

“DOUBT OVER CERTAINTY”: FREE INDIRECT SPEECH AS A MARKER OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS IN ROBERT HARRIS’S *CONCLAVE*

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The article addresses the lexical, grammatical and stylistic features of the functioning of free indirect speech (FIS) in Robert Harris's novel *Conclave*. FIS emerges as a pivotal linguo-stylistic device in Robert Harris's writing, primarily because it merges the detached perspective of a third-person narrator with Cardinal Lomeli's intimate internal struggles. By using this dual-voice technique, Robert Harris adds psychological depth to the story, paving the way for a complex analysis of inner conflict and the breakdown of strict religious rules. The relevance of the study is determined by the need to examine free indirect speech not only as a syntactic phenomenon, but also as a powerful cognitive and stylistic tool for representing a character's psychological drama and social criticism in contemporary English-language prose. The aim of this study is to explore how specific language features of free indirect speech are used in Robert Harris's *Conclave* to illustrate Cardinal Lomeli's state of mind. The objectives of the paper are as follows: to outline the concept of FIS, to reveal the peculiarities of the use of epistemic modality; to detect grammatical and stylistic markers of psychological crisis; and to statistically prove the prevalence of uncertainty in the text. The following research methods were used in this study: the descriptive method; the method of lexical-semantic and stylistic analysis; contextual-interpretative analysis; and the method of quantitative calculations and the comparison of the data obtained. The study pays particular attention to how syntactic fragmentation and lexical variety within FIS reflect the protagonist's inner conflict against the backdrop of the Vatican environment. The results of the research indicate that markers of doubt, as well as the implicit complexity of the text, are the main linguistic mechanisms for representing a crisis of faith and a shift in religious worldview.

“DOUBT OVER CERTAINTY”: НЕВЛАСНЕ-ПРЯМЕ МОВЛЕННЯ ЯК МАРКЕР ПСИХОЛОГІЧНОЇ КРИЗИ У РОМАНІ РОБЕРТА ГАРРІСА «CONCLAVE»

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Ключові слова: *невласне-пряме мовлення, наратор, персонаж, синтаксичні маркери, стилістичні маркери, лексична варіативність, епістемічна модальність, Роберт Гарріс.*

У статті окреслено лексичні, граматичні та стилістичні особливості використання невластне-прямого мовлення (НПМ) у романі Роберта Гарріса «Conclave». НПМ виступає ключовим лінгвостилістичним засобом у творчості Роберта Гарріса. Адже насамперед НПМ поєднує об'єктивну точку зору оповідача від третьої особи з особистими внутрішніми конфліктами кардинала Ломелі. Підкреслено, що завдяки техніці подвійного голосу Роберт Гарріс надає оповіді психологічної глибини, створюючи передумови для комплексного аналізу внутрішнього конфлікту та руйнування суворих релігійних правил. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена необхідністю розглянути невластне-пряме мовлення не лише як синтаксичне явище, а й як потужний когнітивний і стилістичний засіб для відображення психологічної драми персонажа та соціальної критики в сучасній англомовній прозі. Дослідження має на меті встановити специфіку лексико-стилістичних характеристик НПМ для зображення психологічного стану кардинала Ломелі в романі Роберта Гарріса «Conclave». Виокремлено такі завдання: окреслити поняття НПМ, розкрити особливості використання епістемічної модальності; виявити граматичні та стилістичні маркери психологічної кризи; а також довести статистично перевагу сумніву над впевненістю. У роботі використано такі методи дослідження: описовий метод; метод лексико-семантичного та стилістичного аналізу; контекстуально-інтерпретаційний аналіз; метод кількісних підрахунків. Особлива увага звернена на синтаксичну розірваність та лексичну варіативність у межах НПМ, що відображають внутрішній конфлікт головного героя на тлі подій Ватикану. Результати дослідження свідчать про те, що маркери сумніву, а також імпліцитне ускладнення тексту є основними лінгвістичними механізмами репрезентації кризи віри та зміни світогляду щодо релігії.

Introduction. Free indirect speech (FIS) is widely recognized in modern linguistics and narratology as a powerful cognitive and stylistic device used by the narrator who combines their own objectivity with the character's subjective experiences. Traditional linguistic studies on FIS (I. Bekhta, G. Leech, M. Short, E. Rundquist, A. Benfield, E. Semino) have centered on 19th- and 20th-century literature. Today, modern prose provides new narrative frameworks to explore specific emotional states. Consequently, the relevance of this study lies in addressing a specific academic gap: the comprehensive linguistic-stylistic analysis of FIS as a tool for revealing the doubt over certainty paradigm in

modern fiction, particularly as a mechanism for depicting inner psychological drama against the backdrop of an institutional crisis.

The specific features of how epistemic modality and syntactic constructions require further investigation in order to understand the mechanisms involved in capturing the reader's interest. Such research enables the identification of the ways in which FIS is used to convey unspoken utterances.

The concept of «free indirect discourse» functions as a broader umbrella term, encompassing the categories of free indirect thought and free indirect speech. FIS captures character's unspoken utterances to an addressee, whereas FIT expresses only

the internal monologue, reflections and emotions, which remain within the protagonist's mind (Leech & Short, 2007; Lukšić, 2017).

At its core, FIS is a narrative technique that merges the narrator's grammatical framework, specifically through verb tenses and personal pronouns, with the subjective thoughts and emotional perspective of a character. The academic proposes that FIS creates the illusion of capturing a character's unspoken mental states and turning them into text (Rundquist, 2017).

This technique serves to convey intense emotions, such as anxiety, confusion, surprise, doubt, anger, joy or regret, of a character who is unable to express them verbally. FIS is interpreted as a character's speech, woven into the narrator's account, which at the same time retains the characteristics of a live utterance. Moreover, FIS fulfils an important stylistic function in a literary text, as this form allows the character's worldview to be presented without direct quotation and creates a distinctive mode of expression that combines the author's perspective with the character's individual speech (Bekhta, 2012).

FIS is distinct from other types of speech reproduction in the following features: the absence of quotation marks and attributive structures, deictic shifts (temporal, spatial, pronominal), evaluative vocabulary, epistemic modality and expressive coordination (the subjective expressiveness of the narrative is retained through emotional, tonal and lexical features) (Leech & Short, 2007, 2010).

FIS becomes a manifestation of linguistic layering, a synthesis of different perspectives and narrative strategies. The free indirect constructions are based on the interpenetration of the narrator's and the character's discourse, as well as on the superimposition of the author's and the character's points of view (Bekhta, 2004). The FIS form is defined by the manner in which the character's perspective is reproduced, as seen through the prism of the narrator's perspective. In other words, an effect of duality or a two-voiced narrative is created.

Moreover, M. Toolan concludes that epistemic modal adverbs are effective in creating the impression of a dual perspective in free indirect structures, where the reader senses both the narrator's presence and the character's internal reactions to the surrounding reality (Toolan, 2007).

It is widely acknowledged that the structure of FIS contains individual words, phrases, sentences or larger text fragments. First and foremost, in pronominal-temporal transposition, we observe the use of third-person singular pronouns in combination with past verb forms. Preference is given to subjective-evaluative vocabulary, for example, colloquial elements, affirmative and negative statements,

interrogative sentences, repetitions. Stylistic markers of FIS most commonly include ellipsis, aposiopesis, anaphora, alliteration, assonance, rhetorical questions, direct addresses, and exclamations (Fludernik, 1993; Banfield, 1982; Khan et al., 2024).

This paper aims to investigate the linguistic markers of FIS that objectify the paradigm of doubt over certainty within Cardinal Lomeli's consciousness in Harris's novel *Conclave*. To achieve the set goal, the following tasks were accomplished:

- to examine how the stylistic duality of FIS functions as a narrative mechanism to reveal the protagonist's psychological crisis;
- to identify the core lexico-semantic markers of doubt in free indirect combinations, specifically focusing on the role of epistemic modal lexemes;
- to analyze grammatical and syntactic patterns, namely hypothetical models, rhetorical questions, deictic shifts, and fragmentation;
- to evaluate the extracted examples to prove the statistical dominance of uncertainty markers.

Material and Methods. The material for this study comprises the text of Robert Harris's novel *Conclave*. Robert Harris is an outstanding English writer of political and historical fiction, whose works have frequently been adapted into successful films. In terms of genre, *Conclave* is a psychological and political thriller, set in a confined space where the main battlefield is the mind of the protagonist. A total of 97 contextual fragments containing FIS were extracted. The research employs a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative analysis. First, the qualitative part uses descriptive, lexical-semantic and syntactic methods to investigate the text. Combined with contextual interpretation, this approach helps identify specific markers of FIS (such as deictic shifts and rhetorical figures) and reveals the character's hidden cognitive states. Second, to confirm these findings, a quantitative method is applied to the 97 selected instances. This involves calculating the frequency of specific words and grammatical models to statistically demonstrate the predominance of uncertainty markers.

Results and Discussion. Robert Harris succeeds in presenting to the reader the consciousness of the novel's main protagonist, the Dean of the College of Cardinals, Jacopo Lomeli. Lomeli's innermost thoughts turn out to contradict the image of a high-ranking religious figure a reader could typically expect. Since the reader could logically or perhaps idealistically assume that the papal conclave is conducted honestly and transparently and the electors adhere to Christian laws, such expectations are subverted. An enormous responsibility for organizing the papal conclave falls on the Cardinal's shoulders. Lomeli experiences a crisis of faith and even

submits a letter of resignation, though the Pope does not accept it at the time; consequently, this leads to profound doubts about his own faith and the Church as a whole. The novel focuses specifically on Lomeli's inner experience, his struggle with doubts, which reveals a crisis, prolonged internal conflicts and a desire to know the answers to countless unspoken questions.

The analysis of Robert Harris's novel *Conclave* reveals that the representation of Lomeli's consciousness is mainly covered by free indirect speech. This is perfectly illustrated in the extract where the protagonist observes other candidates, ponders over Adeyemi's popularity amongst the cardinals and acknowledges his ability to lead the Church: «*Perhaps he was indeed the candidate to unite the Church. He certainly had the largeness of personality required to fill St Peter's Throne*» (Harris, 2016:164). Here, we can observe the core elements of indirect speech, namely: third-person pronoun, past tense, absence of quotation marks and explicit reporting tags, epistemic modality (perhaps, certainly).

The effect of duality, where the author's objective voice blends seamlessly with Cardinal Lomeli's subjective reflections, can be seen in the following excerpt: «*Lomeli wondered what thoughts must be passing through his mind at the prospect. He was far too lofty for gossip or intrigue*» (Harris, 2016: 55). We trace the narrator's voice confirms the protagonist's state of cognitive exploration through the use of the verb *wondered* and the modal verb *must*. However, the second sentence demonstrates not an objective character sketch by the author but an internal utterance of Lomeli himself. Hence, through FIS, Robert Harris shows how Lomeli attempts to overcome his own doubt by relying on an illusory confidence in the perfection of his colleagues.

In *Conclave*, there is frequent use of lexical patterns such as adverbial elements at the beginning of sentences, epistemic lexemes and parenthetical phrases, which lend an emotional and personal tone to the narrative. Lexical structures involving polyphony, empathy, irony and spontaneous reflections of consciousness are prominent in this narrative.

Due to isolation, intrigue, corruption schemes and fabricated stories, Lomeli's mind becomes filled with paranoia. Linguistically, this is expressed through epistemic lexemes: *perhaps, maybe, no doubt, sure, might, could, would, possible, be likely to, probably, certainly*. In the analyzed fragments of FIS, we observe an accumulation of modal phrases: «*No doubt they were trying to memorize the figures... Or perhaps they were simply savouring the only record there would ever be...*» (Harris, 2016: 152); «*A pair of dark eyes were watching him. Perhaps the fellow*

could lip-read? Anything was possible» (Harris, 2016: 286). These modal words indicate a shift in Lomeli's consciousness from the stage of observation to a stream of hypotheses. At first, the Cardinal expresses distrust of his colleagues, who might have been spreading rumours. In the second example, Lomeli doubts whether the bus driver could have overheard the conversation with Bellini about the crisis in the Church. He clearly did not want the outside world to know the truth that the voters were unable to reach a decision, given that there had already been as many as six ballots.

During the study, we felt the need to highlight the development of the paradigm of doubt over certainty. It illustrates a shift away from dogmatic beliefs, which can lead to intellectual stagnation and foster dogmatism. In *Conclave*, doubt functions as a tool for active self-reflection, ultimately leading to the shattering of the illusion of certainty. Lomeli finds himself at the centre of responsibility, discovery and deception, with various circumstances only increasing his distrust. The painful transition from dogmatic conviction to doubt is presented as an awakening. It is precisely in the FIS that Harris shows that an environment corrupted by the certainty of ambition and impunity triggers the emergence of doubt, which becomes the sole mechanism for Lomeli to maintain moral clarity.

An analysis of the lexemes in the structures of FIS identifies the lexical-semantic group that confirms a clear predominance of doubt over certainty. Quantitative analysis indicates a dominance of characteristics of hypotheticality and epistemic modality. The highest frequency is attributed to the modal verbs of the conditional mood *would* – 30% and *could* – 18%, as well as the epistemic adverb *perhaps* – 14.4% (see Figure 1). In light of these findings, Lomeli's thinking occurs mainly on a hypothetical level. His consciousness is not based on religious dogma, but instead constantly develops alternative scenarios, assumptions and doubts. We observe that lexemes expressing absolute certainty account for only 12%. This significant imbalance is evidence of the Cardinal's lack of faith. It shows the vulnerability of a person in doubt, marking a deep psychological rift in Lomeli's consciousness.

Beyond lexical choices, the paradigm of doubt over certainty in Lomeli's narrative is structurally embedded through complex grammatical and stylistic shifts. One of the notable syntactic markers of FIS in the analysed examples is temporal deixis, where present-oriented temporal indicators are deliberately combined with past-tense narration. The purpose of this is to reflect the protagonist's cognitive dissonance, which occurs in real

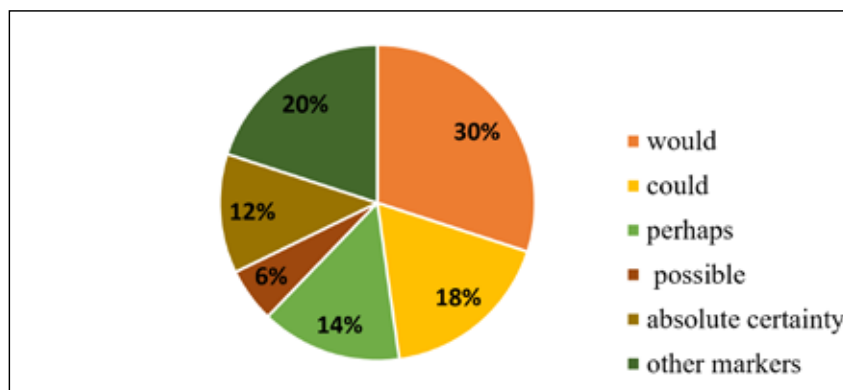


Fig. 1. Frequency of modal words and adverbs in FIS

time. This technique clearly conveys the tension between the inevitability of the event and the protagonist's deep uncertainty: «*Now that the moment had arrived, he was not sure what name to write*» (Harris, 2016: 294). While the narrator sets the scene using past-tense verbs, the deictic marker **now** immerses us into Lomeli's mind. By merging these two perspectives, the grammar itself illustrates his internal crisis and profound state of doubt.

Furthermore, the protagonist's inner turmoil is often conveyed through subjunctive clauses. For example: «*If only he had experienced life in an ordinary parish, just for a year or two!*» (Harris, 2016: 38). We see Lomeli's doubts about his own competence. As the second-highest authority after the Pope, he becomes responsible for the crucial election of a successor, as a crisis within the Church begins to take shape. The cardinals are very concerned that the voting might be delayed for a long period, which could expose a rift publicly. The hypothetical wish, expressed in an exclamatory manner, reveals to the reader Jacopo's true emotions and aspirations.

A parallel example can be found in next sentences: «*On past form, if he was not careful, he would have to take to his bed for a day or two. Perhaps he should?*» (Harris, 2016: 265); «*It was hard not to be impressed. If a man had that strong a sense of destiny, perhaps he had indeed been chosen? Perhaps he had been given a sign, invisible to the rest of them?*» (Harris, 2016: 55). It is important to mention that Harris is prone to adding modal phrases after conditionals. This method creates a double layer of doubt. Cardinal Lomeli can no longer endure the stressful reality. He fails to keep track of the objective facts and therefore begins to construct hypothetical scenarios in his mind.

One of the most striking stylistic markers of Lomeli's psychological crisis is the implementation of rhetorical questions within FIS. This syntactic

device allows the author to convey the character's inner dialogue and moral dilemmas without directly introducing verbs of perception. The following example is illustrative, in which Cardinal reflects on the nature of power and human ambition during the papal election:

«*Who could blame a man if he felt exhilarated at the prospect of being the vehicle of such a manifestation of the Divine Will?*» (Harris, 2016: 158). Lomeli attempts to overcome his own doubts regarding the purity of the candidates' motives. This clash between vocabulary items **exhilarated** and **Divine Will** gives rise to the protagonist's cognitive and existential dissonance.

In addition, repeated rhetorical questions serve as a powerful device in the text. Throughout the work, rhetorical questioning emerges as a structural marker of profound uncertainty, a dynamic perfectly captured in the following excerpts: «*What if God had a plan for him? Could that explain why he had been seized by that extraordinary impulse in St Peter's?*» (Harris, 2016: 127); «*How were they to continue with their deliberations after what had occurred? But equally, how were they to stop?*» (Harris, 2016: 321); «*What sin therefore did she have to confess? Where was her guilt?*» (Harris, 2016: 201). The character's rational thinking is literally paralyzed. Through FIS, we can trace how Lomeli's consciousness may split. He desperately tries to find a foothold, which has led to a sense of loneliness and psychological vulnerability. The technique of rhetorical questions succeeds in recreating the dialogisation of Lomeli's consciousness, where there is no boundary between the narrator and the protagonist.

The following passage reflects this dynamic particularly well: «*He contemplated the mess. Shavings, sawdust, crates, cartons, strips of underlay. Particles of timber and fabric swirling in the shafts of light. Hammering. Sawing. Drilling. He felt suddenly appalled. Chaos. Unholy chaos. Like a*

building site. And in the Sistine Chapel!» (Harris, 2016: 215). In the process of preparing for the election in the Sistine Chapel, Lomeli experiences not only the external chaos of the temporary structure

being erected in the historical building but an inner spiritual turmoil as well. Through fragmentation and nominative sentences, Harris reflects Lomeli's inner conflict.

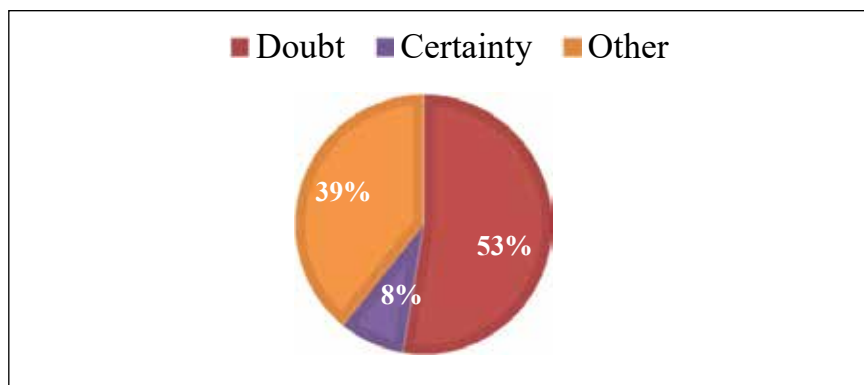


Fig. 2. Percentage of free indirect markers in *Conclave*

To study and systematize FIS used in the novel, an analysis was conducted on 97 instances of free indirect speech. The statistical distribution presented in Figure 2. yields the following results: markers of doubt constitute the majority – 52.6% in the character's cognitive dimension, whilst markers of certainty account for only 8.2%. In an institution where absolute dogmatic certainty is a fundamental requirement of a leader, the protagonist's consciousness is dominated by hesitation, epistemic ambiguity and questions. The remaining 39.2% consist of neutral or descriptive parts of the internal narrative. Ultimately, this analysis reinforces the pragmatic function of FIS in the novel: it quantitatively exposes the profound dissonance between the public façade of a confident Catholic cardinal and the reality of a deeply conflicted, doubting private individual.

Conclusions. The linguistic analysis of free indirect speech in Robert Harris's *Conclave* demonstrates that narrative duality is heavily utilized to reflect Cardinal Lomeli's internal psychological crisis. The transition of the protagonist's worldview is linguistically framed through the emergence of the paradigm of doubt over certainty. Quantitative analysis shows that markers of doubt in internal unspoken speech predominate over the lexicon of certainty, confirming the doubt over certainty paradigm. Lexically, this is realized through a high density of epistemic modal lexemes. Syntactically, Lomeli's cognitive dissonance is conveyed via unrealistic and hypothetical models, high-frequency rhetorical questions and syntactic fragmentation. Furthermore, deictic shifts successfully blur the boundaries between the narrator's objective report and the character's subjective panic.

Ultimately, doubt in *Conclave* is not presented as a linguistic weakness, but as a complex cognitive tool. Future research could explore a comparative analysis of FIS alongside alternative forms of representing another's speech and thought, investigating how various discourse strategies objectify cognitive dissonance in modern literature.

Конфлікт інтересів: Бистров Я. є головним редактором журналу. Для забезпечення незалежності редакційного процесу рукопис розглядався уповноваженим редактором, який не перебував у підпорядкуванні автора та не мав конфлікту інтересів. Автор не брав участі у відборі рецензентів, процесі рецензування та прийнятті рішення щодо публікації статті. Рукопис пройшов стандартну процедуру подвійного сліпого рецензування.

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