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Voice In Fictional Discourse

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1. In a 1976 Modern Language Notes article, literary theorists are criticized by their cohort Stanley Fish for the misuse of theories from other disciplines. Fish explains that "[1]ike Transformational Grammar before it, Speech Act theory has been sacrificed to the desire of the literary critic for a system more firmly grounded than any afforded him by his own discipline. The career of this desire," Fish continues, "always unfolds in two stages: (1)the system or theory is emptied of its content so that the distinctions it is able to make are lost or blurred, and (2)what remains, a terminology and an empty framework, is made into a metaphor."

Although for immediate purposes the misapplication of Speech Act theory need not concern us, the joining of Transformational Grammar and literary study, which also provokes Fish's solicitude, will be treated in this paper as not always misguided and, in select scholarship, not "emptied of its content."

Yet more to the point just now is Fish's censure of terminology made into a metaphor. For the use of "voice" in the title of this paper is not meant to refer to the grammatical active and passive, as might have been assumed by an unsuspecting reader of the title. Instead "voice" is used here and in other scholarship as one of the names of the source of sentences of fictional discourse. "Source" itself is a moot term for this function, as are "narrator," "speaker," "self," "subject," and, of course, "voice." Any incidental connection of the comments here to the conventional linguistic sense of "voice" as the relation between subject and action indicated by the verb form is unintentional and probably only metaphorical. Yet the concept "voice" is not designedly meant as a metaphorical extension of the grammatical term.

2. With these clarifications and confessions made, we can turn to the question of what connection there is between grammar and the study of fictional discourse. The terms "voice," "speaker," "subject," and "self" are, loosely speaking, notational variants associated with the point of view of fictional sentences. Quotation marks and other graphic conventions dispel most problems about who is saying what in fictional texts. Representations of thought, perception and other problematic facets of point of view, however, have recently received the attention of such linguists as Kuroda, Fillmore, Benveniste and Banfield. Their observations draw attention to discrete linguistic constituents in sentences

which suggest various ramifications on language theory. Several early twentieth century linguists -- Bally, Curme, and Jespersen -- also recognized the significance within language theory and grammar of fictive sentences expressing various characters' thoughts.

The syntax of these utterances has lately been described in terms of marked features by Doležel and Hamburger and in terms of the constituent relationship between clause and parenthetical by Reinhart. A case has also been presented for a transformational generative analysis of reported speech, thought and perception. In a Foundations of Language article from 1973, Banfield presents arguments for the nonderivability from direct and indirect discourse of sentences of the free indirect narrative style used for representing nonquoted speech and thought. Unique phrase structures describing utterances of free indirect style are presented; they account for deviant expressive, exclamatory and incomplete root constructions. Examples of such constructions are, respectively: What a thrill it was to be in Iran!, Oh was he furious!, and Strange that Mary should be so envious.

Pausing momentarily, we see from the preceding bibliographical review that an interface between literary and linguistic theory may be detected in the study of point of view and specifically in what has been referred to as style indirect libre, erlebte Rede and narrated monologue. Banfield's term for the style is Represented Speech and Thought, which I likewise will adopt in this paper.

3. Against this background of scholarship we need to take stock of what has been gained by the introduction of transformational generative theory to the scrutiny of narrative style. The published research on point of view fails to reach consensus on the explanatory power of the structural description assigned by the grammar to sentences which shift a work's point of view from neutral narration to an interior view of one character. Consider this example from Lawrence's story, "The Horse Dealer's Daughter."

- (1) He could see the stables and the outbuildings distinctly, as they lay towards him on the slope. Well, he would not go there many more times!

We recognize that the passage shifts from expository, summarized description in the first sentence to a person's thought in the latter sentence. The conversational style interjection in sentence-initial position suggests the utterance is a direct representation of

thought. The construction is not simply an elided version of a narrative sentence of indirect discourse, because the derivation itself would be ungrammatical: *He thought that well, he would not go there many more times. If the utterance were a direct quote simply rendered without the conventional punctuation marks, the pronoun and verb would not be shifted and the sentence would instead read: Well, I will not go there many more times.

That these unembedded expressive constructions occur in fiction is not unremarkable. The rendering of consciousness in so direct a manner has been a stylistic and esthetic boon in modern literature; psychoanalytic and philosophical associations with represented consciousness may also be pursued.

The most exacting of the work on Represented Speech and Thought is that which is specifically syntactic, and significant syntactic claims have been evinced from Represented Speech and Thought as data. Exclamatory, expressive and incomplete sentences were mentioned above as having phrase structures not generated by the standard rule, $S \rightarrow NP VP$. Subject-predicate inversions in sentences of Represented Speech and Thought are also not to be analyzed as generated by this rule and then altered by transformation. If they were generated in this manner, they would be subject to recursion; however, embedding them would produce ungrammatical utterances. These forms are in evidence in this passage from "Little Herr Friedemann" by Mann.

- (2) Were it not better to take one last look and then to go down into that quiet water; after a brief struggle to be free and safe and at peace? Ah, peace, peace -- that was what he wanted! Not peace in an empty and soundless void, but a gentle, sunlit peace, full of good, of tranquil thoughts.

None of these sentences, in fact, are structures which may undergo recursion.

Offering similar evidence in her 1973 article, Banfield proposes several refinements on the root phrase structure rule of the base. These rewritten rules generate directly the non-root-structure-preserving utterances found in Represented Speech and Thought. For the left-most symbol, Banfield adopts the notation "E," which is analagous to the double-barred S concept developed out of Chomsky's "Remarks On Nominalization." For the sake of brevity I will not expound the argument further than the comments already made. These suggest the impact on formal syntactic theory of sentences of

Represented Speech and Thought. They most notably have been cited as evidence for a broader base in the lexicon of the phrase structure grammar.

4. In the preceding section it was proposed that Represented Speech and Thought is a valuable narrative device which is distinguishable by unique syntactic features. The syntax of the sentences, moreover, constitutes extending evidence for formal linguistic theory.

These implications for both disciplines co-exist peacefully. Yet there are also literary and linguistic implications of point of view devices which have caused theoretical disputes. Many of these disputes pertain to the formal status of the voice in sentences representing thought. The loose definition of voice as a narrative role associated with speaker, self or narrator itself poses problems: are these several but equivalent names for a single notion? If not, may some or one of them be present in an utterance when the others are not?

The term "voice," to dwell once more on the rubric, is convenient as part of a title in that it vaguely refers to all of them. But for the same reason the term is symptomatic of the lack of consensus about speaker and self in narration. In Banfield's analysis, the two are separate entities. In every fictional sentence there is a single self, subject-of-consciousness, or point of view to which the expressive elements in the sentence are assigned. In some sentences representing thought (e.g., those in (2) above), there are no linguistic signs of a speaker or narrator, and these then have only a self. The subjective elements of these sentences occur in third person form and refer to the character, not the author or narrator, if there is one. First person forms of Represented Speech and Thought do occur, but in these there are no linguistic forms attributable to a hearer -- no vocatives or adverbs such as "confidentially."

One of the implications of such a perspective is that since there is no addressee and no ostensible speaker of the sentence of Represented Speech and Thought, the so-called performative analysis from Ross's study of declarative sentences is invalidated. This view is corroborated by Kuroda and Benveniste in similar refutations of strict communication or discourse models of language use. In such views the term "discourse" is inappropriate for fiction; "narration" is a preferred alternative. So we see once again how controversial even the title of this paper is when conventionally held assumptions are called into question. Assumptions that all fictional sentences have a narrator

and that the fictional sentence is, like discourse, communication between an addressor and addressee are not borne out by formal syntactic analysis.

5. Exception has been taken to the principle that a sentence in a work of fiction may have a self but no narrator. Dillon and Kirchhoff, Cohn, Chatman, and Pascal contend in various ways that the diction of some sentences of represented thought may seem inappropriate to the character whose point of view is represented. In these cases, the arguments go, another consciousness is present in the sentence, that of the narrator who has chosen the words which seem inconsistent with the character. Pascal gives the name "dual voice" to this phenomenon. The eloquent thoughts of the foolish Emma Bovary of Flaubert's novel are typical examples.

The dual voice position is countered by Banfield in two ways: with an analysis of sentence parentheticals and with the introduction of the concept of non-reflective consciousness.

Parentheticals are phrases such as "she observed" which sometimes appear within sentences of Represented Speech and Thought. They attribute the content to a subject-of-consciousness without implicating an embeddedness relationship between the utterance and the attributing clause. Syntactic argument shows that since parenthetical subjective elements not co-referential with expressive elements in the main utterance do not occur, an analysis positing a second self or narrator for such sentences is untenable.

In respect of other of the disputed cases which cannot contain parentheticals, Banfield holds that the character's thought be considered nonreflective. The attitudes or states of affairs reflected in these representations fall within the character's, or self's, ken. The choice of wording, however, belongs to the exigencies of the author giving expression to these particulars, but not to a separate narrative personality.

It is not clear that Banfield's response to her critics can account for all the cases which may raise questions. The following example presents the thoughts of Tess D'Urbervilles in the Hardy novel.

(3)

[Angel:] "...We will not trifle -- life is too serious."

[Tess:] "It is. Perhaps I saw that before you did."

She was seeing it then. To decline to marry him after all -- in obedience to her emotion of last night -- and leave the dairy, meant to go to some strange place, not a dairy; for milkmaids were not in

request now calving-time was coming on; to go to some arable farm where no divine being like Angel Clare was. She hated the thought, and she hated more the thought of going home.

While some of the phrases here seem appropriate to the awareness of Tess, a humble, inarticulate earth-goddess figure throughout the novel, others, such as "in obedience to her emotion" and "arable," are examples of diction not likely a part of Tess D'Urbervilles' command of language. There are no parentheticals in the sentences of represented thought to warrant a syntactic argument to dispel a second speaker analysis of the passage. At the same time, a reading of the words as products of Tess's nonreflective thought would be incorrect, since the two narrative sentences framing the portion representing her thought make specific reference to her very reflectiveness and conscious pondering of her predicament with her suitor.

I do not mean with this single example to champion the cause of either a multiple or single self interpretation. In fact, even a great quantity of data could not enable a choice to be made; the will to take a stand finds only cross-purpose. This is because there is a third matter regarding point of view, along with the formal status of the voice and the adequacy of the structural description, on which consensus has not been reached. The third consideration must be the theoretical goals motivating the separate arguments. This consideration is superordinate to the other two -- divergent goals make it impossible for the theorists of each persuasion to be satisfied with the observations of the others.

To explain this further, suppose we try to say the most innocuous thing about those sentences, as in the passage from Tess of the D'Urbervilles, where the strict linguistic structure and the vocabulary suggest different interpretations of voice. If we grant first that there is no explicit speaker of the sentences, we might still concede, "There's something else there" -- something colors the representation of thought and makes it more complicated. For the scholar who conjectures a second voice, it is the something else which is of interest; it suggests the ironies, empathies and stylistic subtleties that seem to be the proper objects of study and not to be dismissed. To the structural linguist, the something else is extraneous because it falls outside of the range of what is formalizable. The formal generative grammar, once taken as a suitable

model for the study of literary as well as everyday language, may undergo necessary revisions to best explain the data. Nonetheless, these rewritings of phrase structure rules take place within the framework of a systematic, predictive theory.

Literary scholars of point of view, on the other hand, may concern themselves with aspects of fictional texts which elude the assignment of a generative notation. Their observations do not, however, produce only ad hoc principles applicable to idiosyncratic texts. Careful taxonomies based on varieties of actual literary representation and not grammatical categories have appeared in the literature: McHale has posited a continuum of types of represented speech, while Reinhart has recently done the same for represented thought. Their studies delineate the classifications of phenomena that share a referential function; the theoretical apparatus is descriptive, not predictive.

6. This account of the rift between a generative and a functionalist or interpretive approach to the study of point of view in fiction roughly reflects the movements in contemporary linguistics which sent former standard theorists to generative semantics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics. But after going on at length to depict the connection between formal syntactic theory and fictional texts, I do not intend to conclude that the two are only profitably pursued as individual disciplines. For our understanding of the regularities defined by the formal model may assist our appreciation of aspects of a work of fiction which transcend formalization. The prose of Jane Austen, in Emma, for example, makes abundant use of Represented Speech and Thought, both in the canonical forms and in complexly subtle variations. We appreciate the sophisticated narration of the variations because they seem to be plays on the canonical forms we have learned to distinguish.

In (4), versions of the thoughts, words and interests of more than one self are craftily incorporated in a richly ironic thumbnail sketch of the recent engagement of Miss Hawkins to Mr. Elton.

- (4) (a) The charming Augusta Hawkins, (b) in addition to all the usual advantages of perfect beauty and merit, (c) was in possession of an independent fortune, (d) of so many thousands as would always be called ten; (e) a point of some dignity, as well as some convenience: (f) the story told well; (g) he had not thrown himself away -- (h) he had

gained a woman of 10,000 l. or thereabouts; (i) and he had gained her with such delightful rapidity -- (j) the first hour of introduction had been so very soon followed by distinguishing notice; (k) the history which he had to give Mrs. Cole of the rise and progress of the affair was so glorious -- (l) the steps so quick, (m) from the accidental rencontre, to the dinner at Mr. Green's, and the party at Mrs. Brown's -- (n) smiles and blushes rising in importance -- (o) with consciousness and agitation richly scattered -- (p) the lady had been so easily impressed -- (q) so sweetly disposed -- (r) had in short, (s) to use a most intelligible phrase, (t) been so ready to have him, (u) that vanity and prudence were equally contented.

This paragraph summarizes Mrs. Cole's version of Mr. Elton's report of the events. Overt allusions to the process of reporting are made (f;k), but even phrases which we suspect represent the diction choices of Mr. Elton and/or Mrs. Cole are rendered without quotation marks (such delightful rapidity, (i); distinguishing notice, (j)). The narrator echoes fragments of characters' reports and synthesizes a dissolve of voices. Syntactic fragmentation results from this conflation of points of views, as in portions (m)-(q), where a cumulative donation of details is suggested. Here we get the impression of Mrs. Cole's romanticized reworking of parts of Mr. Elton's account obtruding on the narrated summary.

The central portion, (h)-(q), contrasts with its framing portions. While the center portion gives way to the enthusiasm of Mr. Elton and his raconteur, in the earlier and later sections there is evidence of an editorializing voice. In (b) the epithets "charming" and "perfect" intimate subjectivity, for they are not objective classifications like 'yellow', but judgements. Whoever's evaluations they represent -- Mr. Elton's, his friends' or society's-at-large --, the semantic collocation of these with another epithet, "usual," reduces the portrait of Miss Hawkins with a wry and ironic incongruity which none of the immediate parties involved would exploit. In (r) and (s) phrases pertaining to the discourse context of the narration evoke the self-consciousness of the speaker's role. Interestingly, the discourse terms appear within an utterance ((p)-(u)) that also echoes Mr. Elton's

phrases, or at least his interests (easily impressed/sweetly disposed).

The unclear assignment of a single self per utterance and the semantic indications of a collapse of narration and Represented Speech and Thought thus complicate a formalization of point of view for this portion of Emma. Space does not permit further analysis of this or other passages. However, two not necessarily contradictory conclusions might be drawn from the discussion and data presented. First, the regularities exposed by a formal account of point of view provide a background against which we may assess what is keenly inventive in nonformalizable text phenomena. Deflecting from this principle of interpretation is a second consideration which enlightens the study of Emma: the playful uncertainty in the representation of point of view is a global textual concern and theme as well as a syntactic device. The misjudged signs and realities deployed by the narrative style provide most of the essential wit and expectation in the novel. Further research may discover analagous interactions of syntax and interpretation in fictional texts.

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