The Construal Configurations of Speakers' Subjectivity in Narrative Fictions

Junling Zhang

College of International Studies, Southwest University, Chongqing, China

Abstract—The paper examines different degrees of the subjectivity of speakers who act respectively as a narrator, a character in the story, and the author in narrative fictions. According to the speaker's four different cases of being on stage, off stage, whether serving as a reference point and cross-world identification, eight types of construal configurations of speaker's subjectivity have been summarized. Findings show that the speaker is characterized to be maximally subjective when he/she is an author, and minimally subjective when he/she is a character in the story. The degree of speaker's subjectivity is greater outside the story than that inside it, and it is also greater when he/she is being weakly perceived than that being strongly perceived. Overall, each configuration is a particular narrative strategy adopted by the author to achieve certain effects, and these configurations, to some extent, provide some cognitive interpretations for these achieved narrative effects.

Index Terms—narrative fictions, speaker's subjectivity, construal configurations, narrative strategies and effects

I. INTRODUCTION

The discourse expression is bound to bear the imprint of the speaker, which usually reflects the speaker's attitude, beliefs, and emotions, namely the speaker's subjectivity (Stein & Wright, 1995; Lyons, 1995; Langacker, 1985, 2008, 2013). However, with regard to the subjectivity's definition, scholars have made elaborations from their own research fields and have not reached a consensus. The subjectivity discussed in this paper is based on the speaker's perspective or construe of situations under the framework of Langacker's cognitive grammar. He has summed up five configurations of the speaker's subjective construe. Although these configurations focus on how the conceptual content activated by the speaker's linguistic expression is recognized in real situations, these findings have provided insights for this research on speakers' subjective construe configurations in fictional narrative texts.

The discussion of the speaker's identity has always been the focus of narratology. In narrative fictions, the speaker's identity can be either the author, the narrator, or even a character in the story, which is complex and changeable. While narrative voices are also explicitly discussed in the literature, "assuming that different forms in language are used in subtly different ways to represent the world, is a theoretical position that permits the linguistic analysis of literary texts" (Gylan & Sjölin, 2012, p. 88). Literary discourse is also a way for humans to express themselves, and cognitive grammar emphasizes the central role of meaning, which is crucial for analyzing literary discourse (Langacker, 2014). And "If CG is truly usage-based, it should be directly applicable to the language of literature. Literature is certainly a 'use of language', linguistically encoded by the particular choices made by, and through the competence of, an author" (Harrison, 2017, p. 2). As an important part of literary discourse, narrative fictions must be studied with cognitive grammar.

II. LANGACKER'S FIVE CONFIGURATIONS OF SPEAKERS' SUBJECTIVITY

"Subjectivity pertains to the observer role in viewing situations where the observer/observed asymmetry is maximized" (Langacker, 1985, p. 109). As speech act participants, the speaker is responsible for conceiving the scene, while the addressee reconstructs the speaker's intent. As a conceptual subject, the speaker usually has different perceptions of the same scene. During this process, he will constantly adjust the observation arrangement between the self and the conceptual object, resulting in different cognitive configurations. In an optimal viewing arrangement, the speaker focuses his attention solely on the observed scene and completely loses his self-consciousness. What the speaker observes is the scene only rather than the speaker observing the scene. In this context, the speaker is construed with maximal subjectivity and the entity is construed with maximal objectivity. Opposite to the optimal viewing arrangement is the egocentric viewing arrangement, in which the speaker not only focuses on the conceptual object, but also brings himself into the scope of his observation, namely, the speaker is also part of the conceptualized object. However, this situation can be subdivided into two types: the speaker is either offstage, outside the objective situation, and acts as a reference point for entity positioning, or on the stage exposed to the spotlight.

The other two cases are related to the speaker's conceptual displacement. The utterance "Don't lie to your mother!" is described from a vantage point distinct from the real one. The mother assumes an "external" point of view from the child's perspective to refer to herself. Such a description is more objective and reduces the possibility of

misunderstanding. Its configuration is shown in Figure 1 (a), where G represents the speaker's actual observation position of the relevant ground element in the real world, and G' exists in an imaginary world, an assumed position used to describe this element linguistically. The dotted line represents the connection between G and G'. This conceptual displacement of the speaker from G to G' allows the observed entity to be viewed from offstage. At this time, G is understood objectively, while G' is understood subjectively.

The last type of configuration is termed cross-world identification. In this case, the speaker's viewing position is still at his actual viewing position, but what he perceived is not a real world, but a virtual world as in photography, a movie, or a dream. For example, the sentence "That's me in the middle of the top row" is uttered by the speaker in his actual vantage point, but the reference to "I" in this sentence is not the "I" in the real space but the "I" in the virtual space, as shown in the Figure1(b) is shown. G represents the actual location of the speaker, and G' is the entity described by the language that corresponds to G in the real world.
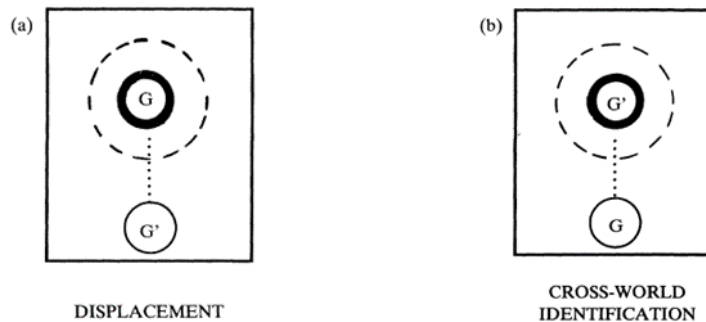

Figure 1

Even though these five types of spears' subjectivity are not used for discourse analysis, they are devoted to understanding the semantic content of language expressions, providing enlightenment for reading and analyzing literary texts. According to the characteristics of fictional narrative discourse, the speaker referred to in this paper includes the author, the narrator, and characters in the story. At the same time, except for the stage area, this paper adjusts the content of the configuration diagram, changing the predicate scope to the scope of the entire narrative text and the objective scene to the story layer. G is the real-world platform where the speaker stays, and G' is the speaker's projection onto the virtual-world platform. In fictional narration, G' in different situations has different identities, and he can be either the author, the narrator, or characters in the story. Applying cognitive grammar to analyze the meaning of language in fictional narrative texts helps us understand the sources of different voices in the text so as to better understand the speaker's intention underlying the narration.
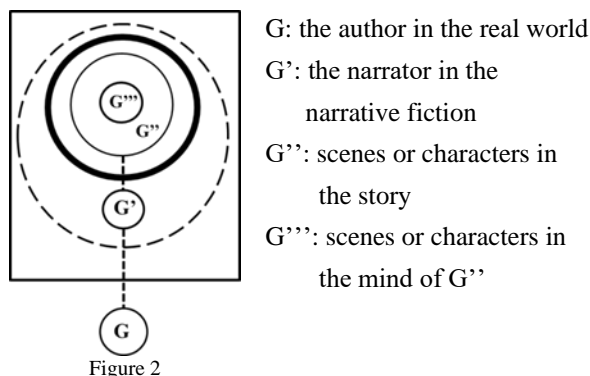
III. THE NARRATOR'S CONFIGURATION

In fiction, the real author usually projects himself on the narrator, observes through the narrator's eyes, and speaks through the narrator's mouth. In this context, the narrator is usually offstage, but he guides the relationship among characters and the story's plot development, which mediates the author/reader and the characters' discourse, as what Langacker describes as the relationship between "conceptualizers", "reference points" and "targets" (Langacker, 1991, 1997). On the one hand, the author, as a conceptualizer, designates the narrator as a reference point to describe the scene and characters in the story; on the other hand, the reader also acts as a conceptualizer to understand the characters' discourses through the narrator. Therefore, the narrator serves as a reference, and the dots bridge the mental contact between the conceptualizer and the story's characters. As far as the narrator's perspective is concerned, he acts as a reference point offstage and can be divided into two configurations: weak perception and strong perception.

A. The Narrator Is Weakly Perceived From Offstage

When the narrator is weakly perceived, he almost focuses all his attention on the observed things, and forgets his own existence. At this time, readers also hardly feel the existence of the narrator.

(1) Elizabeth went away with her head full of him. She could think of nothing but of Mr Wickham, and of what he had told her, all the way home.   (Austen *Pride and Prejudice*)

The narrator in (1) adopts an omniscient perspective. He puts all his attention to the character Elizabeth from her outside movement to inside mind. The expressions "went away" and "all the way home" are descriptions of her action, while other expressions of "her head full of him", "think of nothing But of Mr. Wickham" and "of what he had told her" are descriptions of Elizabeth's innate thoughts. This natural continuation from the character's external actions to the inner thought makes readers hardly feel the existence of the narrator. In addition, in this excerpt, the narrator's perception of the character's mental activities also indicates Mr. Wickham's perception. Namely, the character's psychology is also filled with other things, which is called "embedding of mental spaces" (Langacker, 2008) or "nested mental states" (Zunshine, 2015). One mental state is embedded or nested within another mental state, as is shown in Figure 2:

G: the author in the real world

G': the narrator in the narrative fiction

G'': scenes or characters in the story

G''': scenes or characters in the mind of G''

Figure 2

The author G in the real world projects himself onto the narrator G', who acts as a guide to introduce the character G' in the story, and then G'', in turn, further guides other characters' G''' in the story. At this time, the narrator, as a viewing subject, in this case, is said to be construed with maximal subjectivity, and the objective scene with maximal objectivity, which explains why what we feel is not the presence of the narrator, but the direct presentation of the scene or characters. The narrator's selfless observation mode not only makes his nuanced description possible, but also creates an uninterrupted reading experience for readers.

B. The Narrator Is Strongly Perceived From Offstage

When the narrator is strongly perceived, readers could clearly perceive the existence of the narrator during the reading process. In spite of this, readers' involvement in the story has not been affected. On the contrary, readers need to understand the story or characters' discourse through the narrator's coordination. Example (2) presents two situations in which the narrator is strongly perceived.

(2) a. A black servant, who reposed on the box beside the fat coachman, uncurled his bandy legs as soon as the equipage drew up opposite Miss Pinkerton's shining brass plate, and as he pulled the bell at least a score of young heads **were seen peering out of** the narrow windows of the stately old brick house.

(William Makepeace Thackeray *Vanity Fair*)

b. "Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. ...... Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy......"
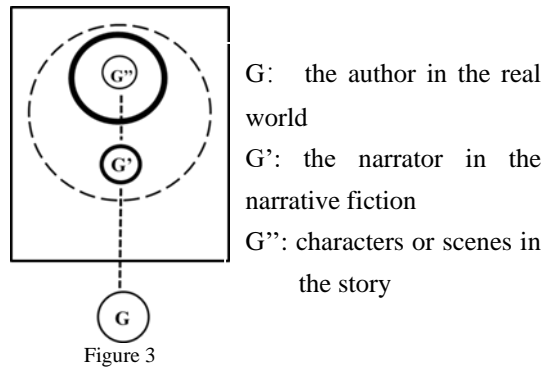
"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

(O. Henry *The Gift of Magi*)

(2a) The description makes the presence of the narrator almost imperceptible initially, but the use of the prepositional phrase "out of" in the end reveals the narrator's observation perspective from outside the window in the story. At the same time, the use of passive voice "was seen" clearly indicates an observing subject. In the current discourse situation, the viewing subject is actually the narrator, who deliberately exposes his position to make the reader realize his existence. But rather than reveal his identity, he invites readers to observe from his point of view, thereby creating an immersive simulation experience for readers. An important condition for simulation is to observe from the perspective of others, through which readers can imagine the characters' actions and imagine the perceived details from that perspective (Hogan, 2017).

(2b) presents another condition in which the narrator is perceived. This is a dialogue between the heroine and the hero after the heroine had her hair cut. The narrator is able to hear their dialogue and see their facial expressions and perceive the entire dialogue atmosphere. The expressions "said Della" and "asked Jim" are the narrator's guide to the characters' dialogues, so readers can first correspond to the discourse with the character who said it. On the other hand, the use of modal adverbs, such as "curiously" and "laboriously" and the subjunctive mood "as if" expresses the narrator's subjective speculation about the character's inner mind. The recognition process of the narrator in the two discourses is shown in Figure 3.

G: the author in the real world
G': the narrator in the narrative fiction
G'': characters or scenes in the story

Figure 3

This is also another way for the narrator to express himself, from which the reader is strongly aware of the narrator's point of view. G' is bolded to highlight his existence. In this configuration, the narrator is both a conceptualizer and the subject of conception. On the one hand, the narrator perceives and records what he had seen from his point of view. On the other hand, he implicitly reminds readers of his existence to help them understand the characters' discourses. When the narrator is strongly perceived, his subjectivity is weakened, and the reader's perception of the authenticity of the narrative content is greater than when the narrator is weakly perceived.

IV. THE SPEAKER IS THE CHARACTER IN THE STORY

When the speaker explicitly uses personal deixis to refer to himself, he is usually the character in the story. The character who speaks for himself is the most direct way to shape the characters' image and inner state. If the character does not lie, his utterances presented at this time are much more trustworthy. The two excerpts in example (3) are respectively two situations in which the speaker is the character in the story. In (3a), the character is expressed through the guidance of the narrator, while (3b) is another case in which the speaker is one of the characters in the story, and the story is narrated from his or her perspective. And in this context, "all these subjects take part in narrative communication and must take the perspective of the fictional characters to understand their motivation and deeds" (Rembowska-Płuciennik, 2012, p. 61). However, when the speaker is the story's character, he can be either offstage, on the stage, or as a reference point to guide the words of other characters in the story.

(3) a. "Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. *I had my hair cut off and sold* because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. ...... Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and *let's be happy......*"
"*You've cut off your hair?*" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.
"**Cut it off and sold it**," said Della. "*Don't you like me just as well*, anyhow? *I'm me without my hair, ain't I?*" (O. Henry *The Gift of Magi*)
b. 1801.*I have just returned from a visit to my landlord—the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with*. **This is certainly a beautiful country**! In all England, *I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society*. (Emily Jane Bronte *Wuthering Heights*)

A. Characters Are Offstage

Like the narrator, the character who is offstage also focuses entirely on the designated object or scene and does not profile his existence. Compared with using person deixis to profile the speaker, the discourses "cut it off and sold it" in (3a) and "this is certainly a beautiful country" in (3b) are uttered by the character in the immediate situation. In (3a), Della is afraid of her husband's anger and disappointment due to her act of having her hair cut. At this point, her thought is full of her husband's attitude towards her outlook regardless of her own feelings. Similarly, (3b) is the character's concentration on the scene in front of her. The adverb "certainly" reflects the speaker's positive evaluation of the presented scenery, revealing the character's excitement and satisfaction. In this context, the description of the scene is objectively construed, and the speaker is maximally subjective, which explains our belief in the true beauty of the scene and our feeling for the speaker's strong subjective enthusiasm for this place.

In (3a), the understanding of the character's discourse is obtained through an intermediary, and in this case is the narrator. The configuration is shown in Figure5a, in which there are twice projections from the author to narrator and the narrator to the character. And (3b) presents the case that the author directly projects himself onto one of the characters in the story, as shown in Figure 4b. In Figure 4a, since the character's speech needs to be guided by the narrator, the speaker's subjectivity is less than that of the author directly projected on the character. It is also for this reason that the character's expression of himself or herself emotions in this configuration is not as strong as that of the author's direct projection onto the character, as the characters convey their personal emotions with the help of the narrator's perspective and voice.
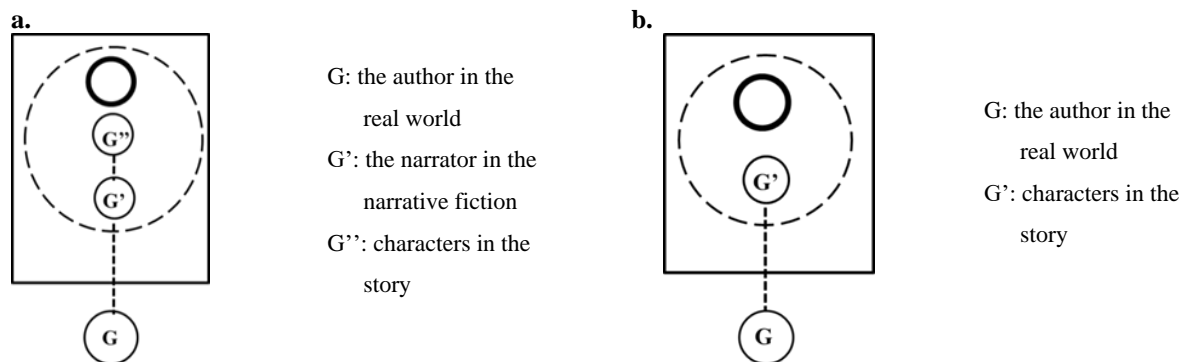
a.

G: the author in the
  real world
G': the narrator in the
  narrative fiction
G'': characters in the
  story

b.

G: the author in the
  real world
G': characters in the
  story

Figure 4

B. Characters Are Onstage

The most apparent linguistic sign of a character stepping onto the stage to profile himself is the use of first- or second-person deixis or what Hyland termed "reader pronouns" (Hyland, 2007). This configuration well invites readers to step on the stage and get involved in the current discourse situation. "The use of first person in a narration both identifies the narrator and providers a perspective for the reader to enter the text world," (Jeffries, 2008, p. 71) and "the second person generalized usage helps the reader see the 'story'" (Jeffries, 2008, p. 80). This is because the use of the first-person "I" could produce an empathic experience, and the use of "you" evokes the readers' first perceptual response to immediately think of themselves.

C. Characters Function as the Role of the Reference Point

The character in the story does not exist in isolation, he or she is unavoidably intertwined with other characters to construct the story. Therefore, they act as the reference point for other characters or the development of the story. For example, the frequent use of "I" and "you" in the dialogue between Della and Jim in (3a) is a way to guide the relationship between the characters, which promotes the plot. The inner monologue of the character in (3b) involves the relationship with her neighbor. The speaker's configuration in Figure 5a presents the discourse uttered by the onstage character with the guidance of the narrator, while Figure 5b depicts the use of the character's perspective to narrate the story, and everything is perceived and narrated from his or her point of view. It is worth mentioning that the characters' conversation mode, as in (3a), requires readers to maintain the awareness of identifying the character discourse while being immersed in the story. The generation of awareness requires more attention (Smith, 2017), thereby allowing readers to find out more details, as "conversation analysis has provided an alternative view of narrative as highly embedded in surrounding talk and deeply sensitive to different participation roles" (Fina & Johnstone, 2015, p. 156). Undoubtedly, the narrator can also take an omniscient perspective to report the characters' dialogue through indirect speech. But in this way, the subjectivity of the narrator will increase. As a result, "much of the significance of what is said lies in overtones which are too subtle to be captured," (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 235) and the interpretation of the characters' discourses will be subject to the narrator's subjective judgement.
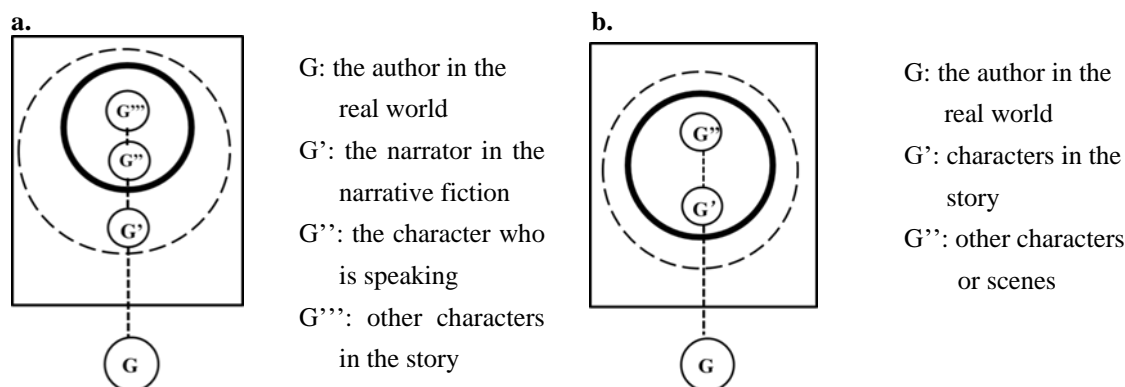
a.

G: the author in the
  real world
G': the narrator in the
  narrative fiction
G'': the character who
  is speaking
G''': other characters
  in the story

b.

G: the author in the
  real world
G': characters in the
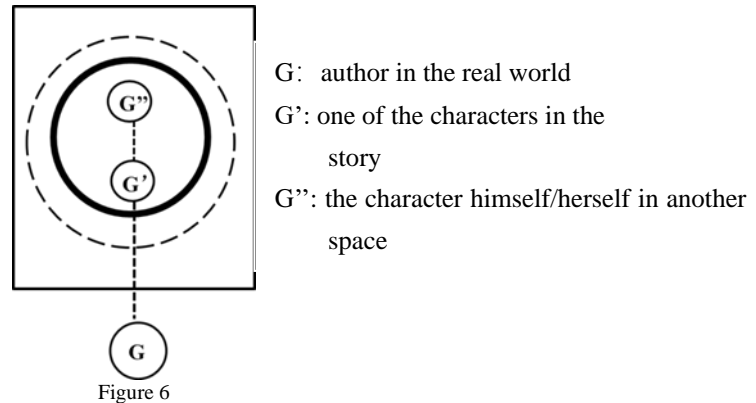 story
G'': other characters
  or scenes

Figure 5

D. Characters' Displacement Across Time and Space

The space of fictional narrative discourse is often variable and multi-layered, because one story is embedded with another story. And the phenomenon that a story space embedded with another layer of story space leads to "embedding of mental spaces" or "nested mental states" as mentioned above, which creates distinct "self" images in different time and space. Della's "I'm me without my hair" in (3a) is a typical example of self-description in different time and space. "I" refers to the "self" image who had her hair cut at the moment of speaking, and "me" refers to the "self" image who

had not had her hair cut. Similarly, example (4) also presents the situation where characters have different identities in different time and space.

(4) To begin my life with the beginning of my life, *I* record that *I* was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and *I* began to cry, simultaneously.   (Charles Dickens   *David Copperfield*)

The designated object that the first-person pronoun "I" refers to is the one in different periods of his life. The use of the present tense in the first sentence indicates that the first "I" refers to the grown-up "I" who is currently narrating the story in the real world, while the second "I" accompanied by the past tense refers to the infant "I" who was in the story world, more specifically, the hospital he was born. Since the speaker profiles himself on the stage in this context, subjectivity decrease, that is why readers would not confuse the exact "I" to whom he or she refers to in different time and space. The configuration is shown in Figure 6.

G：author in the real world
G': one of the characters in the
      story
G'': the character himself/herself in another
   space

Figure 6

V. THE SPEAKER IS THE AUTHOR

In narrative fictions, authors usually do not profile their voice, but "an author may embody in a work ideas, beliefs, emotions" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, P. 89-90), governing consciousness of the fiction. When reading such information in a fiction, we may regard this voice coming from the author[1].

(5) When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse. Of an intermediate balance, under the circumstances, there is no possibility.   (Theodore Dreiser   *Sister Carrie*)

In this discourse, the fact that a girl leaves her hometown after the age of eighteen, either for the better or for the worse, is a statement of opinion, not the narration of the story. This point of view may be the author's real belief, or may be opposed to those the author had in real life. As in Figure 7, the author G in the real-world projects into the narrative world G', in which he speaks. The author may present different opinions and beliefs in different fictions for the purpose of creation. Thus "the flesh-and-blood author is subject to the vicissitudes of real life" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, p. 90). In this situation, the author keeps himself away from the complex story world and communicates with readers outside the story, which reflects the maximal extent of subjectivity. This explains why the voice that we regard from the author may not be the author's real thoughts, as the author puts all the concentration on the work creation regardless of the compatibility with his own idea. Meanwhile, since the author is outside the story, readers' sense of involvement is weak in this context. Offstage effect generates a distance between authors, readers, and characters (Langacker, 1985), especially when the author's attitude is inconsistent with readers' life experience and moral values.

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[1] Even though authors are distinct from implied authors in narratology, they are not strictly distinguished in this paper.

G：the author in the real world

G'：the projected author in the narrative fiction

Figure 7
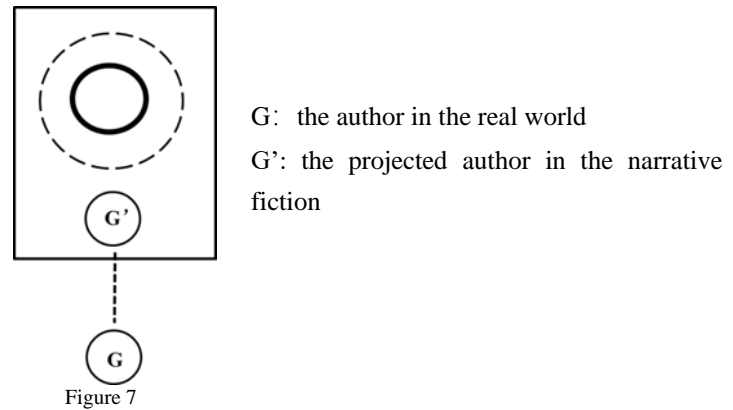
Undoubtedly, the author can also stand on the stage to profile his identity as in the autobiography, diary or letter. However, if an autobiography or letter is a real reflection of the author's life experience, then it is not narrative fiction. And if it is adapted by someone else, then this is similar to the condition when the speaker is a narrator we discussed earlier. Therefore, this special case is not included in the current discussion.

VI. CONCLUSION

Having thoroughly explored a series of configurations of speaker's subjectivity in terms of three conditions when the speaker is the narrator, the character and the author respectively in narrative fictions, this paper found that the subjectivity of the speaker is maximal when he is the author, and the subjectivity is minimal when he is the character in the story. And the speaker's subjectivity outside the story is greater than that in the story. The subjectivity that the speaker is weakly perceived is greater than when he is strongly perceived. Each type of configuration adopted in a specific context is a narrative strategy to highlight a narrative effect. "It is the entirety of how speakers choose to express themselves, to package their ideas into words, sentences, and discourse to meet their communicative and social needs" (Mithun, 2015, p. 39). The comprehension and interpretation of a literary work is a conceptual process, which is in accordance with cognitive grammar's idea that meaning is conceptualization. Cognitive grammar has obvious advantages for analyzing literature, as the speaker is able to be actively involved in the elaboration of meaning construction and conceiving the same situation in alternative ways. The application of grammar to literary work provides empirical support for Cognitive grammar (Langacker, 2014, p. xiii).

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Junling Zhang was born is Huaihua, China in 1988. She received her master's degree in linguistics from Sichuan International Studies University, China in 2013. She is currently a doctoral student in the College of International Studies, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. Her research interests include Cognitive linguistics and discourse analysis.