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Философия времени в романе В.В. Набокова «Машенька»: опыт лингвистического исследования

Морараш Марина Михайловна

Кандидат филологических наук, ассистент,
кафедра русского языка и прикладной лингвистики,
Казанский федеральный университет,
420008, Российская Федерация, Казань, ул. Кремлевская, 18;
e-mail: moramar@mail.ru

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается категория времени – одна из ключевых категорий, представляющих ценность для выявления особенностей мировоззрения писателя русского Зарубежья Владимира Владимировича Набокова. Анализу подвергаются функционально-синтагматические особенности неглагольной номинации темпоральности. В данной работе принципиально новым в исследовании является не столько характеристика особенностей доминирующих языковых средств, участвующих в организации художественного времени, сколько то, как темпоральная категория участвует в концептуализации действительности, формировании смыслового уровня. Основным итогом изучения категории темпоральности в романе В.В. Набокова «Машенька» является то, что глубокий философско-метафорический контекст эксплицируется в результате исследования особенностей функционирования временных отрезков двух смысловых блоков, отчетливо выделяющихся в повествовании на протяжении всего романа – настоящего и прошлого. Любопытно, что привычная произведениям других писателей конкретизация временной приуроченности события, состояния, действия в языковой картине мира изучаемого писателя также концептуализируется и участвует в целостном воссоздании ситуации пребывания персонажей романа в эмиграции, на чужбине, драматического мироощущения человека и его судьбы в XX веке.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

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Philosophy of time in the novel *Mary* by V. V. Nabokov: linguistic research experience

Marina M. Morarash

PhD in Philology, Assistant,
Department of the Russian language and applied linguistics, Kazan Federal University,
420008, 18 Kremlyovskaya str., Kazan, Russia Federation;
e-mail: moramar@mail.ru

Abstract

The article is dedicated to the category of time that is one of the key categories valuable for detection of peculiarities of Russian émigré writer Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov's view of life. The article analyses the functional and syntagmatic peculiarities of nonverbal nomination of temporality. One of fundamentally new features of the present research is not characterisation of dominating linguistic means peculiarities used in artistic time organisation but the way the temporal category influences reality conceptualisation and semantic level formation. The main result of temporality category investigation in the novel *Mary* by V.V. Nabokov is the fact that the deep philosophical and metaphorical context is explicated as a result of investigation of functioning peculiarities of the time periods of two semantic blocks outstanding in the narration throughout the whole novel — the present and the past. The article shows that exact specification of temporal dependence of an event, state or action, which is inherent to works by other writers, is also conceptualized and involved in integral recreation of situations describing characters in emigration, abroad and man's dramatic world perception and his destiny in the 20th century in the studied writer's linguistic picture of the world.

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Keywords

Vladimir Nabokov, "Mary", category of time, emigration, lexeme, art time, past, present.

Introduction

Vladimir Nabokov, the outstanding Russian literary man, who established himself as a writer outside of Russia, opened the cycle of his novels with the novel *Mary* (1926)¹. *Mary*, as his first novel, attracts attention both of literary scholars and linguists due to the fact that all of them consider it not to be exactly Nabokov-like.

The well-known historical and psychological orientation of the novel caused the necessity to investigate the category of time, valuable for revealing the peculiarities of the Russian émigré writer's world outlook. One of the fundamental statements of our research is the image of Nabokov as a creator of the original world concept where two realities coexist (this refers to dualistic model of the world). The linguistic system of category of time expression means is built in the same way. In the present article functional and syntagmatic peculiarities of nonverbal nomination of time are analysed.

Results. Peculiarities of temporality functioning in the novel *Mary* by V.V. Nabokov

First of all, it is worth mentioning the typology of representative words of nominal temporality. A representative functional and semantic class of words with temporary meaning has been revealed. Statistical data demonstrate that the most frequently used lexical units are those related to calendar and day time. Let us compare them: calendar time amounts to 42.77%, day time – to 23.2%, time expressed in hours – 14.1%, seasons – 8.7%, non-common time – 4.5%, descriptive time – 2.64% [Morarash, 2009]. Predominance of lexical units of calendar and day time is most probably caused by actualization of prevailing temporal aspect of the past in the novel. Thus, calendar time is presented by such lexical units as *day, week, month, year, century, epoch* as well as lexical units denominating days of the week, months. Day time – *morning, day, evening, night*. Turning back to statistical data we should mention that temporal lexical units denominating seasons are not frequently used in the novel, however, they form an important layer of artistic time. Unfortunately, they are not studied separately in this work. We will only point out that the central place among them is occupied by lexical units *summer* and *spring* and their derivatives.

¹ The text by V.V. Nabokov *Mary* is cited from [Nabokov, 1990].

The first novel *Mary* was written by the author in accordance with the artistic principles of realism which explains why the world depicted in it is more realistic and natural than in other novels by V. Nabokov. The means of category of time expression at first sight seem quite usual and do not emphasize the author's individual style. However, in the course of the research we will prove that this impression is false.

Having studied the functioning of all lexical units in the novel we noticed two peculiarities. The first peculiarity is connected to the fact that time periods can be related to the events happening during them, thus, receiving an emotional evaluation (quality, evaluativity, figurality): *the weather that day was heavenly* (69), *during those blissful days* (66), *after that blissful autumn* (95), *today it's so nice and fresh, after a thunderstorm* (96), *the best, the happiest years* (97), etc. We would like to mention that such combinations can be characteristic of temporal aspect of the past. They can also signal man's unity with nature and subjective time perception caused by this subordination. Often time in these epithets is shown as a material substance possessing color: *white Berlin daylight* (41), *the morning was a gentle, smoky white* (54), *the day had a milky chill about it* (56), *the orange-colored evening* (103), etc. Color scheme is mainly not complete: in description of the aspect of the present it is derived of bright, saturated colors (including in characteristics of time periods), in description of the aspect of the past – on the contrary: even time periods have a color (*orange*). Color characteristics of time periods strengthen emotional perception of the depicted world.

Predicative combinations of substantives denominating time periods in the novel demonstrate, in their turn, processual element of the semantics of these words: *It's such a pity that the days go by so pointlessly and stupidly* (97), *then came several glorious, sad days at sea* (103), etc. Names of time periods are combined with verbs of motion and their meanings allow treating natural cycles as something alien to a person (unlike attributive combinations, expressed by epithets, where man lives in time). There are figural concepts of time as a possession that can be lost:

(1) *If I had read it I would have wasted the time when I could have been working* [Nabokov, 1990, 62].

Moreover, there have been found some expressions based on the imaginative associative relations where verbs of a concrete physical activity can be used:

(2) *And now it was terrible to think that his past was lying in someone else's desk* [Nabokov, 1990, 69],

(3) *You write that you would give your whole future life for a moment from the past – but it would be better to meet and verify one's feelings*
[Nabokov, 1990, 97].

In the latter example a dominant model of time is represented by the lexical unit *life* which has a connotative sense of temporal duration. Here man is quite active in relation to life; he is a master of his life and time. On the other hand, we will give an example where time is an individual substance that does not depend on human will and other factors:

(4) He **waited for the moment** when the express from the north slowly rolled across the iron bridge

[Nabokov, 1990, 112],

(5) Ganin felt that neither this **week** nor the next **would change anything** [Nabokov 1990, p. 40].

Thus, attributive and predicative relations of temporal substantives actualize such qualities of time as subjectiveness, dynamics and substantiality, i.e. time is considered as a special, constantly moving substance able to perform certain actions and not depending on human will. We should also mention that objectivity of time as a physical entity yields the position to subjectivity in the process of its linguistic conceptualization.

However, these temporal periods do not always receive qualitative characteristics, or to be more exact, they are more frequently used without attributes and do not constitute metaphors and perform the function of adverbial specifiers of temporal orientation: **That evening** Anton Sergeevich had a visitor (61), he raved for **the whole week** (69), **from that day** began the new, snowbound era of their love (83), etc. The action in the novel proceeds for seven days: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Time characteristics – the course of one day – is built by V. Nabokov in such a way that the reader knows it in detail, whereas the author shows it with the use of direct and not mediate indicators of time, such as *at about half past two* (37), *in the middle of the night* (50), *toward evening* (59), *the next morning* (69), *toward evening* (87), *around five o'clock* (92), *in twelve hours' time* (98), etc. Here it is worth mentioning that reading the novel for the first time one may have an impression of multiplicity of temporal lexical units which «spark» on the background of narration, i.e. do not capture all reader's attention but form a truly fundamental layer.

Thus, exact specification of temporal dependence of an event, state or action is used in the novel. This peculiarity may be explained by the idea of continuous time motion. On the other hand, our research shows that these indicators of time signal not only dynamic course of life but also underline inalterability and statics of the characters' way of life.

Atemporal model of present reality can be limited by several factors: firstly, by temporal restrictions of events – *spring, April*; secondly, by absence of any significant/insignificant events in characters' life; thirdly, by absence of purpose that could justify their life. Monotony of life, emotions (boredom, tiredness) and lack of involvement of the characters in life in general presupposes static temporal context. This is proved by two metaphoric episodes of the novel. The first episode is connected to the image of a stuck lift (action starts with it). If the movement of the lift is considered as a dynamic basis of time that is equal to flow of life like in the novel *The Defence* (1929) the above mentioned episode with the lift in the novel *Mary* eventually proves our idea and signals the characters' stuck life and time. The second episode is related to specification of time of the novel. In the second chapter the time when events take place, April, is mentioned indirectly:

(6) *Turning up the collar of his old mackintosh, [...], and thrusting his fists hard into its pockets, he strolled slowly **along the pale April streets**, where the black domes of umbrellas bobbed and swam*

[Nabokov, 1990, 47].

However, before actual indication of the month when action takes place, i.e. at the beginning of the second chapter in description of the pension, the reader has already come across the name of this month but in another aspect: its «name» is used in denomination of the visitors' rooms:

(7) *Along each side were three rooms, numbered with large black figures stuck onto the doors. These were simply **leaves torn off a year-old calendar—the first six days of April**. April 1—the first door on the left—was Alfyorov's room, the next was Ganin's, while the third belonged to the landlady, [...]*

[Nabokov, 1990, 38].

At first, the reader does not connect this description with the real time in the novel but later it creates a bright effect of time pause and reveals its sad meaning. In general, the passage of present time coincides with the natural cycle, "annual" and "daily" cycle of the sun; the same actions are repeated day by day (this also concerns feelings). It is not by chance that temporal lexical units connected to cyclic model predominate: every morning (***Every morning** bent in half like a rag doll, she would hurriedly sweep the dust from under the furniture (39)*), and today (*on Monday morning he sat for a long time naked, [...], appalled by the thought that **today** was another day and that he would have to put on shirt, trousers, socks—all those wretched things impregnated with sweat and dust, – [...], (40)*), etc. Repetition of lexico-grammatical forms creates an impression of inevitability, universality and reiteration of the circle of life. It is interesting that even such a static, isolated image of the present is a special case of a large-scale, dynamic human life.

Taking into account all the above mentioned we get an impression that time being an independent entity moves and man tries to catch up with it, but the lack of events makes time comparatively static or rotating around man, i.e. it develops but is limited by the life of a certain person. Actual physical time goes on, which can be prompted by multiple time indicators in the novel. Man loses the awareness of time and passage of life in the following quotation:

(8) *He was so absorbed with his memories that he **was unaware of time***

[Nabokov, 1990, 73].

Thus, in the novel Mary linear time is conceptualized as movement, as life, as a substance and reflects univocal correspondence between man and time, micro- and macrocosm. Time transforms into one global metaphor of Nabokov's model of time. In this model time is directed, irreversible:

(9) *And at the present moment Ganin felt not only shame but also a sense of **the fleeting evanescence of human life***

[Nabokov, 1990, 50].

The brightest reflection of the idea of transience of life and time can be found in the following quotations: ***his whole life** had been stupid and **fruitless**, and that he didn't know why he had lived,*

or why he was dying (109), she remembered that the old man had gone again today to see about his passport, that he suffered badly from heart trouble, that **life was passing**: on Friday she would be twenty-six (61); I put everything into my poetry that I should have put into my life, and **now it's too late for me to start all over again** (64), etc. In these quotations, where the characters of the novel feel clearly expressed existential vacuum, the image of time represents quite a dangerous power that can control human life.

In the context of the concept of inexorable passage of time and the lack of the characters' sense of life the writer considers problems of human life from philosophical point of view. Fleeting time not filled with events and purposes of life directs life along the way of routine, vulgar and immoral existence (the role of the portraits of characters that reveals either their spiritual emptiness or falseness, artificiality of their way of life) [Morarash, 2014, 5–13]. The semantic potential of dynamic concept of life, which should determine human life, is actualized in the novel *Mary*. Temporal model of the world is built by consequent actualization of the way of life in Frau Dorn's pension and the image of the past; then it is projected to the concept of human personality/mechanical environment. This profound philosophical and metaphorical aspect is revealed after investigation of functioning peculiarities of temporal periods of two conceptual blocks, standing out throughout the whole novel, – the present and the past. This analysis explains significant categorical oppositions in the structure of the whole novel: reality/unreality, existence/non-existence, life/death, animate/inanimate, etc.

Ganin, existing together with other emigrants in the pension, tries to fight the deadly force of time by shifting to the past. The meaning of past events, even the insignificant ones, is individualized and receives a clearly expressed evaluative component. Lexical units identical according to emotions and feelings with the sign + are used in the description of the past:

(10) **Life went on its dear, familiar summertime way**

[Nabokov, 1990, 75], etc.

Outer life is filled with events that bring positive emotions to the character, and consequently, these events can be characterized as dynamic. The greatest number of metaphors and epithets containing periods of time is used in description of the past: *in the deserted sunny evening* (68), *the lovely and wild Crimean spring was already blossoming* (102), *that night, in the strange stealthily deepening darkness* (85), *the night was now waning, the day dragged sluggishly by, peeped the starry night*, etc. The past is rich in characteristics; the world is more vivid, imaginative and reflects the memory of the exile's blissful life. Recreating the world of the past Ganin transforms time: he fills the memories with events, materializes and reifies them, reliving his memory as reality – **«he did not feel any discrepancy between actual time and that other time in which he relived the past, since his memory did not take account of every moment and skipped over the blank unmemorable stretches, only illuminating those connected with Mary. Thus no discrepancy existed between the course of life past and life present»**. The past is tightly connected to the present: the character is derived of his Motherland the memory of which penetrates all his life abroad in such

a way that he seems to be in two dimensions at the same time: in his memory and in the present. Quite often sudden shifts from the past to the present are not marked or justified (wandering around Berlin "*he recuperated all over again, felt what it was like to get out of bed for the first time, felt the weakness in his legs*" – this concerns the character's recovery after illness at the age of 16 in the Russian estate). We can guess about the past by some linguistic features: it is not only rich metaphorization that was mentioned above but also special syntax. Unfortunately, in the framework of the present research we are limited only to stating this fact. We will only point out that the syntax of the narration concerning present aspect is more formal and simple, the biggest number of parts is 3, while the syntax of the narration concerning the aspect of the past is more complex and can contain from 4 to 10 parts; a noticeable poetic rhythm is used. Nabokov's real "mystery" is lyrical nature of his novel that shows his poetic side. A poet is someone who is able to feel and express his feelings by means different to direct indications in the text. Ganin's thoughts transform significantly becoming light, harmonious, metaphorically rich, while to describe the present mechanical language is used, i.e. bonds of the outer world "holding his soul" do not let him speak out. The past can also be distinguished from the present by demonstrative pronouns combined with indicators of time (but not obligatory) used by V. Nabokov (this and that correspondingly): while shifting to the past (*during those blissful days after the typhus (66), on that black stormy night (82), he remembered the whole of that Crimean winter (94), after that blissful autumn (95), the usual obstacles of those days (97), etc.*); while shifting to the present (*wandering around Berlin on that Tuesday in spring (58), that Thursday (78), etc.*). Compare:

(11) *And that chance exhalation helped Ganin to remember more vividly yet the rainy Russian late August, the torrent of happiness*

[Nabokov, 1990, 81];

(12) *Whatever Ganin did at present, that other life comforted him unceasingly*

[Nabokov, 1990, 77], etc.

Moreover, in the past there is always one characteristic detail which is absent or not prominent in the description of the present but which is used as a basis for associative array of perception, – this is the lexical unit sun and its derivatives (*in a pool of sun, the sunny charm of that room, in the bright labyrinth of memory, spreads of sunlight, the evening sun, in the deserted sunny evening, sun flashed, on a sunny evening, dark gold of the sunset, how radiantly one loved, Goodness, where has it gone, all that distant, bright, endearing, etc.*). Summer sun is an important feature of the past life creating a real, lively world, existence of man.

Conclusion. Meaning of the category of time

The category of time as a basic principle of semantic space construction completely recreates the situation of characters living in exile, abroad, dramatic emigrant world perception of man and his destiny in the XX century. As human life really exists in time, we started our research with the

investigation of the category of time. Time becomes a tool that helps to explicate the spiritual side of human life.

Researcher N.D. Arutyunova presumes that "linguistic models of time can be divided into the ones where the main object is man and the ones concentrated on time itself" [Arutyunova, 1999, 689]. In the first case it refers to the time conceptualized by man and having anthropological nature. In the second case — to linear model of time. Both images of time can be found in the novel by V. Nabokov. In the life created by the author man is passive, he does not change the conditions of his living, does not build his present and future that is why life itself starts influencing him. According to N.D. Arutyunova, juxtaposition of time model and life is quite natural because "life goes on in time and obeys its laws" [Arutyunova, 1999, 689].

In the process of study of category of time in V. Nabokov's narration, we can see a model of time representing a complex structure characterized by two active temporal aspects (the past and the present), which signals the significance of the concept expressed by for the writer. In the limits of one and the same work there can be found and mixed several functional variants of the language.

Contrary to the widespread opinion that time in the novels by Nabokov is only non-linear, patterned, etc., we do not deny Nabokov's vision of time as a direct line heading forward. Such two-dimensional character of the category of time functioning determines the peculiarities of composition of the novel and the writer's view of life.

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