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REFERENTIAL SPACE IN STORY-TELLING: FINDINGS ON CHILDREN'S NARRATIVE DISCOURSE

The paper presents a dual dimensional conception of story-telling in terms of narrative line (developing over time) and narrative field (elaborated in space). This conception emerged in analyses of narrative texts constructed by preschoolers in monologic and dialogic discourse. Two narrative discourse conditions were organized: solo narration (narrator with listener) and co-narration (two co-narrators with listener). 358 solo narrated and 170 co-narrated texts were analyzed. The analysis presented here concentrates on textual reference organization and explores reference situations outside the narrative line, i.e., reference situations elaborating the narrative field. As the study shows, children elaborate narrative field in three types of referential space: perceptual, imaginary and attributive. Across the age span studied we noted the growing complexity of narrative field structure (Bokus, 1996). Neglect of the spatial dimension of story-telling may have impoverished the picture of children's narrative competence.

Introduction

Definitions of narrative differ in detail, but all agree on its central property: a narrative is a verbal representation of events that follow one another in time (e.g. Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Peterson & McCabe, 1983, 1991). However, many authors consider other basic properties as well. Let us see what additional properties are proposed by different authors.

According to Polanyi (1985), a story must include not only *main line event clauses*, but also *contextualizing state clauses*. Event clauses have been described as the backbone or "bare bones" of a narrative and they describe what happened. Contextualizing clauses include identification of participants, setting, explanation, evaluation, and other information. Longacre (1983) stated that a narrative involves a distinction between *on-the-line* or *backbone material* and *supportive, explanatary or tributary material* in the discourse. Peterson and McCabe (1991) identified *eventline* or *timeline* of children's narratives and *off-the-line information*. The latter information orients the listener or provides evaluation. Bokus (1991,1996) distinguished *narrative line* and *narrative field* in the narrative text.

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A narrative line reflects changes in reality over time, whereas a narrative field reflects the state of reality within a given spatial area to which the narrator is attending at a given moment.

To what extent have these additional properties been studied? Considerable attention has been given to the story line as central property of a narrative. A good deal is known about the “story line” (e.g. Mandler, 1984), the “narrative line” (e.g. Sachs, Goldman & Chaille, 1984; Bokus, 1991, 1992), the “main line event clauses” (Polanyi, 1985), the “timeline events” (Peterson & McCabe, 1991) or “on-the-line material” (Longacre, 1983). Much less attention has been given to additional narrative properties which describe the background of the developing narrative line, e.g., “off-the-line information”, “tributary material”, “contextualizing state clauses” or “narrative field” (Bokus, 1996).

The purpose of this paper is to present a dual dimensional conception of a narrative in terms of two basic properties. This conception enables us to look at narrative text in time and in space. I will try to show how children elaborate referential space in the process of story-telling.

Basic concepts

The conceptual framework adopted in this paper derives from Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) definition of **text**. According to these authors, a text is best regarded as a semantic unit, a unit not of form but of meaning. A text is realized by, or encoded in, utterances of discourse. **Discourse**, in turn, is treated as a pragmatic unit of language (Bokus, 1991). Therefore narration (or co-narration) needs to be analyzed on two planes:

- the textual (semantic) plane dealing with the content of speech;
- the discursive (pragmatic) plane dealing with the coding of content in the utterances of one or more discourse participants. On this plane discourse can be regarded as the activity of creating text.

The narrative text, as a semantic unit of language in use, refers to a changing reality. In psychology, changing reality is grasped in the notion of **situation** as the state of reality at a given moment. Situation is defined (according to Tomaszewski, 1975) as a set of relations between the elements forming an individual’s environment at a given time. In semantics, the notion of situation is understood in two ways: one, as the context in which an utterance occurs, and the other, the state of reality described by the utterance, what is talked about (Lyons, 1977), i.e. a **reference situation** (according to Shugar, 1976). The changing nature of reality represented in a narrative can be treated in categories of reference situations. Therefore, a narrative text can be operationally defined as a chain of reference situations (Bokus, 1978).

In the psychological definition, every situation, and therefore also every reference situation, is always someone’s situation, i.e., is assumed to have some subject, animate or treated (by a speaker) as animate. A situation cannot be identified without – on one hand – identifying its subject, and on the other – describing the activity or state of that subject. A reference situation is mentally constructed by the speaker and represents a state of reality grasped in the perspective of the selected subject.

To make this clearer, let us say that reference situations comprising a text are distinguished according to the situational subject, and to the state of the situational subject as agent of action or as experiencer.

The state of activity of any subject can embrace:

- the state of external activity accessible to observation

and/or

- the state of the subject's internal activity, which is not directly accessible to observation but is inferred by the narrator.

On the discourse plane, reference situations are more or less precisely coded in utterances. For example, the situation of a crying bear can be presented like this:

"Misiaczek siedzi sam i płacze. *A little bear is sitting all alone and (he)'s crying*¹. Siedzi w lesie... w dużym lesie. *(He)'s sitting in the woods... in the big woods*. Płacze... jak bardzo. *(He)'s crying... so hard* (the child imitates crying bear). Łzy mu spływają po buzi. *Tears are running down his face*. Płacze i płacze. *(He)'s crying and crying*" (R.W. 4;9).

This reference situation was narrated by one child. A similar reference situation was narrated by two children, as follows:

N1 (Z.K.5;4)	N2 (J.B.5;3)
Misio... mały	
misio	...sio (simultaneous speech)
<i>A bear... a little</i>	
<i>bear</i>	...bear (simultaneous speech)
	mały, mały misio płacze...
	<i>a little, little bear is crying...</i>
	Siedzi i płacze
	<i>(He)'s sitting and crying</i>
... w lesie.	
... <i>in the woods</i> .	
	No, płacze bardzo, ten misiaczek.
	<i>Uhhuh, (he)'s crying hard,</i>
	<i>this little bear.</i>
No, płacze.	
<i>Uhhuh, (he)'s crying.</i>	
Ma łezki na buzi.	
<i>(He)'s got tears on (his)</i>	
<i>face.</i>	
	Mhm...
	<i>Mhm..."</i>

Narrative text (let me repeat) is defined operationally as a chain of reference situations, or – in other words – states of reality conceived of by the speaker or speakers from the perspective of a situational subject. Reference situations, which are states of changing referenced reality, transform from one into another, and therefore they form events and

¹English translations of Polish narrative utterances are close approximations. Pronouns in parentheses are not expressed in the children's text. In Polish, the verb morphological structure gives the person and number of the pronominal subject.

episodes. **Events** are situations linked over time. They can also be linked causally, that is one situation causes another. **Episodes** are events linked teleologically, by activity directed to a goal.

In terms of this conception, what is a narrative line? Reference situations represent states of reality temporally ordered and therefore connected only chronologically, or ordered causally or teleologically as well, form what is called the **narrative line**. The narrative line presents the course of states of referenced reality over time. And what the is a narrative field? I will show this on the basis of empirical material from our studies.

Subjects and research design. Empirical material

384 children between ages 3 to 7 took part in the investigation in solo narrator and in co-narrator roles. They recounted to a peer listener the adventures of the heroes of three picture books. Two variants of peer participant structure were designed. One variant was composed of two children, a solo narrator and a listener, and the other of three children, two co-narrators and a listener. The research design was balanced for age, gender and order of participation in the two variants. 358 solo narrated and 170 co-narrated texts were analyzed.

Analyses and results: Two dimensions of narrative text

Narrative line and narrative field

The conceptual framework presented above (reference situations, events and episodes) was used in devising a method for the analysis of narrative texts constructed by preschoolers in solo- and co-narrator roles (Bokus, 1992). We adopted the method proposed by Stei and Glenn (1979) and developed by Peterson and McCabe (1983).

Reference situations were analyzed as the units of more or less complex structure presenting the narrative line:

- series of different situations of the same subject (without chronological sequence)
- sequences of reference situations making up events,
- sequences of events making up episodes.

In other words, we found the same structures as other authors, but not all the reference situations we identified in the texts fitted into the framework of the narrative line.

Table 1 presents the number of reference situations (RSs) outside the framework of the narrative line. Out of over three thousand RSs in the monologic texts, a total of five hundred and five could not be attributed to the narrative line. From analyses of 35 monologic texts, 257 contained RSs outside the framework of the narrative line. And what about co-narration? Out of seventeen hundred and forty-six RSs in dialogic texts, a total of three hundred and fifty-one could not be attributed to the narrative line. From analyses of 170 dialogic texts, 134 contained RSs outside the framework of the narrative line.

In other words, about one out of five to seven RSs (for the youngest children's co-narration even more: about one out of four RSs) stood outside the narrative line. What were they about? Let us look at the example in the Appendix.

In this example, the underlined parts of the text are reference situations that were outside the narrative line. If these reference situations did not exist in the text, the result of the analysis of narrative line would be the same. In other words, an analysis focused on the narrative line does not capture the fact of their occurrence. We conclude that reference situations outside the narrative line belong to another dimension of narrative reference structure.

Table 1. Frequencies of Reference Situations (RSs) outside the narrative line framework. Findings on monologic (solo narrated) and dialogic (co-narrated) texts

	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds	Total
	Solo narration				
RSs outside narrative line	84	111	133	177	505
(%)	(15.16)	(15.23)	(15.91)	(19.56)	(16.70)
all RSs (100%)	554	729	836	905	3024
Texts with RSs outside narrative line	57	61	70	69	257
(%)	(64.77)	(67.78)	(76.92)	(77.53)	(71.79)
all Texts (100%)	88	90	91	89	358
	Co-narration				
RSs outside narrative line	84	87	75	105	351
(%)	(27.27)	(20.62)	(15.12)	(20.08)	(20.10)
all RSs (100%)	308	422	496	523	1746
Texts with RSs outside narrative line	29	33	36	36	134
(%)	(72.50)	(73.33)	(83.72)	(85.71)	(78.82)
all Texts (100%)	40	45	43	42	170

Let us look more closely at the lists of reference situations which were identified in the example in the Appendix. The first list presents reference situations building up the narrative line. The second list presents reference situations standing outside the narrative line. One could say that reference situations in the second list build around a particular reference situation in the narrative line and show it in different lights. And therefore the narrative line can either consist of simple and sufficient representations of referenced reality at a given moment, or can consist of reference situations that are elaborated by other situations of other subjects.

Sometimes in order to present a state of reality at a given moment the narrator, or co-narrators, introduce more than one reference situation into the textual chain. These situations are states of referenced reality which the narrator apprehends from the perspective of different subjects either a) co-present in a given spatial area or b) present in other related spatial areas. These reference situations reflect what at a given moment in time is happening in the space created by the narrator. These reference situations comprise what we call the **narrative field**.

Thus the functional differentiation between narrative line and narrative field can be stated thus: Reference situations that make up the narrative line are linked by the relation THEN, while those that make up the narrative field are linked by the relation WHERE (both relations stated more or less explicitly in the discourse).

Dominating the narrative field at a given moment is usually a situation belonging to the narrative line. This situation stands out as figure on a background, in psychological terms as a "gestalt". The subject of this situation is the hero of the story.

Who are subjects of reference situations elaborating the narrative field? Let us illustrate on the following examples:

Ex. 1.

"Jacek i Wacek... Wacek i Jacek grali w piłkę. *Jacek and Wacek ... Wacek and Jacek were playing ball.* Grali sobie... (the child imitates play) w piłkę nad rzeką. *(They)'re playing...* (the child imitates play) *ball by the river.* A ślimaczek mały się przyglądał, jak grali. *And a little snail was watching how (they) were playing...*" (K.S.4;4)

Ex. 2

N1 (A.G.5;4)

N2 (Z.L.5;8)

Jacek i Wacek grają w piłkę nad rzeką.
Są daleko od domu, bez mamy...
Jacek and Wacek are playing ball by the river.
(They) are far away from home,
without their mummy...

No
Uhhuh...

Mama gotuje obiadek w domu...
The mummy is cooking dinner
at home...

No.
Uhhuh...

I myśli... Myśli, co chłopcy się bawią
przed domem w piłkę...
And (she) is thinking ... (She) is
thinking that the boys are playing ball
in front of the house"

Ex. 3.

"Wacek się uczy pływać w rzece, a pan ratownik idzie drogą do rzeki, i jest daleko... daleko do Wacka... z trzy kilometrów. *Wacek is learning to swim in the river... and the lifeguard is coming along to the river, (he)'s far..far away from Wacek... three kilometres.*" (Z.T.5;4)

In the first example, the subject of the field reference situation, is visible in the picture and co-present within the same spatial area as the heroes of the narrative line.

In the second and third examples, the subjects of the field reference situations are not visible and are located in other spatial areas. Who are these subjects in the last two examples? They are potential participants who are introduced by the narrator (from the narrator's imaginary world) into the picture of what is happening in the narrative line.

As these examples have shown, the narrative field can embrace more than one spatial area:

- the area of real events in narrative line (“... Jacek i Wacek grają w piłkę nad rzeką. ...*Jacek and Wacek are playing ball by the river*”; “Wacek się uczy pływać w rzece /.../ *Wacek is learning to swim in the river /.../*”),

- the area of imagined states and actions in the narrative field (“...Mama gotuje obiadek w domu... *The mummy was cooking dinner at home...*”; “/.../ Pan ratownik idzie drogą do rzeki, i jest daleko... daleko do Wacka... z trzy kilometrów. /.../ *The lifeguard is coming along to the river, (he)'s far...far away from Wacek...three kilometres*”),

- the area of hypothetical events in the consciousness attributed to someone in the narrative field (“/Mama/ myśli, co chłopcy się bawią przed domem w piłkę... (*Mummy*) is thinking that the boys are playing ball in front of the house...”).

So the narrative field can be elaborated in three types of referential space: perceptual, imaginary and attributive.

Referential space structuring

Our analyses showed given relations between subjects in the narrative field and narrative line. It was found (Bokus, 1991, 1996) that children elaborated narrative fields by introducing situational subjects related in some way to subjects in the narrative line, as follows:

(1) spatial relation

-direct

e.g. “Jacek i Wacek grali w piłkę. A ślimaczek szedł blisko nich... *Jacek and Wacek were playing ball. A little snail was coming up close to them...*”(K.A.3;8)

-indirect (i.e. by reference to some common point or object in space)

e.g. “Jacek leżał pod skałą, brudny był... I... i na czubku skały siedziała sobie myszka, mała myszka sobie siedziała... *Jacek was lying under the cliff, (he) was all dirty... And... and at the top of the cliff there was a little mouse sitting, a little mouse sat there...*” (R.W.4;5)

(2) observer – observed relation

e.g. “Jacek wyciągał Wacka z wody. A muchy się przyglądały, jak wyciągał. *Jacek was pulling Wacek out of the water. And the flies were watching how (he) was pulling...*”(J.R.4;7)

(3) evaluator – evaluated relation in categories of good - bad, nice - not nice, pretty - ugly,

e.g. “Jacek fruwał. Wacek patrzył, że Jacek tak dobrze fruwał... *Jacek was flying. Wacek was watching how well Jacek was flying...*” (K.W.6;4)

(4) explainer – explained relation in categories of cause, goal, effectiveness of action, etc.,

e.g. “Misio płakał. Ptaszki się dziwowały, dlaczego płakał. *The little bear was crying. The birdies were wondering why (he) was crying...*” (B.S.5;7)

“Jacek pożyczył skrzydełka. Muchy patrzyły na Jacka, że ma skrzydełka, i nie wiedziały wcale po co... *Jacek borrowed the wings. The flies saw that Jacek had wings and (they) didn't know at all what for...*” (S.C.6;8)

“Misio szukał mamusi. A inne niedźwiadki nie wiedziały, czy znajdzie... *The little bear was looking for his mummy. And the other bears didn't know whether (he) would find her...*” (Z.R.5;7)

As the above examples have shown, a narrative field can be more or less cohesive depending on the kind of relations between subjects of narrative field situations and subjects of narrative line situations. We noticed that reference situations introduced into the narrative field can either compete with the narrative line situation, or they can reinforce the privileged position of the line situation. We explain this as follows:

If the subject of a new field situation is shown in a spatial relation with the hero(es) of the narrative line, the narrator's attention – as well as the listener's – is moved to the new subject and his situation. Perhaps this new situation could be the beginning of a new story line competing with the present one.

If the narrative field is even more cohesive and the new field subjects are shown in different relations to hero(es) of the narrative line, i.e. observer – observed, evaluator – evaluated, explainer – explained, the narrator's attention – as well as the listener's – continues to focus on the situation of the hero in the narrative line.

Let us see what effect these relations between field and line subjects can have on the narrative text. If new field subjects take the role of observers or evaluators they can clarify, or can show up an ambiguity of, the state of the hero,

e.g. “Jacek fruwał w powietrzu. A zajączek się patrzył, jak on fruwał i ruszał skrzydłami ... o tak (the child imitates). *Jacek was flying in the air. And the rabbit watched how he was flying and moving his wings like that ...* (the child imitates) (Z.K.4;8)

Here from the perspective of the rabbit the narrator clarifies the state of Jacek's action.

Sometimes what is happening in the narrative line can be seen and evaluated differently by various subjects in the narrative field,

e.g. “Jacek fruwał sobie nad ziemią. Wacek widział, co Jacek fruwał i machał w skrzydełka... A zajączek widział, co Jacek nie w skrzydełka, tylko nogami. *Jacek was flying over the ground. Wacek saw that Jacek was flying and shaking his wings... And the rabbit saw that Jacek wasn't shaking his wings, only his legs*” (B.A.6;5)

or

“Wacek płynie do piłki. I żabki się cieszą, co Jacek płynie tak dobrze... tak szybko jak pływak. A ważki widzą, co tak nie płynie dobrze... za wolno... źle płynie. *Wacek is swimming to the ball. And the frogs are glad that Jacek's swimming so well... as fast as a real swimmer. And the dragonflies see that (he)'s not swimming well... too slow... bad...*” (J.W.6;9)

Examples like the above show that reality can be referenced as possible worlds (in Bruner's terms, 1986) and not as a given world entirely defined by the story-teller. Possible states of the hero's activity can be created in the discourse in the minds of the narrator (co-narrators) and the listener. These states are shown in the multiple perspectives of different observers or evaluators. The story-teller need not portray a single view of the fictional world, he can present other, overlapping views that allow the listener to build up a

complex picture of reality in the narrative line.

The fourth and final relation we found between field subjects and line subjects is that of explainer - explained. In the explainer role, field subjects tried to interpret and to explain the events presented in the narrative line. These subjects "put questions to themselves" (thought about some matter, wondered about it, had doubts about something, etc.). Their questions concerned the causes and intentions behind acts, the effectiveness of the hero's actions in the narrative line. For example:

N1 (I.B.6;9)

Jacek i Wacek idą do lasu...
bez taty.
*Jacek and Wacek are going
to the woods... without their daddy.*

A motyl się martwi, jak znajdą
drogę do lasu bez taty...
*And the butterfly is worrying
how (they)'ll find the path
to the woods without the daddy...*

I tak sobie patrzy w głowie motylek,
co idą z tatą do lasu...
*And the butterfly sees in his head,
that (they) are going with the daddy
to the woods...*

Ale... po co idą? Na grzyby?
But ... what for? To pick mushrooms?

N2 (G.N.6;7)

No...
Uhhuh...

Bez swojego tatusia.
Without their daddy.

Do lasu.
To the woods.

In introducing field subjects as explainers or interpreters of states and events occurring in the narrative line, children introduced new categories of information. These categories become frameworks for new content serving to develop the narrative line. One could say that field subjects influence (indirectly) the way the narrative line will be presented, and this of course is done by the narrator himself.

Conclusion

The examples presented here and results of analyses published so far (Bokus, 1991, 1996) confirm the importance of looking at the building of narrative text from both angles, in both temporal (narrative line) and spatial (narrative field) dimensions. Consequently,

we lose out by reducing our analyses to following only the narrative line and forgetting all the rest. What does this amount to? It diminishes our estimation of children's narrative competence.

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Appendix

N1(Z.J.5;7)

N2(S.C.5;4)

L(K.R.5;9)

Najpierw było tak: Jacek chciał się pobawić w motylka i fruwać. Bardzo chciał, ale nie miał skrzydeł do fruwania.

First it was like this: Jacek wanted to play butterflies, and fly. (He) really wanted to, but (he) didn't have any wings to fly with
(looks at N2, then at L)

Mhm....
Mhm....

No... a posłuchaj!
So... *and listen!*
(to L)

(looks at L)

No... i... potem pożyczył skrzydła do... nie!... od motylka...

So then (he) borrowed some wings to... no!... from the butterfly...

No i potem przebrał się w motylka
So then (he) dressed up like a butterfly

...-tylka.
...-terfly.
(attempt to speak simultaneously)

(L looks at co-narrators)

Jacek przebrał się w motylka.
Jacek dressed up like a butterfly.

No.
Uhhuh.

I już fruwa... fru...
fruwaaaa i ma oczka (showing the picture) zamknięte...
And now (he)'s flying... fly... flying and (he)'s got his eyes (showing the picture) shut...

...-uwaaaa
...-nięte
...-ing
...shut
(attempts to speak simultaneously)
(brings the book closer)

A Wacek się patrzy, jak Jacek fruwa.
I myszka się patrzy, jak fruwa.
And Wacek is watching how Jacek is flying. And the little mouse is watching how (he)'s flying.

(looks at the book, then at N2)

I zając się patrzy w Jacka. I powietrze się patrzy. I myśli, co dobrze... fruwa... co Jacek tak dobrze fruwa... jak motyl.
And the rabbit is watching Jacek. And the air is watching, and is thinking:

*he's flying... good... Jacek
flies so good...
like a butterfly.*

(nods his head affirmatively)

A woda zła się nie patrzy, zła.
Płynić sobie i płynić na dole.
And the water is bad, it didn't watch,
bad. It just floated and floated on down.
(moves the book over to N1)

Jacek fruwa i fruwa...
Potem bęc... bęcnał na ziemię.
Jacek flies and flies...
And then boom...
(he) bumped down on the ground.

(L re-tells
story about
Jacek
by manipulating
the puppet)

Spadnął (emphatically)
(He) fell down (emphatically)

I leżał tak (showing)
w piasku brudas.
And lay there (showing)
on the sand - dirty kid.

No... (unclearly) ... brudasek,
nie brudas! (emphatically)
*Uhuh ... (unclearly)... little
dirty kid, not dirty kid!*
(emphatically)

In the above text the narrative line is created by the following reference situations:

1. the situation of Jacek, who "really wanted to play butterflies, and fly" but unfortunately he "didn't have any wings"
2. the situation of Jacek borrowing wings from the butterfly,
3. the situation of Jacek dressing up like a butterfly,
4. the situation of Jacek flying in the air with his eyes closed,
5. the situation of Jacek falling to the ground,
6. Jacek's situation after his fall.

The situations outside the narrative line are:

- a. the situation of Wacek watching Jacek fly in the air,
- b. the situation of the mouse also watching Jacek,
- c. the situation of the rabbit also looking at Jacek flying,
- d. the situation of the air (here: as animate and thinking being) watching Jacek and evaluating his flying skills,
- e. the situation of the bad water that keeps floating on down.

All reference situations a-e build around the fourth reference situation in the narrative line and therefore they elaborate the narrative field.