

On the dual nature of the aphorism (a linguistic approach)

The present study investigates the dual textual status of the aphorism. The basic purpose of this presentation is to verify the hypothesis that the aphorism is a text of dual nature.

The aphorism as a literary and linguistic phenomenon constitutes an interesting subject of an in-depth and multi-faceted linguistic analysis. In academic literature the aphorism is defined as a concise statement expressing a general truth, a psychological, philosophical or moral reflection which is distinguished by stylistic expressiveness and brilliance. It may function as an autonomous work or as a part of a larger work or statement. The analysis of the research material is aimed at receiving an answer to the following question: can the aphorism be regarded as a text of dual nature? The theoretical discussion will be illustrated by the material drawn from Russian and Polish sources.

In present-day aphoristic collections textual material is classified by category or by author. Autonomous aphorisms or thoughts abstracted from larger narratives are included in studies. According to J. Glensk, the principle of excluding thoughts derived from the works of authors who never dealt with this genre from aphoristic collections is erroneous. This stance results from recognizing the fact emphasized by many literary scholars that the aphorism may function within a larger work, for instance, as a recapitulating punch line. Taking into consideration the way of functioning of the aphorism in a text, N. Fiedorienko, L. Sokolskaja distinguish the so-called isolated aphorism and an interjected aphorism respectively. This attitude is shared by linguists as well. G. Zolotova perceives short, compressed forms such as an aphorism or proverb as the so-called generic component, whereas K. Mosiolek-Klosinska describes this phenomenon as "a text in a text". The aphorism as an autonomous text has existed since Hippocrates' times. Modern aphorisms are marked by a slightly different character. Many authors who successfully dealt with this genre as an autonomous form have a place in the pantheon of the world aphoristic art (S.J. Lec, G. Laub and many others). In collections containing autonomous aphorisms many examples of aphorisms concerning aphorisms themselves can be found. They constitute their authors' reflection on the generic nature of the aphorism and the essence of an aphoristic art where brevity and universality are predominant features. Vivid metaphors point to the affinity of the aphorisms with a larger work. The autonomy of the aphorism is evidenced by examples coming from modern Polish aphoristic collections.

The functioning of the aphorism in a text is presented on the basis of the material selected from Russian fiction in Polish translation. The discussion of the aphorism as a part of a context focuses on the problem of distinguishing a part of a certain entity. Fiction provides many examples of generalizing aphoristic reflections, functioning in a text as quotations. The selected examples illustrate the most important ways of introducing the aphorism into other texts. The devices which allow the incorporation of the aphorism into the structure of another text include an indirect quotation of an aphorism (with a note about its author), adducing its author or source or a particular communicational situation and the casual weaving of aphorisms in the structure of a text by means of suitable syntactic procedures. A borrowed aphorism (quoted in inverted commas) is introduced into a text after a colon or an ellipsis. Another indication of a reference to an aphorism are the following expressions: as they say, as somebody says/used to say etc. Within a larger work, aphorisms which do not reveal any affinity with other works are merged into the structure of a subordinate clause. The claim about the dual nature of the aphorism is undeniably validated by the collected research material. Therefore, the aphorism can be considered a text of dual nature.