

A CONTRASTIVE-STYLISTIC STUDY INTO THE TENSE DISTRIBUTION IN ENGLISH AND SLOVENE FICTIONAL TEXTS

INTRODUCTION

The article addresses contrastive and narratological issues of the unity vs. diversity of temporal spheres in fictional texts. It focuses on the presentation of mimetic discourse within the past time-sphere narrative, trying to establish the narrative or stylistic functions of the present and past time-sphere verb actions with respect to the role of the narrator or that of the character. The diegetic and mimetic functions of verb actions in certain temporal spheres, ie. tense usage in (free) indirect discourse (free) direct discourse, will be contrastively studied in original fictional texts and their translations, in both directions between English and Slovene. The character's mimetic discourse may be presented through different narrative forms, spanning the report-control cline from the forms "in total control" of the character, ie. free direct discourse, to that "apparently in total control" of the narrator, ie. speech act and thought act report (cf. Leech and Short 1981: 324). In addition to the character's verbal and mental responses, the study includes mediated instances of the character's sensory responses, the basic formula thus being: *He said that/thought that/saw that ...*

Our contrastive analysis considers only fictional texts whose diegesis is rendered in the narrative past tenses, as the English language system observes the sequence of tenses, while the Slovene language does not. The diegesis of a fictional text may be completely located in the present time-sphere, yet such texts do not present any major issues in terms of contrastive relevance for the studied language pair.

For the purpose of this study we have established four types of fictional temporal spheres:

- a. **diegetic past-time sphere** in the narrator's total or partial control, including narrative reports of physical actions and states, ie. mental and sensory perception, as well as forms of indirect discourse (underlined items in the examples);
- b. **diegetic present-time sphere** in the narrator's total or partial control, including narrative reports of physical actions and states, ie. mental and sensory perception, as well as forms of indirect discourse (undulated items in the examples);
- c. **mimetic present-time sphere** in the character's partial or total control, including forms of indirect and direct discourse, as well as free direct discourse (**bold** items in the examples);

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- d. **extra-diegetic present-time sphere** in the narrator's total control (*italicised* items in the examples).

Combinations of marking styles will indicate that the phrasing supports several topic-relevant interpretations.

DIEGETIC PRESENT-TIME SPHERE INTERFERENCES

The underlying proposition to this discussion is that the default temporal location of diegetic discourse is within the past-time sphere. The diegetic sections presented as if situated in the present time-sphere within the default past tense narrative may range from the paragraph-length to whole chapters in a given fictional text. The narrator's option to dislocate the default past-time sphere narrative into the present-time sphere narrative may be systematic or seemingly random, ie. perhaps not evident at first reading. Examples of seemingly random temporal narrative dislocation can be found in *Posmehljivo poželenje* (*Mocking Desire*) by Jančar. The present-time interferences of individual paragraphs up to whole chapters increase as the narrative proceeds. These temporal interferences¹ appear to perform a primarily textual-stylistic function, creating a dynamic structural texture of the narrative.

The inclusion of present time-sphere narrative sections may be systematic. For instance, the first and the last chapter in the novel *Namesto koga roža cveti* (*Instead of Whom Does the Flower Bloom*) by Lainšček frame a retrospectively narrated story which is entirely situated in the past-time sphere, drawing a clear-cut line between the narration of the main character's past life and the captivity of his insane mind in present time.

In the novel *Pomladni dan* (*A Day in Spring*) by Kosmač the first person-narrator recalls his life in retrospective flashbacks, where the narrative and story time do not interfere with each other. Certain sections are narrated in the present time-sphere, one episode even in the future time-sphere. The translator almost invariably locates the narrator's flashback memories in the past time-sphere, simplifying and levelling out the stylistic structure of the narrative.

EXTRA-DIEGETIC PRESENT-TIME SPHERE OCCURRENCES

Metalepses are a further type of deliberate stylistic temporal dislocation that can occur within the past-time sphere narrative. These breaks in narration are identifiable through the use of the gnomic present tense, the use of the first-person singular and plural, and through direct addresses to the reader. For instance, in Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* (*Mlin na reki Floss*), the narrative is occasionally interrupted by the extra-heterodiegetic narrator to comment gnominically on the conduct of the characters.

¹ Although related, this type of temporal interference should not to be treated as an instance of the historical present tense, but rather as the narrator's (or the author's as may be the case) decision to use the narrative present tense.

MIMETIC DISCOURSE PRESENTATION

The unmarked rendition of mimetic discourse applies to the presentation of direct speech produced by the characters. In such sections of a fictional text, the narrator is, according to Leech and Short (1981: 324), “apparently in partial control of report.” Direct speech is identifiable through reporting clauses and the use of quotation marks. A further type of mimetic discourse presentation is found in free direct speech (Quirk et al. 1985, Leech and Short 1981), or, rather, free direct discourse (McHale 1978, Mozetič 2000a, b), where, according to Leech and Short (1981: 324), the narrator is “apparently not in control of report at all.” Free direct discourse differs from direct discourse in omission of the quotation marks, the reporting clause, however, may be present, yet it functions as an embedded sentence in medial position, or appearing in final position. Free direct discourse is easily discovered in the past-time sphere narratives with the omniscient narrator or the third-person narrator, as the character whose free direct discourse is presented can be identified through the first-person narration in the present time-sphere (with an ensuing confluence of narrative and story time) and, especially, through the ideolectal features of the character’s voice.

In two further types of mimetic discourse presentation, ie. indirect discourse and free indirect discourse, the narrator is “apparently in partial control of report” (*ibid.*). These narrative forms are sources of systemic differences in the temporal placement of verb actions in English and Slovene. In English, one of the most striking differences between indirect discourse and free indirect discourse on the one hand and free direct discourse on the other is in the use of different temporal spheres. In past time-sphere narration, verb actions in indirect discourse and free indirect discourse are situated within the diegetic past time-sphere, and hence help to produce the diegetic structural unity of narrative time.

In Slovene, however, the verb propositions in indirect discourse and free indirect discourse retain the mimetic temporal sphere. The default tenses, not the person though, are identical with the tenses originally employed by the character. In order to express simultaneity, the default *sedanjik* (the present tense) is used, anteriority by the default *preteklik* (the past tense), and posteriority by the default *prihodnjik* (the future tense) or the *sedanjik* (Toporišič 1991: 330–334). The default tense system creates a temporal intrusion into the diegetic past time-sphere, especially noticeable with verb propositions spanning several sentences, bringing the narration closer to the now-and-here position of the character, thus delegating more power to the latter.

The basic narrative difference between English and Slovene indirect discourse and free indirect discourse is in the narrative control exercised either by the narrator or the character. The extent to which this systemic difference can be perceived as such heavily depends on the mind-style, ie. “the world-view of an author, or a narrator, or a character, constituted by the ideational structure of the text” (Fowler 1996: 214). Mind-style is primarily characterized by lexico-grammatical features of “*vocabulary, transitivity, and certain syntactic structures*” (*ibid.*). Simple or plain syntax is associated with the straightforward SVO order, with clauses and sentences “organized by *parataxis*

rather than *hypotaxis*" (*ibid.*: 229). There are few verb actions showing the character's mental processes. The cumulative impression is that of pronounced physical action and/or spatial movement. The narrator may be perceived as, in Chatman's words, "a visual recorder, a mere 'camera-eye'" (Chatman 1990: 115). Applied to Leech and Short's chart of speech and thought presentation, such a mind-style will be associated with the prevalence of the narrative report of actions, with the narrator being "apparently in total control of report" (Leech and Short 1981: 324). The prototypical type of such a mind style is ascribed to Hemingway (eg. Chatman 1990, Fowler 1996). Hemingway's straightforward diegetic narrative is often combined with straightforward mimetic types of discourse, ie. direct speech (rather than discourse which also comprises thought presentation) with the plain 'say' as the dominant reporting verb, and free direct speech furnished with quotation marks. Hemingway's plain or physical reporting style consists thus of pure diegetic presentation on the one hand and pure mimetic presentation on the other. He narrates what is visually describable and acoustically recordable. This is aptly illustrated by a passage from his *The Sun Also Rises*, which is characterized by predominantly paratactic sentences and the avoidance of mental processes. The first passage presents a film-like description of actions and states perceived by the first-person narrator: Jake's camera-eye switches from the wide view of the dark streets to his zoomed-in glimpses of the sporadically illuminated face of his companion. The diegetic description is followed by short **mimetic** exchanges of direct and free direct speech:

The taxi went up the hill, passed the lighted square, then on into the dark, still climbing, then levelled out onto a dark street behind St. Etienne du Mont, went smoothly down the asphalt, passed the trees and the standing bus at the Place de la Contrescarpe, then turned onto the cobbles of the Rue Mouffetard. There were lighted bars and late open shops on each side of the street. We were sitting apart and we jolted close together going down the old street. Brett's hat was off. Her head was back. I saw her face in the lights from the open shops, then it was dark, then I saw her face clearly as we came out on the Avenue des Gobelins. The street was torn up and men were working on the cartracks by the light of acetylene flares. Brett's face was white and the long line of her neck showed in the bright light of the flares. The street was dark again and I kissed her. Our lips were tight together and then she turned away and pressed against the corner of the seat, as far away as she could get. Her head was down.

"Don't touch me," she said. "Please don't touch me."

"What's the matter?"

"I can't stand it."

"Oh, Brett."

(Hemingway 1954: 33)

In Slovene translation of the above passage, there are no intrusions from other temporal spheres, as the description involves mere narrative reports of actions and visually perceived statal conditions, expressed by means of compound sentences.

Complex mind-styles, however, allow for (hypotactically expressed) mental processes or speech acts, presented through indirect discourse and free indirect discourse, the tenses structures of which will be different in English and Slovene. The most conspicuous difference between Slovene and English can be observed with Slovene verb actions in the mimetic *sedanjik* present tense and English verb actions in the conventional backshifted diegetic past time-sphere. The English sequence of tenses supports both the narrator's control of report and the textual function of the uniform tense structure in English fiction. The difference between the Slovene *prihodnjik* future tense and the English Future-in-the-Past Tense is primarily perceived as a difference in modality, affecting largely the interpersonal function, while the difference between the Slovene *preteklik* past tense and the English Past Perfect Tense is perceived as a difference in temporal gradation, affecting significantly the ideational function and the textual function.

Systemic differences in mimetic discourse presentation between the tense systems of the contrasted language pair are most evident with:

- a. long stretches of free indirect discourse,
- b. combinations of indirect discourse and free indirect discourse
- c. and combinations of indirect discourse, free indirect discourse and free direct discourse.

Long stretches of free indirect discourse

Long stretches of free indirect discourse in mimetic present-time sphere can be found in the Slovene novels *Posmehljivo poželenje* (*Mocking Desire*) by Jančar and *Con Brio* by Svit. In their English translations, the sequence of tenses is applied when free indirect discourse is marked by apparent deictic differences in the person or by proposition intimately connected with the story. The sequence of tenses is disregarded especially when free indirect discourse is marked by gnomic atemporal statements.

In the following passages from *Poželjivo poželenje* and *Mocking Desire* the narrator passes from a combination of a speech act report into indirect free speech:

A zdaj je bila tu. Govorila je o svoji sestri, ki se je poročila, ko je imela osemnajst let, in zdaj že deseto leto gnije v svojem udobju zgoraj v Indiani. Ob zavoju neke reke. Vsak dan gleda tovorne ladje na njej. Parnikov že dolgo ni več. Zdaj se ljudje vozijo z letali, kvečjemu z železnico. Samo tukaj še parniki vozijo turiste. Ko bi tam mimo prihropel Natches, njene sestre nič ne bi moglo zaustaviti. Vsak teden ji telefonira, da bo pustila vse in prišla za njo. Vendar tega ne bo nikoli storila. ... (Jančar 1993: 136)

But now she was here. She talked about her sister, who had married when she was eighteen and had been rotting in comfort up in Indiana for ten years now. At the bend of some river. Every day she watched the barges on it. Steamships were long gone. Nowadays

people traveled by plane, or by train at least. It was only here the steamships still carried tourist. If the Natchez were to steam past up there, there would be nothing that could stop her sister. She called her every week to tell her she was going to drop everything and come join her. But she would never do it. ... (Jančar 1998: 131)

The mimetic present time-sphere of the Slovene original in free indirect speech brings the reader's vantage point closer to the character, even though there is a shift from the first person to the third person. In the English translation, however, the diegetic past time-sphere location of free indirect speech supports the unity of the diegetic past tense, thus enabling the reader to adopt the narrator's perspective.

INDIRECT DISCOURSE AND FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE

In our corpus, the combination of indirect discourse and free indirect discourse is remarkably represented in Jančar's and Svit's novels. In both Slovene indirect discourse and free indirect² discourse, the mimetic present-time sphere is used. In English translations, the transition from backshifted indirect discourse to free (*in*)direct (?) discourse happens when there is a shift from the proposition intimately connected with the story to a rather gnomic statement or comment:

S tenko, stisnjeno pisavo mi je razložil, da ga je roman pretresel, še posebej njegov konec, kakršnega res ni pričakoval – umreti tako sredi ulice, za mizo kavarniške terase, v rokah tega mladeniča, ki je pravzaprav kriv njene smrti – da pa se ne more strinjati z Agatinimi astrofizikalnimi teorijami, ki so ne samo znanstveno nerigorozne, ampak tudi popolnoma fantazijske. Ideja o supernovi, ki se prikaže na nebu sredi belega dne, in to v trenutku Agatine smrti, je visoko poetična, sicer pa iz trte zvita. Ne vem več, zakaj sem mu odgovoril na njegovo pisemce /.../ (Svit 2003: 79.)

He wrote in a narrow, cramped hand, telling me that he had been gripped by my novel, particularly the ending, which he had not expected – her dying like that on the street, at a table on a café terrace in the arms of the young man who had in fact caused her death – but that he could not accept Agathe's astrophysical theories, which were not only dubious from a scientific standpoint, but also quite far-fetched. ***The idea of a supernova manifesting itself in the middle of the day at the moment of Agathe's death might be highly poetic, but it is completely preposterous.*** I do not know why I answered his letter /.../ (Svit 2002: 79.)

The indeterminate nature of the English modal 'might' allows for several readings (marked underlined, bold and italicised), yet the second part of the compound sentence suggests it should be interpreted as an instance of free direct discourse or,

² Due to the absence of deictic features, the general statement about the supernova could be interpreted as an instance of free direct discourse, it is, however, already the last part of the previous sentence in indirect discourse that expresses the general validity of the character's view.

rather, as a view shared by the extra-homodiegetic narrator, thus ascribing the idea of the supernova extra-diegetic value, even though the statement is part of the letter studied within the narrative past.

A number of examples in the two novels show that the translators of these two works prefer not to use the narrative sequence of tenses – the norm in past narrative fiction – whenever the proposition may be ascribed atemporal relevance. Yet this ‘concrete vs. general’ relevance approach to indirect discourse is more readily associated with indirect discourse conventions in conversational types of discourse rather than in fiction.³ In so doing, some of the general statements expressed via free direct discourse, which can also be interpreted as not backshifted free indirect discourse, be it intentionally or unintentionally acquire the status of the narrator’s gnomic comment, as observed in Eliot’s *Mill on the Floss*.

INDIRECT DISCOURSE + FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE + FREE DIRECT DISCOURSE

To illustrate a combination of indirect discourse, free indirect discourse and free direct discourse, we shall use an example from Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (*Sonce vzhaja in zahaja*). The story is narrated by the first-person narrator Jake, who occasionally interrupts the narrative with his gnomic comments presented in the form of free direct discourse:

We went down the stairs to the café on the ground floor. I had discovered that was the best way to get rid of friends. Once you had a drink all you had to say was: “Well, I’ve got to get back and get off some cables,” and it was done. It is very important to discover graceful exits like that in the newspaper business, where it is such an important part of the ethics that you should never seem to be working. Anyway, we went downstairs to the bar and had a whiskey and soda. (Hemingway 1954: 19.)

Šla sva v kavarno v pritličju. Odkril sem, da se tako najlaže znebiš prijateljev. Ko kaj popiješ, moraš reči samo: “No, zdaj grem nazaj, nekaj brzojavk moram odposlati,” pa je opravljeno. V časnikarskem poslu je zelo važno, da odkriješ takele ljubke izgovore, saj je del njegove etike, da se nikoli ne pokažeš, da delaš. No, odšla sva v bar in popila viski s sodavico. (Hemingway 1991: 15.)

Owing to the differences in temporal placement between free indirect discourse and free direct discourse in the English source text, the two narrative patterns are distinguishable, even though the narrator refers to general statements in both free indirect discourse, ie. the intra-homodiegetic narrator’s discovery how to get rid of unwanted company, and free direct discourse, ie. the extra-homodiegetic narrator’s

³ This study does not further investigate the motives for the translators’ decisions. It could be anything from negative transfer of the source text tense system to the automated use of conversational rather than narrative indirect discourse conventions, or even a deliberate stylistic move. Important is the effect of such a decision, producing a rather atypical narrative pattern.

comment on the importance of ready-made excuses in business. In Slovene translation, the differentiation becomes blurred because of the general validity of both propositions and the consistent use of the generic second-person references in all narrative patterns in the example above. There seems to be a straightforward shift from the indirect discourse statement to gnomic free direct discourse.

In the following excerpt from Kosmač's *Pomladni dan* (*A Day in Spring*), the first-person narration and the exclusion of the narrator from the reported stretch of discourse erodes the differences between free indirect discourse, free direct discourse and present-time sphere narration. This allows the narrator to smoothly pass from the diegetic past-time narration to the diegetic present-time narration, actually being a flashback, which continues over several pages:

A še isti hip sem ga zagledal.

Prav razločno sem ga videl, kako gazi pred mano in s toporiščem sekire otepa sneg z vej, ki se nagibajo na stezo. Steza je ozka in prečka strmino. Noč je dokaj svetla, čeprav gosto sneži. Tišina. Samo Idrijca gluho šumi in sneg drsi skozi veje.

Oče obstane na robu gozda in se počasi obrne k meni.

- Prišla sva, - zašepeta. - Naprej pojdeš sam. In kar hitro. /.../ (Kosmač 1977: 13.)

And at that very moment I saw him.

I saw him quite distinctly, striding on before me through the snow, and with the handle of his axe knocking the snow off the branches drooping over the path. The path was narrow and led across a hill. The night was fairly bright even though it was snowing heavily. Silence. Only the dull gurgling of the Idrica and the snow falling between the branches.

My father stopped at the edge of the wood and slowly turned to me.

"Here we are," he whispered. "You'll go on alone. And quickly. /.../ (Kosmač 1988: 15.)

In the English translation, due to both the default systemic narrative procedure with verbs of perception and the translator's stylistic preference, the homodiegetic narrator's memory remains located or locked in the narrative past time-sphere.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Systemic differences between Slovene and English tense systems in (free) indirect discourse lead to stylistic differences in works of fiction written in the conventional narrative past tense. These can be observed at the textual and interpersonal levels. The textuality of fictional works in English and Slovene differ in the ratio between the diegetic past-time sphere and the mimetic present-time sphere, thus either supporting or disrupting the temporal unity of diegesis. At the more interpersonal level, a different distribution of the discourse-control relationship between the narrator and the character is observed.

When translating from English into Slovene, fictional narratives undergo the transition from temporal unity and distinct indirect discourse structures to temporal

diversity and rather blurred distinctions between free indirect discourse and free direct discourse. In translation from Slovene into English, we have noticed the tendency to retain the present-time sphere with propositions that can be interpreted either as instances of free indirect discourse or free direct discourse.

The systemic discrepancies in the microstructural tense forms of the compared language pair grow noticeable with the length of (free) indirect discourse passages, which may end up in considerable stylistic differences at the level of the temporal segmentation of the text, affecting the macrostructural interpretation of the relation between the narrator and the character. Due to these differences, a general observation can be made that in English narrative texts the narrator appears to be in dominant position over the character, while Slovene fiction comes closer to the character's mimetic presence.

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Povzetek

RAZPOREDITEV GLAGOSKIH ČASOV V ANGLEŠKIH IN SLOVENSkih PRIPOVEDNIH BESEDILIH S KONTRASTIVNO-STLISTIČNEGA STALIŠČA

Besedilo kot diskurz je izraz spleta govornih dejanj določenega govorca ali govorcev. Pripovedno besedilo členimo na diegetični in mimetični diskurz (Genette 1983), na besedilo pripovedovalca in besedilo pripovedne osebe (Berendsen 1984). V pripovednem besedilu se na diskurzni ravni manifestirata dva osnovna tipa govorca: pripovedovalec in pripovedna oseba.

V kontrastivnoslovnem in naratološkem prispevku obravnavamo časovnost oziroma glagolske čase kot sredstvo za prikaz razmerja moči ali prevlade med pripovedovalcem in pripovedno osebo. Z vidika časovnosti obravnavamo izbiro glagolskih časov v naslednjih pripovednih postopkih: odvisni diskurz, polodvisni diskurz, premi diskurz in polpremi diskurz (cf. Leech in Short 1981). Na osnovi slovensko-angleškega in angleško-slovenskega korpusa izbranih literarnih besedil, ki so napisana v pripovednem pretekliku, ugotavljamo, ali besedilotvorna funkcija uporabljenih glagolskih časov izkazuje večjo navzočnost pripovedovalca ali pripovedne osebe ter ali se besedilotvorna funkcija kot znak razmerja moči med pripovedovalcem in pripovedno osebo razlikuje v pripovednih besedilih obravnavanega jezikovnega para. Ugotavljamo, ali so v korpusu opažane razlike v razmerju moči med pripovedovalcem in pripovedno osebo, ki se odraža prek prej navedenih pripovednih postopkov, zgolj posledica sistemskih razlik jezikovnega para ali slogovnih preferenc prevajalcev.