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THE «LITTLE MAN» THEME IN THE WORKS OF GOGOL AND PUSHKIN (A COMPARATIVE STUDY)

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Abstract. *The article compares the «little man» in A.S. Pushkin's «The Stationmaster» (1830) and N.V. Gogol's «The Overcoat» (1842) through close reading and quantitative analysis of thematic vocabulary, the naming of the hero and his direct speech. Family vocabulary is ten times more frequent in Pushkin's story (17.8 against 1.7 per 1,000 words), while clothing and rank prevail in Gogol's. Vyrin is named by his social role 47 times and by his surname once, whereas Akaky Akakievich is named by name and patronymic 88 times. Both heroes speak 342 words, but hedging particles make up 17.0% of Akaky's speech against 3.2% of Vyrin's. Pushkin's little man is a father deprived of his child, Gogol's is a man deprived of a voice.*

Keywords. *little man, Pushkin, Gogol, The Stationmaster, The Overcoat, Samson Vyrin, Akaky Akakievich, character speech, comparative analysis, quantitative literary analysis.*

Introduction. The «little man» is one of the most persistent character types of Russian literature, and its history is usually traced to two stories, A.S. Pushkin's «The Stationmaster» (1830) and N.V. Gogol's «The Overcoat» (1842). The first reader to compare them inside a literary text was F.M. Dostoevsky. In «Poor Folk» the copying clerk Makar Devushkin reads both stories and reacts to them in opposite ways. Of Pushkin's story he writes «Нет, это натурально! Вы прочтите-ка; это натурально! это живет!» [1, p. 59].

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Gogol's story offends him. He calls it «злонамеренная книжка» and claims that «случиться не может, чтобы был такой чиновник», and he even proposes a happier ending in which the general raises the poor clerk in rank and salary [1, p. 63]. Dostoevsky thus showed that the two texts build different relations between the reader and the little man, recognition in one case and humiliation in the other.

Literary scholarship has explained this difference mainly through narrative form. B.M. Eikhenbaum demonstrated that the skaz of «The Overcoat» is «не повествовательный, а мимико-декламационный» [2, p. 313] and interpreted the famous humane passage as a declamatory insertion into the comic text [2, p. 321]. W. Schmid showed that «The Stationmaster» plays with the parable of the prodigal son and with the sentimental scheme of the poor father, and that the explanations offered by the hero and the narrator do not fully account for the events of the story [3]. I.A. Esaulov warns that the very notion of the «little man» reduces Akaky Akakievich to a sociological type and ignores the hagiographic and holy-fool dimensions of the character [4]. Comparisons of the two stories, however, usually rely on selected episodes. The aim of this article is to compare Pushkin's and Gogol's little men on the basis of measurable features of the texts, namely their thematic vocabulary, the way the hero is named and the structure of the hero's own speech.

Materials and methods. The material comprises the texts of the academic editions, «The Stationmaster» from volume 8 of Pushkin's Complete Works [5] and «The Overcoat» from volume 3 of Gogol's Complete Works [6], taken from the electronic versions with page markers. The Pushkin text contains 3,474 words, the Gogol text 10,137 words. Three groups of indicators were measured. First, six thematic fields (family and kinship, suffering and death, religion, money, clothing, rank and power) were counted by word stems and normalised per 1,000 words. Second, all references to the hero by proper

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name, social role or rank, age and kinship were counted. Third, all quoted utterances were attributed to their speakers manually. The speech of Akaky Akakievich includes his inner speech and the words of his ghost at the end of the story. Each word of the hero's speech was assigned a part of speech with the pymorphy3 analyser [7], and hedging particles (*того, этак, право, совершенно, уж, ведь, вот, так, как*) were counted separately. Differences were tested with the χ^2 test.

Results. The main indicators are given in Table 1. The two stories differ in length by a factor of three, yet the two heroes pronounce exactly the same number of words, 342 each. Within a much shorter text Samson Vyrin therefore speaks about three times more than Akaky Akakievich (9.8% against 3.4% of all words, $\chi^2 = 225.6$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 1. Main quantitative indicators of the two stories

Indicator	«The Stationmaster»	«The Overcoat»
Text length, words	3,474	10,137
Words in direct speech (share of text)	677 (19.5%)	920 (9.1%)
Utterances of the hero	23	30
Words in the hero's speech (share of text)	342 (9.8%)	342 (3.4%)
Mean length of the hero's utterance, words	14.9	11.4
Hedging particles in the hero's speech, %	3.2	17.0
Particle <i>того</i> in the hero's speech	0	15
Hero named by proper name	1	91
Hero named by social role or rank	47	4

The thematic profiles of the stories are almost opposite (Fig. 1). Family vocabulary is ten times more frequent in «The Stationmaster» (17.8 against 1.7

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per 1,000 words), and the vocabulary of suffering and death and of religion is also significantly more frequent in Pushkin's story. In «The Overcoat» clothing and rank dominate (12.5 and 18.2 per 1,000 words). Money occurs with the same frequency in both texts (3.2 and 3.4), but its function differs. Vyrin throws away the banknotes that Minsky pushed into his sleeve, and the narrator stresses his reaction, «Слезы опять навернулись на глазах его, слезы негодования!» [5, p. 103]. For Akaky Akakievich money is the measure of a dream, and the price named by the tailor provokes the only loud cry of his life, «Полтора рубля за шинель!» [6, p. 151].

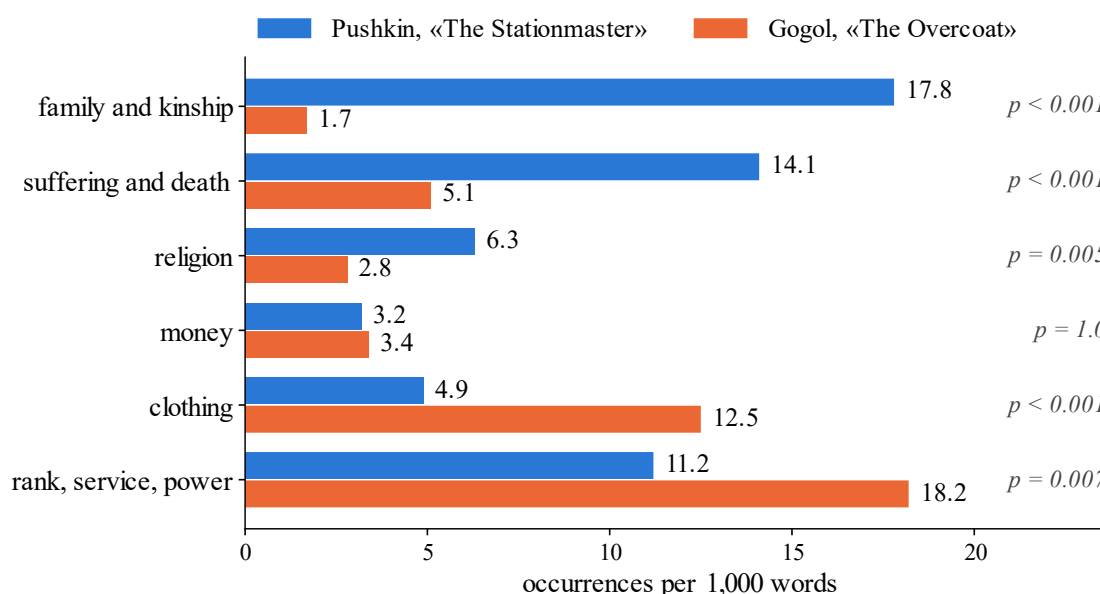


Fig. 1. Thematic fields in «The Stationmaster» and «The Overcoat»
(per 1,000 words, χ^2 test)

The way the hero is named shows a second contrast (Fig. 2, A). Pushkin calls his hero by his social role 47 times, by the word *старик* 11 times and by the word *отец* 5 times, while the surname appears only once, «Это был точно Самсон Вырин» [5, p. 100]. The story opens with a definition of the whole class, «Сущий мученик четырнадцатого класса» [5, p. 97], and the hero remains primarily a stationmaster. Gogol, on the contrary, repeats the name and patronymic *Акакий Акакиевич* 88 times and the surname *Башмачкин* 3 times,

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whereas the rank is mentioned only four times, most memorably as «вечный титулярный советник» [6, p. 141]. The comic insistence on the name is combined with the hero's complete absence from social relations.

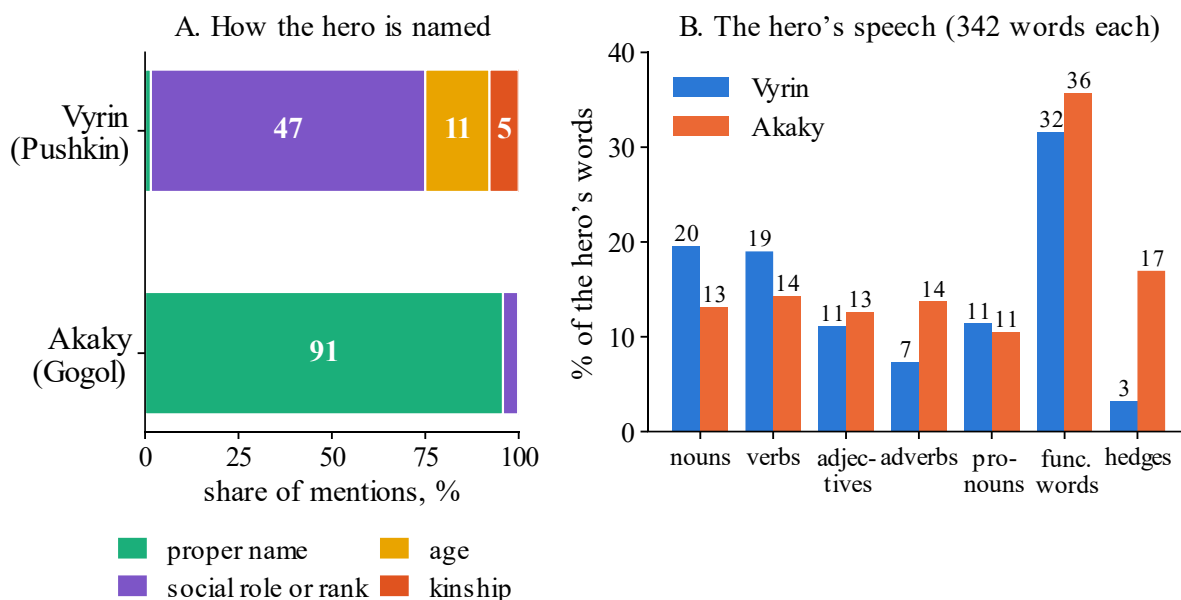


Fig. 2. Naming of the hero (A) and the grammatical profile of the hero's direct speech (B)

The structure of the hero's speech completes the picture (Fig. 2, B). Vyrin's utterances are longer (14.9 against 11.4 words) and contain more nouns (19.6% against 13.2%). He tells his own story to the narrator and uses proverbs that generalise his experience, as in «что с возу упало, то пропало» [5, p. 103]. In Akaky's speech adverbs are almost twice as frequent (13.7% against 7.3%), and hedging particles make up 17.0% of all words against 3.2% in Vyrin's speech ($\chi^2 = 34.1$, $p < 0.001$). The particle *мозо* alone occurs 15 times, as in «А я вот к тебе, Петрович, того ...» [6, p. 149], and it survives even in the speech of the ghost, «наконец я тебя того, поймал за воротник!» [6, p. 172]. These figures confirm quantitatively the remark of Gogol's narrator that «Акакий Акакиевич изъяснялся большею частью предлогами, наречиями и, наконец, такими частицами, которые решительно не имеют никакого значения» [6, p. 149].

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Discussion. The data suggest that Pushkin and Gogol construct the littleness of their heroes by different means. Pushkin's hero is little in his social position. His name is hidden behind his function, but he is a father, he has a voice and he tells his own story, which the narrator follows with open sympathy, «Бедный смотритель!» [5, p. 104]. His suffering is relational, since it concerns the loss of a daughter, and the frequent family and religious vocabulary places it in the frame of the prodigal son parable. The ending, in which the rich lady comes to the grave and «легла здесь и лежала долго» [5, p. 106], does not fit the father's own prophecy of Dunya's ruin, which agrees with W. Schmid's view that the story questions the sentimental scheme it seems to follow [3].

Gogol's hero is little in his speech and in his relations. Family vocabulary is almost absent, and the overcoat takes the place of a companion, since the narrator calls it the «подруга жизни» [6, p. 154]. Akaky's language is reduced to particles, so compassion cannot come from his own words. It is created by the narrator, first in the humane passage, where the hero's plea is heard as the words «я брат твой» [6, p. 144], and then in the epitaph describing a «существо никем не защищенное, никому не дорогое, ни для кого не интересное» [6, p. 169]. The dominance of rank vocabulary corresponds to the vertical of power personified by the «значительное лицо», whose speech consists of the formula «как вы смеете? знаете ли вы, с кем говорите?» [6, p. 165].

These differences explain Devushkin's opposite reactions. He recognises himself in Vyrin, who speaks and is pitied, and he feels humiliated by Akaky, who is deprived of speech and shown from the outside [1, p. 59, 63]. At the same time the data support I.A. Esaulov's warning against reducing both heroes to a single type [4]. The common label «little man» covers two different artistic solutions, littleness through social role in Pushkin and littleness through the

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loss of voice in Gogol. The study has limitations. It compares only two texts, the thematic fields were counted by word stems, and the attribution of utterances was done manually.

Conclusion. The comparison shows that «The Stationmaster» and «The Overcoat» share the theme of the humiliated small official but differ in its construction. Pushkin's story is centred on family and suffering, names its hero by his social role and gives him a coherent voice. Gogol's story is centred on clothing and rank, repeats the hero's name but deprives him of meaningful speech, and transfers compassion to the narrator. Quantitative indicators of vocabulary, naming and speech can therefore complement the traditional interpretation of the «little man» and can be used in teaching Russian literature to compare the two classic texts.

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