

Perspectives on Narrative

Symposium Radboud University Nijmegen

An initiative from the Text, Transmission & Reception-group *Narrativity*

CLS/HCLS – Faculty of Arts – Radboud University Nijmegen

Organizers: José Sanders & Hans Hoeken; Kobie van Krieken, assistant

Date: Tuesday April 23, 2013

Time: 13.00-17.30 hrs

Place: Thomas van Aquinostraat (TvA) 2.00.12

Admission is free - Number of participants is limited

Please register at k.vankrieken@let.ru.nl

Aim: reflecting on perspective in narrative from various angles on a linguistic and discourse level. Our generic interest lies in the function of narrators' voices and narrators' perspectives in narrative text: how are these voices and perspectives constructed linguistically, reconstructed cognitively, and applied functionally intended (either consciously or unconsciously) to establish a particular effect (for instance, identification, transportation, persuasion).

We intend to discuss these insights for literary fictional contexts and expand them to journalistic and persuasive contexts; in these areas, narratives are functionally applied more often today and sometimes tested for their effect. All speakers will analyze representation of perspective in either fictional or nonfictional narrative genres.

Programme

13.00 *Introduction* Hans Hoeken, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

13.15 Barbara Dancygier, University of British Columbia

The Language of Stories – a cognitive approach

14.15 break

14.30 Lieven Vandelanotte, KU Leuven / Université de Namur

When newspapers met fiction? Revisiting "voice" across genres

15.15 Max Verduijn & Arie Verhagen, Leiden University

Viewpoint complexity and 'packaging' – narrative and linguistic tools for mind reading

16.00 break

16.15 Kobie van Krieken & José Sanders, Radboud University Nijmegen

Perspectives on incomprehensible acts in various to news genres

16.45 Anneke de Graaf, University of Amsterdam

Effects of narrative identification

17.15 discussion

17.45 drinks

Abstracts

Barbara Dancygier

University of British Columbia

Form and meaning in the narrative: a cognitive approach

In this talk, I will propose a model for narrative interpretation, based on the theories of mental spaces and blending. The models, while focused on meaning emergence processes, also propose an understanding of the role that context and other pragmatic phenomena play in stories. While the framework aims at representing basic avenues for text-wide narrative comprehension, it also addresses the linguistic features of narrative discourse, such as pronoun choices or tense.

The examples to be discussed come from both fiction and non-fiction narratives written in English. The primary mechanism to be explored through the analysis of these texts is viewpoint compression – a pattern of meaning emergence which explains both local and global textual phenomena. To illustrate the concepts, I will focus on formal and lexical choices which are used in the representation, maintenance, and shift of narrative viewpoint.

Lieven Vandelanotte

University of Namur & University of Leuven

When newspapers met fiction? Revisiting “voice” across genres

The permeable boundaries between fiction and non-fiction have exercised the minds of writers and scholars alike, giving rise, among writers, to experiments given such labels as ‘faction’ (as, famously, in Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*) or ‘creative nonfiction’ (as in Joan Didion’s acclaimed *The Year of Magical Thinking* and, recently, *Blue Nights*), and among researchers in linguistics and communication studies to crossfertilizations of various sorts, for instance the application of linguistic tools of text analysis to fiction and non-fiction genres alike (e.g. Dancygier et al. 2012).

In this paper I take as my starting-point the recurrent claim in the literature that free indirect discourse is not confined to literary texts, but equally occurs in newspaper language (see e.g. Onions 1904: 83-84, Curme 1931: 420, McHale 1978: 282, Semino and Short 2004: 86-87). In comparing fiction and non-fiction extracts, as in (1) and (2) respectively, through the lens of my own thinking on speech and thought representation (e.g. 2009), I hope to shed a new light on the question of “voice” across the fiction/non-fiction divide. By bringing a category of examples to the table in which another’s discourse is drawn into the “narrator’s” or “journalist’s” viewpoint (cf. Vandelanotte 2004a/b, 2012) – as in the underlined parts of (2) – I call for a reappraisal of the broad conception of free indirect discourse (as in the underlined part of (1)) according to which it accommodates a ‘dual voice’ (e.g. Pascal 1977, Oltean 2003) and encompasses functions of empathy as well as irony (Leech and Short 1981, Semino and Short 2004).

- (1) James kept dreading the moment when he would look up and speak sharply to him about something or other. Why were they lagging about here? he would demand, or something quite unreasonable like that. And if he does, James thought, then I shall take a knife and strike him to the heart.

Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse

- (2) She has soft white hair, a clear voice and perfect teeth. “Gnashers in good order,” she said. She is 90 and lives in St Andrew’s. [...] Her father worked for the Great Western Railway

in Berkshire; she and her younger sister played in the garden, shared a governess with the vicar's children and did as they were told – until Betty was almost 18.

Maureen Cleave, "Bright old things", Intelligent Life, vol. 1 (2008) issue 4: 102–108

Adding in the dimension of 'subjectified' uses of so-called 'reporting' clauses such as I think invites further comparison with non-fiction uses, for instance in conversation or argumentative discourse, resulting in a cline of usage types straddling different genres.

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Max van Duijn & Arie Verhagen

Leiden University

Viewpoint complexity and 'packaging' – narrative and linguistic tools for mind reading

Literary narrative texts are often used not only by literary scholars but also by psychologists, philosophers, and other cognitive scientists to demonstrate how complicated and multi-layered mixed-viewpoint situations can get. For example, Zunshine (2006: 32-33) argues that in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), when Hugh is composing a letter with his silver fountain pen, "Woolf intends us to recognize [...] that Richard is aware that Hugh wants Lady Bruton and Richard to think that because the makers of the pen believe that it will never wear out the editors of the Times will respect and publish the ideas recorded by this pen" (italics in original). Similar statements can be found in, among others, Dunbar (2008), Corballis (2011), both citing Shakespeare (*Othello* and *Twelfth Night*, respectively), and in the seminal Dennett (1987), all in highly similar ways.

In all of these cases, the ability to process such complex relationships between different viewpoints is attributed to a presumed unique human capacity to understand mixed-viewpoint situations of the relevant degree of complexity. In other words, a rather direct link is postulated between the conceptual complexity discernible in some narratives and built-in mechanisms for computing such complexities, much in the spirit of work on the so-called "adapted mind" in Evolutionary Psychology (cf. Barkow et al. 1992). One or several, less or more domain-specific, adaptations in the big and powerful human brain are assumed to account for the ability to handle up

to five or six orders of embedding, which in turn constrains the cultural practice of producing narratives (Kinderman et al. 1998; Dunbar 2008).

Using and extending concepts from cognitive linguistics/poetics (cf. Dancygier 2012), we will develop and support an alternative view, viz. that it is the structure and language of narratives themselves that allow us to build an understanding of the connections between different points of view, that may sometimes attain a high level of complexity. In short: certain narrative and linguistic practices are the tools (culturally inherited ones) by means of which ‘mind reading’, including elaborate cases, is performed, rather than manifestations of a general human cognitive capacity evolved for dealing with such complexities.

First, there are good reasons to assume that complicated mixed-viewpoint situations can only be represented in stories (whether fictional or actual); other ways of representing the same complicated situations are not as easily understandable. Second, while narratives provide a better basis for understanding than other manners of representation, it is also true that the specific form of the representation in the story matters greatly to the quality of understanding. We will show how a particular phenomenon we call “packaging” provides some of the means by which certain representations of complex mixed-viewpoint situations can be understood while others cannot. Configurations of viewpoints of some complexity can be introduced into and used in a narrative holistically (i.e. without the complexity being constructed), and prior experience with them turns out to be crucial for understanding. Finally, this leads us to reconsider the way questions about the relationship between discourse structure, viewpoint interpretation, and cognitive processing can and should be formulated. Instead of processing abilities constraining story complexity, it seems that understanding may get as complex as can be constructed in a story.

References

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Kobie van Krieken & José Sanders

Radboud University Nijmegen

Perspectives on incomprehensible acts in various news genres

Background news articles elucidating shocking news events are aimed at guiding readers towards a better understanding or imagination of such events. They do so by employing narrative techniques to reconstruct the experiences and emotions of perpetrators, their relatives, victims, heroes, or eyewitnesses. These narrative techniques include viewpoint alterations as well the representation of news sources’ speech and thought, especially in the free indirect mode. These techniques invite readers to take a look at the events through different perspectives of people involved or even identify with these people (De Graaf et al.

2012), which makes it less hard to understand why and imagine how the horrible events took place (Johnston & Graham, 2012; Berning 2011, 2012). These approaches provide a general view on the use of narrative techniques in written journalism, but they fail to deliver in-depth insights into the linguistic choices that constitute these techniques. For instance, the narratological classification of a narrator as either homodiegetic (present in the story) or heterodiegetic (absent from the story; cf. Genette, 1980) relies heavily on the choice of referential expressions. Likewise, tense switches and coherence markers are linguistic indications of viewpoint reconstructions. A thorough study of the function of narrative techniques in journalistic articles therefore implies studying the linguistic elements that constitute these techniques as well as studying the variation in meaning that these elements represent. In our view, such a study of form and function of narrative techniques in journalistic texts is a prerequisite for formulating refined hypotheses about the effects that these techniques contribute to the reader's construction of a meaningful understanding and imagination of (shocking) news events.

Adapting Dancygier's (2012) cognitive linguistic analysis of narrative, we propose to analyze narrative understanding in terms of the representation of interconnected, embedded and blended mental spaces (Sweetser & Fauconnier 1996). The construction of such mental space structures is signalled by linguistic choices that guide readers' understanding of different viewpoints within the narrative (Sanders, Sanders & Sweetser, 2012). In journalistic narratives about highly shocking acts, it is precisely this representation of various viewpoints – of the perpetrator, eyewitnesses, victims, heroes – that allows the reader to gain a better understanding or imagination of the events. An analysis of the linguistic elements that contribute to the representation of viewpoints will therefore result in knowledge about the fulfillment of the functions of journalistic background stories by means of language. Moreover, it enables the generation of hypotheses about the effects of these linguistic elements on the reader.

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Anneke de Graaf

Universiteit van Amsterdam

Effects of narrative identification

Narratives have the power to change readers' beliefs and attitudes towards the real world. An important determinant of such persuasive power is the perspective from which a narrative is told. Our prior research has shown that readers identify more with the character from whose perspective the narrative is told, which led to attitudes more consistent with the character's position. Following up on these results, a new study was conducted that varied characteristics of the perspectivizing character, such that this character was either similar or dissimilar to the participants. It was expected that identification with a similar protagonist would make readers relate the story more to themselves. Making connections between the story and the self is called self-referencing and is expected to lead to more persuasion. Results showed that participants who read the version with a similar protagonist had beliefs more consistent with the story than participants who read the version with a dissimilar protagonist. This effect was indeed mediated by self-referencing, showing that telling a story from the perspective of a character that is similar to readers makes them relate the story to themselves, which in turn leads to persuasive effects.