

*Semantic Perspective of Semiotics of Silence
in Poetry of Modern Ukrainian Authors
(the End of 20th – Beginning of the 21st Centuries)*

Ukrainian disengagement from the colonial influences in 1991 was a principal incitement for the changes in the cultural sphere. Retreat from the mono-semantic social-realistic modes in writing became the basic thesis for the young literary generation including Yuriy Andrukhovych, Ivan Andrusiak, Sergiy Zhadan, Viktor Neborak, Stepan Protsyuk, Oleksandr Irvanets, Volodymyr Tsybulko, etc. They started to re-think critically the traditional order of things and total irony, deconstruction of stereotypes, word games, parody, carnival, and distancing from a direct dialogue with the reader become main features of these writing practices (Gundorova 1995).

Decentralisation and vanguard aggression against the previous cultural tradition posed a question about non-verbal categories in literature as an aim for modern literary critique in the Ukrainian cultural space. A lively discussion was commenced by the scandalous speech by Volodymyr Tsybulko, a leader of the new generation (born in 1965, published poetical books from 1988), at the Ukrainian writers' congress in Kiev, 1991: he accused the old literary generation of continuing an antiquated writing tradition, refused to speak with "old words which became empty" (Tsybulko 2000: 63–79) and proclaimed NOVOLITERYSM as a search for a modern form of new art expression in the independent Ukraine (ib.).

In the reviews of literary critics and press, he is marked as a "charismatic person in the environment of Kiev pop-bohemia" (Tarnavskyj 2001: 4), and as an "art politician, and who doesn't care, and is a cynic, and at the same time holds a flower in his arms" (Ryabchuk 1997: 15), and as a "dreamy poet" (Zhezhera 2003: 24). He lives in Kyiv and Lviv, is president of the art association "New

Literature” and author of numerous poetical books, such as *Піраміда* (Pyramid, 1992), *Ангели і тексти* (Angels and Texts, 1996), *Ангели в піраміді* (Angels in Pyramid, 1996), *Майн Кайф* (Mayn kef, 2000), *Видране. Вигране. Вирване. Випране* (Torn-out. Chosen. Plucked-up. Washed, 2003), *Книга застережень* (Book of Warnings, 2003), etc.

It has been proposed to use semiotic, hermeneutic and psycho-semantic methods with methodological bases of other scientific disciplines (together with an interdisciplinary approach, deeply connected with transitional studies in the sphere of culture and literature) for reading such poetical texts. Furthermore, the interpretation of the silence phenomenon in the intellectual traditions to which semiotics (Barthes 1989, Krejdlin 2004, Eco 1998, Jakobson 1996, Lotman 1998, Poyatos 1992, Virolainen 2003), cultural studies (Bogdanov 1997, Peters 2004), hermeneutics (Gadamer 1991, Heidegger 1993, Ricoeur 2002), psycho-semantics (Leontjev 1999, Luriya 1979, Spivak 1986, Zhinkin 1982) belong, allows us to read texts written by V. Tsybulko, I. Andrusyak, A. Bondar quite differently, providing them with a concrete sense, a concrete purpose and to see that the writers’ addressing the non-verbal categories is not accidental. It addresses the Ukrainian literary evolution, proposing silence as a serious alternative to a dialogue with the reader.

The necessity of change for a traditional communicative process is reflected in the declaration of a Ukrainian critic and poet regarding the emaciation of the modern verbal form: “We want to live in the world without connotations, where a great number of ideologies are hidden. Words, which were greened with senses and meanings, nowadays became yellow and peeled off” (Moskalets 1999: 11). It has been developed in the article “Minute of Silence” by his Belorussian colleague A. Hadanovich, underlining that impossibility to say something atypical by means of customary words forced the authors to be in the steady search of the new form of art expression (Hadanovich 2002: 18). Since writers mentioned that “слова за себе вже не говорять/ за них контекст говорить більше, ніж самі слова” (“words do not speak by themselves/ context says more than the words”) (Tsybulko 2003), “в їдкій повітрі слів відлунює вода” (“the noise of water is in the poisoned

air of words”) (Andrusyak 1996), it is an obvious requirement for the Ukrainian literature to appeal to the non-verbal sphere – to silence.

It has been claimed that silence is a kind of speaking: it should be heard and commented upon. This claim becomes significant for the new generation: utilizing fabulist allegories and experimenting with language polysemy, writers do not articulate all they mean. Moreover, the language deconstruction becomes the most spread principle for silence transmission in the literary text. Since “the colonial language is not able to supple the postcolonial art” (Hadanovich 2002: 17), dynamic linguistic experimenting is converted into a significant one for V. Tsybulko and his colleagues; that is why a semiotical sign of silence can be interpreted as the pathology of consciousness in the poetical books *Ангели і тексти* (Angels and Texts, 1996) and *Видране. Вигране. Вирване. Випране* (Torn-out. Chosen. Plucked-up. Washed, 2003), written by Volodymyr Tsybulko; as a painful numbness in *Отруєння голосом* (Poisoning Voice 1996) by Ivan Andrusyak; and as a wordless Otherness in *Примітивні форми власності* (Primitive Forms of Property, 2003) by Andriy Bondar.

Bogdanov in his monograph *Очерки по антропологии молчания. Ното Тасеня* (Essays on the Anthropology of Silence. Homo Tacens, 1997) analyses various forms of silence from the sociological (as inability to speak, aphasia), artistic (pauses and fragmentariness of text), philosophical-religious (experience of isikhazm and Buddhism) aspects and marks that silence is a text which testifies unuttered knowledge) (Bogdanov 1997). Moreover, as notices Poyatos, “...the ultimate goal of non-verbal semiotics (whether it will be the analysis of processes of code of human or animal communication, description of verbal representation of nonverbal signs in separate message, whether explanation of communicative aspects of the punctuation system is in printing artistic texts) always is a culture, and these aspects only help to understand it different displays” (Poyatos 1992: 232).

Impossibility to say today something new by a word forces authors to search for other artistic forms of expression: for the poet, “...важко говорити простими словами про непрості речі”/ it is difficult to talk in simple terms about not simple things; “яка ця

лекстика втомлена” (how this vocabulary is tired) (Tsybulko 1996); that is why there is one way – to submerge in silence. The need for changes in the steady communicative system is highlighted by A. Bondar, writing about the inability to use metaphors in poetry: “я більше не можу собі дозволити писати метафорами/ загравати з традицією і писати про равликів” (I can no longer afford to write metaphors/ flirt with tradition and write about snails) (Bondar 2003). Consequently, metaphor as a categorization of linguistic reality turns into a continued threat on the part of totalitarianism and this perception of metaphorical phrases indicates the loss of “existential content of speech” (Kobylin 2002). Andrusyak in his *Отруєння голосом* (Poisoning by voice, 1996) forms the image of the damaged parts of articulation, whose interaction makes the process of speaking difficult and painful (“пересохла горло/ throat which became dry”; “побілілий шматок язика/ pale piece of tongue”, “губи вусатих ям/ lips of moustached pits”, “задуха в легенях маленької хати/ breathlessness in lung of small house”, “крига слів розкололась/ ice of words is split”, “хтось тихо виплюне – люблю/ someone will spit out quietly – love you”) (Andrusyak 1996).

Verbal description of voice-word-silence relationships underlines the role of silence as a special code which is correlated with a message – it is silence on a background expectation of new word. The description of results of colonial influences on people’s mind in poetry in the case of these Ukrainian authors is carried out in the technique of “theater of the absurd” (*The bold soprano* by Ionesco, *Waiting for Godot* by Becket) which includes collage, reflection of stream of consciousness, collision of oppositions; the language of surrounding space as main character of their texts are destroyed and emphasizes in this case the problem of human incommunicability; there is outstanding attention to the analysis of destructive influences of totalitarianism on the human consciousness, what appears in the loss of personality and also the predetermined absurdity of human existence; deep philosophical problems are being resolved in farce forms (See: Klyuev 2002; Narchynska 2005).

Yakobson defined silence in terms of psycholinguistics as a sign of illnesses in tongue-articulatory vehicle: division of words into

pieces, breaking their logical structure and literal perception of metaphorical values make a cause for aphasia and the disintegration of the communicative structures (Yakobson 1996: 30–38). Representation of the absurd model of utterance (Narchynska 2005; Narchynska 2007) in poems by Tsybulko, Andrusyak and Bondar, according to scheme of consciousness proposed by Spivak (Spivak 1986: 85), allows us to talk about the presence of two types of Consciousness in the poetry of these authors: Pathological (Changed) Consciousness and Normal. Therefore, Pathological (Changed) type of poetical narrative in the texts of these authors should be perceived as a mark of the Ukrainian space, infected with aphasia – it is just a stream of consciousness of the nation, infected with the inability to speak (Narchynska 2007) and with the damaged state of the individual consciousness, called in poetry “місце, де сто – це в перуці чергу грам/ a place where 100 means at first 100 grams of alcohol” (Tsybulko 1996), “при родах вмерла покритка поезія/ poetry, who, born a bastard, died during childbirth” (Andrusyak 1996).

Consequently, if absurd language in the texts of Tsybulko, Andrusyak and Bondar is a language of described Ukrainian space, silence becomes a key for the creation of expression for writers: showing a subject, narrator keeps silent and addresses the attempt of giving voice to his motherland – as a method of overcoming the inability to speak, according to Gadamer’s statement that “it is possible to treat inability to the talk with nothing other, as with an other talk” (Gadamer 1991: 89–90). We can see that the author fulfils the function of a doctor: he silently watches the process of overcoming the inability to speak and only for anmoment parts the curtains, to comment on the grave condition of the patient.

The appeal to silence should be perceived as an attempt to create a new type of reader for Ukrainian modern literature. As a fact, the Soviet government proclaimed a project called “mass literature” for increasing the literacy level among blue-collar workers, but really requirements “to write with the right words about right things” was aimed at realizing the concealed policy of transforming the readers of mass literature into “an obedient slave-executor” unsuitable for independent thinking (Yavorska 2001: 11). Moreover, the monograph *Speaking into the Air* by John D. Peters, a modern American

historian, explains the structural role of the author's silence in communication with the reader. Peters underlines that silence as an idea ignores direct dialogue and is based on "ironic playing with word semantic"; it produces the necessary space for the intellectual reader's search: the sense of considered communication consists in ambition to make a perceiver self-made active (Peters 2004).

In this case, silence of modern Ukrainian authors grows into an author's special strategy, while it is possible to perceive "alogical" writing in poetry as no author's voice. That is why, distancing themselves from the colonial tendency to simplify and veracity in art, writers of independent Ukraine select *image and sign of silence* as a rebellion against mass literature through dodging direct answers, playing with allusions, and creating ironic context (See Narchynska 2007). As a result, instead of the passive listener, a generation of Ukrainian authors in the 1990s proclaims the orientation to a new type of the reader, an active participant in conversation with the author and his text.

For instance, paralinguistic semiotics allows us to read the poetry of Andrusyak, Bondar, Tsybulko in oppositions of voice and silence. Their search of new communicative forms, which would draw a borderline between the author and the parodied Ukrainian canon, emphasizes aphasia as an illness of the communicative apparatus of Ukraine through the violation of logical semantic-syntactic connections in a poetic text, and presents *silence as a image* of pathological consciousness, which determines the diagnosis of time of the Soviet times.

Therefore, a critical attitude to the claims about silence as a new form of art expression in poetry of some authors in independent Ukraine should be considered quite seriously: there are significant historical and cultural reasons for its existence. Firstly, the obvious requirement for Ukrainian literature to appeal to the non-verbal sphere was caused by the state's disengagement from the colonial influences and renouncement of the social-realistic modes in writing of the youth literary generation in the 1990s (Yurij Andruhovych, Ivan Andrusyak, Andriy Bondar, Olexander Irvanets, Viktor Neborak, Volodymyr Tsybulko, etc). Secondly, the proposal of silence for independent Ukrainian literature represents a type of

modern art expression coinciding with European literary experience. Thirdly, silence as a kind of literary speaking is a special art strategy addressing Ukrainian literary evolution: it has been proposed as a serious alternative communicative form between the author, the text, and the reader, and aimed at intellectually developing the audience.

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