

LITERARINESS AS FREEDOM OF THINKING

Lindita Tahiri

University of Prishtina, Kosova¹

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Abstract: The study argues about the advantage of the linguistic approach to literature in enabling students become aware of the multiple perspectives of narration giving them the power to do the work that otherwise the supreme interpreter would have done for them, thus sharpening their critical thinking skills. Contemporary novels in Albanian will be examined, by renowned writers such as Ismail Kadare and Ben Blushi. Kadare, probably the most famous Albanian writer ever, will be argued as an example of the author who kept the free thinking alive during the period of extreme totalitarian regime where the language was saturated with communist manipulative rhetoric, and his literature achieved this specifically with impersonal techniques of narration. These texts will be analyzed by pointing out the main linguistic indicators of interior monologue (Cohn), such as features of agency, transitivity, passivization, nominalization, deictic expressions, and free indirect speech. Examples from popular fiction will be discussed, taking into account the negative connotations about popular fiction as a kind of literature associated with industry and entertainment, as opposed to literary fiction which is studied at the academia. Popular fiction will be explored from the perspective of provoking public discussion about important societal issues, such as is the case with the Albanian author Blushi who aroused heated debate and was accused by the Muslim community for ruining the religious harmony of Albanians. This debate will be compared with the initiative to review Kosovar history textbooks due to their negative portrayal of Turkey. As conclusion, the study aims to demonstrate that perspectival narration may be used as teaching strategy to help readers explore the other's self and develop freedom of thinking.

Keywords: pedagogical stylistics, Kadare, critical thinking, literariness

¹ "Kosova" is the Albanian name and "Kosovo" is the Serbian name for the country, which institutionally calls itself the Republic of Kosova. The Serbian government does not recognize the state calling it Kosovo. Many international speakers use "Kosovo" without implying that they believe that Kosovo is Serbian. The deliberate choice in this paper is the Albanian form of the lexeme.

1. INTRODUCTION

Whereas early stylistics of the 60s stressed the autonomy of literature with attention on stylistically marked texts, regarding study of literature as a branch of aesthetics (Widdowson: 1996), modern stylistics views language of literature in relation to other discourses in terms of continuum rather than polarity. This perspective integrates the linguistic and literary study and develops the awareness of literature as language, which is beneficial both to teaching of language and teaching of literature. The focus of stylistics in the text of literature, rather than in vague and impressionistic judgments, makes it a useful pedagogical tool in language and literature studies (Weber: 1996).

Stylistics has pedagogical usefulness because it of its basic principles such as being rigorous, retrievable, and replicable (Simpson: 2004). The teacher does not only interpret messages of the literary work, but analyzes textual features, such as lexicon and syntax, depicting their function towards producing the literariness of a text. This strategy of interpretation based on linguistic analysis avoids for the morally prescriptive language and allows for the plurality of interpretation and readings for the contemporary reader/student, who lives within the uncertainty of the modern age, where everything is opened to redefinition.

According to the literary critic Jesse Matz (2004) one of the important developments of the modern novel is the replacement of a belief in absolute, knowable truth with a sense of relative, provisional truths, with the awareness of ‘reality’ as a constructed fiction. Modern writers do not aim to give a full or neutral version of a story, but they emphasize the limited perspective of the personal point of view. As Matz puts it: “...we have to do the work an omniscient narrator would otherwise have done for us, and the participation gives objective knowledge the feel of subjective involvement” (52). Therefore, the perspectival narration appears as an aesthetic strategy of individuality which helps readers grasp the idea of the content of subjectivity in the midst of the information chaos.

The teaching strategy based on pedagogical stylistics not only makes literature more approachable for students but also contributes for the development of critical thinking, which is commonly listed amongst the main skills belonging to generic competencies – transferable, multifunctional knowledge, skills and attitudes that people could learn and develop in different ways and learning environments, and apply across a variety of job and life contexts (European Commission, DG Education and Culture, 2006,2012). Generic skills have been capturing growing attention all over the world by education policy makers, and therefore particular attention should be paid to the way literature is taught, as a tool to sharpen the most important competences of the modern citizens.

1.1.Literature as public space for dialogue: Albanian case

The Albanian case might not be different from other former communist countries, where a great moral and ideological power was attributed to literature, even to poetry, which although usually

is the elite genre, in these countries enjoyed immense popularity. This trend may be illustrated with one of the Albanian internationally recognized authors of literary fiction, Ismail Kadare, who is a bestseller amongst Albanian readers of all ages. His work kept the free thinking alive during the period of extreme totalitarian regime where the language was saturated with communist manipulative rhetoric. It was his work that refilled with life the drained language of mechanical thought, and it was his language that broke through the walls where the dictatorship could not make the way into. By keeping language creativity alive, Kadare succeeded to give self-dignity to the intimate language of individuals, as readers could find more life in his works than in everyday reality. With the words of the American scholar Peter Morgan (2006:9), “As the voice of an alternative, better Albania, Kadare offered to his countrymen one of the few sources of hope for change”.

According to statistics, literary fiction in Albania still sells well and one may argue that literature amongst Albanian culture is not perceived as privilege of academia. Historically Albanian writers have been identified with the national aspirations and the ‘book’ has been considered as the best means to resist occupation and totalitarianism. The ‘death of the author’ is practically impossible within Albanian culture, in spite the effort of Barthes to liberate the reader from the tyranny of the limited interpretation. The Albanian author is very much alive: he has often been a public figure, and even a hero defending the national cause.

Is there still need for a mission similar to Kadare’s work, a need to make readers critical towards ideological manipulations of public discourse, in the world of today, in the age of globalization and uncertainty, in the age of democracy as well as of massacres and anxiety? Many works of popular fiction, as ‘Da Vinci Code’ does with religion for example, explore important issues for society and tend to provoke public discussion about problems that preoccupy humankind, and this seems to be the feature that the modern consumer of books wants to find into the reading process- the public space for dialogue, evocative to the possibility for interaction that internet provides for its users. We propose that this need may be efficiently explored by the teacher of literature, who in this fashion encourages and inspires the critical and creative thinking as one of the most essential competences for the modern individual.

This skill of critical thinking is crucial within the debates about history textbooks which are taking place in Balkans, and the literature teacher can help students became aware of the editorial, selective, interpretative roles of the historian, as well as of the author of fiction. For instance, in 2011 the Minister of External Affairs in Turkey asked the Kosovar authorities to change history textbooks, because they are “Albanian- centered and portray a negative image of Turkey” (Jazexhi: 2013). What kind of skills do students need in order to maintain the neutral attitude towards ideological maneuvering of any kind?

2. METHOD

Contemporary Albanian literature is analyzed from the aspect of linguistic presentation of character’s ‘mind style’ (Roger Fowler: 1977) pointing out the pedagogical advantage of

linguistic criticism. History textbooks are also analyzed from the point of view of linguistic criticism. Linguistic structures present in the respective texts will be approached as expression of social values, based on the functional model developed by M.A.K. Halliday (1973, 1978, 1994) and adopted by Roger Fowler (1979, 1991,2003), Hodge, Kress and Trew (1979), referred to as Systemic Functional Linguistics. Fundamental to these models is the belief that the uses of language shape the linguistic system.

The language function which will be of primary focus is the interpersonal function , as both interactional and personal, as means whereby social groups are integrated and the individual is identified and reinforced. The indicators for this function, according to Halliday are: lexical register, types of speech and modality, use of person, of modifiers and intensifiers, and in particular comments and evaluative expressions.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be used and the concept of van Dijk (1998) about the rhetoric of polarization will be applied. One of the typical analyses that van Dijk does of the media discourse is the polarized representation of the self and the other, which serves the definition of the social identity of the social group, whose interests are represented in respective discourse. As van Dijk claims, regardless of whether they are aware and knowledgeable about an ideology, this ideology underlies language and exists, the way grammar exists.

Finally, the vigorous discussion set off by the literary theorist Eagleton (1985) about language conventionally perceived as literature, will be taken into account. Nowadays the study of literature, similarly to the study of modern linguistics, is not positioning itself as normative science prescribing one single correct language variant. Rather than aiming to define a trans-historical essence of literature and originality which is hard to clarify, literature scholars are more and more talking about literariness as a potential of all language which may be present in different kinds of discourse .Furthermore, this potential for creativity in language is considered as closely linked to the basic cognitive processes in language usage and language origin (Lakoff and Turner:1989)

3. RESULTS

3.1. Kadare: the split identity

One of Kadare's rare novels translated in English from the original is the Broken April, whose main character is Gjorg, the young mountaineer, who kills a man to avenge the death of his brother according to the provisions of the ancient Code. The novel starts with the thematic positioning of the possessive third person pronoun (His feet were cold), and throughout the text this kind of usage of the pronoun serves the narrative voice to keep a distance and to give the impression of showing rather than telling, in particular when internal thoughts and perceptions of the character are transmitted. The thematic positioning of intensifiers, either as adjectives, adverbs, subordinate connectors or deictics, serves as an orientation towards the interior world of the character. Even the syntactic order of clauses follows the chronological experience of the

character and orients the reading process creating an impression of straightforwardness and symbolism. The author uses free direct speech and partially free indirect speech in the psychonarration (Cohn: 1978) of the character, suggesting not only his thoughts but also emotional extra-linguistics processes directly transmitted by the narrator.

The literature teachers can draw out these points, focusing on all levels of language, e.g. on the lexical choice which is typical for the character and suggests interior perception with character's focalization. They can point out the foregrounded transitivity, as typically Gjorg takes verbs denoting factual actions, but without effect on the objects. His verbs denoting physical actions refer to body movements and are self-referential. Verbs depicting his main activity (wait, shoot) are accompanied by modals (had to, must) adding connotations of obligation and involuntary actions. So his verbs show mainly lack of ability to act rather than real actions, which make him a victim more than an actor.

The English translation points out the lack of action and will, as is the case in this example, by switching the agency to the object compared to the original Albanian where the agency falls on the character: "Slowly the gun barrel swept over some patches" (7). The translation succeeds to transmit the split identity, the dilemma to proceed with the action of avenge which is imposed due to social norms, and for instance students can be led to interpret this as an ever existing dilemma of the modern individual. What is significant, students learn to be sensitive to grammatical indicators used to reinforce specific meanings in all kinds of discourses.

3.2. History through lenses of fiction

Regarding accusations for nationalism in Kosova history books², the teacher can provide a textual analysis and explain for instance that when non-factive verbs (Hudelson: 2002) are used such as: "It is thought by the scholars that Albanian language descends directly Illyrian" (History 6:24), this creates an impression of doubt about our predecessors rather than nationalism. Or, sentences like "Special feature of the influence and legacy of the Ottoman culture here are the various facilities built during that time" (History 7:130) show multiculturalism rather than hatred towards the Ottoman culture, avoiding rhetoric of opposition of evil and righteous.

Another case of telling history through fiction, Ben Blushi's *Living in an island* has provoked profuse debates within the public opinion, accused by the Muslim community for endangering the religious harmony and tolerance of Albanians. The novel portrays the life of an Albanian family embracing simultaneously two religions, as historical allegory pointing to the challenging subject of the religious background of Albanians. The teacher can approach literature as historical construction, where historical characters have been explored in a different light by the author, amongst them Skanderbeg, the most prominent figure in the history of Albanians, famous for his resistance against the Ottoman Empire: "Skanderbeg fought for power and not for faith", says Komneni, renowned historical figure and one of the main characters in the novel. "The book

² Translations from history texts and Blushi's novel are done by the author of the paper.

belongs to the knowledgeable, who are usually the most powerful” declares Isaac to Sara in the closing chapter. “When Turks leave, we will write again the book we have lost.”

The teacher may empower the readers by asking them whose word is it, and should the character’s words be taken as presentation of character’s ‘mind style’ or as author’s own judgment and distinct message ?(Wimsatt and Bredasly: 1947). The teacher can point out to the intrusive presence of the author, as in the case when the former Christian entered the mosque and “ he understood that he demonstrated logical superiority even at the very first Islam lesson”.

By applying pedagogical stylistics students learn to make difference between impersonal and neutral narrative voices and the intrusive and judgmental ever-knowing story-tellers.

CONCLUSION

The teaching strategy based on pedagogical stylistics not only makes literature more approachable for students in this age when reading is globally declining, but also contributes for the development of critical thinking, which is commonly listed amongst the main generic skills the modern individual needs in developing life- long learning. Furthermore, the focus on interior monologue technique with the neutral presentation of the internal life of people is of social and political importance, because it is a concrete tool of arousing tolerance and understanding between people (Aurebach, 1968:552). As a result, students learn to enjoy a non-visible, non-intrusive source of narration, rather than a judgmental and evaluative privileged source of information, and this way they are more resistant to authoritarian discourse

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