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POLYFUNCTIONALITY OF ENGLISH LITERARY APHORISMS

Abstract. The present article examines the polyfunctionality of English literary aphorisms from the perspectives of functional linguistics and literary discourse theory. The study proceeds from the assumption that language is inherently multifunctional and that this property is particularly evident in literary texts. The article outlines the development of the concept of language functions through the functional theories of R. Jakobson, M.A.K. Halliday, V.A. Avrorin, E.S. Kubryakova, N.N. Boldyrev and D.U. Ashurova, demonstrating that language performs communicative, cognitive, interpretative, aesthetic and socio-cultural functions. Since literary aphorisms are highly condensed units of literary discourse, they inherit its polyfunctional organization. The article argues that although one function may become foregrounded in an individual literary aphorism depending on the author's communicative intention, and the semantic organization of the statement, other functions also remain active and interact in the construction of meaning. This interaction contributes to the semantic richness, conceptual depth and artistic expressiveness of literary aphorisms. The study contributes to functional interpretation of literary discourse by applying the principle of polyfunctionality to literary aphorisms and demonstrating the interaction of different functions within these highly condensed literary units.

Keywords: literary aphorism, polyfunctionality, functional linguistics, literary discourse, communicative function, cognitive function, aesthetic function, socio-cultural function.

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ПОЛИФУНКЦИОНАЛЬНОСТЬ АНГЛИЙСКИХ ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫХ АФОРИЗМОВ

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается полифункциональность английских литературных афоризмов с позиций функциональной лингвистики и теории художественного дискурса. Исследование исходит из положения о том, что язык по своей природе является полифункциональным и что данное свойство особенно ярко проявляется в художественных текстах. концепции функций языка в рамках функциональных теорий Р. Якобсона, М.А.К. Хэллидея, В.А. Аврорина, Е.С. Кубряковой, Н.Н. Болдырева и Д.У. Ашуровой, – и показывается, что язык выполняет коммуникативную, когнитивную, интерпретативную, эстетическую и социокультурную функции. Поскольку литературные афоризмы представляют собой высококонденсированные единицы художественного дискурса, они наследуют его

полифункциональную организацию. В статье обосновывается, что, хотя в отдельном литературном афоризме одна из функций может выдвигаться на первый план в зависимости от коммуникативного замысла автора и семантической организации высказывания, другие функции также сохраняют свою активность и взаимодействуют в процессе смыслообразования. Такое взаимодействие способствует смысловой насыщенности, концептуальной глубине и художественной выразительности литературных афоризмов. Исследование вносит вклад в функциональную интерпретацию художественного дискурса посредством применения принципа полифункциональности к литературным афоризмам и выявления взаимодействия различных функций в рамках этих высококонденсированных единиц художественного дискурса.

Ключевые слова: литературный афоризм; полифункциональность; функции языка; функциональная лингвистика; художественный дискурс; коммуникативная функция; когнитивная функция; эстетическая функция; социокультурная функция.

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Language is not merely a system of grammatical rules and lexical units but a dynamic instrument through which people communicate, conceptualize the world, express emotions, construct social relations and preserve cultural experience. In this regard, contemporary linguistics increasingly investigates language from a functional perspective, emphasizing not only its structure but also the purposes it serves in human activity. This shift from structural description to functional realization has significantly influenced linguistic research, leading scholars to recognize that language performs numerous interrelated functions rather than a single isolated task.

The concept of language functions has become one of the fundamental principles of functional linguistics. Researchers such as R. Jakobson, Yu.S. Stepanov, V.A. Avrorin, E.R. Slyusareva, G.V. Kolshanskiy, N.D. Arutyunova, V.Z. Demyankov, E.S. Kubryakova and N.N. Boldyrev have made significant contributions to the study of language functions. A fundamental interpretation of language function was proposed by V.A. Avrorin, who defined it as the practical manifestation of the essence of language and the realization of its purpose within the system of social phenomena (Avrorin 1975). In his view, language cannot exist independently of its functions, just as matter (материя) cannot exist without motion. In this regard, the function of language should be understood not as an additional use of language but as its very mode of existence. Language exists only through functioning in communication, cognition, and social interaction, while every linguistic unit reveals its nature only by fulfilling a particular communicative or cognitive purpose.

Different linguistic schools have proposed various classifications of language functions. R. Jakobson distinguished six functions of language including referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual and poetic. M.A.K. Halliday developed a functional model based on three metafunctions

such as ideational, interpersonal and textual, which explain how language represents experience, establishes interpersonal relations and organizes discourse (Halliday 2002). Yu.S. Stepanov identified three principal functions of language encompassing nominative, syntactic and pragmatic (Stepanov 2021) while G.V. Kolshanskiy regarded the communicative function as the central function from which all other functions derive (Kolshanskiy 2007).

With the emergence of cognitive linguistics, the understanding of language functions was further expanded. E.S. Kubryakova argued that language primarily performs communicative as well as cognitive functions (Kubryakova 2004). These two interrelated functions emphasize that language serves not only as a means of communication but also a tool of conceptualizing and structuring human knowledge. Subsequently, V.Z. Demyankov and N.N. Boldyrev proposed the interpretive function of language. They claimed that language not only communicates and represents knowledge but also interprets reality by organizing, evaluating and explaining human experience (Demyankov 1994; Boldyrev 2019). This broader understanding reflects the shift from viewing language solely as a means of communication to recognizing its essential role in cognition and the interpretation of the surrounding world. Although these scholars have different classification of language functions, their approaches demonstrate that linguistic communication involves the interaction of several functions. Communication inevitably involves cognition, interpretation and evaluation while artistic communication additionally creates aesthetic effects and reflects cultural values. Hence, language should be viewed as an inherently polyfunctional phenomenon where various functions interact continuously in the construction of meaning.

The multifunctional feature of language becomes particularly evident in literary discourse. Unlike everyday communication, literary texts pursue several aims at once i.e. they communicate ideas, represent conceptual knowledge, express the author's world picture, evoke emotional impact, produce aesthetic effects and preserve cultural experience. As D.U. Ashurova mentions, literary text is characterized by the interaction of communicative, cognitive, interpretive, stylistic, pragmatic and socio-cultural functions, all of which are coordinated by the dominant aesthetic function (Ashurova 2022).

Before proceeding to the functional analysis, it is necessary to clarify what is understood by a literary aphorism and to distinguish it from related forms of concise expression. Although aphorisms, maxims, sententia, proverbs and apothegms share certain features, particularly brevity, generalization, they differ in their origin, communicative purpose and degree of stylistic organization. Moreover, the boundaries between these forms are not always strict and in some classifications the terms partially overlap (Cuddon 2013).

Literary aphorisms can be distinguished from adjacent forms primarily by their authorship, communicative orientation and stylistic organization. Besides, it is also characterized to have originated in literary text. Unlike a proverb, which generally represents collectively transmitted cultural experience and has no author, a literary aphorism reflects an individual authorial worldview. A maxim tends to be more didactic and often formulate a principle or rule of conduct where a literary aphorism is usually non-prescriptive: it presents an observation, interpretation or evaluation and allows the reader to accept, question or reject it. Sententiae and apopthegms are more closely related

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to literary aphorisms and may partially overlap with them. A sententia generally expresses a concise judgement while an apophthegm is traditionally understood as a brief memorable saying attributed to a particular person or occasion. A single difference between sententiae and aphorisms is that sententia is usually met in old, classic literature while literary aphorisms are applicable in different periods of time even in contemporary world. (Gasparov 1987) Accordingly, the literary aphorisms are identified according to the following criteria such as identifiable authorship, association with literary text, semantic completeness, generalization, stylistic markedness, non-prescriptive character and capacity to remain relevant beyond their original context. These features distinguish literary aphorisms as condensed forms of authorial thought and contribute to their polyfunctional nature.

The multifunctional nature of language and literary discourse provides the theoretical foundation for understanding literary aphorisms as polyfunctional units. Since literary aphorisms constitute a special form of literary text, they inherit the functional organization of language while realizing it in a condensed form. Within a single statement, an aphorism may communicate information, construct conceptual knowledge, express evaluation, produce aesthetic value and transmit cultural experience. Convergence of these functions represent the expressive power and intellectual richness of literary aphorisms.

Unlike ordinary statements, literary aphorisms are not intended merely to convey information. Their communicative purpose is inseparable from artistic expression and philosophical reflection. Every literary aphorism represents a complete conceptual and stylistic unit in which several functions cooperate to produce meaning. In this regard, literary aphorisms should not be classified as exclusively communicative, cognitive or aesthetic. Rather, one function may become dominant while remaining functions continue to participate in the interpretation of the utterance.

Since literary aphorisms are polyfunctional, the presence of a dominant function does not exclude the realization of other functions. Rather, dominance refers to the function that plays the leading role in conveying the central meaning and communicative intention of a particular aphorism. Following the functional approach to literary text, in which different functions interact within a single textual unit, the dominant function in the present study is identified according to several interrelated criteria: a) the communicative intention of the author; b) semantic focus of the aphorisms, i.e. the main idea foregrounded in the statement; c) the type of effect produced by the aphorism such as transmitting an idea, conceptualizing or reinterpreting a phenomenon, expressing evaluation or foregrounding a social or cultural issues and d) the linguistic and stylistic means that contribute to the realization of this effect. These criteria can be considered in combination rather than separately.

Thus, the communicative function is regarded as dominant when the primary purpose of the aphorism is to convey an observation or generalized idea to the reader. The cognitive function becomes dominant when the aphorism primarily conceptualizes a phenomenon, establishes a new conceptual relationship or restructures the reader's conventional understanding of a concept. The interpretative function dominates when the author presents a familiar phenomenon from a particular or unconventional perspective and encourages its reinterpretation. The axiological function is dominant when the central meaning of the aphorism is based on explicit or implicit evaluation and expresses the author's value judgement. The socio-cultural function becomes dominant when socially

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or culturally shared values, beliefs, norms or problems constitute the main focus of the statement. These functions nevertheless remain interconnected and may support one another within the same aphorism.

The aesthetic function occupies a special position in this functional hierarchy. Following D.U. Ashurova (2022), who considers the aesthetic function to coordinate the interaction of other functions in literary text, it is treated in the present study as a general property of literary aphorisms rather than as a function that necessarily competes with the communicative, cognitive, interpretative, axiological or socio-cultural functions for dominance in every individual examples. Stylistic devices such as metaphor, paradox, antithesis, irony, repetition and parallelism contribute to aesthetic effect while simultaneously reinforcing the function that becomes foregrounded in a particular aphorism.

Thus, functional dominance in literary aphorisms should be understood as relative: one function may be foregrounded in a particular context while the remaining functions continue to participate in the construction of meaning. On the basis of these criteria, the interaction and relative dominance of different functions can be demonstrated through the analysis of literary aphorisms. The communicative function is one of the fundamental functions in literary aphorism since it is addressed to a reader and aims to convey a particular observation or generalization. However, literary communication may differ from everyday communication in that it seeks not only to transmit information but also to provoke reflection and emotional response. Let us analyze Oscar Wilde's well-known aphorism:

"To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all" (Wilde 2001).

At the communicative level, the statement conveys a clear distinction between *living* and *existing*. Yet its significance extends beyond the transmission of information. The aphorism encourages readers to reconsider the meaning of life, thereby realizing cognitive function. At the same time, it implicitly criticizes passive existence, expressing the author's evaluation of the society. The contrast between *live and exist* enhances the aesthetic effect and makes the aphorism more expressive and memorable. In addition, the idea of authentic living reflects universal philosophical and cultural values, revealing its socio-cultural function. Thus, although the communicative function is dominant, it cannot be separated from the cognitive, evaluative, aesthetic and socio-cultural functions to create the aphorism's overall meaning and impact.

The cognitive function becomes particularly prominent in aphorisms that reinterpret familiar concepts or formulate new philosophical insights. According to E.S. Kubryakova, language is not only a means of communication but also a mechanism for conceptualizing reality (Kubryakova 2004). Literary aphorisms vividly demonstrate this cognitive potential because they frequently present unconventional interpretations of everyday experience. For instance: *"Experience is merely the name men give to their mistakes"* (Wilde 2003).

The aphorism does not simply define experience but reconstructs the concept from an unexpected perspective. Instead of describing experience as accumulated knowledge, Wilde ironically equates it with mistakes. This conceptual reinterpretation represents the dominant cognitive function. Simultaneously, the aphorism communicates a philosophical idea, evaluates conventional beliefs concerning experience and achieves aesthetic expressiveness through paradox. The interaction

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of these functions transforms an ordinary definition into a memorable literary observation. It also can be observed in Virginia Woolf's metaphor: *"Books are the mirrors of the soul"* (Woolf 2000). Although aesthetically attractive, the metaphor primarily constructs a conceptual relationship between literature and human identity. The comparison encourages readers to perceive books not merely as objects but as reflections of inner experience. Here the cognitive function dominates because the metaphor organizes thought and shapes conceptual understanding. Nevertheless, the aphorism simultaneously communicates the author's attitude toward literature, expressing positive evaluation and reflects cultural significance traditionally attributed to reading.

The interpretative function, proposed by N.N. Boldyrev is equally characteristic of literary aphorisms. Language does not simply reproduce reality but inevitably interprets it through the speaker's conceptual perspective (Boldyrev 2019). Literary aphorisms often challenge conventional assumptions by offering new interpretations of familiar concepts. For example: *"Laws are like cobwebs, which may catch small flies, but let wasps and hornets break through"* (Swift 2010). In this aphorism, the simile transforms an abstract concept of law into a vivid image. The interpretative function is dominant since it presents the legal system from a new perspective, suggesting that laws are effective only against the weak, while the powerful can escape justice. At the same time, the aphorism performs a communicative function by expressing criticism of legal institutions, an evaluative function by expressing a negative attitude toward social inequality. Its aesthetic function is realized through the figurative comparison of laws to cobwebs and of people to insects of different sizes and strengths. The aphorism also has a socio-cultural function as it reflects the broader problem of unequal power and privilege in society. The interaction of these functions helps explain why the statement remains meaningful and relevant across different historical periods.

The aesthetic function occupies a special position in literary discourse because it transforms language into an object of artistic perception. R. Jakobson emphasized that the poetic function directs attention to the message itself, while D.U. Ashurova argues that the aesthetic function integrates all remaining functions within literary text (Jakobson 1960; Ashurova 2022). Literary aphorisms demonstrate this principle particularly clearly because their artistic organization is inseparable from their philosophical content. In Oscar Wilde's ironic statement *"Fashion is a form of ugliness so intolerable that we have to alter it every six months"* (Wilde 1885:9), the paradox produces humour and stylistic expressiveness demonstrating the aesthetic function. At the same time, the aphorism criticizes superficial social values, interprets the nature of fashion and reflects broader cultural attitudes toward appearance. Thus, aesthetic organization enhances communicative and evaluative meanings instead of replacing them.

The axiological (evaluative) function is also one of the peculiar characteristics of literary aphorisms since authors frequently express judgements concerning human behaviour, morality and society. The axiological function shapes the author's individual world picture and guides the reader toward particular ethical or philosophical conclusions. Let us analyze Oscar Wilde's literary aphorism about selfishness: *"Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live; it is asking others to live as one wishes to live"* (Wilde 2001). The aphorism primarily performs an axiological function by redefining the concept of selfishness through contrast. Rather than criticizing personal freedom, Wilde presents

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selfishness as the attempt to impose one's own way of life on others, thereby expressing a clear moral judgement. Simultaneously, the aphorism fulfills a communicative function by conveying the author's view of the relationship between individual freedom and responsibility. It also performs a cognitive function by encouraging readers to reconsider the conventional understanding of selfishness. The aesthetic effect can be realized through the convergence of parallel syntactic structure and repetition. These stylistic devices create foregrounding by drawing the reader's attention to the central idea of the aphorism. Thus, the interaction among these functions considerably increases the persuasive force of the aphorism.

Finally, literary aphorisms perform a socio-cultural function by preserving collective values and reflecting cultural experience. Language functions not only as an individual means of expression but also as a repository of social memory. Literary aphorisms often transcend their immediate historical context by expressing ideas that become part of cultural understanding. For example, the aphorism *"Books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame"* (Wilde 2003) reflects society's attitudes toward literature which highlights nuances and shortcomings of the society. The expression "the world calls" represents a collective social judgement indicating that the evaluation of books is based on socially accepted beliefs rather than on individual opinion. The adjective "immoral" reflects society's conventional perception of certain books, while the second part of the aphorisms represents the cognitive basis of this judgement: such books are considered immoral because they expose society's own shortcomings and moral failings. By making this implicit reasoning explicit, the aphorism encourages readers to reconsider conventional social judgements about literature and morality. In this way, it reflects and reinterprets culturally shared beliefs, realizing its socio-cultural function.

The analysis presented above confirms that polyfunctionality is one of the defining features of literary aphorisms. As condensed units of literary discourse, literary aphorisms realize several language functions, which together contribute to the transmission of meaning, artistic expression and conceptual content. However, it does not imply that all functions are equally noticeable in every aphorism. Depending on the author's communicative intention and semantic organization of the statement, one function can be the dominant while the other functions continue to support and reinforce.

In conclusion, the present study has demonstrated that polyfunctionality is one of the essential characteristics of English literary aphorisms. As highly condensed units of literary discourse, literary aphorisms realize the multifunctional aspects of language by combining communicative, cognitive, interpretative, evaluative, aesthetic and socio-cultural functions.

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