

## Psycholinguistic Aspects of Focalization in a Paradigm of Narrative Discours

### Психолінгвістичні аспекти фокалізації у парадигмі наративного дискурсу

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*Original manuscript received November 21, 2017*

*Revised manuscript accepted February 10, 2018*

#### **ABSTRACT**

*The author of this article emphasizes that study of the narrative discourse on the example of English literature, the definition of psycholinguistic aspects of such a discourse is a very actual problem of the present, since this kind of discourse plays an important role in all genres of fiction. In this article, the narrative discourse will be analyzed on the example of graphic novels, and based on the analysis will be determined the psycholinguistic features of the narrative discourse. In the article it was emphasized that the analysis of the materials presented in the form of comics is important for defining the features of the narrative discourse, because the person who is observing is only the object of visualization, and not its subject. In the case of the character watches for something, the reader will be positioned exactly like this character. Herewith, a certain type of positioning is important for the narration of text material presented in the form of comics, because it is this type of positioning greatly affects the values created by the reader's work.*

*It was emphasized that the psycholinguistic narrative paradigm in the form of comics should be considered in the context in which comics are the*

assembly of both words and images, and thus the reader should carry out both visual and linguistic interpretation of the content. The psycholinguistic paradigm of comics contributes to the fact that artistic schemes (for example, the point of view, symmetry, the contextualization by means of contextual details), and sections of linguistics (for example, grammar, literature, syntax) appear to overlap each other, create an integral frame, which strengthens the reader's understanding of a certain work.

In this article the context of «focusing» from the point of psycholinguistic view was analyzed. The author of this article described his own version of comic comprehension processing, which is based on the knowledge of various narrative schemes, constantly changing the source data and obtaining the new information. Understanding in this case is represented as a series of transitions from the external to the internal focus. The latter often happens in a visual form, creating visual continuity through the processing of information from the bottom to top, while the change in the time and space of the plot occurs by text information processing from the top to bottom, combining previous knowledge of the characters and actions of the characters of the work into the new contextual scripts.

Analyzing the work «Night Guards» by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, the author of this article proposed the following psycholinguistic aspects of the narrative discourse, namely: visual accentuation, updating of information, meta-narrative presentation of the text, contrasting visual word-combinations, actualization of the narrative potential.

**Key words:** narrative discourse, visual accentuation, updating of information, metanarrative presentation of the text, contrasting visual word-combinations, actualization of the narrative potential.

## Introduction

The study of visual narration has lately been of interest in the academic world. For example, these are researchers done by Flavia De Simone & Simona Collina (De Simone & Collina, 2016). What makes the study of visual images challenging is the fact that the visual experience is described first and foremost with the language; the visual meaning is verbalized and narrativized through any language. One of the great early masters of comic books, W. Eisner was one of the first to demand comics the respect they deserve, both as an art form as well as an object worthy of serious academic study. His book, *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985), is despite its twenty-plus years' age still a valid aid when analyzing the very basic elements of comics, such as imagery, timing and framing, all of which are crucial in understanding and

comprehending the building blocks of comics as a narrative medium. When one examines a comic book feature as a whole, the deployment of its unique elements takes on the characteristic of a language. Comics communicate in a «language» that relies on a visual experience common both to creator and audience. The format of the comic book presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art (for ex.: perspective, symmetry, brush stroke) and the regimens of literature (for ex. grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other (Eisner, 1985).

Despite the fact that W. Eisner produced his fundamental work twenty-seven years ago, this statement holds firm today. Comic book experts continue to stress that comics require unique nature of reading abilities, and the union of word and image has become even more centralized in the modern study of comics. Comics are seen as a language, even though the grammar of this language is far from the completeness of the grammar rules of written language. Comic book narration includes aspects such as the composition of each page, which in turn affects the contents of that page. This creates an interplay between the content and the form, and the elements that are used to create comic book narration are so various that they do not create such limitations to the form, as does the strictly written text. In the structural analysis of *Watchmen* and its narratological levels, this thesis will apply some of Eisner's observations on the «grammar» of comics. It should also be pointed out that languages within this grammar alter greatly, and serve various different purposes – there exists no unified and single language within comics any more than in reality.

Another «structuralist» approach that continues Eisner's ideas on the study of comics is Scott McCloud's acclaimed *Understanding Comics – The Invisible Art* (McCloud, 1993), in which McCloud attempts to develop comprehensive tools for comic book analysis, discussing the various ways and multiple levels comics work at. So, McCloud's work is quite unique (and what can i say, it inspired me the most to break the official requirements to research papers), narrated completely in comic book form, with McCloud's drawn alter ego illustrating the various problematic aspects related to comics with different visual examples. One that still works remarkably well is his demonstration of the power of the «gap» or the «gutter», the white line

between the panels that requires active participation from the reader to construct the events taking place in the timelessness of the white void (McCloud, 1993: 66). *Watchmen* actually puns with the term gutter right at its beginning: «The gutters are full of blood» (Moore & Gibbons, 1987: Ch. I, 1) writes the vigilante Rorschach in his diary, while blood is indeed washing into the street gutter in the accompanying panel – but the panel edges close off the blood from the white «gutter», in which the only blood is the one the reader's imagination puts into it. The gutter is the place where the real action happens, and the metaphorical blood will seep back into the panels throughout the story, shading the panels with bloody pink. As Scott McCloud describes it, the gutter brings us the notion of closure, «the relation between the shown and the not shown, the stated and the implied, the articulated and the suggested» (McCloud, 1993: 67). In such a way, the most global problem nowadays is a problem of focalization in a paradigm of narrative discourse. To solve this problem we used a graphic novel «*Watchmen*» by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons (Moore & Gibbons, 1987).

There fore, the tasks of our research are:

1. To analyze the context of the term «focalization».
2. To describe top-down processing of understanding comics, which is based on knowledge and various narrative schemas, constantly reframing data as new information is acquired.
3. To present the role of the transitions from external to internal focalization.

### **Methods and methodical instrumentation of the research**

The methods of the research are: *theoretical ones* – categorical analysis, structurally-functional analysis, the methods of systematization, modeling, generalization; empirical methods – the analysis of documents, the analysis of products of the activity, the content analysis of the novel.

### **The results of the research and their discussion**

The term «focalization» can be developed to new directions when it comes to visual narratives represented by graphic novels. G. Genette has seen focalization as either non-focalized, internal or external, where internal is via internal monologue while external could be internal by a character observing a scene (Genette, 1980: 189–191). This type of division of focalization is not in itself sufficient in the study of

visual narratives. According to our own views, focalization involves a character experiencing something through seeing or hearing it. Thus internal focalization in visual narratives results in the reader actually witnessing the character's conscious memories, while other characters in the diegetic world of the story do not see them. External focalization can also transfer the private experiences of a character by the way of a point-of-view shot, which the reader must infer as being what the character would have seen from that particular position – but shifts between these two are possible, as this thesis will show. Focalization is also involved when a character becomes a narrator inside a narrative: when a character tells a story in the story world, he has a new and different function in the text at another level, no longer as an actor who defines, and is defined by, a causal chain, but as a diegetic narrator who is recounting a story within the story. In *Watchmen*, this telling of a story within a story is accompanied with an internal focalization of the events being recounted. The reader does not merely listen/read, he IS there, SEEING it, etc.

However, focalization cannot be equated with narration since inadequate character perception is attributed to the character, not the narrator. Focalization represents the fact of character's perception, even if we may discover later that the character misperceived and even if our misperception about the character turns out to have other consequences in our ongoing experience of the story.

Thus, focalization is only reliable to a certain level, and can mislead the reader and his/her narrative schemas. A good example of this is Rorschach, whose real face is revealed to the reader only at the end of Chapter V once he is captured. If visual markers do not assist in recognizing him, the appendix of Chapter VI, including the psychiatric report of Rorschach, hints at the assumption that he is in fact the «prophet-of-doom sandwich-board man», who makes repeated appearances in *Watchmen*, starting at Chapter I, page 1. This new information causes a disruption in the narrative, because it forces the reader to reassess all the previous chapters, reconstructing the narrative schema to fit this new, rather startling information. For example, the last panels on page 4 Chapter I receive a whole new context, as the two detectives discuss Rorschach, calling him «crazier than a snake s armpit». As the prophet-of-doom man passes them (now identified as Rorschach himself by the reader), the other detective shudders – the

irony of them passing the very man they want to catch impeccable in the light of this new information. These reassessments of narrative schemas are relatively easy due to the unique format of comics, which enables the reader to move forward and backward in the story with relative ease.

These types of reassessments can create unreliability within the narration, forcing the reader to question other aspects of the narrative. For example, whenever the events in Chapters I to V are focalized from the point-of-view of Rorschach without his mask, we are deliberately not shown his face. And when he acts as a narrator through the monologue in his diary, there is seemingly no connection to him when he is appearing in the background in his mask-less attire, while it is obvious they are connected when the panel shows him in the mask in the act of writing (Moore & Gibbons, 1987: Ch. I, 14). As Chapter I begins with captions from Rorschach's journal, the panels show him as the prophet-of-doom with his «The End Is Nigh» – sign walking over the blood flowing to the gutter. Yet nothing leads to the reader to connect this character to the one writing the diary, but instead the reader is led to believe that a part of the narrative (the visual panel or the textual captions) has been substituted with something else to highlight a shared quality, thus creating a metaphor of the union between the two.

So, G. Genette approaches of narration were in a case of using a «fundamental cognitive psychological distinction», by which he divides the reader's perception into two kinds of processes: bottom-up and top-down (Genette, 1980: 37). Bottom-up perception involves the organization of such elements as colour, depth and motion, and usually this takes place automatically with very little awareness; this is what happens in reading comic books, as the entire page is immediately perceived, and initial assumptions are made based on the visual information on the pages. Top-down processing, on the other hand, is based on knowledge and various narrative schemas, constantly reframing data as new information is acquired. Both of these processes operate simultaneously on the data delivered by the narrative, which creates representations with different degrees of compatibility. Thus, the comic book reader perceives each page instantly, and then redefines this perception after reading the page, if need be. Top-down processes are not restricted to the particular moment of action, but are able to move forward and backward through data, continuously creating various spatial, temporal and causal hypotheses – «narrative» is the overall

process of searching among various hypotheses. The focus is more on the reader and his/her processes during the reading than the structure of the story itself. These processes involve a continuous creative movement during which the reader constructs the narrative through the main narrative, the appendices and the epigraphs; the fact that a large portion of the narrative information in this process is visual makes this creation process even more fascinating, especially when considering the fact that the extra-positional narrative structure of *Watchmen* can actually deceive the reader by creating a sense of connection where in fact none exists.

Cognitive research shows how we explain behavior in terms of the underlying states of mind by using what is referred to as our mind-reading ability. Combining this research with literary studies, one can explore the specific aspect of the role such mind-reading plays in fictional representations of consciousness. This seemingly effortless mind-reading is of course not problematic, as the risk of misinterpretations are ever-present, such as mistaking tears of grief as tears of joy – this is effortless from the point of cognitive psychology, but the intuitive interpretation we make is still based on our personal experiences and beliefs, and could prove to be false. Readers bring implicit theories of personality and scripts for how narrators behave into every text they read; reader responses vary, as do their attempts at analyzing character motivations, which leads to different assessments when it comes to unreliable narrators. Also we must differentiate between fallible and untrustworthy narrators, casting biased or misinformed narrators as fallible and dispositionally unreliable (unreliability as a characteristics) narrators as untrustworthy. Fallible narrators are more likely to be excused of their failures than those deemed untrustworthy, and the readers are usually required to do some detective work to determine the reliability of a narrator. At this point there is a sense in asking whether literary narratives could actually train our capacities for this mind-reading, and if they even were capable of testing and bending the limits of our abilities to interpret the mental states behind various actions.

In Chapter VI these mind-reading abilities are tested. The captions are mostly from the notes of Dr. Malcolm Long, Rorschach's therapist, and the panel-to-panel transition highlights the situation where the patient (Rorschach) and doctor are sitting face-to-face by alternating 180 degrees between what both men see, which is of course each other. The break happens when the reader suddenly sees through Rorschach's

«inner eyes» when he is asked what he sees in a Rorschach -inkblot: the panel shows a dog with its head split in half with the speech balloon «*What can you see?*», while the next panel shows him, deadpan, replying «*A pretty butterfly*» (Moore & Gibbons, 1987: Ch. V, 1). This shift from external to internal focalization is so sudden it comes as a total surprise, as the previous dialogue has already established a narrative of external focalization. The focalizing verbal narrator is Dr. Long, but the focalization takes a sudden shift into the private and subjective world of Rorschach which no other character in the story can witness. The detective work required to judge Rorschach's reliability can also be tested here. Fallible narrators are not reliable because they are mistaken about their judgments or perceptions or are biased. This type of fallibility is typical of mystery and detective novels, in which the narrator reports on the informational puzzle he/she is working on, but cannot provide the reader with vital pieces of information until the end. Fallibility is therefore situationally motivated, not an inherent characteristic. So far this type of description would fit Rorschach, whose character appears to be an extreme variation of the film-noir type of detective, and whose visual look, too, seems to be borrowed from the same genre. However, Rorschach is also mentally unstable, which is an inherent trait subscribed to untrustworthy narrators. Rorschach acts as borderline case between fallible and untrustworthy, an intersection which resists definition and judgment alike. Reader response requires a move beyond literal reading, a constant re-evaluation of the text.

The chapter also shows the reader major events of Rorschach's traumatic past through internal focalization, including a two-page recollection of his mother having sex, after which Rorschach's reply on what he sees is «*Some nice flowers*» (Moore & Gibbons, 1987: Ch. VI, 5). What the character experiences and how he verbalizes his experiences seem to be strikingly in conflict. Rorschach himself also verbally narrates his life at times, retaining the verbal style of his diary, while the panels are what McCloud refers to as word «specific», where pictures illustrate what the text says (McCloud, 1993: 153). When he finally decides to fully reveal his inner thoughts and visions to Dr. Long and consequently the reader via internal focalization, the narrative takes a more visual tone, discarding the verbal narration (although one undoubtedly exists in the story world, which is the one Dr. Long hears). The inner focalization without textual commentary works infinitely



more intensely than it had if Rorschach had revealed everything at the beginning, or if the visual narrative had been accompanied with the verbal all the way through. These transitions from external to internal focalization often happen in visual form, from an ink-blot to a similar black shadow, creating immediate visual continuity through bottom-up processing, whereas the shift in time and story space is constructed via top-down processing, combining previous knowledge of the characters and actions into the new data. The appendix of this chapter actually acts as a verifying element, supporting the reader into believing that the internal focalizations of Rorschach's past are genuine and not the delusions of a sick mind.

There exists yet one more aspect in Rorschach which is of interest when discussing his mental abilities: his use of language. Rorschach's short sentences do not only echo film-noir detective monologues, but may actually be a symptom of something else. Rorschach's language resembles that of «verbal thought», a far more idiosyncratic language what is normally used in communication. This stylistic tendency can be seen in the works of James Joyce, who developed the technique of individualized monological language. Its principal tendencies are syntactical abbreviation and lexical opaqueness, a language freed from syntactical completeness, a language that suppresses elements that are customary, and often indispensable, in language aimed at communicating meaning. Most typical eliminations are those of articles, subject pronouns, prepositions and copulas. Although this type of reduction may be typical of diaries, this type of castrated grammar may be connected with children's egocentric speech, the thinking aloud children do until age six. By the age of six, this egocentric speech becomes thought, and a new social speech skill develops as the child matures. The interior speech (thought) comprises mainly of predicative or nominal statements, concentrating on the new moments that come to mind. This impoverished syntax of the egocentric speech is, however, counteracted with the semantic enrichment of each individual word. Rorschach's speech is highly reminiscent of this type of egocentric speech, but unlike Joycean monologists, Rorschach uses his partially castrated grammar to communicate:

*Gun. No license. I cheked. Very bad (Moore & Gibbons, 1987: Ch. V, 4) (Dialogue). Stood in firelight, sweltering. Blood stain on chest like map of violent new continent. Felt cleansed. Felt dark*

*planet turn under my feet and knew what cats know that makes them scream like babies in night* (Moore & Gibbons, 1987: Ch. VI, 26) (Monologue, spoken).

*Out in street, inspected defaced building: silhouette picture in doorway, man and woman, possibly indulging in sexual foreplay. Didn't like it. Makes doorway look haunted* (Moore & Gibbons, 1987: Ch. V, 11) (Diary).

*«If reading this now, whether I am alive or dead, you will know truth: whatever precise nature of this conspiracy, Adrian Veidt responsible. Have done best to make this legible. Believe it paints disturbing picture»* (Moore & Gibbons, 1987: Ch. X, 22) (Diary; written to a future reader).

These examples above demonstrate well the type of communication Rorschach resorts to, both in speech as well as writing. His speech misses many articles and copulas, but still manages often to paint disturbing images through the enrichment of words. This aspect of Rorschach's communicative skills creates yet another dimension from which one can assess his reliability, as the use of egocentric speech in spoken language is connected with children; this could act as an indicator of his mental abilities. Rorschach is a conservative, an outsider, disturbingly violent and yet, he is the most popular character of the graphic novel.

### **Conclusions**

So, analyzing «Watchmen» we can propose such ***psycholinguistic aspects of narrative discourse***: visual emphasis; focalization of information; metanarrative presentation of the text; contrasting visual linkings; actualization of narrative potential.

Apart from this significant contribution to the superhero discourse, the comic book is also striking in its multiplicity of narrative levels; often the text and the pictures tell completely separate stories, and still neither can definitely be read as being more dominant than the other. The unique form of the graphic novel that combines the textual and the visual narratives in a longer narrative piece poses interesting challenges when it comes to narratological study, for even the simplest questions of narration and focalization become complicated in the sense that the imagery always narrates «more» than what the traditional view of the focalizer is capable of. Thus the layers of narration are significantly more complex, and the question of how to study these becomes crucial.

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## АНОТАЦІЯ

Автор даної статті наголошує, що вивчення наративного дискурсу на прикладі англійської літератури, визначення психолінгвістичних аспектів такого дискурсу є вельми актуальною проблемою сучасності, адже такого роду дискурс відіграє неабияку роль у всіх жанрах художньої літератури. У даній статті наративний дискурс буде проаналізовано на прикладі графічних романів, на основі аналізу яких буде визначено психолінгвістичні особливості наративного дискурсу. В статті було підкреслено, що важливим для окреслення особливостей наративного дискурсу є аналіз матеріалів, представлених у вигляді коміксів, адже людина, яка спостерігає, є лише об'єктом візуалізації, а не її суб'єктом. У випадку, якщо персонаж спостерігає за чимось, то читач буде позиціонуватися як саме цей персонаж. При цьому певний тип позиціонування має важливе значення для оповідання текстового матеріалу, презентованого у формі коміксів, адже саме цей тип позиціонування великою мірою впливає на значення, які створюються читачем твору.

Було підкреслено, що психолінгвістичну парадигму розповідей у формі коміксів слід розглядати в тому контексті, що комікси представляють собою монтаж як слова, так і образу, і таким чином читач має здійснювати як візуальні, так і мовленнєві тлумачення змісту. Психолінгвістична парадигма коміксів сприяє тому, що художні схеми (наприклад, точка зору, симетрія, наголошення контексту за допомогою контекстуальних деталей) і розділи лінгвістики (наприклад, граматики, літератури, синтаксис) ніби «накладаються» один на одного, створюють цілісний фрейм, який фаши літує розуміння читачем певного твору.

У цій статті було проаналізовано контекст «фокусування» з точки зору психолінгвістики. Автор цієї статті описав власну версію обробки розуміння коміксів, яка базується на знаннях різних нарративних схем, постійно змінюючи вихідні дані, отримуючи нову інформацію. Розуміння в даному разі представлено в ролі послідовних переходів від зовнішнього до внутрішнього фокусування. Останнє нерідко трапляється у візуальній формі, створюючи візуальну безперервність шляхом обробки інформації знизу вгору, тоді як зміна часу і простору сюжету відбувається за допомогою обробки текстової інформації зверху вниз, поєднуючи попередні знання щодо символів та дії героїв твору у нові контекстуальні скрипти.

Аналізуючи твір «Нічні охоронці» Алана Мура та Дейва Гіббонса, автором цієї статті було запропоновано такі психолінгвістичні аспекти нарративного дискурсу, а саме: візуальна акцентуація, актуалізація інформації, метанаративна презентація тексту, контрастні візуальні словосполучення, актуалізація нарративного потенціалу.

**Ключові слова:** нарративний дискурс, візуальна акцентуація, актуалізація інформації, метанаративна презентація тексту, контрастні візуальні словосполучення, актуалізація нарративного потенціалу.

**Ивашкевич Эрнест. Психолингвистические аспекты фокализации в парадигме нарративного дискурса**

#### **АННОТАЦИЯ**

Автор данной статьи подчёркивает, что изучение нарративного дискурса на примере английской литературы, определение психолингвистических аспектов такого дискурса является весьма актуальной проблемой современности, ведь такого рода дискурс играет немаловажную роль для всех жанров художественной литературы. В данной статье нарративный дискурс будет проанализирован на примере графических романов, на основе осмысления которых и будут определены психолингвистические особенности повествовательного дискурса. В статье было подчёркнуто, что достаточно важным для определения особенностей повествовательного дискурса является анализ материалов, представленных в виде комиксов, ведь человек, который наблюдает, является только объектом визуализации, а не её субъектом. В случае, если персонаж наблюдает за чем-то, то читатель будет позиционироваться как этот персонаж. При этом определённый тип позиционирования имеет важное значение для повествования текстового материала, представленного в форме комиксов, ведь именно этот тип позиционирования во многом влияет на значения, которые создаются читателем произведения.

Было подчёркнуто, что психолінгвістическую парадигму рассказов в форме комиксов следует рассматривать в том контексте, что комиксы представляют собой монтаж как слова, так и образа, и поэтому читатель должен осуществлять как визуальные, так и речевые толкования содержания. Психолінгвістическая парадигма комиксов способствует тому, что художественные схемы (например, точка зрения, симметрия, актуализация контекста с помощью контекстуальных деталей) и разделы лингвистики (например, грамматика, литература, синтаксис) как бы «накладываются» друг на друга, создают целостный фрейм, который фасилитирует понимание читателем определённого произведения.

В этой статье проанализирован контекст «фокусирования» с точки зрения психолінгвістики. Автор этой статьи описал собственную версию обработки понимания комиксов, основанную на знаниях различных нарративных схем, при этом постоянно изменяя исходные данные и, таким образом, получая новую информацию. Понимание в данном случае представлено в роли последовательных переходов от внешней к внутренней фокусировки. Последнее нередко случается в визуальной форме, создавая визуальную непрерывность путём обработки информации снизу вверх, тогда как изменение времени и пространства сюжета происходит с помощью обработки текстовой информации сверху вниз, совмещая предыдущие знания символов и понимание действий героев произведения, создавая, таким образом, новые контекстуальные скрипты.

Анализируя произведение «Ночные охранники» Алана Мура и Дэйва Гиббонса, автором этой статьи были предложены следующие психолінгвістических аспекты нарративного дискурса, а именно: визуальная акцентуация, актуализация информации, метанарративная презентация текста, контрастные визуальные словосочетания, актуализация нарративного потенциала.

**Ключевые слова:** нарративный дискурс, визуальная акцентуация, актуализация информации, метанарративная презентация текста, контрастные визуальные словосочетания, актуализация нарративного потенциала.