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“METATEXT” SEPARATED FROM THE MAIN TEXT

The notion of “metatext” appeared in the second half of the 20th century and was used by such linguists as A.A. Potebnia, R.O. Yakobson, M.M. Bakhtin, Yu.M. Lotman and A. Vezhbitskaya. Singling “metatext” out of text was connected with the differentiation between “object language” and “metalanguage”. A metalanguage indicates, comments on, examines, criticizes etc what happens on the level of the object language. It indicates a language that is about language, one level “up” from the “object language”

“Metatext” can be either separated from the main text or placed inside it. The first type of “metatext” (foreword, epigraph, commentaries, footnotes, etc) is not connected syntactically with the main text, being distanced from it. Such “metatexts” differ as for their authorship: writers themselves produce epigraphs but commentaries, footnotes, etc are provided by the readers’ contemporaries, who are “deconstructing” (doing the literary analysis of) these literary works. For example V.N. Korotkiy is the author of commentaries to W.S. Maugham’s stories “Rain and Other Stories”. Being a person of a different culture, he understands what words from the text are too difficult for contemporary Russian speaking readers to understand adequately: abbreviations, archaic and obsolete words, foreignisms, slang, jargonisms, dialectal words, vulgar words, colloquial coinages etc. He also explains different literary facts, informs of unknown for us geographical names, famous people, events from the life of the English speaking society of his time.

Everything what may prevent the readers from understanding becomes the object of commenting. The choice of commentaries shows what kind of reader V.N. Korotkiy has foreseen..

So, commentaries are separated structurally from the main text, but semantically they are related to it: on the one hand, everything what is included in commentaries, has something to do with the main text, and, on the other hand, the main text may be adequately understood only by referring to commentaries.