

Subject-object correlations in ekphrasis episodes of english literary texts

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Resume

The article is devoted to the semantic roles and their verbal representation in the ekphrasis episodes which are defined as the perception scenes of the painting being the object of observation. The semantic roles in reality and fiction do not completely coincide. The agentive force of the object greatly increases at the account of personification and metamorphosis of the image.

The phenomenon of ekphrasis is a sort of connecting agent between a verbal narration and a visual art object, therefore the ekphrasis consists in a text created at the confluence of two different artistic systems and has a distinctive feature namely performance of the descriptive function/ Such performance results in transmission of emotional and stylistic component of an artistic image.

The descriptive force of the ekphrasis facilitates better transmission of verbal information related to works of visual art to the readers. Of special interest is an emotional aspect of percept's comprehension of artistic canvas when the objects described on it get a capability to revive on a lifeless linen and to influence the people around in an effective manner. The same or maximum approximate influence is seemingly to be contained in the ekphrasis itself which is responsible for a qualitative transmission of a visual component along the route "a visual object – a percept – a text object – a reader".

The ekphrasis being a widespread instrument for description of visual perceivable artistic objects still remains to be an underinvestigated phenomenon.

Key words: subject; object; ekphrasis; literary text; correlation; Agent; Experient; Percept

In recent times the peculiarities of interaction of different codes of art work attract attention of many investigators (1; 2; 3; 4). In this context examination of transcoding of iconic symbols in to verbal ones appears to be a very topical subject. Specific linguistic and psychological aspects of perception were examined in numerous works (5), however they analyzed linguistic and psychological peculiarities of perception in ekphrasis situations.

Such analysis carried out using literary text (LT) XIX – XX centuries and oriented to identification of specific character of "subject-object" correlation related to perception in literary text's ekphrasis episodes is made for the first time and this determines novelty of this investigation.

In this article we provide for the first time a detailed examination of specific character of interaction of subject and object under perception and their semantic roles of in ekphrasis episodes that are defined as frame situations assuming perception of an artefact or, to be more precise, observation and appreciation of a canvas. An observer (a spectator) appears to be a Subject (S) and a fiction work appears to be an object (O), in our case - a picture (canvas or its reproduction).

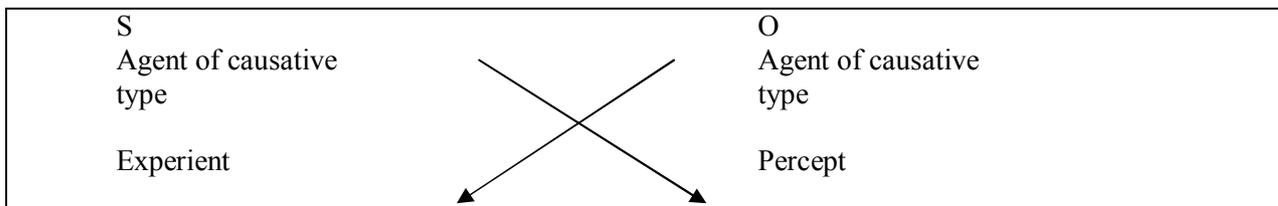
In real life interaction of a subject and an object of perception consists in bidirectionality of processes of apperceptive complex:

- 1) for creation of a sensitive pattern. In this case vector there is a vector "object → subject" and
- 2) for organization of perceptive activity. Here we have a "subject → object" vector [6].

The process of appreciation expresses a unity of perception (a sensitive pattern) and apperception that is a system of internal conditions providing opportunities of its existence. Thus a subject (S) – an observer and an object (O) - a canvas appear to be at the same time as carriers of active or pseudoactive origin as well as carriers of passive origin. Subject has an effect on an item is subjected to that effect itself. Subject's effect has a passive character - it does not result in object's qualitative changes during observation. That is why it has a limited agentive role. Subject's activity consists in the fact that it displays initiative and organizes conditions for appreciation though observation may take place spontaneously and not purposefully. In this case a subject performs a role of indirect causative Agent.

Object's activity has a sufficiently mediated character: it stimulates sensory centers and results in appearance of visual imageries that transform into mental imageries i.e also performs agentive functions having indirect causative character.

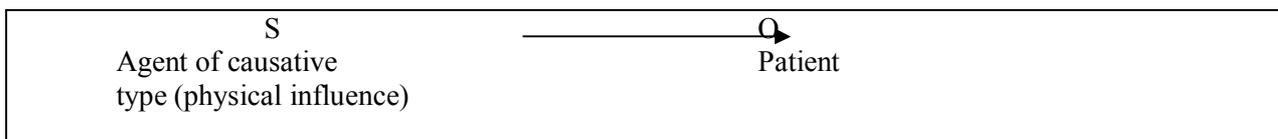
At the same time a subject being under effect at the time of direct observation performs a role of Experient and an object performs a role of Percept:



Over the period of appreciation subject can exert direct physical influence on object (to turn a picture, to clean its surface etc.). In this case subject performs a function of an Agent of causative type and object appears to be a Patient. For example:

He (Conchis) moved the Rodin to one side and he lifted the frame down. He lifted it for me to see (Fowles 65)

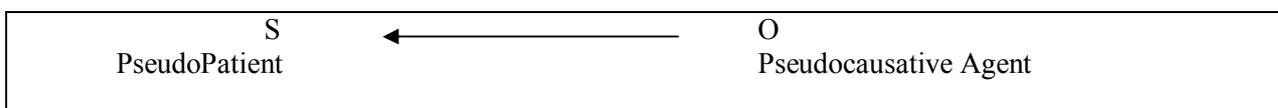
It concerns a one of supposed pictures of Modigliani from Conchis's collection, one of rather mysterious personages of "Magus" by Fowles. In this case subject performs a direct agentive function, appears to be a causative Agent since it exposes object to indirect physical influence. Object appears to be a Patient. This may be presented as follows:



In literary text an interaction of subject and object of perception may be authentic to real correlation. However it may differ significantly from interaction of subject and object in real life. In ekphrasis episodes of literary text we often observe distinctive shifts of semantic roles of subject and object. In particular in many literary texts (see works of N.V. Gogol, C. Dickens, A. Conan Doyle, E. Poe and other) the agentive role of object of observation increases significantly. Object may exert influence being highly competitive with direct physical influence on subject with regard to force and consequences. It is necessary to emphasize the fact that image has no personification, – it remains in its static condition as before, there is no metamorphosis. That is why in this case there are grounds to refer to a seeming causative agentive character of an object and an imaginary sense of physical influence experienced by a subject of observation. Thus subject performs a role of pseudoPatient and object – a role of pseudocausative Agent. For instance, in novel by I. Murdoch "The Sandcastle" Mor sees the portrait of Demoyte and it seems to him that it has a direct physical influence on him:

When Mor looked at the picture, everything else went out of his mind <...>. Now its presence assailed him with a shock that was almost physical. (118).

An imaginary attack is expressed here by a causative verb to assail. This feeling of physical influence intends to emphasize portrait's energetics, its magic vital force. This may be presented as follows:



Cases of such pseudoactivity of the object may be found, for example, in "The Hound of the Baskervilles" by Conan Doyle:

The face of Stapleton had sprung out of the canvas (183)

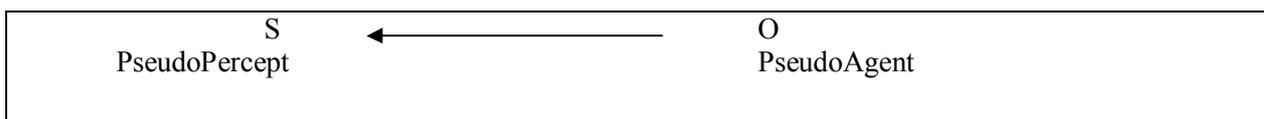
Of course the face in fact did not spring from the canvas but the object of observation performs a formal function of pseudoAgent with maximum actualization of expressive potential of statement. An image, that remains to be as it is, has a great emotional and psychological influence on observer, – Dr. Watson who thought that the image might spring out and attack him (imaginary physical causation). Anthropomorphization of Stapleton's face takes place via a descriptive verb to spring out which traditionally forms in its literal sense collocations with an animate subject.

A portrait of German composer G.F. Handel does not remain to be lifeless in one of the novels by C.Dickens:

It was a most wonderful closet <...>. Above it, a portrait of Handel in a flowing wig beamed down at the spectator, with a knowing air of being up to the contents of the closet, and a musical air of intending to combine all its harmonies in one delicious fugue (56)

It seems that Handel swaps roles with an observer, the honourable Septimus who liked to refresh himself with several glasses of wine from the mentioned sideboard. The composer or rather his portrait was a witness of innocent funs of Septimus. Verbs to beam down, an attributive knowing (a knowing air) promote transformation of a static image in a face with a pseudoagentive function. Remaining to be a portrait image Handel is perceived as an alive participant of the events taking place in front of him. It seems that he enters into some conspiracy of silence with those who have a weakness for hard liquors with an indulgent smile from his portrait.

Thus portrait in the novel by C. Dickens, remaining to be a static object, acquires some dynamic features and that results in a change of object's semantic role: acting as a Percept he turns into a pseudoAgent (imaginary active person) and Septimus into a pseudoPercept (imaginary object of observation):



In surrealistic works the question concerns not only and not so much pseudoactivity of object of perception, – a canvas but it does concern specific physical actions that are taken and performed in some cases by a described and perceived object.

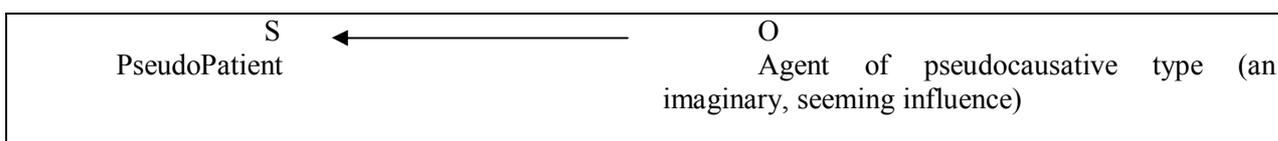
In this connection we may remember actions of a money-lender's portrait in the narrative by N.V.Gogol "Portrait" that came to life with an image leaving canvas's frames and beginning to act as an anthropomorphous creature: money-lender's image has some sort of personification, it carries out some actions oriented to physical influence on a subject of observation (direct physical causation). With his devilish look it horrifies its new owner, causes disasters and even his death, and thus it has emotional and psychological influence akin to physical influence (emotional and psychological causation):

The artist suddenly shuddered, and turned pale. A convulsively distorted face gazed at him, peeping forth from the surrounding canvas; two terrible eyes were fixed straight upon him; on the mouth was written a menacing command of silence. (82).

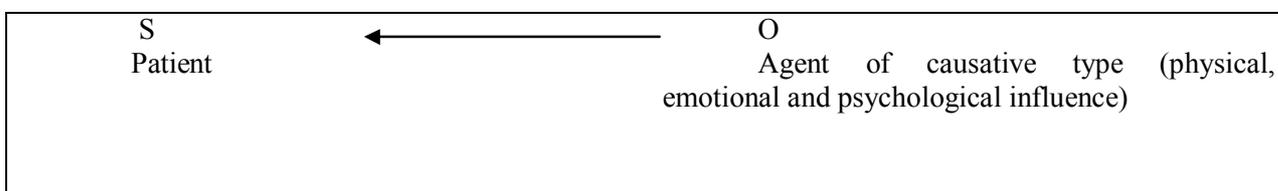
and further:

<...>the old man moved, and suddenly, supporting himself on the frame with both arms, raised himself by his hands, and, putting forth both feet, leapt out of the frame<...>. (85).

Thus at the first stage relation of subject and object may be schematically described as follows:



At the following stage (real coming of the portrait to life, metamorphosis) this relation transformed and that may be schematically described as follows:



In fantastic works direct physical influence on a picture may have a reversing force. Dorian Gray's attempt to destroy his own portrait that had become the mirror of his black soul resulted in death of aggressive subject while the portrait returned to its initial static condition and again turned into an image of a fine youth - the main hero of the novel. Here Dorian Gray (observer) performs a role of Agent and the portrait performs a role of Patient. However as soon as the image was stabbed with a knife it started to perform a role of Agent killing the person who tried to destroy the picture and at the same time transforming him into Patient.

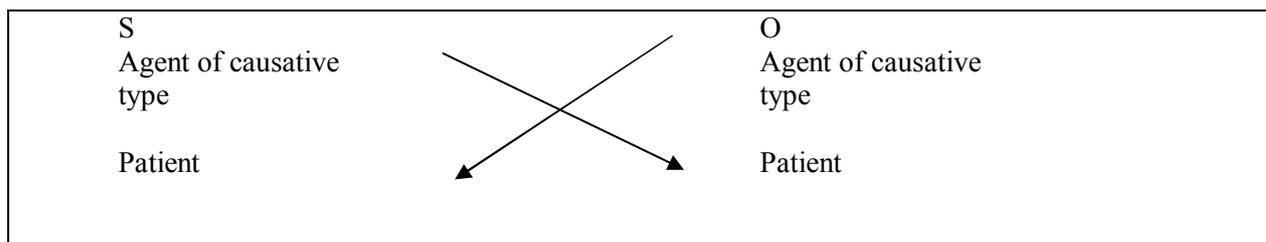
In verbal plan this role transformation is ensured by relevant verbs of influence (physical causation) of one item on another resulting in performing of uncharacteristic functions by subject (observer) and object (picture).

He (Dorian) seized the thing (knife), and stabbed the picture with it (216).

Here subject performs a specific action being quite possible in a real life with regard to object (stabbed the picture) thus performing a role of causative Agent and the portrait performs a function of Patient. O. Wilde does not describe a reverse, impossible in a real life surrealistic process. Readers get to know only about consequences of the event itself:

Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart (ibidem: 217).

Interaction between subject and object in this case may be schematically described as follows:



So in literary text roles of subject and object in ekphrasis situation often experience transformation. In particular we observe significant increasing of agentive role of object that performs functions not only of Agent of indirect causative type but also functions of causative Agent or pseudocausative Agent. In two latter cases image is either subjected to personification and can have a direct physical influence on subject or exerts an imaginary, seeming physical influence without any qualitative changes. However in this situation observer thinks that he undergoes a real physical influence initiated by object.

Object's pseudocausative role is observed in literary texts of both realistic and surrealistic genres and causative and agentive role is characteristic for objects of observation in surrealistic works (object's personification, metamorphosis). The latter allows to state that "subject-object" correlation of perception can perform a genre-forming function.

As a result of such transformation of semantic role of the object under observation we see a change of subject of perception that begins to perform functions of pseudoPatient or Patient itself.

Thus correlation of subject and object in ekphrasis situation may significantly differ from their correlation in a real life.

The transformations we noted are based on specific character of artistic world with its imagery, various aberrations relating to interaction of people and items, their topological characteristics etc.

Mechanisms of subject-object relations in literary text including in ekphrasis episodes require further more intent attention and analysis that will result in more profound understanding of internal structure of art work and peculiarities of transcoding of different sign systems.

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