

## SUMMARIES

### THE NATURE AND FUNCTIONALIZATION OF THE LANGUAGE OF LITERATURE UNDER DIGLOSSIA

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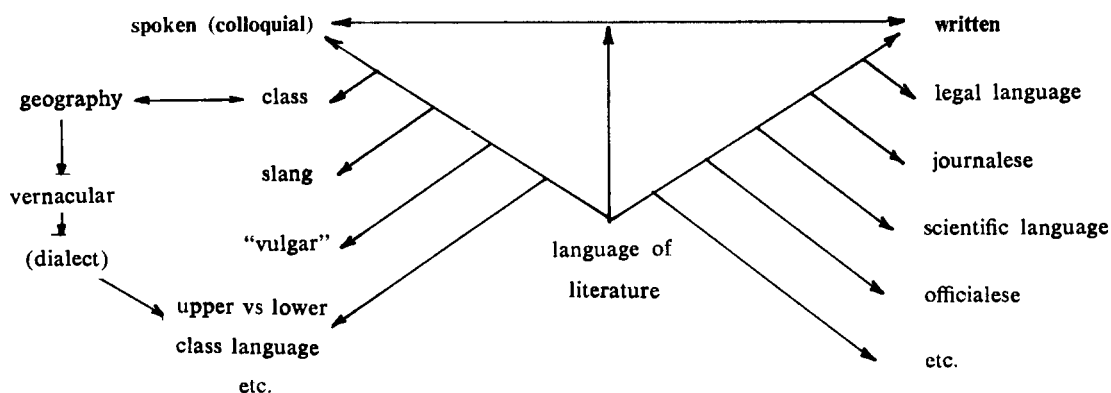
This article attempts to examine some assumptions made concerning the nature of the language of literature by analysing one case of the functionalization of this language. The "language of literature" (or "poetic language")<sup>1</sup> has at least two different meanings: a. the concrete structure, vocabulary, etc. of the specific language used in literary works during a certain period; b. the distinctive way the language used in literature functions and conveys meaning as supposedly opposed to the way language is used in other kinds of discourse. In the latter case, the language of literature is supposed to possess some characteristics peculiar to itself, but realized by various linguistic means in any given language. According to Russian Formalism and Czech structuralism the main feature of the language of literature is *the tension between automatized language of ordinary communication and its deautomatization*.

In modern terms, taking into consideration both structuralistic linguistics, socio-linguistics and politico-linguistics, language is *not* a one-level system (with orthography, phonology, morphology, vocabulary syntax etc., as the traditionally accepted levels), but a manifold system, or — to use another term — a *polysystem*, where all systems of which it consists partly overlap and hence are never totally independent of each other. Such systems

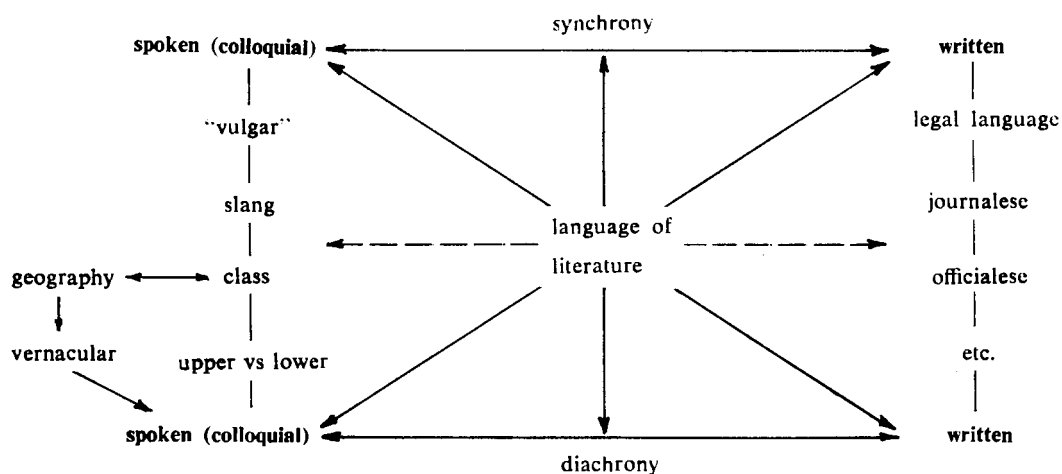
i It is rather necessary to point out the insufficiency and inadequacy of English terminology. The view of language as polysystem has not yet influenced the scientific vocabulary of English, nor have modern poetics and the new dynamic theories of literature changed the traditional vocabulary of "literary criticism" in its most awkward shape. There is no adequate terms to denote *the language of literature* since the term "the language of literature" itself may refer to any kind of literature, even non-fictional, while the conventional use of *poetic language* tends too much to eliminate, be it only implicitly, the language of prose and drama. The English "*language of literature*" is then an inadequate equivalent of the Russian term "*xodožestvennyj jazyk*" or the Swedish "*Skönlitterära språket*".

and subsystems are very often metaphorically called "language", e.g.: *written* vs. *colloquial* language, "legal language", "language of journalism" (journalese) and the like.<sup>2</sup> In our terms, the main *systems* of a language as a polysystem are *the written* vs. *the spoken (colloquial) standards*, each divided into many subsystems, such as official "language" (officialese) or "dialect". Each of these systems (and their multifarious subsystems) usually tend to be or become highly conventionalized, thus rendering ordinary communicational praxis maximally efficient. On the other hand, the language used in literary fiction is always, though in different degrees depending on period, "usurpatory" in the sense that it cuts across all systems, thus exploiting to the utmost the different resources of a given language. This phenomenon may be described on the synchronic level by the following diagram :

<sup>2</sup> The English terminological distinction between *written* and *spoken (colloquial)* language is also inadequate from the terminological point of view, particularly when compared with the Russian terms *literaturnyj* vs. *rozgovornyj jazyk* with its many subdivisions, or with the German distinction between *Schriftsprache* and *Umgangssprache*, or that in Swedish *Skriftspråk* and *Talspråk* etc. No scientific discipline can make progress without constantly modifying and adjusting its terminology, and there is nothing more irritating than an ossified terminology that nobody dare touch because of time honoured linguistic traditions, so dominant in English research. This is the reason why we are all forced to content ourselves with indirect renderings of our conceptions, and to use for example, "literary study", "literary criticism" even "theory of literature" when we really mean "the science of literature" — *literaturovedeniye*, *Literaturwissenschaft*, *Literaturvetenskap*, or *maddá ha-sifrut*. If English is to serve as the adhoc lingua franca for international intellectual communication, it cannot go on for long clinging desperately to inadequate terminologies while other languages have already developed better ones.



If we take in consideration the polychrome interrelations, too, the same may be described by the following diagram:



If we now proceed to examine, in the light of this hypothesis, the problems of functionalization of the language of literature, it is obvious that the latter is to a large extent dependent on the nature of the polysystem in any given language, i.e. on its resources, its mode of existence and the inner interrelations between the systems. The nature of the polysystem, or *l'état de langue* (as Flydal [39]\* puts it,) plays a crucial role in determining the character and functions of any given language of literature, and is consequently an integral constituent of any theory of poetics.

One of the central, though until recently most ignored, factors of *l'état de langue* is the case of *diglossia*. An investigation of the language of literature under diglossia may bring to light some data about its functionalization which a unilingual situation does not provide. Since there are many types of diglossia, this article — while mentioning the main cases — concentrates on the case of a dead

classical language used as the only (or main) literary language of a certain community. The most difficult case, and the most interesting one from the point of view of an Israeli researcher, seems to be the case of *Hebrew*. Hebrew, at least in Eastern and Central Europe, was a classical dead language with no related variant in the community which used it (this has not been the case with Chinese and Arabic). Jews used there mostly Yiddish, a Germanic language, and gradually Russian, Polish, Ukrainian or German for either everyday communication or written communication or both.

It is generally assumed that about 200 A.D. Hebrew ceased to be employed as spoken language by the majority of Jews, but it continued nevertheless to serve as the main, or exclusive, cultural *lingua franca* in all Jewish communities. It served for many centuries as the language of flourishing literature, and finally underwent an amazing secular renaissance (after a period of stagnation) about 1760. It entered upon a new era about 1880, when it gradually established itself as the spoken language of Jewish new immigrants of Palestine, was later recognized as an official

\* This number refers to the bibliography at the end of the full Hebrew version of the article, pp. 300-302.

language by the British authorities in Palestine (1921), and became the official language of Israel in 1948, when 88 % of the population of the new state declared that it was their main or only language. The article, after a brief survey of the diglossia situation of the Jews in the Middle Ages and later, goes to concentrate on the diglossia situation in the 19th century (and the early 20th). The question posed is the following: how could literature be created in a language whose polysystem was defective. In other words, how did Hebrew writers manage to functionalize a language as a language of literature when it lacked not only necessary lexical items, but also (and mainly) the contrastive reactions of the polysystem, which form for "the person in the culture" (Voegelin [78] p. 61) the semantic and stylistic poles within a given language?

The article, based upon some preliminary field work, draws the conclusion that the functionalization of the language of literature in Hebrew was rendered feasible by a series or set of compensations, which fall into four main categories:

1. Direct use of the other languages under diglossia, whether Russian, Yiddish or Aramaic (also a classical language used concurrently with Hebrew). This principle of compensation appears to be rather rare;

2. Caïque to the other languages under diglossia: this compensating principle appears to be widely prevalent, particularly in dialogue;

3. Synchronization of the diachronic phases of Hebrew. This manner of compensation appears to be quite often used, since the wealth of the diachronic layers of Hebrew opened before writers a variety of synchronizing possibilities. Although an artificial substitution of this sort could not be so clear-cut as the poles of the polysystem in living languages, it has nevertheless crystalized into some main conventions;

4. Use of the collocations of ancient literary corpus (Biblical and post-Biblical literature, as the *Mishna*, the *Midrashim*, etc.). A byproduct of this very dominant technique was the semantic density and ambiguity of the text. Thus, this compensational principle served both to replace polysystemic variation and contrast and to give rise to the multiplicity of meaning often resulting in a literary work from the conscious manipulation of the polysystem.

Although the exact qualitative and quantitative relations between the four ways of compensation cannot be determined until a far more extensive field-work is carried out, it is, however, possible to make some statements which may serve as theoretical hypotheses: (1) There is never a single principle of compensation in a given text, but a combination of all four or some of them; (2) In some texts evidently only some principles out of the four dominate; (3) There are apparently differences in point of the dominance of compensational devices not only between different texts, but also between different writers, as well as between literary trends and periods; (4) Both

the quality and the quantity of the compensational principles vary in different sections of the text. There will be differences in this respect within the same novel between a passage of description and a dialogue scene.

The compensational techniques are not necessarily to be taken as poor substitutes for a perfect polysystem. Although the use of a dead language seems to-day, to most nations, to be an obstacle, this has not always been the case. In many societies, in the past or nowadays, writing in vernacular was not regarded as desirable, but rather as the mark of the uncultured man. The use of a prestigious dead language was considered not only desirable, but completely natural, the user being able to perform such transpositions and transformations as *led him back from* the quasisystem to the actual one; but since the other living language(s) used was (were) often defective too, the various languages complemented one another as if they were belonging to the same language.<sup>3</sup> As far as the writing of fiction and poetry in Hebrew are concerned, this practice involved not only difficulties but also some advantages: the writer could exploit the potentialities of what was by definition essentially "estranged" and de-automatized, or at least significantly untouched by daily communicational wear and tear. This explains to a certain extent why some prominent contemporary Hebrew writers,<sup>4</sup> who started writing under diglossia conditions, refuse to relinquish, even many years after the language has become a full-fledged living polysystem, the conventions of diglossia writing, thus refusing to recognize as it were the modern language. As they just would not lose or give up *the artistic advantages diglossia once involved*, they refuse to submit to the new realities which dictated a real polysystem preferring to keep manufacturing their own quasi-polysystems.

Thus, the examination of Hebrew literary language in its diglossia period throws light not only on the nature of Hebrew language of literature itself, but also on that of the language of literature in general. It clearly shows that in spite of a defective polysystem, it is possible to create a successful quasi-polysystem, which will function effectively in literature. The language of literature thus appears to be a peculiar kind of conditioned linguistic system, *functionalizable under most different circumstances*. The indispensable need for tension between automatized communicational language and its de-automatization is once again demonstrated to be a *sine qua non* for the functioning of the language of literature. But

3 The components of the polysystem constantly undergo changes, determined mainly by socio-linguistic and politico-linguistic causes. Thus, for instance, considered a dialect under Tzaristic times, Belorussian is now regarded as a language. It is therefore not exceptional that two subsystems (or systems) should become two distinct languages, and vice versa.

<sup>4</sup> As, for example, Nobel-prize winner S. J. Agnon.

the material means by which this end is achieved can apparently exist or be created under extremely different, sometimes even diametrically opposed conditions. The study of the language of literature requires a thorough investigation of the correlations between the linguistic polysystem and the linguo-literary functions. All the main hypotheses of Structuralistic poetics such as, among

others, the *manipulation of language*, *automatization* — *de-automatization*, *semantic density*, *the poetic function*, *making strange*, should be re-examined and reformulated in the light of these investigations. This article aims to be a single (if not the first) step towards this end, namely, a minimal theoretical basis for further research work.