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## **Semantic and Pragmatic Presuppositions in Postmodern Text**

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### **Abstract**

The article suggests the analysis of literary texts based on the linguistic theory of presuppositions, which is considered to be one of the possible promising approaches to interpreting implicit levels of literary text. The use of this approach is expected to be effective at various communication levels: character-character, narrator-reader, author-reader. The authors use the method of discourse analysis to study the different types of presuppositions and their functioning not only within isolated abstract expressions, but as a part of a broad cultural context. Linguistic methods are combined with a philological method of text interpretation and an intertextual approach, of being subject to consider a random expression in the context of the literary work as a whole. The analysis of presuppositions specificity in the text and the ways of its explication are based on the theory of presuppositions. The methodology of the analysis focuses on identifying presuppositions to establish dominant semantic categories and systemic interaction between them, constituting the artistic picture of the world in Pelevin's story as a postmodern writing code. Study of the text the presuppositions level helps to clarify the architectonics of the postmodern literary text and to define the ideological constants forming the semantic field of comprehension. The main positions in Pelevin's work are occupied by such semantic categories as 'cosmology', 'religion', 'society', 'science', 'art', etc. Their analysis allowed to formulate a meta-subject of postmodern text, which can be defined as 'rite de passage'. Pelevin's story is viewed in the context of the dialogue between modernism realized the exhaustion of modern culture, and postmodernism accepted this situation as a given and played the fate tragedy as satyr drama in the best traditions of the ancient theatre: where the modernist hero dies, the postmodernist marginal is able to overcome an irresistible edge.

**Keywords:** Semantic presupposition, pragmatic presupposition, discourse analysis, Victor Pelevin, transgression.

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## **Introduction**

Nowadays, more and more scientists are turning to the concept of presupposition. It has become common in logics, linguistics, and literary criticism at present. This is primarily due to the fact that for understanding the text, it is important to consider not only the explicit information, which is expressed directly and can be taken literally. A substantial part of the text, especially considering fiction, consists of those levels that require some effort to retrieve and decoding the meanings contained in them. Such meanings are usually called hidden or implicit.

In common sense, the semantic component of the statement, hidden and contained in the utterance 'by definition' is considered the presupposition. Contradictions among scientists which concerned the structure of utterance, the relation between utterance and subject of speech and so on, eventually resulted in the formation of three leading tendencies: Frege and Strawson developed semantic models; Stalnaker (1974) suggested pragmatic models; Beaver and Geurts (2014) introduced dynamic models. In the given paper, we use the semantic and pragmatic models.

Our work aims to identify and analyze various types of presuppositions in the 'Hermit and Six-Toes' (1997), Pelevin's postmodern novel since we assume they serve as basic principles which construct the inner world of work by setting up constants that determine the characters' outlook, their system of values, their thoughts about the universe, etc. At the same time, we take into account the approach suggested by T. Radbil in the research dedicated to 'Nika', Pelevin's short story. In particular, pragmatic anomalies as a literary device emphasizing the author's 'game of referential ambiguity' were studied (Radbil, 2001).

## **Materials and Methods**

The methodology of work is based on the principles of consistency and general scientific methods: descriptive-analytical and inductive-deductive.

The use of the discourse analysis method is due to the necessity of turning to the study of various types of presuppositions not only within the framework of an isolated abstract utterance, but also in a wider cultural context. Thus, according to Yu. M. Lotman, a literary text as a complicated secondary modeling system has been analyzed (Lotman, 1998). The appeal to the philological method of text interpretation was dictated by the necessity of considering parts in the framework of the whole, namely, a separate statement of a novel as an integral part.

## **Results and Discussion**

The analysis of presuppositions in the text and the methods of its explication is based on the theory of presuppositions. The theoretical basis of the work consists of studies on linguistic pragmatics (Stalnaker 1972, 1974, 1978, 2002; Kiefer, 1973), semantics of utterances (Paducheva 1985, 2013; Arutyunova, 1985) and the discourse cognitive foundations (Kubryakova & Demyankov, 1996).

A semantic model considers utterance as a two-part structure consisting of explicit and implicit elements. To understand its meaning the recipient must comprehend and appropriately interpret both aspects of the statement. The explicit part of a statement is usually called assertion, while the implicit part can be represented by implication, inference, and presumption: 'Linguists and philosophers have long recognized that natural languages offer the means to distinguish between the main point of an utterance, its assertive content, and information that should be considered as background for the participants of the conversation, so called presupposition' (Chemla & Bott, 2013). Dynamic semantic models consider the meaning of any statement as a two-component structure consisting of presupposition and assertion (Heim, 2002). At the same time, we emphasize that the meaning of presupposition is not explicitly expressed in the utterance, but is deduced from it as its logical consequence ('entailment') (Stalnaker, 1974). Sharing this point of view, J. Yule delimited

presuppositions and their consequences because the presenter has the presuppositions and not the sentence: 'A presupposition is something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance. Speakers, not sentences, have presuppositions. An entailment is something that logically follows from what is asserted in the utterance. Sentences, not speakers, have entailments' (Yule, 1996). We cannot agree with his position and we are convinced that it happens in a completely different way: presupposition is a part of the sentence, and its meaning is implied by the speaker and is derived from it by the listener.

To distinguish presuppositions we use the psycholinguistic theory of the utterance actual division. We share E.V. Paducheva's opinion, who believes that assertion is related to rheme, i.e. with that part of the statement, which contains information new to an addressee, and the presumption is contained in the theme and can be considered as already known information (Paducheva, 1985). The presumption does not coincide with the theme, but it is deduced from it, for example, in the sentence 'The President of Ukraine made a speech', the theme is 'The President of Ukraine', and the presupposition is 'There is a President in Ukraine'.

Scientists have found out that it is possible to check whether a certain part of a statement contains a presupposition by using denial (Beaver & Geurts, 2014; Paducheva, 2013). Denial will refer only to an assertion, without affecting presupposition, for example, if we say that 'the President of Ukraine did not make a speech', denial will not cancel the fact that 'there is a president in Ukraine'. It follows that presuppositions, unlike assertions, do not fall under the influence of negation. Thus, presupposition is accepted as a true statement, not subject to criticism. The part of presupposition that determines the meaning of the consequence arising from it is called a presupposition-trigger (Levinson, 1983).

Some triggers are named in the article by Beaver and Geurts (factives, aspectual verbs, adverbs of manner, additive particles, cleft sentences, quantifiers, names and so on (2014)) and this list can be continued.

Presuppositions turn out to be connected in the sentence with specific words or some elements of the syntactic structure, which gives a reason to distinguish lexical and structural presuppositions (lexical vs. structural presuppositions – Yule, 1996), and these linguistic means themselves are called presupposition activators or presupposition-triggers (Levinson, 1983).

*The pragmatic presupposition* does not either focus on the sentence or utterance, but on the communicants (Stalnaker, 1974). It is connected with the communicants' ideas about context conditions (context conditions – van Dijk 1981) of the actualization of statements in the discourse and their interpretation and it is related to the conditions of the statement relevance and success (appropriateness/felicity conditions) (Bach & Harnish 1979).

Pragmatic presupposition means communicants' ideas about discourse contextual conditions (van Dijk, 1981), which appropriateness/felicity conditions depend on (Auwera, 1979; Bach & Harnish, 1979; Fillmore, 1971; Kevelson, 1980; Stalnaker, 1972; 1974). These conditions include the so-called '*general knowledge fund*' of the interlocutors (Arutyunova, 1985; Bach & Harnish 1979; Ballmer, 1982; Dinsmore, 1981; Sperber & Wilson, 1982; Stalnaker, 1972; 1974; Werth, 1984), comprising both information already acquired by the speakers and the listener's willingness to accept the presuppositional part of the speaker's statement as given by definition: 'participants in the phenomenological field must have a common set of context propositions – a common presuppositional fund, without which their common activities of generating and understanding discourse is difficult or impossible due to a violation of the inter-subjectivity principle' (Makarov, 2003).

One of the most important specificities of fiction is the impossibility to take into account all the possible presuppositions of characters and narrator embedded in it. In order to outline the

boundaries of the phenomenological situation, it is necessary to select the most significant ones, according to their frequency and depending on their place in the narrative (strong or weak narrative positions). At the same time, the truth of pragmatic presuppositions cannot be verified; they are considered true 'by definition' and are taken for granted by all the interlocutors (Stalnaker, 1972).

Speaking about fiction text analysis, two levels of communication can be distinguished. By interlocutors, we understand, firstly, the author and the reader, and, secondly, the characters who participate in communication, since the cognitive fund of these two groups of interlocutors may not coincide or coincide partially. Actually, we consider the differences in the interlocutors' cognitive funds as the mechanism that generates artistic conflict, which determines the dynamics of plot development.

Like other postmodern texts, Pelevin's novel is a parody: two chickens born on a poultry farm and fed for food – chicken meat and eggs – talk about the structure of the universe and sense of life. The comic effect is achieved due to the fact that the reader is unaware of the chickens dwelling on intellectual topics until the end of the story. The bird 'community' is a parody of humanity: a certain social hierarchy is established in it, it has its own mythology, the basis of which is eschatological ideas about the end of the world, etc. The main characters become outcasts: the one is because of his physical ugliness, for which he got the nickname Six-Toes (he has six toes instead of five), the other, named Hermit, left the society on his own will and wished to be alone and live 'on the outskirts'. The story is preferably made up as dialogues between these two characters. We will try to analyze the presuppositions presented in their remarks to clarify the mental construction of the world, built by the author in the text under consideration.

### **Cosmology and Epistemology**

At Hermit and Six-Toes meeting the latter reflects on the meaning of life and what the 'solar system' of the world they live in is:

‘– Yeah... we just keep living our lives, but what's it all for? The mystery of the ages. Who has ever truly comprehended the subtle filiform essence of the lights of heaven?’ (Pelevin, 1997).

Rhetorical questions presuppose a negative answer: nobody knows why we live, and the character clarifies that this is the 'mystery of centuries', because he is convinced that attempts to find out the sense of life have been made for a long time and they constantly fail, just like the 'essence of the stars', which is incomprehensible, in his opinion. However, in the prepositional part of the question, the stars' existence is confirmed (the existential type of presuppositions), and 'their essence' is characterized as 'thin' and 'filiform'. The presuppositions triggers are the interrogative words 'why' and 'unless'.

The world of characters has a distinct division between the center and periphery. Comparing them, Six-Toes remarks that he could observe only two stars at the same time:

‘– That never happens in the center of the world. The suns all at once’ (Pelevin, 1997).

In this case, the character absolutizes his personal experience, using 'never.' However, the interlocutor's condescending reaction and his response show Six-Toes' statements relativity:

‘– I've seen eleven of them at once. One at zenith and five in each epicycle. Of course, that wasn't here’ (Pelevin, 1997).

The presuppositional parts of these sentences mean: 'what I have just said is true'; it really was, but in a different place and at another time. 'The characters' utterances are made up according to a scheme: firstly, a general statement, secondly, clarification and specification. To confirm the truth of the utterance, presupposition triggers are included in a sentence. Introductory constructions ('truly', 'in the sense of', 'of course', etc.) or impersonal sentences, for example, 'I was hard to believe that was

how the huge unruly crowd appeared from here' (Pelevin, 1997), which implies that 'despite the fact that it was not even believed in something, but it was so in reality', can function as triggers.

There is a constant change of day and night, but no one in Six-Toes' society knows the patterns of changing the time of the day. Obscurity generates fear, expressed by the fact that 'when the lights of heaven wavered and began gradually to dim, and the distant community gave out a communal gasp of horror like the wind rustling through a straw', at that moment Six-Toes himself falls into a daze or 'a state of torpor'. Only Hermit has learned to navigate by the state of 'heavenly bodies' and can quite accurately determine the nightfall:

'...Glancing up at one of the heavenly bodies, he went on in a tone of suggesting a shift from idle chatter to a serious conversation: — It'll get dark soon' (Pelevin, 1997).

Here, comparison functions as the pragmatic presupposition comparison ('a state of torpor' is compared with 'wind rustling through straw'). The point is, who knows what the comparison says? It is most unlikely to address the characters who have spent their whole lives indoors in the poultry farm, but not to the reader.

### **Society Structure**

The center of the world is the 'combined feed-trough and drinking-trough', the proximity to which determines the place of each member of society in the social hierarchy. The highest layer in it is occupied by the so-called 'Twenty Closest' who were the closest to the feeder. Accordingly, the further a member of society is from the center, the lower his status is. And, finally, the character of the story is a marginal, a renegade, physically handicapped and a political exile as a result:

'What they said me was, Here we are just coming up to the Decisive Stage, and there you are with six toes on your feet... Real good timing, they said...' (Pelevin, 1997).

Thus, the presuppositional part states that society is in anticipation of some radical change, i.e. experiencing the approach of a radical change moment (as it will be clear to both the character and the reader – this is nothing more than a transition between life and death), called the 'Decisive Stage'. Hermit is much better aware of what this 'Stage' is, because he has observed it several times, but he hints at a sad outcome to his interlocutor, stating that it is impossible to repeat this transition:

'— I've already seen five of these Decisive Stages. Only they all had different names.

— But how can that be?' said Six-Toes. — I know this is the first time it's happened.

— Of course it is. It would be rather interesting to see what happens the second time around... But then we're talking about somewhat different things' (Pelevin, 1997).

The trigger of presupposition is the first remark 'of course it is'. The conditional mood ('would be') and an expression of interest ('rather interesting') reveal the implicit meaning of Hermit's remark. Actually, what is meant becomes clear only after re-reading the text of the story. On understanding that 'Decisive Stage' means slaughtering chickens on the poultry farm, the reader accesses the character's knowledge fund, which allows him to understand the Hermit's hints essence and interpret his remark in a different way, where the phrase 'rather interesting' does not express curiosity at all, but means something like this: 'a repetition of the decisive stage is impossible, since you can't die twice, but if it does happen, then I would like to see it. 'The characters' remarks will be read in a new way as well, for example, Hermit's remark about the heavenly bodies located in the sky as follows: 'One at zenith and five in each epicycle' (Pelevin, 1996). The reader becomes aware of the author's irony, because the chickens in his novel either dwell on the universe, and use scientific terms borrowed from the geocentric model of the Ptolemy's universe, which, incidentally, was disproved by Nikolai

Copernicus in the 16th century. The reader realizes that the 'heavenly object', by which the Hermit determined the time of nightfall, is the clock hanging on the room wall.

So, the initial reading of a literary text gives the reader access to a fund of knowledge common with the author's that he has not had before, and when the reader reads the story again, he can see and understand what was previously hidden from him or what he could only vaguely guess. For example, Pelevin's play with a reader who aims to guess, reading the story for the first time who exactly the character of the novel is, grounds on giving human features to bird characters (face, five-fingered limbs, etc.). The chickens can both speak and dwell on common and scientific topics. At the same time, the characters have meals in a very strange for human but usual for the chicken way, for example, Hermit 'walked away, and picking up a food scrap from the ground with his foot, began to eat' (Pelevin 1997), and other members of the society get their food from the feeder. In this case, the play with the reader is based on the use of the concept of 'feeding through' not in a metaphorical ('a stable source of illegal income'), but in a literal meaning ('a device for feeding animals').

### **Religion and Science**

The characters touch upon religious issues in one of the episodes. The concept of 'God' turns out to exist in society:

'Listen,' said Hermit, 'here you keep on saying everything – God this, God that – do they believe in God over there, then?' (Pelevin, 1997)

An appeal to God or a simple reference to God ('Lord', 'glory to God') is an existential presupposition. In Six-Toes' answer to the question of what God is, the comic effect is created by several methods:

'— The devil knows. There is something, that's for sure, but just what, nobody knows. For instance, why does it get dark? If you like you can explain it by natural causes, of course. And if you go thinking about God, you'll never get anything done in this life...

— So just what can you get done in this life?' Hermit asked.' (Pelevin, 1997)

Firstly, the devil existence is immediately confirmed, which, unlike the character, for some reason knows for sure whether there is God or not. The character himself doubts, following Rene Descartes' well-known statement *de omnibus dubitandum* ('All is to be doubted'). The character believes that the question of the cause of any phenomenon can be answered both from religious and scientific positions, using a rational approach. The character's thoughts parody the naturalistic theory of the myths origin, founded and formulated by Theagenes of Rhegium in the second half of the sixth century BC (Losev, 2000), which scientific justification was obtained in the works by Gottfried Hermann (1817). They interpreted myths allegorically and believed that they encoded scientific ideas about natural phenomena.

Secondly, faith in God is endowed with negative connotations. The trigger of the investigation from the presupposition, which means 'something can be done in life', is the syntactic construction of the condition with 'if ... then'. The dialogue between the characters is built in such a way that one of them states something, and the second questions the investigation arising from the presuppositional part of his interlocutor's statement, as seen in the mentioned example, in order to specify the opponent's vague statements. We also note that it is hardly possible to clarify the meaning of the statement, because the unknown one is determined through another unknown, and at the same time Six-Toes uses a manipulative means of referring to a fund of general knowledge ('why do you ask stupid questions, as if you don't know the answer already') or appeal to 'the mystery of the ages' (Pelevin, 1997).

Another answer to the complicated philosophical questions is the universal formula of 'the laws of life', i.e. the character recognizes the existence of certain objective laws of nature and society, independent on anyone's subjective will. For example, the following explanation of how the world works is given in:

'— What way is it?' Hermit asked in a curious voice.

— Just the way it is. We move in space and time. According to the laws of life' (Pelevin, 1997).

Of course, the questioning character, unlike the reader, means the poultry farm occupying 'the Wall of the World' area, but this does not change the essence of the matter. The parody effect is achieved due to the fact that the reader, who Pelevin's texts are primarily addressed to, understands what exactly kind of 'laws of life' are meant. Every Soviet student in the course of philosophy must have studied the theory of dialectical materialism, developed in the works by K. Marx and his follower V. Lenin. According to this theory, the basic properties of moving matter were two objective categories – space and time: 'There is nothing in the world except moving matter, and moving matter cannot move the other way than in space and time' (Lenin, 1968). These dogmas were the core of Soviet science and ideology and were recognized as the only true ones, contrasted with the so-called bourgeois idealistic philosophy and were taken as evidence of the primacy of matter in relation to consciousness. The example of such a dogmatic, limited approach to reality is Six-Toes' reasoning. They provoke Hermit's indignation: 'No matter what we talk about, it is all the law of life, or the mystery of the ages' (Pelevin, 1997), because their increased frequency and the use of various, sometimes unrelated phenomena as an explanation, deprives the concept of 'mystery of the ages' or 'the law of life' of any meanings, turning them into a signifying without a signified, semiotic sign without a denotation, i.e. in simulacrum. V. Pelevin's novel was first published in 1990, and similar tendencies arose in the Soviet counterculture at the turn of 1960-1970 in the works of representatives of conceptualism and social art in Moscow (known as Soviet Pop Art), for example, in Lev Rubinstein's or Dmitry Prigov's poetry, the paintings by Ilya Kabakov or Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid.

Declaring that 'numbers rule the world,' Hermit quotes Pythagoras literally. The followers of the ancient Greek philosophers considered the number as an independent ontological category, a metaphysical substance, which was the basis of the universe and carried the idea of harmony and world order. However, it is essential for our study that the consequence of the presuppositional part of this statement is the belief that someone or something rules the world. In this case, these are the numbers, in other cases God is called the 'supreme power' that governs the world or the 'law of life', etc., which reflects the eclectic nature of postmodern consciousness, trying to combine individual elements of various philosophical systems, often contradicting each other.

### **Poetry and Arts**

The characters of Pelevin's novel are familiar with some forms of art, namely, poetry. When Hermit begins to recite, poetry turns out to exist in Six-Toes' society. The comic effect arises thanks to the 'all' used as a trigger, and the set of 'all existing poems' includes only twenty-five elements:

'I know all the poems, thank God. Not by heart, of course, but I've heard all twenty-five of them' (Pelevin, 1997).

The statement truth is supported by the triggers, which are introductory phrases and denial: 'thank God' (appeal to the authority of 'higher forces' as confirmation of one's own rightness) and 'not by heart' (it is impossible not to know a poem that does not exist by heart).

The second case is especially interesting because its partial negation (I know something, although not by heart) is used to confirm the truth of the statement as a whole indirectly, in this case, the existence of a certain poetic found consisting of 25 poems in Six-Toes' society.

In Hermit's world, first of all, literary genres are of great diversity – these are choral lyrics, parables, etc. A parody of postmodern performances is such a synthetic genre form ('a gesture'), which the character describes:

'It's a gesture,' Hermit answered. 'An art form. You read a poem and perform the actions to go with it' (Pelevin, 1997).

Secondly, as the reader advances through the text, it becomes clear that Hermit, unlike Six-Toes, does not reproduce ready-made literary forms, but creates them, acting as the cultural 'traditions' author, that is, assumes the functions of a mythological cultural character who 'obtains or, for the first time, creates various cultural objects for people (fire, cultivated plants, tools), teaches them hunting techniques, crafts or arts and introduces a certain social organization, marriage rules, magical prescriptions, rituals and holidays' (Meletinsky, 1982), for example, Prometheus (the ancient Greek character), Enki (the Sumerian mythology character) or Quetzalcoatl (a deity in Mesoamerican culture and literature, the Aztec god of wind, air, and learning).

Thirdly, Hermit has some sense of beauty. In particular, he distinguishes between the direct and figurative meanings of words and he loves to make up exquisite metaphors to denote the most common objects, for example, a mound of sawdust and peat, where the character hides from rats, he calls 'The Sanctuary of the Soul,' explaining to his opponent that he likes 'the sound of it' (Pelevin, 1997).

### **Rite de passage**

As a result of the analysis of presuppositions, we have concluded that Pelevin's story is based on the plot of the transition from one state to another, which is natural for a text created in the transitional era. The author offers two transition strategies – destructive (characters whose life purpose was the desire taking place closer to the feeder) and constructive (Hermit's preference, as he invents a way to overcome the Wall of the World, and then decides to leave the poultry farm and gain freedom). The centripetal movement in the novel is opposed to the centrifugal movement. Crossing the Wall of the World is similar to initiation, i.e. experiencing symbolic death and new birth.

As you can see, the traditional mythological model of the 'sacred center and periphery' in the post-modern work is inverted, however, preserving the opposition between the worlds. Now the center is endowed with negative connotations, and the periphery is assigned such signs as 'desired', 'kingdom of freedom', 'world of dreams', to achieve which it is enough to show a little ingenuity and perseverance. Relying in general on the romantic idea of double-peace and referring to the type of romantic character, outwardly representing an unremarkable creature, endowed with a rich spiritual world and the ability to overcome any social restrictions at the same time, Pelevin creates a work that mirrors the plot of 'The Metamorphosis', Franz Kafka's short story (German: *Die Verwandlung*) (1912). V. Nabokov, convinced that the novel tragic outcome could have been prevented, predicted the post-modernist response to the writer- modernist. According to A. Appel's memoirs, V. Nabokov said in one of the conversations: 'I could have reminded Kafka that Gregor was a scarab with elytra, since neither Gregor nor his creator understood that while the maid was cleaning the room and the window was open, he could fly out, free himself and join the other happy dung beetles rolling their dung balls along the paths' (Appel, 2017). It is the very flight that ends Pelevin's novel. If you use one of the V. Nabokov's entomological metaphors, then the same thing happens both to the characters of the postmodern writer and the caterpillar when it turns into a butterfly. They manage to overcome the impassable border not only physically (to leave the poultry farm), but also to go beyond their own capabilities, which in terms of non-classical philosophy is defined by the concept of transgression.



## Conclusion

Our suggested model for the analysis of fiction is based on the linguistic theory of presuppositions which we consider as one of the possible promising approaches to the interpretation of the implicit levels of a literary text. The explication of the consequences derived from the interlocutors' semantic presuppositions allows us to determine the fundamental foundations of their ideas about the world, since here the researcher deals with beliefs accepted by the speaker as true 'by definition'. Pragmatic presuppositions work not only at the character or narrative's levels but also help to clarify the specificities of the dialogue established between the author and the reader. The reader can get full aesthetic pleasure of the author's game only after re-reading the text, gaining access to the author's cognitive found. There are intertextual references to various pretexts, both artistic and scientific, parodied in the novel at the same levels: biblical, romantic, modernist, etc. The prospects of further researches are determined by the necessity of analytical tools and various ways of their application in relation to the literary text, as well as the introduction of such a concept as subtext in its relation to pragmatic presuppositions to the analysis system.

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