan Mukarovsky's semiotic concept, which played the central role. Further important people and Prague school theorists were F. Vodička and

R. Jakobson. Consistency of methodological approaches and theoretical conclusions make close relatives form Prague structuralism and Russian formal school. Prague School followers interpret language as a system, as mutual interaction of functions. They also come out from phenomenological-herbart tradition of their predecessors like J. Durdík, O. Hostinský and O. Zicha. Unlike de Saussure and his Russian followers, the Czech theorists did not preclude diachronic principle of language system and linguistic signs and provided essentials for genetic structuralism [7]. After arriving to Czechoslovakia, Jakobson together with Jan Mukarovsky developed poetic language conception in the environment of Czech artistic poetism and surrealism. He co-worked with leading Czech avant-garde artists: V. Nezval, J. Seifert, Toyen, V. Vancura, S.K. Neumann, I. Olbracht, J. Voskovec, J. Werich, etc.

Jakobson's and Mukarovsky's common aesthetic concept, considering de Saussure's theory, focuses to the expressional level of an artistic sign and its autonomy. They both emphasize the specificity of poetic sign, poetic language, and priority of expression to meaning. According to Prague structuralist theses written by Jakobson and Mukarovsky, an organizing principle of art as a semiologic system is its aiming not to what it signifies, but to the sign itself. Releasing signs from real objects is in aesthetic communication strengthened by the idea of unity of artwork, aesthetic character as an autonomous and self-reflexive entity. Due to its nature, it is the base of the whole structuralist-semiotic concept of art work as the separate dynamic unity. This is the differentiation of artistic-semiotic system from other semiological systems [7, p. 193].

Through Kant's principle of 'art without notion', functionalist understanding of the work of art as dialectics of its functions, norms and values, emphasizing the importance of artistic avant-garde projection in development of culture in the early twentieth century, Jakobson together with Mukarovsky contributed to new perception of art and works of art in the twentieth century. The art of the new century started to be interpreted as a dynamic system of elements and their relations with dominance of one of the functions of the system. By Mukarovsky, in the system of art dominates aesthetic function, so Jakobson named this functional dominance of literary and artistic text as poetic function. The essence of both of them is Kant's concentration of artistic sign into itself, notionlessness, lack of usefulness and autonomy, weakening the ability that the work of art can serve for practical purposes and is achieved only as result of mutual communication between the percipient and an aesthetic object in aesthetic situation.

Prague structuralists with Roman Jakobson's theoretical contribution added to three defining functions of communication (cognitive, expressive, and appellative) the fourth function - aesthetic function. Mukarovsky said it has a universal nature and expresses focusing on the percipient to the sign itself.

4. Conclusions

Jakobson discussed rational and objective essentials of poetry and poetic signs. Poetic sign is perceived and interpreted as unity of morpho-syntactic structure of the linguistic code of a particular language, and hierarchy of differences within given poetic convention. In the spirit of Russian formal school and Czech structuralism he was interested in material and technical aspects of artistic structure designing. His poetics understood as notionally open system, as structural-semiotic interpretation of a work of art. The artwork is not the result of author's personality expression, nor the picture of non-literary reality. The artwork has semiotic nature; it is the aesthetic sign and represents complex aesthetic structure. The percipient's attention is focused on the nature of poetic texts, and structural patterns of literary works. These fundamental aesthetic conclusions of Jakobson are bound with his lifelong effort to examine poetic texts as linguistic ones.

Even he presents a new model of communication in Poetics linguistics; he still follows his older poetological and aesthetic research but also brings new topics, trends in the field of Cybernetics and Information theory. His functional theoretical synthesis is accepted and even inspirational for contemporary scientific community. Communication model serves him more as a means for defining the style and poetrycity - poetic function. Thus it forms the basis of his aesthetic theory and understanding aesthetic phenomena of artistic and non-artistic ones. His model found particular application mainly in the theory of literature and drama, and he made significant aesthetic research of poetic and narrative texts and contributed to development of theory of metaphor and narrative theory. For Jakobson was art not only an important source and stimulus to scientific work, but it was for him intentional way of seeing the world ("I grew up among artists" [8]), so in his dialectical perception of literary texts functions did not dominate information, information communication, but poetics, poetic communication.

According to Jakobson, any of the communication functions in various manifestations can dominate and determine target of spoken communication but also it can determine verbal structure of speech. During the poetic function examining, author repeatedly emphasizes, that poetic function is not the function that would be applied only in artistic texts, and certainly it can not be limited to poetry. It may be a part of other artistic codes, but because of its linguistic character it may be part of every speech. In non-poetic and non-artistic texts of everyday communication it has only an incidental, secondary function and normally here dominates its cognitive and reference function, so the poetic text is not perceived as a poetic one only due to its shape characteristics (e.g.: metrum, verse, rhyme), but mainly due to its function, due to its functional aspect in communication context. After all, poetic means may be used also in rhetorical text or in common speech or in marketing communications. Jakobson argued that artistic sign may be interpreted in the process of communication with other than aesthetic aim; otherwise it would reduce its phatic, conative and

information potential. Even poetic text can be interpreted in accordance with the structuralist research of the Prague school as a multifunctional text, such as text, which often has other extra-aesthetic features.

Recent unilateral overexposure of aesthetic function of media communications in mass media and advertising have created a virtual, media and traditional values, deprived paradoxal anaesthetic world. Dominance of entertainment in the mass media on everyday bases misuse aesthetic function of mass media and marketing communicates in communication in its most varied forms. Mass media lists and use historical experience of art with artistic symbols creation. Communication experience of art is used by media subjects, mostly in manipulative modes, especially in advertising and propaganda.

Jakobson at the time of his work did not expect that in terms of consumer society, in the twenty-first century, mass media and advertising and media communications gain other, incomparable dimensions. According to S. Rozenberg existing media and advertising tend to use “the form of the environment contamination” via inadequate information – decisive way of ‘virtual world’ creation, competitive opposite of reality authentic image, which can be generated from adequate information [9]. Mass-media version of the world lost its functionality, except for its propaganda function, because its main purpose is, as H. Pravdová says, “to exponentiate, and help to shape and establish mass media stereotypes in the society as the natural part of media version of reality. Using the media entertainment consciously manipulates and directs the audience's attention and deliberately "distract the audience attention from serious social problems and inequalities.” [10]

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