

VOLODYMYR SAMIILENKO'S PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE: NATIONAL, ARTISTIC, AND UNIVERSAL DIMENSIONS

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Abstract: *The article examines the philosophy of language of Volodymyr Samiilenko, a 19th-century Ukrainian writer and thinker, through the interconnected dimensions of language as a basis for national identity, its relation to the fine arts, and its role as a form of consciousness and an expression of human essence. Samiilenko regarded language as a constitutive condition of both individual and collective existence. It functions as a foundation of national identity, particularly under conditions of cultural suppression, and as a medium that connects linguistic meaning with aesthetic form. His thought also presents language as inseparable from consciousness and as an expression of human essence. At the same time, Samiilenko's philosophy of language reflects a broader intellectual trajectory in Ukrainian thought, where language is understood as a component of both national and universal existence. This universality is grounded in his vision of the Universe as a reflection of the God-Cosmos, which shapes his interpretation of language and human activity. Samiilenko's linguistic and philosophical ideas thus constitute an original and insufficiently studied contribution to the philosophy of language, requiring further analysis within wider literary and intellectual contexts.*

Keywords: *philosophy of language, Volodymyr Samiilenko, national identity, aesthetics and language, Ukrainian intellectual history.*

Introduction

The philosophy of language is based on the heritage of thinkers representing different cultures and philosophical schools and was formed in a continuous polylogue between semantics, structuralism, phenomenology, Humboldtianism, and other trends. Due to the long language and cultural oppression and colonial practices imposed by different empires, Ukrainian thinkers are mostly absent from the diverse corpora of language philosophers despite the colossal attention to the language as the factor of ethical, spiritual, and national self-identifying. It is

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crucial to fill in this gap and introduce Ukrainian scholars' and writers' views on language in the common international discourse.

Volodymyr Samiilenko (1864–1925) is one of the most original and, at the same time, underestimated Ukrainian writers, who, in addition to his own works (the poem *Herostratos* (1889), poetry collections *From the Poems of Volodymyr Samiilenko* (1889), *To Ukraine* (1906; 1909; 1918), translations of works by French, Spanish, Italian, and English authors), influenced the development of the Ukrainian language in the journalistic and academic spheres (working for the newspapers *Hromadska Dumka*, *Rada*, and *Shershen*, publishing articles *Caring for the Phonetic Beauty of the Language*, *Foreign Words in the Ukrainian Language* (1918), and a number of reviews of works on Ukrainian grammar and stylistics). Contemporary scholars continue to reflect on the contributions of linguists, philosophers, and writers from different periods to the philosophy of language, including Wittgenstein's concept of grammar and grammatical realism², Leibniz's main ideas about the importance and method of linguistic comparison³, introducing the concept of discourse into the philosophy of language by Émile Benveniste⁴.

Volodymyr Samiilenko's philosophy of language has only been sporadically mentioned by literary scholars who have focused on his poetry and translations. The clear emphasis on Volodymyr Samiilenko's language creativity as an important component in developing and protecting the national cultural space is traced in the works *Nation-Building Dominant in Volodymyr Samiilenko's Artistic Thinking*⁵ and *Poetic Shevchenkoiana of Volodymyr Samiilenko*⁶.

² Persu, Darius. Grammatischer Realismus: Eine Analyse zum Wittgenstein'schen Begriff der „Grammatik“. *Analele Universității din Craiova. Seria Filosofie*, 2023, vol. 2.52, pp. 111–127.

³ Gensini, Stefano, "Leibniz's Last Letter on Linguistic Matters", *JoLMA*, 2021, no. 2., pp. 369–392.

⁴ Vlăduțescu, Ștefan, "Émile Benveniste's imprint on linguistics and communication", *Analele Universității din Craiova. Seria Științe Filologice. Lingvistică*, 2018, vol. 1-2), pp. 228–235.

⁵ Hnatiuk, Myroslava, (2012). "Natsiietvirna dominanta khudozhnoho myslennia Volodymyra Samiilenka", *Naukovi zapysky TNPU im. V. Hnatiuka. Seria: Literaturoznavstvo*, Ternopil, 2012, vol. 34, pp. 3–11.

⁶ Hnatiuk, Myroslava, "Poetychna shevchenkiana Volodymyra Samiilenka", *Shevchenkoznachchi studii*, Kyiv, 2014, vol. 17. pp. 178–188.

Analyzing one of the most significant and original and, at the same time, least known texts – the poem *Gaia* by Samiilenko, Yurii Kovaliv emphasized the multifaceted philosophical thinking of the writer⁷. The same work attracted the attention of Oksana Tykhovska, who analyzed the ideological and thematic levels in Samiilenko's artistic model of the gap between the Ukrainian national idea and the Kremlin-Bolshevik tyranny and characterized his ideas on ethnotypes in the context of the current Russian-Ukrainian war⁸.

The article aims to analyze Volodymyr Samiilenko's ideas in the philosophy of language and the role of language as a component of not only national but also universal human existence outlined in his fiction works and linguistic articles.

Language as a Framework of National Identity

The function of language as a means of communication and verbalization of a person's worldview in artistic images has been consistently emphasized in the literary process since its inception in the 11th–12th centuries. Thus, even in *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* (1187), an unknown author emphasized the power of the words of the legendary singer Boian, whose ability to realize the expressive potential of language (at that time, Old Kyivan or Old East Slavic) brought to life a new artistic reality, which at the time of reading the text became, in fact, an isolated existential dimension of the reader.

This trend was preserved in the texts of ancient Ukrainian literature from the beginning of the 19th century and began to be realized on a national scale thanks to a number of determining factors: the development of artistic literature based on the vernacular (the emergence of new Ukrainian literature) in the works of exceptionally talented authors (Ivan Kotliarevskyi, Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko, Taras Shevchenko), increased interest in folklore (an European trend), the formation and development of scientific and artistic centers which were formed around newly established universities (Kyiv and Kharkiv schools of Ukrainian

⁷ Kovaliv, Yurii, "Volodymyr Samiilenko", *Slovo i Chas*, Kyiv, 2019, no. 2, pp. 64–69.

⁸ Tykhovska, Oksana, (2023). "Khudozhnia model prirvy mizh ukrainskoiu natsionalnoiu ideieiu ta kremlivsko-bilshovytskoiu tyraniieiu u fantastychno-satyrychnii poemi Volodymyra Samiilenka "Heia"", *Naukovyi visnyk Uzhhorodskoho universytetu: Seriia: Filolohiia*, 2023, vol. 2 (50), pp. 551–557.

Romanticism), the development of Ukrainian linguistics (Mykhailo Maksymovych, Izmail Sreznevskyi, Iakiv Holovatskyi; later – Pavlo Zhytetskyi, Oleksandr Potebnia) and literary studies, as well as the emergence of literary criticism (Mykola Kulish, Mykola Kostomarov, and others).

It was on this foundation that Ukrainian literature developed in the second half of the 19th century. This period is special, in particular, because its main representatives actively worked with the language in all key areas of its functioning in society: basic colloquial, artistic, journalistic (informational), educational (teaching and lecturing, creating alphabets, reading and grammar manuals, popular science books), purposefully or involuntarily entering the realm of language policy, which covers all of the above areas. The activity context and life position of artists determined the meanings represented at the ideological and figurative levels of functioning in their texts of the concepts of “language,” “word,” “poetry,” “song,” and “duma” (as an allusion to the folklore genre and, at the same time, a voiced idea or concept), etc.

As with a number of other key patterns, the literature of this period reflects the establishment and development of the ideas of Taras Shevchenko, who was a central figure in Ukrainian literature in the mid-19th century and almost single-handedly set the trend for the development of poetry. In this regard, it was his views on the role of language in the life of the Ukrainian people that formed the traditional vision, which later grew with new interpretations. Taras Shevchenko interpreted language as a continuation of the Word of God, linking it to its creative, expressive, and developmental potential: “What are words, it would seem... / Words and voice – nothing more. / But the heart beats – comes alive, / When it hears them! / Surely, from God / Both that voice and those words.”⁹ This idea was later developed not only in Ukrainian literature but also in the early ideas of one of the most influential philosophers of language in 19th-century Ukraine, Oleksandr Potebnia, who reinterpreted the influential ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt¹⁰.

This trend can also be seen in the work of Volodymyr Samiilenko, who addressed the theme of language as an immanent component of

⁹ Shevchenko, Taras, *Zibrannia tvoriv u 6 t.*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, 2003, vol. 2, p. 94.

¹⁰ Potebnia, Oleksandr, *Mysl i iazyk*, Kharkiv, 1892, pp. 7–9.

national existence in his early work, particularly in the poem *Ukrainian Language (In Memory of T. Shevchenko)* (1885), where he interpreted Taras Shevchenko's contribution to the development of the Ukrainian literary language through an instructive story about an indifferent people who did not notice the value of their own treasure – their native language – and “someone wonderful” whose “skillful hand”¹¹ gave the treasure its proper cut. Of particular note in this work is the image of antagonistic forces, in which the author sought to emphasize the confrontation with the enemies of Ukrainians precisely in the sphere of protecting their own language, rightly considering it one of the main battlefields for national identity: “And to the spite of its enemies, it shone / Like a precious diamond, like a bright star. / And it will shine for as long as here stays the sun, / And it will blind the eyes of evil enemies.”¹² Volodymyr Samiilenko believed that removing the instruments of Russification from Ukrainian cultural and educational space was an effective means of combating the colonial policy of the Russian Empire, which should be used first and foremost by the nationally conscious intelligentsia: “Let those enemies become deaf quickly, / Our language shines brighter every hour!”¹³

In the context of the national liberation struggle, Volodymyr Samiilenko understood language (words) as an effective weapon – an image that later became widely known in the poetry of Lesia Ukrainka (*The word, why are you not a solid sword...*), Oleksandr Oles (*Oh, native word! Chained eagle...*) and Yevhen Malaniuk (*The Stylet or the Stylus*), becoming part of the Ukrainian poetic tradition. Mykola Bondar noted that already in his first works, the writer “emerged as a principled opponent of any violence, no matter how noble the goals and ideals that caused the struggle,” and therefore rightly called him a “consistent pacifist.”¹⁴ Indeed, Volodymyr Samiilenko consistently expressed his contempt for violent actions in his works: the poet claimed that they could tarnish even the most noble motives (“Oh, freedom! In your most sacred name / We have killed all that is best in our hearts, / And in our frenzy we turn to you, goddess, /

¹¹ Samiilenko, Volodymyr, *Poetychni tvory. Prozovi tvory. Dramatychni tvory. Perespivy ta pereklady. Stati ta spohady*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, 1990, p. 39–40.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Bondar, Mykola, “Tvorchist Volodymyra Samiilenka”, Samiilenko, Volodymyr, *Tvory*, Kyiv, Dnipro, 1989, pp. 12–13.

Only with wild animal roars"¹⁵), and called on people not to imitate their barbarian enemies. This thesis is clearly expressed in the cycle *Iambs* (1888–1889), created in the style of Auguste Barbier's iambic poetry: "We will not go against our enemy / To fight him in bloody battle, / We know that his barbarism is not / To teach us savagery"; "We hate evil, we stand against it / Our souls are ready at all times; / But we will not use / Any other weapon against him, except the words."¹⁶ In this cycle, we can see the artist's strongest expression of faith in the correctness of his chosen path and the effectiveness of words as a means of struggle: "Love of truth will guide us on our path, / It will give inspiration and power to words. / And our fiery iambic pentameter will strike like thunder / On the ugly structure of injustice."¹⁷ At the same time, in this work we can trace the embodiment of ideas that the artist developed in other texts of the second half of the 1880s: the cathartic function of the artistic word, language as the repository of the spiritual sphere of human life (*Song*, *Elegies*, etc.).

Philosophy of Language through the Lens of Fine Arts

The embodiment of this concept of language in Volodymyr Samiilenko's work correlates with parable forms. It is precisely to the genre of the parable poem (according to Mykola Bondar's classification¹⁸) that the chronologically first text belongs, in which we can trace the outlined interpretation of artistic speech – *Song* (1886). The song, as the embodiment of verbal creativity in the author's understanding, is a way to express all the "secret desires" that people are accustomed to hiding not only from those around them but also from themselves and to express the "grief of a painful life"¹⁹ in order to achieve relief. The poet extended the cathartic potential of artistic words to their ability to awaken empathy in human consciousness: "And even the most bitter ones learned / The sweet tears of compassion".²⁰

¹⁵ Samiilenko, Volodymyr, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 63.

¹⁸ Bondar, Mykola, *Poeziia poshevchenkivskoyi epokhy. Systema zhanriv*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, 1986. 327 p.

¹⁹ Samiilenko, Volodymyr, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

The work also contains a thesis about the divine origin of creativity: the song is a divine gift and “a messenger from the best worlds.”²¹ This idea is developed in another original poem-parable, *Eagle* (1890). In the allegorical image of a bird flying high into the sky and calling others to follow, the author embodies the type of artist who seeks to spiritually enrich his compatriots and all of humanity. Having reached “cloudless heights,” the eagle experienced the highest spiritual bliss but was forced to return because “he understood that he was a son of the earth, / That he would be forever bound to it.”²² Earthly life – a symbol of everyday life and routine work – is a dominant component of the artist’s life, but he has a special gift that distinguishes him from others: the ability, in moments of sadness and decline of spiritual strength, to soar with his thoughts “beyond the clouds to his sun,” to immerse himself in his own creative world, “to drink in the free rays of freedom.”²³ The last stanza of the poem represents the author’s vision of the social role of the artist, marked by the Promethean motif: “And when tired, he would sit down again on the ground, / On a high mountain, at the edge of a dark cliff, / And tell other earthly creatures / About the sky, about the sun, about the shining mountains.”²⁴

A distinctive summary of the writer’s views on literary creativity during this period was the central image of the lyrical manifesto *Poetry Will Not Die* (1891) – “the creativity of the spirit,” whose existence is identified with existence itself: “As long as the Earth lives, as long as people live here, / As long as people listen to the voice of nature with their hearts, / The cares of shopkeepers will not yet kill it.”²⁵ The author developed his ideas about the cathartic, heuristic, and educational functions of verbal creativity, previously expressed in the poems *Song*, *Eagle*, and the cycle *Elegies*, summarizing them with the thesis of the immortality of ideas and feelings embodied in the poetic word: “And if evil fate has decreed that humanity / Must one day await the end of its life, / Then there will be one last grave on earth – / That of the last singer.”²⁶

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Language as a Form of Consciousness and an Essence of Humanity

Volodymyr Samiilenko's linguistic philosophy came to fruition in the poem *Gaia* (1921–1922). In this work, the writer's unique worldview and philosophical concept takes shape—the idea of God-Cosmos, according to which the entire material universe is Unity, which is God itself. It is conveyed through the prism of the main character, a Martian who traveled in a spaceship through different galaxies and has a much broader outlook than earthlings with their primitive view of the world: “The universe for them is just lanterns / Or lamps for their planet, / Hung up high for their use, / So that landmarks are visible on the roads. / That there is a group of worlds at every star, / Only poets think about this here.”²⁷ He partly explains this limitation by people's obsession with “their legend about God-man”²⁸ – a distorted understanding of any religion, which boils down to “humanizing” its deity in a way that is convenient for the believers themselves.

Instead, the Martians are capable of comprehending the entire God-Cosmos: “He is embodied in all the wonders of heaven, / Of cosmic bodies; that in all of nature he / Is the spirit that makes it alive and mobile: / That spirit that warms every atom.”²⁹ That is why he can objectively assess the dystopian picture of earthly existence, which is on the verge of catastrophe (a vision inspired by the horrors of World War I and the Bolshevik occupation of Ukraine). In this case, language itself becomes the last refuge of the remnants of intelligent life, which is finding less and less space amid continuous wars of conquest and the destruction of the planet by its own inhabitants.

Through the prism of his character, the author noted Esperanto as an attempt to achieve understanding and salvation for earthly civilization: “That language is neither folk nor alive, / But it may seem quite alive. / It was created by one mind, / So that all peoples could easily understand each other³⁰”; “That language is artificial, but in no other language / Are words and thoughts so closely intertwined / In wonderful harmony; / Here every word is a pure grain. There is no place in it for that superfluous chaff / That

²⁷ Samiilenko, Volodymyr, *Slova i dumky: poetychni tvory, staty, avtobiohrafichni notatky ta spohady*, Kyiv, Veselka, 2014, p. 209.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 211.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 211–212.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 205.

has long been mixed into our languages. / It is flexible, melodious, and orthological. / Although a little anemic for poets.”³¹

Volodymyr Samiilenko used the thesis of the “anemic” nature of the perfected human language (as Esperanto appears in the context of the ideological and problematic component of the work) as a basis for criticizing avant-garde trends, which he considered too extravagant and harmful to the national literary tradition: “Let everyone mutilate and torture their native language to their heart’s content, even to death; / But I no longer count the super-poets, / Because their futuristic whirligigs / Need human words no more / Than solos and duets for the cats.”³² The writer’s subjective rejection of new trends in literature had a strong argument, linked, in particular, to his own linguistic philosophy, his awareness of the functionality of language, and the importance of its preservation and evolution. This defensive position is partly in line with the views of Oleksandr Potebnia, who explained the cognitive functions of language through an analogy with the visual apparatus:

Just as the slightest change in the structure of the eye and the functioning of the optic nerves inevitably leads to a different perception and thus affects a person’s view of the world as a whole, so every detail in the structure of language must, without our knowledge, produce its own special combinations of elements of thought. The influence of every detail of language on thought is unique and irreplaceable³³.

Conclusions

Volodymyr Samiilenko’s philosophy of language, manifested in his works, reflects the development of Ukrainian scholars and writers’ views on language as a component of not only national but also universal existence. It has a global scope, due to the vision of the Universe as a reflection of the God-Cosmos, which constituted the original worldview concept that shaped the writer’s views on various manifestations of human activity. Volodymyr Samiilenko’s linguistic and philosophical ideas are an

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 206.

³² *Ibid*.

³³ Potebnia, Oleksandr, “Iazyk i narodnost’”, *Mova. Natsionalnist. Denatsionalizatsiia*, New York, 1992, p. 84.

original and little-studied phenomenon that should be investigated more thoroughly with the involvement of broader literary and scientific contexts.

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