

PERFORMATIVITY AS ANALYTICAL CATEGORY OF POSTMODERN NARRATIVE TEXT

Розглядається поняття перформативності як категорії аналізу наративних текстів: розвиток понять перформативу та перформативності, можливості їх застосування для аналізу оповідного тексту на рівнях історії, наративу, взаємодії тексту та читача.

Ключові слова: перформатив, перформативність, оповідний текст, рівні оповідного тексту, теорія мовленнєвих актів.

Рассматривается понятие перформативности как категории анализа нарративных текстов: развитие понятия перформатива и перформативности, возможности их применения для анализа нарративного текста на уровнях истории, нарратива, взаимодействия текста и читателя.

Ключевые слова: перформатив, перформативность, нарративный текст, уровни нарративного текста, теория речевых актов.

The notion of performance has been widely used in the literary and cultural studies. The present article aims at investigating its applications in the analysis of written narratives and points out several problems connected with the notion of textual performances at the levels of story, narrative, textual interaction with a reader

Key words: performativity, narrative performance, narrative levels, the speech acts theory.

The origins of the concept of “performativity” stem from the speech acts theory developed by J. Austin and J. Searle. Later the concept finds its way into literary analysis and narratology. J. Austin excluded literary language from the processes of illocution or perlocution but, nevertheless, his theory became applicable to the analysis of literature in 1970s [3, p. 67]. His tripartite functional classification of the speech acts was further developed by J. Searle and utterance acts came to be described in terms of proposition (reference to objects, concepts), illocution (intention involved) and perlocution (effect on any hearer) [10]. It was this linguistic model “which has made the largest contribution to the study of narrative” [9, p. 22] in terms of performativity.

Since J. Austin and J. Searle's speech acts theory 'performativity' has turned into a truly "carry-home concept". It has been applied to almost every area of cultural studies, from *actually* performed drama to the performances of gender to the performativity of written narratives [8]. During the 70s and 80s of the XX century the speech act theory – and, more importantly, its application in the field of literature – was in the lime-light (M.L. Pratt, R. Ohmann, S. Fish, J. Kristeva, T. van Dijk, E. Benveniste, J. Katz) but in the 1990s the literary use of speech acts analysis was distinctly declining while the Austinian concept of performativity moved to a central position in performance theory [3, p. 74]. Whereas the situation with the performance theory seems to resemble that with the speech acts theory and does not extend itself on the analysis of written literary narratives, some attempts are being made to change this state of things. Narrative performance has been frequently referred to, even if by means of other terms, however, there has been no systematic study of the concept of performativity in the field of narratology [1].

The present article aims at investigating its applications in the analysis of written narratives and points out several problems connected with the notion of textual performances.

In the context of narrative theory, "performativity" can be investigated on three levels: the story level, the level of narration, and the level of interplay between a text and a reader. The narrative performance is constituted from linguistic features, being, in a sense, a story performed by discourse, from complex relationships between the personae involved in narrative communication, as well as from the spatial scheme of narration (text deixis, setting/scene, contextual space, etc.) that creates an arena of performance, similar to an acting space [9].

But can we really talk about performances *by* narratives? The idea of a text that performs is problematic; however, several aspects of performativity may be applicable to its analysis. Narrative performativity may be defined as the capacity to generate in the reader's mind the notion of performance. In narratology, performativity denotes modes of presenting or evoking action. A performance, i.e. the embodied live presentation of events in the co-presence of an audience at a specific place and time, is performative in the narrow sense: performativity I. In a wider sense, the term performativity can also be applied to non-corporeal presentations, e.g. in written narratives: performativity II. Here performativity

refers to the imitation or illusion of a performance. In this case, readers reconstruct the performance dimension in their minds – the performance is imagined [2, p. 6]. Performativity has two manifestations: on the story level, when the actions taking place in the story are in the focus (performativity I.i. and performativity II.i.), and on the level of narration, where the actions are of a different kind, i.e. the act and process of narrating, of mediation (performativity I.ii. and performativity II.ii.).

The present article is dealing with performativity II: the textual performance, opposite to the live enactment in front of an audience in a real world context or on stage which is performativity I. In this case, the level of a story cannot play any significant role, since any “performance” in a text on the story-level would fall under the category of characters’ actions and be fictive, rendering the concept of performativity II.i. redundant. Performativity II.ii., “the narrator’s self-thematization” [2, p. 7], in written narratives, on the other hand, seems perfectly justifiable. This illusion would have been impossible if we could have had direct, unmediated access to the level of the story.

The description of the textual performance on the story-level, although imaginable in the metaphorical sense, would be rather a stretched usage of the category. The term **performative** in the wide sense of dramatic or unmediated coincides with the term ‘mimetic’ as opposed to ‘diegetic’ [2, p. 21]. In this sense, only drama (or oral narratives) may be considered performative, although we might claim that “performativity can become a feature of narratives that are regarded as mediated such as short stories or novels” [2, p. 23]. The mimetic qualities of written narratives have undergone a close scrutiny. If on the level of a story only the unmediated actions may be considered performative, then, in the strictest sense, the direct discourse of the characters is performative because even the depiction of mental processes – however crafty the writer may be in the “stream of consciousness” technique – never yields to the verbatim representation. But the fully unmediated direct speech is also an idealisation: “A narration of any sort is inevitably a mediated experience” [9, p. 24]. In the recent article F. L. Cioffi attempts, however, to analyse “Infinite Jest” by D.F. Wallace in terms of performance based on the novel’s intricate plot-line [4].

Some scholars view narrative performance as constituted from the relationship between the text and its reader – between “act” and interac-

tion, between “the narrative performers” and the narrative audience. The acting and interaction in question “also necessitates a very special attention to space, which both defines and shapes, and which provides an arena both of display and of judgment” [9, p. xiii]. The performance in literary narratives may be described in several connotative categories or models: the theatrical, the linguistic, the erotic, the ludic and the physical or energetic one [4, p. 14–15]. They cover the relationships of the **narrated** ↔ **narration** (the theatrical model of space which serves as a metaphor for the story space as the arena for performance); the **narrator** ↔ **narrated** (the ludic model which manifests itself in, e.g. the way the different degrees of authority that the narrative voice possesses evoke different reactions from the readers); the **narrator** ↔ **narratee/hearer** (the constant strive of the storyteller to “persuade the narratee of the interest and point of the story, thus regaining control of the narrative situation” [4, p. 20]).

The linguistic models of narrative performance include discussions on the multiplicity of textual voices (Bakhtinian ‘dialogism’), a linguistic dynamism, the developments of speech-act theory and pragmatics. The linguistic proof, as it were, of the narrative’s influence on its readers can be described in terms of the illocutionary forces of the text. W. Iser [6] and M. Kearns [7] theorize the reader’s response in general terms when they argue that literary narratives, by performing illocutionary acts and implicatures, trigger interpretative choices in the act of reading. Here the concept of performativity seems to combine the formalized features of performativity in speech act theory with the contingent aspects of (mental) performances in the reader’s relation to the text [2, p. 31].

The act of narration can be also described as a performance of its narrator, foregrounding narrator’s mediation status, the most prominent signs of which are metanarrative (self-reflexive) and metafictional (reflexive) comments, narrator’s overtness and explicitness. The foregrounding of the act of narration can feign a performance in which narrator and audience are conceived as fully embodied, co-present and interactive. Moreover, W. Schmid argues that the act of narration implies both the story narrated (*die erzählte Geschichte*) and the story of narration (*Erzählgeschichte*)” [11, p. 268–70]. While analysing narrative’s performativity on the level of narration, the empirical author and paratextual information may be taken into consideration – as the infor-

mation that draws attention to the narrative act's being engaged with cultural conventions. The extradiegetic, first-degree narrative will create the "first-order illocution" of the text, a "display text" [9, p. 24] and any second-order speech acts that it contains will be valid only within the framework of the narrative. This difference allows us to further distinguish between the author-reader relationship as a first-order illocutionary act which is manifest in such paratextual information as the author's introduction to the book or the book's title [9, p. 27]. The narrator-narratee relationship, on the other hand, is considered to be intratextual and the second-order illocutionary act: "the frequent narratorial performatives which advise, warn, or question the narrative audience ... are in fact second-order illocutionary acts belonging to the world of the text and produced by its narrator" [9, p. 28]. However, it is also possible for the real reader to occupy the position of the narratee and thus become forced into text through the forces of illocution and perlocution. Certainly, the reader cannot be *made* by a text to perform a physical action (at least, not directly), but she can be made to experience the disconcerting feeling of being talked directly to, of being given orders or asked questions. M. Fludernik comments on the effects of the second-person texts on the reader: "Whereas the typical story-telling mode allows the reader to sit back and enjoy another's tribulations, hence instituting a basic existential and differential gap between the story and its reception, second-person texts (even if only initially) break this convention of distance, seemingly involving the real reader within the textual world" [5, p. 457]. Second-person narratives reach out to the reader roles projected by the text and invite active participation and even identification by real readers.

All that being said, to speak about performativity is to speak about linguistic performativity of texts, the effects of which extend onto the level of the text-reader interaction. The "narratological study of performativity offers the potential of complementing structural analysis of narrative with analysis of its communication situation that is culturally and historically specific" [2, p. 35]. Although, in most cases, the notion of performance is used broadly to cover all aspects of written narratives: writer as a performer, textual space as the theatrical arena for the performance of the story, narrator's act, reading as an "individual performance" [9, p. 10], in the end, it is just another metaphor: "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players".

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