

DENOTATIONAL ASPECT OF ENGLISH AND SWEDISH PROVERBS, EXPRESSING THE FAMILY RELATIONS

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***Abstract**— The proverb, or to be more precise its denotational aspect, should be studied in the field of compositional syntax because of its metaphorical nature. First of all the participants of the situation may be expressed by words relating to another situation preserving or changing the structure of the situation they refer to, secondly, the participants may be expressed by words typical for the situation they describe, but the structure of the situation may be different from the typical one.*

Keywords: denotational aspect, situation, proposition, proverb, direct meaning, indirect meaning

1. INTRODUCTION

At present the theory of compositional syntax is paid much attention to in the field of theoretical syntax. The main point of the theory is that every sentence has two semantic aspects: denotational, or situation, and significational, or proposition [2]. The system of compositional syntax is the system of independent analysis of denotational and significational aspects of the sentence and their further overlaying. The first step of analysis includes the modelling of the situation for the sentences under consideration [4]. Denotational aspect, which is analyzed in this work, is the result of the people's vision of the world. It characterizes the situation, described in a sentence, and the relationship between its components. But it does not formulate the real "state of affairs", it just shows how this situation is reflected in the mind of the speaker [1], [5]. The problem here is that representatives of two different cultures may perceive the world around them in different ways. The application of the analysis of denotational aspects towards proverbs is of the most interest, because the proverb reflects the centuries-old experience of the people, and consequently the difference in the perception of some situations by several cultures may be clearly seen through proverbs [6].

The proverb, or to be more precise its denotational aspect, should be studied in the field of compositional syntax because of its metaphorical nature too. First of all the participants of the situation may be expressed by words relating to another situation preserving or changing the structure of the situation they refer to, secondly, the participants may be expressed by words typical for the situation they describe, but the structure of the situation may be different from the typical one.

Proverbs are the models of different typical situations and typical relations between things from the real life. At the same time, because of their frequent usage with figurative meaning, it becomes necessary to bind them to some concrete situations for their further interpretation [6].

This work presents the analysis of the denotational aspect of proverbs, reflecting the relations between a man and a woman. The comparative analysis of the denotational aspect of Swedish and English proverbs helps to reveal both similar and different interpretations of these situations by two peoples. Proverbs about matrimony disclose the situations of marriage, matchmaking, choosing of a partner, choosing of the time most suitable for marriage, marrying off one's children, and distribution of family duties.

This work presents the analysis of the situation of choosing a partner for family relations and the situations of argument and divorce.

2. MODELING of the SITUATION, DESCRIBING CHOICE of a PARTNER

The situations, describing the choice of a partner are very often introduced by the predicates "to choose" and "to take", which realize their direct meaning and are typical for this situation. The dictionary gives the following definition of the verb "to choose – pick out (someone or something) as being the best or most appropriate of two or more alternatives". Thus, a man chooses one woman, which is the most suitable for creating a family, from a number of women. Choosing a wife he may be guided by definite parameters. If the situation of choice is introduced by the verb which does not have any relation to this situation, then belonging to this situation is defined by the parameters, which a man or a woman uses choosing a partner. For example, the proverb "A maid marries to please her parents, a widow to please herself" [3] may be analyzed as the situation of choice in spite of the fact that the verb to marry is typical for describing the situation of marriage. However, since the parameter of choice is introduced to the situation, it may be interpreted as it follows: A maid chooses a husband to oblige her parents, a widow – to oblige herself. The proverb "A lewd bachelor makes a jealous husband" [9] may be seen as one more example of this situation. The proverb advises not to choose jealous men as future husbands. In this case the parameter of choice is the subject of the situation. The predicate to make refers to the semantic group of verbs of creation and means "to form (something) by putting parts together or combining substances; to create". But in this proverb the verb to make realizes its secondary meaning "to achieve a new rank or status". A bachelor, thus, achieves the status of a husband.

The Swedish proverbs describing the situation of choosing a partner for marriage, as well as the English ones, introduce this situation with predicates “att taga” (to take) and “att välja” (to choose), which are typical for this situation: “Hustru bör väljas med öronen, inte med ögonen. [10]” (Wives should be chosen with ears, not with eyes.) In spite of the fact that this situation does not name an active subject, taking part in choosing a passive subject – a wife, its presence is implied and is required, because the position for it is open by the predicate to choose. Moreover, the proverb has the instruments of choice – ears and eyes, not typical for this situation, but indirectly indicating the parameters of choice: while choosing a wife a man should not be guided only by her physical attractiveness.

“Den som tager en änka, får bord och bänka, men mycket att tänka. [11]” (That man, who chooses a widow, gets a table and a bench, but a lot to think about.) This situation of choice is introduced by the predicate, typical for this situation. The participants of the situation are also typical, but they only imply the parameters of choice, describing the consequences of an unfortunate choice.

The proverb “Ingen ung kvinna tar sig en gammal man för Guds skull. [10] (No young woman takes an old man for Christ’s sake.)” describes a typical situation of choosing a man by a woman, naming the parameter of the choice – the age.

The predicate, introducing the situation of choice in Swedish proverbs, which is untypical for this situation, is the predicate “att äkta” (to marry): “Den som i sitt femtionde år äktar en ung hustru, han bjuder döden till gäst. [11]” (A man in his fifties who marries a young wife; he invites the death.) The reference of the proverb to this situation is made by its participants: a wife and a man who chooses her, – and a parameter of choice – the age. Besides, the proverb shows the consequences of the wrong choice.

3. MODELING of the SITUATIONS of ARGUMENT and DIVORCE

The situation of argument in English proverbs is introduced by the verbs “to prate”, “to scold”, “to stumble”, “to grumble”. The example of such a situation is a proverb “If a hen doesn’t prate she will not lay” [3], where the verb to prate realizes its indirect meaning – to talk foolishly, to utter in an idle or empty way, to tell off. This verb outside the context is not typical for describing the situation of argument. The predicates “to scold” and “to grumble” are used in their direct meaning and indicate the situation of argument in proverbs. Besides these verbs, denoting actions, the situation of argument may be introduced into the proverbs by the verb “to be”. The distinctive feature of these proverbs is introduction of the dynamic situation with a static proposition. For example, “The quarrel of lovers is the renewal of love” [8]. In this case, the abstract noun, acting as a subject of the situation, is the direct indicator of the situation of argument.

In Swedish, like in English, the situation of argument is often introduced by the predicate of action, untypical for this situation, but preserving the negative connotation: “Liten tuva stjalper ofta stort lass. [7]” (Small hummocks often topple over big carts.) The word “att stjalpa” has the meaning “to tip over or cause to tip over and fall, especially from a height”. The concrete noun “tuva”, which is the subject of the sentence, does not realize its direct meaning “a small raised area of ground, like a very small hill”, and means “an obstacle”, which is the reason for the situation of argument. The concrete noun “lass”, which is an object of the sentence, realizes its indirect meaning, denoting family – the subject of the situation. Thus the interpretation of this proverb may be expressed by the following situation: “Small obstacles or arguments may destroy even close-knit families.”

The translation of the proverb “Den trätan “mitt och ditt” har skiljt mången ifrån sitt [11]” is “The argument “mine and yours” has divorced a lot of people with themselves”. The predicate of action “att skilja” is used in its direct meaning “legally dissolve one’s marriage with (someone)”. However, the position of the subject of proposition, open by a predicate, is taken by the reason for appearance of the situation of divorce – the argument. As in English, the static proposition is very frequently used to introduce the dynamic situation: “Att skiljas är att dö en smula [11]” (To divorce means to partly die). It should be mentioned that in this proverb, like in the previous one the position, which is open by the predicate of state for a subject or an object of the situation is taken by the reason for appearance of the situation of divorce.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the problems, connected with modeling of the situations of choice, argument and divorce in family relations, which was presented in this work, shows that to construct the models of these situations in proverbs, which are the source of the world perception by one particular people, it is necessary to use additional linguistic resources – vocabularies. One of the main ways of reflecting the peculiarities of each situation in the sentence is its lexicon, where the main role is taken by the verb.

The analysis has shown that the situation of choice of a partner for marriage can be introduced in the proverbs by the verbs in their both direct and indirect meanings. The participants of this situation are the subject (initiator of the choice), the object of choice, the parameters of choice and the consequences of this or that choice. Even if the participants are expressed by the words untypical for this situation – the words realizing their indirect meaning – this model is usually preserved.

The situation of argument includes two subjects, one of them is active, denoting the initiator of the argument, and the second one is passive, the other participant of the argument. The proverbs usually name the reason for the argument. The situation of divorce has the same model as the situation of argument.

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