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FEATURES OF USING TEMPORAL MEANS IN LITERARY TEXTS

Balikova Charos Norbek qizi

Master's student of Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

charosbalikova5@gmail.com

+998950182809

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This article explores the features of using temporal means in literary texts from a functional and stylistic perspective. It examines how tense, aspect, and temporal markers contribute to the construction of narrative time, organization of events, and development of artistic meaning. The study highlights the role of temporal shifts, historical present, and aspectual variation in creating expressive and cognitive effects in literary discourse. The findings demonstrate that temporal means function as key elements in shaping narrative structure, reader perception, and overall aesthetic impact of literary texts.

Introduction

In modern linguistic and literary studies, the analysis of temporal means in literary texts has become an important area of research, as it reveals how authors construct artistic time and shape narrative structure. Temporal means – such as tense, aspect, temporal adverbs, and syntactic constructions are not merely grammatical tools in literary discourse; they function as stylistic devices that contribute to the aesthetic, emotional, and semantic depth of a text. Through the strategic use of temporal forms, writers are able to manipulate the perception of time, create narrative tension, and guide the reader's interpretation of events.

The study of temporality in literature is closely connected with broader theoretical frameworks, including narratology, stylistics, and discourse analysis. Scholars such as Gérard Genette have emphasized that narrative time involves complex relationships between the order, duration, and frequency of events. These temporal dimensions are realized linguistically through specific grammatical and lexical choices, which allow authors to shift between past, present, and future perspectives, as well as to compress or expand narrative time. As a result, temporal means play a crucial role in organizing the internal structure of literary texts.

Furthermore, the functional use of temporal forms in literature is closely linked to the author's communicative and stylistic intentions. For example, the use of the present tense in narration (the "historical present") can create immediacy and vividness, while shifts in tense may signal changes in perspective, memory, or psychological state. From a stylistic point of view, temporal means also contribute to the creation of imagery, mood, and character development, making them an essential component of literary expression.

Literature review

The study of temporal means in literary texts has been widely explored within modern narratology and stylistics, where time is viewed as a fundamental component of narrative structure. Gérard Genette, in his influential work on narrative discourse, identifies key temporal categories such as order, duration, and frequency, emphasizing that literary time is not a direct reflection of chronological reality but a constructed phenomenon shaped by the author's stylistic choices¹. Contemporary studies build on this framework, highlighting how linguistic temporal markers contribute to the artistic organization of narrative time. In recent stylistic research, Paul Simpson argues that tense and aspect function as important tools for viewpoint construction in literary discourse. According to him, shifts in temporal forms often signal changes in narrative perspective, allowing authors to move between external description and internal focalization. This demonstrates that temporal means are closely linked to the representation of consciousness and character perspective, making them essential for interpreting literary meaning².

From a cognitive-narrative perspective, David Herman emphasizes that readers actively reconstruct temporal relations while processing a text. He suggests that temporal structures in literature guide the reader's mental simulation of events, influencing how stories are understood and remembered. This approach underlines the interactive nature of temporality, where meaning is co-constructed by both the author and the reader through linguistic and cognitive mechanisms³. Moreover, recent corpus-based and discourse-oriented studies highlight the variability and flexibility of temporal means in literary texts. Elena Semino demonstrates that authors strategically use temporal patterns to create stylistic effects such as suspense, retrospection, and narrative layering. These studies confirm that temporal forms are not only grammatical categories but also powerful stylistic resources that shape the aesthetic and communicative impact of literary works⁴.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach combining stylistic and discourse analysis to examine the use of temporal means in literary texts. A selection of authentic English literary

¹ Genette G. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. — Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988. — 168 p.

² Simpson P. *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. — London: Routledge, 2004. — 247 p.

³ Herman D. *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. — Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. — 448 p.

⁴ Semino E. *Corpus Stylistics: Speech, Writing and Thought Presentation in a Corpus of English Writing*. — London: Routledge, 2004. — 256 p.

works is analyzed to identify how tense, aspect, and temporal markers function within narrative structures. The analysis focuses on their role in shaping narrative time, viewpoint, and stylistic effect. Drawing on narratological principles associated with Gérard Genette, the research interprets temporal forms as key elements of artistic discourse influenced by context and authorial intention.

Results and discussion

The use of temporal means in literary texts represents a complex interaction between grammatical structures and artistic intention, where time becomes a stylistic and narrative resource rather than a purely chronological category. In literary discourse, tense and aspect are frequently manipulated to construct different layers of narrative time, enabling authors to control the reader's perception of events. According to Monika Fludernik, narrative temporality is closely linked to experientiality, meaning that temporal forms contribute to how readers experience events as immediate, distant, continuous, or completed⁵. For instance, in many novels, the past simple tense is used to narrate a sequence of events ("He entered the room, looked around, and sat down"), creating a clear chronological progression, while the past continuous ("He was walking through the empty streets") introduces background information and atmosphere. A notable feature of temporal means in literary texts is the use of the historical present, which shifts narration from past to present tense to create vividness and immediacy. This stylistic device is widely used in modern fiction. For example, instead of writing "She opened the letter and realized the truth," an author may write "She opens the letter and realizes the truth," bringing the reader closer to the unfolding events. Geoff Thompson points out that such tense shifts are not random but serve specific discourse functions, such as increasing dramatic tension or highlighting key moments in the narrative⁶. This demonstrates how temporal forms are functionally activated to enhance the expressive power of literary texts.

Another important aspect is the interaction between temporal means and narrative perspective. Authors often use shifts in tense and aspect to reflect changes in point of view or psychological state. For example, in stream-of-consciousness writing, present tense and progressive forms are commonly used to represent the character's immediate thoughts and perceptions ("I am thinking... I am remembering..."), while past forms may signal reflection or recollection. Peter Stockwell emphasizes that such temporal patterns guide the reader's interpretation by aligning linguistic form with cognitive perspective⁷. Thus, temporal means become a tool for representing subjectivity and inner experience.

In addition, temporal markers such as adverbs and conjunctions play a crucial role in structuring literary discourse. Words like "suddenly," "then," "after a while," and "meanwhile" help organize the sequence of events and create narrative cohesion. For

⁵ Fludernik M. *An Introduction to Narratology*. — London: Routledge, 2009. — 200 p.

⁶ Thompson G. *Introducing Functional Grammar*. — 3rd ed. — London: Routledge, 2014. — 320 p.

⁷ Stockwell P. *Cognitive Stylistics: An Introduction*. — London: Routledge, 2002. — 193 p.

example, the sentence “Suddenly, the lights went out, and a strange silence followed” uses a temporal adverb to signal a shift in the narrative flow and increase suspense. Similarly, flashbacks are often introduced through temporal markers such as “years earlier” or “at that moment,” allowing authors to disrupt linear chronology and create complex narrative structures. Brian Richardson notes that such non-linear temporal organization is a defining feature of many contemporary literary texts⁸. Furthermore, aspectual distinctions contribute significantly to stylistic effects in literature. The contrast between perfect and non-perfect forms, for instance, allows authors to express the relationship between past events and present relevance. Compare: “He lost everything” (a completed action in the past) and “He has lost everything” (a past action with present consequences). This subtle difference can influence how the reader interprets the emotional and narrative weight of an event. Bas Aarts argues that such grammatical choices are crucial for conveying nuanced meanings in literary discourse⁹.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of temporal means in literary texts demonstrates that tense, aspect, and temporal markers function not only as grammatical categories but also as powerful stylistic tools. Authors employ these means to structure narrative time, organize events, and guide the reader’s interpretation of the text. Through techniques such as tense shifts, the historical present, and aspectual variation, literary discourse achieves vividness, coherence, and expressive depth. Furthermore, the analysis shows that temporal means are closely connected with narrative perspective, cognitive processing, and artistic intention. By manipulating temporal structures, writers create complex and dynamic representations of time that enhance emotional impact and reader engagement. Therefore, the study of temporal means is essential for understanding how language operates within literary discourse as an integrated system of form, meaning, and function.

The list of used literature

1. Aarts B. Oxford Modern English Grammar. — Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. — 424 p.
2. Fludernik M. An Introduction to Narratology. — London: Routledge, 2009. — 200 p.
3. Genette G. Narrative Discourse Revisited. — Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988. — 168 p.
4. Herman D. Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative. — Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. — 448 p.

⁸ Richardson B. Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction. — Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006. — 176 p.

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