

SPEECH, DIALOGUE AND REMARK IN CONTEMPORARY ARMENIAN DRAMATURGY

Armen Avanesyan¹, Mher Kumunts^{2*}, Lernik Hakobyan¹, Ani Ghazaryan¹, Mihran Hovhannisyan¹

¹Institute of Literature after M. Abeghyan, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia

²Dialectology Department, Institute of Language after Hrachya Acharyan, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia; Goris State University, Goris, Armenia

¹PhD in Philological Sciences (Armen Avanesyan, Lernik Hakobyan, Ani Ghazaryan) | Post-graduate student (Mihran Hovhannisyan)

²PhD in Philological Sciences, Associate Professor (Mher Kumunts)

¹ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3231-7531> | Email: avanesyanarmen18@gmail.com

²ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5496-3783> | Email: mherkumunts@gmail.com

¹ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3459-5686> | Email: lerhakobyan1970@gmail.com

¹ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8593-0957> | Email: arpinanyan21@gmail.com

¹ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0359-4193> | Email: mihranhovhannisyan@inbox.ru

***Corresponding Author:** Mher Kumunts | Email: mherkumunts@gmail.com

Abstract: This article examines the role of speech dialogue and remarks (author's remarks) in modern Armenian dramaturgy. In drama, speech goes beyond its traditional function of pure communication and becomes the main driving force of dramatic action, often replacing physical movement and narration. Based on the analysis of the plays of prominent representatives of Armenian playwrights - Norayr Adalyan, Aghasi Ayvazyan, Gurgun Khanjyan and Vahan Vardanyan, it is shown how stage speech fluctuates between prose narration and poetic rhythm. The analytical method also emphasizes the structural significance of remarks. It is shown that in the plays of the modern Armenian period, remarks are not simply technical instructions for the directors, but important epic elements that define the spatial and psychological nuances of the text. The study concludes that the combination of speech and remark in the works under study indicates a genre fusion of prose and drama and the birth of a new, unique performative textuality.

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the study of theatrical text has increasingly emphasized the complex performative nature of dialogue and remarks in the text. While previously the dramatic text was often viewed as a mere draft of a performance, today it is perceived as an autonomous literary space, where speech itself shapes the action (Jarcho, 2020). Modern scholarly thought argues that dialogue in drama is not simply a reflection of everyday conversation, but a highly stylized form of "speech action," where linguistic exchange itself drives the narrative and shapes the power relations between characters (Herman, 2018; Spencer, 2022). In this context, dramatic speech abandons the simple retelling of past events, instead creating a conditional, immediate present.

In parallel with dialogue, the structural role of remarks has also undergone serious theoretical revision. Modern theatre studies argue that authorial considerations are not subordinate or secondary elements to speech: they function as a kind of "endotext" that carries deep psychological, spatial, and socio-historical meanings (Chen, 2023; McKinney, 2021). They act as "signifying cuts" that interrupt the continuity of dialogue in order to create the world of the play (Tompkins, 2024).

This theoretical framework is particularly relevant when examining contemporary Armenian dramaturgy. In recent decades, Armenian playwrights, many of whom came to the theater from prose, have fundamentally changed the structure of drama. Aghasi Ayvazyan, Perch Zeytuntsyan, Norayr Adalyan, and others have developed a dramatic script in which speech dominates and simultaneously acts as both epic narrative, lyrical exegesis, and philosophical rhetoric. This article examines how these contemporary works use the interplay of

dialogue and remark to blur the boundaries between prose and drama and to view speech itself as the main dramatic event.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper uses the textual and qualitative analysis of contemporary Armenian dramaturgy, based on modern theories of theatre structure and semiotics. Following contemporary approaches to discourse analysis of drama (Hoover et al., 2014; Ryngaert, 2019), our study identifies two main textual components: stage dialogue and authorial remark. The focus of the analysis is on a selected set of plays by Armenian authors, through which it is assessed how speech functions not simply as a means of communication between characters, but as a structural mechanism that advances the narrative.

Applying the latest theories of dramatic discourse (Herman, 2018; Tompkins, 2024), the syntactic and rhythmic features of dialogue are studied, clearly distinguishing between prose and verse dramatic structures. Additionally, textual analysis of remarks views them as autonomous narrative elements that bridge the diegetic (narrated) and mimetic (performed) spaces of drama (Chen, 2023). This dual approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how contemporary Armenian playwrights construct dramatic tension and atmospheric depth through language.

III. DISCUSSION

2.1. speech and Dialogue

Speech plays a crucial role in drama, serving as the primary means through which a play is constructed. In this context, words are almost always spoken and hold verbal significance. There is minimal use of thought, description, or recollection. In a dramatic work, the speech pronounced by the characters is almost always in the present tense, aligning closely with the current moment and state. Even when characters recount or reflect on past events, their speech is intimately tied to their present circumstances and mental state. The past in the text shapes the verbal present.

In drama, speech is characterized by “not being a narrative or a conversation about past and finished events, but a conventional presence of events through speech” (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 160). This means that references to past events are woven into the fabric of the ongoing dramatic events, rather than existing as mere memories. For example, in Norayr Adalyan's play “The Witnesses of a Murder”, the testimonies of witnesses during the trial, while equivalent to a recollection, is not perceived as a mere recounting of past reality. It would be more accurate to say that each character's testimony about past events (such as the attempted murder) serves as a reaction to their current situation. Therefore, it is not accidental that other conversations outside the incident prevail in the speech of the characters:

“CONTROLLER: *Friends and compatriots, if anyone saw anything, please speak up. We're all in a hurry, and midnight is approaching quickly. Let's get home on time.*

MALE JURYMAN: *Please, go ahead!*

CONTROLLER: *What can I add? From my perspective, everything looks fine. Neighbour, what do you think?*

NEWSAGENT: *Out of trouble; everything is fine.*

CAFÉ WAITER: *Let the singer have her say, and then she can go to her pianist's embrace.*

SINGER: *Hooligan, I'm a moral singer.*

CAFÉ WAITER: *A virgin?*

SINGER: *Almost a virgin.*

CAFÉ WAITER: *Almost a virgin? So, you're not a virgin, just pretending to be one?”* (Adalyan, 2003, p. 38)

This differs from other literary genres, especially prose. In prose, events and situations have already occurred and been completed. Often, even when written in the present tense, prose evokes the sense that these events have happened in the past. As a result, prose typically emphasizes the description of events that have already taken place.

In a dramatic work, there is indeed a past, but it is often omitted from the text itself. While this past reality is crucial, as it is the beginning of an act and drives the plot. The events that occurred before the first lines are crucial to the play's structure, *with their gradual disclosure through speech being central to the construction of a play.*

In drama, there are two distinct perceptions of speech: the text created by the playwright and the stage speech delivered by the actor. Drama expert Henrik Hovhannisyan offers an insightful observation on this matter:

"Stagecraft is also art of speech – thinkable, readable and audible-articulate. The dominance of speech is so profound that it becomes challenging to distinguish the autonomy of scenic value (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 29). Setting aside the scenic value of speech for the playwrights to assess, let's focus on its textual examination. Drama, before it becomes performance material, exists primarily as text with inherent literary value. *"Drama is complete as a literary composition and retains its independence from the theatrical conditions that bring it to life. The precondition of its perception is silence and the solitude of the perceiver, with the stage serving merely as contemplation"* (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 187) .

The text is built upon the word, which as a lexical unit is an abstract and marginal value. However, when that word is used in speech, it transforms into a component of content, engaging in contextual relationships and revealing various layers of meaning.

A dramatic work as a text is complete and unchanging; no matter how many times you read, the text remains the same. In contrast, a performance never ends. With each performance, the play is refined and developed further. Different theatrical troupes may interpret the same text in entirely distinct ways.

This is a defining feature of drama. The playwright envisions events and their progression, presenting them as a tangible illusion. Through speech, these imagined scenarios are brought to life and structured as a process. When reading a play, one simultaneously experiences the perspective of both the reader and the audience. The reader becomes an active participant, engaging in the unfolding of events as if they were speaking and directing them, while also assuming the role of an observer-spectator, observing the events as they occur.

Dramatic speech, as a literary value in silence, *offers infinite possibilities and options for perception*. In contrast, staged speech is constrained and more narrowly perceived through visible and audible means. Speech itself has no dimensions and transcends limitations. Artistic speech, even when fully formed, has a conventional structure.

In drama, the dominance of speech is undeniable. A dramatic work is often viewed as an external manifestation of speech, where the narrative unfolds through dialogues, develops, reaches a climax, and resolves (finale).

In contemporary Armenian drama, two primary verbal structures are prominent: prose and verse. Prose predominates, with most plays employing the narrative style typical of prose and developing through narrative motifs. It is not surprising that many playwrights transitioned from prose to drama, including Aghasi Ayvazyan, Perch Zeytuntsyan, Norayr Adalyan, Alexander Topchyan, Gurgen Khanjyan, Karine Khodikyan, and others. This transition often involves adapting short stories into dramatic works. *Prose-drama genre influxes often happen at the level of speech*. "Speech carries possibilities, introduces elements of artistic expression that are unique to it and operate independently, pushing drama towards poetry, epicism, and philosophical reflection" (Hovhannisyan, 2003, pp. 188-189).

In drama, speech can embody various layers and levels: epic-narrative (epic), lyrical (lyrics), contemplative, judgmental, rhetorical (rhetoric), and others. These elements can coexist within the internal structure of the drama, creating a balance where some aspects might shade or dominate others. For instance, in a monodrama, the speech often takes on a more epic quality, with the development of a single character's thoughts unfolding through a narrative process.

In Alexander Topchyan's monodrama "Both Human and God", the protagonist Mariam, who is chained, recounts her biography and sufferings. Similarly, in Nelli Shahnazaryan's drama "Procession", the protagonist intertwines her past history with her current state: she is alone, her mother-in-law is dead, and she is the only person present at the funeral. In this work, the transition to the past is used to make sense of the protagonist's present state. However, rather than experiencing the past, it is reflected upon and integrated into the present, becoming a component of it.

Dramas with political themes, such as Gurgen Khanjyan's "Tigran the Great," "Solar Ship," Karine Khodikyan's "Play Time," Alexander Topchyan's "Scum's Confession," and Samvel Kosyan's "The Latecomers," as well as those exploring state-related issues, like Aghasi Ayvazyan's "Aziatik," Norayr Adalyan's "Markos," and Perch Zeytuntsyan's "Don't Look in the Mirror," often highlight the dominance of speech through rhetorical constructions.

In dramatic structure, the speech in prose is often marked by mental and logical underpinnings, leading to “rhythmic and syntactical units in prose that are irregular and dictate tempo changes” (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 227). However, *“Speech has its own inherent quality and autonomy, regardless of genre or type, and acquires unique artistic value within the dramatic structure”* (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 159).

The poetic construction of dramatic speech is even more complex. Poetry tends to bypass straightforward descriptive language, focusing instead on evoking sensory experiences. Rhythm takes precedence in verse, with its units operating like drum beats—canonical and resistant to literal, semantical or philosophical interpretation. In crafting verse, the playwright adheres more to rhythmic dictate than traditional syntax. While syntax remains, it functions like a grammatical framework within which rhythmic units take priority, creating a rhythmically structured melody of speech.

These plays exemplify the use of poetic construction in drama: “Beyond,” “Sodom,” “Alexander,” “Uncertainty” by Vahan Vardanyan, “The Devil’s Wives” by Samvel Kosyan, “Trdat” by Tigran Balayan.

In Vahan Vardanyan’s dramas, poetic speech is intricately woven with movement. When reading these works, the primary perception is of the melody, which blends with the thought making rhythm rather than thought the driving force behind the movement and a vision. For instance, in the drama “Sodom,” various scenes—such as conversations of two soldiers, the city elders and Lot, or Lot and God—may appear static in terms of scene, but the movement is realized in speech.

LOT

*Is this the fiery angel of God?
How can I speak in your presence?
I’m just a lifeless shell of earthly dust-
A fragile vessel of clay, easily shattered,
Just as it was taken from the earth.
But who are you?
I can’t even bear to look at your face.*

POWER

*I am the one you think you know,
Or did you truly know me?
Speak calmly,
But first, listen.*

*Tomorrow morning,
When the first rays of the sun
Gently touch the stone steps of Sinai
And glide quietly down the mountain slopes,
Where the beasts come to bask in the sunlight
With their cubs around —*

*You are like that, but restless,
Like an animal in danger,
Gathering your loved ones close,
Fleeing the city to the hills ahead.
As long as you haven’t reached them,
The Lord will wait.*

*But as soon as you arrive,
He will destroy you.
This shiny house of wild vipers
Under the fearsome whips of the lightning* (Vardanyan, 2002, pp. 66-67).

At the beginning of the drama "Alexander," the conversation between Alexander the Great and General Parmenion might initially seem like a simple conversation between two people sitting by a fire in a tent, but that's only at first glance. In reality, the dynamics of the scene are deeply embedded in the speech itself. The author skillfully employs poetic language to enhance the scene, as the significance lies not in the progression of the action but in the situation in which the dialogue unfolds.

ALEXANDER

*The army will arrive in seven or eight days.
You know, I can't wait that long.
Tomorrow morning, I'll lead the army into battle.*

PARMENION

*But Alexander,
We only have the bodyguard regiment,
And the Thessalian cavalry-
Two thousand men.
How are we supposed to take the city? (Vardanyan, 2006, p. 5).*

In such a case, the speech governs the situation, assuming the function of movement itself. "In the depths of the verse, it's not so much drama as it is dance that governs, akin to the orchestration in ancient Greece. This orchestration serves not only as the foundation of the scenery but also as a mental engine, providing a tonal and rhythmic base as well as an emotional signal (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 194). The verse form of speech does not create the situation but exists independently, with its own transitions of imagery and emotional nuances.

In a dramatic structure, speech becomes more expressive when it is accompanied by implied movement. Speech transforms into a blend of a gesture, facial expression, and pronunciation. Certain words suggest specific gestures and facial expressions, such as desire, refusal, agreement, anxiety, pleasure, fear, and expectation. "Each phrase, word, or exclamation carries its own facial expression and movement" (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 275). The more these expressions of gesture and facial expressions are integrated into the speech, the more pronounced the dramatic movement becomes.

"WOMAN: *My poor Judas...! Don't tell me you're being tested to see if you can break the Teacher's commandment. You broke it long ago. Now you need rest. Find peace within yourself, and do not be at odds with yourself!" (Zeytuntsyan, 2001, p. 14).*

In this verbal passage, the phrase "my poor Judas" is intended to convey pity through a facial expression or perhaps with a gesture like patting Judas' head or kneeling beside him. The command "don't tell me" suggests a gesture and facial expression of rejection. The statement "you broke it long ago" serves as a gentle scolding, while "Now you need rest" expresses care and concern, etc.

Dialogue is also a verbal unit of the dramatic structure. Dialogue allows a playwright to build and reveal the dramatic tension and unfolding events. Dialogues are like small modules through which the playwright sets up and gradually unveils the drama.

This is a subtle and complex aspect of dramaturgical structure: the intersection of dialogue and speech. Dialogue is crafted through speech, but not every speech is a dialogue, and not every dialogue constitutes a drama. "For example, if two people are simply discussing a topic without any dramatic tension or conflict, their interaction may involve speech but lacks dramatic elements. On the other hand, when speakers engage in a heated exchange, probing each other's vulnerabilities or emotional triggers, and as a result, their characters are revealed and their relationship evolves, this interaction becomes dramatic. In essence, the drama emerges when dialogue involves a clash between opposing poles (Belinsky, 1953, p. 62).

In a literary text, dialogue encompasses more than just the surface cause or situation it addresses. While the reason for conflict in a dramatic work may be clear and the situation might align well with the inner content, the dialogue often conceals deeper nuances that enrich the dramatic context. Dialogue can unfold as a *question-and-answer* exchange:

"NERO: *Now I am a lion. What are you?*
AZIATIK: *The only gladiator left alive in the Coliseum.*

NERO: *And how long do you intend to stay alive?*

AZIATIK (humbly): *As long as God wills.*

NERO: *And my will means nothing to you, slave?*

AZIATIK: *Your will can destroy my body.*

NERO: *Do you have anything else?"* (Ayvazyan, 2003, p. 122).

As a dispute:

"ARAM: *"Why? Wasn't what I said true? Yesterday's brief escape was a laughable farce. What did you mean? I've seen enough. A spoiled, stubborn woman who makes a scene to get what she wants.*

NAREH: *A person incapable of doubt is the most dangerous. I would have gladly smashed a bottle of cognac over your head, but I was ordered to greet you with a smile."*

ARAM: *Do you think I don't understand why you have made this scene? It's to make sure I don't come back out of fear, knowing that the renovation will fail. Women are always concerned with renovations, while husbands are mostly indifferent. Here, it's the opposite. I will continue my work to thwart your deceitful plan."* (Khodikyan, 2004, pp. 92-93).

As a contemplation:

"MARKOS: *Nothing scares people more than death, which offers no ordinary escape. For millions of years, death has been ours; we belong to death, yet we fear it more than a black, poisonous snake.*

ISABEL: *Because the snake silently crawls toward us"* (Adalyan, 2005, p. 34).

As a mystery:

"GIRL: *Do you doubt it? Then look into my eyes... Don't look away—look, look!*

GRIG: *I can't. There are only hollows where your eyes should be... It's frightening...*

GIRL: *Look deeper, look. There are eyes in the depths"* (Khanjyan, 2008, p. 173).

In addition to the aforementioned methods, dialogue can also unfold in various other ways.

"In drama, speech can either emerge as a result of a situation or constitute the situation itself. Conversely, a situation can also arise from speech or reveal underlying intentions" (Hovhannisyan, 2003, pp. 162-163). This is why contemporary Armenian drama often is more about situations and states rather than acts, due to the predominance of speech. To create movement within these situations, states playwrights frequently use elements, which are out of speech, such as unpronounceable words, phrases, sentences - *remarks*.

2.1. Remark

When reading dramatic works, you might encounter passages written in lowercase, usually italicized, and often enclosed in parentheses. These texts, which can range from single words to complete sentences, are referred to as remarks.

Remarks in drama are particularly important during the reading process. They help the reader visualize the setting and actions, often imagining a stage where characters interact and perform. As Aghasi Ayvazyan notes in the introduction to the stage novel "The Boys": "From here begins this stage novel, which you can both *read* and *play (perform)*, either *on the stage* or *in your mind*, if your imagination permits..." (Ayvazyan, 2001, p. 2).

For readers, the speech itself is usually clear, but to fully envision the setting, moves, movements of characters, and, sometimes, expressions of a state, playwrights include remarks which can be considered as authorial hints. These remarks assist readers in imagining the action and atmosphere more vividly. There is a common belief, particularly among directors, that playwrights use these remarks to assume a directorial role while writing, and they also stage through their remarks while writing. The writer and playwright Norayr Adalyan admitted, in one of his courses, that while writing a play, his desk often transforms into a makeshift stage. He uses various techniques to explore the scenic situation, helping him better visualize the tangible form of his written work.

A remark, however, is a textual reality, beyond the level of speech, and often even a disturbing circumstance for the directors. Here it is appropriate to quote a part of Henrik Hovhannisyan's memoirs:

"- How do you think the mise-en-scène will be decided?" Atjemyan asked me. According to the author's remarks...?

-But the remark is in parentheses," I replied. "It's not part of the dramatic text" (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 182).

Remarks assist the reader in staging the dramatic work in imagination. While reading a novel or short story, the events unfold in the imagination, but in drama, the imagined scenes have defined boundaries. The stage serves as an artistic space where the events take place.

Thus, remarks should be first and foremost examined as text.

In drama, some remarks have significant informative value. At the end of the 19th and into the 20th century, before the actual dramatic work began, characters were often described in detail. For example, a character might be introduced with specific information: “**THOMAS** - a wealthy landowner and merchant's son, educated, 38 years old, town melik, judge, landlord” (Demirchyan, 1985, p. 63). Similarly, details about appearance, clothing, character traits, and other specifics were provided. For instance, “**ARTAK** - the only son of his parents, serving his military duty in a unit near Moscow. He is tall, with a round face and prominent, fleshy ears...” He is quiet, humble. Deeply in love with Valya, and love gave him courage, determination...” (Harutyunyan, 1979, p. 282).

Such detailed remarks are no longer common in contemporary Armenian drama. Instead, contemporary works often feature either a simple list of characters, such as “**MONK, RED ARMY SOLDIER, OFFICER FROM ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY FEDERATION, BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, MAN WITH A BACKPACK**” (Ayvazyan, 2003, p. 193) or brief descriptions of characters, like “**SIRAK** - unemployed and homeless, sleeps in an abandoned house; **LUSO, or Lucia Mikayelovna Akopyants** - a refugee living in the same house” (Khanjyan, 2008, p. 197), and so forth.

In the 1930s and 1940s, proponents of “new drama” sought to transform the use of remarks in world drama. American writer of Armenian descent, William Saroyan, is regarded as a pioneer of this innovation. Subsequently, this approach to remarks became commonplace in anti-drama and the Theatre of the Absurd.

Remarks in drama typically serve as both opening and concluding elements. Opening remarks are particularly significant as they provide the initial context for understanding the work. They function as the starting layout, setting the stage for what follows and offering essential entry points into the drama.

Opening remarks typically describe the setting or provide a general idea of the scene, depending on the playwright's preference. Some playwrights, like Aghasi Ayvazyan and Gurgen Khanjyan, focus on the creative (writing) function, emphasizing the artistic and conceptual aspects of the work. Others, such as Perch Zeytuntsyan, Norayr Adalyan, and Karine Khodikyan, concentrate on the stage (staging function), positioning the work within a specific imagined setting. These remarks often outline the initial situation or positioning, setting the stage for the act that follows.

“Prince's house- a grand vestibule in a pagan style, sculptures of gods and an altar. Prince Vriv and Ovak observe a dogfight from the balcony overlooking the yard. On one side is the prince's favorite, the gampr¹ Arjuk; on the other, a shepherd's dog. The sounds of the fight and the shepherd's calls encouraging his dog can be heard: “Kyaf, ho! Come on, Kyaf...” (Khanjyan, 2001, pp. 227-228) (free, creative solution).

“A piano with black and white keys illuminated in total darkness. Chopin's music plays. Gradually, Man appears at the edge of the stage, away from the piano. He is dressed in a black tailcoat and white bow tie, seated on a soft, backless chair” (Adalyan, 2003, p. 71) (scenic solution).

Often, such remarks are of limited help to directors during performances, as modern directors tend to prioritize their own vision over the playwright's instructions.

“- Doesn't the director have the right to deviate from the author's remarks in parentheses?” Atjemyan asked.

- Perhaps, I replied, - but the *mise-en-scène* is not solely dictated by the instructions and remarks in parentheses...” (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 183).

Current remarks often describe characters' moves (e.g., sits down, walks to the door, attacks) and their emotional states and mood (e.g., saddens, is afraid of, laughs, cries, gets angry). In many cases, these remarks can be considered redundant because “if the author's remarks do not even hint at the mood (which is not always necessary), the situation and tone are often clear on their own...” (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 183).

In drama, there are situations where the actor (director) decides how to present a scene. The same speech can be delivered with varying tones - whether with a smile, seriously, or bitterly - depending on the direction of the

¹ Gampr is an Armenian breed of flock guardian dog native to the Armenian Highlands. It falls within the Ovcharka group of livestock guardian dogs, which can be found throughout the Transcaucasian area.

performance. For example, one Georgian theatre portrayed the famous soliloquy from Shakespeare's "Hamlet" - "To be or not to be?" - as a comic situation. "An actor's smile is neither written nor dictated by any remark. And if it is dictated, it holds minimal significance. *The remarks are beyond dramatic speech* and their role in the unfolding acts is minor" (Hovhannisyan, 2003, p. 248).

There are also remarks of a different nature that add an epic quality to a dramatic work and are more frequent throughout the play. For example: "*The director moves the trash can around, searching for the most comfortable position. Meanwhile, the insurance Agent, who also works as a newsagent, carefully examines the items in the apartment. A Man kisses Neighbour, while Woman watches them silently and motionless*" (Adalyan, 2003, p. 86).

The emergence of such remarks is linked to the genre blending of prose and drama. The descriptiveness typical of prose infiltrates the drama, with "actions described in such remarks extending beyond the stage, creating an epic or cinematic impression." (Zohrabyan, 2008, p. 21).

As a result, remarks are now so prevalent that it can be said that the dramatic text is effectively divided into two components: the speech as an expression of a thought and the remark as a depiction of a movement.

IV. CONCLUSION

In contemporary Armenian dramaturgy, the traditional dominance of physical action over speech is radically reversed. Speech itself becomes a decisive dramatic event, endowed with its own spatial and rhythmic autonomy. The works of Armenian authors testify that dialogue can generate action, dictate pace, and reveal deep psychological states without the need for external plot mechanisms. Regardless of whether speech manifests itself in the logical prose of political plays or in the rhythmic, figurative verse of poetic dramas, it serves as the vital force of the theatrical situation.

Moreover, the extensive use of remarks imparts an epic dimension to the structure of the drama, testifying to the fact that many contemporary playwrights are prose writers. These authorial remarks function as full-fledged textual realities, guiding the reader's imagination and conveying atmospheric depth. Ultimately, the combination of speech and remark in contemporary Armenian dramaturgy creates a rich, hybrid textuality, where the narrative is continuously experienced in the present tense, providing endless possibilities for both literary perception and stage interpretation.

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