

Narrative Constituents: A Reconsideration of Constructivist's Mind and Perception

Ideologies in *The Judgment* by Franz Kafka

Tooba Asif

National University of Modern Languages

Abstract

This article explores narratological constituents as mentioned in Jahn's (2017) book of Narratology. The focus is to highlight and analyze major narratological constituents, i.e., narrator, narration, narrative situation, focalizer, and focalization. Genette's and constructivist's focalization models for narrative analysis have been considered. The article seeks to identify levels of perception involved in the story and highlight the idea of Genette's non-focalization or zero-focalization. Understanding the emotions, behavior, and psychological state of the characters, Hermen's (2014) cognitive narratology helped in this regard. The research is qualitative; data has been described and analyzed in descriptive form. The research population was Kafka's short stories, and the sample for the study is the story *The Judgement*. Since Kafka is known for his distinctive creativity in writing, he is also famous for constructing a psychoanalytical approach towards his characters. The article identified various focalization levels and types of narrators in the story.

Keywords: Human Narrative, Kafka, Perception, Culture, Judgment, Construction, Focalization

Narrative Analysis, Perception, and Kafka

Narrative analysis has been profoundly associated with literary text in general, such as novels or short stories. The incumbent term narrative is derived from the verb narrate. Although the narrative is all around us, it cannot be confined to texts only. Narrative analysis can be associated with cultural events, society, historical writings, and epic stories. It is considered a medium to understand the world and social data production by various theorists and social scientists (Bruner and Denzin, 1989). When we talk about the narrative, the term is associated with all the acts of narration such as storytelling, television reporter, radio broadcasting, a teacher in a school, everyday events and social settings, a newspaper columnist, and journalism. Therefore, narration is defined as an unconscious act of spoken language activity. It is considered a prototypical form of art in literature and literary studies and a more comprehensive study of human narrative and perception.

Narrative structure constructs in literary theory are known as narratology. The most distinguished names associated with primary and classical narratological constituents include Gerard Genette, Stanzel, Chatman, Lanser, and Fludernik. Genette (1988) differentiates between narration (the act of the narrator while telling a story), discourse (the actual utterance or narrative as a text), and history (the story which a narrator tells in his or her narrative). According to Jahn (2017), Genette's model consists of a voice, homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narration, focalization, and other categories. Chatman (1978) discussed the overtness and covertness of the narrator. If the narrator's voice is in the foreground and directly addresses the readers using first-person, e.g., *I*, then overt narration. Whereas covertness is the vice versa of overt narration. The narrator's voice remains in the background. As a reader, we are not introduced to the narrator

unequivocally. However, in classical narratology, Stanzel (1982) introduced the ideas of narrative situation, type of narrators, and their narration; one is authorial, the other is the figural narrator. He also talked about characters in the story and termed them as reflectors.

When discussing post-classical narratology, the first model to name is a constructivist model of focalization. In contrast to Genette's model of non-focalization or zero-focalization, recent trends in narratological research provide more aspects to focalization in terms of reconceptualization; thus, focusing on the cognitive parameters. First, this mental model of vision establishes an analytical criterion towards cognitive narratology and psycho-narratology, which talk about comprehensive ways of the human mind such as the narrator, character or reflector, the readers, or the author itself. Secondly, the constructivist's perception in narration and storytelling, the point of view of the focalizer and his or her focalization adhere to the cognitive aspects in narratology.

However, when we discuss perception and subjective insight view into storytelling and focalization, the most projecting figure in literary studies comes with Franz Kafka. Though Kafka's writing style is straightforward, the construction of events and deeper understanding of the characters' perception is challenging. To understand Kafka, one must be intellectual and philosophical. It requires perception and internal and external focalization to intrude meaning. It is famous about Franz Kafka that he digs deeper into the mind of his characters and talks about the absurdity of life. Many of Kafka's writings reflect his personal life experience.

Kafka's (1912) story *The Judgement* is about a young merchant Georg Bendemann and his diminishing relationship with his father. The narrator's voice in the story is covert and heterodiegetic, i.e., he is not part of the action. Georg writes a letter to his unnamed childhood

best friend, who lives in St. Petersburg, announcing his engagement to a woman belonging to a well-to-do family named Frieda Brandenfeld. The story constructs a narrative, i.e., the father accuses his son of neglecting him and blames Georg for the death of his mother due to lack of his attention, care, and negligence. Georg has neglected his father too. He has not visited his room and never asked how he feels. Georg never showed any sympathy towards his father and always remained outside with his fiancé and friends.

Post-classical Constructivist Approach to Narratology

When perception and mind are discussed in narratology, they belong to post-classical narratology, also known as cognitive or psycho narratology (Herman, 2014). Thus, this article conducts a narrative analysis based on classical narratologies and a post-classical constructivist approach to narratology. It reconsiders the constructivist's approach to mind and perception about the psychological and emotional state of the characters created by Kafka and his ability to understand the complexities. Furthermore, it addresses critical questions like the significance of narratological constituents in the story *The Judgment*. How is the Constructivists' idea of perception achieved among the story's central characters and the narrator? How have the emotional and psychological aspects of the main characters been reflected in storytelling?

The study is author, reader, and text-centric. In Pakistan, little work has been done in applied linguistics. This article contributes to applied linguistics in research, teaching, and functioning. It addresses the constituents of narrative and their analysis at the national level and international domain. It used Genette's (1988) narrator model and Constructivist's (2007) model of focalization to draw narratological constituents, levels of focalization, and how the perception is involved in narratives. For cognitive-narrative analysis, Herman's (2014) ideology of cognitive narratology is

used as a framework to draw all-inclusive narrative analysis related emotional and psychological state of the characters' minds that environmental circumstances in the story have affected. The story formulation model was applied as a methodology and theoretical framework to gain data. Whereas the findings depicted that personal narratives were omnipresent within collective narratives. Moreover, it was viewed through analysis that narrative interaction occurs at two stages, i.e., formulation of story and formulation of narrative.

Findings and Discussion

Kafka constructed a covert heterodiegetic narrator at the beginning of the story. According to Jahn (2017), classical theorist differentiates covert and overt, heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narration. A covert narrator is the one who exhibits none of the overt narrator's features. The voice is neutral and shows no conative solicitude. Neither has he/she addressed himself/herself nor the readers. The heterodiegetic narrator is the one who is not part of actions or events in the story. He belongs to an outer world (Genette, 1988). Extract 1 taken from the story qualifies for the above narratological constituent, i.e., covert- heterodiegetic narration

“It was on a Sunday morning in the nicest time of Spring. Georg Bendemann, a young merchant, sat in his private room on the first floor of one of the lightly built low-rise houses of a long row facing the river, differing only in their height and the colour of their façades. He had just finished writing a letter to a friend of his youth now living abroad. After enclosing the letter in the envelope in playful slowness, he rested on his elbows on the desk and gazed through the window onto the river, the bridge, and across to the weakly green banks on the far side.”

It has been witnessed from the above extract how the narration went by simply describing the events into their temporal and sequential form. The voice is neutral or covert and heterodiegetic. However, Extract 1 delineates a character's perception or focalization. This addresses the second research question. According to Genette's (1988) model, there is an element of zero focalization or non-focalization in narratological constituents. It means that neither the point of view is involved in the story nor the perception related to the narrator or the reflector. However, Constructivists (2007) objected to this idea of zero-focalization. They described levels of focalization in their model, i.e., internal, external, and hypothetical internal. Depending upon the nature of voice, it could be authorial or figural.

Extract 2:

“Maybe bringing him home would not prove to be a success at all – he himself said that he no longer understood the circumstances at home - and he might remain abroad in any case, embittered by the advice and more alienated from his friends than ever. And in case he would follow their advice, and – of course not of his own doing but through circumstances – fail, and not be able to manage with his friends and not without them, suffer humiliation, no longer possess a real home and finally lose the friends, would it not have been much better for him to have stayed abroad where he was? Under such circumstances, is it at all plausible to think that he had a realistic chance of progress over here?”

The beginning of the line consists of the term ‘maybe’, which depicts an example of hypothetical internal focalization. Jahn (2017), in his book, described the term hypothetical internal focalization, which is when a character or reflector thinks about what another character

might be thinking or his perspective regarding things. For example, in the above extract, Georg wonders about his unnamed friend stuck in Russia. His anonymous friend also does not want to return home because Georg thinks that his friend might view that returning home would not be fruitful now. Moreover, a new place and people might have given him new chances. That is why he wonders being alienated from previous ones would be the alternate solution.

Discussing focalization and kind of focalizer, Kafka creatively shifts from fixed to variable focalizer to multiple. For instance, an example of external focalizer, the narrator who comments on the attitude of Georg's unnamed friend, e.g., "*Two years ago, the friend had learned of the death of Georg's mother, and had expressed his regrets in a letter with a dryness that could only be explained by assuming that the sorrow over an event like that is inconceivable across such a great distance.*"

This reports the third question related to the emotional and psychological behavior of the characters. Linguistic choices of words such as *dryness* and *inconceivable* illustrate the mental state of Georg's unnamed friend. The uncertainty and alienation he faces while being stuck in Russia due to political unrest affected his personal life and close relations. He is not being able to express in deepest condolence about the death of his best friend's mother. Georg has been expecting an empathic note from his unnamed friend and being with him in this dire situation, yet nothing happened accordingly. According to cognitive narratology, humans expect greater than they input any such effort regarding their relations to each other (Herman, 1999). Likewise, in the story, each character was expecting something from another. However, due to lack of communication, there were indifferences.

Georg and his father's emotional and psychological turmoil again highlight differences in perception and performance. Georg's father has been mourning the death of his wife throughout the story. He blamed his son for not being attentive towards his parents. The restlessness in characters also depicts Kafka's personal life and relationship with his father, friend, and fiancé. In real life, Kafka and his father were not on good terms. They had to have arguments over trivial things. Likewise, in the story, Georg's father has not been happy with his engagement to Miss Frieda Brandenfeld, a girl from a well-to-do family. He thinks that his son is not sorrowful yet joyful starting his new life.

Moreover, Georg's father calls him selfish, and he has no concern for the people around him. He neither looks after him nor talks to his friend and sympathizes with him as he lost business in Russia. Moreover, his father accuses Georg that he has "*defiled our mother's memory, betrayed your friend, and put your father to bed so that he can't budge anymore.*" Considering the Constructivist's level of focalization, here, the father is the focalizer, and homodiegetic narration is involved. Because he is one of the important characters besides Georg and his unnamed friend. Father is narrating and sharing his point of view regarding his son's careless behavior and egocentric attitude. He revealed that his son was jealous of the success of his unnamed friend. When he faced loss in business due to the Russian revolution, Georg never asked him to provide financial support in this dire situation. Instead, he lied to his father that he had been writing letters to his best friend, who had been stuck in Russia for the last three years.

Before moving toward the extracts, first, it is to know what these terms mean and how Jahn (2017) has explained them. The mentation allows to frame focalization. The discourse now is related to online mentation. Meanwhile, offline mentation involves a story now. In the story,

online mentation is witnessed in the following way; when Georg informs his father '*I only wants to tell you,*' continued Georg, passively following the movements of the old man, '*that I have announced my engagement to Petersburg after all.*' in the discourse now that is *I only wants to tell you*, Georg reveals about his engagement which is a story directly to his friend. Whereas offline mentation is related to the narrator's internal perception. "*It must be almost three years ago that my friend had visited us here. I remember you didn't like him particularly. Despite the fact that he was in my room I had denied him before you at least twice.*"

In these lines, Georg narrated his friend's visit three years ago. He imagines his father disliking his friend and being biased for certain peculiarities of his unnamed friend. Basically, in offline mentation, an extant element of imagination occurs when a narrator recollects previous events. Jahn's online and offline mentation is the narratological constituents that act as mental activity. An online perception or mentation is related to the five senses, something a character has experienced and recalls. While offline perception primarily addresses the character's imagination and other sensations that one perceives in hallucination and dream.

Conclusion

Thus, the levels of focalization achieved by different narrative techniques in the story *The Judgment* disapprove of Genette's concept of non-focalization or zero-focalization. Kafka has presented the story from different perspectives, i.e., there is a covert heterodiegetic narrator in the beginning who depicts the situation. The paradigm shifts to homodiegetic overt narration and internal focalization when the story is narrated from the eyes of its central characters. Moreover, the theory of cognitive narratology has provided a medium to evaluate characters' emotional and psychological states. There is undoubtedly a lack of communication and resentment in the hearts

of the characters. Georg's selfishness has made him a devilish person. His demon has caused him to suicide in the end because he has been shown the mirror by his father. Besides various narratological constituents, the article concludes with the idea of focalization levels and kinds of emotional and psychological distress that characters have been suffering throughout their lives in the story.

References

- Botella, L., Herrero, O., Pacheco, M., & Corbella, S. (2004). Working With Narrative in Psychotherapy: A Relational Constructivist Approach.
- Babu, N. (2011). Theory of mind understanding in narration: A study among children from different socioeconomic backgrounds in India.
- Currie, M. (1998). The Dark Clouds of Enlightenment: Socio-narratology and Heart of Darkness. In Postmodern Narrative Theory (pp. 135-151). Palgrave, London.
- Diengott, N. (2010). Fludernik's natural narratological model: A reconsideration and pedagogical implications. , 39(1), 93-101. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1515/jlse.2010.005>
- Flory, M., Sauquet, A., Hawkins, M. A., & Saleem, F. Z. (2012). The omnipresent personal narrative: story formulation and the interplay among narratives. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*.
- Gamannossi, B. A., & Pinto, G. (2014). Theory of mind and language of mind in narratives: Developmental trends from kindergarten to primary school. *First Language*, 34(3), 262-272.
- Herman, D. (2014). Cognitive narratology (pp. 46-64). de Gruyter.
- Herman, D. (2007). Storytelling and the sciences of mind: Cognitive narratology, discursive psychology, and narratives in face-to-face interaction. *Narrative*, 15(3), 306-334.
- Jahn, M. (1999). More aspects of focalization: refinements and applications. *Recent trends in narratological research*, 85-110.
- Kleres, J. (2011). Emotions and narrative analysis: A methodological approach. *Journal for the theory of social behavior*, 41(2), 182-202.

Montashery, I. (2014). Virginia Woolf's Maternal Narrative. *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies*, 2(4), 42-49.

Mura, P., & Sharif, S. P. (2017). Narrative analysis in tourism: a critical review. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 17(2), 194-207.

Ripley, D. A. (2005). *Cognitive narratology: A practical approach to the reader-writer relationship*. Marquette University.

Slimak, L. J. (2007). *A mind with a view: Cognitive science, neuroscience and contemporary literature* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Akron).

Troscianko, E. (2014). First-person and second-generation perspectives on starvation in Franz Kafka's 'Ein Hungerkünstler'. *Style* (DeKalb)

Tucan, G. (2012). The reader's mind beyond the text—The science of cognitive narratology. *Romanian Journal of English Studies*, 9(2), 299-308.