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# CRITERIAL ASPECTS OF FOCALIZATION

Conceptul de focalizare, ce desemnează perspectiva naratorului sau a personajului în textul narativ, constituie o sursă de investigare relativ controversată, fapt ce își găsește reflectarea nu doar în lipsa unui sistem bine definit de termeni (*centru deictic, filtru, focalizator*), dar și în existența unui șir de tipologii ale focalizării axate pe diferite criterii. Articolul dat este dedicat studiului aspectelor focalizării (perceptual, psihologic și ideologic) și mijloacelor lingvistice de desemnare a focalizării în textul narativ englez (elementele deictice, tipologia circumstanțialelor, raportul temă-remă, verbele de percepție vizuală, categoria modalității, tehnicile de reprezentare a discursului, registrul verbal etc.) care contribuie la identificarea agentului focalizator în procesul de interpretare textuală.

**Kew-words:** focalization, aspects of focalization, object of focalization, perspectivization, deictic elements.

Focalization is the mediation of the story/content of the text through the perspective of a certain agent, called the focalizer. In S. Rimmon-Kenan's account, it is a means of selecting and restricting narrative information, the events and states of affairs in the story being presented to the reader from the character or narrator's point of view [6, p. 71]. It is the act of seeing, filtering the content of the text through someone's subjective prism. Manfred Jahn suggests a 'constructivist' model of focalization that is founded on the hypothesis that any act of perception yields a "mental representation of the sensory input that our sense organs are capable of recording, in effect allowing us to see a real X as a mental Y." [3] The narratologist states that "A focalizer 'sees X as Y', in effect creating a filtered and colored view of the world" [*Ibidem*]. Following the vision-centric approach to focalization, Manfred Jahn formulates the guiding question in determining focalization as follows: "WHO perceives WHAT as happening WHERE/WHEN" – in which WHO is the central consciousness that shapes perception and sensation, WHAT is the X-perceived-as-Y percept, i.e. the object of focalization, and WHERE/WHEN is the perceived spatio-tem-

poral or coordinate of Y [*Ibidem*]. Therefore, the same narrative content could be presented quite differently, depending on the focalizer or no internal focalizers at all, on the event chosen to begin the primary action line or on the form order of events.

The object of focalization can be any element from the story. Therefore, characters, objects, landscapes, events, etc. are all elements focalized either by a narrator-focalizer or a character-focalizer. That is why readers are rarely presented with a neutral, objective view of events. According to M. Bal, readers are confronted with an interpretation, a vision of the story events and states of affairs, based on perception, which, in its turn, depends on a number of factors: one's position with respect to the perceived object, the distance, previous knowledge, psychological attitude towards the object [1, p. 142]. Consider the extract from Virginia Woolf's fictionalized story *Flush: a Biography*:

> *... what a variety of smells interwoven in subtlest combination thrilled his nostrils; strong smells of earth, sweet smells of flowers; nameless smells of leaf and bramble; sour smells as they crossed the road; pungent smells as they entered bean-fields. But suddenly down the wind came tearing a smell sharper, stronger, more lacerating than any – a smell that ripped across his brain stirring a thousand instincts, releasing a million memories – the smell of hare, the smell of fox. Off he flashed like a fish drawn in a rush through water further and further... And once at least the call was even more imperious; the hunting horn roused deeper instincts, summoned wilder and stronger emotions that transcended memory and obliterated grass, trees, hare, rabbit, fox in one wild shout of ecstasy [9].*

The episode begins with someone smelling different smells and it seems these smells are perceived of as attractive. In the last sentence, it becomes clear that this someone is in fact a young dog; he is the focus of perception, the focalizer. The reader perceives the elements of the story through the limited perspective of the dog: the smells, the attractions of fox and hare, the flash of passion, etc. Obviously, it is not the dog who speaks here. Since this is a case of figural narrative situation, the heterodiegetic narrator tries to reproduce the dog's impressions in an internal focalization.

Focalization is a textual factor relating to both content and narrative discourse. It is a rhetorical strategy aimed at creating an empathetic or

ironical effect on the focalizer. Focalization can also generate suspense by announcing something that will occur later, or by temporary withholding information which is needed**.** In M. Bal's view, focalization is the most important means of manipulation and investigation of focalization should not be restricted to literary narratives, but applied to the analysis of newspaper reports which aim at revealing the hidden ideology embedded in their contents [1, p. 164].

At the level of narrative discourse, focalization involves the analysis of language indicators expressing it: given *vs.* new information, deixis, including deictic expressions related to time, place, socially deictic expressions, system of denomination, verbs of perception and cognition, modality, evaluative word-choices, various types of discourses (direct, free direct, free indirect speech and thought, etc.).

Focalization, following Rimmon-Kenan's interpretation, consists of the following facets or criterial aspects: perceptual, psychological and ideological [6, p.77]. Each of these aspects is signaled in the text by specific linguistic devices. The perceptual facet concerns the focalizer's sensory range: vision, audition, touch, smell, taste, bodily sensation, etc., and is determined by two main coordinates: *space* and *time*. The external focalizer is granted the position of a bird's-eye view, while the internal focalizer has the status of a limited observer. In the first case, the focalizer is located at a point far above the object(s) of his perception. This position offers the focalizer a panoramic view or a simultaneous focalization of things happening in different places [*Ibidem*]. Unlike external focalization, the perceptual domain of a character-focalizer is limited to the spatial frame of his location at the time of focalization. If, for instance, the character-focalizer is inside a locked room, the room itself can be presented through his eyes, but not the street, unless there is a window through which he looks out [*Ibidem*, p. 78]. Similarly, a sequence of events can be conveyed in a way which seems to reflect the sequence of impressions of a particular character, from whose perspective readers are seeing whatever develops, the narrator resorting to event coding within and across sentences, in Short's terminology [7]: *A figure appeared in the door. It was Conchis* [2].

The perceptual facet is expressed in the text by a set of lexical means related to the perceiver/conceptualizer and the act of perception: verbs of sense perception '*to see, to feel, to hear',* deictic elements including per-

sonal pronouns '*I/me/you/they/it*'; demonstratives '*these/those'*; definite reference. The spatial coordinate of focalization is marked by spatial deixis, *i.e.* linguistic means locating the perceiver in a place: spatial adverbs *'here/there', 'nearby/far away',* locatives *'in the valley'*, demonstratives '*this/that'* and verbs of motion *'come/go', 'bring/take'*, etc. [8, p. 45]. The following example allows the readers to shift their cognitive stance immersively into the story mainly through the perceptual facet:

> *Very slowly, very dimly, with much sniffing and pawing, Flush by degrees distinguished the outlines of several articles of furniture. That huge object by the window was perhaps a wardrobe. Next to it stood, conceivably, a chest of drawers. In the middle of the room swam up to the surface of what seemed to be a table with a ring round it; and then the vague amorphous shapes of armchair and table emerged.... . Nothing in the room was itself; everything was something else. Even the window-blind was not a simple muslin blind; ... . Looking-glasses further distorted these already distorted objects so that there seemed to be ten busts of ten poets instead of five; four tables instead of two. And suddenly there was a more terrifying confusion still. Suddenly Flush saw staring back at him from a hole in the wall another dog with bright eyes flashing, and tongue lolling! He paused amazed. He advanced in awe. ... He pursued his investigations, cautiously, nervously, as an explorer in a forest softly advances his foot, uncertain whether that shadow is a lion, or that root a cobra. At last, however, he was aware of huge objects in commotion over him; and, unstrung as he was by the experiences of the past hour, he hid himself, trembling, behind a screen* [9].

The sequence is conceptualized from the perspective of the internal observer, the protagonist Flush, a tawny cocker spaniel owned by the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The subjective point of view of the focalizing agent is marked by the sequential arrangement and the array of syntactical and lexical devices. Whatever is observed in the room is rendered through the restricted perspective of the dog, partly aware of the articles of furniture being perceived. The fronting of the adjuncts (*Next to it … In the middle of the room…, Very slowly,…And suddenly, at last)* combined with verbs of visual perception (*…Flush by degrees distinguished… Flush saw staring back at him)* and verbs of appearance

(*swam up to, emerged*) convey the perceptual experience created by the visualized domain or stimuli. The focalizer of this episode construes a distorted image of the immediate reality in which the number of objects is doubled (*there seemed to be ten busts of ten poets instead of five; four tables instead of two*) and in which his own image in the mirror is interpreted as another dog with glowing eyes and protruding tongue staring at him from a hole in the wall: *Suddenly Flush saw staring back at him from a hole in the wall another dog with bright eyes flashing, and tongue lolling!* The skewed perspectivized domain of the focalizing agent is linguistically conveyed by means of the epistemic modality and evidentiality: the modalizers *conceivably, perhaps*, lexical verbs of perception *seemed*, *was aware* and the adjective *uncertain* which reveal a high degree of uncertainty concerning the perceptual domain being conceptualized. The mirror perceived as a hole in the wall represents an element of underlexicalization, according to R. Fowler, the lack of sufficient vocabulary to designate the concept in focus, which is another indication of the limited perspective belonging to the entity at the level of action - the dog.

Concerning the temporal coordinate, external focalization is panchronic, the orienting agency having at its disposal all the temporal dimensions of the story, past, present, and future, whereas internal focalization is usually limited to the present of the characters or retrospective when the character, the orienting agency, is focalizing his own past [6, p. 78]. Linguistically, this coordinate is revealed through temporal deixis, *i.e.* expressions locating the observer in time: temporal adverbs *'today, yesterday, tomorrow, soon, later'* and locatives '*after three weeks'*, tense and aspect in verb forms [8, p. 46]:

> *When October came in, she [Gertrude] thought only of Christmas. Two years ago, at Christmas, she had met him. Last Christmas she had married him. This Christmas she would bear him a child* [5, p. 27].

The excerpt drawn from the same novel quoted above reveals the manifestations of a focalizer associated with the character, Mrs. Morel. The linguistic markers of subjectivity in this fragment allow the readers to project themselves into the time perspective of the experiencer referred to by the personal pronoun *she*. The series of deictic expressions are mainly temporal in nature: *two years ago, last Christmas, this Christmas.* These adverbials, common in conversation, when used in narratives, cre-

ate a sense that the narrator is identifying himself very closely with the story present. We, readers, perceive the events as retrospective *Two years ago […] she had met him.* or prospective *This Christmas she would bear him a child.* from character's temporal viewpoint. The counterparts of these adverbials in narratives, that might render the narrator's temporal perspective, are *two years before, previous Christmas* and *next Christmas*.

The psychological facet involves the mind and emotions of the focalizer. Hence, there are two determining components: *the cognitive* and *the emotive* orientation of the focalizer towards the object of focalization. The basic aspects of cognition by means of which the focalizer formulates his perspective include knowledge, conjecture, belief, memory, etc. In terms of knowledge, external focalization is omniscient. The external focalizer knows everything about the represented world. If limitation of knowledge occurs, it is out of rhetorical considerations, to create suspense, surprise and shock, or to manipulate the reader. The knowledge of an internal focalizer, on the contrary, is restricted [6, p. 79].

The emotive component comprises such manifestations as fear, pity, joy, revulsion, etc. Conceived in these terms, *external vs. internal* opposition becomes *objective*, neutral, uninvolved *vs. subjective*, coloured, involved focalization. The object of focalization can be perceived either from without or from within. The former case yields a presentation of external manifestations, which serve as clues from which readers might infer the emotions. The latter type discloses the inner life of the focalized entity, through interior monologues, free indirect and free direct discourse, verbs of perception and cognition (to think, to seem, to feel, to know, to recognize, etc.), modal expressions (apparently, evidently, as if, etc.), evaluative word choices, the system of denomination, including social deixis which encode the social relations and attitude of the narrator and character(s) towards the focalized entity [6, p. 80; 8, p. 46]. Other means of expressing the psychological facet of focalization include *mimetic syntax*, i.e. the type and structure of sentences which reinforce either the style of a character's mind or the actions he is undertaking, and *broken syntax*, which shows a momentary dominance of impression over clarity of expression, employing questions, exclamations, ellipses, etc.

In the short story "Eveline" James Joyce presents the dilemma of the main character who must either care for her father and children or flee

her homeland with a sailor who has made a rather ambiguous proposal. The whole story contains descriptions of Eveline's reaction to internal and external impressions and memories. The psychological facet of focalization is mostly expressed through various sequences of free indirect thought that contain exclamations:

> *She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness* [4].

Questions are direct elements presenting Eveline's inner reality: "*She had consented to go away, to leave her home. Was that wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question*."

The ideological facet of focalization consists of the set of beliefs and values in accordance with which the events and characters of the story are evaluated. The vehicle for the ideology can be the narrator or the character, depending on the type of narrative situation. Usually the dominant ideology in a text is that of the narrator-focalizer. A character may represent an ideological position through his way of seeing the world or his behavior, but also through explicit discussion of his ideology. Similarly, the norms of a narrator-focalizer may be implicit in the orientation he gives to the story, but they can also be formulated explicitly [6, p. 81-82]. The linguistic markers involved in tracing the ideological facet are value-laden and ideologically slanted expressions. Mindset cues are relevant in determining the ideological facet of focalization. These include direct or oblique references to a person's attitude, interest, knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, hopes, fears, etc. (e.g., one person's "terrorist" may be another's "martyr" or *freedom fighter*) [3; 7]. Referring to the previously quoted text, Eveline is ideologically represented as a young girl burdened with responsibilities and represents the joyless life of the Irish. At the same time, she is the representation of the woman whose life is determined by the stigma of femininity attached to it by the patriarchal society. She ends up serving a domestic role, realizing the gendered aspect of her fate. Another ideological aspect is her catholic family background. Eveline comes from a strongly catholic family, her mother was catholic while she was alive, and her brother is in the church decorating business. The picture of the priest, which hangs on the wall in their house, is another catholic symbol in her life.

In conclusion, using the facets of focalization in considering the actualization of narrative perspective, combined with the detailed analysis of language means denoting alignment to the orientation, perception, and cognition of a focalizer in the text, offers a comprehensive model of perspectivization and its linguistic manifestation, thus raising the readers' awareness of text subjectivity and enhancing their engagement with the text.

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