

NARRATIVE DISTANCE THROUGH SPEECH PRESENTATION IN SEMBENE OUSMANE'S *God's Bits of Wood*

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Abstract

This paper is entitled Narrative Distance through Speech Presentation in Sembene Ousmane's God's Bits of Wood. The research analyses the distance taken by the narrator in the story he tells. This narrative technique helps to determine the degree of precision in a narrative and the accuracy of information conveyed to the reader. In this respect, the narrator may adopt maximal or minimal distance depending on his/her will, as the organizer of the whole narrative. In this paper, four types of discourse are our main concern: narratized speech, transposed, direct speech.

Keywords: *Narration, narrator, narrative, speech/discourse, distance.*

DISTANCE NARRATIVE À TRAVERS LA PRÉSENTATION DE LA PAROLE DANS "Les Bouts de bois de Dieu" DE SEMBENE OUSMANE

Résumé

Cet article est intitulé "Distance narrative à travers la présentation du discours dans Les bouts de bois de Dieu, de Sembene Ousmane." Cette recherche analyse la distance adoptée par le narrateur dans ce qu'il raconte. Cette technique narrative nous aide à déterminer le degré de précision et l'exactitude de l'information livrée par le narrateur dans le récit. Dans cette perspective, on peut adopter une distance maximale ou minimale, selon son choix en tant qu'organisateur du récit. Ce travail se focalise sur quatre types de discours notamment : discours narrativisé, discours reporté (cas du style indirect), discours reporté (cas du style indirect libre), et discours direct.

Mots clés : *Narration, narrateur, récit, discours, distance.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to analyse the distance adopted by the narrator in the telling of his story. The narrator in this respect, adopts maximal or minimal distance depending on his will. Distance is the concept which refers to the degree of precision in the telling of the story, by either the main narrator or the second narrator in the story events.

In speech presentation, the narrators (main or second) may adopt a kind of distance in presenting the character's utterances with or without precision.

Wayne (1983: 155) pushes forward his view about variations of distance. He says:

Whether or not they are involved in the action as agents or as sufferers, narrators and third person reflectors differ markedly according to the degree and kind of distance that separates them from the author, the reader, and the other characters of the story.

This passage shows the difference between the narrator, author, reader, and other characters. Thus, the distance talking about in this paper concerns the narrator's position in presenting the characters' speeches and actions in his/her recounting of events, and the degree of accuracy of information he conveys. When the narrator is outside the story, he most of the time maximizes distance in reporting characters' speech and action, unless he/she behaves like God who knows everything about characters and events. This means that, when he appears like an all-knowing (omniscient narrator) he minimizes distance for he shares the characters' feelings, thoughts, emotions, etc. on the contrary, when the narrator is inside the story (involved) he minimizes distance through the use of the first-person point of view. Having a full part to play in the story, he/she adopts a smaller distance between him/her as a character, and the story he/she tells. The degree of accuracy and information he/she conveys is well noticed because the first person he/she uses shows that is telling about him/herself or about others, but as a witness.

In their article, Guillemette Lucie and Lévesque Cynthia, (2016), quote Genette's narratology (1980: 41) that technical choices must be made in view of reproducing a particular result in the story's verbal representation. In this way, the narrative employs distancing and other effects to create a particular narrative mood (disposition to do something) that governs "the regulation of narrative information" provided to the reader. These researchers go on telling that, for Genette, there are simply varying degrees of telling (diegesis) with the narrator, either more involved in the narrative and leaving less or more room for the narrative act.

Thus, as every narrative implies a narrator, there are four types of discourse, each of them demonstrating progressively a greater (maximal) distance or a smaller

(minimal) one taken by the narrator with respect to the text. The distance taken by the narrator may be moral, it may be intellectual, physical, temporal, emotional. (Wayne, 1983: 156).

Therefore, *God's bits of wood* by SEMBENE does not make apart. It contains characters whose speeches are represented by narrator in the story. As the organizer of the whole story, he, willingly refuses to give the floor to characters and thus decides to insert their speeches in the story he tells, assuming either a smaller or greater distance. So, with regard to the accuracy and degree of precision, attention will be put on physical, temporal and emotional distance. In so doing, four types of discourse will help us to demonstrate this. These are: Narratized speech, transposed speeches (both indirect and free indirect style), and reported speech.

We talk of narratized speech, when the character's words and actions are integrated into the narration and are treated like any other event. Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 109) refers to this as a diegetic summary, to mean a speech act that has occurred without any specification of what was said or how it was said.

Taking into account this idea, the narrator, in narratized speech, summarizes some parts of the event-story; and thus the reader does not have access to the detailed information.

Transposed speech, especially indirect style, occurs when the character's words and actions are reported by the narrator, who presents them with his interpretation. This is also called indirect content paraphrase or indirect discourse. Rimmon-Kenan, (1983: 109, idem) argues that, in indirect discourse the narrator paraphrases the content of a speech event, ignoring the style or form of the supposed "original" utterance.

The third type is Transposed speech, case of free indirect style. In this type, the character's words and actions are reported by the narrator but without using a subordinating conjunction. Rimmon-Kenan highlights this idea when he talks about free indirect discourse. In his book, *Narrative fiction, Contemporary poetics* (1983), he quotes Golomb (1968: 251-262) who also discusses the subject under what he calls "Combined speech", not only the co-presence of two voices but also that of narrator's voice and a character's pre-verbal perception or feeling. Besides, Jeremy Hawthorn (1985: 44) says that this free indirect speech is noticed when there is difficulty in distinguishing between what a narrator says and what a character thinks or verbalizes.

As the matter of fact, let us add that this type of discourse occurs in different forms: there may be insertion of some interrogative sentences, exclamatory sentences, use of colon in the narration without inverted commas, and finally the absence of introductory verbs. Herman and Vevaek (2001: 26) add that "free indirect speech does apply the typical changes of indirect speech. It changes the tense and switches the personal pronoun.

The following and last discourse is direct speech, which consists of citing the character's word verbatim by the narrator. In other words, the act of citing word by word or pure reproduction of words. The fact of repeating exactly the character's words is called "direct speech" or "narration". Alok and Deepak (2009: 246). It is called narration because, in narratives, the relater of events decides to repeat the characters' words verbatim or without modification. Then, once these words are reproduced by the narrator, it undoubtedly becomes the narration to show that the words are not from a character, but from the storyteller who produces them as they were uttered by a character.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

To tackle this work, some methods and techniques were resorted to, especially narratology approach, and statistics, together with documentary and the internet browsing technique. Narratology is the study of text structure or text organization. This approach will be reinforced by stylistics to show the style used by the narrator in the presentation of characters' speech.

According to Gerard Genette's work (1972 and 1983), as it is cited by Guillemette Lucie and Lévesque Cynthia (2016), internal analysis, like any semiotic analysis, exhibits two characteristics. Firstly, it is concerned with narratives as independent linguistic objects, detached from their context of production and reception. Secondly, it aims to reveal an underlying structure that can be identified in many different narratives. By the structure, Cuddon (1998: 871) says that it is the sum of the relationships of the parts to each other, thus, the whole. Very often, the narrative structure is a straightforward progression with one event following another and moving towards a conclusion where all is resolved, add, Steven and Helen (2004: 155).

According to Genette, every text discloses traces of narration, which can be studied in order to understand exactly how the narrative is organised. Taking into account this idea, let us mention that this approach helped us to analyse the degree of accuracy by the narrator who may be either more or less involved in what he tells.

As the role of language in literature should not be ignored in the study of narrative structure, stylistic approach will be used with narratology in order to analyse the language used by the narrator and how he handles the characters' style in their speeches which are made up of words, structures and sentences.

Meenakshi H. (2015) states that "literature is language in its applied form and prepares a basis of the study of language through various points of view". Therefore, it is worth considering linguistic aspects of text organisation.

The documentary technique helped us to select information related to text organization. The reading of different sources enabled us to compare different elements related to types of discourse, which were developed by different scholars, in different

ways. The internet was also of great help for it provided us with new material about the topic.

This paper develops four types of discourse presented by the narrator with respect to the text he tells, adopting other maximal or minimal distance.

a. NARRATIZED SPEECH

It has been aforementioned that in this type of discourse the character's words and actions are integrated into the narration, and that they are treated or considered like any other event. This is well illustrated in the following extract from the narrative.

Old Niakoro was only half listened to the wives of the absent men. She seemed, rather, to be watching over them, like a shepherd not far distant from his flock. Only rarely did she take part in their gossiping except, occasionally to tell them a story of times when they were not yet born. (pp. 1-2)

In this passage, the narrator, telling the story through the third person point of view, is not one of the characters, but the observer of events. In this respect, he takes maximal distance integrating Niakoro's words and actions in the narration, and thus treated as any other event. This is shown in "only rarely did she take part in their gossiping; except, occasionally, to tell them a story of times when they were not yet born." Here, the narrator is talking about the character's story but with no precision or detail about it. As the organiser of the whole story, he, at will, summarizes Niakoro's action of telling a story about their times when listeners were not yet born. Similarly, an eloquent illustration goes as follows:

Doudou, the secretary-general was preparing to make some kind of an announcement, but his voice was suddenly drowned out by the shrieking of siren, and immediately the anxiety returned: sweat ran down their faces oozed in the hollow of their hand, their eyes went dull, their thick-lipped mouths hung open. (p.21)

This extract contains elements related to the degree of precision of information conveyed. This information seems vague in that the narrator restricts it, by providing only the subject matter, especially the character's announcement with no details. If the information were clear, it would provide satisfactory details concerning that announcement. But, the way it is delivered, does not allow the reader to get complete and accurate information. That is, he willingly judges better to summarize Doudou's action assuming greater distance. Besides:

And then, the waiting began; a long wait, broken into minutes, into seconds. The words that were spoken again, and all the words that had been heard were pondered and studied again. (P.18)

The statement “*The words that had been spoken were spoken again*” makes the reader think of the kind of words referred to. The narrator, still standing outside the story, delivers this information inaccurately engendering a kind of curiosity to know more about the subject underdiscussion. The maximal distance taken by the narrator is clear, in that, he is telling events without showing any kind of involvement in the narrative and events he tells. He remains an observer of characters and events.

b. TRANSPOSED SPEECH: INDIRECT STYLE

This type of discourse is different from the first in that the character’s words and actions are reported by the narrator, who presents them with his interpretation. As it has been said, this type is referred to as indirect content paraphrase or indirect discourse, by Rimmon-Kenan (Idem), who argues that, in this type, the narrator paraphrases the content of a speech event, ignoring the style or form of the supposed “original” utterance.

The narrator portrays this type of speech in these lines:

In the midst of the general laughter Mamadou Keita was at last able to resume his interrupted speech: “I did not say that I was against the strike. I said only that a decision of this importance had never before been taken here, and that we must think about it carefully. (pp. 9-10)

In this passage, there are two different kinds of narrators. The first part is told by an outsider who introduces the second narrator so that he may tell what he knows in his own setting. In this respect, the second narrator is an insider, that is, a character with a full part to play in the story. Thus, the main narrator takes the maximal distance to tell what the second narrator is going to say on his turn. Taking the floor, this narrator uses or takes “I” position or first person point of view to report his own words and actions, and present them with his interpretation. Therefore, this extract bears some elements which show indirect style. This element is the use of subordinating conjunction “that” which introduces indirect style. The narrator, in this respect, refuses, at will, to repeat his own words verbatim. He minimizes distance through the position he takes in the story. (“I” position). Would he want to consider the original utterance, the conjunction “that” would be dropped, and thus, there would be insertion of necessary punctuation such as comma and inverted commas. Here, it is clear, as Gibbons (1979: 33) says that indirect speech gives the actual words of the characters as they are alleged to have been spoken, but changes the grammatical person of the subject and the grammatical tense of the verb. This means that putting the sentence uttered by Keita, in direct speech, the grammatical person and tense wouldn’t respect the same form.

Likewise, let us read the following:

“Just rice!” The shopkeeper repeated, shaking his head so violently that he uncombed thickets of his hair seemed to jumb. I told you yesterday, Rama, that I couldn’t do anything more for you, or for any of the strikers’ families. (p.42)

The speaker in this passage is a character with a full part to play in the narrative. If we look at the way this passage is organized, it is clear that it is made of two parts: the first told by the main narrator, who finally gives the floor to the second narrator, that is, a character. As Tylor (1981: 49) says, characters are agents of motivation and reaction to events. In this passage, the character uses I-position to react to events, especially that of the strikers’ need. He is one of the characters and thus has a full part to play. The main narrator maximizes distance when he stands outside the story telling about the shopkeeper’s attitude towards Rama. Then, through the use of first-person, the second narrator minimizes the distance to show his personal involvement. His telling shows that he is talking to another character in the narrative by reporting what he told that character the day before. When he says *“I told you yesterday that I couldn’t do anything more for you, or for any of the strikers’ families”*, it is, without doubt that, he is reporting his own words and actions by ignoring the form of the original utterance (indirect speech).

c. TRANSPOSED SPEECH: FREE INDIRECT STYLE

We talk about free indirect speech when the character’s words and actions are reported by the narrator, but without using a subordinating conjunction and reporting verb (Lucie and Cynthia). As it has been said earlier, this is also called “Combined speech”, free indirect discourse, a style that appears when there is difficulty in distinguishing between what a narrator says and what a character thinks or verbalizes, especially, monologue. This occurs when there is a single person speaking alone with or without an audience. (Cuddon, 1998: 517). The extract below highlights this point:

Samba N’Doulougou did not understand what force it was that compelled him to come here now and seek out this woman whose body he had enjoyed one night. Was it pity for the weak and infirm, or was it for the mother and the child? He remembered the shame he has lived with for months, as he watched her working in the sun while her belly grew larger with the child, his child. (p. 202)

In this extract, there is a question which is inserted in the narration. When reading, the reader sometimes gets confused when he finds himself/herself unable to decide the utterer of some words in the passage. When he or she reads, it is not absolutely clear that the words he/she reads represent words that the narrator himself is meant to have produced, or they may rather be words that the narrator uses to represent un verbalized mental process in one of the characters. Therefore, the question *“Was it pity for the weak and infirm, or was it for the mother and the child?”* creates a confusion of this kind, for it is not easy to decide the one who utters these words in the narration. As Jeremy (Idem) argues that this difficulty in distinguishing between what

the narrator says and what a character thinks or verbalizes is what is known as free indirect style. Furthermore, the maximal distance is taken by the narrator, but who, somewhere breaks it when he enters the character's mind. Such a narrator, also called "omniscient narrator" is referred to as "all-knowing narrator who has the ability to move freely through the consciousness of any character; a narrator who has also complete knowledge of all the external event in a story. In the same vein, in the omniscient point of view, the story is told by a narrator using the third person who has knowledge and prerogatives are unlimited. He is free to go wherever he wishes, to peer inside the minds and hearts of his characters at will and tell us what they are thinking or feeling [...] He knows all. (Perrine L., 1988: 137). This is called "The third person omniscient point of view. (Jane and Farrell, 1991: 653). The statements "*Samba N'doulougou did not understand*"; "*He remembered*"; "*the woman whose body he had enjoyed one night*" illustrate this kind of distance adopted by an omniscient narrator. The narrator is inside the character's mind or reads the mind of Samba N'Doulougou, and then, being inside him, he enjoyed the woman with him for he shares this feeling.

By point of view, Milligan (1984: 101) states that it is the perspective from which a novel is narrated. Herman and Vervaeck (2005: 70) avoid the use of point of view, and prefer the term "focalization". They say that the term refers to the relation between that which is focalized – the characters, actions, and objects offered to the reader – and the focalizer, the agent who perceives and who therefore determines what is presented to the reader.

To come back to our extract, the omniscient point of view is taken by an all-knowing narrator, to break the maximal distance: he is inside the focalized-character, sharing his emotion, feeling, thoughts, ...

Another extract runs as follows:

He strode off rapidly, his thoughts twisted bitterly around the image of Bakayoko. Who was this man whose shadow reached into every house, touching every object? His words and his ideas were even where, and even his name filled the air like an echo. (p.64)

Like in the previous quotation, this also contains the question which pushes the reader to ask himself some questions related to the one who utters them. It could be unwise to say that the question asked in the extract is either the narrator's or the character's mind process or utterance. The statement "his thoughts twisted bitterly around the image of Bakayoko", shows how the narrator breaks the distance to be in the character's mind, but there is no witness that he is still reading it through the question which comes after this statement.

d. DIRECT SPEECH

Direct speech, occurs when the actual words uttered by the speaker have been reproduced. Direct speech (DS), also called direct discourse (DD) or quotation reproduces the original words *berbatim*. The tense forms, dietic references, and original lexis are preserved as they have been uttered by the speaker. (Panjaitan, 2018: 20)

Similarly, Karagevrekis (1992: 56-7) says that direct speech gives a supposedly exact rendering of the words spoken, which are placed within quotation marks and are usually introduced by a reporting verb. [...] Moreover, an effort is made, as far as it is possible in the written language, to reproduce features of the original speech by means of punctuation, of the marks of exclamation and interrogation, of italicized words, etc, because a character's individual mode of expression (i.e. his idiosyncratic speech can reveal more about his personality than any narratorial report or comment.

The similarity between Panjaitan and Karagevrekis's views about direct speech is well noticed. This similarity lies in the form of reproduced words and the necessary elements of direct speech. These elements include punctuation (quotation marks/inverted commas, comma/colon, exclamation and interrogation/question mark) and the reporting verbs. These features are needed whenever the narrator repeats exactly the character's words.

Likewise, in the work under study some characters' words are cited *verbatim* by the narrator who adopts a great distance. This is shown in the following passage:

“Learning-learning what?” Niakoro demanded, and there was both mockery and sadness in her voice. “If I call you I am told not to disturb you-and why? Because you are learning the white man’s language. What use is the white man’s language to a woman? To be a good mother you have no need of that.” (p.4).

The direct speeches are well stated in this passage. These are “learning – learning what?” and if I call you ... you have no need of that”. It is clear that the narrator reproduces the character's words without modification. The “Niakoro demanded up to her voice” is uttered by the narrator when he takes a kind of maximal distance. In this quotation, he refuses to report the character's words with his own interpretation and prefers to render them as originally uttered by the character. These speeches are introduced by a reporting verb “Niakoro demanded”. Besides, the speeches are presented in inverted commas and some end by the question marks. All these are indices of direct discourse. Another passage runs as follows:

Ramatoulaye entered by the center door. “Have you passed the night in peace?” She asked, and since the tailors, bent over their work, did not reply, she called, “Hadramé, Hadramé!” One of the men stopped his pedaling to look up, and

when he recognized her, he said, "Hadramé is in the back, Rama. He will be here in a minute". (p.41)

Through this extract, there are elements which show that someone is telling the story. In his telling, he reports the character's words as they were uttered. These repeated speeches are: "*Have you passed the night in peace?*"; "*Hadramé, Hadramé!*", and "*Hadramé is in the back, Rama. He will be here in a minute.*" Thus, their respective reporting verbs are: She asked, she called, and he said. So, there is maximization of distance by the narrator who decides to perform pure reproduction. That is, there is the use of punctuation such as comma, inverted commas, question mark as well as exclamation to show that the words uttered are not his own, but other people's words. There is a narrative voice repeating them. This is a third-person narrator.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we tried to show how the narrator can employ distancing as a technical choice in the narrative he tells. This distance can be either maximal or minimal. Through the speech presentation, the narrator adopts maximal distance when he tells the story as an observer of characters' actions and events. Being outside the story events, he narratizes the characters' speeches by interrogating them into the narration, on the one hand, and by the characters' words with his own interpretation on the other. This distance can also be broken when the narrator enters the character's mind. When the maximal distance is broken, there is adoption of minimal distance. Besides, a greater distance is also observed when the narrator refuses to report the character's words and actions with his interpretation.

Minimal distance is noticed when the narrator, be it main or second, tells the story through an the first person point of view or when he tells the story in third person point of view and behaves like a superhuman being who knows everything about characters and events.

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