

ПИТАННЯ ЛІНГВОКОНЦЕПТОЛОГІЇ ТА ДИСКУРСОЛОГІЇ

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PRAGMATIC PECULIARITIES OF VERBALIZATION OF *SECRET* IN ENGLISH FICTIONAL DISCOURSE

Summary. The *relevance* of this article is determined by the constantly growing interest that researchers take in the study of cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics of how and why people decide to keep or, conversely, reveal secrets. The *purpose* of our study is to describe the verbalization of the concept *secret* in modern English literary fictional discourse. The communicative acts of hiding or revealing secrets in personages' speech have been chosen as the *object* of our investigation. The *subject* of the research comprises the semantic means used by the communicators to tell his/her secret, or to conceal it. As a *result* of our research, we have offered a definition of the concept *secret* as a piece of information, kept from the knowledge of others or shared only confidentially with a few. The analysis of the reasons for keeping secrets has been helpful to identify possible circumstances that lead to secretiveness. Moreover, two types of secrets have been differentiated: one's own secret that is face-threatening for the speaker and secret concerning a third person that can serve as a source for blackmailing. These types of secrets have been traced and analyzed in fictional discourse with the help of author's remarks, and inner speech of the personages. In the course of the analysis, a number of adjectives and intensifying adverbs that are used along with the word *secret* in personages' speech have been singled out.

Key words: secret, secrecy, privacy, interaction, fictional discourse, communication.

*Everyone has secrets. Everyone should be allowed their secrets.
You can never know everything about a person. You'd go mad trying to.
from "Behind her eyes"*

Formulation of the problem. "People keep secrets in all walks of life. They keep them from their friends, partners, family members, and coworkers" [12, p. 1]. Despite the fact that secrecy is incredibly common, it has rarely been studied directly in the field of linguistics. Nearly everyone has secrets, people conceal things from other people, which can be traced in fiction and literary works due to the effort their authors make to inform their reader about it. However, no study, to our knowledge, has considered the nature of secrets, their types, and reasons for keeping/revealing secrets in literary discourse. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to describe the nature of secrets, as well as the ways secrets are revealed by communicants in dialogic interaction.

Reference to previous studies. In the past 50 years, only a handful of articles have focused their research on secrecy/secret(s), *keeping secrets* [Wegner, Lane, & Dimitri, 1994; Lane & Wegner, 1995; Lehmilller, 2009; Goncalo, Vincent, & Krause, 2015], or *revealing them* [Taylor, De Soto, & Lieb, 1979; Yovetich & Drigotas, 1999; Kelly, Klusas, von Weiss, & Kenny, 2001; Slepian, Masicampo, & Ambady, 2014]. It is obvious that these articles lie within the domain of *social psychological literature*, while in modern linguistics, these topics are rarely touched upon.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. It is noteworthy that two major reasons explain the lack of linguistic research on secrets. First, secrets and secrecy seem *difficult* to study. Researchers want to measure and observe the effects of secrets, but by their very nature, secrets are hidden from plain view. Second, the first work on the analyzed topic, namely "Secrets: On the ethics of concealment and revelation (1983)" by S. Bok, defined the term *secrecy* too narrowly (as "intentional concealment" [3, p. 5]), and the following works have consistently used this definition. For instance, *secrecy* was described as the "deliberate hiding of information from at least one other person" [7, p. 35], "active inhibition of disclosure" [10, p. 212], and "intentional deception via an act of omission" [8, p. 239].

These definitions suggest an individual has a secret *only* in the presence of someone from whom s/he is trying to actively withhold the information, and that secrecy *cannot* take place when a person is alone. Correspondingly, secrecy has typically been studied in this way.

However, new definitions of secrets and secrecy allow for conducting more profound studies. M. L. Slepian et al. define *secrecy* as “the intention to conceal information”, which suggests that secrecy can take place *outside of active concealment*. A desire to keep information secret may not only lead people to conceal within social interactions but also lead them to experience more frequent thoughts about the secret outside of concealment settings i.e., “*outside of relevant social interactions*” [12, p. 3–5].

Aims and objectives. It is a common truth that an individual *has* a secret the moment he or she decides to withhold information about an episode or act from another person. The secret exists from that point in time, often before the individual is in the presence of someone from whom they wish to conceal the secret. “The shift from active concealment to the intention to conceal changes the focus of when and where secrecy takes place” [12, p. 3]. Thus, the phenomenon of secrecy calls for a *dyadic interaction*: one person hiding a secret from another during a conversation or social interaction.

The *aim* of this research is to explore the processes of keeping and revealing secrets by the person-ages of English fictional discourse. This research had a broad range of *objectives*. The first objective is to describe the pragmatic reasons for keeping and revealing secrets, the second one is to study the personages’ interaction in fictional discourse in terms of holding and telling secrets, and the third one is to determine the ways of secret verbalization in the communication.

The linguistic analysis of the selected data has been based on the application of *general scientific methods*, namely: the method of observation, the descriptive method, and *special linguistic methods*, namely: the contextual-interpretational method and the cognitive discourse analysis.

The main part. Firstly, one of the simplest ways of tackling the outlined problem is to analyze the definitions of the term *secret* provided in dictionaries. According to M. Webster Dictionary, *secret* is “1. something kept hidden or unexplained; 2. something kept from the knowledge of others or shared only confidentially with a few” [18, p. 547].

Cambridge Dictionary claims that *secret* is “1. a piece of information that is only known by one person or a few people and should not be told to others; 2. a fact about a subject that is not known” [15, p. 965].

According to Collins Dictionary, *secret* is “a fact that is known by only a small number of people and is not told to anyone else” [16, p. 1456].

Macmillan Dictionary defines *secret* as “1. a piece of information that is known by only a small number of people and is deliberately not told to other people; 2. something that cannot be explained or that is difficult to understand” [17, p. 997].

Thus, all the definitions provided by the dictionaries share the semes of “hidden or unexplained”, “known by only a small number of people” and “kept from the knowledge of others”.

We offer the following definition of the term *secret*: a piece of information, kept from the knowledge of others or shared only confidentially with a few.

One of the most common conceptualizations of secrets involves a distinction between *privacy* and *secrecy*. B. L. Bellman claimed that “the term *private* usually establishes that the other person does not have a right to some knowledge” but that *secrets* involve “information that the other person may have rights to, but that the possessor chooses, is told to, or is obligated to withhold” [2, p. 4].

Another prominent conceptualization of secrecy is based on S. Petronio’s communication privacy management theory. According to this theory, any information that is restricted from others is considered private, and granting access to such private information involves various risks. Based on this perspective, secrets are a subset of private information, which is “a highly restricted set of private information” [11, p. 31].

Let us now focus on the reasons why people conceal and reveal secrets. Conceptualizing secret-keeping as purposeful act has important theoretical implications. If keeping secrets is something people do on purpose, it implies that individuals keep secrets to achieve some objective.

As an individual’s reasons for keeping secrets are tied to their particular circumstances, there are as many reasons for secrecy as there are secrets:

- a desire to keep others from forming negative evaluations;
- relational maintenance: individuals sometimes try to protect relational bonds by keeping secrets, or they hope to shield others from stress [13];
- concerns about communication competence: people who keep secrets may have concerns about their own or the potential confidant’s ability to discuss the issue. They also may believe that discussing a secret would violate a communicative norm [1];
- individuals sometimes keep secrets to defend themselves from social threats: there are situations when others can take advantage of an individual or a group if they learn a secret [3];
- privacy: people sometimes purposefully conceal information because the information is personal or not relevant to others;
- individuals keep secrets to serve a relational bonding function: when people collaborate to keep a secret, it can promote identification among those who keep the secret, demonstrating who is an insider and who is an outsider [6].

Our observations of personages' fictional communication in which they concealed or revealed secrets have enabled us to identify possible reasons for being secretive. The first reason is hidden in the nature of the secret: it refers personally to the secret-keeper and is negatively evaluated by him/her. Thus, revealing of such a secret would be "face-threatening" for the person and his reputation. If a secret concerns a third person, the communicant might be tied by the promise to keep the secret and he/she feels it is their duty to keep silent. Besides, the communicant might doubt the veracity of the secret that he was able to find out. In such a case he/she wants more information on the topic before sharing the secret with anybody else. A reason for keeping a secret might also be simulated — the speaker intends to reveal it to his/her interlocutor in order to attract their attention, become more authoritative, or demonstrate that he/she belongs to the same social group with the interlocutor, or in order to entertain them.

The reasons people keep secrets and the criteria they use when deciding to reveal secrets offer insights into the goals people bring to their social interactions. Individuals who keep secrets to *avoid being negatively evaluated* are using secrecy to achieve different objectives than are those who keep secrets to *strengthen their relational ties* with others. Similarly, people who decide to reveal secrets because the *information happens to fit well in a conversation* have different goals than those who reveal secrets only when someone urgently needs to know the information [4].

As people have been purposefully keeping something secret, deciding to reveal a secret involves more than just evaluating reasons to disclose it:

- self-expression: the desire to express oneself [5; 9];
- some individuals reported that they would reveal their family secret if the other person asked directly about the secret. It is possible that people who are asked directly about a secret may assume that the other person probably knows or suspects the secret anyway, which might make them assume that further attempts to conceal the information are futile [14];
- another common criterion for revealing a secret was to *help the other* person, especially if the other person was in a similar situation and telling might help the other get through it [4].

The implementation of secrets can be found throughout books in different forms, namely *author's narrative proper*, *entrusted narrative*, *dialogue*, *interior speech*, *represented inner speech*, *represented uttered speech*. To illustrate:

1. Interior speech:

- "I wonder why not, what it might contain that I do not want my husband to see. **What secrets might I have? Secrets I don't even know myself**" [24, p. 41].

- "I could feel a resentment growing within me. An anger. He seemed so determined that I could not be helped. So adamant. Suddenly I didn't feel so inclined to tell him about my journal, or Dr Nash. **I wanted to keep my secrets for a little longer. I felt they were the only thing I had that I could say was mine**" [24, p. 214].

2. Author's remark:

- "**And there she goes, burying her secret, the thing my mother will deny until the day she dies**" [19, p. 64].

- "I know where he hides his little office bar, and the vodka. **(Another secret Adele shared)**" [19, p. 339].

In addition, both cases of *direct* and *indirect* acts of concealing and revealing secrets are presented in the analyzed books. Let us cite some examples.

Direct act of secret disclosure:

"Mummy," said Josh.

"Hmmm?"

"I need to tell you a secret."

"Hmmm. What's that?" She closed her eyes and hugged him closer.

"I don't want to tell you," said Josh.

"You don't have to tell me," said Celeste dreamily.

"But it makes me feel sad," said Josh [22, p. 311].

Indirect acts of secret concealment:

- "Cassie had to take a rest. Well, she's still resting."

"A rest?" I say.

"Yes. While she was here she got hurt, and it affected her badly. So my aunt put her in an institution. My dad calls it a rehab center," he whispers. **"Please don't tell anyone that. No one at all."**

"Of course not. What did they do to her?" I ask, the words careful and soft [19, p. 150].

- "We've just been here so long, worked so hard. And you —" She grabs a new pair of tights and shoes. "There's no excuse, really. I'm sorry. I won't do anything else again." She hugs me before I can answer.

"Please don't tell Mr. K," she says. "I'll do whatever you want. Just don't tell him what I did." She squeezes me tighter.

"I don't push her away, but I don't hug her back either. I came looking for answers, and what I found is even worse than I thought" [19, p. 440–441].

However, most importantly, there is a distinction between *types of secrets* according to the surrounding circumstances, personages' relations, and attitudes to each other. Thus, the classification of secrets falls into two types: *secret as a danger* and *secret as an act of blackmailing/intimidation*. These two types are not chosen by accident, there is a strong link between the types and the psychological nature of keeping and revealing secrets.

If the character understands that revealing the secret s/he is keeping is risky and unsafe for the reputation, relations, etc., then, evidently, we can speak of the secret as a *danger*. To illustrate:

• “And you’ve been reading it, as we’ve been going along?”

“No,” he says. “**You’ve been writing it in private**”.

“But how—?” I begin, and then say, “Ben’s been reminding me to write in it?”

He shakes his head. “**I suggested that you keep it secret**,” he says. “**You’ve been hiding it, at home**. I’ve been calling you to tell you where it’s hidden”.

“Every day?”

“Yes. *More or less*” [24, p. 41].

• “What if Adam ever met Adele? What if he talked about David? And what kind of mother wants to set her son that example? To say that it’s okay for a married man to come around, fuck, and then leave? I try to tell myself that’s my main concern, but I’m kidding myself. **My main worry is that Adam is too young to keep secrets**, and if he ever gets dropped off at the clinic after school for some reason, the last thing I’d need is for him to recognize the man who visits Mummy some nights. It’s all so sordid” [23, p. 148].

And if someone has learned a secret that has been carefully concealed, then the person may use certain information against the keeper of the secret. The person claims to know the secret and threatens the keeper by revealing the secret to everyone else or by using the information to his/her advantage if the keeper does not do what the person wants. This type can be categorized as an act of blackmailing/intimidation. Let us cite the following examples:

• “I know a lot, Bette Abney. **I know lots of things you probably wouldn’t want me to know**. And I plan to prove it. Show everyone who you are.” He lets his fingers graze my collarbone.

“Don’t touch me,” I say.

Does he really know the things I did? I can’t seem to move.

He laughs. “**Your secrets are safe with me**,” he says. Then he adds, “**Well, maybe not**” [19, p. 168].

• “What are you willing to give me?”

“Nothing! I’m done with you.” I look toward the door to make sure no one is in the hall or passing by.

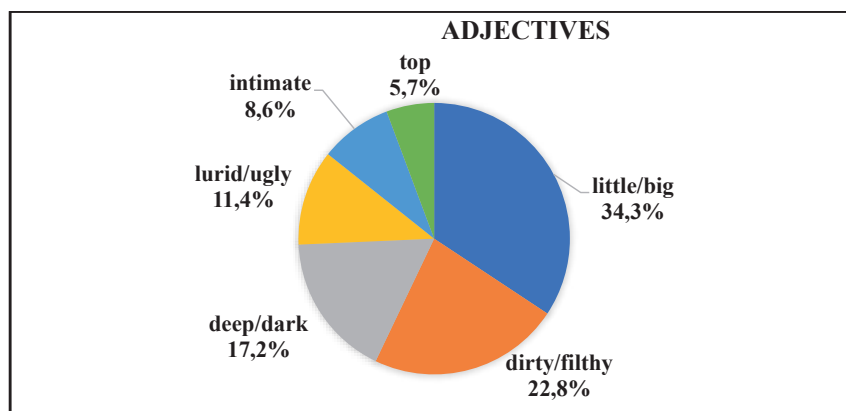
“Are you really done?” He pushes his hands farther into the water. His fingers graze along my calf, then over my knee. “**Or are you worried that I’ll tell everyone that matters your secrets?**”

I flex. His eyes narrow” [19, p. 381].

• “**And if you think about telling Dr Sykes about our tawdry little affair, then I will show him this**”. He holds up Adele’s phone. “**And then you’re going to look as obsessive as Anthony Hawkins**”. He leans in close to me, threateningly controlled and quiet. “Because only a fucking crazy person would start a secret friendship with the wife of the man they’re fucking”. He pulls back slightly. “**And Dr Sykes is a man’s man. He won’t care that I fucked you. But he won’t respect you for fucking me. He’ll find a way to get rid of you himself**” [23, p. 238].

Our observations of personages’ communication in which they concealed or revealed secrets have shown a marked tendency to accompany the notion of secrecy with numerous *evaluative adjectives* that mark a secret type or degree: *little/big*, *dirty/filthy*, *deep/dark*, *lurid/ugly*, *intimate*, *top*. They are often used in *superlative* form and are preceded with intensifying adverbs *so*, *such*, *pretty*.

The proportion of these adjectives is outlined in the diagram.



Picture 1. The frequency of adjective usage

The following examples represent the usage of these adjectives.

- “My mom has no idea. About any of it. She wasn’t even there—she got back the next morning. My dad made me swear not to tell. He wants to protect her. I feel kind of bad for him. That’s a **pretty big secret** to keep from the person you’re married to.” He steps a third time. “She just thinks you’re insane” [20, p. 371].

- “We are quick to see the stain, the worm, the latent criminality in even the best people. Experience tells us the nice man next door is capable of anything. The priest may be a pedophile, the cop a crook; the loving husband and father may harbor a **filthy secret**. Of course, we believe these things for the same reason the defender believes as he does: people are only human” [21, p. 182].

- “And there, on the wall, are tape measures, strung like snakes that nip at your wrists, your waist, your thighs, threatening to expose your **darkest secrets**. When these come down, you know you’ve gone too far, that home beckons, that your skin and bones aren’t enough to sustain you any longer” [19, p. 133].

Conclusions. Thus, secret has been defined as a piece of information, kept from the knowledge of others, or shared only confidentially with a few. The reasons for secret-keeping are linked to particular circumstances and types of secrets. On the one hand, some secrets can be “face-threatening”, have negative impact on the secret-keeper and might even lead to some destructive outcomes for his/her reputation and relations with the other people. Such secrets can be classified as *dangerous* ones. On the other hand, if a third person learns a secret, he/she wants to use it for their own benefit, thus using a secret as blackmailing. Taking advantage of the situation, a person might threaten the secret-keeper by revealing the hidden information. In this case, the secret-keeper has to sacrifice everything to keep a secret between him/her and the blackmailer.

It is hoped that these studies will prove that fictional discourse is a precious source for singling out and analyzing various types of secrets thoroughly concealed by the personages from the personages they communicate with, or revealed to them in a confidential, intimate manner to demonstrate belonging to the same social class. For this purpose, fictional discourse offers dialogues, author’s remarks, and personages’ inner speech. Moreover, language means of revealing secrets have been uncovered, bringing to light a set of adjectives that come along with the word “secret” to describe the type of secret and its degree. Finally, a classification of secrets in literary discourse has been provided differentiating between proper secrets and their types, determined by different circumstances and relations between personages.

Perspectives for further research. *The perspective for further research is seen in the comprehensive study of the concept of secrecy.* There is a need to probe more deeply into the phenomenon of secrecy by examining cognitive pragmatic grounds for secrecy and for revealing secrets.

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ПРАГМАТИЧНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ВЕРБАЛІЗАЦІЇ *СЕКРЕТУ* В АНГЛОМОВНОМУ ХУДОЖНЬОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

Анотація. *Актуальність* статті визначається постійно зростаючим інтересом, який дослідники в галузі когнітивної лінгвістики та психолінгвістики виявляють до вивчення факторів, які сприяють процесам зберігання або, навпаки, розкриття секретів у комунікації. *Метою* дослідження є опис вербалізації концепту *секрет* у сучасному англomовному художньому дискурсі. *Об'єктом* дослідження обрано комунікативні акти приховування або розкриття секретів у мовленні персонажів. *Предметом* дослідження є семантичні засоби, які використовують комуніканти для розголошення або приховування секретної інформації. *У результаті* проведеного дослідження запропоновано визначення поняття *секрет* як інформації, яка прихована від відома інших або передана конфіденційно лише декільком особам. Аналіз прагматичних причин приховування секрету виявив низку обставин, що супроводжують розголошення або приховування секрету в комунікації. Крім того, виокремлено два типи секретів: власний секрет, що становить загрозу для «обличчя» мовця, і секрет, що стосується третьої особи та може стати приводом для шантажу. Вербалізація двох цих типів секретів була простежена та проаналізована в художньому дискурсі в авторських ремарках та у внутрішньому мовленні персонажів. У процесі аналізу була виявлена низка прикметників та прислівників-інтенсифікаторів, які деталізують тип *секрету* у персонажному мовленні.

Ключові слова: секрет, секретність, приватність, взаємодія, художній дискурс, комунікація.

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