"Philosophical Expression Through Language in Postmodern English Literature"

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Abstract

It argues that key postmodern features—skepticism toward metanarratives, intertextual play, metafictional architecture, semantic indeterminacy, and shifts across discourses—are primarily enacted at the level of language. The theoretical framework draws on accounts of linguistic self-reference, differential meaning, the redefinition of the author–text relation, and the reader's role in meaning production. Using a typological analysis of selected postmodern English novels and narrative strategies, the study demonstrates that language in postmodern texts is not a transparent medium reflecting "reality" but a productive mechanism that stages philosophical problems: plurality of truth, fragmented identity, the constructed nature of time and memory, and the limits of knowledge.

Keywords: postmodernism, English literature, philosophy of language, metafiction, intertextuality, discourse, semantic indeterminacy, reader-response, meaning production, narrative.

Аннотация

В исследовании рассматривается организация центральных особенностей постмодернистской поэтики, таких как сомнение в метанарративах, интертекстуальная игра, метафикциональная структура, семантическая неоднозначность и междискурсивные сдвиги, на лингвистическом уровне. В качестве теоретической основы выбраны самореферентность языка, дифференциация значений, переопределение отношения между «автором» и «текстом», а также роль «читателя» в производстве смысла. В качестве материала для анализа в типологическом подходе рассмотрен ряд примеров английской постмодернистской литературы (романы, использующие метафикцию и интертекстуальные методы). В результате установлено, что язык в постмодернистском литературном тексте является не прозрачным средством отражения «реальности», а механизмом для постановки и создания философских проблем (множественность истины, фрагментация идентичности, конструктивизм времени и памяти, пределы знания).

Ключевые слова: постмодернизм, английская литература, философия языка, метафикция, интертекстуализм, дискурс, семантическая неоднозначность, читатель, смыслообразование, повествование.

Annotatsiya: Tadqiqot doirasida postmodern poetikaning markaziy belgilaridan bo'lgan metanarrativlarga shubha, intertekstual o'yin, metafiksion struktura, semantik noaniqlik va diskurslararo ko'chishlar til darajasida qanday tashkil topishi yoritildi. Nazariy tayanch sifatida tilning o'z-o'ziga ishora qilishi, ma'no differensialligi, "muallif" va "matn" munosabatining qayta ta'riflanishi, shuningdek "o'quvchi"ning ma'no ishlab chiqarishdagi roli haqidagi qarashlar tanlandi. Tahlil materiali sifatida ingliz postmodern adabiyotining bir qator namunalari (metafiksiya va intertekstual usullar bilan ishlovchi romanlar) tipologik yondashuvda ko'rib chiqildi. Natijada postmodern adabiy matnda til "reallik"ni shaffof aks ettiruvchi vosita emas, balki falsafiy muammolarni (haqiqatning ko'pligi, identitetning parchalanishi, vaqt va xotira konstruksiyaligi, bilishning chegaralari) sahnalashtiradigan va ishlab chiqaradigan mexanizm ekani asoslandi.

Kalit so'zlar: postmodernizm, ingliz adabiyoti, til falsafasi, metafiksiya, intertekstualizm, diskurs, semantik noaniqlik, o'quvchi, ma'no ishlab chiqarish, narrativ.

In postmodern English literature, philosophical expression often emerges not through the direct articulation of an "idea," but through the staging of how language itself operates. Language here is not perceived as a simple communicative channel; rather, it functions as a medium in which meaning is produced, disrupted, multiplied, and problematized. Consequently, understanding a postmodern text requires analyzing not only

what the text says, but how it says it—at which points discourse exposes its own mechanisms, and through which strategies the reader is compelled to participate in the production of meaning. In postmodern prose, a "questioning" mode of narration prevails over an "assertive" one: processes such as the instability of fixed meaning, the slippage of reference, and the transformation of form into content embed philosophical inquiry within the internal logic of the text itself.The relevance of this article lies in the fact that philosophical expression through language in postmodern English literature is directly intertwined not only with aesthetics, but also with epistemology (the nature of knowledge), ontology (the status of being), and theories of the subject (the construction of identity). In postmodern texts, "truth" is usually not presented as a singular, finalized judgment; rather, it appears as a dispersed phenomenon spread across multiple discourses, quotations, narratives, and textual games. At this point, the intertextual nature of language, the problematization of the text itself through metafiction, and the systematic use of semantic indeterminacy become mechanisms that directly generate philosophical meaning.

Aim of the study: to reveal, through typological analysis, the mechanisms by which language becomes a vehicle of philosophical expression in postmodern English literature (metafiction, intertextuality, polyphony, parody, semantic slippage, and narrative self-reflexivity).

Objectives: to define the role of language in postmodern poetics on the basis of theoretical sources; to demonstrate how philosophical problems are "constructed" at the linguistic level in postmodern texts; to analyze the redistribution of the author–reader relationship; and to generalize the findings in order to describe linguopoetic models characteristic of postmodern English literature.The scientific novelty of the article lies in its systematic treatment of philosophical expression in postmodern English literature not as a separate "theme," but as a mode of linguistic operation. That is, philosophy in the text often emerges not through explicit ideological exposition, but through language's relationship to reference, the narrative's self-questioning stance, and the reader's obligatory participation in the production of meaning. The theoretical framework draws on poststructuralist approaches (the differential nature of language and deconstructive reading), the reinterpretation of authorship, and postmodern historicity (the constructed nature of historical narrative).

The research methodology integrates three complementary approaches: (1) theoretical–conceptual analysis; (2) typological–comparative analysis; and (3) linguopoetic observation based on elements of close reading. The theoretical–conceptual analysis synthesizes scholarly views on linguistic self-reflexivity, the differential nature of meaning, the reader–text relationship, and the pluralized mode of "truth" in postmodern narrative. The typological–comparative approach groups various examples of postmodern English prose within a unified framework of "language strategies" and demonstrates the relationship of each group to philosophical expression.

As empirical material, works of English postmodern prose characterized by strong metafictional and intertextual play were selected: the authorial intervention and multiple endings in John Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman; the intergeneric collage and quotation-based structure of A. S. Byatt's Possession; Julian Barnes's Flaubert's Parrot, which plays with the boundaries between biography, essay, and novel; as well as the criteria proposed by Linda Hutcheon within the framework of "historiographic metafiction" to address the problem of postmodern historicity. This selection is considered sufficient to illuminate the reconfiguration of the "author–text–reader" relationship and the problem-posing philosophical role of language.

The criteria for analysis were defined as follows:

(a) the distance and points of intersection between narrative instances (authorial voice, narrator, and character discourse);

(b) the function of intertextual signals (quotation, allusion, pastiche) in the production of meaning;

(c) strategies for creating semantic indeterminacy and polysemy;

(d) the ways in which the boundaries between "truth" and "interpretation" are dissolved within the text;

(e) the interpretative responsibility imposed on the reader.

The results of the analysis demonstrate that in postmodern English literature the role of language as a vehicle of philosophical expression can be systematized into five core models:

(1) metafictional self-reflexivity;

(2) intertextual plurality and the "archive of texts" model;

(3) semantic slippage and the disruption of determinism;
(4) the destabilization of authorship and the expansion of the reader's function;
(5) the reconstruction of historicity through language.

In the first model, metafiction rejects the "transparency" of language: the text openly exposes its own process of construction, juxtaposing the "world being narrated" with the "mechanism of narration." In Fowles's novel, the shifting position of the narrator and the multiplicity of endings make it difficult to perceive "reality" as a single cause-and-effect chain; as a result, the reader is compelled to understand being not through a definitive explanation, but through choice and probability. Fowles's authorial play—often interpreted as a form of "Godgame"—does not transform meaning into an explicit doctrine; instead, the limits of knowledge and the problematic nature of freedom are presented as an experiential process mediated through language and composition. The key implication here is that postmodern philosophical expression frequently emerges not in the form of a thesis, but through the reader's experience of navigating the narrative itself.The second model is associated with intertextual plurality. In postmodern English novels, the text often functions as a constellation of other texts—their echoes and rewritings. In A. S. Byatt's Possession, diverse genres (letters, diaries, scholarly commentary, poetry) are combined through a collage technique, which philosophically demonstrates that "truth" does not originate from a single authoritative source. The document-like fragments within the text may initially generate a sense of authenticity for the reader; however, their selection, arrangement, and annotation ultimately reveal that "truth" itself is a product of editing and interpretation. At this point, language—specifically intergeneric registers and stylistic codes—gives rise to an epistemological question: "Which discourse tells the truth?" As a result, the intertextual structure itself becomes the very mode of philosophical expression.The third model is characterized by the systematic production of semantic slippage and polysemy. In postmodern texts, the traditionally "stable" relationship between sign and referent is constantly precarious: words slide from one meaning to another, allusions open up multiple layers, and the reliability of the narrator is called into question. The differential regime of meaning emphasized by Derrida appears in such texts not merely as theory, but as practical poetics; meaning is not given in a "ready-made" form, but emerges within a network of differences. Derrida's well-known thesis "il n'y a pas de hors-texte" underscores the difficulty of locating a pure, self-evident "ground" outside the text (Derrida, 1976, p. 158). When read in the context of the postmodern novel, this idea does not lead to the simplistic conclusion that "everything is false," but rather to a philosophical condition in which meaning is always mediated, context-dependent, and open to interpretation. From the authorial perspective, this openness does not weaken artistic thought; on the contrary, it renders it multilayered and demands intellectual responsibility from the reader.The fourth model concerns the destabilization of authorship and the transformation of the reader into an active subject. In his essay "The Death of the Author," Barthes rejects the notion of authorial sovereignty and describes the text as a "tissue of quotations" (Barthes, 1977, p. 146). In postmodern English literature, this principle becomes artistic practice: the distance between the narrator's voice and the author's voice sometimes disappears, sometimes is deliberately widened; as a result, the reader is compelled to repeatedly ask the question, "Who is speaking?" This question is not merely technical, but philosophical: it foregrounds issues of the stability of the subject, the source of discourse, and the authority of interpretation. The reader thus shifts from a passive "recipient" to a "co-producer": filling textual gaps, negotiating contradictions, and sustaining multiple interpretive paths in parallel.The fifth model is explained through the reconstruction of "historicity" by means of language. Hutcheon demonstrates that in postmodern novels historical material functions not as "document," but as "narrative," meaning that history itself is shaped through modes of storytelling (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 105). Here, language becomes a vehicle of philosophical expression in two ways. First, historical facts appear within the text in edited, annotated, and structured forms, making their status as non-given, non-final truths perceptible. Second, linguistic registers resembling historical discourse are rendered through parody or pastiche, exposing the coded nature of "historical language" itself. As a result, in the postmodern English novel history is represented less as a fixed "past" than as an imagination constructed through language, intensifying ontological questions: how do we access past events, and who, through which language, renders them "present"?Taken together, these five models lead to a general conclusion: in postmodern English literature, philosophical expression is realized not so much through language's transmission of meaning as through its transformation of meaning into a problem. Language here functions not as a "mirror," but as a "laboratory": within the text, meaning is tested, disrupted, reconstructed, and multiplied.

Discussion of the Results. The discussion of the findings shows that the issue of philosophical expression through language in postmodern English literature converges around three major theoretical nodes:

(1) the problem of reference;

(2) the problem of the subject and authorship;

(3) the narrative nature of history, memory, and knowledge.

The first node centers on the problem of reference. Postmodern texts weaken confidence in language's ability to refer "directly" to external reality; however, this weakening does not amount to a rejection of realism. Rather, it demonstrates that reality itself always appears through interpretation and discourse. This position resonates with Lyotard's notion of skepticism toward metanarratives: when the grand explanatory narratives of modernity disintegrate, the legitimation of knowledge increasingly occurs through localized, language-bound games (Lyotard, 1984, p. 60). In literary practice, this is manifested, for example, through the collision of different discursive regimes within a novel, or through the mutual negation and fragmentation of multiple "languages of truth." From the authorial standpoint, this situation does not force the reader into relativism; on the contrary, by revealing that every claim is bound to language, context, and purpose, it strengthens a culture of critical reading.The second node concerns the issue of the subject and authorship. In postmodern English prose, the "I" often ceases to function as a stable center; instead, it is distributed across multiple styles, quotations, roles, and masks. This condition can be explained through Foucault's concept of the "author function," according to which the author operates less as a biological individual than as an organizing function within discourse (Foucault, 1984, p. 107). In literary texts, this function is frequently rendered in an ironic mode: the author's seemingly "authoritative" position appears to be reinforced, yet is simultaneously exposed and called into question. This strategy generates a philosophical inquiry: to whom does meaning belong, and where does it "reside"—in the author's intention, within the structure of the text, or in the activity of the reader?The third node is linked to the narrative nature of history, memory, and knowledge. In the postmodern English novel, memory functions not as an "archive," but as a process of narration: it is selective, fragmentary, and reconstructed through stylistic codes. Consequently, time in literary texts is often non-linear; retrospective fragments, parallel episodes, conditional endings, and the integration of document-like segments soften the boundary between the "past" and the "present." This, in turn, leads to an ontological problem: to what extent does an event's "having occurred" differ from its "having been narrated"? Postmodern texts frequently foreground this distinction, encouraging a cautious and reflective approach to historical knowledge.

In conclusion, it can be argued that linguistic strategies in postmodern English literature secure philosophical expression on two levels. On the first level, the text raises philosophical questions (truth, identity, time, knowledge). On the second level, the language and form of the text themselves become a demonstration of those questions, such that the reader not only reads about the philosophical problem, but experiences it in the very process of reading. For this reason, in postmodern poetics the function of language is not limited to "expression"; it organizes a "philosophical experience."

Conclusion

According to the findings of the study, in postmodern texts language functions not as a transparent medium, but as a mechanism for the production, questioning, and multiplication of meaning. Strategies such as metafiction, intertextual collage, semantic indeterminacy, the destabilization of authorship, and the narrativization of historicity directly "stage" philosophical problems within the text itself. In this process, the reader is not a passive recipient but is actively involved in the construction of meaning as an interpretive subject; philosophical content thus emerges not primarily through the exposition of ideas, but through the mode of linguistic operation and the experience of reading.

From a practical perspective, the study suggests that research on postmodern English literature should not be limited to thematic and plot-based analysis, but should instead foreground linguopoetic mechanisms such as narrative voices, registers, systems of quotation, intertextual markers, and semantic slippage. As directions for future research, it is proposed to analyze the language of the postmodern novel through corpus-based statistical and stylistic approaches, as well as to investigate reader reception using empirical methods (questionnaires, experiments). In this way, the study confirms that in postmodern English literature language is not merely a vehicle of philosophical expression, but its primary formative field.

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