

## ON THE LINGUOCULTURAL ESSENCE OF THE TITLE OF A LITERARY TEXT

**Maia Gabadadze**

Assistant-professor of Kutaisi University,  
Kutaisi, 13 Tsereteli str., 4600, Georgia,  
+995597444495, maia.gabadadze@unit.edu.ge,  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5067-9229>

**Abstract.** The present paper deals with the linguocultural study of literary titles. Different aspects of titles have always been the subject of scholars' interests. However, there are still some problems that require special attention. One of such issues concerns the revelation of their linguocultural essence that should be carried out via interdisciplinary and interparadigmatic research methodology. The novelty of our approach to the literary title lies in the fact that we consider it as a linguocultural phenomenon which should be studied both in relation to the work it entitles and in the context of the literary-cultural paradigm within which the work was created. If we apply functional methodology of linguistic analysis to the title, it can be defined as specific type of a text – a pre-text or a foretext, encompassing in a compressed form the conceptual nucleus of a literary work or its aesthetic evaluation, which can unfold and expand simultaneously with the main bulk of the text located beneath it. Due to its prior position, the title acts as an organizing dominant of the text, structuring it semantically and compositionally in such a way that brings the main ideas and emotions of the work into focus. We assume that within the framework of modern linguistic thought, when lingual units are analyzed with the help of the three-dimensional semiotic model integrating semantic, syntactic and pragmatic aspects of research, the title is considered as a specific aesthetic sign. This assumption relies on the fact that the literary title is chosen by the author only after completing the process of writing the text, and presumably after serious consideration of the ways of presenting the main idea most effectively. We claim that diachronic comparative analysis of literary titles reveals the fact that their structural-semantic typological dynamics reflects the alternation of literary-cultural paradigms that is predetermined by epochal changes of literary thought.

**Keywords:** interparadigmatic, literary title, typological dynamics, aesthetic-conceptual meaning.

**Introduction**

Within the framework of modern linguistic thought, scholars consider a literary text as a lingual sign of the highest rank, with the help of which the author verbalizes and reveals his/her aesthetic-communicative intention. In this respect, the phenomenon of the title is of paramount importance, since it not only identifies a work, but fulfils descriptive, connotative, organizing and other functions as well.

Different aspects of literary titles have always been the subject of academic interest of both literary critics and linguists. Despite this continued interest, there are some problems that require special attention. One of such issues concerns the revelation of the linguocultural essence of the title of a literary text that should be carried out with the help of interdisciplinary and interparadigmatic research methodology. We assume that linguocultural peculiarities of the title should be revealed both in relation to the text it entitles and in the context of the literary-cultural paradigm within the framework of which a literary work was created. We think that the research of the titles in these two directions will enable us to reveal their linguocultural essence in its multifacet complexity. We also believe that diachronic comparative analysis of literary titles will help us define their structural-semantic types, at the same time showing how their evolution through the history reflects the alternation of literary-cultural paradigms that is predetermined by epochal changes of literary thought. As far as we know, literary titles have not been studied from this angle so far.

### Methods

It is natural that there arises a question concerning the research methodology which is to enable us to reveal and generalize all the essential features that form the specific essence of literary titles. We assume that this goal can be achieved only by their linguocultural analysis, since it is the linguocultural research that makes the study of linguistic phenomena via interdisciplinary and interparadigmatic methodology possible.

Interdisciplinary research of literary titles implies the interaction of such disciplines of humanities as:

Linguistics – inasmuch as the title is, first of all, a lingual phenomenon;

Literary criticism – inasmuch as we study the title in relation to a literary work it entitles and on its basis;

History of the literary culture – inasmuch as we study title types in the context of literary-cultural paradigms within which literary works were created. According to our research hypothesis, the diachronic typological variation of titles reflects the alternation of literary-cultural paradigms that is predetermined by epochal changes of literary thought;

General aesthetics – inasmuch as it unites the abovementioned disciplines.

As for the interparadigmatic methodology of research, it is conditioned by the linguocultural analysis of literary titles which is considered as an independent, third paradigm in the sequential order of philological and linguistic thought. We assume that the study of the title of a literary text will acquire its theoretical and methodological completeness when it is reviewed dynamically via systemic-semiotic, anthropocentric-communicative and linguocultural paradigms of research:

a) we would determine specific sign status of literary titles and carry out their structural-semantic typology within the framework of systemic-semiotic paradigm of linguistic thought;

b) anthropocentric-communicative approach to language phenomena enables us to focus on the pragmatic aspect of the study of literary titles, involving text linguistics and discourse analysis into their research. Accordingly, the title would be considered via intersubjectivity and interactionality, on the one hand, as a manifestation of the author's intention, subjective-evaluative modality and aesthetic-communicative strategy in the process of text-creating; on the other hand, we would concentrate on the reader's interpretative activity in the aesthetic perception of the text, it being considered as his/her communicative interaction with the writer.

c) linguocultural paradigm of interdisciplinary analysis enables us to generalize diachronic typological evolution of literary titles in the context of the history of literary culture since, according to our research hypothesis, typological dynamics of literary titles reflects the alternation of literary-cultural paradigms that is predetermined by essential epochal changes of literary thought.

The first attempt to analyze literary titles was made by Krzhizhanovskij during the 20-30-ies of the twentieth century (Krzhizhanovskij, 1931). Since then the title has become the subject of academic interest of both literary critics and linguists. In spite of such intense interest, there are still some problems that require special attention. One of such issues is the revelation of the linguocultural essence of the title of a literary text and the definition of its aesthetic-semiotic status. The sign status of the title is controversial. Opinions differ as to whether the title should be defined as a constituent part of a literary text or as an independent, autonomous title containing the conceptual nucleus of a literary work in a compressed form. According to some scholars, once the title names the text identifying it, it should be defined as a representative of the whole work rather than as one of its semantic-compositional elements. From the linguistic viewpoint, the title is, first of all, a name of the text. In this respect, it can be compared with a proper name, identifying and differentiating a given text from other ones. However, the title is much more than a book's name. Gerard Genette, perhaps the best known of modern titologists, suggests that, as well as identifying a work, the title also fulfils descriptive, connotative and temptation roles (Genette, 1997).

### Results

Within the framework of modern linguistic thought, when lingual units are analyzed with the help of the three-dimensional semiotic model integrating semantic, syntactic and pragmatic aspects of

research, the title is considered as a specific aesthetic sign. From the semantic viewpoint, the title is regarded as a pre-text representing the whole work in a compressed form. This assumption relies on the fact that the literary title is chosen by the author only after completing the process of writing the text, and presumably after serious consideration of the ways of presenting the main idea most effectively. It being chosen, the title constitutes a summarized, representative, and concise statement carrying the main ideological and thematic message of the text. That is why some scholars refer to it as a “thematic construction” (Gvozdev, 1977: 86).

The title is some kind of informative signal about the content of the text. Frequently, the reader makes a decision to get acquainted with the book only after reading its title, the title encompassing the essential, conceptual nucleus of the literary work it entitles in a most appealing way. The famous dictionary compiled by Dali defines the title as the name of a literary work placed in a position prior to the text itself, either on the title-page or at the top of the first page, occupying an “introductory position” so that it would be read before the text (Dali, 1956: 17). In a wider sense, the title is the name of a book, a chapter or some constituent part of it, while in business correspondence it denotes the office location, the sender’s or the receiver’s name. In his dictionary, Ozhegov defines the title as the name of a literary or music work encompassing the overall meaning of the work it entitles (Ozhegov, 1967: 11).

Opinions differ concerning syntactic peculiarities of literary titles. According to Ronginsky, the title, however limited it might be in its verbal representation, is always characterised by some kind of completeness which it acquires in relation to the text. Therefore, the title should be considered as a sentence and consequently its structural typology should be carried out via syntactic approach to lingual units (Ronginskij, 1977: 183). Another scholar, Bogorodsky claims that the title is most frequently represented by a nominalized syntactic transform of a sentence, which contains the conceptual nucleus of the text in a compressed way (Bogorodskij, 1969: 155).

From the pragmatic viewpoint, the title should be considered via intersubjectivity and interactionality. On the one hand, the title can be regarded as a kind of reference point, a guideline, which explicitly or implicitly serves as a manifestation of the author’s aesthetic-communicative intention, his/her subjective modality and communicative strategy. On the other hand, the literary title fulfils numerous functions, such as informative, rhetorical, summarizing, representing, provocative and so on. One of the major functions of the literary title is “focusing,” which implies selecting from among the main elements of core content one theme to stand as the leading one of the work. Therefore, a focusing title suggests which of the contending themes should be given a central place in interpreting the work and organizing one’s appreciation of it. In this way, the author prepares the reader for the aesthetic perception of the text. Thus we can conclude that the literary title possesses all the necessary features of a verbal sign in its semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions.

Despite the continued interests of different scholars, both linguists and literary critics, the problem concerning the semiotic status of the title and its position in the hierarchical system of lingual signs remains controversial. Within the framework of the 20-th century systemic-semiotic paradigm of linguistic thought, the semiotic understanding of the language system and its evolution have developed in two main directions. On the one hand, it concerned the pragmatization of verbal signs that necessitated the study of lingual units in relation to the reality in which they are utilized (that is, in the context of speech act and communicants). On the other hand, lingual units themselves have undergone semiotic evolution from the word as an elementary designating unit in the hierarchy of language system to the text as a full sign of the highest rank capable of performing communication (Iebanidze, 2004: 34).

### Discussion

In linguistic literature and literary criticism the title is considered either as a constituent part of a text or as an independent text. In modern textual theory, titles are classified as an element of what Gérard Genette has termed the text’s ‘paratext’. Genette argues in his seminal *Seuils* (the title in translation is *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*) that texts are ‘rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations’. According to Genette, we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of the verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make*

*present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world' (Genette, 1997: 79). Therefore, the paratext transforms the text into a book so that it can be received and read as such. The title, then, as a paratextual element, is both inside and outside the text, that is, both part of a text and an independent text itself.

Some scholars think that the title is embedded in a literary work as one of its compositional, structural elements which can be reviewed alongside with other textual segments, such as an introduction, a main bulk of the text it entitles and a conclusion (dolidze, 2009). Others consider that the title stands above the text's spacial and temporal dimensions, thus encompassing the whole literary work. This assumption is predetermined by the fact that the title is not included in the linear development of the text (mart'ashvili, 2003).

Opinions differ according to the perspective, the literary title is analyzed from. If the title is analysed from the reader's viewpoint, it can be considered as a part of the text, while for the author the title is as independent as the text it represents. This assumption can be substantiated by the fact that the literary title is chosen by the author only after completing the process of writing the text. The literary title is generally a concentration and focusing of the author's system of intentions. It is thus a kind of subtext that encompasses the overall meaning of the text by various means of title design. This encompassing by the literary title is multi-directional. As the literary title can encompass central themes appearing in the body of the text, the text may also encompass the title, and the reader may discern title elements scattered throughout it.

Thus, the linguosemiotic status of the title is controversial. Critical review of linguistic literature and literary studies on this problem has enabled us to single out some general standpoints according to which:

1. the title is considered as one of the components of the text it entitles;
2. the title is regarded as a paraphrased version of the text; that is, the title equals the text it represents;
3. the title is a text itself;
4. the title is more than a text, it is superior.

However, none of these statements gives linguistically an adequate definition of the title. We assume that they should be considered as those essential features of the title the set of which forms its invariant, inner form that should serve as a basis for working out a relevant definition of this phenomenon.

Before presenting our own opinion in regard to the linguosemiotic essence of the literary title, we think it necessary to make the definition of the text more precise, it being a dominant concept in the study of the title. In modern linguistics there are two major methodologies of defining the text: structural and functional. From the structuralist viewpoint, text can be defined as a sequence of thematically interrelated sentences that forms a meaningful whole. According to this definition, the lower border of the text is restricted as it implies a sequence of at least two sentences. However, the structural definition leaves the upper border of the text open because of the varying diapason of its theme (Kirvalidze 2008: 14). From the functionalist methodology, the main criterion for the text definition is not a quantitative criterion, it is a potential of a lingual unit to perform communication. Accordingly, a verbal unit of any length, be it a sequence of thematically interrelated sentences, one simple sentence or even a single word, can be defined as a text if it performs a communicative function (Iebanidze, 2004: 277).

If we apply functional methodology of linguistic analysis to the title, and at the same time, take into consideration its main features discussed above, then the title can be defined as specific type of a text – a pre-text or a foretext, encompassing in a compressed form the conceptual nucleus of a literary work or its aesthetic evaluation, which can unfold and expand simultaneously with the main bulk of the text located beneath it. Due to its prior position, the title acts as an organizing dominant of the text, structuring it semantically and compositionally in such a way that brings the main ideas and emotions of the work into focus. In other words, the title functions as an aesthetic-semiotic unit designating the informative kernel of a literary work or its evaluation in a most compressed way. Therefore, the title acquires functional-semantic completeness to some degree, that makes it a pre-text/fortext or a 'paratext' (in Genette's terminology), possessing its own communicative perspective.

The novelty of our approach to the literary title lies in the fact that we consider it as a linguocultural phenomenon which should be studied both in relation to the work it entitles and in the context of the literary-cultural paradigm within which the work was created. Our analysis of the Brit-

ish literature of XVII-XVIII centuries has shown that their titles were mostly represented by anthroponyms without any modifying epithets. For instance, “Roxana” (D. Defoe), “Sir Charles Grandison” (S. Richardson), “Amelia” (H. Fielding) and so on. Consequently, such titles were neutral as they only identified a certain person as a subject matter of the literary text without expressing the author’s subjective-evaluative modality, i.e. the way he/she sees its aesthetic-literary content. Anthroponymic titles were still retained in the XIX century. For instance, “Ivanhoe” (W. Scott), “Emma” (J. Austen), “Jane Eyre” (Ch. Bronte), “Oliver Twist” (Ch. Dickens), etc. At the same time, there appeared titles that already contained information about profession, origin, social status or some other important aspects of the main character, such as: “Kidnapped” (R. L. Stevenson), “The Professor” (Ch. Bronte), “The Mayor of Casterbridge” (T. Hardy), “The Bride of Lammermoor” (W. Scott), “Jude the Obscure” (T. Hardy), “Our Mutual Friend” (Ch. Dickens), “A Woman of No Importance”, “An Ideal Husband”, “The Devoted Friend”, “The Selfish Giant” (O. Wilde) and so on.

The XX century titles also contain the words denoting main characters. It should be noted, that the personages of the XX century fictional writing are not as ‘ideal’ as the characters of the previous centuries since the titles are often represented by the lexemes with negative connotational meaning, such as: “One Fat Englishman” (K. Amis), “The Man of Property” (J. Galsworthy), “The Black Prince” (I. Murdoch), “Lady Chatterley’s Lover”, “The Trespasser” (D. H. Lawrence). This can be explained by the socio-cultural and political situation of the epoch – the two world wars and great economic changes in England have found their manifestation in literary thought, respectively, in fictional titles. However, it does not mean that the XX century literary titles bear only negative connotations. There are a lot of appealing titles with positive connotations, such as: “The Unconquered” (W. S. Maugham), “The Loved One” (E. Waugh), “A Word Child” (I. Murdoch), “The Wonder Hero” (J. B. Priestley) and so on.

Among the XIX-XX century titles there are some that identify the location where the events described in the text take place. Such titles are represented by the proper names designating: a region or an estate – “Crome Yellow” (A. Huxley), “Mansfield Park” (J. Austen)); a street – “Angel Pavement” (J. B. Priestley); a house – “The Old Curiosity Shop”, “Bleak House” (Ch. Dickens), “The Country House” (J. Galsworthy); real or fictional world – “El Dorado”, “Treasure Island” (R. S. Stevenson), “The Island Pharisees” (J. Galsworthy) etc.

It is important for the author to bring into focus the place of the textual world which frequently acquires a symbolic meaning of the main theme of a literary work. For instance, Ch. Dickens’s “Bleak House” is a symbolic title designating the style of life of the XIX century England. Sometimes authors are disposed to describe the society they live in and express their own critical attitude to the existing social-political system with its accompanying customs and traditions. We find such criticism in W. Thackeray’s “Vanity Fair”. The book’s title comes from John Bunyan’s story “The Pilgrim’s Progress”, first published in 1678 and still widely read at the time of Thackeray’s novel. In that work, “Vanity Fair” refers to a stop along the pilgrim’s route: a never-ending fair held in a town called Vanity, which is meant to represent man’s sinful attachment to worldly things. In his novel Thackeray satirizes the English society, which is characterized by hypocrisy and opportunism, greed, idleness and snobbery. Therefore, “Vanity Fair” is a symbolic generalization of England of that period, where everything – even people and love – could be sold and bought.

Sometimes writers express their viewpoints allegorically placing and depicting their heroes in an imaginary world with symbolic meaning. J. Swift’s “Gulliver’s Travels” is a typical example of this. It serves as a biting satire of English society, and as Swift ensures, the book is both humorous and critical, constantly attacking British and European society through its descriptions of imaginary countries. Another example of symbolic titles is “The Island of Pharisees” by which J. Galsworthy critically characterized his contemporary English society as self-righteous and hypocritical.

Titles with the temporal meaning are rare in English fictional writing. They are used to evaluate the events narrated in the text rather than to denote a definite period of time. Therefore, it is natural that such titles contain evaluative lexemes with both positive or negative connotations in an explicit or implicit form. For instance, “Hard Times” (Ch. Dickens), “When the Going Was Good” (E. Waugh), “Bright Day” (J. Priestley), “The Time of the Angels” (I. Murdoch), etc. They dispose readers to foresee the possible development of the plot of a literary work in terms of *good* or *bad*, thus preparing them to share the author’s aesthetic-communicative intention conveyed in the text.

In the XVII-XVIII centuries authors tried to stimulate readers' interests by using long descriptive titles containing the plot of a literary work they represented. Such titles were characteristic of the novels of adventure genre, such as "The Life, Adventures and Piracies of The Famous Captain Singleton" (D. Defoe), "The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner" (D. Defoe), "A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794 through Holland and Western Frontier of Germany" (A. Radcliffe), "The Adventures of Roderick Random", "The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker" (T. Smollett). Descriptive titles were rarely used in the XIX century. Authors of this period used neutral forms of the title which were less informative in regard to the plot and the theme of the text. Such titles are, for example, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (R. L. Stevenson), "The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club", "A Tale of Two Cities" (Ch. Dickens), "The Return of the Native", "Two on a Tower" (T. Hardy). The only exception in the XIX century titles were the titles of some of Thackeray's novels in which the author retained a descriptive form of presenting the plot of a literary work. For instance, Thackeray's novel "The Adventure of Philip" was originally known as "The Adventures of Philip on his Way Through the World: Shewing Who Robbed Him, Who Helped Him, and Who Passed Him By." The titles of his other novels, such as "The history of Pendennis. His Fortunes and Misfortunes", "The Newcomers: Memories of a Most Respectable Family", "The Virginians: A Tale of the Last Century" - also resemble descriptive titles. It is not easy to convey the conceptual nucleus of a literary work in its title, yet some authors manage to do it masterfully. For instance, Jane Austen's titles "Pride and Prejudice", "Sense and Sensibility" and "Persuasion" serve as classic examples of the titles which represent the conceptual essence of the works they entitle in a simple but most effective way via generalizing abstract nouns.

British writers of the XX century avoid using the titles with concrete descriptions of textual events. They prefer the titles which inform readers only about the central event of the text: "The Flight from the Enchanter", "A Fairly Honourable Defeat" (I. Murdoch), "They Walk in the City", "Festival at Fairbridge" (J. B. Priestley), "Love Among the Ruins" (E. Waugh), etc. Characteristic of this epoch is the appearance of metaphorical and allusive symbolic titles that represent conceptual generalization of an aesthetic-literary content of a work. To this type of literary titles belong, for example, "The White Monkey", "The Silver Spoon" (J. Galsworthy), "Under the Net", "The Sandcastle", "The Bell" (I. Murdoch), "Decline and Fall" (E. Waugh), "The Razor's Edge" (W. S. Maugham), etc.

### Conclusion

Thus, we have presented our viewpoint concerning the linguocultural essence of the title of a literary text. On the one hand, it finds its manifestation in the linguosemiotic peculiarities of the title, whereas on the other hand, linguocultural essence of titles is realized in their typological dynamics which is predetermined by the epochal changes of literary thought.

### REFERENCES

- dolidze, t. (2009). *inglisuri sagazeto-sainpormatsio t'ekst'is st'ilis taviseburebani (inglisuri da kartuli enebis masalaze) [The stylistic peculiarities of the Newspaper-informational text in English language (As according to the English and Georgian texts)]*. The abstract of the dissertation for the PhD in Philology. Batumi.
- lebanidze, g. (2004). *k'omunik'atsiuri lingvist'ik'a [Communicative linguistics]*. Tbilisi: „Ena da Kultura“.
- mart'ashvili, n. (2003). *mkhat'vruli p'rozauli t'ekst'is satauris inpormat'uloba (prangul mkhat'vrul p'rozaze daqrdnobi) [The informativity of the artistic prosaic text (As according to the French artistic prose)]. saenatmetsniero dziebani [Saenatmetsniero dziebani]*. #15, 53-60.
- Genette, G. (1997). *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 79-93 .
- Kirvalidze, N. (2008). *A University Course in Text Linguistics (for MA and PhD students of English Philology)*. Tbilisi.

- Bogorodskij, V. (1969). *O sistemnom podhode k jazyku [About the systematic approach to the language]*. Moscow: «Nauka».
- Gal'perin, I. R. (1981). *Tekst kak ob#ekt lingvisticheskogo issledovanija [The text, as the object of the linguistic research]*. Moscow: «Nauka».
- Gvozdev, L. (1977). *Metody i principy sovremennoj lingvistiki [The methods and the principles of the modern linguistics]*. Moscow: «MGU».
- Dali, D. (1956). *O sistemnom podhode k jazyku publicistiki [About the systematic approach to the publicism]*. Moscow: «Nauka».
- Krzhizhanovskij, S. D. (1931). *Pojetika zaglavij [The poetics of the entitlement]*. Nikitinskie Subbotniki [The Nikitin Saturdays']. Moscow.
- Ozhegov, S. A. (1967). *Metody i principy sovremennoj lingvistiki [The methods and the principles of the modern linguistics]*. Moscow: «MGU».
- Ronginskij, V. M. (1977). *Sintaksicheskie modeli zagolovka i ih ispol'zovanie v razlichnyh stiljah rechi [The syntax models of the entitlement and their usage in various styles of speeches]*. Moscow.