

MEDIATED REPRESENTATION OF INTERNAL EXPERIENCE IN THIRD-PERSON NARRATION: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF WOMEN-CENTRED PROSE

НАРАТИВНЕ ПРЕДСТАВЛЕННЯ ВНУТРІШНЬОГО ДОСВІДУ В ОПОВІДІ ВІД ТРЕТЬОЇ ОСОБИ: КОРПУСНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ЖІНКОЦЕНТРОВАНОЇ ПРОЗИ

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The article examines the representation of internal experience in third-person narration in contemporary women-centred prose. The focus is on cases where inner states are not verbalised directly but appear in connection with speech, action and perception. The analysis is based on a corpus compiled from five English-language novels, where narration is organised around a female focalising character and where the pronoun she is used as the main point of entry into the material.

The study considers the frequency and collocational profile of she and the contexts in which it occurs. Particular attention is paid to reporting verbs, mental and perceptual predicates, bodily actions and modal forms. The analysis shows that reporting and action verbs are the most frequent, while mental verbs occur less often and do not organise the narration. Internal states are not named directly. They appear in speech, action and perception and are reconstructed in context. These elements occur together within the same fragments of the text and do not function as separate layers.

The results also show that this way of representing internal experience is connected with the organisation of narrative situations. Inner states remain tied to interaction, reaction and perception and do not appear separately. They are conveyed through the immediate context in which the character acts and reacts. The focus shifts from naming inner states to the way they appear alongside speech, gesture and perception. Internal experience is therefore not isolated in specific lexical items but becomes visible through recurring configurations in the text. This makes it possible to observe how stable patterns are formed and how they operate across different texts rather than in isolated cases including fragments built on minimal but recurrent signals.

Key words: internal experience, third-person narration, women-centred prose, corpus analysis, collocations, narrative perspective.

У статті розглядається репрезентація внутрішнього досвіду в оповіді від третьої особи у сучасній жінко-центрованої прозі. Увагу зосереджено на випадках, коли внутрішні стани не вербалізуються безпосередньо, а виявляються у зв'язку з мовленням, дією та сприйняттям. Дослідження ґрунтується на корпусі, укладеному на матеріалі п'яти англomовних романів, у яких нарація організована навколо жіночого фокалізуючого персонажа, а займенник she використовується як основна точка входу до матеріалу.

У роботі проаналізовано частотність і колокаційний профіль займенника she, а також контексти його вживання. Особливу увагу приділено дієсловам мовлення, ментальним і перцептивним предикатам, тілесним реакціям і модальним формам. Аналіз показує, що найчастотнішими є дієслова мовлення та дії, тоді як ментальні дієслова трапляються рідше і не організують нарацію. Внутрішні стани не називаються безпосередньо. Вони виявляються у мовленні, дії та сприйнятті й реконструюються в контексті. Ці елементи співвідносяться в межах одних і тих самих фрагментів тексту і не функціонують як окремі шари.



Результати також показують, що такий спосіб репрезентації внутрішнього досвіду пов'язаний з організацією наративних ситуацій. Внутрішні стани залишаються пов'язаними з взаємодією, реакцією та сприйняттям і не постають окремо. Вони передаються через безпосередній контекст дії та реагування персонажа. Увага зміщується від називання внутрішніх станів до способів їхнього виявлення поруч із мовленням, жестом і сприйняттям. Внутрішній досвід, таким чином, не зосереджується в окремих лексичних одиницях, а стає помітним у повторюваних конфігураціях тексту. Це дає змогу простежити, як формуються сталі патерни і як вони функціонують у різних текстах, а не в поодиноких випадках, зокрема у фрагментах, побудованих на мінімальних, але повторюваних сигналах.

Ключові слова: внутрішній досвід, оповідь від третьої особи, жінкоцентрована проза, корпусний аналіз, колокації, наративна перспектива.

Introduction. Internal experience has always been one of the central elements of fiction as it is through thoughts, feelings, doubts and reactions that a literary character is revealed most fully. At the same time, the ways of presenting inner states in narrative prose can be different. In some texts they are verbalized openly and directly, while in others they are conveyed through speech, gestures, pauses, looks or fragments of perception which only point to what is happening internally. Such representation is especially relevant for third-person narration, where the character does not speak about her inner state directly and where thoughts, emotions and reactions are often conveyed through other narrative means. For this reason, internal experience should be traced not only in mental verbs or explicit psychological description, but also in those elements of the text that accompany speech, action and perception.

This tendency can be clearly observed in contemporary women-centred prose, where narrative attention is frequently focused on everyday situations, interpersonal interaction, emotional tension and the character's perception of herself and others. In such texts third-person narration often develops around a female focalizing character, and the pronoun she becomes one of the key points through which the organisation of narrative perspective may be traced. The analysis of its collocational profile makes it possible to see what kinds of verbs, structures and contextual patterns accompany the representation of inner experience, and whether this experience is named directly or remains embedded in reporting, action and perception. A corpus-based approach is therefore relevant here, as it allows one to move from individual examples to recurrent tendencies and to show how internal experience is represented not occasionally but systematically in the selected novels.

Literature overview. The problem of representing internal experience in fiction has been examined within narratology, stylistics and discourse-oriented approaches, with attention to how thoughts, emotions and perceptions are verbalised in narrative texts. The question of how internal experience is presented in fiction is closely connected with the ways in which consciousness is made visible in the text. In this respect, D. Cohn [1] shows that inner states are not always verbalised directly and may be conveyed through forms that do not name them explicitly. A. Palmer [2] develops this idea further and treats fictional minds not as something given in the text but as something that is reconstructed by the reader on the basis of recurring patterns.

Linguistic approaches to fiction deal with how language works in the text. G. Leech and M. Short [3] connect linguistic choices with point of view. M. Toolan [4] looks at how narrative organisation affects interpretation. For this study, this matters because internal experience is not expressed only through separate words but through how they appear and function in context. S. Rimmon-Kenan [5] and M. Fludernik [6] also show that narrative perspective is not fixed but varies depending on how access to the character's inner world is organised, ranging from explicit representation to more indirect and fragmented forms.

Research into lexical meaning and discourse organisation further supports this view. M. Stubbs [7] emphasises that meaning is shaped through recurrent collocations, and A. Partington, A. Duguid and C. Taylor [8] show how such patterns contribute to the construction of discourse. This is important for the study of internal experience, as it cannot be reduced to mental verbs alone but depends on

the interaction of reporting structures, perceptual markers and evaluative forms. Corpus linguistics makes it possible to trace such regularities systematically [9; 10; 11], although in the present study it serves primarily as a methodological tool.

The focus on women-centred prose introduces a more specific context, as this type of fiction often concentrates on everyday situations, interpersonal relations and emotional perception. Studies in this field show that internal experience is frequently conveyed indirectly, through speech, gesture and perception, rather than through explicit psychological description [12; 13]. This makes such texts particularly relevant for analysing how inner states are represented through recurrent linguistic patterns.

These approaches make it possible to consider internal experience not as a directly given element of narrative but as a construct emerging through the interaction of linguistic forms. At the same time, while narratological and stylistic studies describe the modes of presenting consciousness in detail, the question of how these modes are realised through recurrent linguistic patterns in specific types of fiction remains insufficiently systematised. This creates the need for an analysis that combines theoretical insights with corpus-based methods and is based on the material of contemporary women-centred prose.

The aim of the article is to identify the linguistic means through which internal experience is represented in third-person narration in women-centred prose and to determine what role reporting verbs, mental and perceptual predicates, bodily actions and modal forms play in this process.

Methodology. The study is based on a corpus compiled from five contemporary English-language novels representing women-centred prose: *Bridget Jones's Diary* by H. Fielding [14], *Confessions of a Shopaholic* by S. Kinsella [15], *I Heart New York* by L. Kelk [16], *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by G. Honeyman [17] and *Beach Read* by E. Henry [18]. These texts were selected because they are centred on female experience, interpersonal relations, emotional reactions and everyday situations, that is, on those spheres where internal experience becomes especially visible in the narrative structure. At the same time, the novels differ in period, narrative rhythm and stylistic manner, which makes it possible to trace not an isolated authorial pattern but more general tendencies in the representation of internal experience in this type of prose.

The analysis focuses on third-person narration organised around the pronoun *she*, which was treated as the main point of entry into the material. This choice is determined by the structure of the selected texts, where the narrative often develops through a female focalizing character and where she regularly appears in contexts combining speech, action, perception and evaluation. The corpus was examined with attention to the frequency and collocational profile of *she*, as this makes it possible to see what kinds of lexical and grammatical elements accompany the representation of internal experience. Special attention was paid to reporting verbs, mental and perceptual predicates, bodily actions. The aim at this stage was not simply to identify frequent collocates but to determine what functions they perform in contexts where the character's inner state is not named directly.

The methodological basis of the study is corpus analysis combined with contextual interpretation. Corpus analysis is used to identify recurrent collocational patterns in the texts [9; 10; 11]. The importance of recurrent collocations for the construction of meaning has also been emphasized in studies dealing with lexical semantics and discourse organisation [7; 8]. In the present article these approaches are used as an instrument for identifying the linguistic environments in which internal experience is represented. The corpus data therefore serve as a basis for further interpretation rather than as a self-sufficient quantitative result.

The procedure of analysis included several stages. First, the corpus was compiled from the selected novels in electronic form. Second, concordance lines with the pronoun *she* were extracted and examined in order to identify the most frequent collocates. Third, the collocates were grouped according to their semantic and functional role in the text. This made it possible to distinguish reporting forms, mental predicates, perceptual and semi-cognitive verbs, bodily actions, modal forms and discourse markers. At the next stage, the concordance lines were interpreted contextually in order to determine

how these elements participate in the representation of internal experience. Such interpretation was necessary because the same verb may perform different functions depending on context, and the representation of inner states in fiction is often realised not through isolated items but through their interaction within a broader narrative fragment.

The methodological procedure also takes into account the narratological understanding of consciousness in fiction. D. Cohn (1978) shows that inner states are not always verbalised directly and may be conveyed indirectly. A. Palmer (2004) treats fictional minds as something reconstructed from textual patterns rather than given in the text. These ideas are important for the interpretation of the corpus material, as they make it possible to relate recurrent linguistic patterns to broader ways of presenting consciousness in narrative prose. Corpus analysis is combined with contextual interpretation. Attention is paid to what occurs near she and how these elements function in the representation of internal experience.

Results and discussion. The analysis is based on a corpus compiled from five contemporary novels representing women-centred prose, where third-person narration is consistently organised around the pronoun she. The frequency and collocational profile of she allow tracing how internal experience is constructed in the texts. It does not appear as an independent descriptive layer but emerges within the narrative flow, in connection with speech, action and perception.

The most frequent collocates (see Table 1) show that narration is organised through reporting structures and sequences of actions.

Table 1

The most frequent collocates of the pronoun she and their functions

Collocate	Frequency	Function in the text
said	351	reporting / speech organisation
was	296	narrative progression
's	228	grammatical structuring
says	137	reporting / speech organisation
had	98	narrative progression
did	53	narrative progression
looked	39	perceptual framing
could	36	modal evaluation
asked	42	reporting / interaction
laughed	21	bodily reaction
smiled	15	bodily reaction
thought	16	mental process
knew	10	mental process
seemed	10	interpretative / epistemic marker
sighed	12	bodily reaction / emotional signal

Created by the author.

Narration develops through reporting structures and sequences of actions. In “I probably won’t even get it,” she says, and looks away, the reporting verb is immediately followed by a minimal gesture. The shift is small, but it is enough: what could be formulated as uncertainty or disappointment is not named. It is displaced into looks away. The character’s state is not described but inferred.

Mental verbs are present, but they do not form a dominant pattern. In she thought it was bollocks or she knows there’s no way I would’ve come tonight, cognition appears as part of situational evaluation. These forms remain tied to interaction and immediate context. They do not open extended access to inner reflection and do not organise the narrative around introspection.

A similar tendency can be observed in perceptual and semi-cognitive verbs. In she looked at me as though I’m a moron and she looked at me as if she wanted to hit me, the verb looked introduces a comparison rather than a statement. The constructions as though and as if shift the focus from what

the character feels to how her behaviour is interpreted. The same holds for for all she knows, where knowledge is presented as limited and hypothetical.

A considerable part of internal experience is externalised through bodily actions. In she laughed, a cocktail party tinkle or she laughed so much she had to cross her legs, emotional states are rendered through sound and movement. In she smiled at me then, her whole face crinkled into warm lines, the description remains on the surface, but it is sufficient to reconstruct the emotional tone. Even when the description becomes more complex – she was still smiling at me, but with a healthy dose of terror in her eyes – the state is not named directly. It is distributed across elements that do not belong to one lexical group.

More restrained markers function in a similar way. In she sighed, looking at her rings, the verb does not specify the emotion. It only positions the character within the situation. The interpretation remains open, but it is not arbitrary. It is guided by context and by the accumulation of such small signals.

What becomes visible across these examples is not a set of lexical items referring to inner states, but a pattern. Internal experience is dispersed across reporting structures, perceptual framing and embodied action. It does not function as a separate layer of description. Instead, it remains embedded in reporting, perception and action. This way of organising internal experience corresponds to what D. Cohn (1978) describes as indirect presentation of consciousness and to A. Palmer's view of fictional minds as reconstructed through inference rather than stated explicitly (Palmer, 2004). In the analysed texts, third-person narration consistently maintains this mediated form: experience is not stated, it is reconstructed.

These patterns are linked to the types of situations represented in the novels. In *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, internal experience is tied to interaction, where speech is followed by reaction and where the character's state is not named directly. Moments of embarrassment, hesitation or self-doubt appear in short sequences combining what is said with a gesture or a shift in perception. A similar organisation can be observed in *I Heart New York*, where emotional states are connected with new situations and with the character's responses to them rather than with extended introspection.

In *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*, this pattern becomes more restrained. Internal experience is not verbalised directly even in situations of emotional tension. It is conveyed through minimal reactions, fragmented perception and small deviations in behaviour. In *Beach Read*, internal states are more often linked to reflection, but they remain embedded in dialogue and interaction and do not form a separate descriptive layer.

Across the texts, internal experience remains connected to the situation. It appears in what the character says, does and perceives at a particular moment and does not function independently. The patterns identified in the corpus correspond to this organisation. Internal states are not stated directly. They are reconstructed in context.

Conclusions. The analysis shows that internal experience in the selected novels is not presented as an independent descriptive layer and is not verbalised directly through mental predicates. It appears within the narrative flow, in connection with speech, action and perception. The collocational profile of the pronoun *she* reflects this organisation. Reporting and action verbs are the most frequent. Mental verbs occur less often and do not organise the narration. Internal states are not named directly. They appear in speech, action and perception and are reconstructed in context. These elements occur together in the same fragments of the text and do not function as separate layers.

The results also show that this way of representing internal experience is connected with the organisation of narrative situations in women-centred prose. Across the analysed texts, inner states remain tied to interaction, reaction and perception and do not emerge as a separate domain. They are conveyed through what the character says, does and perceives in particular situations, where even minimal shifts – a gesture, a pause, a change in tone – carry interpretative weight. This confirms

that mediated representation of internal experience is realised not through isolated lexical items but through stable patterns that operate in the text and are supported by the structure of narration.

Perspectives of further research. Further research may be extended to a broader corpus and include a comparative analysis across different types of women-centred prose.

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