

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AS EMBODIED CONSTANTS OF NONVERBAL EXPERIENCE IN FICTIONAL TEXTS

Oksana Melnychuk

Candidate of Philological Sciences, Postdoctoral Student,

Lviv Polytechnic National University, Ukraine

e-mail: melnychuk_oksanadm@ukr.net, orcid.org/0000-0003-4619-363x

Summary

Fiction is a valuable source of knowledge — any text can be viewed as a communicative phenomenon that verbally presents a fragment of a complete system of knowledge about the world. Nonverbal communication or nonverbal behavior the characters use is an embodied nonverbal experience the narrator presents and the reader perceives. Constants of nonverbal experience become visible as linguistic units or words denoting different kinds of characters' motion: gestures, movements, face expressions. The notion of experience is connected with the notion of knowledge that presuppose revealing a textual meaning in terms of a scheme containing constants of nonverbal experience. The sphere of cognitive narratology makes visible the connection between nonverbal communication, nonverbal experience embodied in a multidimensional meaningful fabric of a fictional text. Cognitive narratology seeks to reproduce the connections between the narrative levels of the text and the modes of cognitive activity of the reader, turning to conceptual analysis and linguistic analysis of the text.

Key words: cognitive narratology, textual meaning, scheme, motions, character's behavior.

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1. Introduction

In cognitive narratology, the main goal of narrative analysis is the process of understanding and interpretation, which helps the reader to reconstruct fictional or narrative worlds (*Herman, 2000*). The cognitive trend in narratology is directed on the development of a mental/psychic model which ensures the linguistic identification of the components of the meaning of a fictional text, which objectifies knowledge about nonverbal communication/behaviour, involving a number of related factors that create the “logic of the story” or coherence, in order to understand and interpret a fictional text (*Kuzmicova, 2013*).

Narrative as a “cognitive tool” is embedded in a wide range of research practices, in particular, the creation and interpretation of a fictional text; it is used as a strategy for organizing knowledge and solving the problem of meaning-making. Cognitivists who defend the idea that fiction has significant cognitive value argue that through narrative it is possible to gain experience of empirical facts, concepts, human nature, or experience of nonverbal communication/behavior, embodied as constants of nonverbal experience. Cognitive and narrative methodology includes methods related primarily to cognitive-semantic and narrative analysis of the constants of non-verbal experience in fictional text, which requires the involvement of a cognitive scheme (*Gonzalez-Marquez et al., 2007*).

The cognitive approach as methodology to the narrative provides an environment for important thinking actions represented by the characters, which allows the reader to understand

and interpret states, events and actions related to non-verbal communication/behavior, to create comprehensive connections between structural, cognitive, interpretive spheres of knowledge representation (Mikkonen, 2015). The cognitive scheme as a means of embodiment the constants of nonverbal experience in a fictional text provides a philosophical and empirical basis for the constants of nonverbal experience within a coherent and discourse-oriented narrative world (Caracciolo, 2014). Cognitive schematization, focusing on the constants of nonverbal experience in a fictional text, enables a holistic understanding of textual communication as a mental/psychic model that gives meaning to the experience of nonverbal communication/behavior, influencing the understanding and interpretation the general meaning of a fictional text.

The article aims to ground the notion of the constants of nonverbal experience as embodied nonverbal communication in a fictional text. The tasks of the article comprise (1) analysis of fictional text and embodiment of nonverbal communication experience; (2) investigation of the constants of nonverbal experience and the meaning of a fictional text and (3) revealing the constants of nonverbal experience as a cognitive scheme.

2. Fictional text and embodiment of nonverbal communication experience

All of the researches of experience and consciousness have a philosophical origin. That is, the perceived object is different from its perception; the experience due to which the subject becomes aware of a thing as an object is not the object but an experience of the object. Thanks to the reduction, as E. Husserl explains, “the world, or individual things in the world, as absolute, are replaced by the corresponding meaning in the consciousness of the individual” (McCormick, 1981: 24). Conceptualization of the experience of nonverbal communication/behaviour in a fictional text is a linguistic embodiment through the words denoting movements, gestures, face expressions, postures, distance, etc. which we call “constants”. Therefore, we argue that it is a kind of cognitive schematization, which organize the embodied constants of nonverbal experience forming the meaning in a fictional text.

Experience is the main concept of epistemology in connection with the terms “reasoning” and “mind”; “keeping something in mind” (German *Erfahrung*) or experiencing the events and actions of one’s existence (German *Erlebnis*); the basis of the theory of empiricism (the term “empiricism” comes from the Greek *empeiria* – “experience”), in which it acts as a source of knowledge. Experience is a step on the way to get true understanding in terms of universals. However, according to ancient scientists, experience is an incomplete form of knowledge, because “there can be no pure rational penetration into the real needs or the internal structure of nature, and only the sense organs convey the proper information about the external reality” (Health, 2006: 515).

Experience as a mental phenomenon is the activity of consciousness, “direct knowledge of the world through observation”, which is accompanied by a feeling of direct contact with reality through the senses; there is the reality of objects and situations external to the subject. In contrast to the mental activity of thinking (reasoning, mind), experience “encompasses consciousness, in which the object is presented to the subject and has different modes: sensual, aesthetic, moral, religious, verbal and non-verbal” (Honderich, 2005: 281).

In theories of knowledge, experience is interpreted in two ways: (1) internally, as a conscious formation; (2) externally, in relation to things in the world that a person is aware about. Most philosophers approach experience to sensory knowledge. Embodied or perceptual experience builds concepts through the process of recoding perceptual meaning. Concepts are the basic units of knowledge that are necessary for categorization (the ability to identify

individuals, entities, and properties) and conceptualization (the ability to construct alternative planes of category). A fictional text is an environment of knowledge actualization concerning nonverbal communication; it is a multimodal, communicative contextual system, which forms a cognitive perspective of understanding its meaning.

Linguistic data exist as secondary phenomenon as to the mental models that give them meaning and are primary to them. The constants of nonverbal experience are linguistic, embodied signs, which, unlike variables, are always the value (name) of a specific entity — a designation of voice characteristics or character movements. The cognitive perspective, which emphasizes the existence of schemas and mental models for perceiving and processing information, is closer to rationalism than to empiricism (*de Mey, 1982*).

The deep roots of cognitive linguistics go back to the phenomenological revolution in philosophy. Phenomenological epistemology considers knowledge as a “synthetic interaction between the cognitive activity of the subject and the givenness of the object of knowledge” (*Geeraerts, 1985: 13*). In this context, phenomenological epistemology is contrasted with theoretical views of philosophical knowledge, in which either a subject of thinking or a given object is responsible for getting knowledge. An important consideration of D. Geeraerts regarding epistemology is that knowledge is stored in structures. Cognitive linguistics studies a more practical direction of experience, considering language as a psychological projection, that is, language as an organization of knowledge about nonverbal communication/behavior that encompasses the perception of a fictional text as embodied experience.

Phenomenology emphasizes consciousness and intentionality regarding the joint interaction of the physical and the mental aspects with the environment. Consciousness exists in the bodily experience of the world. The reader who perceives a fictional text is not only a thinker, but a physical subject — his act of reflection is based on consciousness, which is “physical subjectivity”. Therefore, intentionality is the main topic of phenomenology and one of the universal structures of consciousness. The mental status of the lexical values of the constants of non-verbal experience is related to the general function of thinking, that is, to the function of cognition as a reflection and reconstruction of experience. Linguistic meaning is continuous both with respect to the embodied “ownership of the world” in the schematized subjective experience and with respect to the referential “shared access to the world” in the intersubjective experience of understanding a fictional text. The meaning of the character’s or narrator’s linguistic expressions “spoken” in the text “points something out” to select a shared aspect of the universe of discourse within the linguistic conceptualization of the experience of nonverbal communication. A conceptual structure is constructed, covering category structures and knowledge organization (i.e., conceptual structures). In particular, the grammatical constructions of the fictional discourse participate in the interpretation of the constants of nonverbal experience, which have been objectified by linguistic methods: “experience does not determine conceptual systems, [it] only motivates them” (*Langer, 1989: 15*).

Perceptual experience opens the way to the categorization of world phenomena, and these categories in concrete fields are metaphorically projected onto abstract spheres, such as time, emotions, and the structure of events. In fictional discourse, the subject — the character and/or the narrator — experiences and constructs the experience of nonverbal communication; it may be implicitly, or linguistically, encoded in an expression such as “I”. The subject is called “ego”, its location reveals the experience of the present time and is static existence. Temporal moments and events are conceptualized as objects in motion. On the contrary, events that have yet to be experienced are conceptualized outside the ego, a place, which is inaccessible to the human visual apparatus (*Dirven and Verspoor, 2004: 14*).

By analogy with the origin of experience in language, which includes visual and sensory paths that connect the subject (experiencer) and the object (experienced) of cognition, we affirm the two-way interaction between the text and the reader. On the one hand, the reader emits a “probe” that moves towards the textual object and detects it upon meeting (this is a “reader as a source” sensory pathway). On the other hand, the textual object emits a “stimulus” that is directed at the reader and stimulates his sensibility (this is a sensory path of the “text as a source” type). Human vision is a “sensing system” emanating from the reading subject to detect a specific textual object at a distance, or as a property of the reading subject’s vision that perceives a visual textual object (*Talmy, 2000: 124*).

3. The constants of nonverbal experience and the meaning of a fictional text

Cognitive narratology refers to the “mental (mind-relevant) manifestations” of the story as a “communicative and semiotic tool for the organization of experience”, a means of creating meaning located between the two poles of author-reader communicative activity: “creation and interpretation”, or “construction and reconstruction of the fictional world of the prose text”. Therefore, the meaning of the story, which contains the constants of non-verbal experience, is a “cognitive construct or a scheme, not a proposition; a mental/psychic model, which linguistically manifests cognitive entities and structures of knowledge and the connections between them” (*Herman, 2014: 30*).

The cognitive and narratological approach covers not only the innovative analysis of D. Kohn, who developed the categories of speech presentation as a manifestation of the mental processes of the characters, but also the analysis of the linguistic texture of the language as a manifestation of thoughts and consciousness (*McHale, 1978; Stanzel, 1984; Leach and Short, 2007*). The study of the constants of non-verbal experience is also focused on imagined worlds, or characters (*Wert, 1999*). These are fictional worlds in which, within the context of the larger plot the world represented by the narrative involves characters making plans, considers possible choices of their actions, and desired states of affairs. Therefore, the discourse level of the character, which embodies the constants of nonverbal experience as a narrative action and a characteristic of nonverbal communication/behavior, is woven into the general meaning of the text.

The constants of nonverbal experience are linguistic representations in the discourse of the narrative world, which verbalize and actualize semiotic signs associated with the detection of movements, gestures, voice characteristics of the characters. The constants of nonverbal experience are structured knowledge about human communication/behavior, which is included in the textual system (narrative communicative levels), explicable as linguistic designations of paralinguistic or kinetics (*Hall and Knapp, 2013*). The term “constant” (from the Latin *constans* — “constant value”) embodies objectified experience, the linguistically expressed result of sensory perception, the designation of a verbalized sign as an element of the general cognitive chain: perception (processing of sensory data) → conceptualization (formation of notions/concepts) → objectification (identification of notions/concepts by verbal and non-verbal means) → verbalization (designation of concepts/concepts in language) → actualization (the author’s choice of linguistic means to denote the constants of nonverbal experience).

Notions/concepts formed due to experience about nonverbal communication/behavior have a concrete, “constant” linguistic expression; they are linguistic signs. We identify the constants of the nonverbal experience denoting different types of motion in a fictional text. Nonverbal communication is characterized by the use of nonverbal behavior, it is a type of knowledge structured by concepts and expressed by specific linguistic signs, or constants of

nonverbal experience, woven into the meaning of the story, the functions of which go beyond the simple transmission of “communicatively significant signals” or “character peculiarities” (Tomasello, 2005). Constants of nonverbal experience, representing nonverbal communication/behavior, serve as a means of forming the fictional meaning through the plot and unfolding the dynamics of the fictional text.

4. The constants of non-verbal experience as a cognitive scheme

Cognitive narratology suggests that the constants of nonverbal experience are presented as a cognitive scheme in a fictional text that is connected to its meaning. The basis for the creation of a cognitive scheme of the constants of nonverbal experience are the approaches of classical narratology and modern scientific research. Classical narratology focused on a limited set of basic genres, interpreted stories as self-sufficient products, and not as texts to be reconstructed in a continuous and changing reading process, without paying due attention to psychological, social, cultural and historical contexts.

However, during the heyday of the structuralist study of texts, theories of “reception” were directed towards cognitivism: W. Iser postulated the concept of the “implicit reader” (Iser, 2001), S. Fish improved “affective stylistics” (Fish, 1970), P. Grice established the rules of the “principle of cooperation” (Grice, 2001), and R. Barthes “allowed” readers to co-create literary texts. All these steps signalled a “cognitive turn”, and “post-classical” narratological approaches were cognitively oriented: “the power of language is not in words, but in the mind”. The stories containing the constants of nonverbal experience were considered as research material for the elements of non-verbal communication and a communicative environment that reproduces the conditions of real communication, or they were a means of character characterization, outside the general context of presenting the meaning of fictional text.

The processes of creation, understanding and interpretation of the meaning of fictional text involve a complex interaction of information coming from different levels. Thus, according to D. Herman, there were productive the following models (1) the model of processing discourse for the purpose of studying the pronoun in a narrative context; (2) the use of frames and scenarios to create a theory of logically possible/impossible narrative worlds; (3) involvement of empirical psycholinguistic methods in order to clarify cognitive and affective dimensions of narrative experience; (4) the use of the model of “intelligent behaviour” against the background of the fictional “mind”; (5) the study of emotions through the analysis of narrative structures; (6) interpretation of narratives as cognitive phenomena; (7) development of neophenomenology, cognitive hermeneutics and philosophy of mind in narrative (Herman, 2011).

Story worlds are characterized as mental models of the fictional reality where the reader moves, or makes a “deictic shift” to understand the story. A “narrative world” is a “discourse model”; it is a global mental representation that allows the reader to make inferences about the characters’ actions. Just like cognitive frames, story worlds, or models for understanding narrative discourse, function in two directions as “top-down” and “bottom-up” ones during the perception and understanding of the narrative and are subject to renewal (Jahn, 1997).

Examining the constants of non-verbal experience in order to identify the meaning of the narrative involves four areas of knowledge representation, which are specified in a fictional text as (1) narrative levels (structure), (2) a frame model covering deep and surface frames (cognition), (3) the discourse of narrator and characters (interpretation) and conceptualization of experience (philosophy of empiricism). The boundaries of these interrelated areas are tentative and demarcated for research purposes (Ryan, 2019).

The cognitive scheme of the realization of the constants of non-verbal experience in the discourse of a text is embodied by the author-narrator who takes into account the structural, cognitive, interpretive and philosophical spheres of knowledge modelling regarding the presentation of the textual meaning. Therefore, the constants of non-verbal experience are revealed in the communicative interaction of author-narrator → character ↔ reader which compose a frame model as a system of surface (semantic, syntactic system) and deep (discourse of characters) frames, which are interpreted by the reader in the general discourse of the text (Herman, 2003).

Cognitive narratology as a method of modelling the narrative world encompasses classical narratology. It is marked by a large number of methodologies and research hypotheses; the result is a multitude of new views on the forms and functions of narrative. Cognitive narratology (in its postclassical period of development) not only removes the limitations but also engages the potential of structuralist models, resulting in the study of embodied nonverbal communication as the constants of nonverbal experience forming a cognitive scheme that is multifaceted in nature, giving importance to structural, interpretive and philosophical spheres in the context of understanding the meaning of a fictional text.

5. Conclusions

The embodiment of constants of nonverbal experience in a fictional text is the result of experience conceptualization of nonverbal communication/behavior presented by the author-narrator in the discourse of a fictional text. The conceptual categories that structure knowledge about nonverbal communication in relation to characters' speech form linguistic categories that not only enable communication, but also determine the way in which the meaning of a fictional text is understood. The embodiment of the concept in the text is realized by objectifying part of the conceptual content by means of different levels. The values of the constants of non-verbal experience as a conceptual structure depend on the context of actions, events, and speech behavior of the character and their interpretation by the reader.

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