

## ASPECTS OF FOCALIZATION

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Conceptul de focalizare, ce desemnează perspectiva naratorului sau a personajului în textul narativ, constituie o sursă de investigare relativ controversată, fapt ce își găsește reflectare 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 prezent constituie un studiu contrastiv al diferitelor teorii privind fenomenul focalizării în textul narativ. Sunt expuse opiniile lingviștilor notorii ce au contribuit la definirea conceptului de focalizare și aplicarea sa ulterioară la analiza textuală. O deosebită atenție se acordă mijloacelor lingvistice (elemente deictice, verbe de percepție fizică și mentală, expresii modale) și aspectelor focalizării (perceptual, psihologic și ideologic) care contribuie la identificarea agentului focalizator.

The essay reviews the traditional point-of-view concepts within the narratological framework of Genettean and post-Genettean focalization theory. Focusing on 'a mental model of vision' that argues that focalization rests on "vectored indicators of subjectivity", the essay explores the concept of 'deictic center' and provides a more comprehensive set of focalization criteria, subsequently used in the presentation of an improved gliding-scale typology.

While the narrative unfolds, the reader is invited to see the referential content through the narrator's or character's perspective. The process of selecting and restricting narrative information, of seeing events and states of affairs from somebody's point of view has been termed in G. Genette's account as *focalization* [8]. Consequently, a text is anchored on a *focalizer* (Bal) / a *deictic center* (Buhler) [4] / a *self* (Banfield) [3] / a *reflector* (James) [11] *point of view* when it presents his or her thoughts, reflections and knowledge, actual and imaginary perceptions, as well as his/her cultural and ideological orientation.

Text deictic elements - pronouns, proximal and distal adverbs (*here, there, now, then*), modals (*presumably*), and tenses - are criterial focalization indicators the reader needs to keep track of if the narrative is to be understood properly. G. Genette notes that in any textual analysis, we must pose the following questions: first, Which character's point of view orients the narrative perspective?, and second, Who is the narrator? In other words, Who sees? and Who speaks? [8].

G. Genette identifies three types of focalization. First of all, there is the *classic narrative*, the *non-focalized narrative*, or the narrative "*à focalisation zéro*." Second, there is *internal focalization*, which can be *fixed*, *variable*, or *multiple*. Third, there is *external focalization* (which one finds in Balzac, when the enigmatic hero acts before our eyes without us being allowed to know his thoughts or emotions). As G. Genette points out, a given text may change from one type of focalization to another; no rule says that focalization must be constant [8].

Seymour Chatman refines the distinction between *seeing* and *speaking* by proposing the alternative terms "filter" and "slant". "Filter" refers to narrative instances where the narrator "can elect to tell a part or the whole of a story neutrally or "from" or "through" one or another character's consciousness" [5]. "Slant", by contrast, encompasses the attitudes narrators may share with characters about people or events in the story world and which manifest themselves in narrators' comments, judgments, and the like.

Post-Genettean focalization theory was largely influenced by M. Bal's [2] critique of G. Genette and her introduction of various new terms and definitions. As M. Bal points out, one cannot present any kind of event verbally without presenting it through a certain vision; zero focalization is thus impossible. A narrator always has a point of view, a way of seeing things. Some kind of focalization is thus always present in a text. In fact, critics who follow G. Genette (Mieke Bal, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Suzanne Fleischmann) prefer a binary paradigm. The critical distinction is whether the **focalization is internal or external**.

If the focalization is internal, M. Bal explains, it is located in a character who participates as an actor in a narrative. If it is external, it is located in an anonymous agent outside of the narrative. M. Bal proposes three major modifications: (1) she gives away Genette's category of zero focalization - mainly, she argues, because it rests on a confusion of subject and object, a confusion of "who sees?" and "what is seen?"; (2) she adds the

concepts of "external" and "internal focalizers," in effect re-introducing narratorial point-of-view (via the external focalizer); and (3) she initiates an inquiry into the nature and epistemological restrictions of perceptible and imperceptible objects.

Furthermore, there are various "**levels of focalization**" which can make focalization "complex" or layered. Within a narrative fragment focalized by an external focalizer (EF) there can be a level shift to a character-bound focalizer (CF), who focalizes an object or another character [2]. In fact, the EF always keeps the focalization in which the focalization of the CF may be embedded as object. Thus, figural narration is a situation of embedded focalization:

*"In the morning she found in her chair upon the porch the book she had left by the river. A fresh indignity! But she came and went as she intended to, and sat as usual upon the porch amid her familiar surroundings. When the Offender passed her by she knew it, though her eyes were never lifted. Are there only sight and sound to tell such things? She discerned it by a wave that swept her with confusion and she knew not what besides..."*

*He stood motionless, watching her slim, straight figure lessening by degrees as she walked slowly away from him. He was wondering what she meant. Then a sudden, quick wave came beating into his brown throat and staining it crimson, when he guessed what it might be." (A Shameful Affair", Kate Chopin)*

The short story "A Shameful Affair" by Kate Chopin is an example of figural narration that contains embedded focalization. The passage begins with the narrator's perspective which changes in the second sentence. The exclamation "*A fresh indignity!*" is that of Mildred, the main character, displeased with the farmhand's behavior who dared to kiss her. Then the narrator's point of view persists "*Are there only sight and sound to tell such things?*" until the subsequent sentence "*She discerned it by a wave that swept her with confusion and she knew not what besides...*" At this moment the focalization is again shifted to the girl who becomes the perceiver of the events. In the last paragraph of the passage the focalization shifts to another character—the farmhand who sees things ("*...watching her slim, straight figure...*"), ponders over them ("*He was wondering what she meant.*") and feels them ("*Then a sudden, quick wave came beating into his brown throat and staining it crimson...*"). The last sentence represents a fusion of two voices: the interior state of the character externalized by the narrator. The colours "*brown*" and "*crimson*" are obviously perceived by an external focalizer.

G. Genette's terms have been taken up by Rimmon-Kenan and extended into a classification of **critical aspects relevant in focalization** analysis: the perceptual, the psychological and the ideological facet [14].

**Perception of the focalizer** is determined by both **space and time**. **Spatially**, the external focalizer has a bird's-eye view, allowing either a panoramic view of the story's events or a simultaneous focalization of things happening in different places. This kind of perception is obviously denied to the internal character-focalizer. It is possible within any text to observe a change in spatial focalization from bird's-eye view to one limited observer or a shift from one limited observer to another. Thus Kate Chopin's short story "A Shameful Affair" commences with the narrator's general presentation of the story place - *the farm*, its inhabitants (*the master, the mistress, Mildred Orme and the farmhands*) and gradually the perspective shifts to the main character—*Mildred Orme*:

*"This was no such farm as one reads about in humorous fiction. Here were swelling acres where the undulating wheat gleamed in the sun like a golden sea...The house itself was big and broad, as country houses should be. The master was big and broad, too. The mistress was small and thin...From her agreeable corner where she lounged with her Browning or her Ibsen, Mildred **watched** the woman do this every day. Yet when the clumsy farmhands all came tramping up the steps and crossed the porch in going to their meal that was served within, she never looked at them. **Why should she? Farmhands are not so very nice to look at, and she was nothing of an anthropologist**" (Kate Chopin "A Shameful Affair").*

The verb "to watch" from the last paragraph of the given example marks the shift. The question "*Why should she? (look at farmhands)*" and the answer "*Farmhands are not so very nice to look at...*" can be ascribed to Mildred, since they reveal her superior social position and disapproving attitude towards the farmhands.

The second coordinate of the **perceptual facet of focalization is that of time**. If we are dealing with external focalization, it is panoramic for an unpersonified focalizer, but retrospective for a character focalizing his or her own past. Internal focalization, however, is logically synchronous with the information regulated by the focalizer. Thus an internal focalizer is limited to the "present" of the characters while the external focalizer has access to all the temporal dimensions of the story (past, present, and future).

Except the coordinates of time and place, the perceptual feature of focalization contains other **sub-aspects**, those of **primary perception**: *vision, audition, touch, smell, taste, bodily sensation* [10], realized in the narrative mostly through verbs of physical perception or other lexical indicators related to perception:

"SHE sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains and in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne. She was tired.

Few people passed. The man out of the last house passed on his way home; she heard his footsteps clacking along the concrete pavement and afterwards crunching on the cinder path before the new red houses. One time there used to be a field there in which they used to play every evening with other people's children." (Eveline, James Joyce).

In the passage, Eveline, the main character, is the focalizer mostly in the perceptual aspect. The determinate origo (the origin of personal-spatial-temporal coordinates: *she-at the window - in the evening*) of the girl projects the perspective on the reader through the co-occurrence of various sublevels of perceptual facet:

Sight – "*She sat...watching the evening invade the avenue.....*" The reader is invited to see the avenue as Eveline sees it: the people passing, the pavement, the houses.

Smell – "*...in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne.*"

Audition – "*...she heard his footsteps clacking along the concrete pavement and afterwards crunching on the cinder path before the new red houses.*"

Bodily sensation – "*She was tired.*"

Retrospection - Eveline's memories about her childhood – "*One time there used to be a field there in which they used to play every evening with other people's children.*"

Within the **psychological facet of focalization**, it is the focalizer's mind and emotions that take on importance. These include: fear, pity, joy, revulsion. The external or narrator-focalizer, within the cognitive component, has of necessity unrestricted knowledge about the represented world. The knowledge of the internal focalizer, however, is necessarily restricted; as part of the represented world, an internal focalizer cannot know everything about it. In its emotive aspect, the difference between external and internal focalization gives us the difference between "objective" (or neutral or uninvolved) focalization and "subjective" (or colored or involved) focalization.

In "Eveline," 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 the heroine'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.*" 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 third facet of focalization is that of **ideology**. According to Uspensky, this facet (sometimes simply referred to as the "norms of the text") consists of "a general system of viewing the world conceptually," in accordance with which the events and characters of the story are evaluated [16]. These norms, ordinarily presented through a single dominant perspective (often a narrator-focalizer), are usually taken as authoritative, and all other ideologies in the text are evaluated from this "higher" position. In more complex examples, however, the unitary authoritative external focalizer may give way to a plurality of ideological positions, the interplay among them provoking, according to Bakhtin, a nonunitary or "polyphonic" reading of the text.

Ideologically, Eveline is portrayed as a young girl burdened with responsibilities, and represents the joyless life of the Irish. At the same time she is the portrayal of the woman whose life is structured and controlled 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 Harry, her brother, is in the church decorating business. The picture of the priest which hangs on the wall in their house and whom she knew nothing about is another catholic symbol in Eveline's life.

Based on the above mentioned aspects of focalization as well as the number of *focal agencies or deictic centers*, a typology of focalization has been provided by modern naratology:

**The fixed focalization** presents the narrative facts and events from the constant point of view of a single focalizer. This can be illustrated by the following passage from Katherine Mansfield's short story *Bliss*:

*“It was dusky in the dining-room and quite chilly. But all the same Bertha threw off her coat; she could not bear the tight clasp of it another moment, and the cold air fell on her arms.*

*But in her bosom there was still that bright glowing place – that shower of little sparks coming from it. It was almost unbearable. She hardly dared to breathe for fear of fanning it higher, and yet she breathed deeply, deeply. She hardly dared to look into the cold mirror – but she did look, and it gave her back a woman, radiant, with smiling, trembling lips, with big, dark eyes and an air of listening, waiting for something...divine to happen...that she knew must happen...infallibly” (K. Mansfield, Bliss) [13].*

While there is a narrator telling us about Bertha, we do not look at her from a distance or from a bird’s eye perspective; the perspective adopted here is Bertha’s own. She experiences the chilliness of the room and she regards herself in the mirror, perceiving her own radiance, the trembling of her lips, and so on. In other words, whatever is observed in the room is focalized through Bertha, and we as readers are invited to look at the same things as if we were looking through Bertha’s own eyes. Moreover, we have access to Bertha’s state of mind and emotions: *“she could not bear”* the tight clasp of the coat; she felt a *“bright glowing”* in her bosom, and she *“hardly dared to breathe”* because of her overpowering sense of bliss.

The **variable focalization** offers the arrangement of different episodes of the story as seen through the eyes of several focalizers. For example, in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, the narrative’s events are seen through the eyes of Clarissa Dalloway, Mr. Dalloway, Peter Walsh, Warren Septimus Smith, Rezia Smith, and many other internal focalizers.

*“For he was gone, she thought -- gone, as he threatened, to kill himself -- to throw himself under a cart! But no; there he was; still sitting alone on the seat, in his shabby overcoat, his legs crossed, staring, talking aloud.*

*Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down). He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime . . . . (V. Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway)” [17].*

The passage depicts two reflectors, Rezia and Septimus. The shift from Rezia’s point of view to Septimus’ does not occur simultaneously with the paragraph break. The first sentences of the second paragraph are still Rezia’s perception of what Septimus is muttering, and of what he is writing down. The word “revelation” is ambiguous, suggesting either Rezia’s desperate irony or Septimus’s sincere belief. It is not until later in the text, when the bird begins to call out Septimus’s name and to sing “in Greek,” that the reader has enough evidence to ascertain that a shift has taken place.

**In multiple focalization** an episode is presented repeatedly, each time seen through the eyes of a different (internal) focalizer. Typically, what is demonstrated by this technique is that different people tend to perceive or interpret the same event in radically different fashion. Texts that are told by more than one narrator (such as epistolary novels) create multiple focalization based on external focalizers (example: J. Fowles, *The Collector*).

**In collective focalization** it is through either plural narrators ('we' narrative) or a group of characters ('collective reflectors') that the events are exposed. Stanzel [15]; Banfield [3].

*“When she was ill and sat by the window in her room he sometimes went in the evening to make her a visit. They sat by a window that looked over the roof of a small frame building into Main Street. By turning their heads they could see through another window, along an alleyway that ran behind the Main Street stores and into the back door of Abner Groff’s bakery. Sometimes as they sat thus a picture of village life presented itself to them. At the back door of his shop appeared Abner Groff with a stick or an empty milk bottle in his hand. For a long time there was a feud between the baker and a grey cat that belonged to Sylvester West, the druggist.” (Sh. Anderson, Mother) [1].*

The paragraph depicts two deictic centers, that of the mother and of the boy (*they - at the window – in the evening*). Both of them are focusing their attention on the same objects of focalization: the street, the buildings, the stores, the scene of fight between the baker and the cat.

An instance of collective focalization through “we narrative” can serve the short story “A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner:

*“We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.” (W. Faulkner, A Rose for Emily) [7].*

In fact, focalization has a strong manipulative effect on the reader, since his perception of the unfolded events can be biased by this process of selecting and restricting the information. M. Jahn's 'model of vision' was a successful attempt to explain the cognitive mechanism of this phenomenon [10]. He postulates a concept according to which a passage that presents objects and events as seen, perceived, or conceptualized from a specific focus-1 will, naturally and automatically, invoke a reader's adoption of this point of view. A focalization window is anchored in a "deictic center," which orients deictic expressions (verbs like *come* and *go*, spatial, temporal, and modal adverbs, denominations, expressive constructions, and so on). The compatibility of these elements is a crucial coherence factor that is continually monitored by the reader. His mental pattern consists of two *foci*: *Focus I* that represents a point of view, an origo, a deictic center (K. Bühler), a focal character (G. Genette), a reflector (H. James) and *Focus II* – the object of focalization (M. Bal) or a non – focal character (E. Segal).

M. Jahn establishes a scale of focalization where four main categories represent a morphological progression: *strict focalization*, *ambient focalization*, *weak focalization* and *zero focalization*, the question applied to the categorization being 'whose subjectivity (i.e. affect, perception and conceptualization) orients the narrative perspective?' The main properties used to differentiate the four types are: presence or absence of focus-1; the nature of the spatio-temporal link between F1 and F2; presence or absence of focus-2.

In strict focalization, F2 is perceived from (or by) F1 under conditions of precise and restricted spatio-temporal coordinates.

"Mrs. Mooney glanced instinctively at the little gilt clock on the mantelpiece as soon as she had become aware through her reverie that the bells of George's Church had stopped ringing. It was seventeen minutes past eleven: she would have lots of time to have the matter out with Mr. Doran and then catch short twelve at Marlborough Street" (J. Joyce, *The Boarding House*) [12].

The passage exhibits strict focalization. Its F1 is situated in a relatively determinate *here-and-now*, the reader has access to the reflector's perceptions and thoughts.

In *ambient focalization*, the field of subjectivity is shown as an ellipse which has two foci, ambient focalization is based on two (or more) F1's, depicting a thing summarily, from more than one side, possibly from all sides, considerably relaxing the condition of specific time-place anchoring, and allowing a mobile, summary, or communal point of view.

"MRS. MOONEY was a butcher's daughter. She was a woman who was quite able to keep things to herself: a determined woman. She had married her father's foreman and opened a butcher's shop near Spring Gardens. But as soon as his father-in-law was dead Mr. Mooney began to go to the devil. He drank, plundered the till, ran headlong into debt." (J. Joyce, *The Boarding House*) [12].

The second abstract, in contrast, is less strictly focalized. The passage uses relaxed time-place deictics, the point of view is mobile, and it frequently employs the durative and iterative frequencies of summary mode of description. The inner world of the focalizer is not presented to the reader. It is important to note that in the traditional acceptance this passage would be treated as external or narrator's focalization.

In *weak focalization*, all F1's, and with them all spatio-temporal ties, disappear, leaving only a focused object (F2). *Weak focalization* occurs in passages presenting a sequence of bare facts, independent of an individual point of view or specific spatiotemporal conditions. G. Genette's *Water boils at 100 degrees C* (1988, 101) might be a suitable example, even though it falls short of narrative import. Lastly, in *zero focalization* the focused object itself disappears, as possibly do the limits of the perceptual field itself (which for this reason is shown as a dotted shape). Instances of *zero focalization* can be found in S. Beckett's works.

M. Jahn, scale of focalization does not exclude the classical typology first mentioned in the essay. They rather supplement each other, since the continuum is based on different criteria, the degree of subjectivity exposed and the nature of spatio-temporal coordinates, and can be applied to borderline cases as the patterns of weak or zero focalization, thus helping to describe the complex phenomenon of focalization.

From what was stated above, one might conclude on the complexity of axioms considering focalization and the interplay between various aspects of focalization, as well as the criterial indicators of subjectivity. The identification of subjective slant in a narrative text and its shift from narrator to a character or from one character to another within the narrative is essential for the reader's construction and interpretation of the fictional world.

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