

## Visual Images of Subjective Perception of Time in a Literary Text

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### ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the subjective perception of time, or psychological time, as a text category and a literary image. It focuses on the visual images that are characteristic of different types of literary time - accelerated, decelerated and frozen (vanished). The research is based on the assumption that the category of subjective perception of time expresses different concepts and is formed through different text categories, including the category of visual evaluation. The main objective of the research is to determine the role played by the linguistic means expressing the category of visual evaluation in modelling subjective perception of time in a literary text. To attain the posed objective we have accomplished a number of tasks by means of the following linguistic methods: the method of contextual, component and stylistic analysis and the method of classification. The authors conclude that the linguistic means of expression of visual evaluation, i.e. words denoting colour and light, play an important role in modelling psychological time in a literary text, since they allow a reader to "see" the flow of time in a character's mind.

### KEYWORDS

Subjective perception of time, psychological time, literary text, text category, linguistic means, visual evaluation, literary image, visual images, decelerated time, accelerated time, frozen time, vanished time

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## Introduction

Subjective perception of time is one of the constituents of man's psychic world. Subjective perception of time is often referred to as psychological time. It is the time in which the reflection of real temporal interrelations in an individual's consciousness is being formed (Turayeva, 2009). Owing to the fact that psychological time has peculiar features, the reflection of temporal relations in our consciousness is not completely identical with the real time. In contrast to the time of the objective world the time of the psychic world does not always flow at the same speed (can accelerate or decelerate), can be interrupted (freezes or vanishes altogether) and chronologically inconsequent (turns back (in recollections) or towards the future (in dreams), then returns to the present moment). It is accounted for by the fact that our sense of time and estimation of time intervals

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duration depend on a number of phenomena directly and indirectly involved in the process of perception.

Chief among these are: visceral sensitivity, i.e. a number of physiological factors such as heart rate, respiration, body temperature (Hancock, 1993; Rammsayer, Bahner & Netter, 1995), age changes (Lawrence, Meyerson & Hale, 1998; Lewis, 2013), etc.; real processes and events occurring in time and their hedonic value (Sucala et al., 2010; Rubinstein, 2013); emotions (Droit-Volet et al., 2013; Young & Cordes, 2013); sensory modality (Grondin, 2010); perceptual (subjective) space (Elkin, 1968); cyclic time (Rubinstein, 2013).

It should be noted here that the popularity of timing and time perception research has been considerably enhanced due to the recent contributions from neuroscientists such as those by P.A. Hancock & R.A. Block (2012), J.T. Coull, V. Van Wassenhove & H.B. Coslett (2013), M. Wittmann (2013), R.A. Block & R.P. Gruber (2014), C.V. Buhusi (2014), W.J. Matthews & W.H. Meck (2014), V. Tucci et al. (2014), R. Broadway et al. (2015), etc. As compared to the earlier achievements in this field the contemporary research is focused mainly on the internal clock and the cerebral bases of timing and time perception.

Researchers of the literary text distinguish two ways of describing time in literary works: objective literary time including cyclic time and subjective literary time including psychological time (Galperin, 2014; Pappina, 2010). Objective literary time reflects generally valid characteristics of time – one-dimensionality, unidirectionality and continuity. Subjective literary time conveys individual peculiarities of time as perceived by an author/storyteller or characters. The most studied of the two is the objective literary time.

Subjective literary time has been given quite enough attention by specialists in the study of literature. According to M.M. Bakhtin (1975), B.S. Meilakh (1974), T.L. Motilyeva (1974) and J. Kazakova (2013), psychological manipulations with time were discovered and established by the Romantic movement, developed in the European novel of the XXth century and are still characteristic of modern European literature with its magic realism destroying the idea of time. These are specific techniques novelists use to distort the passage of neurobiological time – slow down, arrest or speed up – so as to convey their characters' state of mind, emotions (Lakin, 2015), create vivid images and prolong the first impression, i.e. "defamiliarize", restore the reader's perception of things to the vitality of the first sight (Clune, 2013).

Subjective literary time as a textual category has not been investigated properly so far. The works by Z.Ya. Turayeva (2009, 2012), A.F. Pappina (2010), L.A. Nozdrina (2009), A.S. Dmitriev et al. (2013) & E.V. Nesterik et al. (2014) dealing with time on the textual level shed some light on the problem. Turayeva and A.F. Pappina (2010) define literary time as a conceptual and global category of the text respectively and contribute somewhat to the research of the subjective time variety under consideration. However, this contribution gives only a hazy notion of what psychological time expresses in a literary text and what linguistic means it is expressed by.

As rightly been said by Marija Brala Vukanovic and Lovorka Gruic Grmusa in their book "Space and time in language and literature", most researches dealing with the topic of expression of time approach it either from the linguistic or from the literary perspective. However, when the object of research is as general and as universal as time is, it is only by working from a multidisciplinary perspective that

one can hope to achieve some objective insights into it (Vukanovic & Grmusa, 2009).

This paper investigates the role played by the linguistic means expressing the category of visual evaluation in the formation of subjective perception of time in a literary text.

The object of our research is subjective perception of time as a textual category and a literary image.

The analysis presented in this article is based on the hypothesis that the category of subjective perception of time, or psychological time, expresses different concepts and is formed by means of different text categories in a literary text, including those of the category of evaluation. The hypothesis, in its turn, has been put forward on the basis of the results of literary time investigations in the study of literature, psychology and text linguistics.

The main objective of our research is to determine the role played by the linguistic means expressing the category of visual evaluation in modeling subjective perception of time in a literary text. To attain the posed objective we have accomplished the following tasks: using the results of literary time investigations in the study of literature, psychology and text linguistics we have defined more precisely the formal and semantic aspect (the plane of content and plane of expression) of psychological time and carried out a detailed analysis of the contexts in which linguistic means expressing the category of visual evaluation partake in the formation of subjective perception of time.

The urgency and novelty of the research is conditioned by the need for a more comprehensive study of conceptual text categories and in particular their formal aspect (the plane of expression) as well as the interest of modern linguistics in the problem of conceptualization of the world by language means, the specificity of the reflection of such fundamental categories as time, space, consciousness, human being in everyday consciousness and naive linguistic world-image.

The study of such phenomena as psychological time sheds light on the important problems of modern humanities, i.e. the problem of man's self-cognition including the cognition of his/her inner world.

## Methods

The above-posed tasks have been accomplished by means of the following linguistic methods:

- the method of contextual analysis;
- the method of component analysis;
- the method of stylistic analysis;
- the method of situational modeling used to recreate the model of the situation described in the text;
- the method of classification allowing systematization of the results of the conducted analysis.

The analysis involves extracts from the works of English and American writers of XIX-XX centuries – James Joyce (*Araby*), Richard Aldington (*Now Lies She There*), Ray Douglas Bradbury (*Dandelion Wine*), Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce (*An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*), Richard David Bach (*Jonathan Livingston Seagull*) and Harper Lee (*To Kill a Mockingbird*).

## Results

Subjective perception of time, or psychological time, is a kind of text (literary) time. It is the time of the hero's transformation which it sets against a surrounding world that becomes a mere background, a decoration, a setting for him (Hayot, 2012).

Along with the other categories of literary time – the story time, the time of the author, the time of the reader, etc. – this time forms the temporal structure of a literary text.

Subjective perception of time as one of text categories has a formal and semantic aspect (the plane of content and plane of expression). The plane of content of psychological time is characterized by ambiguity and complexity. Subjective perception of time shows the manner in which time and action flow in a literary text and conveys a subjective evaluation of the events described. In other words, the category of psychological time expresses the notions conveyed by the category of temporality, aspectuality and evaluation. This and the psychological data given above suggest that literary characters' subjective perception of time is modeled by different text categories.

First of all, it is the category of literary time, namely, cyclical and physiological time constituting it. In essence, the latter is a variation of the former, since both represent repetitive, similar events. Physiological time denotes the stages of human life, and cyclical time refers to the phases of the cosmological cycle of nature (Yakovleva, 1997).

The perception of time and cyclical time are closely linked, as our sense of time is based on the perception of the natural cycles (Arutyunova, 1997).

The modeling of psychological time involves the category of events and processes. The category of events and processes denotes actions of a subject and an object occurring in space and time (Pappina, 2010). It covers such notions as an event proper, a process, state and a fact (Arutyunova, 1988). In addition to the indication of "external time" (when?) the words of the category of events possess the property of "internal time" (how?), i.e. can introduce quantitative and qualitative aspectual evaluation (Gak, 1997). The category of events proper denotes the dynamics of actions pointing to the rapid pace of their full or partial alternation. Processes proper are characterized by the indication of actions in statics or lasting dynamics, i.e., stopped or decelerated actions (Pappina, 2010). These categories form the basis for other types of time in a literary text, in particular, plot and non-plot literary time.

A significant role in the formation of subjective perception of time in a literary text is played by subjective evaluative modality, namely, by sensory and emotional evaluation (Nesterik & Makhmetova, 2014). These types of evaluation are an integral part of every literary image as they make its contents more efficient and thus organize a reader's perception.

Finally, the subjective perception of time can be represented by the category of literary space. As is known, the system of spatial relationships often "serves as a language for expressing other non-spatial relations of the text" (Lotman, 1970). Subjective (conceptual) space serves as a means of conveying the inner world of characters (Pappina, 2010). The same function is performed by subjective literary time. And as perceptual space and time are inextricably linked, within a literary text they can possibly merge into a single image of subjective time-space: "The

inner world" is "built" at the intersection of the two antinomic lines – time and space, constituting a kind of coordinate system" (Kovalenko, 2000).

The listed categories allow us to form an idea of what means can be used to express psychological time in literary speech.

First of all, these are the words that make up the semantic field of cyclical time. In a natural language, they denote the cycles associated with the phenomena of nature and indicating man's "life circles".

Subjective perception of time can be expressed by words of the category of events. In a literary text, this category is formed by different kinds of predicates, participles and gerunds.

Psychological time can be expressed by lexical units rendering sensory and emotional evaluation, as well as by means modeling spatial relationships in a literary text.

It is the general view of the expression plane of the category under consideration. In the course of the analysis of language material we tried to establish the role played by the above-named means in the formation of literary characters' subjective perception of time as well as meanings and functions acquired by them in a literary context.

This article discusses the contexts in which sensory evaluation serves as the primary means of expression of psychological time. Subjective perception of time presented in them is revealed indirectly through visual experiences.

Visual images of subjective perception of time are formed by the words of negative visual evaluation.

Deceleration or full stop of psychological time causes visual perception either to stop functioning or become overly bright and clear. In the latter case an individual's consciousness captures the finest details of the surrounding world and the subtlest shades of color. The linguistic means modeling frozen and decelerated time indicate the brightness and intensity of colors and the discontinuance of perception. Let us consider some examples.

1. From the front window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the *dark* house where she lived. I may have stood there for an hour, *seeing nothing* but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress (Joyce, 2012).

The deformation of time perception in this passage is related to the image of house, but rather its transformation. The object of perception appears as something not quite certain – *the dark house*. The adjective *dark* blurs the individual features of the house and at the same time disables in a way the visual perception of the subject, obscures his consciousness. He does not see the house, he sees the one that lives in it, or rather her image – *the brown-clad figure*. There is a sense of immersion into the object of perception. In fact, the subject of perception overcomes the objective space, immerses in himself, in his own mind.

2. When I opened the window just now a draught of wet, cold air gushed into the room and sent my loose pages whirling. Yet the wind had sunk to a gentle soughing, and the heavy rain had diminished to a chill drizzle as the huge skirts of the storm swept northward. Looking from the lighted room into *the darkness*, I

*could see nothing* and hear nothing but the muted wind. *The darkness* seemed to press close up to the house and to isolate it, as if there had been an unthinkable lapse of time and the earth were slowly turning in *sunless and starless space* where movement and non-movement are the same. I shivered; and shut and curtained the window (Aldington, 1967).

The whole passage is built on the contrast of the closed space housing the narrator-observer – *the room* – with the open space – *the darkness*. This contrast reflects the conflict of the external and internal worlds (the inner world of the narrator), the objective and the subjective. The violation of the border which runs between the two worlds – *the window* – leads to a clash, and since then time begins to slow its progress, and the perceived object becomes less distinguishable.

To refer to it, the author introduces the noun *darkness* the semantic structure of which enables him to solve simultaneously several literary tasks. Besides the indication of the nighttime the noun *darkness* implements a broader meaning here – ‘dark as the absence of light’. *Darkness* is opposed to the subjective space of the observer – *the lighted room* – on the basis of the presence/absence of light. This contrast can highlight another attribute, already mentioned above – closed/open space. In other words, the noun *darkness* gets herein also a spatial meaning, i.e. it denotes not just the darkness as the absence of light but the outer darkness. The listed meanings minimize not only visual but also auditory perception of the narrator, and with it the reader: *I could see nothing and hear nothing but the muted wind*. The outer darkness absorbs the world and its sounds and then the observer himself – he seems to be dissolved in it.

3. His voice was at the bottom of a green moss well somewhere under water, secret, removed.

The grass whispered under his body. He put his arm down, feeling the sheath of fuzz on it, and, far away, below, his toes creaking in his shoes. The wind sighed over his shelled ears. The world slipped *bright* over the glassy round of his eyeballs, like images sparked in a *crystal* sphere. Flowers were *sun and fiery spots* of sky strewn through the woodland. Birds flickered like skipped stones across the vast inverted pond of heaven. His breath raked over his teeth, going in ice, coming out fire. Insects shocked the air with electric clearness. Ten thousand individual hairs grew a millionth of an inch on his head. He heard the twin hearts beating in each ear, the third heart beating in his throat, the two hearts throbbing his wrists, the real heart pounding his chest. The million pores on his body opened.

I'm really alive! he thought. I never knew it before, or if I did I don't remember! (Bradbury, 1975).

4. He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw *the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf* – saw *the very insects upon them*: the locusts, the brilliant bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching *their webs* from twig to twig. He noted *the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops* upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragonflies' wings, the strokes of the water spiders' legs, like oars which had lifted their boat – all these made audible music. A fish slid

along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water (Bierce, 1998).

In these passages, subjective perception of time emerges as a complex phenomenon. It is portrayed as a distortion of visual, auditory, tactile, and other sensations. The sounds, colors, and feelings are exaggeratedly distinct, bright, and alive. Auditory evaluation is presented by words denoting the sounds that the human ear perceives either in silence or is not able to perceive at all – *grass whispered, toes creaking, wind sighed, breath raked, insects shocked the air, twin hearts beating, two hearts throbbing, real heart pounding, humming of gnats, beating of dragonflies' wings, strokes of water spiders' legs*. Linguistic means forming visual evaluation indicate the clarity of visual perception – *bright, crystal, sun and fiery spots, with electric clearness, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf, saw the very insects upon them, brilliant, prismatic colors*. Words and expressions that render other sensations indicate slowness of perception – *ten thousand individual hairs grew a millionth of an inch on his head, the million pores on his body opened, he felt the ripples upon his face*. It is obvious that with such perception mental processes begin to slow down: as a hard-working thought can turn off or push into the background many physiological sensations, so the intensive work of perception is able to stop the mental process. The same can be said about the feeling of time – it is ousted by other sensations. The flow of psychological time corresponds to the nature of perception. The characters' perception is decelerated, so is the passage of time in their minds.

Linguistic means of visual evaluation depicting accelerated time indicate such properties of colors as vagueness, obscurity, heterogeneity and also the fuzziness of vision and high speed of movement of an object or person:

5. Here he came this minute, a *blurred* gray shape roaring out of a dive, flashing one hundred fifty miles per hour past his instructor (Bach, 2014).

6. He did, by pushing the tire down the sidewalk with all the force in his body. Ground, sky and houses melted into a *mad palette*, my ears throbbed, I was suffocating (Lee, 1960).

7. Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round-spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forests, the now distant bridge, fort and men-all were *commingled* and *blurred*. Objects were represented by their *colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color* that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration that made him giddy and sick (Bierce, 1998).

As can be seen from the examples, objects moving at high speed have a certain color – *blurred*. If there are several objects, their colors mix and are, as a rule, hard to distinguish – *mad palette, commingled, colors only, circular horizontal streaks of color*. The units expressing visual evaluation that are involved in the depiction of accelerated time indicate vagueness, obscurity, heterogeneity of color, blurred vision and great speed of movement of an object or a subject: the object is moving so fast that the character is unable to make out its shape, only the color which is uncertain – *blurred*.

The analysis of the linguistic means expressing the category of visual evaluation in the descriptions of subjective perception of time confirms the thesis that psychological time is a complex phenomenon as it is modeled by different types of evaluation presented in the text by means of different categories.

The varieties of subjective perception of time investigated in this paper – accelerated, decelerated and frozen (vanished) – can become an object of further research involving modern English and American literary works as well as fiction written in other languages.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Most contemporary researchers of time in the context of fiction focus mainly on the typology of literary time and its functions as a fundamental element in fiction. Some of them consider time as a theme in literature (Time in literature, 2014) in which case it is studied in relation to different genres and epochs. Others study the fictional time to answer the philosophical questions about the nature of time itself and its representation (Bourne & Bourne, 2016). There is substantial research on types of literary time based on different types and genres of fictional works (Turaeva, 2014). These include papers on models of time in works by certain authors (Grishakova, 2012).

However, none of them are concerned with the expression plane of these representations, types and models, i.e. the set of the linguistic means modeling them in a literary text, their analysis and classification.

Psychological time constitutes no exception to this state of things as it is commonly studied in theory and with reference to certain literary epochs, such as Modernism, genres (novels, poetry, etc.) and/or authors (Khanom, 2013; Wang, 2014).

The contribution of this work, as compared to recent research on the topic, consists in the following:

- psychological time is studied from the perspective of text linguistics which is a quite new trend in linguistic research;
- the main lines of studying the content and expression planes of text time are revealed;
- the role of means expressing different text categories in modeling literary characters' subjective perception time is elucidated;
- a detailed description of the content aspect (the plane of content) of the studied category of time is given;
- a body of linguistic units forming psychological time in a literary text is identified and systematized.
- basic functions, formal and semantic transformations of the means expressing various text categories involved in modeling literary characters' subjective perception of time are fixed.

The novelty, urgency and significance of the present research lies in the fact that it defines the ontological status of psychological time and its concept from the perspective of various disciplines as well as the main trends of investigating the content and expression planes of the category of literary time. Thereby it contributes to the study of text categories and the solution of the problem of time in philosophy, psychology, linguistics and literary studies. Moreover, its results can be used in the study of the general theoretical problems of linguistics and philosophy such as language and reality, language and consciousness, language and man.

Subjective perception of time is expressed by the words of negative visual evaluation. When psychological time decelerates or ceases visual perception is darkened or too bright, distinct. In the latter case the consciousness of the subject captures the finest details of the reality, subtle shades of color. Linguistic means



expressing visual evaluation denote such characteristics of color as brightness, intensity, indicate the intensity and slowness of perception: perception of this kind is possible only during deceleration of the mental process, disconnection of consciousness from other perceptions and sensations.

The means of expression of visual evaluation conveying accelerated time denote such characteristics of color as fuzziness, promiscuity, indicate blurred vision and high velocity of movement of an object or a subject: the object is moving so fast that its contours become blurred, and the color becomes uncertain.

Thus, we may conclude that the linguistic means of expression of visual evaluation, i.e. words denoting color and light, play an important role in modeling psychological time in a literary text since they allow a reader to "see" the flow of time in a character's mind.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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