

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

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LANDSCAPE OF ACTION AND LANDSCAPE OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN CHILDREN'S SPONTANEOUS NARRATIVES*

The theoretical background of this research is provided by Bruner's (1986) theory of double landscape of narration, as well as the concepts of story line and story field, as developed by Bokus (1991, 1993), see also papers in Britton & Pellegrini (1990). The main question is: what linguistic forms are used to point to each of the landscapes separately or to their combination?

Sixty 6-year-olds were asked to narrate a story of their own choice ("Please tell me a story that nobody heard before"). The narrative texts produced were very differentiated, as concerns length, coherence, and character (fictional vs. realistic, or mixed). Most of them dealt with fictitious or pseudo-fictitious events.

Several strategies in creating story landscapes were identified as well as linguistic means used to realize them. The majority of the stories, although not all of them, contained some references to the states of consciousness of the protagonists (using mental verbs such as think, believe, feel, want, etc.). A positive correlation was observed between coherence of the episodic structure and development of the plane of consciousness.

Introduction

Understanding the world and creating its representation is a constant activity of the mind. From birth a child actively experiences his surroundings, and everything that takes place in that world is an *event* for him. Over time repetitive, everyday events generate their mental representations. This is a prerequisite for narrative thinking, the activation of which requires the creative invention of a story-teller. The narrator makes events the objects of his reflection. Then there emerge *general representations of events*, referred to as *scripts* (Chafe, 1990, Gopnik & Maltzoff, 1997). A narrative text is a verbal representation of events set in time (the narration line) and space (the narration field) (Bokus, 1991).

* This short communication is based on a poster presented at the International Conference "Children's discourse from a narrative perspective" (Kazimierz Dolny, September 17-21, 1998, Poland). Requests for copies should be sent to the author at the Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology, Institute of Psychology, Jagiellonian University, Piłsudskiego 13, 31-110 Kraków, Poland. Fax: +48 12 4217710.

Bruner (1986) describes the dimensions of narrative thinking in terms of landscape of action and landscape of consciousness. Creating a representation of the actual actions of the story protagonists, the narrator develops the landscape of action. The landscape of consciousness indicates the mode of conscious experience of the world by the story protagonists. These states are linguistically expressed by the words: think, feel, believe, want (Bruner, 1986). The *double landscape of narration* is a prerequisite of narrative thinking, necessary both for story-making and story understanding. It requires metarepresentational ability to adopt the meanings attributed to the situation by others. The narrator creates a subjective world, seen from the point of view of a protagonist (Bruner et al., 1990). There are three processes that realize the double landscape of narration. *Presupposition* permits the listener to accept some information only in the particular case, but not always and unconditionally. Due to *subjectification* the fictional world is seen from the point of view of one of its protagonists. Finally, by using *multiple perspectives* the narrator sketches the landscape of the fictional world in a way that helps the listener to develop its complex picture (Astington, 1990).

The study

Forty Polish children aged 6 years (20 girls and 20 boys) participated. The investigation was carried out in a kindergarten in Kraków.

Only those children who wanted to "play and make up stories" participated in the research. Their stories were tape-recorded, then transcribed and segmented. The subjects received the instruction: "Tell me a story that nobody has heard before".

Theoretical assumptions and research questions

The theory of the double landscape of narration (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Astington, 1990) and the concepts of narration line and narration field (Bokus, 1991, 1998), as stated in the Introduction, were the theoretical background of the study.

The two following questions were posed:

- What forms of narrative thinking serve to create the landscape of action and the landscape consciousness separately, and also the double landscape of narration?
- What language forms are used to build each kind of landscape, respectively?

Results

Story length

The texts of 40 spontaneous stories that were obtained varied with respect to formal structure, degree of creativity and involvement of the fictive element. The story length was measured in terms of the number of words, utterances, phrases and episodes. Each of these formal indicators was interpreted in terms of the cognitive and linguistic competence of the given child. The number of words served to evaluate the child's ability to verbalize thoughts and expand the narrative text. The number of phrases and utterances reflected the ease in expressing the intended contents. The proportion between the number of utterances and the number of phrases indicated verbal fluency. The number of episodes and the way they were linked reflected the ability to verbalize larger, logically interconnected mental entities. Table 1 gives the quantitative data based on the formal indicators.

Table 1. Story length

Mean values for:	Girls (n=20)		Boys (n=20)		Both (n=40)	
words	3938	mean 196.9	2586	mean 129.3	6524	mean 163.1
phrases	422	mean 21.1	209	mean 10.5	631	mean 15.8
utterances	264	mean 13.2	171	mean 8.6	435	mean 10.9
episodes	269	mean 13.5	183	mean 9.2	452	mean 11.3
Indicator of fluency	264/422 = 0.63		171/209 = 0.82		435/631 = 0.69	

The girls' stories were longer than boys' on every indicator. The indicator of verbal fluency, however, was higher for boys (0.8) than for girls (0.6), which could suggest the boys were able to talk on a specified subject more easily.

Episode linkage (the role of connectives)

It is primarily the kind of linkage between the episodes, not their number, that determines the coherence of the text. Three ways of linking episodes were specified:

- isolated episodes: no linguistic form used for linking events, no logical relation of cause and effect;
- partially linked episodes: the logical relation between the events was not linguistically explicit, but only implicitly given in the story content,
- causally linked episodes: a linguistically expressed cause and effect relation between the events

The number of each type of linking episodes is given in Table 2.

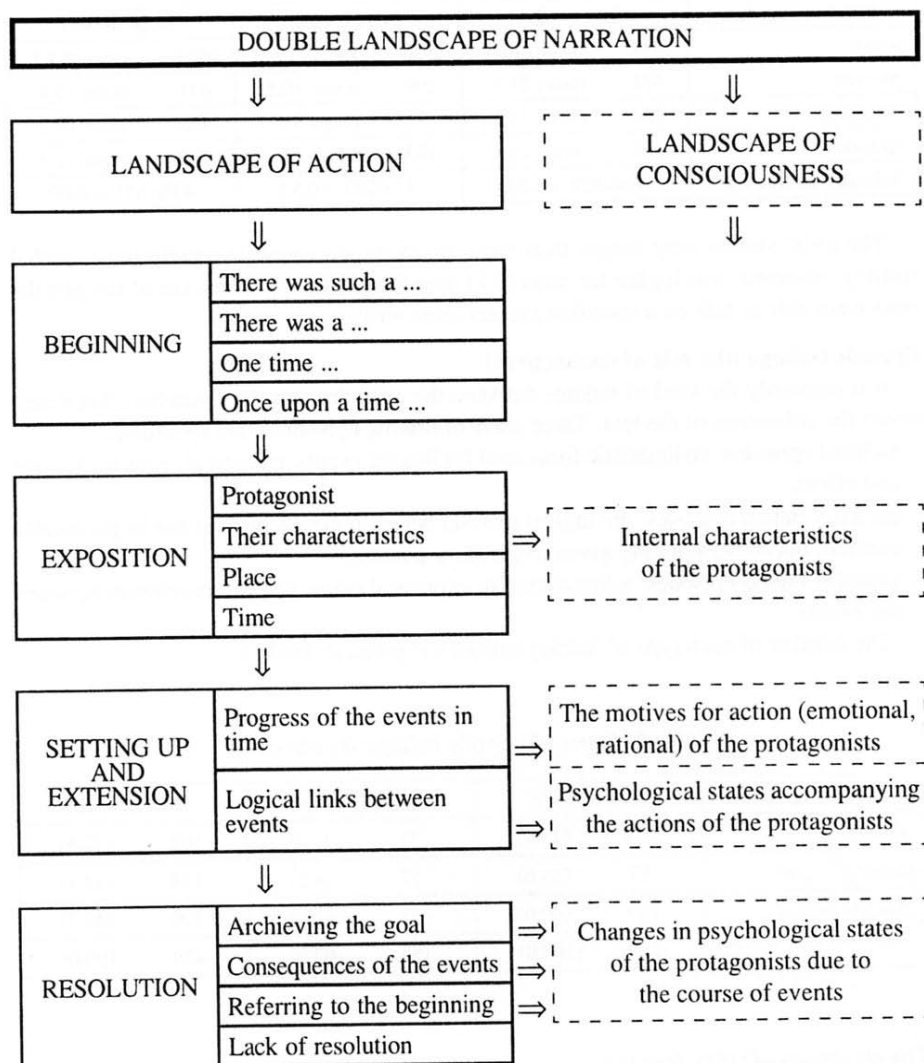
Table 2. Types of episode linkage (in percents)

Type of episode	Girls (N=20)		Boys (N=20)		Both (N=40)	
isolated	63	(23.4)	39	(21.3)	102	(22.6)
partially linked	97	(36.0)	57	(31.2)	154	(34.1)
causally linked	109	(40.6)	87	(47.5)	196	(43.3)
All	269	(100.0)	183	(100.0)	452	(100.0)

The strategies of story making

The description of the double landscape of narration may be related to the structural invariants of narration (exposition, setting up the plot, its extension, ending, cf. Mandler, 1983). A model of the universal strategy of investigating narrative landscapes is proposed here.

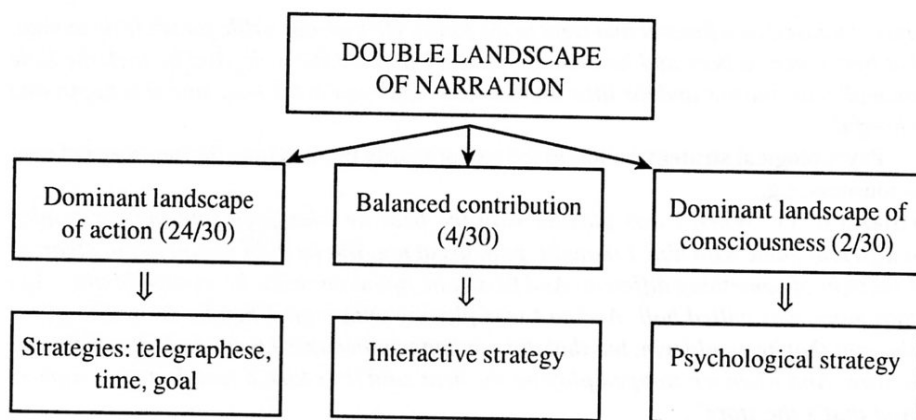
MODEL OF NARRATIVE LANDSCAPE



We observed a *universal* strategy of story making, which corresponds to the structural invariants of narration. 25% of the stories were made on a single level of narration – the landscape of action; 75% on a double landscape of narration.

Specific strategies of the double landscape

The double landscape of narration is qualitatively heterogeneous. The relative contribution of elements belonging to the landscape of action and those of the landscape of consciousness varies. The structure of the double landscape is presented below.



Most of the stories sketched within the double landscape framework includes only single elements of the landscape of consciousness. We can suppose that the meta-representational ability that underlies narration is only in the formative stage at the age of 6–7.

There are the following specific strategies of story-making where the landscape of action is dominant:

The **telegraphese strategy** – the child creates a text according to a plan where by only crucial points are filled with content, e.g.,

(Paweł W., 6, 7) *"The little bear was at home, he was walking along a path, he was walking. And then a wolf crept up on him and imprisoned him. Later his mum was looking for the bear and killed the wolf, with a rifle. The end"*.

In **time strategies** – the plot is fixed on a time line, e.g.,

(Ania G., 6, 4) *"There was a little dog and he suddenly saw a cat. The cat hid himself in a kennel and then he saw mice and ate those mice immediately. And that dog could not find the cat and later there was night and that dog was let loose and later he went into that kennel, but the cat had already been running away from that dog. And the dog did not catch him. And one time he did not catch him, he escaped on a tree and did not come down"*.

Another method of building the text is by **goal strategy**, which realizes the cause and effect train of events, e.g.:

(Agnieszka B., 6, 10) *"There was an Aunt living in a house and he had no friend, so he went to look for one somewhere during a walk. And as he was walking he found a little animal and called him Filipek [little Philip]. And it turned out that he was also an ant. And they went together to that ant, home, and Filipek was not homeless, and the ant found the friend he was looking for"*.

The balanced contribution of both action and consciousness landscapes is characteristic of the **interactive strategy**, e.g.:

(Madzia D., 6,3) *"There was once a little animal who did not have a mother, and once he went to the forest and he wanted to see a wolf. And the wolf went to that animal's burrow, but he is not there. And that's what the wolf thinks: "Perhaps he is looking for me". So then a little rabbit told the little animal that the wolf spied on him. And the wolf dis-*

guised himself as a forester and went to the forest. He took out a rifle for the little animal, but here comes a bear and he took off his mask and ate the wolf. And he took the little animal to his burrow and the little animal said thank you to the bear, and was happy and cheerful".

Psychological strategy builds up the plot primarily by sketching the landscape of consciousness, e.g.:

(Blażej 6, 1) *"When I was playing with the bear he whispered into my ear to play a different game with him. I thought: perhaps at tag. But he didn't want to play that, so I thought of something different. And finally he found out what he wanted to play. And that game was called ball. And so I was playing with him. When he started to play I thought that he would win, but that did not happen, because I won, and later there was a draw. And when we stopped playing the bear said let's take a rest. I at once agreed. And that's the story".*

The linguistic form of the landscape of consciousness

The subjects used mental verbs in their stories, as it was suggested by Bruner. The type of conjunction that precedes or follows them is also significant for the interpretation. Here are examples of the language forms most often used in the children's stories:

"...he was sad...", "...lazy ...", "... stupid ..."

"... she wanted to ...", "...decided to ...", "thought, and ..."

"... then she got angry ...", "... she was scared, when ...", "... that she got frightened ..."

"... and they came to like him ...", "... and she became good ...", "... and he became happy ..."

These examples illustrate that the landscape of consciousness is related to two different elements of the universal structure of narration. The subjects also introduced dialogue into their stories (in 14 cases out of 40), which underlay the dynamics of the landscape of action and, within the landscape of consciousness, made the experiences of the protagonists more realistic.

Conclusions

Most of the spontaneous stories of the 6–7-year-old children were characterized by a double landscape of narration. The relative contribution of the landscape of action was greater than that of the landscape of consciousness, which should be interpreted in relation to the children's theories of mind (Bokus, 1998). The strategies of narrative thinking varied within both the single and the double landscape of narration. It is due to the fact that children showed the investigative-experimental attitude, combining information from various sources. They created a plot with a the narrative line, but also developed its field and referred to the psychological states of the fictional characters.

The stories within the landscape of action can be referred to, metaphorically (and the very term of 'landscape' prompts us to use metaphors), as "painted with one's fingers". The train of events is sketched from the narrator's point of view, with no explicit relation to the various perspectives of the story protagonists. The double landscape means "picture making". Due to a wide array of colors (knowledge and thinking) and wide possibilities of displaying them (the degree of clarity and coherence of the stories) the narrator uses several planes, perspectives, or 'light and shade effects' (the level of metarepresentational narrative ability).

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