# Polycode Essence of Postmodern Comic Literary Text

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*Abstract*—**The present paper aims at the analysis of the postmodern comic literary texts and their peculiar features. In the focus of the attention is polycode organization of the texts, which is based on polystylistic and polysemiotic techniques. Application of these techniques proves that the comic depends on the carnival type of consciousness of the author, who is a creative personality – Homo Ludens. The author of the postmodern comic literary text has a specific vision of the world which is expressed through the use of carnival plots, images, themes and devises. It has been demonstrated that most commonly used are intertextual inclusions, sarcasm, irony, combination of verbal and non-verbal elements, game with fronts.**

*Index Terms*—**carnivalization, comic, creativity, polycode means, postmodern literary text**

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the priority interests of linguists remains the question of the interdependence of language and personality, their role in the creation of textual space, because "any separate human individuality, taken in its relation to language – is a special position in worldview" (Humboldt, 1984, p. 80). The last decades of the 20th – early 21st century are marked by "the transition from the study of language as a rigidly and clearly structured entity to its study as an integral part of the world of man – the creator and user of language" (Frolova, 2009, p. 44). As a result, there is a need to study the mechanisms of human verbalization of knowledge about the world around them and the peculiarities of their transmission in the process of communication. Thereby, interdependence of man and language are prior for studies, where language as a product of creativity of linguistic personality is studied in combination with the figure of the author, features of the viewpoint.

Creativity acts as a tool for the implementation of individual author's style, manifestation of creative potential, gives the opportunity to diversify author's work, to abandon stereotypes. Creative authors have a good sense of language and style, which allows them to be extraordinary in the process of text creation, skillfully playing with the form and meaning of the word. Such individuals are not afraid to go beyond the conventional framework, to create something new, they creatively influence the immanent world of language.

In comic literary texts, in particular postmodern texts, creativity depends on carnival type of consciousness. Carnival consciousness is thought of as "an individual author's view of the world, its play with reality, language game in the text, which is a product of the author's cognitive picture of life" (Kuznietsova, 2019, p. 68). One of the forms of carnival is written. The author uses the so-called mechanism of carnival: carnival themes, plots, images, individual comic style, in which carnival can be seen as a separate creative method of the author, as a certain vision of reality.

This paper is an attempt to explore a carnival model of the world of postmodern writers. This model is manifested in the form of polycode means – grapho-phonetic and stylistic.

## II. THEORETICAL PREREQUISITES

Postmodern perception of the world as absurd and unpredictable influenced narrative techniques, stylistic means and methods of classical stylistics. This led to the destruction of all generally accepted rules and patterns of their functioning in the literary text. This contributed to a voluntary combination of expressive and graphic means, which, in turn, influenced the creation of spontaneous writing that is dominated by narrative chaos, improvisation, quasi-reality, varied language games, etc. Thus, under the influence of postmodernism, literary texts are created by means of a combination of different fragments, and are viewed as an endless connection of words and associations.

According to I. A. Bekhta, "a peculiar feature of the postmodern text is that at the level of narration the reader develops "uncertainty" during its development, a kind of "corrective irony" to all manifestations of life" (Bekhta, 2002, p. 216). This leads to interactive perception that is involvement of the addressee in joint activities to create the text. The

scholar also indicates that the three key phenomena in postmodern text creation are intertextuality, hypertextuality and self-referentiality. "Intertextuality embodies the eclecticism of one or more sign systems taken from different cultural spheres, epochs and individual practices, accompanied by the emergence of new or additional meanings, textually fixed quotations. Hypertextuality reflects the idea of rhizomatic writing with its tendency to nonlinearity in modern thinking: the reader must guess the author's logic in the sequence of presentation. Self-referentiality is manifested in a specific narrative manner which makes the story the essence of the text" (Bekhta, 2010, p.14). Certain features of the postmodern literary text characterize the author as an extraordinary personality, open to experiments with the meaning and form of the word.

Postmodern literary texts are addressed to the intellectual elite familiar with the codes of the cultural-historical epoch, and also, to the mass reader who can find an accessible code "on the surface" of the text. This code will then become the essence of numerous interpretations (Chotchaeva & Sosnovsky, 2017). Between the author and the addressee is formed a common space of knowledge, their cognition, such as common language, speech, communicative knowledge between the author and the addressee, which is to focus the unity of opposing individuals, their speech-thinking activity, represented by constant reflexive monitoring of this activity. It is carried out continuously, covers the behavior not only of the speaker (author), but also other participants in communication, that is the personality on whom the speech is aimed, and those who observe the speech-thinking activity (Alefirenko, 2010, p.16-17). So, it becomes clear how important the role of language in the process of knowledge representation is. It lies in the selection of means of saving and giving information in the processes of selecting knowledge, in the adequate interpretation of the author's intention.

The author of literary texts is creative in using postmodern techniques of text formation. Postmodern authors express their own ironic attitude to certain established social, cultural, political, and religious norms. The postmodern textual space becomes "a certain territory of the total game, in which the reader, the text, the context and the author ideally occupy equal positions. The author does not dictate and cannot dictate all the meanings that the text generates, and the reader is prepared in advance to learn much more from the text than the author wanted to say" (Olizko, 2009, p.29). In this way postmodern literary texts are a reflection of the author's special perception of the world.

The author of postmodern literary texts is Homo Ludens, who acts as the "creator" of the carnival model of the world. They express individual perception of reality and seek to share it with the addressee. The author and the addressee thus enter into a "carnivalized dialogue". Such a dialogue is "interpreted as a "two-voiced word", where the author's word dominates, which is expressed in the emotional unity and togetherness of the author and the reader – game dialogue, where laughter acts as an element of playful attitude to the world, man, language" (Samohina, 2016, p.62). Carnival laughter "destroys any hierarchy, debunks the established dogmas […], brings together and combines the sacred with the profane, high with low, great with insignificant, wise with insignificant" (Bakhtin, 1990, p.15).

The postmodern author uses "mechanisms of carnivalization" – that is, usage of carnival images, themes, plots, language to create an individual comic style that reflects author's carnival type of consciousness. This type of consciousness is inherent in the creative personality of the joker, who plays with the addressee, with the universe, "dressing up" as a clown, using elements of theatrical play, masks, demonstrating carnival semantics, which is manifested in freedom of expression, incongruity, in fact, turning the world upside down. The humorist creates a kind of "trap" and lures the addressee into the carnival "action", forcing the letter to play by the rules of carnivalization, which is a collective phenomenon" (Samokhina, 2017, p.119-120). Therefore, the carnival consciousness is a festive worldview of the author of everyday life. The author immerses in it as a kind of game world, choosing a special comic style of communication.

Carnivalization is embodied in the text, communication, understood as "transfer of carnival forms of folk laughter culture in literary language, transformation of these forms into a system of certain literary means, […] to understand various phenomena – cultural, social, literary" (Lyubokha-Kruglik, 2016, p.375). Carnivalization is the author's invitation to a holiday, a "holiday of language play, grotesque images, philological research, linguistic discoveries, […] where the role of language is like a spring that unfolds carnival scenes, generates grotesque images, vivid and unexpected twists and turns" (Fedorova, 2016, p.5). The essence of the theory of carnivalization is to erase the boundaries between dualistic oppositions: elitist and popular, high and low.

Carnivalization appears as "a process of emotionally expressive communication, which is based on the element of laughter, carnival worldview […], where there is a constant spread of carnival energy" (Samokhina, 2017, p.119). Under the influence of this energy, a carnival-masquerade atmosphere is created, an environment in which the authors of comic literary texts realize their own communicative skills. "Carnivalization of comic literary texts is revealed on three levels: conceptual – general organization (idea of the work, idea), plot – specific episodes in which there is a carnival aesthetics (masked games, original themes, etc.), and text – the use of stylistic and graphic techniques. The most frequent linguistic means of creating carnivalization include language play, parody, intertextuality, stylistically marginal vocabulary (slang, abusive vocabulary), merging and contrasting literary and non-literary language, carnival images and symbols, games with spelling and text structure and structure" (Degtyareva, 2009, p.11). In comic literary texts, the game in all its possible manifestations and variations comes first.

The carnival action is based on the language game as "creative, non-standard, non-canonical, deviation from the linguistic / stylistic / speech-behavioral / logical norm of using any speech units and / or categories to create witty expressions, including comic ones" (Skovorodnikov, 2009, p.389), which helps to build another world, opposite to the

official one, when the everyday and the festive change places, dissipate, mix, that is lose their "limitations"" (Zagibalova, 2012, p.54). Language game is understood as "a certain type of speech behavior of the speaker, based on intentional (conscious, deliberate) violation of systemic relations of language, that means destruction of speech norms in order to produce non-canonical language forms and structures, which as a result of this destruction acquire expressive meaning and ability to evoke the reader's aesthetic and, in general, stylistic effect" (Kozhina, 2006, p.657). Consequently, language play causes a deliberate targeted violation of the language, speech or communication norms. The purpose of such violations is to create a comic effect, to attract the attention of the addressee and focus on a particular fact, to form the necessary author's mood. The language game is transformed into the so-called linguo-creative code, the author of which – Homo Ludens, shows the peculiarities of individual self-presentation in various fields and forms of creativity.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The methodological background of the study is functional-communicative stylistics of the text, that integrates the achievements of functional and communicative approaches, which means that it allows the analysis of the functioning of the text in communication, including the relationship between the author and the addressee in different communication situations. The author of a postmodern literary text is a person who has a linguo-creative type of thinking, which is reflected in the themes, plots, language tools, as well as in the composition of literary texts. The author creates a carnival model of the world, in which demonstrates their own communication skills with game techniques, intertextuality, parody. Carnivalization in the postmodern litarary text is expressed in their polycode organization that is polystylistic and polysemiotic techniques.

The study tries to explore how postmodern writers create comic literary texts and what is their polycode essence. Therefore, the research deals with postmodern comic literary texts that vividly demonstrate authors' carnival perception of the world.

The current study is based on the postmodern comic literary texts by a famous American writer Dave Barry and the caricatures from The Far Side Off-The-Wall Calendar by Gary Larson. The former represents polycode techniques and the latter – polysemiotic ones.

## IV. RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

Postmodernism makes it possible to "combine the diversity of traditional and innovative styles, change the boundaries between genres, art forms, theory and practice, high and low styles, balance between old and new forms of artistic representation" (Maevska, 2013, p. 68 (see also Samokhina, 2015)). Carnival postmodern text rethinks and parodies all previous cultural epochs, because postmodernism is thought of as a combination of fact and fiction.

Postmodernism in carnival culture is characterized by openness to synthesis and mobility of individual writing techniques, which gave rise to a variety of textual forms. The main features of postmodernism include: parody, intertextuality, interdiscursiveness, (self-) irony, game techniques, fragmentation and the principle of editing, genre and stylistic syncretism, etc.

Thus, the key characteristic of postmodern literary texts lies in their polycode nature, manifested in a combination of different sign systems or styles of speech, for the understanding of which the addressee simultaneously involves all receptive channels. The main manifestations of polycoding are polystylistics and polysemiotics. The former is considered as the interaction of different literary systems; mixing genres and genre forms; citation and allusions as features of the text that reflect the "citation thinking"; combination of different language styles: figurative, scientific-theoretical, documentary-journalistic. It occurs when one literary text combines styles, figurative motifs, borrowings from the arsenal of different eras, regions, cultures and subcultures. Polystylistics "used by modern postmodern authors are game texts with a large number of genre variations (from riddles to anecdotes), which involve deciphering them by the addressee who enjoys this process (Samokhina & Dmytrenko, 2020, p.102). The latter is caused by the use of other graphic symbols and ideographic elements together with verbal signs. They are mathematical symbols, punctuation marks, Latin inscriptions, Internet addresses, various graphic symbols. Thus, non-verbal means of conveying information in the text are not only illustrations to the verbal part of the text, but also independent symbolic messages that carry their own semantic meaning.

Taking into consideration manifestation of carnivalization at the text level, the language game in all its possible manifestations and variations comes first. Polystylistics may be actualized in such stylistic devices as:

a) intertextuality (parody on a historical fact):

(1) *Then nothing happened until 1497, when King Henry VII of England hired an Italian explorer named John Cabot to try to reach Asia by—those explorers were always trying wacky stunts like this—sailing across the Atlantic. Instead, Cabot—he could easily have avoided this by the simple precaution of looking at a map—wound up in Canada. Here is an actual quotation about this event from the World Book Encyclopedia:*

*Cabot found no such luxuries as jewels or spices. But he saw an enormous amount of cod.*

*Whoo! I bet THAT thrilled old Henry VII, don't YOu? Picture the scene: he's sitting on his throne, all excited because he's been waiting for months and months, and he can hardly wait to see what kinds of jewels he's going to get*

*for his investment, and <u>Cabot hands him a bag of dead cod and says: "And there's plenty more where THAT came from!"</u>* (Barry, 1999, p. 17).

Comic effect arises when Dave Barry adds to the description a so-called actual historical quotation from the *World Book Encyclopedia*, which ridicules real events. After all, according to historical data, Cabot found the richest fishing ground in the world. Thus, the significance of the discovery of the island of Newfoundland, which allowed the British of that time not to go fishing in Iceland, is diminished *("And there's plenty more where THAT came from!")*.

b) sarcasm:

(2) *What prospective buyers said, when they looked at our house, was: <u>"Huh! This is ... interesting."</u> They always said this. They never said: "What a nice house!" Or: "We'll take this house! Here's a suitcase filled with money!!" No, they said our house is interesting. <u>What they meant was: "Who installed this paneling? Vandals?"</u>*

*Sometimes, to cheer us up, they also said: <u>"Well it certainly has a lot of possibilities!"</u> <u>Meaning: "These people have lived here for 10 years and they never put up any curtains"</u>* (Barry, 1989, p. 54).

In the example, comic effect is achieved through the implicit use of sarcasm (*"Huh! This is ... interesting."; "Well it certainly has a lot of possibilities!"*). Dave Barry ridicules such blemish as hypocrisy – *"Who installed this paneling? Vandals?"; "These people have lived here for 10 years and they never put up any curtains"*.

c) irony:

(3) *Renting a car offers many attractive advantages to the traveler: independence, convenience, dependability, and a <u>sudden, massive lowering of the IQ</u>. I know what I'm talking about here. I live in Miami, and every winter we have a <u>huge infestation of rental-car drivers</u>, who come down here seeking warm weather and <u>the opportunity to make sudden left turns without signaling across six lanes of traffic into convenience stores</u> (No, not into the parking lots. Into the stores)* (Barry, 1999, p. 19).

The irony of this example lies in exaggeration – it turns out that the result of car rental is a complete mental degradation of the driver. Dave Barry expresses dissatisfaction in a comment expressed by hyperboles: *a huge infestation of rental-car drivers, the opportunity to make sudden left turns without signaling across six lanes of traffic into convenience stores*. We can conclude that it is better not to go out on the streets of Miami in winter because of the invasion of unconscious tourists.

As for the polysemiotic nature of the postmodern comic literary texts, it is represented by carnival images and symbols, games with spelling and structural-graphic design of the text. For example:

a) combination of verbal and non-verbal elements:



(4)

Figure 1. Image From the Day to Day Calendar (Larson, 2021)

Humor lies in the play on words "a red nose" – an attribute of a clown and "a red-noser". Thus, we observe the violation of logical and conceptual norms, because all clones in the room have red noses.

The following example non-verbally demonstrates the theme of the whole month – drinking (in the upper right corner is a picture of a man pouring a glass of alcohol). In the central picture we see a bartender bird, which is an allusion to the typical gatherings of men in the bar. Humor arises from the violation of ontological norms – while *"checkin' out a decoy"* the bird was a decoy itself. As a result, it sits with a bandaged wing, a leg in plaster and a band-aid on the thigh.

(5)

Figure 2. Image From the Day to Day Calendar (Larson, 1998)

b) game with fronts:

(6) *So as I was saying, the only sane way to lose weight is to get yourself on, and then stick to, a regular, planned, conscientious program of purchasing newly published diet books. Here are some that I especially recommend:*

**_The Handsome Sincere Random Doctor Medical Diet Poop Yourself Thin The Elvis Presley Memorial Diet The Total Tapeworm Diet How to Lose Weight in the Coming Depression Shed Unwanted Ounces the Orson Welles Way The Dead Preppy Cat Microcomputer Diet Book The All-Goat-Products Diet The Frequent Casual Motel Sex Diet The Amazing Mother Theresa Weight Loss Plan_**

*All of these books are very excellent, and there are thousands more that are just as good, many of them offering such proven and time-tested features as consecutively numbered pages* (Barry, 1985).

The game with fonts is represented by the graphon – Dave Barry uses different types of fonts and separates them with indents. The author highlights the most important information in bold. The space between paragraphs is used to visually emphasize a more significant part of the text. Dave Barry deliberately plays with fonts to ridicule the uselessness of books about weight loss. Thus, we see the nonce title, which is difficult to divide into separate books: **_The Handsome Sincere Random Doctor Medical Diet Poop Yourself Thin The Elvis Presley Memorial Diet The Total Tapeworm Diet How to Lose Weight in the Coming Depression Shed Unwanted Ounces the Orson Welles Way The Dead Preppy Cat Microcomputer Diet Book The All-Goat-Products Diet The Frequent Casual Motel Sex Diet The Amazing Mother Theresa Weight Loss Plan_**.

The author also uses the technique of irony, which is realized by comparison (*such proven and time-tested features as consecutively numbered pages*).

According to the examples we can highlight the most inherent features of the polycode postmodern comic literary texts. They are intertextual inclusions, sarcasm, irony, combination of verbal and non-verbal elements and game with fronts. All these elements in the text lead to the violation of logical, conceptual and ontological norms.

## V. CONCLUSION

Postmodern comic literary texts contain carnival energy, which consists in the authors' desire to share their own worldview, ideas, influence the reader, play in a comic puzzle. The author resorts to carnivalization, where the everyday and the festive change places, erasing the invisible line between them. Carnivalization as a separate creative method of postmodern authors, as a textualized form of carnival is based on the idea of overturning the meaning of binary oppositions generated by the author's carnival consciousness. Carnivalization is expressed in the polycode organization of literary texts, i.e. polystylistic and polysemiotic techniques. Carnival as one of the characteristic features of postmodernism is to transfer the signs of parody style to literary texts. Postmodern authors are distinguished by carnival freedom of text creation, a kind of logic.

The analysis has demonstrated that Dave Barry and Gary Larson, as authors of comic postmodern texts, are talented individuals who master postmodern techniques, create a special carnival reality to achieve a comic effect and aesthetic impact on the addressee. The playful tone of the comic postmodern literary text is created through the use of various means – humor, irony, sarcasm, language play, etc. The authors use these tools to entertain the addressee, to draw attention to themselves and their work.

The prospects for further research lie in the study of mechanisms of the comic in postmodern comic literary texts of different genres.

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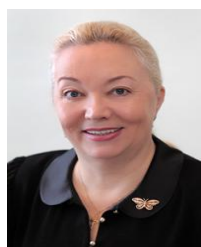
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