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Types of Plot Development in Sudden Fiction

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Abstract
The article highlights dependence of the text composition on the literary text type. The literary text structure can have four basic types of plot development, such as: "a fork", "a ring", "a chain", and "a fan" [8]. Later their variations have been added by the investigators [4; 6; 17]. It is noteworthy that each object of research (children folklore, song folklore, short stories) contributed to the number and variety of plot development types. Now there will be a specific object of research — Sudden fiction. Analysis of Sudden fiction shows that short stories have specific composition and basic four types of plot development are combined with their varieties.

Key words: text composition, types of plot development, "a fork", "a ring", "a chain", "a fan", Sudden fiction.

Literary text structure

Notwithstanding the fact that literary text belongs to different genres, in its structure some certain regularities are traced: every text has its form and content, thus, it can be considered both from the point of its structure and its semantics. Text semantic structure, its composition connected with text categories are very important [15]. Odintsov has enormously contributed to the problem of composition, which turns out to be the basis for text stylistics. In broad terms, composition is understood as structural efficiency, arrangement according to certain charts of the set elements, units of speech [7, p. 143].

Vorobyova considering mental spaces speaks about plot suspense in some literary texts [1]. Plot suspense can be connected with the system of images in

the text and can be treated as the phenomenon that foresees such a plot structure and text composition, which result in conflict [12]. Thus, by its essence plot suspense is a conflict, which in its turn is the source and main reason of plot development [2, p. 175].

Mentioned above four types of plot development have been successfully applied in the analysis of different texts: children folklore [6], short stories [3; 4; 9], British and German folk and literary fairytales [10; 11], American traditional and author's songs [8; 9; 16; 17]. Now there will be a specific object of research — Sudden fiction.

Sudden fiction

This genre has different names: flash fiction, including microfiction, microstories, short-shorts, short short stories, very short stories, postcard fiction, and nanofiction. Its characteristics are brevity, specific plot, and a twist or surprise at the end [19].

Highsmith [13] uses the term "flash fiction", which includes "complete stories of fewer than 1,500, 1,000, 500 or even 300 words". Short stories of such a kind he names short-short stories, immediate fiction, sudden fiction, and microfiction. In this approach, we see that volume of the text is important. Flash stories can fall under any genre: sci-fi, fantasy, horror, etc. The best flash fiction stories features are few characters, laconic descriptions that show rather than tell, and clear vision of the author, because "the reader and writer of flash fiction share a small but intimate space" [13].

Robert Shapard in the Introduction to "Sudden fiction" [18, p. xiii–xvi] explains how this term appeared. When short stories of definitely new genre appeared, at first they were called *Blasters*. The problem was that some subtle stories "simply didn't *blast*". Then Robert Kelly named these stories sudden because "they are all suddenly just there…" [18, p. xvi]. Now short-short stories have gained great popularity because of their unusual composition, laconicism, and in many cases thanks to defeated expectancy.

For my analysis I have chosen two books of Sudden fiction including 130 short stories. In some cases, I guess, it was their size, which allowed the compilers of the book to include them into the volume. To such type belongs, e.g., the short story by Ray Bradbury "I see you never". Its protagonist, Mr. Ramirez, is an illegal Mexican immigrant. Though he has been living in the USA for 30 months, a police officer has come to the place he has been renting to accompany him to the border and to send him back to Mexico. I would say that the end of the story is logical and expected; illegal immigrants are being sent home all over the world.

But the greater majority of the stories are really unexpected for the reader because of their content, like "The red fox fur coat" by T. Gersão, in which a young woman wants to buy a fur coat but it is too expensive for her. The saleswoman kindly spreads out the payment. This fur coat haunts girl's brain; she imagines how she will wear it and gradually in her actions and mind trans-

forms into a fox who is fond of raw meat, who runs into the forest with so much desired fur coat on, shaking her tail and body, sniffing the air, the ground, and the wind.

Though these stories are very short in volume most of them are masterpieces with hidden context, like "Good, Brother" by Peter Markus. Two brothers live in a small stinky town with a dirty river. They catch fish, cut off their heads and nail them to the fence. They have 155 heads and each of them has its own name but Jimmy or John, because these are brothers' names. Sick and tired of this miserable place their mother announces them that they are leaving it. Brothers take rusty nails and the elder brother starts hammering them one by one into his brother's hand: "*Brother didn't even wince, or flinch with his body, or make with his boy mouth the sound of a brother crying out. Good, Brother, I said*" [14, p. 266]. This text definitely has plot suspense based on the conflict between the real world, in which two brothers and their parents live and possible new world, which children are afraid of and don't want to move to, notwithstanding the fact that their familiar world is full of mud, stinky heads of dead fish and has absolutely no future.

Of course, most of the stories are interesting but I would like to mention those, which will keep the reader thinking about them for a long time thanks to the extremely high degree of suddenness: "In reference to your recent communications" by Tessa Brown, "Blood" by Zdravka Evtimova, "Seven pieces of severance" by Robert Olen Butler, "Tomorrow's bird" by Ian Frazier, "Reply all" by Robin Hemley, "Audio tour" by Patricia Marx and beyond.

Now let us discuss possible types of plot development, which can be found in texts belonging to Sudden fiction genre.

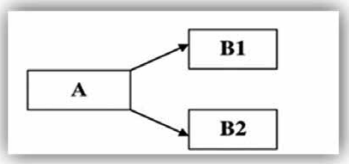
Types of plot development

I have singled out four types of plot development: "a fork", "a ring", "a chain" and "a fan" [8]. Let us discuss them in brief.

Type 1. *"A fork"*

"*A fork*" is created as a result of break between desired and reality. There is purpose, desire, but perspectives of their implementation are limited or hardly possible. In such cases subjunctive mood is very often used. The more unreal desire, the larger the gap is.

Figure 1.
"A fork" *as a type of plot development*

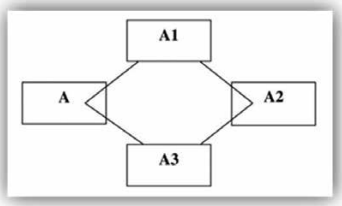


This model is very popular in love songs, when the lovers are separated and one of them expresses one's dreams and conditions of meeting. In some fairy-tales a "fork" arises up in a practical joke, fooling, that strengthens comic effect. It also may show hindrances in performing one's action or realization of one's dreams.

Type 2. *"A ring"*

It is more typical of dialogic speech. In children folklore, in facetious songs this model includes such elements, as a topic of discussion, undertaken action, instrument, its properties, again a topic of discussion: illogical sequence of actions brings us back to the initial action. In poetic texts "a ring" is formed by parallel constructions, such repetitions, as framing, specific rhythmic picture, etc.

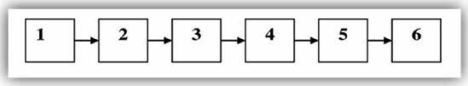
Figure 2.
"A ring" *as a type of plot development*



Type 3. *"A chain"*

The third type of plot development — *"a chain"* — is widely spread in such functional-semantic types of speech, as a dialogue and narration. The content of this type may be an action or state of the object. Slavic musical folklore is represented by a chastooshka as well as by facetious songs, which have neither logical completion nor definite end. In prosaic and poetic texts the author quite often concludes his work by aposiopesis. In these cases, it means that (s) he wants to draw the reader in into the independent "hitting" of finale and it shows that events will proceed yet.

Figure 3.
"A chain" *as a type of plot development*

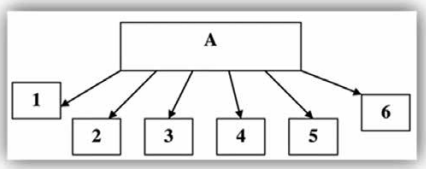


This *"chain"* can be filled with such items, as "event", "subject", "person".

Type 4. *"A fan"*

It can be considered as a frame-script. A certain event, which is simultaneously described in different aspects takes place. An object can also be exposed to description. A person (an acting character of the literary text) simultaneously or in sequence performs several actions.

Figure 4.
"A fan" *as a type of plot development*



Thus, different approaches to the text structure give us possibility to understand how it is composed but it doesn't signify that we understand its meaning. From the structure we may proceed to the details, which help us understand the author's intentions. We usually start with structural analysis. It is an established fact that interpretation must be based on the text structure [5, p. 3].

Types of plot development in Sudden fiction

When I started working on this topic my hypothesis was that stories with such unusual content must have specific plot development. Let us illustrate most typical models with examples from Sudden fiction texts.

The text "The red fox fur coat" by T. Gersão, which I have already mentioned above has one of basic models, "the chain":

Figure 5.
"A chain" *as a type of plot development of the short story*
"*The red fox fur coat" by T. Gersão*

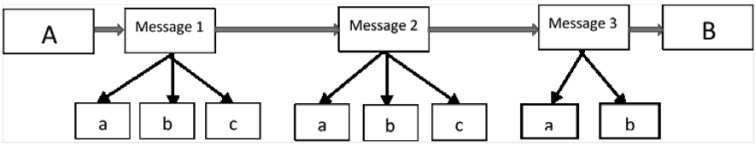


Here the actions of the heroine are described in a logical order. When she buys at last the long desired fur coat she runs into the wood and without any doubt there will be new actions because she has transformed into the fox either mentally or in habits.

The short story "The rememberer" by Aimee Bender has the same type of plot development, only the shorter chain. The woman's lover is changing his outlook: "some kind of ape", "a sea turtle", "some kind of salamander" [14, p. 63–67]. Each time the woman tries to find special food and special place, water, etc. for the new kind of animal.

These four basic models are usually combined, like "a chain of rings", "a chain + a fork", "a chain of fans", etc. The structure of the short story "In reference to your recent communications" by Tessa Brown is easily visualized, because the author has made subtitles herself. The text presents three SMS messages and comments to the them. Block A is a sort of introduction, block B — summary. SMS 1 and 2 have 3 comments, SMS 3 has 2 comments.

Figure 6.
"A chain of fans" *as a type of plot development of the short story "In reference to your recent communications" by Tessa Brown*

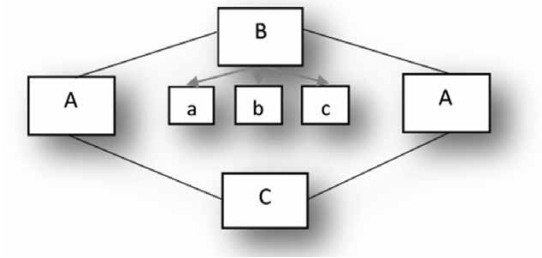


Answering SMS is a routine thing. What makes this plot sudden? A man decided to break with his mistress, he sends her common messages informing her about it. He comes to know that that his bank account is frozen, cellular phone is disabled; moreover he "*has been jailed on the charge of possession of marijuana with intent to distribute*". All these things are the revenge of the woman who was betrayed by her lover [14, p. 142–149].

There are many interesting examples of various types of plot development but for the limited space I will give only one more example. I want to present such a type, as "the fork" where there is a real chain of events or actions combined with desired or imaginary ones.

The heroine of the short story "Paper slippers" by Leelila Strogov comes to a doctor (A) because she is pregnant. She decides to bear the child and stages of her son Alex growing up are described in B section. Alex appeared to be a good child. Though in section C he is described as "another boy from a broken home" who has been caught shoplifting by the police. Then the reader comes back to the very beginning and understands that events described in B were imaginary and the woman interrupts her pregnancy and in a very miserable state comes back home [14, p. 320–325].

Figure 7.
"A ring of a fans and a fork" *as a type of plot development of the short story "Paper slippers" by Leelila Strogov*



Conclusion

I have come to the conclusion that in most of the texts we may come across four basic types of plot development as well as their combinations. My aim was

not to make some calculations but to make the first approach to the analysis of Sudden fiction. I may state that most frequent are such types, as "a chain", "a fork" and combination of "a fork" with "a chain" and "a fan". However, the structure of most texts is so unusual and defeated expectancy so unexpected that in majority of cases it is difficult to attribute the text to this or that model.

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Семиотическая и лингвистическая относительность языковой картины мира: философский взгляд

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Аннотация
В статье раскрываются особенности корреляции языковой и философской картин мира, обсуждается вклад философского осмысления отдельных дисциплин в философию языка. Автор демонстрирует на конкретном языковом материале как символизм функционирует в языковой картине