**Key Words: Four Approaches to the Notion**

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Being one of the features of an academic article, key words are common to many spheres of knowledge. Despite its importance, the notion of key words has not received all the attention it deserves. In fact, the term key words does not have an established definition: scholars tend to rely on its metaphoric nature, rather than on some accepted terminological usage. Thus, in every work devoted to the subject of key words they either receive a new definition according to the purpose of the research or are not defined at all.

The study of the literature on the subject has revealed that the notion of key words has been considered from at least three points of view: linguocultural, psycholinguistic and linguopoetic. Moreover, the linguocultural approach manifests itself in two different ways: the study of key words of culture and the study of key words of the epoch.

The most important works on key words of different cultures are those of the Polish linguist Anna Wierzbicka. Her main idea is that most cultures are characterized by culture-specific concepts represented by key words, which are untranslatable into other languages but can be explained with the help of the ‘core’ concepts – elementary units of our thinking, which are universal, that is, common to all the world’s cultures [Вежбицкая: 8-9]. Many linguists working in the field of cultural studies followed suit, developing Wierzbicka’s ideas.

As for key words of the epoch, it is a narrower notion that has been named in various ways: key words of the moment, key symbols of the epoch, chronofact words, trendy words. As the very term suggests, scholars dealing with the subject concentrate on the words that reflect people’s concerns within a certain period of time – not infrequently, the current one. Researchers either try to single out as many key words of the epoch as they can or focus on a certain key word and its functioning.

The psycholinguistic approach is concerned with the methods of singling out key words in a given text. In Russian linguistics, this branch is connected with the name of L. Sakharny and his co-authors, who proposed the theory of primitive texts on the basis of the study of key words. According to them, primitive texts are the result of compressing the sense of primary, ‘extended’ texts. Such compressed texts reflect the way people think: by means of simple structures and key words without losing coherence [Сахарный, Сибирский, Штерн: 81-83]. Some time later, Sakharny’s colleagues introduced a method of singling out key words based on the frequency criterion.

The proponents of linguopoetic approach study key words with special reference to the global purport of a literary work. Within this field, they sometimes also focus on the role of key words in the author’s individual style [Кухаренко, Ларин]. Some more criteria for selecting key words have been listed: apart from frequency, it is their semantic potential, rich contextual links, connection with the global purport of the given work of verbal art and, sometimes, their use in its title [Фонякова: 142]. This list of features helps researchers when they try to single out key words in literary texts ‘manually’. Recently researchers got the opportunity to study key words with the help of modern technologies: certain computer programs have been devised to serve as a useful aid in the linguopoetic study of texts. The results of such study may, however, require further comment and revision of a human researcher.

Each of the four approaches contributed to the study of key words in its own way. Psycholinguistics provided us with methods of and criteria for singling out key words. Linguoculturology established the link between them and cultural concepts. Finally, linguopoetics demonstrated how methods of corpus linguistics – that is, singling out key words automatically – could be exploited in an effective, sometimes even unexpected, way.

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