

LINEARISATION IN NARRATIVES

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Project	Categories across Language and Cognition.
Task	Collect narratives that are told in your speech community and, in addition, elicit narratives with pictures that first need to be sorted before the story depicted can be told.
Goals	The goal of this task is to find general as well as culture and/or language specific linearisation strategies in narratives.
Prerequisites	Video-camera, 4 wordless pictures each for six "Sir James" Stories.

Background

There is quite a lot of research done on linearisation and segmentation in discourse and in a number of text categories, for example, fund raising letters, medical documents, scientific explanations, and so on (see, e.g., Degand, Fabricius-Hansen & Ramm 2009 and the RST bibliography on the Rhetorical Structure Theory website⁶). Moreover, the topic of linearisation is also central for research in conversation analysis, although the term itself is not used (see, e.g., Jefferson, 1978). But what about culture-specific linearisation schemata that underlie narratives?

Narratives are conventionalised stories that tell fictional or non-fictional events of one or more protagonists. They are created in a special format and are told for an audience in a specific way, often by one narrator in a monologue, but also by more than one narrator—in the latter case in a joint venture kind of dialogue which may even involve the audience. The aim of narrating a story can be manifold, but most narrators aim to entertain and/or to educate their audience.

Research on narratives by Colby (1973), van Dijk (1977), Kintsch and Green (1978) and more recently Klapproth (2004; see also Senft, 2006) has shown that we can identify culture-specific schemata that underlie stories in different languages and cultures. Based on the tradition of schema theory (developed by Bartlett, 1932) and notions like "plans" (see Miller et al., 1960), "frames" (see Goffman, 1974; Tannen, 1979; van Dijk, 1977) and "scripts" that are understood as standard stereotypical event sequences (see Schank, 1975; Schank and Abelson, 1977a,b), this cross-linguistic/cross-cultural project will analyse the macrostructures of narratives (see Senft, 1992:414-419; Senft, 2010:145-147, 260-262) that can be detected not only across different languages but also within different narrative genres within languages (see Senft, 2010).

This subproject combines our interest in the interface between language and cognition with our more general cultural anthropological interests, because—as Klapproth (2004:404) rightly points out—"[t]o have a story is to have a world". Analyses of narratives—be it fairy tales, myths and other text sorts of this kind—will reveal not only general language- and culture-specific linearisation strategies but also provide an insight into what rhetorical

⁶ Rhetorical Structure Theory website: <http://www.sfu.ca/rst>.

devices (like flashbacks, foreshadowing and reference to geographic landmarks) story tellers use in and for their planning and ordering of the parts or episodes of their narratives. This project will concentrate on narratives that tell fictional events, but the documentation of stories where narrators report non-fictional events is not categorically excluded.

General research questions pursued with this project are: How do speakers of a language linearise narratives? Do they differentiate different forms or genres of narrative and do they metalinguistically label these text categories? If genres of narratives are differentiated, are these specific text categories linearised in a specific way or is it possible to isolate general linearisation strategies that hold for all kinds of narratives? Which linearisation strategies in narratives are language and culture-specific? If we compare narratives told in different languages and cultures, do we find linearisation strategies which are used despite the fact that these languages are unrelated with and different from each other? What rhetorical devices are used in and for their planning and ordering of the parts or episodes of their narratives? Are these rhetorical devices language and culture specific or not?

Tasks

The following tasks are only well suited for researchers working in communities where narratives are told as a linguistic and cultural practice. So please check whether narratives are told in your language community and find out how they are told.

There are two tasks: an open form of data collection and a controlled form of data collection. These tasks should be done on different occasions, not one after the other.

Open data collection

Collect narratives (at least 6 to 10; more if possible) and audio- and video-record the narrator(s). Make sure that there is an audience of native speakers who listen to the narrative. Depending on how long the narration is, ask narrators the following questions, either directly after they have told the story or some time later (as a rule of thumb a session with one consultant or a joint session with more consultants who narrate one story should not be longer than an hour):

- What is the title of this narrative?
- Why did you select this particular story from other possible stories you know?
- Where did you hear this story or who told you the story? Were you explicitly asked to memorise the story? If not, why did you memorise this story?
- Is this story still told to children? Are children eager to hear such stories, do they care about them or are they no longer interested in hearing them? If so, why?
- What do people think about this story? Is there a moral or a specific "message" that goes with it? Is it assumed to be educational?
- Are there personal property rights (or clan-rights, etc.) that go with this story? Can other people also tell this story?
- Are there different versions/parts of this story?
- What about the social status of people who can narrate this story? Stories in general?
- Is there a general name for this kind of narrative and are there other narrative forms that have different names? Are there narratives that are thought to be more important than others? The one s/he just told?

The answer to these questions should provide information about indigenous narrative text categories and possible metalinguistic labels for these genres, like story, joke, myth, etc.

Controlled elicitation of narratives

Using a series of four wordless pictures (see "Stimulus" below) and inspired by the work like that of Berman and Slobin (1994), the more controlled elicitation of stories aims to find out whether speakers of different languages recognise a plot structure in these pictures and if so, how they relate the events with each other, whether speakers of different languages tell the plot of these stories in different ways using different linearisation strategies and different narrative perspectives, or whether speakers of different languages use similar or at least comparable linearisation strategies in telling the stories depicted in the pictures.

Stimulus

The stimuli consist of six short stories taken from the "Der kleine Herr Jakob" ("Sir James") picture stories (Press 1997). Each of the stories consists of four pictures.



The following (relatively culture-neutral) stories were selected:

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| No. 1 | Sir James, his neighbour and the apple tree |
| No. 5 | Sir James and the proud fisherman |
| No. 9 | Sir James and the big parasol |
| No. 23 | Sir James and the goat |
| No. 37 | Sir James and his neighbour cut down trees |
| No. 38 | Sir James's adventure with his big dog on a lake. |

Procedure

Put the four pictures for the six stories in front of the consultant in the following order:

No. 1:	4	1	3	2
No. 5:	1	4	2	3
No. 9:	2	1	4	3
No. 23:	2	4	3	1
No. 37:	3	2	1	4
No. 38:	3	1	4	2

Ask the consultant to order the pictures so that they tell a story and then ask him or her to tell this story.

Another important step in the process will be for the researcher to arrange an audience for the story. Control that members of the audience are not among your future consultants.

Instruction

As the instruction for the consultant please use an equivalent of the following formulation in your language:

Look, here are four pictures. Use them to create a story that tells what happens here. You can order them so that they tell something that happened to the little man. Please order the pictures and then tell the story.

Consultants

Try to work with as many consultants as possible (at least 8, but researchers may wish to work with more), male and female, young and old. This more controlled way of data elicitation should be done after the open data collection of narratives is finished. The open data collection of narratives is more important for the aims of this task than the controlled elicitation of stories. Nevertheless, ideally consultants who told narratives in the open elicitation should also participate in this form of data elicitation.

Camera position

Make sure that the video-camera is positioned in such a way that it captures the pictures and the narrator—and, if possible, also part of the audience. It must be possible to check the order of the pictures on the film.

Analyses

Data will be transcribed, glossed and analysed following the proposals provided by van Dijk (1977, especially pp. 23ff), Kintsch (1977), Schank and Abelson (1977a&b) and Senft (1992; 2010), who describe how to isolate the macrostructure of stories (i.e., their plots or plans and how to zoom in from these macrostructures on their more detailed scripts).

Outcome

The project will provide answers to the research questions mentioned in the paragraph about the background of the project. Participants in this task will meet regularly to discuss their data and their analyses. The project aims for a joint publication of the cross-linguistic/cross cultural results of the data analyses.

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