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Actant Patterns of the Artistic World

Galina Oleinikova¹

Abstract: At present, in studies devoted to the literary text, the latter is considered not from a historical, bibliographic or psychological point of view, but as a phenomenon of language from a formal and semantic point of view. The sphere of interest of textual scholars is the various language levels and linguistic features of the text, which are primarily related to the interdisciplinary direction of all scientific knowledge. The fact that a text is not limited to one and only one correct interpretation has led scholars to the conclusion that a text is not just a linguistic unit. It is a complex system, and, like any system in nature, it should be studied taking into account internal and intersystemic interrelationships. This has led to the emergence of related sciences, the subject of which is the text as a means of language communication. Among the relatively new areas in the study of text are functional stylistics, linguistic stylistics, and text linguistics, which study the structure of “text - language communication,” communication between the author and the reader, between the reader and the main characters or actants of a fiction.

Keywords: literary text; linguistics; actant; the actantial model; facets of actants

1. Introduction

At present, in the studies devoted to the literary text, the latter is considered not from a historical, bibliographic or psychological point of view, but as a phenomenon of language from a formal semantic standpoint. In the field of the interest of researchers of the text, there were different language levels and linguistic features of discourse - a phenomenon that Russian formalists called “literary.”

To consider and study the structure of the text, its semiotic representation, the study of the main components of the work, especially the formal compositional and textual

¹ Associate Professor, PhD, Izmil State University for Humanities, Ukraine, Address: Riepina St, 12, Izmil, Odesa Oblast, 68601, Ukraine, Corresponding author: oleinikova1211@gmail.com.

analysis, as well as the representation of the characters, their relationship and role in the work, the researchers give priority to the study of the actant model of texts of different genre components.

It should be mentioned that, the text in semiotics appears in the unity of two structures - a surface one, directly accessible to perception and represented by vocabulary and syntax, as well as a deep one, which “consists of norms, values and attitudes, universal in what they reflect value and normative structures in the textual specific social systems” (Stepanov, 2000, pp. 174-175). Narrative perspective, as explained by A.-J. Greimas, is between these two levels (Greimas, 2004). It is at the narrative level that one can find interpretations of events characteristic of a certain community (socio-cultural meanings) and it is through this sphere that it is possible to reach the deep structure and organization of the text itself. The analysis of the narrative perspective consists in the description of the actants, as well as the description of the place and time that determine the unfolding of the plot.

The actant model of a work of art is, first of all, a clear identification of the conflict of the narrative perspective, the study of its origin and development, as well as the grouping of actors in relation to the conflict. In addition, the actant model allowed philologists to take a fresh look at the problem of the character, since this model represents the character as “some kind of individual belonging to the global system of actions, changing from the “amorphous” form of the actant to the concrete form of the actor” (Greimas, 2004).

Most modern semio-linguistic researches are based on W. Propp’s theory of the functions of actors, by which he understood a constant value or constant stable elements that form the constituent parts of the text, which, in turn, create the framework of the entire work of art.

The issues of representation and classification of actors or subjects of action in the narrative were dealt with by such scientists as V. Ya. Propp, A.J. Greimas, Kl. Bremont. So, according to V. Propp, the classification is based on the actions that the actors or characters perform (donor, helper, pest, etc.), and each character performs only one action. At the works of Cl. Bremont, for whom characters are agents of action sequences, positive from the point of view of one character, turn out to be negative from the point of view of another, i.e., an important feature in his classification is the difference in the perspectives of the characters. So, taking into account the historical content, Cl. Bremont notes that the entire historical line of the character is a sequence of functions, that is, the character performs a certain role,

realizing in his actions some probable process. From here, two types of roles are distinguished: active, performed by those who initiate actions and passive, performed by those who mainly undergo the actions of others. Thus, “active” roles are divided depending on what effect they have on the carriers of “passive” roles: modifier, conservative, assistant, pest, protector, deceiver.

Ts. Todorov classifies the characters in the terms of three types of possible relationships between them: love, communication and help.

In linguistics, the term actant appeared thanks to L. Terrier, according to whom actant in linguistics is “living things or objects, like taking part in the process in any position, to inspire a simple extra, and in any way, to inspire the most passive position”. Actants are pronounced by names or by their vouchers and without intermediary follow orders to the words (Greimas, 2000).

Having taken as a basis the term “actant” from L. Tenier, A.-J. Greimas proposed the following definition: an actant is an object or being that acts or is acted upon; in the structure of the narrative, it is a type of formal unit of narrative syntax that does not yet have semantic and ideological content (Greimas, 2000). At this level, according to A.-J. Greimas, the actant in the text can be represented not only by a concrete but also by an abstract concept, verb phrase, etc.

The researcher singles out three rows of the actant plane: the Subject and the Object, located on the axes of desire, the Giver and the Gifted on the axes of knowledge and the achievement of the goal (receiving the Object), and the Helper and the Antagonist on the axes of power, forming the actant model. Thus, the researcher identified six types of actants:

subject – the protagonist around whom the events unfold, synonymously – the main character of the story;

– the object of his desire, search, which is also the object of communication; a person, object or other value for the subject, the possession of which all his actions are aimed at;

- the sender (addressee) - a person, force, circumstance that forces, urges the hero to go in search of the object and to act in the search process according to certain rules;

– recipient (addressee) to whom the hero must hand over the found object;

- the hero’s assistant - a force that supports him in his search for an object;

- an opponent (adversary) who obstructs the hero.

According to A.-J. Greimas, the assistant and the opponent are not full-fledged actants - they are “circumstantial participants”, projections of the subject’s own will to action and obstacles that he imagines on the way to realizing his desire (Greimas, 2000). Based on the classification proposed by A.-J. Greimas, the schematic model of the actants of the work looks as follows (Figure 1):

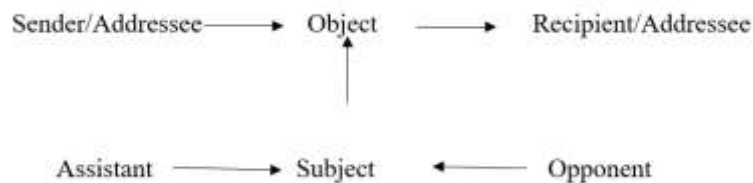


Figure 1. Actant model of A.-J. Greimas

The scheme proposed by him is based on the Object desired by the Subject, what the Subject strives for throughout the text and what is its goal. In turn, we see a projection on the author of the work, who creates his imaginary reference world and strives to convey it to the Subject, the reader.

Within the framework of our research, we define the actant model as a model taken from the aspect of the functional characteristics of the characters of the work, which is presented in a narrative perspective by the author and at the same time is, paraphrasing Yu. Stepanov, a “plan”, a “prototype” of the future story conceived by the writer (Stepanov, 2000, p. 604).

The actant model allows us to consider the text as a performance projected onto an axial screen, in which the actants schematically represent the acting characters in the world of the literary text: good and evil, angel and devil, etc., which makes this scheme, according to the remark by A.-J. Greimas, operational (*opérationnel*). Based on the proposed scheme, he considers four of the six actants as basic and necessary - these are the Subject, Object, Giver and Gifted, and the Helper and Antagonist are to a large extent optional, far from always obligatory, so he proposes to call them *circostante*s.

The abstract actant model proposed by the researcher is implemented in the text in the form of a set of actors, which can be both animate characters and inanimate objects and phenomena. Thus, one and the same actant can be realized in the text in the form of different actors, and one and the same actor can play the role of several actants. The narrator (actant) can play the role of a participant in events and an unfortunate lover (actors), and several characters can take turns acting as a narrator, passing the word to each other.

Jacques Fontanille, a French semiotician, one of the leading representatives of the Paris School of Semiotics, defines an actant as an abstract entity necessary for the implementation of narrative predication: “L’actant est donc cette entité abstraite dont l’identité fonctionnelle est nécessaire à la prédication narrative” (Fontanille, 2000, p. 142). Any statement, in his opinion, consists of two types of values - the predicate itself, expressing a state or action, and actants, participants in the action, between whom the predicate establishes various kinds of relations and who perform a certain number of functions. To schematically express all these relationships at the phrasal level, he derives the following basic formula: ENONCE = ACTANT--(FONCTIONS)-PREDICATS (Fontanille, 2000).

It differs from the discursive one in that in the text one and the same actant interacts with a whole class of predicates that are involved in the production of the text. At the same time, each of the predicates can interact with different (several) actants. As a result, the text is a network of actants and predicates, which can only become intelligible under two specific conditions: the predicates must form a small number of classes, the actants for each predicate must also be limited, predictable and assumed.

The scientist puts forward a version about the existence of three types of actants - positional, which he singles out on the basis of the “logic of places,” transformational, distinguished on the basis of the “logic of acting forces,” and fundamental. Like other researchers, Jacques Fontanille believes that both animate and inanimate objects and phenomena can play the role of an actant in a text.

The goal of the actant theory in the study of the artistic text was the study of the “poetic sign and system of signs”¹, as well as the identification of a general idea about the actants necessary for the production of the text, regardless of which specific actors take part in this process.

Returning to the actant model proposed by A.-J. Greimas, the scientist allowed syncretism of all actants in one actor. So, for example, in fairy-tale narratives, the subject and recipient are usually one character (the hero, who, at the request of the king-sender, looks for the princess-object, marries her himself). The reverse option is also possible, when the functions of one actant are distributed among several actors (Greimas, 2000). A.J. Greimas assumed that such features could have genre-creating power.

This assumption, in our opinion, is clearly reflected in the genre of science fiction. As G. Oleinikova notes, “genre specificity of science fiction works determines the

construction of the world depicted in them. This manifests itself in the typological features of construction and images in the text of all three main components of any artistic text: time, place, characters” (Oleynikova, 2010, p. 35). The palette of unusualness of the characters ranges from completely ordinary, normal people (but necessarily caught in unusual, abnormal circumstances) to absolutely paranormal, inhuman actants.

The paranormality of the actants of the science fiction world demonstrates various forms and types of the actants of the artistic world and is directly related to both the temporal and the spatial component of the entire narrative perspective of the work.

In conclusion, it can be noted that the practical significance of the theory of actants is very high: the construction of an actant model when analyzing a text allows to reveal not only the main driving forces of the plot, but also a number of semantic, structural, psychological and ideological meanings behind them. The actant model is a tool that can be successfully used to identify specific features of texts of different genres.

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