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# Storytelling in conversation applied to literary discourse

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## Abstract

Our paper's object of study is communication through literature, approached from the perspective of discourse analysis. Among the objectives of the research one can count identifying specific elements of storytelling in conversation in the literary text when compared to storytelling in the real conversation and identifying the functions of storytelling in conversation in the literary text; we are also interested in the position within the literary text of the different components and phenomena that are specific to conversation (overlapping, interrupting, corrections) and in the speaking order rules (how the principle of the preferred organization of conversation works). Special attention shall be paid to the discursive markers of the distinction between the receiver of the replies and the reader, as well as to the strategies and means the author makes use of, in order to involve the reader in the world of his work.

The results of the project will be useful to experts, researchers in domains such as pragmatics, discourse analysis, stylistics. Interpreting the literary text from a pragmatic point of view can represent an access path towards the world created by the author, towards understanding the essence of the characters and towards pointing out the writer's intentions. The material that is provided by the literary text can be used in other research of pragmatics, while at present, the material made available by every-day conversations is more frequently used.

The selected corpus for the current project includes novels of authors such as: Nicolae Filimon (*Ciocoii vechi și noi/Old and New Parvenu.*), Mihail Sadoveanu (*Noaptea de Sânziene/Midsummer Nights*), George Călinescu (*Scrinul negru/The Black Chest*), Gabriela Adameșteanu (*Dimineața pierdută/Lost Morning*). The selection of writers started from the assumption that the frequency of using some types of stories can vary according to the author's preferences, the epoch or the literary orientation.

The theoretical frame is represented by the ethno-methodological model of conversational analysis and by the pragmatic-interactionist model, with a special view on literary discourse (the narrative model of William Labov and Joshua Waletzky). We have taken into account the classification of narrative genres suggested by Suzanne Eggins and Diana Slade.

In this paper we are going to signalize the formal features of storytelling in the real conversation compared to the literary conversation. The first chapter, *Conversation. Theoretical aspects*, represents an overview on the different types of interactions, the specific features of the conversation and of its structural components, as well as presenting the ethno-methodological model of conversational analysis, a model that will be a starting point in the analysis of the conversations in the literary texts.

The second chapter, *Storytelling as conversational activity*, aims at pointing out the features of storytelling in a conversation, distinguishing between compact and segmental storytellings, mentioning the component sequences of the storytelling itself, identifying the

functions of the storytelling in conversation and presenting the four storytelling genres established by Suzanne Eggins and Diana Slade (narrative, recount, exemplum, anecdote).

The third chapter, *Storytelling in conversation in the literary text*, is dedicated to the analysis of the storytelling in conversation in the mentioned novels.

The fourth chapter, *Positive expressive speech acts and metacommunicative utterances in the literary text*, has as object the analysis of some specific aspects of how the compliment and the self-compliment function as speech acts from the category of positively perceived expressives, in a literary text, Nicolae Filimon's novel *Old and Parvenu*, and meta-communicative utterances. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the role of the two subtypes of speech acts in the typological defining of the characters and in the system of relationships established between them and the role of the metacommunicative utterances in written discourse.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to the conclusions of the entire research. In this part we confined ourselves to the task of analysing the relation between storytelling in conversation in the literary text and storytelling in the real conversation and the specific aspects of each discursive form. We shall continue by presenting some of the findings reached so far in our research.

Storytelling, as a conversational activity, frequently appears in the natural process of socializing. Often met in both every-day conversations and in the literary text, in the dialogue between characters, storytelling embeds the characteristics of a conversational stage, since it is a "a combination of verbal exchanges that are in subordinating (to a main exchange) or in coordinating relations" (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, 1991:26, trad. n.).

While in every-day conversation storytelling is found in the form of "a sequence of conversational movements of the type Offer, Rephrasing Request, Rephrasing, Satisfying, that alternate in various ways" (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, 1991:39, trad. n.), in the literary text, the author seems to know his/her characters well, so that storytelling that one of the participants wishes to offer, is accepted without objections by the interlocutors. Because the literary text is created and controlled by the writer, one can notice a higher degree of cohesion and coherence of storytelling that is inserted in the dialogue between the characters than of storytelling that emerges in every-day conversation. Spontaneity, which defines stories from every-day conversations, is mimed in the story from the literary text.

The interactive feature of storytelling can be noticed in both situations, since storytelling is based on the cooperation between the sender and the receiver for assuming the two roles. The exchanges of Supporting, Amplifying and Motivating or Disabling the storyteller that appear at the level of the preliminary exchanges (the foreword of the story) as well as the conversational procedures the speaker makes use of, the elements that trigger the interlocutor's intervention, the

formulae explaining the meaning of the utterances, the flattering formulae or the ways in which interruptions are marked in the story, these all highlight the conversational attitude of the participants. In the case of storytelling in every-day conversation, the speaker can tend towards condensing the story, while in the case of storytelling in the literary text, he/she can tend towards offering details as much as possible.

The temporal sequence of events is important for storytelling in both situations, since narrating is a “method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred” (Labov, Waletzky, 1967:13).

Storytelling can vary in dimensions and different types of stories appear both in every-day conversations and in the literary text: “from extremely short to relatively long, from highly organized structures to simple plain serial types” (Labov, Waletzky, 1967:20). The two types of storytellings, compact or segmented, are encountered both in every-day conversation and in the literary text. However, one can notice a more serious distribution of the sender and receiver roles in the literary text.

The story of the speaker from the literary text seems better structured, as a result of a “pre-paration and pre-selection process” (Pratt, 1977:125) coming from the writer; thus, the receivers’ interventions are numerically more reduced than in every-day conversations. Inserting the replies of the action of the heroes in direct speech, inserting the fragments containing reflection in stories about personal experience, evaluating the events brought into the receivers’ attention are some of the strategies both the transmitters of the stories from literary texts and those of the stories in every-day conversations make use of.

The structure of the stories is different according to their purpose both in every-day conversations and in novels. The narrative structure and the evaluative structure can be distinguished in the structure of the main verbal exchange of the story.

The situations that trigger stories are diversified both in novels and in every-day conversations. Stories can be personal, of the memorialistic type, or they aim at sending useful information to the receivers. The function of sending information and the evaluating function are the two functions that are specific to stories that have personal experiences in the middle. In the literary text, the orientation of both the receivers and the reader is essential for decoding the writer’s intentions.

The comment of the story’s speaker that highlights his / her point of view, the comments of the main character or of the action’s witnesses, the intensifiers or the comparators, that relate the narrated action to other possible actions, represent means of accomplishing the evaluation function.

Stories are useful for orienting the new-comer, but also for orienting the reader, a receiver who has no right to reply. Evaluation conducts the reception of the story by the interlocutors and

by the reader, but also “understanding the essence of the characters who assume the narrating function” (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, 1991:77, trad. n.). The comments of the audience may lack, the silence of those who are aligned as receivers or the stage entry of another character, which draws the attention of the listeners of the story to something else, are signalled by the author in the narrating fragments.

The narrative genres, “different functional varieties of storytelling texts” (Eggins, Slade, 1997: 238), indicate the different purposes of stories that are offered by the speaker or elicited by one of the participants. The more frequent presence of storytelling in the literary text can highlight “the nature of the community that constitutes the fictional world” of the author’s work (Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, 1991:77, trad. n.).

The similar structure of the spontaneous and literary storytellings indicates the existence of structural patterns that are common to the two communication situations. The different means of linguistic attainment and the differences related to the component sequences separate the stories from the every-day conversation from those from the conversation in the literary text. The lack of spontaneity, the rigid repartition of the speaker and receiver roles, the controlled utterances, related to the author’s intentions are features specific for the written text. The tendency to gather details, to elaborate, the presence of the fantastic component, the emphasis on the orientation and evaluation component distinguish between storytelling in conversation in the literary text and storytelling in every-day conversations.

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