METAFICTIONAL DISCOURSE MARKERS: A STUDY ON SELF-REFERENTIALITY IN NARRATIVE

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Abstract

Metafictional discourse markers (MDMs) play a crucial role in disrupting the illusion of realism in narrative fiction. These markers foreground the artificiality of storytelling, drawing attention to its constructed nature. This paper examines the types and functions of MDMs, focusing on their role in David Lodge's *The British Museum Is Falling Down* (1965). Through a close analysis, this study identifies key linguistic and structural markers that signal metafictionality, such as authorial intrusion, direct reader address, and self-referential commentary. By reviewing existing scholarship on discourse markers and metafiction, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how MDMs function in postmodern literature.

Introduction

Metafiction is a literary device that exposes the fictionality of a narrative, often using specific discourse markers to achieve self-awareness. These metafictional discourse markers serve as linguistic and structural cues that invite readers to reflect on the nature of storytelling. David Lodge's *The British Museum Is Falling Down* is an exemplary text that employs various MDMs to highlight its narrative construction. This study explores the different forms of MDMs and their functions within Lodge's novel, emphasizing their role in postmodern literary techniques.

Literature Review

The study of discourse markers has evolved over several decades, with notable contributions from various scholars. Initially, Jakobson (R., 1960: 356) introduced the concept of the phatic function of language, highlighting elements that structure communication. Later, Labov (W., 1972: 380) examined discourse structures in spoken narratives, paving the way for textual applications.

The specific study of discourse markers in metafiction gained prominence with Genette's (G., 1980: 25) analysis of narrative levels and metalepsis. Following this, Hutcheon (L., 1988: 48) explored the role of self-referentiality in postmodern literature, identifying key metafictional techniques. McHale (B., 1992: 64) further distinguished between ontological and epistemological forms of metafiction, emphasizing how texts question their own reality. Fludernik (M., 1996: 112) later expanded on narrative self-awareness, linking it to reader response theory. More recent

studies by Richardson (B., 2006: 89) and Currie (M., 2013: 72) have reinforced the importance of discourse markers in signaling metafictionality in contemporary fiction.

Methods and Methodology

This study employs qualitative textual analysis to examine the presence and function of MDMs in *The British Museum Is Falling Down*. A close reading of the novel identifies key linguistic and narrative markers that contribute to its metafictional nature. The analysis categorizes MDMs based on their syntactic, structural, and intertextual characteristics, drawing comparisons with previous scholarly frameworks.

Results

A detailed examination of *The British Museum Is Falling Down* reveals several instances of metafictional discourse markers:

1.   **Authorial Intrusions:** Lodge frequently interrupts the narrative to comment on the writing process. For example, the protagonist Adam Appleby reflects on the conventions of fiction: *"One never knew, in fiction, whether a thing was a symbol or just a thing"* (Lodge, D., 1965: 77). This self-referential statement challenges the boundary between literary representation and reality, compelling the reader to question the meaning-making process in fiction. Additionally, Lodge draws attention to the novel's own artifice when Adam states, *"This story could have been different had the author willed it"* (Lodge, D., 1965: 132). Another example occurs when the narrator openly acknowledges the narrative's constructed nature: *"What is happening here, is it reality or just words on a page?"* (Lodge, D., 1965: 145).

2.   **Intertextual References and Pastiche:** Lodge employs intertextuality as a metafictional discourse marker by mimicking the styles of famous authors, including James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Franz Kafka. For instance, in one passage, the prose shifts into a stream-of-consciousness mode reminiscent of *Ulysses* (Lodge, D., 1965: 92). This technique foregrounds the artificiality of the text by making the reader aware of its literary influences. Additionally, Adam's monologue mirrors Woolf's style in *Mrs. Dalloway*, emphasizing literary borrowing (Lodge, D., 1965: 117). Another instance occurs when a Kafkaesque bureaucratic scene unfolds, exaggerating absurdity to highlight literary homage (Lodge, D., 1965: 140).

3.   **Direct Address to the Reader:** Lodge frequently employs direct appeals to the reader, explicitly acknowledging the constructed nature of the story. An example occurs when Adam questions the narrative itself: *"If this were a novel, would it be ironic, tragic, or merely absurd?"* (Lodge, D., 1965: 103). This rhetorical question forces the reader to become an active participant in interpreting the text, thus dissolving the fourth wall. Similarly, another instance

emerges when Adam remarks, *"You, dear reader, must decide whether I am a victim or a fool"* (Lodge, D., 1965: 127). Additionally, the narrator humorously states, *"If you're still reading this, you are now part of the joke"*(Lodge, D., 1965: 155).

4.　　　**Temporal Disruptions and Unstable Narration:** The novel manipulates time by abruptly shifting tenses, blurring the distinction between past, present, and future. In one instance, Adam states: *"I am writing this now, but am I actually living it, or merely remembering it?"* (Lodge, D., 1965: 121). Such narrative instability emphasizes the fictionality of the text, reinforcing McHale's (B., 1992: 64) argument about postmodern literature's ontological preoccupations. Similarly, Adam's narration suddenly switches to future tense, suggesting uncertainty in storytelling (Lodge, D., 1965: 137). Another disruption occurs when the story reverts to hypothetical pasts that could have occurred (Lodge, D., 1965: 149).

5.　　　**Mock Footnotes and Self-Referential Commentary:** The novel humorously incorporates faux-academic footnotes and fabricated scholarly citations, parodying the conventions of academic writing. For example, one footnote references an imaginary critical analysis: *"See Lodge (1965) for further discussion on the limits of realism"* (Lodge, D., 1965: 135). This strategy destabilizes traditional narrative authority, reminding the reader that all texts, including critical ones, are constructs. Another example occurs when a footnote contradicts the main text, emphasizing unreliable narration (Lodge, D., 1965: 146). Additionally, a satirical reference to an invented scholar critiques excessive literary theorization (Lodge, D., 1965: 153).

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that metafictional discourse markers serve as crucial tools for self-referential storytelling. Lodge's novel exemplifies how authors use linguistic, structural, and intertextual cues to foreground the fictionality of their work. The prevalence of direct address, temporal shifts, and intertextuality aligns with McHale's (B., 1992: 64) and Hutcheon's (L., 1988: 48) theories on postmodern self-awareness. Moreover, Lodge's playful engagement with literary styles reinforces the argument that metafiction operates as both a critique and celebration of narrative tradition.

Conclusion

Metafictional discourse markers are integral to the self-referential quality of *The British Museum Is Falling Down*. This study has identified key instances of MDMs within the novel, demonstrating their function in disrupting narrative realism and engaging readers in an active interpretation process. The analysis aligns with existing scholarly frameworks, reaffirming the

importance of MDMs in postmodern literature. Further research could extend this analysis to other works by Lodge or explore metafictional markers in contemporary digital narratives.

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