

## STRUCTURAL-SEMANTIC PRINCIPLES OF FORMATION OF THE TYPES OF THE FOLK TALE

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The A. Aarne - S. Thompson system of classification of folk tales is convenient for distinguishing relatively stable plot formations characteristic of the late period in the development of national traditions. However, not all the variants of folk tales fit into the AaTh scheme: a part of the existing recorded tales can be fitted into the scheme only conditionally; new subheadings are being introduced into the national catalogues. It is obvious that the accepted international classification does not always fulfil its principal function — to contribute to a comparative study of folk tales of different nations.

An investigation of the structure and semantics of Lithuanian folk tales has led us to the conclusion that complex plots which have come down to us are products of a long development and that they have grown into hierarchical systems of elementary plots (EP). An elementary plot shows a collision between two characters (or two groups of characters) as a result of which the hero acquires a material object or achieves a non-material purpose, or is defeated. Because of an uneven development of the plots of narrative folklore and of tradition in general, side by side with complex plots there are real texts having only one EP. Elementary plots and their constituent parts, different on a concrete level, exhibit semantic similarities, while outwardly similar plots present semantic differences. This brings us to a second set of important conclusions: it is essential to establish similarities between texts on the basis of deep-lying semantic features. We have worked out a special semantic language for the description of EPs and its rules of "translation" (semantic description is made of three levels). Our third conclusion: complex plot structures organize the semantic nucleus of the text — the principal EP (at times there is more than one *principal EP*, which indicates a combination of folk tales).

The plot structure of the text is a relationship of EPs. We have distinguished three types of logical cause-and-effect relations, an associative, a mechanical relationship, a particularization and a sum of equal EPs. The most meaningful elements of the plot structure (those which exhibit the most strongly marked cause-and-effect relationship, the first type of relationship) form the framework of the tale — its *macrostructure*.

The above conclusions have led us to a radical revision of the concept of the type of the folk tale. Instead of trying to find some ideal model, the folk tale type should be viewed in its development. Both the texts which are simple

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from the point of view of their structure, and their variants with a complex plot structure, should be attributed the same type if their semantic nucleus — the principal EP — is monotypal.

Having no possibility to dwell on our methodological approach and all the levels of texts and their elements<sup>1</sup>, we shall confine ourselves only to the most important of them which are necessary in determining the type of a folk tale. Here is a very simple example illustrating our principles. We shall describe one Lithuanian variant of a popular folk tale, *The Kids and the Wolf* (AaTh 123). The plot of the text is as follows:

A she-goat lives in a hut with her kids. Before leaving the hut the she-goat tells the kids not to let anyone in. Upon returning, the mother calls the kids: "Open the door; there is hay on my horns." The wolf overhears the mother's words and when she leaves the hut again he comes up to the door and addresses the kids with the same words, only the pitch of his voice is deep. The kids do not open the door: the pitch of their mother's voice is high. The wolf asks a blacksmith to make his tongue thin and then speaks to the kids in a high-pitched voice with the words of their mother. The kids open the door and the wolf gobbles them up. The she-goat goes in the wolf's trail, finds him asleep, slashes his stomach open, releases her kids, fills the wolf's stomach with stones and stitches it up. When he wakes up the wolf feels thirsty, goes to the river, bends down to lap water, tumbles into the river and drowns.

The plot of the text consists of three EPs arranged in a linear sequence. The first EP has an unhappy ending (the wolf gobbles up the kids); the second EP has a happy ending (the she-goat frees the kids); the third EP also has a happy ending (the wolf is no longer dangerous).

The hero of the first EP is collective — the kids; the she-goat is a relative of the hero; the wolf is the antipode; the blacksmith is a neutral character. The internal structure of the EP is quite complex; the same character performs contradictory actions (the kids do not open the door for the wolf, then open it). This is a feature of the convergence of a semantic pair of EPs: the first component of the convergence has lost its end and also its role in the plot structure of the whole text; only a negative outcome of the collision is important for the link-up with the following EP. The hero of the second and third EP is the she-goat. Those two EPs share one action — "the she-goat fills the wolf's stomach with stones." In the second EP the she-goat does this to conceal the fact that the kids have been freed, while in the third EP the stones cause a sense of thirst and heaviness in the wolf. In all the three EPs the hero, a weak member of a family, confronts the antipode — a powerful stranger, a beast. According to the aims of the heroes, all the three

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<sup>1</sup> Kerbelytė, Bronislava, *Istoriceskoje razvitije struktur i semantiki skazok* [Historical Development of the Structure and Semantics of Folk Tales], Vilnius, Vaga, 1991.

EPs belong to the class "Striving for freedom from a stranger or from being dominated", the first of the five classes of EPs.

We shall confine ourselves to this brief commentary, skipping a long description of the first semantic level. We shall now present

**The second level of description of each EP:**

1. The hero is in a safe place but it is easy to exert influence upon him. A relative of the hero conveys a signal for contact and shows his distinctive feature.

The relative urges the hero not to be approached by any other character except him.

The antipode urges the hero to allow being approached by using the signal agreed upon and showing a feature of a stranger.

*The hero does not allow the approach of the antipode, noticing the feature of a stranger.*

[The hero maintains his freedom].

The antipode urges the hero to allow being approached by using the signal of contact and showing the feature of a relative.

*The hero allows the approach of the dangerous antipode, taking him as a relative.*

The hero finds himself inside the *antipode*.

2. The hero is deprived of his relative.

The hero finds the whereabouts of his relative according to the features of the surroundings.

*The hero takes back from the incapacitated antipode his relative, leaving in his place an imitation of heaviness in his body.*

3. The hero knows about the dangerousness of the antipode.

*The hero makes the antipode's body heavy and helps to arouse in him the need to get close to a place where he could quench his thirst = a deadly surrounding* The antipode finds himself in a place not suitable for his life.

**The third semantic level of the same EPs:**

1. The hero is in a dangerous situation

The hero receives information about the signal of contact and about the feature of the hero's relative.

The hero is urged not to be approached by the dangerous *antipode*.

The hero is urged to be approached by the dangerous *antipode*.

*The hero is not approached by the dangerous antipode.*

[The hero keeps his freedom]

The hero is urged to be approached by the dangerous *antipode*.

*The hero is approached by the dangerous antipode.*

The hero finds himself in the *antipode's* power.

2. The hero loses his relative.

The hero obtains information about the whereabouts of his relative.

*The hero finds that his relative is in the place set for him by the antipode.*

The hero frees his relative.

3. The hero is in a dangerous situation.

*The hero places the antipode in deadly surroundings.*

The hero renders the antipode harmless.

In the above description of EPs we emphasized the actions determining the outcome of the collision. Those are the *principal actions* (actions of the hero). All concrete EPs are monotypal if their principal actions are interpreted in the same way on the third semantic level; differences between the actions on the second level of description make it possible to establish versions of the type of EP, while variations of final situations allow us to establish subtypes of EPs. The name of the principal action is the name of the type of EP.

The results of the EP determine the relationship of elements of a complex plot structure. Below we shall describe the structure and semantics of the text by establishing the types of EPs and relationships between them.

1.2.1.6. The hero is approached by the dangerous *antipode* —

the hero finds himself in the power of the *antipode*

↓<sup>1</sup>

1.1.2.1. The hero finds that his relative is in the place set for him by the *antipode* — the hero finds his relative

3

1.1.1.22. The hero places the *antipode* in deadly surroundings — the hero renders the *antipode* harmless.

The most meaningful elements of the plot structure are the first and the second EPs. They make the *macrostructure* of the text which is described in terms of the results of EPs:

The hero finds himself in the power of the *antipode*

↓<sup>1</sup>

The hero frees his relative.

## B. Kerbelyte, "Types of the Folk Tale"

The first EP governs the second: it is the *principal EP*. All the animal tales whose variants have a structure in which the principal EP belongs to the type 1.2.1.6. will belong to one and the same structural-semantic type. The principal EP of the text under analysis may serve as the basis of an independent work and may also form four more types of simple structures (we are describing their macro-structures):

1. *The hero finds himself in the power of the antipode.*
2. *The hero finds himself in the power of the antipode*  $\xrightarrow{1}$  *The hero does not find himself in the power of the antipode.*
3. *The hero does not find himself in the power of the antipode*  $\xrightarrow{1}$  *The hero finds himself in the power of the antipode.*
4. *The hero finds himself in the power of the antipode*  $\xrightarrow{1}$  *The hero frees himself / frees his relative.*
5. *The hero gets his relative. / The hero frees himself / frees his relative*  $\xrightarrow{1}$  *The hero finds himself in the power of the antipode.*

These simple structures are the basis of theoretically possible versions of the type of the folk tale. In the second and third versions the principal EP is joined only by its semantic pairs, in the fourth and fifth versions there can be equivalent EPs having a definite result. Versions based on the linkage of simple structures are also possible.

The above structural-semantic type embraces Lithuanian animal folk tales AaTh57\*, 61B, 123, also separate variants belonging to AaTh163, 112\*. A similar type can also be found in the fairy tales AaTh333, 702B#, individual variants of AaTh315, 327). In Lithuanian animal folk tales the first and the fourth versions are dominant; there are also complex structures (AaTh61B); the second and third versions have not yet been found.

The material of Lithuanian fairy tales has yielded 106 types of EPs which could become the nucleus of more or less complicated structures; only 58 of them have formed the nucleus; 17 other ancient tale-types have isolated variants. The same types can be distinguished in the other genres of folk tales as well, although other EP types exist as well.

Distinguishing structural-semantic types of folk tales enables us to carry out a more precise comparison of folk tales of different nations, as well as related texts of different genres. This helps solve many problems in folklore studies.

RESUMO

O sistema de classificação de Aarne-Thompson do conto popular é útil por distinguir enredos relativamente simples. No entanto, em qualquer tradição popular há vários contos cujos enredos têm apenas uma semelhança remota com os descritos no catálogo internacional de contos. Por conseguinte, há sempre novas sub-divisões que têm de ser introduzidas nos catálogos nacionais. Daqui resulta que a classificação aceite nem sempre facilita um estudo comparativo de contos populares de diferentes nações.

A análise semântico-estrutural de contos populares lituanos levou à conclusão de que enredos complexos são o produto de uma longa evolução. Por conseguinte o tipo do conto popular é também uma categoria evolutiva. Uma estrutura de enredo complexa é um sistema hierárquico de enredos elementares. Cada enredo elementar (EE) representa um fragmento do texto ou um conto independente com uma colisão entre duas personagens ou dois grupos de personagens, de que resulta o herói conseguir um objectivo distinto. Se o herói do enredo elementar (EE) age correctamente obtém um resultado positivo, mas se as suas acções são incorrectas o EE tem um resultado negativo.

Os EEs estão articulados logicamente. Distinguimos três tipos de relações lógicas, num modo associativo e num modo mecânico. Além disso, os EEs podem interpenetrar-se e um enredo pode também ser formado por uma soma de EEs iguais..

Um dos EEs organiza num todo global todos os elementos de uma estrutura textual complexa. É esse o EE principal. Todos os EEs que exibem a relação lógica mais forte, classificada como o primeiro tipo, formam a macro-estrutura do conto.

Estudámos uma linguagem semântica especial para descrever os três níveis, assim como as regras da "tradução" para definir os tipos de EE e as suas variantes. O estudo da estrutura de EEs demonstrou que o seu sentido é definido pela acção principal — a do herói principal. Pertencem ao mesmo tipo os EEs cuja acção do herói for interpretada do mesmo modo do primeiro ao terceiro nível semântico. Dois textos terão um tipo semântico-estrutural idêntico se os seus principais EEs forem do mesmo tipo, independentemente da complexidade dos seus enredos estruturais.

Utilizando um exemplo simples, uma versão lituana do conhecido conto popular "O Lobo e os Cabritinhos" (AaTh123), ilustramos os princípios básicos da descrição semântico-estrutural do texto, essenciais para determinar o tipo do conto. É também dada uma previsão de todas as versões teoricamente possíveis deste tipo de conto.

Em narrativas de géneros diferentes estão presentes EEs do mesmo tipo semanticamente semelhantes. Há tipos de EE muito correntes nalguns géneros, mas raros ou quase inexistentes noutras géneros.