

GRETA LEMANAITĖ DEPRATI
Jagiellonian University, Cracow

PERCEPTION AND EVALUATION IN LITHUANIAN CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES

The study is based on a particular scene of a picture-based narrative, namely, 'the jar episode' in the Frog Story ("Frog, where are you?", Meyer, 1969). The subjects were three groups of native Lithuanian narrators: seven- and ten-year-old children (22 per group) and 20 adults. The purpose of the study is to try to explore how young narrators perceive their emotions and feelings, and how they express their evaluation of the events in a narrative discourse, in other words, what causes the majority of narrators to see and say only what they would like to be true, but not what is exactly shown in the picture.

Problem

Meyer's wordless picture book *Frog, where are you?* (Mayer, 1969) on which the research has been based was used by a number of authors for very different linguistic and psycholinguistic studies, e.g. Berman (1993), Bamberg and Reilly (1996), Bamberg and Damrad-Frye (1991), Reilly (1992). Berman's and Slobin's very exhaustive comparative study *Relative events in narrative. A Crosslinguistic Developmental Study* (1994) was also based on the book. The aim of the present paper is to discuss the problem how children and adults perceive and evaluate particular events of a story, why speakers use various language options to justify the protagonists' acts, and why most adults don't even mention a given episode.

The study

The study is based on 64 native Lithuanian narratives. 22 7-year-old, 22 10-year-old schoolchildren and 20 adults (all with high school education) took part. Before narrating, every subject was instructed as follow: "Here is a picture-book which tells you a story. Look through all the book from the beginning to the end. When you are ready, tell me a story, please". During the narration the book remained in the narrators' hands and they could turn the pages by themselves.

Requests for copies should be sent to the author at the Department of General and Indo-European Linguistics, Jagiellonian University, al. Mickiewicza 9/11, 31-120 Kraków, Poland. E-mail: leman@vela.filg.uj.edu.pl

The research is based on one particular scene of Mayer's wordless picture book *Frog where are you?* (Mayer, 1969). The book contains 24 pictures and tells us a story about a boy and his pet dog looking for a frog which had disappeared one night from the jar where the frog was kept. The story is composed of several main episodes which contain particular events. For the study, pictures 4-7 in the book on the Broken Jar Episode were used. The Episode has three basic events: the Put Event (when the dog looking for the frog puts his head into the jar and is stuck there), the Fall Event (when the dog with the jar on his head falls through the window), and the Break Event (the jar is broken).

As mentioned, before starting narrating every speaker had a couple of minutes to plan all the story and make decisions where to start, what to include and what to omit, what words to use depending on the story plot.

Goals of analyses

“What is narrated depends upon the narrator being able to interpret the characters and their relations in time and space, to understand how the initiating events impact on the main protagonist and lead to the formation of a goal plan, how the protagonist enacts this plan over time, whether the attempts to achieve the plan fail, how the protagonist reacts to the failures, and finally, how attempts succeed and end the story” (Berman and Slobin, 1994, p.88).

Analyses and results

As Table 1 shows, event constellations in the Broken Jar Episode are quite diverse. Not every speaker decided to include all three basic events of the Episode as a whole, and 9% of the subjects decided to omit the Broken Jar Episode as not important for the whole story plot.

Table 1. Event constellations in the Broken Jar Episode

	N	Put Fall Break	Put Fall	Put	Fall	Fall Break	Put Break	No Jar Episode
7 years	22	36%	27%	-	14%	18%	-	5%
10 years	22	50%	18%	9%	-	9%	5%	9%
Adults	20	25%	35%	-	15%	5%	5%	15%
Total	64	38%	27%	3%	9%	11%	3%	9%

Before analyzing the Broken Jar Episode, some remarks on including by narrators particular basic events should be made. As stated above, one must plan how one is going to tell the story. Table 2 presents the percentages of the three main events of the Broken Jar Episode. Analyzing Table 2 one can recognize that most consequent were the 10-year-old speakers. They mentioned Put, Fall and Break events in decreasing order. Interestingly, 7-year-olds and adults preferred the Fall event and paid less attention to the Put and Break events. This suggests that young children and adults have a common way of story plan-

Table 2. Percentage of subjects who include particular basic events

Age	N	Put	Fall	Break
7 years	21	62%	100%	57%
10 years	20	90%	85%	70%
Adults	17	76%	89%	41%
Total	58	76%	91%	57%

ning. Young children don't try to describe the pictures precisely, because they lack experience. Adults do the same thing, but for different reasons – they tell the plot of the story omitting some unimportant – to their mind – elements.

The least important event (especially for adults) was the Break event. This suggests that 7-year-olds and adults are not concerned about the result of the Episode, i.e. the broken jar. On the one hand, one could agree with Bamberg's and Damrad-Frye's opinion that "young narrators do not consider the fact that anger against the dog at this point in the story is an obstacle to continuing the joint search for the lost pet frog" (Bamberg & Damrad-Frye, 1991, p.702). On the other hand, it seems that in a child's mind damage of the broken jar is less than that of the hurt dog. The Put event also is not so important as is the Fall event. Another reason for the high percentage of the Fall event is that in picture 6. the dog falls out of the window. It seems that speakers are describing what is directly shown on the picture, but from another point of view the Fall event is a sort of culmination of the Episode.

All the narratives were told from the third person perspective. Although the dog is highly active in the Episode, the story is organized through the boy-protagonist's mind, his perceptions, desires and consciousness. So we could divide all the narratives into two groups depending of the boy's reaction to the last event of the Episode – the Broken Jar event. The first group included all the narrators who used any verbal negative reaction to the dog's falling through the window and breaking the jar (1a-f below¹), i.e. then it was said that the boy "got angry" (1a,b,c,d below), or "is angry" (1e below), "is discontented" (1f below).

- (1) a) *berniukas supyko*
(the) boy *got angry*
- b) *berniukas supyko, kad jisai sudaužė varlytės namelą*
(the) boy *got angry, because he (=dog) has broken the frog's house*
- c) *supyko ant ėžiuko, kad sudaužė stiklainą ir pats vos neušimudė*
(the boy) *got angry at the dog, because (he) has broken the jar and nearly killed himself*
- d) *berniukas truputį supyko*
(the) boy *got a little bit angry*
- e) *berniukas truputį nepatenkintas*
(the) boy *is a little bit discontented*
- f) *piktas. Ką jis čia iddirbinėja tas jo gyvenimo draugas?*
(the boy *is) angry. What is he doing, that friend of his life?*

¹ Examples used for the paper are most common for all age groups.

If one examines the examples above more precisely, one can see that only a very small part of the “Negative reaction” group of narrators used really negative reactions as is shown in 1a and 1b above. Even if the child says that the boy got angry, it is not made clear why the boy got angry. Is he angry because the dog has broken the jar, or because the dog fell out through the window, or because the child just depicts the picture, in which the boy has his brows wrinkled? Most of the group used a quantitative evaluative construction – the boy is angry, but just a little bit (1c,d,e above), i.e., he is not really angry because the dog has broken the jar but because the dog could hurt himself and cause the boy fear for his (dog’s) life (1c). And still the boy is angry, but calls his dog a “friend” (1f). The fact that narrators used verbal negative reactions shows that mainly they do so to state what is visible in picture 7 – the boy has wrinkled brows.

The other group is “Non-negative reaction” i.e. from the verbal point of view the boy is not angry or there is no reaction at all (2a-e below).

- (2) a) o paskiau nuėjo Dariukas á lauká ir pasiëmë ðuniuká
and later Dariukas (name) went outside and took the dog
- b) bet paskui pats idðoko pro langá ir sugavo
but later he (the boy) jumped out of the window and caught (him)
- c) berniukas nuėjo, apsikabino ðuniuká
(the) boy went out and embraced the dog
- d) berniukas idëjës á lauká rado ðuniuká gyvą
(the) boy going out found the dog alive
- e) berniukas ateina, já nuramina, paguodžia: “ar čia tau skauda”?
(the) boy comes, calms him (=dog), comforts (him): “does it hurt you”?

The most common example for this group is no reaction as in 2a above. The boy comes out, takes his dog and they go to search for the pet frog. However, the group could be called “Positive reaction”, because there was a huge number of instances where the boy’s reaction was very positive. Narrators used such verbal interpretations as “embraced” (2c), “found the dog alive” (2d), “calms him (dog)”, “comforts (dog)” (2e).

In example 2b an interesting phenomenon of perception is observed. In the picture one can see the boy with the dog in his arms. The speaker said that, after the dog fell through the window, “later he (the boy) jumped out of the window and caught (the dog)”. Although from a physical point of view it is not possible, such was the narrator’s desire. Before one can say anything, a decision must be made as to what to say. In this case the narrator’s decision was to remove guilt from the dog because of the broken jar and to express the narrator’s wishes through the boy-protagonist’s consciousness and acts.

Another factor to be taken into consideration when analyzing perception and evaluation in *Frog story* narratives is the speaker’s intentions to justify the dog’s or the boy’s acts. As mentioned above, there are three basic events in the Broken Jar Episode: Put, Fall, Break. Not every narrator included all the three basic events of the Episode (see Table 2 above). The Put event was included by 76% of all speakers and almost all of them, especially the 7-year-olds, used justifications to explain the dog’s act (in picture 4 one can see the dog with the jar on his head). Most of the verbal justifications for this event was that it was *unintentional*. The majority of the 7-year-olds used this sort of justification (3a below), but the older narrators were much more creative in justifying the dog’s act (3b below).

- (3) a) jo ėuniukas uřimovės *netyėiomis* stiklainą ant galvos
his dog got *unintentionally* the jar put on his head
b) o ėuniukas ákidės galvė á stiklainą *dairosi kaip kosmonautas á visas puses, gal kė geriau pamatys per padidinamėjį stiklė*
and the dog with his head in the jar *is looking around as a cosmonaut, maybe (he) will see something better through the magnifying glass*

As presented in Table 2, the Fall Event is much more important for the narrators than any other event. Thus one can find many more justifications there too. As it happened with the Put Event, the majority of 7-year-olds used a huge number of “unintentionals” (4a below), but in the other age groups (10-year-olds and adults) creativeness of justifications increased with age. The most unexpected and interesting justifications were used by adults. However, it is possible to divide the justifications of the Fall Event into two different groups. The dog fell down through the window: 1) because of the jar (4b,c,d,e,g below); 2) because of the boy (4f below).

- (4) a) ėuniukas *netyėia* ėoko pro langė
the dog *unintentionally* jumped through the window
b) ėuniukas *nieko nematė, nes stiklainis buvo su vandeniu*
the dog *could see nothing, because the jar was with (=full of) water*
c) jo *stiklainis labai sunkus buvo* ir ėuniukas iėkrito nuo palangės
his *jar was very heavy* and the dog fell off of the window-sill
d) kaip ėuo *bandė suloti, tai kaip sulojo paskui atsklido aidas, o nuo to aido iėkrito ėuniukas su stiklainiu ant řemė*
when the dog *tried to bark, so after he barked the echo came and because of the echo the dog with the jar fell on the ground*
e) ėuniukas uřsilipo ant palangė, bet *neidėlaikė pusiausvyros* ir nukrito
the dog climbed on to the window sill, but he *couldn't keep his balance* and fell
f) *berniukas nelabai priřiūrėjo savo ėuniukė, todėl ėuniukas iėkrito*
the boy did not look after the dog, so the dog fell out of the window
g) ėuniukas *neapsikentė, kad stiklainis uřmautas ant galvos, ėoko pro langė*
the dog *being annoyed that the jar was stuck on his head, jumped out of the window*

The reason for this pattern of justifications is that in general the construction of all the narration is organized through the boy's perspective, but particular events are based on the main protagonist of the event. In this case the main protagonist is the dog.

The last event of the Broken Jar Episode – the Break Event – has the lowest percentage (see Table 2), thus there are very few justifications. Some differences between the Break Event and the two other events should be mentioned, namely, the youngest speakers didn't use any justifications for the Broken Event at all. They only mentioned that the jar was broken or the dog broke the jar. However, 10-year-olds and adults use more justifications, and no *unintentionally* was used. All the speakers, to justify the dog, said that the jar has to be broken to free the dog's head (5a,b below) and this way the dog was able to go on further searching for the lost frog.

- (5) a) reikėjo ją sudaužyti, *kad jis galėtų išlįsti*
 it was necessary to break it (jar) so that he (dog) could get out
 b) sumuša stiklainą, bet *taip jis išvaduoja savo galvą*
 (he) breaks the jar, but *this way he gets his head free*

However, the Break Event has not many justifications; speakers have already removed the guilt from the dog because of the broken jar. As was mentioned, in the Fall event there is a huge number of justifications. Thus speakers planning their narrations had already decided that the dog would not be guilty. Speakers already said that “the dog was annoyed that the jar is stuck on his head” or “the jar was very heavy” (see 4a-g above). There was no other way for the dog to get free except to break the jar. On the other hand, although in picture 7 one can see a fragment of the broken jar, not every speaker talked about the broken jar at all.

One more factor to be taken into consideration when analyzing perception and evaluation is an event view. “An event view is part of the preverbal message that determines the choice of constructions” (Berman & Slobin 1994, p. 519). According to Berman and Slobin, there are three event views: Cause, Become and State. Language usually allows more than one way to encode an event, so the narrator has a choice of perspective. Lithuanian syntax provides options of an active perspective (*The dog jumped. The dog broke the jar*) or a passive perspective (*The dog fell down. The jar broke*). In the Episode both participants – boy and dog – are active, but in the Fall Event the dog is chosen as a topic.

Table 3a. Become-View construal (“fall” vs. “jump, run” etc.) of the Fall Event

Age	N	Become-View	%
7 years	21	15	71
10 years	17	12	71
Adults	15	13	87
Total	53	40	75

Table 3a shows that 75% of all speakers used the passive perspective of the Fall Event, i.e., the dog *fell* down through the window. It seems to suggest that it was not the dog’s intention to fall and it was not the dog’s intention to break the jar.

Table 3b. Become-View construal (“jar broke” vs. “dog broke jar”) of the Break Event

Age	N	Become-View	%
7 years	12	8	67
10 years	14	8	57
Adults	7	3	43
Total	33	19	58

The predominant construal of the Break Event focuses on the dog and the jar. According to Berman and Slobin (1994), speakers of other languages take a Become-View: English – 50%, Spanish – 65%, German – 100%, Hebrew – 69%, Turkish – 80% (p. 527). Table 3b shows that Lithuanian narrators take 58%. The jar breaks, the dog is not guilty. In both mentioned Events, in taking a Become-View narrators use past perfect and occasionally (only adults) present perfect.

Conclusion

From the verbal and syntactic point of view perception and evaluation in Lithuanian children's narratives are quite personal, but if one analyzes the Broken Jar Episode on the cognitive point of view they are very close. Only very few speakers suggested to us that the boy got angry because the dog had broken the jar. The vast majority of speakers, to make us believe the dog is not guilty, use not only linguistic options, but also event construals. It is much easier to lay the fault at somebody's door than to justify somebody. Therefore event construals with justifications are much more explicit. Usually direct evaluation of the event is not used. Only by analyzing the utterances, verbalizations and comparing the pictures with the narratives can one make deductions about speakers' wishes and evaluation of the event.

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