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COHESION IN THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SHORT STORIES AS A DEVICE OF FOREGROUNDING

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The article considers the role of cohesion in the creation of the stylistic device of foregrounding. The quantitative and qualitative aspects of foregrounding (G. Leech) are characterized in the contemporary short stories of the American writers in the genre of flash fiction. In these texts the connection of stylistic devices in strong positions such as the beginning and the ending of the stories is observed. The language means of creating lexical, image-making and phonetic cohesion are determined. Especially explicit technique is the use of extended metaphor (the stories by R. Carney, D. Newkirk, G. Evary) which gives a considerable emotional effect to the narration. The extended metaphors in the texts are a component of the quantitative aspect of foregrounding and at the same time they actualize image-making cohesion. 10 stories out of the analyzed 15 texts are united by the identical lexical cohesion of the strong positions. Five works contain antonymic cohesion of the text parts where the device of foregrounding is realized with the help of antithesis. Thus, the text endings become something like happy end in the characters' lives, therefore it is possible to speak about emotional gradation (the stories by J. Updike, D. Shea). The highest frequency of lexical repetitions is present in the story by A. Guendron where the title word "scarves" is used 16 times and acquires a symbolic character, becomes an artistic detail in the memory about the mother. The image-making cohesion in a new flash fiction story by D. Newkirk "Whispers" in combination with phonetic cohesion expressed by alliterations provides the foregrounding of prose poeticalness. It is proved that the suggested notion by G. Leech and M. Short "cohesion of foregrounding" reveals a significant semantic and pragmatic role of cohesion as a device of realizing qualitative and especially quantitative aspects of foregrounding the text components in the contemporary short stories as well as actualizes the effect of prose poeticalness.

Keywords: *the device of foregrounding, cohesion, lexical repetition, antithesis, extended metaphor, stylistic convergence, prose poeticalness.*

КОГЕЗІЯ В СУЧАСНИХ АМЕРИКАНСЬКИХ КОРОТКИХ ОПОВІДАННЯХ ЯК ПРИЙОМ ВИСУНЕННЯ

Ємець О. В.

У статті розглянуто роль когезії в створенні стилістичного прийому висунення. Охарактеризовано кількісний та якісний аспекти висунення (Дж. Ліч) у сучасних коротких

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оповіданнях американських письменників жанру *flash fiction*. У цих творах спостережено зв'язок стилістичних засобів у сильних позиціях – початку та кінці оповідань. Визначено мовні засоби створення лексичної, образної та фонетичної когезії. Особливо експліцитним засобом є використання розгорнутої метафори (твори Р. Карні, Д. Ньюкерка, Г. Евері), що надає оповіді значного емоційного ефекту. Розгорнуті метафори – компонент кількісного аспекту висунення, водночас вони актуалізують образну когезію. 10 оповідань *flash fiction* з 15 аналізованих об'єднані ідентичною лексичною когезією сильних позицій. У п'яти творах спостерігаємо антонімічну когезію частин текстів, де реалізовано прийом висунення за допомогою антитези. При цьому кінцівки творів являють собою своєрідний хепі-енд у житті персонажів, тому можна зробити висновок про використання емоційної градації (твори Д. Андайка, Д. Ші). Найвища частотність простих лексичних повторів наявна в оповіданні А. Гендрон, де заголовне слово *scarves* повторюється 16 разів і набуває символічного характеру, стає художньою деталлю пам'яті про матір. Образна когезія в новому оповіданні Д. Ньюкерка "Whispers" у сполученні з фонетичною когезією, вираженою алітераціями, сприяє актуалізації поетичності прози. Доведено, що запропоноване Д. Лічем та М. Шортом поняття "когезії висунення" виявляє важливу семантичну та прагматичну роль когезії як засобу реалізації якісного й особливо кількісного висунення компонентів тексту в сучасних коротких оповіданнях та актуалізує ефект поетичності прози.

Ключові слова: прийом висунення, когезія, лексичний повтор, антитеза, розгорнута метафора, стилістична конвергенція, поетичність прози.

Introduction. The contemporary British and American short stories attract the attention and interest of not only numerous readers, but also linguists, literary scientists and translators. It can be explained by their brevity, the psychological character of narration, and the description of everyday life situations. In these stories there are not many dialogs, the author's narration prevails. Due to this, many stories are distinguished by the use of syntactic stylistic devices and tropes. One of the characteristic features of short stories in the twenty-first century is the variety of genres. In particular, as V. Lutsyk emphasizes, it involves the trend to microprose, such types as sudden fiction, flash fiction, microfictions, short-short story [3: 194-195]. The prominent Ukrainian linguist and stylistician O. P. Vorobyova defines short stories as texts of 3,000-5,000 words, while short-stories include 1,000-2,000 words [2: 15]. At present, very popular flash fiction texts have 500-1,000 words on the average. Veorica Patea claims that the genre of short story goes back to mythology and the Biblical narrative [10: 12]. Flash fiction continues the tradition of sudden fiction and short-short stories. Three collections of flash fiction stories have been published in the USA and one in Australia – in 1992, 2006, 2015 and

2016. The collections published in the twenty-first century include the masterpieces of such well-known writers as John Updike, Don Shea, Grace Paley, David Galef. The 2015 collection "Flash Fiction International" contains the stories of writers from different countries, but mainly by the American and British authors. Besides, the electronic literary magazine "Flash Fiction Magazine" is published regularly, every week. The stories from this literary magazine which came out quite recently, in 2022 and 2023, became the source of inspiration for our writing this article.

Due to the brevity of flash fiction stories, the peculiarities of their structure and semantics are clearly realized, in particular the categories of cohesion and modality. Correspondingly, the stylistic devices are especially foregrounded. We can agree with the conclusion made by O. Babelyuk that, from linguostylistic point of view, the brevity of short stories results in the limited amount of foregrounding devices, therefore their role in the stylistic and image-making system of the text increases [1: 44-45]. Our investigation of flash fiction stories is based on the analysis of stylistic and structural features of the texts, in particular the forms of foregrounding of certain text elements and fragments.

Analysis of previous research. The theory of foregrounding was developed by formalists (V. Shklovsky, R. Jakobson) and the Prague School of Linguistics (J. Mukarjovsky). They formulated the principles of making a literary text more noticeable. The whole theory of foregrounding was aimed at revealing the difference between the poetic language and everyday speech. Among the definitions of foregrounding the most detailed belongs to John Douthwaite: "Foregrounding is the general linguistic technique by which a marked linguistic expression is produced in order to make that expression convey a different meaning than its synonymic equivalent marked construction would have conveyed" [4: 93]. We suggest a shorter definition: "Foregrounding is the way of formal text organization which concentrate the reader's attention on certain elements of the message".

At the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries such outstanding linguists as Mick Short and Geoffrey Leech contributed to the further development of the theory. In particular, Geoffrey Leech suggested the formulation of two basic aspects of foregrounding: the qualitative and quantitative aspects [8: 93].

The qualitative aspect is the deviation, i.e. the breach of linguistic norm, while **the quantitative aspect** involves the deviation of some expected frequency [8: 38-39]. According to Mick Short, deviation can be phonetic, lexical, semantic and grammatical [11: 36]. These types of deviation refer to the qualitative aspect of foregrounding. In terms of stylistics, the qualitative aspect can include such techniques as neologisms, archaisms (when used in the contemporary literature), oxymoron, live (original) metaphors [12: 547]. In our opinion, deviation as a type of foregrounding is treated too widely and includes nearly all tropes and lexical-syntactic devices. From this point of view, hyperbole and meiosis should be included into the list of semantic deviation as well as pun, i.e. play of words. While these types of deviation

have been described in the works by M. Short and W. Van Peer [11; 12], the quantitative aspect received less attention of the linguists. The deviation of the expected frequency can be interpreted as the expansion of lexical and stylistic information, i.e. the redundancy of stylistic devices, on the one hand. On the other hand, the reduction of information, the omission of some significant text elements can also produce the effect of foregrounding.

In one of our previous papers we determined that the most explicit device of foregrounding is **stylistic convergence**. Stylistic convergence involves the concentration of different stylistic devices which add expressiveness to each other [9]. Such concentration, especially in a text fragment, attracts the reader's attention due to the use of semasiological, syntactic and phonetic devices. Besides, using the technique of convergence, authors aim to foreground the idea of the text, to produce pragmatic effect on the reader. No less important is the aesthetic effect.

Let us consider a fragment of the flash fiction story "Traveling Alone" by Rob Carney. The narrator describes the thunderstorm and expresses his admiration with the beauty of the nature: *Out the window was this giant cloud that looked like a lightning factory. You know, like this was where and how lightning was made, then shipped around the world to thunderstorms. Like down there, in the middle, gods were working with hammers and anvils and bellows and wearing those helmets with a little strip of glass to look out of. Like a cloudy furnace. Like the birthplace of light* [5: 224-225]. Here the stylistic convergence contains similes, metaphors, parallel constructions, polysyndeton and some sound repetitions. At the same time, the fragment is an example of extended metaphor which has conceptual character: NATURE IS GOD. The extended metaphor unites the second part of the story, connects the images of gods and factory. Therefore, it actualizes image-making cohesion.

M. Halliday and R. Hasan defined cohesion as a set of special relations which is common to all texts and which serves to reveal the interdependence of the content of separate fragments in a text [7: 5]. In short, cohesion means different types of connections of different parts in a text. According to the linguistic elements, such types of cohesion are singled out: lexical, grammatical, phonetic, stylistic, image-making. Image-making cohesion, as in the example from Carney's stories, involves the connection of images in the text which are often realized by linguistic metaphors. While foregrounding is basically the notion of stylistics, cohesion is the domain of text linguistics. Naturally, two notions overlap. However, the links between cohesion and foregrounding were suggested by the term "**cohesion of foregrounding**" introduced by Geoffrey Leech and further developed by Mick Short [8; 11]. Cohesion of foregrounding implies the connection(s) between the foregrounded parts or features in the text, which the author is consciously or subconsciously signaling as crucial to our understanding of what they have written [11: 36-37].

The aim of this paper is to determine the language means of foregrounding and to characterize the functions of different types of cohesion in foregrounding. Thus, in our research we tried to combine the analysis of cohesion, its type with the investigation of linguistic techniques of foregrounding. **The methodology** of research consisted in the following procedures: 1) recognizing the foregrounded text parts; 2) identifying the linguostylistic elements of the foregrounded parts; 3) explaining the type of cohesion of these parts; 4) interpreting the role of cohesive elements in foregrounding. The main principles of this methodology were formulated by John Douthwaite [4: 93], we only modified these principles and added the fourth stage. While investigating the cohesion of foregrounded parts, we applied the following methods. First, the method of contextual analysis was

employed in order to determine the meanings of the foregrounded lexical units. Secondly, the method of stylistic analysis was used in order to characterize the types of tropes and/or syntactic stylistic devices. Thirdly, the elements of conceptual analysis were relevant because stylistic devices in strong positions of the texts can acquire conceptual character. And fourthly, the elements of quantitative analysis were appropriate for determining the frequency of lexical and stylistic devices as elements of cohesion, according to the quantitative aspect of foregrounding.

Results. For the investigation of cohesion and its role in foregrounding 15 short stories were selected from two collections "Flash Fiction Forward" (2006) and "Flash Fiction International" (2015) as well as short stories from the electronic "Flash Fiction Magazine" published quite recently – in 2022 and 2023. To some extent, these texts reflect the trend in short fiction in the twenty-first century.

The first stage in our research involved recognizing the foregrounded parts and characterizing their place in the stories. Thus, it is possible to state one of the features: cohesion unites lexical and stylistic devices in two strong positions – the beginning and the ending. Such distant cohesion is observed in 10 stories.

In the story "Perfectly" by Don Shea the title word is repeated in the initial and one of the last paragraphs: *Perfectly. She did it perfectly. I have never in my life broken up with a woman like that. – It was a perfect parting. Beautiful* [5: 72-73]. The cohesion of this lexical unit produces a contradictory impression. On the one hand, as the narrator describes his parting with a beloved woman, it looks ironic. On the other hand, the man admires his former wife: *How can you not love a woman who parts with you like that?*

The cohesive elements in the story "Truthful Lies" by Frankie Mc. Millan also function in strong positions. The very title and the repetition of the title words produce the effect of qualitative

foregrounding expressed by the oxymoron: *I am a truthful liar, believe you me. – I lied you when I told you I was lying. Tell me you're made of truthful lies* [6: 95-96]. The woman who narrates the story tells these bitter paradoxical statements because she has lost her baby and does not want to tell the truth to everybody.

Leigh Wilson begins and ends her text "Bullhead" with the same oxymoron: *Every story is true and a lie*. The paradoxical statement is expanded in the final paragraph: *Every story is true and lie. The true part of this one is: Love and the memory of love can't be drowned. The lie part that this is good thing* [5: 25]. Besides qualitative aspect of foregrounding, here quantitative aspect of this device is realized. The last paragraph includes antithesis (true-lie), metaphor and parallel construction. The paradox consists in the structure of the text which tells about a woman who still remembers her first love, a boy, "a love of her life", and during 50 years goes to the lake which drowned her native town during the construction of the dumb. She drops a coin in the water over the place where she and the young man made love, this coin is a sign of memory. That is why the stylistic convergence in the final paragraph foregrounds the alternative for the reader to decide: is it a good or a bad thing to keep the memory of the first love so long?

There was a certain challenge for us in the translation of the oxymoron *Every story is true and a lie* because the antonymic words are expressed by two different parts of speech. In translation we retained the antithesis using the same parts of speech (adjectives): *Кожна історія є правдивою одночасно*.

A tragic story by Don Shea "Jumper Down" also includes lexical cohesion of the title words in two strong positions: *Henry was our jumper up expert: had been for years. When the jumper was up, by which I mean he or she was still on the building ledge or the bridge, Henry was superb at talking them down. – seems to me if I was a jumper on the way out, right out there on the ragged edge of*

the big mystery, I might, indeed, upon my exit, find some last modicum of comfort in Henry's words, human words of recognition and congratulation [5: 3-4]. Here we can speak about identical cohesion (*jumper*), but, similar to the story "Bullhead", the final paragraph develops and extends the idea of consolation. Translated by our senior student Juliya Didokha, this paragraph foregrounds the author's pragmatic intentions in the target text as well: *Мабуть, якби мені судилось покинути цей світ і якби я сам став там, над урвищем, за крок від стрибка у небуття, то перед відходом із життя я справді віднайшов би бодай маленьку крихту втіхи у словах Генрі, у щирих словах визнання та схвалення*. The translator applied the devices of synonymic translation (*human words – щирі слова*) and modulation (*від mystery – небуття*), while the title word *jumper down* was reproduced by contextual variant (самогубець).

The ironic and humanistic story "My Date with Neanderthal Woman" by David Galef contains lexical cohesive elements in three strong positions – the title, the initial and final paragraphs. The very title is already the example of qualitative aspect of foregrounding as an indirect oxymoron is realized in these three; the date can be with a contemporary woman. While the first paragraph contains the narrator's reflections about what Neanderthals used to eat or receive as a gift, the last paragraph includes the author's conclusion about the tolerance and mutual understanding between people with different cultural and national backgrounds: *Yes, I know all the objections. Some couples are separated by decades, but we are separated by millennia. I like rock music and she likes the music of rocks. I'm modern Homo Sapiens and she is Neanderthal, but I think we can work out our differences if we try* [5: 111]. In this paragraph both quantitative and qualitative aspects of foregrounding are actualized. The quantitative aspect is represented by stylistic convergence, while the qualitative aspect is revealed by

antithesis (*Homo Sapiens* – *Neanderthal*; *decades* – *millennia*). Parallel constructions in two sentences and the metaphor *music of rocks* are also components of the convergence. From the translation point of view it was a challenge to render the play of words *rock music* – *music of rocks*. Two variants were suggested to render this device: *Я люблю слухати важкий рок, а вона тягати важкі камінці; я люблю слухати рок музику, а вона – слухати музику скель*. The second variant seems to be more relevant.

Another distinctive feature of cohesion as a device of foregrounding in several analyzed flash fiction stories is the use of antithesis in two strong positions. Especially expressive from this point of view is the short story "Big Food Love" written by Gary Every and Published in "Flash Fiction Magazine" in August 2022. Again, both aspects of foregrounding are realized in the text, not only in strong positions, but throughout the story. The qualitative aspect involves the fantastic situation, similar to David Galef's story, of love between a modern man and a legendary snow woman (often called Sasquatch or Bigfoot). The story abounds in metaphors and hyperboles. But the contrast between the initial and final parts consists in the attitude of the main character Bert Snerdley to the Bigfoot. He believed in the existence of Bigfoot and was hunting this creature. In our interpretation, Bert's aim was not to kill it, but to catch it: *Bert Snerdley had been hunting for Sasquatch for decades. He hunted during the heat of summer, winter snows, summer showers, and autumn chill. Despite never finding any fur, bone, or even a stinky pile of poop, despite the complete and total lack of evidence, Bert Snerdley continued to be certain of the existence of Sasquatch* [6: 30]. The more so, he bought a siren bigfoot mating call in the Internet to find the creature more easily. It is interesting to note that Every gives the similar name – Bertha – to the Bigfoot woman. Describing her emotions, the author creates another stylistic convergence using hyperboles, metaphors and sound repetitions: *For*

centuries Bertha Bigfoot believed she was all alone in the universe. When your heart is so big like Bertha's, and then it breaks from loneliness, it is painful beyond belief. Bertha Bigfoot heard the bellowing bugling snarl of Bert's infernal, machine, and her heart began to pound like the beating of drums [6: 31]. The ending of the story is a happy-end, Bertha finds Bert, they fall in love and have children. That is why we can speak about a striking contrast, an antithesis between the cohesive parts. The more so, all Bert's dream have come true. And he is only sorry that he wasted so many years in vain: *No female of any species had ever looked at Bert Snerdley with love and adoration in their eyes*. The final part also contains a with metaphors, hyperboles and alliteration. Of course, the reader can't help feeling the irony in the last lines: *You can find Bert Snerdley atop the tallest tree in the forest every other day, sitting inside the biggest nest you have ever seen, his butt warming a clutch of bigfoot eggs* [6: 32]. However, another interpretation can consist in the following: this flash fiction story is an allegory of love of two lonely people who have found each other. The title of the story can be translated according to the existing Ukrainian equivalent: *Кохання Снігової Жінки*.

Cohesion of foregrounding based on antithesis can also be observed in the story by the famous writer John Updike "Oliver's Evolution". The title of the story suggests changes in the behavior of the main character. While in childhood Oliver was a weak boy, vulnerable to different injuries and diseases, when he became an adult, the head of the family, he felt responsibility for his children. So he is described metaphorically as a strong tree: *Oliver has grown broad, and holds the two children at once. They are birds in a nest. He is a tree, a sheltering boulder. He is a protector of the weak* [5: 145].

All in all, in five stories out of fifteen flash fiction texts analyzed, antonymic cohesion between the initial and final fragments prevails. As we have known, the last strong position reveals a kind of

happy ending (the story by Gary Every) or a positive change in the person's character and behavior (the story by John Updike). The similar effect can be observed in the story by a popular American writer Dave Eggers "Accident". The author describes the car accident caused by the main character. He leaves his car and expects an unpleasant reaction from the teenagers, even some kind of violence. But the teenagers are quiet and tolerant, they are ready to forgive him. The man is very touched, he even wants to cry. The extended simile in the last sentence reveals how much tolerance and understanding can do as distinct from aggressiveness: *In a moment of clarity, you finally understand why boxers, who want so badly to hurt each other, can rest their heads on the shoulders of their opponents, can lean against one another like tired lovers, so thankful for a moment of peace* [5: 102].

The repetition of the same word(s), that is identical lexical cohesion, is characteristic of all analyzed flash fiction stories. However, the frequency of such repetitions, i.e. the degree of foregrounding the quantitative aspect of the utterances is different. The biggest frequency of identical lexical repetitions can be found in a very touching story "My Mother's Many Scarves" by Andree Gendron. The title word *scarves* is repeated 16 times in the text. The narrator, a woman says, that she *inherited many things from her mother beyond common physical traits*, including silk scarves. These scarves which her mother wore at school as a secretary, in her trips abroad (where she also bought new scarves) told the daughter about the mother's life and habits. With time, the daughter understood: *It's clear to me that the things I inherited from my mother are ever-present* [6: 50]. So, this object becomes an artistic detail and a metonymic detail in the story, a symbol of the mother – daughter relationship.

Such types of cohesion as identical lexical cohesion and antonymic cohesion are present in the majority of the analyzed text. Image – making cohesion realized by means of extended metaphors

and similes are observed mainly in the stories "Traveling Alone" and "Bigfoot love". But especially talented example of the use of image-making cohesion for foregrounding is the story "Whispers" by David Newkirk published quite recently, in March 2023, in "Flash Fiction Magazine". Here image-making cohesion extends throughout the whole text and interacts with stylistic cohesion, i.e. the repetition of the same stylistic devices. The ocean waves are described by means of anthropomorphic metaphors: *It is 2021. The waves have whispered for twenty-nine years since I met them, and longer still since they last talked to Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall*. The waves are ascribed such human features as the ability to speak (the verbs *whisper, call, beckon, talk*). The narrator seems to listen to them in different periods of his life. Rethinking his life, the events and relationships with his women, he understands that waves are internal, as distinct from people's lives. The stylistic convergences in the fourth and last paragraphs include metaphors and sound repetitions are not only the device of foregrounding uniting the plot of the text, they also make the story very poetical: *The waves will whisper until the broated sun scorches the earth in billions of years. They will call to generations upon generations. They will beckon the listener to leave their world, and simply be. – all too often, I realize, I have not listened for the waves. I know they are still whispering. They have never stopped* [6: 94]. The frame repetition of the metaphor *the waves whisper* is the most explicit example of image-making cohesion as the device of foregrounding.

Conclusions. One of the genres of the contemporary American short stories is flash fiction. Flash fiction stories are two-three pages long, with few dialogs. Due to the brevity of these texts, such a stylistic device as foregrounding can be observed very clearly. Our analysis of two aspects of foregrounding – quantitative and qualitative (G. Leech) resulted in the conclusion that the foregrounded parts in flash fiction stories are mainly located in two strong

positions such the beginning and the ending of the texts. These parts are mostly connected lexically or metaphorically. In such case we deal with cohesion of foregrounding (G. Leech) which means the connection of the foregrounded parts (language units) in the text. In the analyzed 15 flash fiction stories written after the year 2000 the quantitative aspect of foregrounding is realized by means of stylistic convergences and lexical repetitions. The qualitative aspect is mostly actualized with the help of tropes (metaphor, simile, hyperbole) and antithesis. In ten stories the foregrounded parts in strong positions are connected by identical lexical cohesion, including the repetition of the title words ("Whispers", "Bigfoot Love", "Jumper Down" and others). In five stories antonymic cohesion of the foregrounded parts prevails, and the last paragraph reveals a kind of happy ending in the life of the main character, so it is possible to speak about emotional

gradation. The highest frequency of lexical repetitions can be observed in the story "My Mother's Many Scarves", where the title word is repeated 16 times and becomes a metonymic, artistic detail. Image-making cohesion of the foregrounded fragments involves the use of extended metaphors or metaphoric similes ("Traveling Alone"). In such case metaphors are elements of the stylistic convergence which is one of the most explicit devices of the quantitative aspect of foregrounding. The story "Whispers" is based on image-making cohesion and reveals an example of poetical prose. In conclusion, we can say that cohesion can be considered one of the devices of foregrounding as it actualizes the text links and helps to attract the reader's attention to the most significant parts of the texts. The prospects of further research lie in the investigation of different types cohesion and their role in foregrounding in the classical short stories.

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