



## Cognitive dissonance in philological perspective

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**Abstract:** The article deals with the problem of cognitive dissonance that represents itself as the discrepancy between cognitive bases of communicants, exteriorized at the level of language. Cognitive dissonance may be caused by various reasons, including linguistic ones connected with the inappropriate choice of language means and communicative strategies, as well as social and other extralinguistic factors, which refer to semantic and conceptual incompatibility actualized in human intercourse. As the result, in most cases the communicants tend to eliminate situations of dissonance by various means appropriate and achieve the state of consonance. Within the domain of literary space the potential of language that refers to cognitive dissonance emergence and its further annihilation if possible may be used to produce a certain stylistic effect and produce the aesthetic impact necessary as well as become intellectual stimulus for further inference. The analysis of cognitive dissonance situations represented in the artistic discourse has shown that in the domain of verbal art their creative abilities, both in terms of naturally occurred and intentionally provoked precedents, represented via means of language, can be exploited for the sake of constructing the specific atmosphere of virtual space and artistic images creation, which contributes to the author's message successful transfer to the reader or listener. This may be confirmed by the results of linguopoetic and linguostylistic investigations, as well as profound philological context analysis, based on integrating linguistic knowledge with knowledge of the world, in which language data are prioritized.

**Key words:** cognitive dissonance; communication; vertical context; background knowledge; artistic message; literary space.

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### НАУЧНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

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**Аннотация:** В статье рассматривается проблема когнитивного диссонанса, который представляет собой несовпадение когнитивных оснований коммуникантов, воплощенных на уровне языка. Когнитивный диссонанс может быть вызван различными причинами, в том числе лингвистическими, связанными с неправильным выбором языковых средств и коммуникативных стратегий, а также социальными и другими экстралингвистическими факторами, относящимися к смысловой и концептуальной несовместимости, актуализируемой в общении людей. В результате в большинстве случаев коммуниканты стремятся устранить ситуации диссонанса различными подходящими средствами и достичь состояния консонанса. В области литературного пространства потенциал языка, относящегося к возникновению когнитивного диссонанса и его дальнейшему уничтожению, если это возможно, может быть использован для получения определенного стилистического эффекта и оказания необходимого эстетического воздействия, а также стать интеллектуальным стимулом для дальнейшего вывода. Анализ ситуаций когнитивного диссонанса, представленных в художественном дискурсе, показал, что в сфере словесного искусства их творческие способности, как в плане естественно возникших, так и намеренно спровоцированных прецедентов, репрезентируемых средствами языка, могут быть использованы для построения образа, создания особой атмосферы виртуального пространства и художественных образов, способствующей успешному донесению авторского сообщения до читателя или слушателя. Подтверждением этому могут служить результаты лингвопоэтических и лингвостилистических исследований, а также глубокий филологический контекстный анализ, основанный на интеграции лингвистических знаний со знаниями о мире, в которых приоритет отдается языковым данным.

**Ключевые слова:** когнитивный диссонанс; коммуникация; вертикальный (тематический) контекст; жизненный опыт; художественный посыл; литературное пространство.

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**Информация о конфликте интересов:** авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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## Introduction

In accordance with the cognitive dissonance theory, within the framework of which the present research has been done, the discrepancy between individuals' cognitions, i.e. between their knowledge, opinions and beliefs as well as the ways information is produced and elaborated, involves psychological discomfort, which calls for its elimination or neutralization in order to achieve the inner balance and peace of mind, i.e. the state of consonance and spiritual harmony [Aronson 1969, Festinger 1968, Schiffrin 1994]. Cognitive dissonance refers to situations when a human being experiences certain psychological stress when ideas and actions, including one's linguistic activity, are not psychologically consistent with one's settings, beliefs and values, thus becoming issues beyond one's cultural, conceptual and linguistic world view. Thus, a person experiences dissonance due to the fact of obtaining information that is not consistent with his or her cognitive attitudes since the basic conceptions with regard to the world order as well as fundamental connections and regularities, based on one's knowledge and individual interpretations, have become destroyed and violated. The state of affairs in question serves as a trigger for making attempts to overcome and reduce the discomfort arisen. Otherwise stated, in case of cognitive dissonance a human being strives for internal psychological comfort and consistency that will enable the person in question to find him- or herself in the usual, real and cognizant situation

and familiar world. The internal inconsistency tends to become strong motivation to search for various ways to reduce cognitive dissonance, which in the more general sense include the rational approach to the situation, which concerns with making changes to justify incomprehensible social or linguistic behavior of the communicants that causes stress. This can be achieved by adding new cognitive elements to the domain of one's cognitive system, as well as the confirmation bias application as referred to contradictory information avoidance. In other similar cases search for harmony and consonance refer to both content and ways of presentation, as well as focusing on the statements that support one's prior knowledge and expectations in terms of values, beliefs and attitudes, usually completely ignoring dissonance- and conflict-causing information [Festinger 1968].

Within the domain of linguistics the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance presents one of the topical and most significant problems that concern with linguistic and general knowledge interaction as referred to the ways of cognitive processes presentation and interpretation, as well as the use of language not only in terms of causing or avoiding cases of naturally occurring and unintentionally provoked dissonance but also with respect to deliberate creation of cognitive and linguistic incompatibility to achieve stylistic and rhetorical purposes. From the heuristic point of view ways of cognitive dissonance reduction are subject to the analysis with regard to contextual

approach and linguistic creativity issues based on the use of language potential abilities for the sake of communicants' conceptual bases coordination. It should be emphasized that as for the linguistic area of the analysis one should bear in mind that first and foremost this concerns language and the peculiarities of its use in actual speech, which reflects linguistic knowledge possession and linguistic units characteristics [Kubryakova 2005, p. 29].

### Methodology

The process of speech interaction in terms of cognitive dissonance theory is closely connected with such problems as the knowledge inference from the information transmitted, the intentions of the speaker or writer decoding, as well as the adequacy of interpretation of the statement from the linguistic point of view, including communicative strategies implementation. In this regard a complex approach to the phenomenon in question, based on the analysis of actual speech representations, seems appropriate in terms of integrating knowledge of the world with the linguistic knowledge.

We precede from the premise that the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance should be discussed in terms of discrepancies between communicants' cognitions actualized at the level of language. This means that the category in question can be regarded as the cognitive-communicative category, represented by the opposition of consonance vs. dissonance within the domain of speech interaction [Drozdova 2011]. It should be emphasized that any communicative act as a certain piece of oral or written speech is supposed to be analyzed in terms of linguistic and mental processing, with special attention to extralinguistic issues, which concern with the discursive approach to the study of the phenomena under consideration, as discourse is a dynamic phenomenon, based on the entire set of issues taking part in communication process formation and referring to the complex approach of the phenomena in question. The notion of discourse concerns with the continuity of the topic in question as well as the ability of new worlds creation, and includes both linguistic and extralinguistic factors, which determine human interaction [Kubryakova, Aleksandrova 1999].

The communicative pragmatic function of language has been discussed time and again and analyzed in detail via means of various methods on the basis of different approaches to the problem. For example, the lingual personality conception, integrative and dynamic by its nature, plays an important role within these lines both in terms of penetrating into the inner structure of the processes concerned with human ability to use language and the anthropocentric approach emergence as one of the fundamentals of cognitive linguistics [Karaulov 2010; Ivantsova 2010]. In the course of human communication the communicative pragmatic function of speech serves to be the central one as referred to interaction of various types of interlocutors. Thus, such notions as 'addresser' and 'addressee' deserve

special attention and subject to the analysis in terms of the speech acts theory, which has become one of the precursors of cognitive and discursive approaches to language phenomena [Kubryakova 2005]. Taking the speech acts conception into special consideration one should bear in mind that in some cases we may confront situations with both direct and indirect ways of linguistic representation used to express the content and the purport of an utterance. Such cases are not always easily identifiable and adequately interpretable, as very much depends on the linguistic and extralinguistic context actualization that may implicitly convey additional information and largely determined by communicative-pragmatic factors, which lie in the domain of perlocution and focused on the recipient's (addressee's) reaction correspondence to the addresser's communicative task and serves to achieve a certain pragmatic and stylistic effect.

It should always be borne in mind that it is impossible to experience the true impact of a work of art without real understanding of the literary text [Nazarova 1994, p. 129]. The process of understanding represents itself as a cognitive activity that concerns identification of a linguistic unit semantic potential actualized in the work of literature as referred to its function in terms of the author's intention realization. The process of establishing contact between the author and the reader (or the listener) depends on the appropriate choice of linguistic means and communicative strategies, aimed at the convergence of the conceptual spheres of the author and the addressee. Acts of reality perception and interpretation are determined by peculiarities of human consciousness as the reality appears to us transformed by our cognitive abilities [Skolimovsky 1983, pp. 779–780].

One more very important point to be made concerns problems of adequate interpretation and understanding of the utterance, determined by such parameters as both general and linguistic knowledge of the recipient as well as the total conceptual potential of the listener or reader. Compliance with communication norms and principles as the basis of successful linguistic and social intercourse correlates with one's background knowledge and individual world view peculiarities (Kharkovskaya et al. 2020). It should be emphasized that the reaction to the situation both on the part of an addresser and addressee involves paying special attention to each word spoken or written, including all possible variants and shades of meanings, both actual and potential, as well as analyzing them in terms of socio-historical context, which within the limits of fiction refer to the notion of vertical context [Gyubbenet 1991]. Vertical context concerns the realities, which first and foremost represent historical and philological information. For example, linguists state that in terms of fiction the use of allusions and quotations based on ancient sources, mythology, the Bible, as well as texts of English and world literature, Shakespeare's poetry should be taken into special consideration in terms of the English linguistic cultural tradition. Otherwise stated, the problem of adequate interpretation of the

author's intention in the work of literature very much depends on the recipient's background knowledge possession [Akhmanova, Zadornova 1977], or, to be more precise, issues concerned with profound philological context analysis, based on linguistic and cultural knowledge integration, including the use of implications instead of direct and explicit ways of information transfer [Zadornova 1984]. Thus, questions that arise in this connection concern the whole range of issues that refer to language use to create images, situations and other components of the process of virtual worlds creation as well as the peculiar aesthetic effect production, analyzed within the domain of linguostylistics and linguopoetics [Lipgart 2021; Borisova 2008]. V.V. Vinogradov proclaimed the necessity of elaboration of special approach to the language of artistic prose and poetry in order to distinguish the particular branch of philology, based on the aesthetic function of language with respect to realization of the authors' intention [Vinogradov 1954], which later has been extended and developed as the special domain of philological science, linguopoetics. A.A. Lipgart writes that linguopoetic research, which is determined by the goal of penetration into the entire literary text continuum via means of a certain stylistic device investigation, deals with the analysis of stylistically marked linguistic units in terms of their value and functions as referred to the basic intention of the author and the aesthetic impact produced by a work of literary art [Lipgart 2021]. It should be emphasized that for appropriate understanding of the author's intention, one should take into account both the artistic techniques specifics and vertical context peculiarities, as well as deep philological context that characterizes the work of art not only as a creative linguistic and literary formation, but also as a socio-psychological phenomenon. The latter possesses both explicitly and implicitly expressed properties, which play an important role to achieve the communicants' cognitive bases consensus. Precedential phenomena can be regarded as one of the most important components of the process of adequate interpretation of the utterance as they can be regarded as certain 'keys' or 'passwords' for inference [Gudkov 2000; Krasnykh 2001], functioning as material and language indicators to provide access to implicit information [Vinogradov 2001, p. 39]. Intertextuality that refers to textual as well as extra-textual correspondence within works of literature, introduced both explicitly and implicitly, should be discussed with respect to the entire space of the world culture, on which artistic reality is based, including dialogical interaction between the author and the reader. This refers to its realization in the course cognitive dissonance purposeful creation within the limits of literary space as well as its consequences elimination, in some contexts concerned with correlation of the linguistic sign, by which human experience is fixed, with other semiotic means of expression [Vishnyakova 2002; 2015, 2018]. Thus, in case of cognitive dissonance occurrence various ways of its elimination and

compensation are used in the literary sources under consideration, though it is not always the case that consonance is successfully achieved.

### Analysis and Results

In the course of our investigation we precede from the premise that cognitive dissonance occurs in situations that refer to the lack of correspondence between cognitive and conceptual bases of the communicants. Within the domain of fiction authors use the discrepancy to transfer both intellectual and emotional-evaluative information in order to create appropriate images, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to present the characters and the environment realistically to make the description plausible. This contributes to deeper penetration into the essence of the basic message of the author concerned with the concept of the artistic text and its adequate interpretation [Vishnyakova 2002]. Social determination of the events described as well as ways of identifying characters within certain circumstances refer to the specifics of individual perception, social status and linguocultural prerequisites for social and linguistic behaviour of the characters that enables the author to create images that possess all the features necessary for a certain aesthetic purpose achievement. Let's turn to the material and analyze the extract borrowed from "The French Lieutenant's Woman" by John Fowles. The interlocutors are a young rich heiress Ernestina Freeman and her servant Mary.

'You will kindly remember that he comes from London.'

'Yes, miss.'

'Mr. Smithson has already spoken to me of him. The man fancies himself a *Don Juan*.'

'What's that then, Miss Tina?'

There was a certain eager anxiety for further information in Mary's face that displeased Ernestina very much.

'Never mind now. But if he makes advances I wish to be told at once. Now bring me some barley water. And be more discreet in future' [Fowles 1969].

Thus, within these terms cognitive dissonance may serve as one of the specific devices concerned with the author's intention elucidating. Actually, the conversation presents a good sample of two cognitive dissonance varieties, the reasons for which are lack of social grounds and life experience as well as lack of education and cultural knowledge possession, where both lead to the usefulness of any attempt to eliminate the dissonant situations. In the passage the mistress warns the maid against her lover; she hints at his free manners of a person living in the capital and compares him with Don Juan, referring to the literary name as a common noun indicated by the indefinite article (a Don Juan), i.e. a person with a certain kind of reputation. The appeal to literary vertical context and lack of feedback demonstrate differences in linguistic and cultural knowledge possession on the part of the female characters in question. As for the cognitive dissonance effect, it becomes absolutely clear that the

maid's background knowledge absence prevents her from understanding the content of the utterance and impossibility of the dissonant situation elimination or reduction. The maid is completely unaware of the fact that dissonant has arisen due to the limitations of her individual world view and social status. At the same time, the maid's social and linguistic behaviour demonstrates incomprehension with regard to the concerns of her mistress, who faces the cognitive incompatibility occurred and who is confined to the current state of affairs resolve by giving an order to inform her in case of his 'making advances'. Cognitive dissonance is evident due to the corresponding communicative-pragmatic marker in the addressee's lack of understanding: "What's that then, Miss Tina?". It should be noted that the addresser does not try to neutralize or reduce cognitive dissonance by giving some interpretive explanation, using the following remark: "Never mind now", which refers to the futility of further discussion due to social restrictions and different social affiliations. Thus, from the point of view of the mistress, it seems inappropriate to continue the conversation, since for her the other interlocutor (the maid) is not of any interest or value in terms of effective communicative results [Gudkov 2000].

At the same time the comic effect produced can be discussed within the framework of the precedential phenomenon mentioned and the way linguistic units function to attract attention of the reader and to produce certain stylistic impact. The author of the novel is fully aware of the fact that the reader possesses the necessary information of the cultural phenomenon in question (Don Juan) and is familiar with its implicit characteristics, which facilitates inference. The use of the verb "to fancy" ("The man fancies himself a *Don Juan*") which means 'to picture in the mind', 'to imagine'; 'to have an excessively high opinion of oneself', 'to be rather conceited' enhances the emphasis and reinforces the mistress's irony along with anxiety, but the maid practically does not pay any attention to it, which serves to intensify the artistic effect produced and evokes a response from the reader. Thus, in a number of cases cognitive dissonance tends to be analyzed within the scope of stylistic and poetic potential of language use, especially in cases of intertextual phenomena actualization that contribute to the creation of a multifaceted stylistic effect based on the abilities of several closely related phenomena immediate application.

One more example can be adduced to illustrate the point – the conversation between the two main characters of the novel "The Collector" by John Fowles, Miranda and her kidnapper Frederick Clegg, who pretends to be called Ferdinand, by the analogy with the protagonist of Shakespeare's play "The Tempest". Nevertheless, in the novel Miranda calls Clegg 'Caliban', which is the name of a monstrous man, violent and uncivilized, who tries to abuse Miranda, the princess from Shakespeare's play. In the following example the use of the unit 'Tantalus',

in which the futility of Clegg's effort is evaluated in accordance with its real signification, serves as one of the attributes to reflect the opposition of two lingual personalities that represent the two mindsets:

'I shouldn't have given you such a shock.'

It's not your fault, I said. I'm not like other people. Nobody understands.

'I understand.'

I dream about it, I said. It can't ever be real.

'Like *Tantalus*.' She explained who he was [Fowles 1963].

To reduce the dissonance occurred as the result of Clegg's lack of education and cultural knowledge Miranda, an art student art lover, tries to explain the meaning of the name 'Tantalus' and the additional connotations associated with it to Clegg, thus, reducing the dissonance. At the same time only superficial approach to what is really going on may give grounds for the discussion of the dissonance genuine elimination in this case.

It is a well-established fact that Fowles repeatedly refers to Shakespeare's play in his novel and on deep penetration into human psychology he touches upon a great number of philosophical and social psychological problems that can be conceived in the process of inference caused by the author's ability to use language in such a way as to say more than can be seen at first sight, as much of his message is presented implicitly and concerns the general sense of human existence and mutual relations: "Fowles invites us to defy his main character's excuses and read between the lines, and the facts paint a more chilling picture. Fred doesn't accidentally abduct Miranda, there's a sense that he's been leading up to this event his whole life" [Andrews 2014].

Fowles' appeal to Shakespeare's work in the novel being realized at different levels of representation, including the situation of being cut off from the whole world and its reality as well as the alignment of forces of good and evil in terms of compositional arrangement, enables the author to touch upon problems that concern the state of dissonance emerging not only in individual cognitions, but realized as intrinsic inherence of human relations. The use of intertextual phenomena, some of which can be analyzed in terms of precedential names and situations, enables the reader to discover the new psychological and linguistic peculiarities of the characters' mentalities (for example, Miranda's use of the expression "Come, thou tortoise!", with which Prospero addresses Caliban in "The Tempest" and which remains totally incomprehensible to Clegg, though he rightfully thinks that it might be taken from literature). This serves to prove that the search for the elimination of dissonance at all levels is a very complicated and often unfeasible task. To illustrate the point one can refer to Miranda's effort to feel sorry for Clegg-Caliban in her attempts at expanding his world view and awakening living emotions in him. In some cases, Miranda calls him by the name that he would like to be called – 'Ferdinand', but there is no feedback at this level either, as the word in isolation

is powerless to change human nature. Thus, in the end the girl dies, adding to the collection of a ruthless maniac, for whom consonance is at last achieved in his unreal, isolated and limited world. Thus, the allusion to Prospero's words "*Be collected; No more amazement; Tell your piteous heart, There's no harm done*" [Shakespeare 1975], addressed to Miranda in the play acquires an ominous meaning in Fowles's novel, including iconic association of the formal part of the linguistic sign used. Otherwise stated, in the virtual literary space of "The Collector" the situation of dissonance becomes invincible and gets out of control in terms of its avoidance or impact mitigation, thus becoming the basis for creating a special kind of imagery in relation to the characters and atmosphere.

Within the domain of fiction one may come across situations when interlocutors, who experience cognitive dissonance, still don't find a solution to the cognitive-communicative misunderstanding, even in case of intelligible and clear explanations received on the part of both the addresser and the addressee, including the lingual personalities' appropriate features demonstration. For instance:

'I see! I see!' went on Jephson, oratorically and loudly, having the jury and audience in mind. 'A case of *the Arabian Nights*, of the ensorcelled and the ensorcellor.'

'I don't think I know what you mean,' said Clyde.

'A case of being bewitched, my poor boy – by beauty, love, wealth, by things that we sometimes think we want very, very much, and cannot ever have – that is what I mean, and that is what much of the love in the world amounts to.'

'Yes, sir,' replied Clyde, quite innocently, concluding rightly that this was mere show of rhetoric on Jephson's part [Dreiser 1925].

The example above is characterized by the addresser's suitable choice and appropriate use of words to explain the meaning of the precedential name '*the Arabian Nights*' to achieve certain communicative-pragmatic purposes, on the one hand, and clear understanding of the real state of affairs by the addressee, on the other. The extralinguistic nature of the communicative situation in question represents itself as a factor that determines intentional misunderstanding of the meaning of the precedential name on the part of the addressee. In other words, it is not the intellectual level enhancement and the level of the addressee's development of emotional and evaluative sphere that cause cognitive dissonance, but the addresser's hidden motives properly understood by the addressee. The author uses this technique, as well as the expressions like 'oratorically and loudly', 'ensorcelled and the ensorcellor', 'a case of being bewitched', 'we want very, very much', 'much of the love in the world amounts to' to realize the intention to create a plausible image of the current situation and characters in order to convey the basic message of the literary work and to provide the necessary aesthetic impact.

As is well known, the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance both in the real life and within the

boundaries of literary space may be caused and avoided by the attraction of the linguistic means of presentation as well as with the help of other semiotic systems components use. Thus, for example, the phenomenon of silence that has been analyzed in the course of profound philological investigation [Vishnyakova, 2018<sup>1</sup>] presents a special problem within these terms. Its semantic and functional peculiarities analysis is closely connected with the vertical context application as it is difficult to overestimate the effect produced by the philological potential of 'silence' actualization and its dynamic transfer within the domain of literary space. 'Silence' as one of the basic universal concepts can be extensively exploited to produce cognitive dissonance as well as to annihilate its consequences. In general, the phenomenon of silence presented at various levels of representation attracts attention of both linguists and representatives of other fields of science, who perceive it as a fact of speech culture, dominating in a certain sense over other ways of human intercourse, including sounding speech [Vishnyakova 2018].

The concept of silence has been extensively represented in poetry and fiction. For instance, in the poem by John Milton it is personified:

"Now came still evening on, and twilight gray  
Had in her sober livery all things clad;  
Silence accompanied, for beast and bird,  
They to their grassy coach, these to their nests,  
Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale;  
She al night long her amorous descant sung;  
Silence was pleas'd: now glow'd the firmament  
With living sapphires..." [Milton 1904].

In Shakespeare's "Hamlet" 'silence' plays a significant role in terms of its message transfer and represents itself as the stimulus for further inference on the basis of the outspoken (e.g. "The rest is silence"), along with other significant factors, both artistic and historical [Lipgart 2018]. 'Silence' has subsequently become an extraordinarily productive discourse-forming intertextual poetical device within the English literary continuum. As has been mentioned, it can be realized as the cognitive dissonance inspirational factor as well as the method of its elimination, being designated by different iconic and linguistic means, borrowed from the arsenal of semiotics and semasiology. In the "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot it correlates with the other notional key-concepts and contributes to the creation of the very specific conceptual space of the work of art [Vishnyakova 2002, pp. 96–120]. In some of the cases it is represented implicitly being the reflection of the cognitive dissonance emergence as well as images constructing on the basis of the opposition between the words and the still: "Speak. My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me. Speak to me. Why do you never speak"; "Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair Spread out in fiery points Glowed into words, then would be savagely still" (Eliot 1974). Thus, the concept of silence realization via means of various manifestations contributes to one more important cognitive dissonance characteristics that

concern its universal character in terms of human communication. This can be illustrated by the reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein, who proclaimed the creative force of silence due to its explicable status: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” [Wittgenstein 1961, p. 110].

### Conclusion

In conclusion it should be stated that cognitive dissonance as a philological problem can be discussed in terms of its characteristics and functions, among which is its ability to be used within the literary space. Language as the means of communication serves to achieve consonance and understanding in the course of human interaction as well as being

used to achieve certain communicative-pragmatic purposes and to create stylistic and rhetorical effect required. This means that in the discourse of fiction and poetry cognitive dissonance situations can be used to construct artistic images and to achieve the aesthetic effect necessary, which contributes to the successful transmission of the author's conceptions and understanding of the basic concept of the text. The use of the language potential abilities enables the writers to create artistic images and complicated collisions, based on cognitive dissonance, as well as to discuss and to solve the humanity's vital problems, that serves to achieve the state of consonance between the author and the reader (listener) in terms of the author's message adequate interpretation.

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