

Simpson and Fowler's Classification of Narrators

MA Course on Narratology

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Fowler's Classification of Narrators

Fowler (1986, 1996) proposes a classification of narrators. His typology is much more grounded on the linguistic features displayed by the telling voice on each occasion and is directly connected to how psychological point of view is projected in texts. Fowler presents two initial types, in turn also subcategorized further: internal and external narration on the one hand, and narration types A, B, C, and D, on the other. Internal narration presents the perspective of an element from within the story, be it a character's consciousness (type A narration) or an omniscient narrator with access to characters' feelings, attitudes and emotions (type B). External narration avoids claiming access to the characters' thoughts or feelings, nor does it make the narrator's thoughts and feelings explicit either (type C narration); the narrator's persona, however, might be underscored in relation to his/her knowledge of the actions and events of the story (type D), although still avoiding any evaluation or thought presentation.

Fowler's Classification: Cont.

Linguistically, the four types can be clearly identified; for instance, Fowler claims that type A, being the most subjective, 'consists of either first-person narration by a participating character, or third-person narration which is strongly coloured with personal markers of the character's world view, or which includes free indirect discourse or internal monologue'. Instances of modality and *verba sentiendi* ('words of feeling') are also typical of this type. Type B is consistently characterized by third-person narration of the omniscient kind, with total access to the characters' consciousness: 'to a greater or lesser degree, the author gives an account of the mental processes, feelings, and perceptions of the characters, so the chief linguistic marker of this variant of internal narration is the presence of *verba sentiendi* detailing intentions, emotion, and thoughts'. Type C is associated with the most impersonal and detached form of narration so *verba sentiendi* or any type of moral judgement would be suppressed. Type D, despite emerging from an external perspective, allows the narrator's persona to have some kind of saying about the actions and events of the story, if not about their feelings, emotions and thoughts. That persona might be highlighted by first-person pronouns and perhaps some modality but the impossibility of accessing the inner consciousness of the characters is marked by the presence of 'words of estrangement', metaphors and comparisons: 'These expressions pretend that the author – or often one character observing another – does not have access to the feelings or thoughts of the characters'.

Simpson's Classification of Narrators

Simpson combines narratological aspects and linguistic indicators. Simpson proposes two broad categories of narration ('Category A' and 'Category B') decided on the basis of who the teller of the story is, thus, very close in nature to Fowler's internal and external perspectives. 'Category A' corresponds to first-person narratives in which a participating character in the story is also the one who tells. 'Category B' is primarily characterized by a non-participating third-person teller, but a crucial further subdivision is established: 'Category B narratives in Narratorial Mode' and 'Category B narratives in Reflector Mode'. If the teller of the story is totally disembodied in as much as he/she does not intrude in the characters' consciousness, but narrates from a floating position instead, then the story is using a Category B in the Narratorial mode. If the story is narrated in the third person but from the point of view of one of the participants made focalizer or reflector, then that narrative falls within Category B in the Reflector mode. Although Simpson's model owes a lot to its immediate predecessor, Fowler's, the dual nature of his Category B also acknowledges the classical narratological dichotomy of the 'seer' versus the 'teller'.

Simpson's Classification: Cont.

Simpson expands the linguistic indicators identified by Fowler in what he calls 'shadings', distinguished as positive, negative and neutral shading. Each narration type can, consequently, be coloured further depending on the most prevalent linguistic indicators. For instance, Category A positive (+ve) narratives will most likely display a concentration of verba sentiendi, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, deontic and boulomaic modalities (see modality) and, sometimes, also some instances of generic sentences. Category A with negative shading (-ve), on the other hand, will highlight epistemic and perception modalities, epistemic modal auxiliaries, modal adverbs and modal lexical verbs, as well as perception adverbs. The effect of such shift is one of bewilderment, uncertainty or self-questioning in the negative category. The neutral shading allows texts to be free from narratorial modality as the story is told through categorical assertions alone; sequences of straightforward physical description with little attempt at psychological development are also characteristic. Category B in both modes is also capable of displaying the three kinds of shading although the effects are, naturally, different. For instance, category B (N) neutral achieves the highest level of impersonality by underscoring an absence of direct description or analysis of thoughts and feelings of characters, so it feels virtually journalistic in style. Conversely, B(R)+ve can contain not only occurrences of deontic and boulomaic modality and evaluative adjectives and adverbs, but also free indirect discourse. If the free indirect discourse particularly emphasizes the inner working of the reflector's mind via thought presentation, then stream of consciousness is used.