

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

In mid September 1998, more than twenty researchers gathered in Kazimierz Dolny (near Warsaw) for five days (17-21) for the International Conference on *Children's discourse from a narrative perspective: Action and consciousness in story construction*. The conference was most excellently hosted by Barbara Bokus whom I would personally like to thank.

The conference was an occasion to meet old friends, to make new ones, and to discuss our research and views. However, this conference was special. It took place in a beautiful villa in the middle of a wood ten minutes walk from the Vistula river. The quiet atmosphere of the countryside, the full immersion in the topics at hand, and the concerned attention with which Barbara and her collaborators provided for the disparate needs of their guests, concurred in fostering the quality of the discussion.

As a result, in two numbers of *Psychology of Language and Communication* are collected the sixteen papers ensuing from the meeting. The present one deals with three main topics: entry into narration, modes of narration, and action and consciousness in narrative discourse.

In the opening paper, *Entry into narration*, Shugar identifies three prerequisites for the development of the narrative function of speech. The first is the disposition of infants to make assertions about the world, the second is the availability of semantic means for referring to the perception of the changing states of the world, and the third is a mechanism that allows intersubjective exchange in a mutual running context of communicative cooperation. The operations of reference to the temporal sequences of the events are used by the child as devices for directing the attention of others to the changing states of reality so that before words 'the child can in this way produce a story-like, perception-driven account of events anchored in the here and now, displaying a latent semantic structure' (p. 13). The subsequent development of the lexicon and the progressive articulation of semantic structures provide the child with the linguistic means necessary to communicate the mental representations of his/her experiences and, then, to decontextualize them.

The following two papers deal with modes of narration. Söderbergh, in *Narrative structure in drawings illustrating story texts by a jive-and-half year old fluent reader*, presents the case of a preschool girl, already a fluent reader, who reproduced sixteen episodes from the written stories she had read in twenty-eight spontaneous drawings.

Her drawings were analyzed by comparing them to the corresponding written episodes. From this comparison the girl's awareness of the salient and dramatic aspects of the stories can be clearly assessed. Then the structure of the drawings that matched the criteria advanced by N. Stein for the definition of a story was compared with that of the verbal stories produced by 5-6-, 8-9-, and 11-12-year-olds reported in Stein's research. The complexity of the pictorial stories equals that of the verbal stories produced by 11-12-year-olds. This is not surprising, given the different demands of the two conditions and tasks; however, it shows that the preschool girl was able not only to acquire the narrative structure underlying the stories she could read and had re-read several times, but also to transfer such structure in her pictorial transposition of the story.

In a different perspective, in *Projecting speech to protagonists in oral and written narratives a developmental study*, Nordqvist analyzes the way 9- and 15-year-olds and adults use the indirect, direct, and free direct (when there is not a verb of saying) forms of reporting speech. As she stresses, in verbalizing the picture story *Frog, where are you?* by M. Meyer, the narrator projects his/her own speech to the characters. The developmental changes in the forms used to report speech confirm the already assessed preference for direct quotations in young children. She concludes that younger children follow a 'write as you speak' strategy of narration and older children a 'speak as you write' strategy in both the oral and the written modality. Adults, instead, master sophisticated linguistic and pragmatic strategies that allow them to project speech to the characters of the story using the three forms of reporting speech in a varied way which is differentiated in the oral and in the written modality.

In the following paper, *The textual pre-conditions for action narration in children's story construction*, Caramelli, Borghi, and Tison show that 9- and 12-year-olds differ in the way they continue construction of the plot of the stories they are presented with. With age, there is an increase in the production of thematic cores as children become able to build up more elaborate plots. These changes also depend on the topic of the stories so that these changes are conceptual more than linguistic. The underlying structure of social-role-based plots does not change with age and is characterized by synthetic events. With emotion-based plots younger children provide explanations and older children deal with their consequences. With object-based plots younger children make reference to time and place specifications of a static kind while older children shape their plots with events and the introduction of actions and new agents.

The remaining two papers and the two short communications focus on consciousness or on what has recently been called 'theory of mind'.

Baumgartner, Biagini, and Deveseovi show that there is a qualitative change in the use of internal state words made by 3- and 4-year-old children. In *Psychological language recursiveness in children's narratives*, they find that children asked to narrate the picture story *Frog, where are you?* by M. Meyer produce the same number of mental state attributions at 3 and 4 years of age and that the most frequently used internal state words are references to perceptual/physiological states, expressions of communication, emotions, volitions, cognitions, and obligations. However, the analysis of the levels of linguistic complexity with which internal states are expressed shows that 4-year-olds are able to produce a second order recursion of two structures of

predicate and argument related to each other, i.e. children are able to link two different actions that have different functions in the story as in, for example, 'he thinks that the frog has escaped'.

The paper by Bokus, *Action and its representation in the minds of story characters: Findings from children's discourse*, deals with the landscape of consciousness as concerns mental state ascriptions made by the narrator (4-7-year-old children) to field participants. In fact, the narrator ascribes to field participants either causal or teleological interpretations of the events depending on the symmetrical or asymmetrical relation between field participants and the heroes of the story. Moreover, the narrator develops the narrative line in the landscape of action or in the landscape of consciousness depending on his/her own attitude to these interpretations. When the narrator makes use of the mind of field participants to represent his/her own interpretations of the heroes' actions, he/she develops the story in the landscape of action, thus becoming the 'omniscient and omnipresent storyteller'. However, if he/she does not clearly understand what is going on in the story, field participants' minds can be used to represent the fictional dimension of the story and the narrator will develop it in the landscape of consciousness.

In her communication, *Landscape of actions and landscape of consciousness in children's spontaneous narratives*, Ligêza finds that 6-year-old children, when requested to produce a new narrative on the spot, make use of the landscape of action, the landscape of consciousness, and a mixed form with a prevalence of the former. Children use different strategies of narrative thinking in the two landscapes of narration and this depends on their developing theory of mind.

The comprehension of realistic and fairy tales is dealt with in the communication *Children's understanding of motives of people's behavior Reception of fairy tales and realistic stories among preschoolers* by Biańska-Pikul. After being told a realistic story and a fairy tale, 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children are asked to explain the reasons for the characters' behavior. Children show an increase in their story understanding with age; also the kind of story influences the level of their comprehension as the fairy tale is understood only by 4-year-olds on. Among the children able to understand the fairy tale, the interpretation of the character's behavior given by 5-year-olds is rooted in the external situation more than in an attitude change on the part of the character, thus showing the persistence of the tendency toward realism.

The variety of the perspectives underlying the papers collected here testifies to the vitality and the relevance of the study of narrative production and comprehension for the understanding of childrens minds. A great effort toward a better comprehension of the human mind lies behind these studies. However, we would like to remind the reader that all these efforts make no sense in a world in which, especially nowadays, violence and war are still tolerated instead of rejected.

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