

## Sound Images of Subjective Perception of Time in a Literary Text

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**Abstract:** The article deals with subjective perception of time, or psychological time, as a textual category and a literary image. It focuses on the sound images that are characteristic of different time perceptions-accelerated, decelerated and frozen (vanished). The research is based on the hypothesis that the category of subjective perception of time expresses different concepts and is formed by means of different text categories, including those of acoustic evaluation. The authors arrive at the conclusion that linguistic means expressing acoustic evaluation, i.e. words denoting sounds and their properties, play a significant role in modeling psychological time in a literary text as they enable a reader to “hear” the flow of time in a character's consciousness.

**Key words:** Subjective perception of time • Psychological time • Literary text • Text category • Linguistic means • Acoustic evaluation • Literary image • Sound images • Decelerated time • Accelerated time • Frozen time • Vanished time.

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper is devoted to the investigation of sound images that occur in literary texts in the descriptions of subjective perception of time, i.e. the time as perceived by literary characters or a storyteller.

Subjective perception of time is one of the constituents of man's psychic world and is often referred to as psychological time or perceptual time which is the condition of the change of human sensations and other mental acts of a subject [1]. However, more often this time is understood as a specific reflection of real temporal interrelations in an individual's consciousness [2]. Owing to the fact that psychological time has peculiar features, the reflection of temporal relations in our consciousness is not completely identical with the real time. In contrast to the time of the objective world the time of the psychic world does not always flow at the same speed (can slow down or gather speed), can be interrupted (stops or vanishes altogether) and chronologically inconsequent (turns back or to the future, then to the present moment). It is accounted for by the fact that our sense of time and estimation of time intervals duration depend on a number of phenomena directly and indirectly involved in the process of perception. Chief

among these are: visceral sensitivity, i.e. a number of physiological factors such as heart rate, respiration, body temperature [3, 4], age changes [5, 6], etc.; real processes and events occurring in time and their hedonic value [7, 8]; emotions [7, 9]; sensory modality [9]; perceptual (subjective) space [10], i.e. the time that “is perceived by senses and created through tendencies that differ from one person to another” [11]; cyclic time [7].

The object of our research is subjective perception of time as a textual category and a literary image.

Researchers of the literary text distinguish two ways of describing time in literary works: objective literary time including cyclic time and subjective literary time including psychological time [12, 13]. Unlike with the objective literary time that reflects universally valid properties of time-one-dimensionality, unidirectionality and continuity-subjective literary time conveys individual peculiarities of time perception including those mentioned above [14, 2]. It can be further divided into literary characters' biographic time, the time of their activity and their perception of time [15] which is the focus of our research.

Subjective literary time has been given quite enough attention by specialists in the study of literature. According to Bakhtin [16], Meilakh [17], Motilyeva [18]

and Kazakova [19], psychological manipulations with time were discovered and established by the Romantic movement, developed in the European novel of the XXth century and are still characteristic of modern European literature with its magic realism destroying the idea of time.

Subjective literary time as a textual category has not been investigated properly so far. The works by Turayeva [2, 14], Pappina [13], Nozdrina [20], Panasenko [21], Dmitriev, Zaboleeva-Zotova, Orlova and Rozaliev [22] dealing with time on the textual level shed some light on the problem. Turayeva and Pappina define literary time as a conceptual and global category of the text respectively and contribute somewhat to the research of the subjective time variety under consideration. However, this contribution gives only a hazy notion of what psychological time expresses in a literary text and what linguistic means it is expressed by.

The present research is based on the hypothesis that the category of subjective perception of time, or psychological time, expresses different concepts and is formed by means of different text categories in a literary text.

As rightly observed by Marija Brala Vukanovic and Lovorka Gruic Grmusa in their book "Space and time in language and literature" (2009), most researches dealing with the topic of expression of time approach it either from the linguistic or from the literary perspective. However, when the object of research is as general and as universal as time is, it is only by working from a multidisciplinary perspective that one can hope to achieve some objective insights into it [23]. This paper deals with the expression of time from both literary and linguistic perspective. Moreover, we rely on the evidence and data of psychologists in support of the hypothesis set forth above.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The main objective of our research is to determine what subjective perception of time sounds like in a literary text, i.e. what sound images are characteristic of different time perceptions-accelerated, decelerated and frozen (vanished). To attain it we have defined more precisely the concept of subjective perception of time, found out what its plane of content is represented by and what linguistic means are used to express it in a literary text and, finally, to support our theoretical results, analysed the role of words and expressions pertaining to

the category of acoustic evaluation, i.e. the means of language denoting sounds and their properties, in modeling subjective perception of time in a literary text.

The analysis involves extracts from the works of English and American writers of XIX-XX centuries-Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce, William Cuthbert Faulkner, Ray Douglas Bradbury, Edna Mayne Hull, Richard Gordon, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, Robert Penn Warren, Richard David Bach, Edgar Allan Poe-and is based on the following linguistic methods: the method of contextual, component and stylistic analysis and the method of classification.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Subjective perception of time as a part of subjective literary time serves to convey characters' inner world and determine readers' emotional perception [24]. It should be noted that characters' time perception is not restricted to the deformation of the flow of time in their minds caused by certain situations or states. It can be understood in a broader sense-as their perception of a time-epoch (in the course of narration characters develop their own ideas of a time-epoch which are revealed through their judgments and deeds) in which case it serves to express ideological aesthetic evaluation [15].

This brings us to the conclusion that subjective perception of time is a peculiar means of expressiveness or stylistic device. This device can be defined as a kind of metonymy: characters' psychic states are pictured as deformation of the passage of time in their consciousness and their ideology is expressed through their attitude to a time-epoch.

Subjective perception of time as a text category has a formal and semantic aspect (a plane of content and a plane of expression). The plane of content of psychological time includes the notions conveyed by this category. The plane of expression is represented by a number of linguistic means expressing these notions in a text.

The content plane of psychological time is polysemantic. Subjective perception of time shows the manner of time and action flow in a literary text and conveys subjective evaluation of the situation described. To put it differently, the category of psychological time expresses notions conveyed by the categories of temporality, aspectuality and subjective modality or evaluation:

- Temporality: the manner of the passage of time in a literary text;
- Aspectuality: the manner of the passage of action in a literary text;
- Subjective modality: emotional reaction of characters, their perception of a time-epoch, the author's attitude to his/her characters and events described [25].

The expression plane of subjective perception of time is no less complex than its plane of content. It comprises a large number of different language phenomena. As previously stated, the reflection of temporal relations in an individual's consciousness is not completely identical with real temporal relations which is due to the fact that subjective perception of time involves and is affected by physiological, sensory and emotional processes, events of the real life, subjective space and cyclic time.

Being basic components of time perception, the listed phenomena determine its representation in a literary text. Hence, we can maintain that subjective perception of time is modeled by means of different text categories—the category of literary time, namely, cyclic and physiological time included in this category, the category of events and processes, the category of subjective evaluative modality and the category of subjective space. Providing clearer, the expression plane of subjective perception of time can be presented by words belonging to the semantic field of cyclic time, words of the category of events, lexemes with the meaning of sensory and emotional evaluation and language means modeling space relations in a literary text [24].

In this research we focus on sensory evaluation or, more precisely, on acoustic evaluation and discuss the extracts in which subjective perception of time is revealed indirectly through acoustic sensations. Acoustic evaluation is an integral part of every literary image as it makes its contents more efficient and serves to organize a reader's perception [26]. Using the words denoting sounds and their properties authors create sound images of subjective perception of time. Sounds are selected so that the reader can imagine and feel the flow of time in a character's consciousness.

Sound images of psychological time are formed by words of negative acoustic evaluation.

Decelerated time is conveyed by the words and expressions containing a quantitative evaluation of a sound. Linguistic means expressing a qualitative evaluation of a sound only indirectly indicate

deceleration. These are the words that express such properties of a sound as clarity, precision, brokenness, rhythm, monotony and intensity:

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a *sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil*; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was and whether immeasurably *distinct* or *nearby*—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but *as slow as the tolling of a death knell*. He awaited each stroke with impatience and—he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew *progressively longer*; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear *like the thrust of a knife*; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

(Bierce, An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge)

“Don't you want me to help?” he whispered. His father did not answer and now he heard again that stiff foot striking the hollow portico with that wooden and *clocklike deliberation*, that outrageous overstatement of the weight it carried. The rug, hunched, not flung (the boy could tell that even in the darkness) from his father's shoulder struck the angle of wall and floor with a sound *unbelievably loud, thunderous*, then the foot again, *unhurried and enormous*; a light came on in the house and the boy sat, tense, breathing steadily and quietly and just a little fast, though the foot itself did not increase its beat at all, descending the steps now; now the boy could see him.

(Faulkner, Barn Burning)

Deceleration of psychological time may be indicated by lexemes denoting the sounds that one can hear only in complete silence or sounds that cannot be perceived by human beings at all. Perception of these sounds is possible only in a special state of consciousness—full concentration of attention on the

sound, deceleration of acoustic perception, distraction of consciousness from other perceptions and sensations:

His voice was at the bottom of a green moss well somewhere under water, secret, removed.

The *grass whispered* under his body. He put his arm down, feeling the sheath of fuzz on it and, far away, below, his *toes creaking* in his shoes. The *wind sighed* over his shelled ears. The world slipped bright over the glassy round of his eyeballs, like images sparked in a crystal sphere. Flowers were sun and fiery spots of sky strewn through the woodland. Birds flickered like skipped stones across the vast inverted pond of heaven. His *breath raked* over his teeth, going in ice, coming out fire. Insects shocked the air with electric clearness. Ten thousand individual hairs grew a millionth of an inch on his head. He heard the twin hearts beating in each ear, the third heart beating in his throat, the two hearts throbbing his wrists, the real heart pounding his chest. The million pores on his body opened.

I'm really alive! he thought. I never knew it before, or if I did I don't remember!

(Bradbury, Dandelion Wine)

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf-saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The *humming of the gnats* that danced above the eddies of the stream, the *beating of the dragonflies' wings*, the *strokes of the water spiders' legs*, like oars which had lifted their boat-all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

(Bierce, An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge)

If sound images are formed by the words denoting loud, staccato sounds, deceleration is conveyed by other means-words of the category of indefiniteness indicating obscurity of a sound and phrases creating the effect of a silent film:

The second shot came as he twisted the gun free from the other's fingers. Gun in hand, he stepped back. He felt a *vague* amazement and horror as Harmsworth fell like a log to the floor and lay there. Even *more vaguely*, he was aware that a door had *burst* open and that a girl was standing there, *her mouth opening and shutting, making sounds*. Then the door *slammed*. He heard a *frantic* dialing and a *high-pitched* girl's voice *screaming something* about police.

(Mayne Hull, The Wishes We Make)

Vanished or frozen time is often represented in the image of a specially emphasized silence. Words and expressions conveying turned off sounds signal a stop of time in the minds of characters. Linguistic means introducing a negative sensory evaluation emphasize the static nature of the situation depicted. These are the words and expressions denoting hushed, often continuous and monotonous sounds. On the background of complete silence these sounds are deformed in the consciousness of the subject-grow (increase in volume, strength), are converted into sounds of a different kind in accordance with the nature of perceptual distortions. Not only do these metamorphoses indicate the complete lack of movement and sound in the atmosphere surrounding a character but they also show that the character is in a state of suspense:

One minute to twelve. The room had suddenly come to a frightening, unexpected *silence* and *stillness, like an unexploded bomb*. A *clock tingled* twelve in the distance. My palms were as wet as sponges. Someone *coughed* and I expected the windows to *rattle*. With slow *scraping* feet that could be heard before they appeared the Secretary and the porters came solemnly down the stairs. The elder porter raised his voice.

(Gordon, Doctor in the House)

His father did not answer and now for perhaps half a minute there was *no sound at all* save that of *breathing, the faint, steady suspiration* of complete and intent listening.

(Faulkner, Barn Burning)

For an hour he watched the sun creep up the patterned folds of the chintz curtains. *In the deep quiet* a trapped *wasp buzzing* on the inside of the window-pane assumed the proportions of *a clamour*. From time to time another buzzing drifted down from upstairs, resembling *several more larger wasps* caught on larger window-panes. He heard *low footfalls, the clink of bottles, the clamour of pouring water*.

(Fitzgerald, The Lees of Happiness)

His voice just stopped. It didn't trail off like a voice coming to a stop. One second it was there, going on, word by word, *in the stillness* which filled the square and the crowd in front of the courthouse and was *stiller for the grinding of the July flies* in the two catalpas rising above the heads of the people who had crowded up on the patch of grass roots. The voice was going there, word by word, then suddenly it was not there. There was only *the sound of the July flies*, which seems to be inside your head as though it were *the grind and whir of the springs and cogs* which are you and which will not stop no matter what you say until they are good and ready.

He stood there a half minute, not saying a word and not moving. He didn't even seem to be noticing the crowd down there. Then he seemed, all at once, to discover them and grinned.

(Warren, All the King's Men)

Accelerated time sounds differently than decelerated and vanished time. It is portrayed by onomatopoeic verbs denoting sharp, staccato sounds and words indicating such properties of a sound as continuity, integrity (unbrokenness), speed, impetuosity, intensity and obscurity. Together these means create the image of a rapidly moving object or person:

By the time he passed four thousand feet he had reached terminal velocity, the wind was *a solid beating wall of sound* against which he could move no faster. He was flying now straight down, at two hundred fourteen miles per hour.

(Bach, Jonathan Livingston Seagull)

An appalling plash within two yards of him was followed by *a loud, rushing sound*, diminuendo, which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an *explosion* which stirred the very river to its deeps!

(Bierce, An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge)

It happened that morning, then, just after sunrise, that Jonathan Livingston Seagull fired directly through the center of Breakfast Flock, ticking off two hundred twelve miles per hour, eyes closed, in *a great roaring shriek* of wind and feathers. The Gull of Fortune smiled upon him this once and no one was killed.

(Bach, Jonathan Livingston Seagull)

While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened-the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight-my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls *rushing asunder*-there was *a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters*- and the deep and dark tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "House of Usher".

(Poe, The Fall of the House of Usher)

## CONCLUSION

Linguistic means expressing acoustic evaluation play a significant role in modeling subjective perception of time in a literary text. Using the words denoting sounds and their properties authors create sound images of different time perceptions-accelerated, decelerated and frozen (vanished). Sound images of psychological time are formed by words of negative acoustic evaluation.

Decelerated time is conveyed by words and expressions containing a quantitative evaluation of a sound, namely, by the linguistic means that express such properties of a sound as clarity, precision, brokenness, rhythm, monotony and intensity and by lexemes denoting sounds that can be heard only in complete silence or sounds generally inaccessible to human perception. If sound images are formed by the words denoting loud, staccato sounds, deceleration is conveyed by other means-words of the category of indefiniteness indicating obscurity of a sound and phrases creating the effect of a silent movie.

Vanished or frozen time is often represented in the image of a specially emphasized silence. Words and expressions denoting turned off sounds signal a stop of time in the minds of characters whereas linguistic means expressing hushed, often continuous and monotonous sounds emphasize the static nature of the situation depicted.

Accelerated time is portrayed by onomatopoeic verbs denoting sharp, staccato sounds and the words indicating such properties of a sound as continuity, integrity (indivisibility into intervals), speed, impetuosity, intensity and obscurity. Together these means create the image of a rapidly moving object or person.

In this paper we investigate subjective perception of time on a particular linguistic material-extracts from English and American literary works of XIX-XX centuries. However, it appears that similar results can be obtained by studying broader material as well as by studying psychological time on the material of other languages.

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