

Types and Functions of Foregrounding in the Contemporary Flash Fiction Stories

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The theory of foregrounding occupies an important place in Stylistics. Foregrounding can be defined as the principle of text organization which is aimed at attracting the reader's (listener's) attention to the pragmatically significant parts of the message. In this paper, the techniques of foregrounding in the contemporary American flash fiction stories are investigated. As G. Leech singles out two aspects of foregrounding – quantitative and qualitative ones, the techniques of quantitative aspect such as stylistic convergence and parallelism in the stories are characterized. It is emphasized that convergence is the main technique of foregrounding in flash fiction. The components of convergences and the position of the foregrounded parts appear to be pragmatically important. The major type of qualitative aspect in the stories is deviation, mainly semantic and morphological deviation. The paper states that due to the presence of the foregrounded parts in strong positions the tropes in convergence acquire a conceptual character and become the conceptual metaphors of love, friendship, and sympathy. Thus, many of such stories can be described as modern parables. The prospects of further research of foregrounding are formulated.

Keywords: foregrounding, quantitative aspect, qualitative aspect, stylistic device, stylistic convergence deviation, parallelism.

1. Introduction

In his well-known book *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose* (1996) Mick Short called the first chapter in a peculiar way: *Who is Stylistics?* Short explains the personification in the title by the fact that he considers Stylistics a friend of his. I have the same attitude to this science.

Stylistics is a classical linguistic discipline which has its roots in Ancient Rhetoric. Stylistics has a long-established terminology and classification, but the recent decades have shown that it is a dynamically developing science. Simpson justly states that Stylistics in the early twenty-first century is very much alive and well (2004: 2). There are several reasons of significance and popularity of Stylistics at the present period. Firstly, as Busse notes (2010: 33), the last decades have seen a further division of Stylistics into such branches as Cognitive Stylistics, Multimodal Stylistics, Corpus Stylistics, Historic Stylistics, and Pragmatic Stylistics. Feminist Stylistics (Simpson 2004: 2) can be added to this list. Moreover, Stylistics gave birth to the development of Cognitive Linguistics after the appearance of the fundamental book *Metaphors We Live By* written by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Cognitive Poetics, which firstly developed as a branch of Stylistics, is now becoming an independent field of research due to the investigations of Stockwell (2002), Tsur (1992), Vorobyova (2004).

Secondly, Stylistics possesses a fundamental theoretical and methodological foundation which makes it possible to analyze new linguistic phenomena in the language of the Internet, mass media, and in modern literary fiction. One of such theories is **the theory of foregrounding**, the application of which to the investigation of contemporary short stories will be shown further on.

According to the definition of Busse and McIntyre, “Stylistics in the most general sense is the study of style in language and how this results from intralinguistic features of a text in

relation to non-linguistic factors such as author, genre, historic period, and so on” (Busse 2007: 6). In reference to literary texts, Leech characterizes Stylistics as the analysis of literary texts, using the linguistic technique (2007: 18). In such case, we deal with Stylistics of literary texts. In this article, I will apply the principles of stylistic analysis to the investigation of short stories. **The purpose** of the paper is to determine the types of the stylistic devices of foregrounding in the contemporary American flash fiction stories. **The significance** of the research lies in the fact that flash fiction as a genre of short stories is gaining a big popularity in the USA and other countries. These stories have not been investigated from the point of view of foregrounding effect. Therefore, such approach can help to determine the principles of emphasizing important ideas and their stylistic effect in the contemporary prose.

2. Methodology of research

The major contemporary scientists who contributed to the development of foregrounding theory are Short (1996), Leech (2007), Douthwaite (2000), Van Peer (2006), Arnold (2004). They suggested the classification of the types of foregrounding, describing some devices of foregrounding from stylistic and pragmatic viewpoints. My investigation of foregrounding is based, to a large extent, on the methodology of analysis of this stylistic phenomenon suggested by Douthwaite. He divided the process of analysis (or the algorithm) into three stages: 1) recognizing a foregrounded element; 2) identifying the linguistic nature of the foregrounding technique employed; and 3) interpreting the type of foregrounding in context (2000: 93).

In the process of investigating foregrounding, the following methods of analysis were employed. Firstly, the method of stylistic analysis of the foregrounded text parts. Foregrounded parts are “the parts of the text which the author, consciously or unconsciously, is signaling as crucial to our understanding of what he has written” (Short 1996: 36). Special attention was paid to such technique of foregrounding as stylistic convergence. Secondly, the elements of conceptual analysis were applied. The foregrounded text fragments contain stylistic devices which often acquire conceptual character. As Short puts it, when analyzing the text, “stylisticians try to discover not just *what* a text means, but also *how* it comes to mean what it does” (1996: 6). The foregrounded parts are stylistically and pragmatically significant to the author who, in such way, tries to emphasize his/her worldview, the picture of the world.

Thirdly, the method of contextual analysis was employed for determining the meanings of the foregrounded lexical units, in particular those used as lexical or semantic deviation. Also, the elements of statistical analysis were applied for characterizing the frequency of repetitions, what Short calls the cohesion of foregrounding (1996: 36-38). The statistical approach was useful for determining the most widely used techniques of foregrounding in the short stories. The genre of a very short story makes it possible for the writer to vividly realize his/her pragmatic intention as well as creativity and talent in a literary text. At the same time, the conclusion of Babelyuk seems very appropriate here. She considers that from the linguistic and stylistic points of view, “the conciseness of short texts is realized in the limited amount of foregrounding techniques per text unit, thus increasing the role of such techniques in the formation of the image-making and stylistic system of the text” (2009: 45).

3. Literature review

For the research of foregrounding, I chose the collection of short stories “Flash Fiction Forward”. I selected 28 stories out of 80 for analysis and interpretation. These texts contain the explicit manifestations of foregrounding. As it was mentioned, the investigation included determining the foregrounded parts (text fragments), identifying the type and the technique of foregrounding and interpreting the effect produced.

The theory of foregrounding is one of the foundations of Stylistics. The term “foregrounding” was borrowed from the art of painting where the foreground is the part of a painting which is the most prominent in the work of art. The theory owes much to the Russian formalists (Shklovsky 1917, 1988; Jakobson 1964) and the Prague School of Linguistics (Mukařovský 1964) who formulated the principle of making a literary text more noticeable. The suggested terms ‘vydvizheniye’ and, later, ‘aktualizace’, were translated into English by Garvin (1964) in 1960s as ‘foregrounding’. The theory of foregrounding was intended to explain and reveal the difference between poetic and everyday language.

Leading stylisticians give different definitions of foregrounding. Douthwaite gives a detailed definition: “Foregrounding is the general linguistic technique by which a marked linguistic expression is produced in order to make that expression convey a different meaning than its synonymic equivalent unmarked construction would have conveyed” (2000: 93). Another definition stresses the reader’s feedback: “Foregrounding is the ways of the text organization which focus the reader’s attention on certain elements of the message” (Arnold 2004: 99). In my opinion, the word “certain” in this formulation should be replaced by the words “significant” or “pragmatically important”. Thus, it is possible to state that foregrounding is the principle of a literary text organization which focuses the reader’s attention on the pragmatically important elements of the message.

There are several approaches to the classification of the foregrounding types. The first is suggested by Leech (2007: 38) and involves the division of this device into qualitative and quantitative aspects. **The qualitative aspect** is the deviation from the language code itself, a breach of some linguistic norm. **The quantitative aspect** involves the deviation of some expected frequency (Leech & Short 2007: 39).

The majority of stylisticians single out two basic principles of foregrounding – **deviation** and **parallelism** (Short 1996; Douthwaite 2000). Deviation can be phonetic, graphological, lexical, grammatical, and semantic (Short 1996: 36-58). Among the foregrounding techniques related to deviation, Van Peer & Hakemulder mention neologisms, live metaphors, oxymoron, paradox, archaisms, ungrammatical sentences (2006: 547). Parallelism is associated with the quantitative type of foregrounding. It involves the repetition of sentence structure and some words in several sentences. The quantitative aspect can manifest itself in not only syntactical, but also lexical and phonetic repetitions. The second approach involves determining the particular techniques of foregrounding. Arnold unites the most famous stylistic devices into a system and suggests that there are three major techniques (types) of foregrounding: 1) the effect of defeated expectancy; 2) coupling; 3) stylistic convergence (2004: 100-112).

The two classifications have much in common. Parallelism and coupling denote the same linguistic phenomenon – the use of the same or similar language units in similar positions. The effect of defeated expectancy (or anticipation) formulated by Jakobson (1964: 363) can be produced by different types of deviation, especially lexical deviation. The famous examples can be a well-known word *manunkind* created by Cummings (Arnold 2004: 136), the title of

the poem *Peoplization of America* by A. Lawrence devoted to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, or the most recent neologism *Brexshit* (mocking the word Brexit). However, in general, the effect of defeated expectancy is somewhat wider and can be observed in the unpredictable endings of humorous stories or detective novels.

The only difference in the two approaches is the device of **stylistic convergence**. According to Riffaterre, stylistic convergence is the accumulation of different stylistic devices which add expressiveness to each other (1967: 432). Convergences can include the combination of tropes with phonetical repetitions and/or syntactical structures, usually concentrated in one or several text fragments. My investigation of foregrounding in the poetical short stories by Kate Chopin and Dylan Thomas revealed that stylistic convergence is the most explicit example of the quantitative aspect of foregrounding, especially when original tropes interact with alliterations (Yemets 2012: 46, 55).

A significant factor in the investigation of foregrounding is the position of the foregrounded elements in literary texts. The famous formulation of strong positions (the title, the epigraph, the beginning, the ending) by Arnold (2004: 69-70) is very appropriate here. Strong positions are such text fragments where the language units acquire special importance. When convergences, parallelism, or different types of deviation are used in such strong positions as the beginning or the ending, it gives special emphasis to these text fragments.

4. Analysis of Foregrounding in Flash Fiction Stories

4.1 Stylistic convergence as a quantitative type of foregrounding

The American prose in the early 21st century reveals a clear tendency for creating shorter stories. Actually, it continues the tendency of the late 20th century with short-short stories, sudden fiction and, more recently, flash fiction. Three collections of flash fiction stories have been published in the USA and one in Australia – in 1992, 2006 and 2015. The collection *Flash Fiction Forward* (2006) includes the stories of the American writers, among them John Updike, Grace Paley, Don Shea. The 2015 collection *Flash Fiction International* contains the stories of writers from different countries, but the majority of them are British and American authors.

In this paper, I analyze the types and techniques of foregrounding from the collection *Flash Fiction Forward*. All the stories are written after the year 2,000. My choice is explained by the fact that this book contains real literary masterpieces and seems to be the best collection of stories of such genre.

A distinctive feature of foregrounding in these texts is that stylistic convergence functions mainly in strong positions, in particular in the endings (14 stories, or 78 per cent of the foregrounded texts) and in the beginning (4 stories, or 22 per cent). As flash fiction stories in the collection are small in size, mainly 2, maximum 3 pages long, the size of convergences is also small. In the majority of texts, convergences are contained in one or two last paragraphs, and only in the text *Travelling Alone* by Rob Carney the convergence embraces half a text.

At present, there is no detailed classification of stylistic convergence in scientific literature. I can suggest the following classification depending on the major components: tropeic-phonetic, tropeic-syntactic, tropeic-lexical. Thus, convergences can contain a minimum of two stylistic components – tropes (metaphor, simile, hyperbole, oxymoron, epithet); phonetic expressive means (alliteration, assonance, paronomasia); syntactic repetitions

(anaphora, enumeration, etc.); lexical stylistic devices (gradation, archaic words, neologisms, etc.).

In the collection *Flash Fiction Forward* tropeic-syntactic convergences prevail – 14 out of a total of 18 devices; 6 convergences include tropes and lexical devices, and only two convergences are tropeic-phonetic in the story *Travelling Along* by R. Carney.

The semantics of tropeic-syntactic convergences refers to human relations, emotions and feelings. One of the most touching flash fiction stories is “Bullhead” by Leigh Wilson. The narration reveals the feelings of pity and sympathy of the daughter to her mother. When the mother tells her a story of the love of her life, she always cries. Once a year, the mother rents a boat and goes out on the lake that drowned her hometown during the construction of the dam. The mother drops a coin in the water, just over the place where her old house could be and where she made love with the boy next door, the love of all her life. Later the boy moved with his family to Texas, and the mother never saw him. But the mother, a married woman with children, still remembers him and drops a coin as a symbol of memory every year. Fifty years – fifty coins. The last paragraph contains the tropeic-syntactic convergence which is not big in size: *Every story is true and a lie. The true part of this one is: Love and the memory of love can't be drowned. The lie part is that this is a good thing* (FFF 2006: 100). The most foregrounded element here is oxymoron *Every story is true and a lie* which reflects the paradoxical situation in the story and in many life situations. The quantitative aspect of foregrounding is also realized by the metaphors *love and the memory of love can't be drowned*, which are based on the transfer from abstract to concrete, parallel structures in two sentences and antithesis. Though the metaphor is not extended, it has conceptual character both in this paragraph and in the context of the whole story. The conceptual metaphor (CM) can be expressed as LOVE IS TIMELESS. The key word *love* is repeated in the story 10 times and creates cohesion of foregrounding.

One of the most brilliant flash fiction stories in this collection is *My Date with Neanderthal Woman* by David Galef. All the three foregrounding techniques are actualized in this text – deviation, parallelism and convergence. The stylistic convergence in the last strong position – the final paragraph – is not big in size either, but it contains various stylistic devices – metaphor, hyperbole, pun, antithesis and parallel constructions: *Yes, I know all the objections. Some couples are separated by decades, but we're separated by millennia. I like rock music and she likes the music of rocks. I'm modern Homo Sapiens and she's Neanderthal, but I think we can work out our differences if we try* (FFF 2006:111). In the whole story and in this fragment, the writer expresses the idea of tolerance and mutual understanding between people from different cultures. The contrast between the two people is shown ironically, especially in the description of Glena, the Neanderthal woman: *She nodded, then pointed to the chocolate and rubbed her belly; In fact, the little loincloth Glena wore, made me feel overdressed; Eventually, her hand crept into mine and nearly crushed it* (FFF 2006: 110-111). Despite the fact that antithesis becomes the leitmotif of the story, the final fragment, in its strong position, reflects the author's outlook most fully and suggests the idea of overcoming differences. Thus, the underlying CM can be expressed as CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IS NOT BARRIER TO LOVE.

In the story *A Patriotic Angel* by Mark Budman the tropeic-syntactic convergence also occupies the final position. The anthropomorphic metaphor DOLL IS LIKE HUMAN BEING becomes the leitmotif of the text. A lonely man talks with a doll, an angel in the supermarket, as if it were a human being. He asks questions typical for getting acquainted with a young

woman: “What will you play for me?”; “Are you working here? Or did they lay you off, too?” (FFF 2006: 157-158).

The device of gradation is at the center of the plot in *Oliver’s Evolution* written by John Updike. The author describes how a weak, vulnerable boy becomes a strong man, a backbone of the family when he feels the responsibility for his wife and his children. The stylistic convergence in the last paragraph is one of the smallest in size among the analyzed stories but it is very expressive: *You should see him now, with their two children, a fair little girl and a dark-haired boy. Oliver has grown broad, and holds the two of them at once. They are birds in the nest. He is a tree, a sheltering boulder. He is a protector of weak* (FFF 2006: 145). The convergence includes two metaphors, one of them extended, and parallel structures. The position of the foregrounding technique, the explicit, emotional expression of the writer’s attitude to the main character – all these factors make the metaphors not only very prominent, but also conceptual. This CM can be expressed as FATHER IS A STRONG TREE. Stylistic convergences in this story, like in the texts by Wilson and Galef, stress the spiritual family values in the artistic, image-making form.

Only in two flash fiction stories, can we see the tropeic-phonetic convergence – *Justice: A Beginning* by Grace Paley and *Traveling Alone* by Rob Carney. In Grace Paley’s text, the convergence is in another strong position – the beginning. The narrator, a member of the jury, describes the mother of the defendant with pity and sympathy: *She leaned on the witness bar, her face like a dying flower in its late-season, lank leafage of yellow hair, turning one way, then the other in the breeze and blast of justice. Like a sunflower maybe in mid-autumn, having given up on the sun, Faith thought, letting wind and weather move her heavy head* (FFF: 124). I give only the final part of the convergence, but the quantitative aspect of foregrounding is explicitly expressed by means of similes which develop into extended metaphors, and numerous alliterations in the adjacent components of tropes. Especially foregrounded is the repetition of the sound [l] in the similes. The tropes are conceptual in character as they reflect the conventional CM WOMAN IS A FLOWER, in particular its variety in relation to elderly women: OLD WOMAN IS A WITHERED FLOWER. The idea of pity, of tolerance and sympathy to the mother is the leitmotif of the story. At the same time, such combination of tropes and sound repetitions in the fragment make it a piece of poetical prose, very expressive and pragmatically significant.

While in the analyzed stories by Updike, Wilson, Galef, Paley as well as in majority of other texts of this collection (the stories by Don Shea, Dave Eggers, David Stevens), the quantitative type of foregrounding is actualized in the description of human emotions and relations, the story by Rob Carney reveals a man’s admiration of nature. It is in the description of such natural wonder as lightning that the writer creates stylistic convergence. The convergence is the biggest in size of all the stories and extends from the middle to the end of text (more than half a page): *Out the window was this giant cloud that looked like a lightning factory. You know, I mean, you should’ve seen it. It wasn’t shooting out lighting bulbs. They were all happening inside the cloud, so these areas would suddenly flash in the middle ... then somewhere else ...then pmm pmm pmm pmm pmm all in a row* (FFF: 224-225). The convergence begins with similes combined with alliteration and onomatopoeia; the other part of the convergence abounds in similes which continue as original extended metaphors creating some modern mythological picture: *And I mean, it really looked like a factory. [...] Like down there, in the middle, gods were working with hammers and anvils and bellows and wearing those helmets with a little strip of glass to look out of it. Like a cloudy furnace. Like the birthplace of light* (FFF: 225).

Here we can see that the tropeic-phonetic convergence also includes syntactic repetitions – polysyndeton, enumeration – and parallel structures. Actually, there are three techniques of foregrounding used in this convergence. But it proves that in a literary text the classification is not absolute. At the same time, in Carney's story the quantitative aspect of foregrounding is especially explicit, and the main role belongs to numerous similes and metaphors which have hyperbolic connotations. The natural phenomenon is shown as something majestic, immense and divine. The author seems to create modern mythology and the underlying conceptual metaphor actualized in this convergence can be expressed as **GODS ARE WORKERS**.

4.2. *Parallelism as a type of foregrounding*

Parallelism as a type of foregrounding is an important element of poetry, publicistic texts, and literary prose. In the collection of flash fiction stories the parallelism rule is especially evident in the story *To Reduce Your Likelihood of Murder* by Ander Monson. It is a very ironic text, a kind of warning or instruction to women and girls how to avoid being murdered. The following peculiarities can be observed in the use of parallelism. 1) The majority of sentences are imperative. Out of 60 sentences of the text, 28 sentences are negative-imperative and 10 sentences are imperative-emphatic with the verb *do*: *Do not go outside. Do not go outside, on dates, or to the store. Do not go on dates with men. Do not drive yourself to dates. Do carry mace. Do carry guns if you can get them* (FFF 2006: 142). 2) These parallel constructions also include another foregrounded device – syntactic anaphora, i.e. repetition of initial parts of sentences (*Do not ...*). 12 imperative sentences are parallel structures without anaphora: *Install alarm system on every window, every doorway in your house [...] Keep away from the windows at all times*.

This story is a brilliant example of the role of parallelism as the indicator of semantic synonymic relations between sentences and, as Short puts it (1996: 67-68), by relating the parts of the text together, it acts as a powerful device in the cohesion of foregrounding. Every sentence or every other group of parallel structures is emotionally stronger and shows a greater degree of reducing the possibility of murder: *Do not date your boy-friend. – Do not like so much. – Do not sleep deeply. – Do carry guns if you can get them. – Always travel in a crowd* (FFF: 141-142). Such technique of increasing alarm and tension creates **gradation** – an efficient stylistic device. Due to gradation, the situation seems absurd and ironic, it seems a young woman cannot live a normal life because she can be murdered.

The last paragraph of the story creates the effect of defeated expectancy: *Still you will be killed. You're born for it* (FFF: 142). So, the author concludes that all efforts in saving your life are futile. The ironic effect is created not only by the absurdity of advice (*Do not stay at home. Do not wear black*), but also by the redundancy of parallel structures which actualizes the quantitative aspect of foregrounding.

In the story by Stace Budzko *How to Set a House on Fire*, the main foregrounding technique is also parallelism. 16 out of 21 sentences are imperative, and 11 of them include polysyndeton, i.e. the repetition of conjunctions *before* and *after*: *Before you light the gas, light a cigarette [...]. Before this, walk through the ranch house with a miner's lamp [...]. Before leaving, make sure the hay bales drip with fuel* (FFF: 46.). Here parallel constructions underline some identity and sequence of actions.

Actually the same function – describing the sequence of actions, only in reverse order – is performed by parallel structures in the story *Currents* by Hannah Bottomy. Here the

cohesion of foregrounding is realized by syntactic anaphora in all paragraphs: *Before that, one of the girls held the hand of a wordless Filipino boy. – Before that, Gary saw the brown hair sink and resurface as the body bobbed* (FFF: 51-52). The story is tragic and tells about the emotions of people who tried to save a drowning boy.

An interesting example of parallelism on the text level can be seen in the story *Bullhead*. The first strong position, the initial paragraph, is connected with the last paragraph by frame repetition of the oxymoronic phrase *Every story is true and a lie*. I have analyzed the convergence in the ending with these words, so this connection is a manifestation of the cohesion of foregrounding. While in the initial fragment Wilson tries to surprise and interest the reader by the paradox, in the final paragraph conclusion is made as for positive and negative sides of such memory of love. However, the conclusion is somewhat ambivalent, and it is up to the reader to decide whether it is good or bad.

Frame repetition as a technique of foregrounding is realized on the macrolevel in Stacey Richter's story *Tiffany*. The initial words of the first paragraph "*Divide or die*" are repeated at the end of the paragraph: "*Divide or die*", *they elaborated* (FFF: 71). Similarly to the story by Wilson, here the cohesion of foregrounding helps to underline the main idea, the alternative for the main character.

Parallelism as a single type of foregrounding is not very typical for flash fiction, except the story by A. Monson. In some texts, parallelism is combined with extended metaphors, though it does not create convergence (the stories by Robert Coover, Eva Ginsburg and other texts): *The voices torment me [...]. – The voices used to talk to me about the Beatles [...]. – Sometimes the voices themselves don't know what they want* (Jack Handey, *The Voices in My Head*).

4.3 Deviation as a qualitative type of foregrounding

Deviation belongs to the qualitative type of foregrounding. It can be realized by means of different stylistic devices. However, in flash fiction stories, except semantic deviation, other types of this technique are observed only in some stories.

Semantic deviation is present in the paradoxical title of David Galef's story *My Date with Neanderthal Woman*. This title also realizes historical deviation, as people of two different periods cannot coexist. The oxymoron in the *Bullhead*, *Every story is true and a lie* has been discussed in this paper. A very peculiar example of semantic deviation can be observed in Don Shea's story *Jumper Down*. The author makes a paradoxical description of the man who committed suicide: *He was dead, but he hadn't died yet* (FFF: 18). The word *dead* here can be understood as "motionless": But further on, one more technique of qualitative aspect of foregrounding is used when one of the paramedics runs to the dying man and tells him the words of consolation: "*I just gotta tellya, I wanted you to know, that jump was fucking magnificent*" (FFF: 19). This type of deviation can be called pragmatic paradox (Yemets 2012: 59-60), because a person talks to a dead man who can't hear the paramedic. At the same time, such paradox produces a tragic but positive effect on the dying person, as the last words he hears are the words of praise.

Short (1996: 40-41) and other linguists consider metaphor as a technique of semantic deviation. In this paper I pay more attention to metaphors and other original tropes as components of stylistic convergences. In such cases, the interconnection and interaction of different types and techniques of foregrounding enhances the stylistic effect. As a separate technique of qualitative foregrounding and as a case of semantic deviation, metaphors are

particularly important when they are extended, when they embrace the whole text, becoming a compositional metaphor. In a number of stories such role is played by anthropomorphic metaphors. The story *The Orange* by Benjamin Rosenbaum is based on the ironic metaphor: *An orange ruled the world*. The ending is humorous and produces the effect of defeated expectancy: *I bought the orange who ruled the world for 39 cents [...]. Today, he told me: "It is time", and I ate him* (FFF: 135-139). The pots and the kettle in the text *The Kettle* by Eva Ginsburg are described as human beings with their thoughts, hates and envies, while the short story of J. David Stevens *The Death of the Short Story* begins with the anthropomorphic metaphor "*The Story's death caught us all off guard*". The metaphor extends through the whole text with the help of the words from the semantic field "Death": *eulogy, funeral, demise, outcry*, thus acquiring conceptual character.

5. Conclusions

The theory of foregrounding is one of the fundamental theories in stylistics. Two aspects of foregrounding are singled out – quantitative and qualitative aspects. Quantitative aspect can be realized by the redundancy of stylistic devices such as the concentration of these devices in some text fragments or by numerous lexical / syntactical repetitions. The most typical techniques of quantitative aspect of foregrounding are stylistic convergence and parallelism. Qualitative aspect often manifests itself as deviation represented by original tropes and lexical devices (neologisms, archaic words, etc.).

In this paper, the techniques of quantitative and qualitative aspects of foregrounding are analyzed in the contemporary American flash fiction stories. Flash fiction includes very short stories, 2-3 pages long, with mainly monological narration. Therefore, the techniques and effect of foregrounding are more explicit in these texts than in novels.

All in all, 28 stories in this collection include different types of foregrounding. The investigation shows that the major foregrounding technique is stylistic convergence which is realized in 18 texts. Parallelism in its different varieties is actualized in 11 stories. Various types of deviation as examples of the qualitative aspect of foregrounding can be found in 7 stories. In the stories by D. Galef, A. Monson, R. Carlson, L. Wilson, two techniques of foregrounding are employed.

The investigation showed that the most foregrounded device in these stories is stylistic convergence. Convergence functions in 18 out of 28 stories with foregrounding. A peculiar feature of convergences in flash fiction stories is that they are contained in strong positions, especially in the endings (14 stories). The endings of the texts often involve metaphors, antithesis, and syntactic repetitions, thus making the endings pragmatically significant and even poetical. The most common type of convergence is tropeic-syntactic (14 stories), where an important role is played by similes and metaphors, while tropeic-phonetic convergence is realized only in one story (R. Carney). What makes stylistic convergences especially meaningful is the conceptual character of metaphors in these foregrounded parts: *LOVE IS TIMELESS* (L. Wilson), *WOMAN IS A FLOWER* (G. Paley), *FATHER IS A STRONG TREE* (J. Updike), *GODS ARE WORKERS* (R. Carney).

Parallelism as a technique of foregrounding is particularly efficient when it is combined with polysyndeton and syntactic anaphora, as in the stories by A. Monson and S. Budzko. Frame repetition in the texts by L. Wilson and S. Richter creates the cohesion of foregrounding. However, in some stories parallel structures are components of convergences, and it

demonstrates the interaction of foregrounding techniques for producing a stronger aesthetic and pragmatic effect.

The most typical type of deviation as a technique of foregrounding in the analyzed flash fiction texts is semantic deviation. This deviation is realized in the strong positions – the paradoxical title of the story by D. Galef and in the tragic ending of the text by D. Shea. As a whole, semantic deviation is represented by the anthropomorphic extended metaphors (the stories by B. Rosenbaum, D. Stevens).

As my investigation reveals, foregrounding, especially its quantitative aspect, is not only a device of attracting the reader's attention, but also a signal, a trigger of pragmatically important information, of the writer's outlook. Foregrounding in flash fiction stories also fulfils an aesthetic function as it makes the stories or their endings the pieces of poetical prose. Due to these features, I could call these stories modern parables, parables of love, friendship, sympathy.

The prospects of further research can involve the investigation of foregrounding in the contemporary novels and publicistic texts.

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