

**Structuralist and Discursive-semiotic Analysis of the
Folklore Short Story “Pearl Leaf”**

Seyed Mohtsham Mohammadi,

Assistant professor of Persian language and literature department,
Salman Farsi University, Kazerun, Iran (corresponding author)

mohtasham@kazerunsfu.ac.ir

Motahara Allahdadi,

M.A. student at Salman Farsi University, Kazerun, Iran

motahareallahdadi@gmail.com

Ali Mohammad Mahmoudi,

Assistant professor, Department of Persian Language and Literature,
Salman Farsi University, Kazerun, Iran

mahmoodi@kazerunsfu.ac.ir

Introduction

This research uses a discursive semiotic approach to analyze discourse systems such as the intelligent discourse system (prescriptive discourse, inductive discourse and intent-based discourse) in one of the Iranian folkloric short tales, “Pearl Leaf” [in Persian, “Barg-e Morvarid”]. The collector of the tales believes that these tales are not only attractive and simply beautiful, but also very firmly established from the perspective of principles of storytelling; they have timely excitements and ups and downs; therefore, they are comparable to today’s principles of fiction-writing (Anjavi Shirazi. 1974: eleven). This tale is selected because of its logical conflict as well as its coherent structure. The tale is about a blind king who has three sons who are assigned with finding the pearl

leaf. It is Malek Mohammad who, after passing different stages, finds the magical object which is remedy for his father’s blight; thus, he deals with the initial flaw of the tale with his heroism and restores his father’s sight.

Methodology

This is a theoretical research conducted with a content analysis method using library tools. First, by a review of literature, a void in related research was identified. Then, using a discursive-semiotic approach based on Greimas’ discursive-semiotic theory, the researchers tried to analyze discourse systems such as the intelligent discourse systems (prescriptive discourse, inductive discourse and intent-based discourse) in the tale “Pearl Leaf”.

Discussion

Discourse systems

Greimas believes that most stories begin with a flaw and end with a contract. This contract is either between the actant and another agent in the story or between the actant and himself/herself (Abbasi and Yarmand, 2010: 150). The conflict is an action that, accompanied by the fulfillment of a plan, can cause a change in situation. After the contract, the actant needs to acquire the ability to perform the task. Then the main stage which is the process of performing the act begins. Therefore, the stages of narrative process can be shown as below (Shaeiri, 2018: 93):

Contract ➡ ability ➡ action ➡ assessment

Greimas suggest a semiotic square in the deepest level of the text which is a place for basic and abstract concepts of the narrative; the abstract data in the deep structure which become apparent in the semiotic square appear in this level of reproductive process like pure tensions in superstructure and are called by Greimas actants or agent roles (Moein, 2003: 181). Semiotic square is composed of four words which can be imagined in four positions on the square. Collectively, these four positions result in three types of relation:

- a) contrary, which exists on the axis of contraries, between the two words on the upper part of the square (ugly and beautiful);
- b) contradictory, which is created between a contrary and its negation (beautiful and not-beautiful);
- c) implication, which is created between contrary negation and a positive word (not-beautiful and ugly).

The narrative of “Pearl Leaf” is composed of four chains of prescriptive discourse, each of which move the narrative forward in one way or another; however, there is only one main discourse in the center of this narrative around which other discourses move. The narrative is about a king who asks his sons to look for a pearl leaf to heal his eyes. Finding the value object has spiritual value for the king’s sons because the pearl leaf means healing the father’s blindness.

Conclusion

The active-prescriptive discourse can be considered effective in the progress of the narrative in “Pearl Leaf”, since without this discourse, the narrative is incomplete. The main action is instrumental in the

formation of the narrative discourses in the story because it is only Malek Mohammad's act, not his spiritual and emotional status, that can create a change in the situation and make it better. Malek Mohammad could never attain the status he deserves and inherit the throne if he did not leave the house with his brothers to make a change in the situation and find the object, wrestle with demons and achieve victory and then narrate his adventures for his father. As such, none of these changes were possible without Malek Mohammad's action. The research revealed that in order to transform the existing meaning and pass the initial crisis, the actant (Malek Mohammad) should have first negated his previous situation (his weakness) and then have gone toward a secondary situation (power) with a new meaning. The narrative process of change in the meaning in "Pearl Leaf" includes passing the stages of contract, main action (ability and action) and cognitive and practical assessment.

References:

- Abbasi, A. (2004). The narrative-semantic function of signs in the painting of sacrifice by the Prophet Ibrahim. *Collection of Articles of the First Conference of Semiotics of Art*. Farhangestan-e Honar, 205-226. [in Persian]
- Abbasi, A. & Yarmand, H. (2011). Passing the semiotic square toward tensive square: A discursive-semiotic study of *The Little Black Fish*. *Researches in Comparative Language and Literature*, 2: 3, 147-172. [in Persian]
- Abbasi, A. (2016). *Applied narratology: Linguistic analysis of narrative (applied analysis of narrative situations, plot, and*

- narrative syntax*). Shahid Beheshti University Press. [in Persian]
- Ahmadi, B. (1991). *Structure and interpretation of the text*. Markaz. [in Persian]
- Anjavi Shirazi, S. A. (1974). *Iranian tales* (first volume). Amir Kabir. [in Persian]
- Elsaesser, T. & Pope, A. (2004). *A review of linguistic semiological studies of cinema* (F. Sasani, trans.). Soureya Mehr. [in Persian]
- Greimas, A. (2019). *The imperfection of meaning* (H. R. Shaeiri, Trans.). Khamoush. [in Persian]
- Haddadi-nia, S. (2016). *A discursive-semiotic study of narrative in Abbas Maroufi's novels based on Greimas' narrative theory: A case study – The symphony of the dead, The year of riot and Farhad's body*. M.A. thesis in Persian language and literature, Razi University. [in Persian]
- Jabbari, J. (2016). *A study of Mohammad Reza Bayrami's Suspended Bridge based on Propp's and Greimas' theory*. M.A. thesis in Persian language and literature. Mohaqqueq Ardabili University. [in Persian]
- Khorasani, F. (2010). *A study of the narrative structure of the story of Siavash based on Greaims' discursive-semiotic theory*. M.A. thesis in Persian language and literature, Tarbiat Modarres University. [in Persian]
- Moein, B. (2003). The relationship between semiotics and semantics in children's literature. *Book of the Month of Children and Adolescents*, 7: 76, 179-187. [in Persian]

- Nabi-lou, A. R. (2013). A study of the narrative structure of children's literature based on Greimas' theory. *Kavoshnameh*, 14: 26,147-172. [in Persian]
- Niazi, F. (2015). *An analysis of children's stories based on Greimas' theory in ancient tales*. M.A. thesis in Persian language and literature, Qom University. [in Persian]
- Pakatchi, A. & Shaeiri, H. R. & Rahnama, H. (2015). Analyzing discursive processes in the verse Qare'eh based on tensive semiotics. *Language Related Research*, 6: 25, 39-68. [in Persian]
- Propp, V. (2018). *Morphology of folktales* (F. Badrei, Trans.). Tous. [in Persian]
- Rowshanfekr, K. & Nasihat, N. (2012). A discursive-semiotic study of the narrative structure of the story "Va Ma-Tashaoun" based on Greimas' theory. *Criticism of Contemporary Arabic Literature*, 2: 3, 39-62. [in Persian]
- Salimi, S. (2012). *A structural analysis of the tales in the book What did the flower do to the pine? based on Vladimir Propp's theories*. M.A. thesis in Persian language and literature, Shahrekord University. [in Persian]
- Shaeiri, H. R. (2007). A study of different types of discourse systems from the perspective of discursive-semiotics. *Collection of Articles of Allameh Tabatabaei University*, 9: 219, 106-119. [in Persian]
- Shaeiri, H. R. & Vafaei, T. (2009). *Phoenix: A path to fluent discursive-semiotics*. Elmi va Farhangi. [in Persian]

- Shaeiri, H. R. (2012). *Visual discursive-semiotics: Theory and analysis of artistic discourse*. Sokhan. [in Persian]
- Shaeiri, H. R. (2016). *Discursive-semiotics of literature: Theory and analytical method of literary discourse*. Tarbiat Modarres University Press. [in Persian]
- Shaeiri, H. R. (2017). *Analysis of discursive-semiotics of discourse*. SAMT. [in Persian]
- Shaeiri, H. R. (2018). *Principles of modern semantics*. SAMT. [in Persian]
- Toolan, M. (2014). *Narrative: A critical linguistic introduction* (S. F. Alavi and F. Nemati, Trans.). SAMT. [in Persian]