SOME ASPECTS OF VISUAL LITERATURE SYNTAX

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Introduction. Do you remember Will Eisner, one of the giants in the field of sequential art… a term he introduced and what is actually sequential art and is it the same as visual literature? What is the syntax of the genre, what are the significant units of the piece of literature of new era? The present article deals with general aspects of the problem of definition and concept of graphic novel, its modern version. Illustrative material, the material of investigation is the graphic novel of A. Grecian «Rasputin». As long as it still exists the problem of the term and definition herewith we make an attempt to characterize structural units of the concept, clarify some aspects of the definition and unify the term of the kind.

The study the syntax of graphic novel is the part of the semiotic study of the genre. Actually, it helps establish certain relation between the significant units of graphic novel. In this article we chase the aim to define the significant units of the visual literature in general and graphic novel, in particular, in order to clarify the definition, term and the concept of the graphic novel as a representative of visual literature. To achieve this aim we should solve some objectives, mainly: 1) to describe the types of syntactic units, 2) to illustrate these types with the example of the material of our investigation, 3) to establish the relation «text-image», 4) to sum up the history of the development of genre with different terms accepted by different researchers and understand why and what is more appropriate one for our investigation, which has final perspective and aim to analyze translation variants and see the reflection of text-image relation in different languages. For meeting the aims of this brief analysis we use descriptive methods of investigation.

Research methods and methodology. So, as we mention above, the researchers distinguish different types of visual literature and keep using different terms, from our point of view, to clarify the term, the definition, the concept, it is necessary to explore syntax, and the quality of syntactic units of the graphic novel. For example, as Ann Miller focuses on syntagmatic links between units of visual literature (Miller, 2009) and consider them to be meaningful for the aims mentioned. In this respect some tools of semiotics could be applied to learn more about syntax of graphic novel. What are those links inside the binary image-text unity?

Results and discussions. The transformation of the adult comic to graphic novel may reveal the importance of significant units. We shouldn’t be neglecting the fact that the term (graphic novel) was also employed for commercial reasons; that is, the comic-book has been usually considered to be directed to a teenager and children audience, whereas the graphic novel is directly addressed to a mature and adult readers. The development of this genre owes to the development of the society, some extra- language causes which finally resulted in intra- genre changes and the birth of graphic novel. Let’s see a bit some important factors of graphic novel essence.

The graphic novel has been defined as opposed to the comic book. as a medium eminently aimed at a child audience, the graphic novel has clearly opted for, if not exclusively, an adult audience. Sometimes, the graphic novel is perceived as an adult comic and precisely this point has been mostly emphasized in recent investigations looking for a way to find the definition. The importance of this point, as Groensteen (Groensteen, 2011, as cited in Gómez, 2013) emphasises comics association with children's audiences and the erroneous conception that equates this audience with the less educated stadiums of society. R. Sabin also points out this issue when he states:
Throughout their history they (comics) have been perceived as intrinsically 'commercial', mass-produced for a common denominator audience, and therefore automatically outside notions of artistic credibility. (Sabin, 2011, as cited in Gómez, 2013)

It could be wondering to what extent being aimed at a child audience is a reason for delegitimization (since other media commonly associated with this audience, such as illustrated books, do not suffer from the discredit of comics) and if the rejection of the audiences presumably established by the comic industry It provides sufficient reasons for the legitimization of the comic. Gálvez (Gálvez, 2013), among others, justified the decision in favor of a supposed development of the comic:

The conventions, imposed from the assumption of being a medium directed almost exclusively towards a childish or infantilized public, acted as a rigid corset that limited its (that of the comic) development.

The idea behind this argument is the absolute equality between the maturity of the public and the maturity of the work. Claiming for itself a mature audience, the graphic novel is considered mature as well. An example of this can be found in the interview between Frank Miller and Will Eisner published in Spain by Norma in 2006.

As Pons states (Pons, 2015), we agree with, states the following.

Obviously, the practice of children's and youth themes cannot be defined in any way as a pejorative element, but there is no doubt that the medium's specialization in this type of stories fostered a defined sociocultural consideration of the comic linked to children's and youth culture that, especially in Europe, it curtailed the possibilities of generalization to all types of readers of the language of the comic (Pons, 2015).

Eisner says literally the following: I wasn't aware that I was starting a revolution. I knew that what I was doing was something different because I had intended it to be different, and because I was speaking to a completely different reader.

Continuing with the confusion, also the theory and criticism of the graphic novel (and especially the culturalism perspective) is full of references to the supposing recent maturity of the comic. Santiago Garcia (Garcia, 2013) defines, for example, Maus as the comic that dared to be older.

Still there is a confusion of terms (comics and graphic novel, visual literature and sequential art of Eisner), although the terms are related, there are differences in their functioning and functions.

To clarify terms, we recover, in the first place, the reflections on adult comics made by Remesar and Altarriba at the end of the eighties. In Comiscarias, the authors distinguish between two possible ways to reach the consideration of adult comics:

The first refers to the level reached in the use of the codes of the medium, regardless of the contents that are transmitted. The second is due to the fact that there is an audience that can be considered adult in the most cultural sense of the term and that legitimizes, through its consumption, one type of production over the others (Remesar and Altarriba, 1984).

Regarding the first of the proposed meanings, Remesar and Altarriba criticize the fact that the maturity of the comic becomes a stage that can only be accessed by renouncing research on the language of the comic, that is, opting for those most consolidated comic book language resources. We find the same reflection in the graphic novel. Gálvez warns that the graphic novel can demonstrate the maturity of the medium but that it can also become a new scheme to imitate. If the path of experimentation is abandoned, he says, the language of the comic would stagnate and become impoverished (Gálvez, 2014).

The fact that the maturity of the comic is focused exclusively on the graphic novel, marginalizes the short comics that continue to be a very fruitful field in small jewels. But, also, if we limit the concept to the external format and to black and white, we ignore great works made in the album format or in color, color being an expressive and narrative element of great weight in the language and grammar of the comic (Gálvez, 2014).

Also in contemporary criticism, there are those who qualify the validity of the terms exposed. Roger Sabin, for example, disagrees with the term «adult comics» since comics, like any other medium, can be read at different levels. In the same way that we don't talk about adult television or
adult bookstores, he says, it would be more appropriate to distinguish between children's comics and comics for general readers. Even so, the term «adult comic» is the one that the industry prefers.

In any case, we believe that the term adult comic is misleading since it does not distinguish between the two proposed meanings. We therefore opted for «adult comics» when we refer to comics intended for a non-children's audience, without this consideration in any way affecting the assessment of the work or being interpreted as a sign of its maturity or even in the middle.

From a culturalist perspective, it is often stated that until the advent of the graphic novel, the comic has been, with few exceptions, an almost exclusively children's medium. In this section, we will just mention a bit of the history of comics from a perspective of its publication of comics for an adult audience.

Some comic strips were more geared towards children's audiences than those of adults. As stated Gómez (Gómez, 2013) the appearance of mere slapstick, a «serious» subtext was hidden. As we will see in the corresponding section, the category of «serious issues» is very problematic in an investigation like the one at hand, which is why we qualified that, in this case, Sabin refers to the fact that these comic strips gave a good account of real social situations. Like the class difference (See Gómez, 2013). Children's comics rapidly gained ground as publishers became aware that the potential market was not among workers but among children (a trend that would be reproduced throughout Europe). Consequently, the funny animals and the strips starring naughty children printed in full color and with the minimum of text. Then, after the World War II, the public lost interest in superheroes and horror comics replaced them. The immense amount of violence they contained no more interested the public. Maybe it was the social factor and point of no returning for the inevitable change of the content of the books of this specific genre, at the same time from this very point comics for adults start their lives as graphic novels.

So, does the genre of graphic novel shaped the way we are accustomed to see in now belong to art or literature? Some authors below speak about similarities taken from cinematography. Cinema as motion picture is imitated by graphic novel, by its visual image part. Language of graphic novel becomes the tool to emphasize and finalize the perception of an idea or message of the authors. We will speak about this message as a unity of text and image, or image and text, we say that to underline the domination of one or another part in every individual case and page. Sometimes the text becomes more important and it is highlighted by authors. The example of it we may find in Rasputin graphic novel book 10. See the figure 1.

![Figure 1. Rasputin, book 10, page 28.](image)

Miller calls graphic novel visual literature and mostly focuses on the ties and certain relations between constraints of the genre of visual literature, its meaningful units for the process and the result of constructing the authors message. Gubern speaking about subcategory of visual literature, comics, states that the most characteristic relationships between the significant units are vignettes or images, pictures. Although he affirms that the genre can be studied both from the graphic angle and from the
narrative, Gubern focuses on the narrative aspect applying a good part of the theory of the film montage, theory of filmmaking. Gubern speaking about similarities between cinema and graphic novel points out the following: «...the narrative and dramatic units both in cinema and in comics are the sequence, defined by its unit of dramatic action, the scene, defined by its time and place and, ultimately, the image itself with a certain «functional analogy» As stated Gubern (Gubern, 2011, as cited in Gómez, 2013).

According to this cataloguing the very different types of connection between consecutive images, distinguish various logical connections. The logical connections have a certain relationship with what in cinema is called raccord and that can be of a spatial, action or movement nature. Miguel Ángel Muro qualifies that «the change from cartoon to cartoon requires the construction of a coherent imagined space (which is not continuous, most of the time) and an orderable temporal path» (Miguel Ángel Muro, 2013, as cited in Gómez, 2013).

This coherence is achieved, most of the time, by maintaining background and figure. Graphic literature nevertheless is a static medium, unlike cinema (to which one could add that the assembly of significant units is based on spatial juxtaposition and not on temporal succession), it therefore means that its own continuity mechanisms are neglected. of the cinema as the raccord action, gesture, axis and look. Although it is true that in visual literature we can also talk about succession based on the temporality of the cartoon, on the reading vector and on the plot. Gubern defines some of them by their peculiarity (See Gubern, 2011), mainly: 1. Contiguous spaces defined as structures that create the illusion of space and time continuity in the action, by showing in successive images. 2. Fading defined as progressive alteration of the tonal values of the image in successive images. 3. Text integrated into the cartoon, fulfilling the function of clarifying or explaining its content, facilitating the continuity between two cartoons or reproducing the narrator's comment. Rodríguez Diéguez, following Roland's terminology Barthes, distinguishes between text relay (relais), certain supposed adaptation or modification of the pre-existing temporal rhythm, and anchor text (ancrage), he states that the functions of the relay and anchor text are to direct the readers and focus their attention to the significant units of the image. He also mentions that it reinforces the valid meaning of polysemic significant units resulting in varied meaning interpretations. Benoit Peeters pointed out that the récitatifs also fulfill an important function uniting different images. 4. Cartridge: The cartridge is a particular case of support located between bullets (spaces with integrated text inside) or occupying a complete bullet. It is clear also an informative importance of the cartridge for it can accommodate, along with its own story, complementing the initial image. 5. Sounds and voice-overs defined as a record based on the integration in the image of a sound whose source of origin is shown in a following or previous image. It exists a certain spatial montage relationship applicable when successive images show the same space (see more about it at Gómez, 2013). We can therefore highlight 1) expansion or concentration: it is a more or less progressive variation (depending on the number of vignettes it occupies) of the width of the frame. 2) analytical montage: procedure similar to that applied by Pudovkin in the cinema and based on the meticulous decomposition of the scene into its most significant elements. See more about this procedure in the cited above work. This type of montage has a strong impact on the reading rhythm, as if accelerating or motivating reader to be eager to read furthermore. If we see the example (Fig. 1) we can find these cinematographic tools of montage (different scenes from different time are concentrated on the one page), sequence of the events is respected, the zoom is applied and also which as long as we can see juxta position is one of the favourite tools of A. Grecian in his graphic novel of Rasputin.
Regarding the temporary structures of the montage, Gubern describes several usual procedures.

The distinction between zoom and traveling makes little sense, since the imitation of these cinematographic resources produces very similar effects depending on the degree of iconicity. Thus, in a comic by Alex Ross it is relatively easy to distinguish whether or not the cartoonist has changed the point of view, while in one by Cianyde and Happiness it is totally impossible.

- Slow motion defined as a montage structure that creates in the reader the illusion that the action takes place in an unreal time, artificially dilated.
- Flash-back and flash-forward: variations of the temporal continuum arising from the novel and inherited by the comic through the cinema. We'll look at them in more detail later, when we talk about flashback and flashback in the section on time in the chapter on narratology. See the examples below, the figure 2 shows flashback, the memoir about Grigoriy’s father and the figure 3 represents the future, literary imagination, representing Rasputin in modern times.
- Juxta position of the characters: the father and the son are contrasted, as it can be seen in the image below.
Finally, Gubern treats dreams and subjective perceptions, except those contained in balloons, as psychological structures of the montage.

In conclusion, Gubern states that reading comics is a complex process that makes the reader highly participate in decoding the set of codes that come into play in a narrative governed (...) by various codes of languages.

However, as Rubén Varillas affirms, that it is the idea of logic that seems to predominate in the transition of vignettes (...) but it is not enough to explain the entire process. In this sense, he opts for Scott McCloud's classification of the types of transition that can occur (Rubén Varillas, 2016). To explore it, we must first specify what McCloud (McCloud, 2015) calls closure and which is identified with «the phenomenon of seeing the parts, but perceiving the whole», which in comics is translated as the (more or less conscious) capacity of the reader to perceive a series of vignettes as a space-time continuum. According to McCloud's (McCloud, 2015) classification we can distinguish the features listed below.

- **Moment to moment transitions**: this is the most common and occurs among those vignettes that show two phases of the same action carried out by a character or object. By using this type of transitions (especially when the temporal ellipsis between the different panels is short) we can achieve the slow motion effect that Román Gubern suggested.
- **Action-to-action transitions**: it is not about reflecting the progress of the same action, but rather its consequences or its transition to a different one (even though both are part of the same sequence).
- **Theme to theme transitions**: or, element to element according to Varillas, occur when the author directs the focus of attention from one element to another. An especially illustrative example is the shot-reverse shot that the comic takes from the cinematographic language.
- **Scene-to-Scene Transitions**: Due to scene change, they involve an ellipsis in both space and time.
- **Aspect-to-aspect transitions**: occurs when the images show different aspects of a place, idea, or mood. This is precisely the type of transition that allows the analytical montage that Gubern suggested.
- **Non-sequitur transitions**: occurs when no logical relationship can be established between the different bullets. This type of transition, although it can be poetic, does not allow
a narrative development.

To these we could add a specific type could have been included in the transitions from scene to scene, but which is more conditioned by the morphology of the image than by the space-time skip. Shape-to-shape transitions occur when the author looks for visual similarity between panels. They can include very diverse spatial-temporal jumps (See Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Rasputin, book 7.

**Conclusion.** We can agree with the author cited above in that of reading comics is the process motivating readers be involved in the course of decoding the set of messages that are embedded into various codes of languages. These embedded messages could be presented by syntactic units spoken in this brief article. In particular, syntax of graphic novel presupposes syntactic units’ interrelation and in its turn these units in every individual case could be positioned differently according to focus of authors ideas. In our research of Rasputin graphic novel these significant syntactic units are as follows. 1) Contiguous spaces defined as structures that create the illusion of space and time continuity in the action, by showing in successive images. 2) fading or progressive alteration of values of the image in successive images. 3) Text integrated into the cartoon, 4) image of a sound, 5) concentration, 6) analytical montage or meticulous decomposition of the scene into its most significant elements, 7) juxta position of graphic novel characters. Rounding up this brief general review it should be pointed out the perspective of the present study is to explore probable influence of the image to the translation variant chosen, that is the reason why we could be in need of detailed exploration of image part syntax and the text position peculiarities.

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DEJAKI ASPEKTI SINTAKSISU VIZUALNOI LIITERATURI

Anotacija


Metoju tsye’-ts’i stat’yi yez vyznachennya znachnykh odnicy vizualnoi literatury zagal’noi i graficheskogo romanu, zokrem, z metyo upuchenniya vyznachennya, termynu ta’ Podnymienia graficheskogo romanu yjey predstavnika vizualnoi literatury. Dla doslidzhennya postavlennoi metyi potribyno vyriขายt’ nizku zavod’, a samye: 1) oisati typy sintaksicheskikh odnicykh, 2) proiz’ostvuyaty’ z tity na prikladu materialu nashego doslidzhennya, 3) vstanoviti vidnochenie ‘tekst-zobrazheniya’, 4) pidvesti pismennik istoriy’ rozvitku zhanka z riznymi termynami, prinyaymi riznymi doslidhikami, i erozumity’ chomu i yakoy z nich bliyee pidkhodit’ dlya nashego doslidzhennya.

Mетоди дослідження. Для досягнення цієї аналізу використано описовий метод дослідження. Це дає нам можливість поділитись з читачем зовнішнім сприйняттям і розумінням досліджуваного матеріалу.

Основні результати дослідження. Трансформація коміксів для дорослих у графічний роман може виявити важливість значущих одиниць. Зазвичай комікс вважався розрахованим на підліткову та дитячу аудиторію, тоді як графічний роман адреєований безпосередньо зрілому та дорослому читачеві. Розвиток цього жанру зумовлений розвитком суспільства, деякими позамовними причинами, які зрештою призвели до внутрішньогенераторних змін і народження графічного роману. Інколи графічний роман сприймаються як комікс для дорослих, і саме цей момент переважно наголошується в останніх дослідженнях, які шукають способ знати його визначення. Читання коміксів — це процес, який спонукає читачів залучитися до процесу декодування набору повідомлень, вбудованих у різні коди мов. Ці вбудовані повідомлення можуть бути представлені синтаксичними одиницями. Зокрема, синтаксис графічної новел вигадує взаємозвязок синтаксичних одиниць, a в своєй черзі одиниця в
Abstract

Background. The present article deals with general aspects of the problem of definition and concept of graphic novel, its modern version. Illustrative material, the material of investigation is the graphic novel of A. Grecian «Rasputin». An attempt is made to characterize structural units of the concept, clarify some aspects of the definition and unify the term of the kind. The study the syntax of graphic novel is the part of the semiotic study of the genre. Actually, it helps establish certain relation between the significant units of graphic novel.

The purpose of this article is to define the significant units of the visual literature in general and graphic novel, in particular, in order to clarify the definition, term and the concept of the graphic novel as a representative of visual literature. To achieve this aim we should solve some objectives, mainly: 1) to describe the types of syntactic units, 2) to illustrate these types with the example of the material of our investigation, 3) to establish the relation «text-image», 4) to sum up the history of the development of genre with different terms accepted by different researchers and understand why and what is more appropriate one for our investigation.

Methods. For meeting the aims of this brief analysis we use descriptive methods of investigation. It gives us the possibility to share with the reader our perception and understanding the material under investigation.

Results. The transformation of the adult comic to graphic novel may reveal the importance of significant units. The comic-book has been usually considered to be directed to a teenager and children audience, whereas the graphic novel is directly addressed to a mature and adult readers. The development of this genre owes to the development of the society, some extra-language causes which finally resulted in intra-genre changes and the birth of graphic novel. Sometimes, the graphic novel is perceived as an adult comic and precisely this point has been mostly emphasized in recent investigations looking for a way to find the definition. Reading comics is the process motivating readers be involved in the course of decoding the set of messages that are embedded into various codes of languages. These embedded messages could be presented by syntactic units. In particular, syntax of graphic novel presupposes syntactic units' interrelation and in its turn these units in every individual case could be positioned differently according to focus of author's ideas.

Discussion. In our research of Rasputin graphic novel these significant syntactic units are as follows. 1) Contiguous spaces defined as structures that create the illusion of space and time continuity in the action, by showing in successive images. 2) Fading or progressive alteration of values of the image in successive images. 3) Text integrated into the cartoon, 4) Image of a sound, 5) Concentration, 6) Analytical montage or meticulous decomposition of the scene into its most significant elements, 7) Juxtaposition of graphic novel characters. The perspective of the present study is to explore probable influence of the image to the translation variant chosen, that is the reason why we could be in need of detailed exploration of image part syntax and the text position peculiarities.
The final perspective is to analyze translation variants and see the reflection of text-image relation in different languages.

**Keywords:** graphic novel, syntax, syntactic unit, visual literature, comics.

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