**Narrators and Narrative Situation I – NARRATIVE VOICES & FOCALISATION**

**NARRATORS AND NARRATIVE SITUATION[[1]](#footnote-1)**

* The category of the narrator is specific to the diegetic genres, i.e. genres pertaining to narrative, such as narrative prose and narrative poetry
* Two aspects are considered – together they form the **NARRATIVE SITUATION**

- WHO SPEAKS – narrative voice

- WHO SEES – focalisatoin

**NARRATIVE VOICE**(S)

* narrative situation is part of discourse – of HOW narrative is told
* narrative is always told by someone (mediated through a ‘voice’)
* ‘WHO SPEAKS’ is asked about the narrative as a whole (if dialogue included, it reported by the narrator; narrative situation remains the same)

G. Genette’s classification of narrative situations:

* **homodiegetic narrator** – character in the story
* **heterodiegetic n.** – character outside the story, knows everything about it
* **autodiegetic narrator** – the homodiegetic narrator is also the protagonist

Franz Stanzel’s distinction between

* **first-person** narrative situation and
* **third-person** narrative situation

This classification corresponds with Genette’s categories of homo- and heterodiegetic narrator + the FIGURAL narrative situation (see below)

N.B. **NARRATOR is NOT the same as the AUTHOR** (this is more obvious in homodiegetic narrators but it applies in autobiographical texts as well; the narrating ‘I’ is always a construct, regardless of whether they are part of the story world or not).

**NARRATEE** – reader or listener *in* the narrative – narratee is not the actual READER, just as the NARRATOR is not the actual AUTHOR

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NARRATIVE TEXT

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STORYWORLD

author narrator character character narratee actual

(speaking) (listening) reader

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**OVERT and COVERT NARRATOR**

* OVERT n. – distinct personality, make their opinions known, explicit judgements
* COVERT n. – a hardly noticeable narrator – concentrates on *showing* rather than *telling*

**FOCALISATION**

Narrator verbally transmits the events and existents of narrative.

* If told from an outside position, narrators adopt the **OMNISCIENT point of view**
* But they can also adopt a **LIMITED** **point of view** – if the narrative is told by a character who is ignorant about parts of the story outside their scope or perception

N.B.: The choice of perspective is independent of whether the narrator is a character in the story or not.

To better distinguish between **NARRATIVE VOICE** (who SPEAKS?) and **NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE** (who SEES?), Genett introduced the concept of FOCALISATION:

* **EXTERNAL FOCALISER** – outside the story  
  - aka **NARRATOR-FOCALISER** (the scope of perception seems to be that of a heterodiegetic narrator)
* **INTERNAL FOCALISER** – limited scope of perception pertaining to a character  
  - aka **CHARACTER FOCALISER**

- **language (style)** can be used to indicate an **internal focaliser** (e.g. child’s language)

**Focalisation often shifts throughout narrative**. The alternation between the external and internal focaliser is often used in film narrative.

* **FIGURAL NARRATIVE SITUATION** (Franz Stanzel) – the narrator makes us imagine that we perceive the situation through a character’s consciousness
* **NARRATOR COMMENT** – combination of heterodiegetic narrator and external focalisation
* **NARRATING I – EXPERIENCING I** – when a homodiegetic narrator as an external focaliser reminiscences about past experience
* **UNRELIABLE NARRATORS** – sometimes we tend to distrust what a narrator says (occasionally, the narrator is disclosed as unreliable only at the end of narrative – e.g. in detective stories)

CONCLUSION:

The number of ways in which narrators and focalisers can be defined and combined is almost endless. But it helps to think about narrative voice and focalisation to see how atmosphere, reader sympathy etc. are created in a text.

1. Based on Stefanie Lethbridge and Jarmila Mildorf, *Basics of English Studies*,‘Chapter 2, Prose’, 56–62. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)