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FIRST-PERSON NARRATION IN WOMEN-CENTRED PROSE: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL VERBALISATION

Abstract. Aim. The article focuses on the analysis of cognitive and emotional verbalisation in first-person narration in contemporary women-centred prose. Particular attention is given to the way internal experience is introduced into narrative discourse through recurrent verb patterns. The study addresses first-person narration not only as a narrative perspective but as a linguistic mechanism that organises the representation of thinking, perception and emotion.

Methodology. The research is based on a corpus of contemporary English-language novels centred on female experience, including works by H. Fielding, S. Kinsella, L. Kelk, G. Honeyman and E. Henry. The texts are selected according to two criteria: the use of first-person narration and a thematic focus on everyday experience and emotional relations. The analysis combines corpus-based methods with discourse interpretation. Frequency lists and collocational patterns are used to identify recurrent verb usage, with a focus on verb lemmas that verbalise cognitive, perceptual and emotional processes. The extracted verbs are grouped according to their semantic functions, which makes it possible to trace their distribution and role in narrative organisation.

Scientific novelty. The study proposes an approach to first-person narration as a system of recurrent linguistic patterns rather than a purely narratological category. It demonstrates how verb distribution reflects the organisation of internal experience in women-centred prose and shows that cognitive verbs form the core of narrative structuring, while emotional and perceptual verbs are integrated into the same contexts. The combination of corpus-based analysis and discourse interpretation makes it possible to identify stable patterns of verbalisation that are not always visible in close reading.

Conclusions. The analysis shows that first-person narration in women-centred prose is organised through recurrent verb patterns centred on cognitive verbs. Verbs such as *think*, *know*, *remember* and *realise* structure the narrative through processes of reflection and evaluation. Emotional and perceptual verbs



occur in the same contexts and are combined with verbs of thinking, while reporting verbs, primarily *say*, are used in dialogue and reported speech. Across the analysed novels, narrative development proceeds through the representation of internal experience rather than through sequences of external events, which indicates a shared mode of narrative organisation.

Keywords: first-person narration, women-centred prose, corpus linguistics, cognitive verbs, emotional verbalisation, narrative discourse, collocational patterns, internal experience

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НАРАЦІЯ ВІД ПЕРШОЇ ОСОБИ У ЖІНКОЦЕНТРИЧНІЙ ПРОЗІ:КОРПУСНИЙ АНАЛІЗ КОГНІТИВНОЇ ТА ЕМОЦІЙНОЇ ВЕРБАЛІЗАЦІЇ

Анотація. Мета. Статтю присвячено аналізу когнітивної та емоційної вербалізації в нарації від першої особи у сучасній жіноцетричній прозі. Основну увагу зосереджено на способах введення внутрішнього досвіду в наративний дискурс через повторювані дієслівні моделі. Нарація від першої особи розглядається не лише як наративна перспектива, а як мовний механізм організації репрезентації мислення, сприйняття та емоцій.

Методологія. Матеріалом дослідження слугує корпус сучасних англійських романів (твори Г. Філдінг, С. Кінселли, Л. Келк, Г. Хонімен та Е. Генрі), відібраних за критеріями наративної перспективи та тематичної спрямованості. Дослідження поєднує корпусні методи з дискурсивною інтерпретацією. Частотні списки та колокаційні моделі використовуються для виявлення регулярностей у вживанні дієслів, із фокусом на дієслівних лемах, що вербалізують когнітивні, перцептивні та емоційні процеси. Виділені дієслова згруповано за семантичними категоріями, що дозволяє простежити їх розподіл і функціонування в організації наративного дискурсу.

Наукова новизна. Запропоновано підхід до аналізу нарації від першої особи як системи регулярних мовних моделей, а не лише як наратологічної категорії. Показано, що розподіл дієслів відображає організацію внутрішнього досвіду в жіноцетричній прозі: когнітивні дієслова формують ядро нарації, тоді як емоційні та перцептивні інтегруються в ті самі контексти. Поєднання корпусного аналізу з дискурсивною інтерпретацією дозволяє виявити сталі моделі вербалізації, які не завжди очевидні при традиційному текстуальному аналізі.



Висновки. Нарація від першої особи у жінкоцентричній прозі організується через повторювані дієслівні моделі з домінуванням когнітивних дієслів. Дієслова *think, know, remember, realise* структурують наратив через процеси рефлексії та оцінювання. Емоційні та перцептивні дієслова функціонують у тих самих контекстах і поєднуються з когнітивними, тоді як репрезентативні дієслова, передусім *say*, забезпечують розвиток нарації через діалог і відтворення мовлення. У проаналізованих романах наратив розгортається через репрезентацію внутрішнього досвіду, а не через послідовність зовнішніх подій, що свідчить про спільний принцип організації нарації.

Ключові слова: нарація від першої особи, жінкоцентрична проза, корпусна лінгвістика, когнітивні дієслова, емоційна вербалізація, наративний дискурс, колокаційні моделі, внутрішній досвід

Introduction. Contemporary popular fiction centred on female experience has attracted increasing scholarly attention as it reflects important changes in the representation of women, everyday life, work, emotional relations, and personal choice. For a considerable period of time such texts were mostly discussed within the framework of chick-lit, women's fiction or popular romance, yet these labels do not fully explain the internal diversity of prose focused on women's experience. A substantial part of such fiction is built not only around plot conventions but around the verbal organisation of inner life, that is, around the ways in which thought, feeling, hesitation, recollection, and evaluation are introduced into the narrative. In this respect narrative perspective is of particular importance, as it shapes the relation between event and experience and determines whether emotional and cognitive states are named directly, interpreted, delayed or only partially verbalised. First-person narration occupies a special place here because it creates conditions for the direct representation of internal processes and makes visible those linguistic patterns through which experience is structured in discourse.

The aim of the article is to analyse cognitive and emotional verbalisation in first-person narration in contemporary women-centred prose. The object of the research is first-person narrative discourse in English-language novels centred on women's experience, whereas the subject is the system of recurrent verbal patterns used to represent thinking, feeling, perception, and evaluation. The material of the research comprises a corpus of contemporary English novels selected according to narrative perspective and thematic relevance. The corpus-based approach has been combined with discourse interpretation, which makes it possible to move from separate textual observations to more general regularities in the organisation of first-person narration. Sketch Engine has been used to



identify frequent verbal collocations and recurring patterns, further grouped according to their semantic functions. Such an approach enables a closer examination of how first-person discourse verbalises internal experience and what types of cognitive and emotional activity become most prominent in women-centred prose.

Literature review. The study of narrative organisation in fiction has traditionally been associated with narratology, where primary attention is given to categories such as perspective, focalisation, and modes of presenting consciousness. Foundational works demonstrate that narrative perspective is not merely a structural element but a mechanism through which fictional experience is shaped and made accessible to the reader. Thus, the distinction between different modes of representing consciousness, outlined in narratological research, makes it possible to analyse how internal states are verbalised, whether directly or through mediating structures (Cohn, 1978; 4; 13]. Characters' thoughts and emotions are represented through linguistic choices and narrative organisation, which determine how internal experience is verbalised in the text [11]. In this respect, first-person narration occupies a specific position, as it foregrounds internal processes and allows the narrative to be built around acts of thinking, remembering and evaluating rather than external events.

At the same time, linguistic approaches to narrative have demonstrated that the analysis of fiction requires attention not only to narrative categories but also to the language of the text. Stylistic studies show that patterns of lexical choice, syntactic organisation and discourse structuring play a central role in shaping meaning and reader perception [9; 17]. This makes it possible to approach narrative world construction through recurring lexical patterns, which show how textual reality is formed in discourse [14]. From this perspective, narrative perspective can be approached as a linguistic phenomenon, manifested in regularities of verbal usage, rather than as an abstract narratological category. Such an approach makes it possible to analyse how internal experience is structured at the level of language and how different types of verbs contribute to its representation.

The development of corpus linguistics has provided methodological tools that allow the transition from individual textual observations to the analysis of larger patterns across multiple texts. Recurrent lexical and grammatical patterns are identified in the corpus and analysed in relation to the material of the study (Sinclair, 1991; 2; 10]. Frequency and collocation are used to trace these patterns and to determine how they are organised in discourse [1; 12]. In particular, the analysis of verb patterns makes it possible to identify how different types of experience – cognitive, perceptual, emotional – are distributed and verbalised in texts. Thus, corpus methods are especially relevant for the study of first-person



narration, where internal processes are expected to be reflected in recurrent linguistic structures.

Collocational patterns are analysed in relation to the material of the study. The combination of words is examined in order to identify recurrent ways of representing thinking, perception, and emotional experience [15]. Such patterns are further interpreted with regard to their role in the organisation of discourse and communicative tendencies [16]. In fiction, this concerns the lexical choices through which internal experience is verbalised. In fiction, such regularities become visible in recurrent lexical choices that structure narrative discourse. In fiction, this makes it possible to approach narrative discourse as a system of recurrent linguistic choices rather than individual stylistic features. Consequently, the integration of narratological and corpus-based approaches creates a framework in which first-person narration can be examined both as a mode of storytelling and as a set of linguistic patterns that organise cognitive and emotional experience in women-centred prose.

Methodology. The material of the research comprises a corpus of contemporary English-language novels centred on women's experience, including *Bridget Jones's Diary* by H. Fielding [3]), *Confessions of a Shopaholic* by S. Kinsella [8], *I Heart New York* by L. Kelk [7], *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine* by G. Honeyman [6], and *Beach Read* by E. Henry [5]. The texts were selected according to two criteria: the use of first-person narration and a thematic focus on everyday experience, emotional relations, and individual perception. Such selection makes it possible to analyse comparable narrative structures, as all the novels represent contemporary popular fiction organised around the internal experience of female protagonists. The limited number of texts is not incidental but is determined by the need for methodological consistency and the possibility of a detailed corpus-based analysis of recurrent linguistic patterns rather than a broad but less controlled overview.

The analysis combines a corpus-assisted approach with discourse interpretation. Frequency lists were used as a starting point for identifying the most recurrent lexical units in the corpus; however, attention was limited to those items that are relevant for the analysis of internal experience. Proper names and function words were therefore excluded, as they do not contribute to the representation of cognitive and emotional processes. The analysis focuses on verb lemmas, which serve as the main linguistic means of verbalising thinking, perception, and feeling in first-person narration. Particular attention is paid to recurrent collocational patterns, as they reveal not isolated lexical choices but stable ways of structuring internal experience in discourse. The extracted verbs were grouped according to their semantic functions, including cognitive processes, perception, emotional states, reporting, and evaluative patterns. Such

grouping makes it possible to move from individual lexical items to structured categories that reflect different types of experience. The final stage involves the interpretation of these patterns in terms of their role in the verbalisation of internal experience and the identification of dominant tendencies in the organisation of first-person narrative discourse.

Results and Discussion. The analysis focuses on the distribution of verbs in first-person narration and their organisation across semantic categories.

The most frequent verbs in first-person narration include *say* (1137 occurrences), *think* (324 + 310), *know* (242 + 185), and *do* (659), together with auxiliary verbs (*be*, *have*) which structure the grammatical organisation of the narrative (Table 1). The verb *say* occurs in contexts of reporting and dialogue, where events are introduced through the narrator's voice. Verbs such as *think* and *know* are regularly used in contexts of reflection, where the narrator returns to events and comments on them.

Table 1

Most frequent verbs in I-narration

Verb (lemma)	Frequency	Category
be (am/'m/was)	very high	auxiliary / state
say	1137	reporting
think	324 + 310	cognitive
know	242 + 185	cognitive
do	659	general action
have	341	auxiliary
feel	184 + 207	emotional
mean	192	cognitive / evaluative
want	101 + 119	emotional / intention
look	103 + 140	perception
see	54 + 90	perception
remember	41 + 30	cognitive
realize	92	cognitive
guess	47	evaluative
suppose	99	evaluative

Created by the author

The verbs *feel* (184 + 207) and *want* (101 + 119) are used to introduce emotional and intentional states, while *look* (103 + 140) and *see* (54 + 90) occur in contexts of perception. Their frequency is lower than that of cognitive verbs but remains stable across the corpus. The distribution by semantic categories (Fig.

1) shows that cognitive verbs form the largest group. Emotional and reporting verbs follow, whereas perceptual and evaluative verbs (*guess, suppose, mean*) are less frequent.

CONCORDANCE

Article 8

sample 1 • 21,221

21,796-30 per million tokens • 2.0%

Collocations

CHANGE CRITERIA

BACK TO CONCORDANCE

	Word	Cooccurrences ¹	Candidates ²	T-score	Mt	LogDice ³
1	'm	1,582	1,584	38.27	4.73	11.14 ...
2	was	1,340	5,918	30.51	2.59	10.65 ...
3	'd	1,138	1,934	31.57	3.96	10.65 ...
4	said	1,137	2,987	30.49	3.35	10.58 ...
5	could	745	1,396	25.37	3.82	10.07 ...
6	do	656	1,984	22.76	3.14	9.86 ...
7	've	619	998	23.42	4.09	9.83 ...
8	had	633	2,457	21.48	2.77	9.77 ...
9	say	525	992	21.28	3.81	9.59 ...
10	did	473	1,299	19.59	3.27	9.42 ...

	Word	Cooccurrences ¹	Candidates ²	T-score	Mt	LogDice ³
11	'll	450	760	19.85	3.97	9.38 ...
12	have	341	1,914	14.59	2.24	8.91 ...
13	think	324	879	16.16	3.29	8.90 ...
14	thought	310	607	16.31	3.76	8.86 ...
15	ca	270	437	15.43	4.03	8.67 ...
16	would	258	1,241	13.15	2.46	8.55 ...
17	knew	242	1,131	12.01	2.50	8.46 ...
18	just	237	1,605	11.46	1.97	8.40 ...
19	can	219	633	13.19	3.20	8.35 ...
20	felt	207	395	13.35	3.80	8.29 ...

Figure 1. Most frequent collocations of verbs in the corpus

Cognitive verbs are used in contexts where events are interpreted or reconsidered. The narrator returns to the same situations, introducing them through verbs such as *think, know, remember* and *realise*. In such cases, narration develops through sequences of reflection rather than through direct description of events.

Emotional verbs occur in the same contexts and are combined with verbs of thinking and evaluation, as in *Something hot is blocking my throat. I think it could be panic*, where perception and emotional response are introduced within the same fragment.

The verbs *feel* and *want* occur in contexts where emotional states are presented together with perception or physical reaction, often in situations of tension or uncertainty, as in *But when I eventually pull the bill out of the envelope... my smile falters, then disappears... Something hot is blocking my throat*, where emotional experience is introduced through a sequence of bodily and perceptual reactions.

Reporting verbs, primarily *say*, occur in contexts of dialogue and reported speech, where the narrator introduces and reproduces utterances, for example *I think the excitement of futures is the... um... their speculative nature... I hear myself saying*, followed by short dialogic exchanges such as *"I know," I say, and take a deep breath*, where narration proceeds through sequences of speech representation.

Evaluative verbs such as *guess, suppose* and *mean* occur in contexts where interpretation is not fixed and is presented as tentative. They are used together with cognitive verbs and form part of the same patterns.

The distribution of verbs shows that first-person narration is organised around recurrent patterns of thinking, evaluation and reporting. Emotional and perceptual verbs do not form separate groups but occur within these patterns. Narrative development proceeds through the representation of internal processes rather than through sequences of external events.

The distribution of verbs across semantic categories remains uneven. Cognitive verbs form the largest group in the corpus, including *think*, *know*, *realise* and *remember*. Emotional verbs (*feel*, *love*, *want*) and reporting verbs (*say*, *tell*) also occur regularly, while perceptual verbs (*see*, *look*, *notice*) are less frequent. Evaluative verbs (*guess*, *suppose*, *mean*) form a smaller group.

Table 2

Distribution by semantic category

Category	Examples	Frequency trend
Cognitive	think, know, realise, remember	dominant
Emotional	feel, love, want	frequent
Perception	see, look, notice	moderate
Reporting	say, tell	frequent
Evaluative	guess, suppose, mean	notable

Created by the author

This distribution is reflected in the narrative organisation of the analysed texts, where events are introduced through processes of thinking, evaluation and interpretation rather than through direct description.

The distribution of verb patterns observed in the corpus corresponds to the type of experience represented in the selected novels. All the texts are centred on the internal perspective of the protagonist, where events are not presented as independent actions but are continuously interpreted, reconsidered and evaluated. This is reflected in the high frequency of cognitive verbs, which organise the narrative through processes of reflection rather than through external events.

Across the novels, similar situations recur: uncertainty, hesitation, emotional tension, and the need to interpret one's own actions or the actions of others. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* and *I Heart New York*, narration develops through sequences where everyday events are constantly re-evaluated. In *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*, this takes the form of delayed understanding, where the narrator gradually reconstructs past experience. In *Beach Read*, reflection is closely connected with emotional and interpersonal development. Despite differences in plot and tone, the novels are united by the fact that events are introduced through internal processing rather than direct description.



Emotional experience in these texts is rarely presented as an isolated state. Instead, it is embedded in sequences of perception, physical reaction and reflection. Situations of tension are introduced through bodily and perceptual detail and only then interpreted through cognitive verbs. This creates a narrative structure in which emotion is not named directly but appears within a chain of responses. Such organisation corresponds to the observed combination of emotional and cognitive verbs in the corpus.

Another shared feature of the novels is the role of dialogue and reported speech. Narrative development frequently proceeds through the reproduction of utterances, which are introduced by reporting verbs. These sequences are not limited to communication between characters but include self-address and internal dialogue. As a result, the narrator's voice combines reporting and reflection, and the boundary between external speech and internal thought becomes less distinct.

Taken together, these features indicate that first-person narration in women-centred prose is organised around internal experience as the primary structuring principle. The recurrence of cognitive, emotional and reporting patterns reflects not only linguistic regularities but also a shared mode of representing experience. The novels differ in сюжет, tone and stylistic features, but they are united by a similar organisation of narrative, where meaning is constructed through processes of thinking, evaluation and interaction rather than through sequences of external events.

Conclusions. The analysis shows that first-person narration in women-centred prose is organised through recurrent verb patterns centred on cognitive verbs. Verbs such as *think*, *know*, *remember* and *realise* form the core of the narrative and are used in contexts of reflection and evaluation. Emotional and perceptual verbs occur in the same contexts and are combined with verbs of thinking. Reporting verbs, primarily *say*, are used in dialogue and reported speech. Across the analysed novels, narration develops through the representation of internal experience rather than through sequences of external events.

Perspectives of further research. Further research may involve expanding the corpus and conducting comparative analysis across women-centred prose.

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