Linguistic Patterns of Viewpoint Transfer in News Narratives

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When processing narrative discourse, readers construct a network of mental spaces through which they move as the story unfolds (Sweetser & Fauconnier, 1996). Different spaces can be profiled at different points in the narrative and shifts between spaces occur frequently. Keeping track of this dynamic network is a highly complex process that, despite the cognitive load it demands, progresses remarkably smoothly. The present study aims to examine to what extent this process is facilitated and guided by linguistic structures.

To attain this aim, a cognitive linguistic corpus analysis of news narratives was conducted. News narratives construct a complex network of mental spaces (Sanders & Van Krieken, 2019): a Reality Space representing the deictic center of reader and journalist *here-and-now* (publication date); a Narrative Space representing newsworthy events *there-and-then* (crime, accident); and an Intermediate Space representing the information of the news actors, retrieved or overheard by the journalist at a time *in-between* the newsworthy events and the present (press conference, court case). Determining to what extent and how shifts between these three spaces are linguistically marked is the central goal of this study.

A corpus of 100 crime news narratives published between 1960 and 2009 in 11 different Dutch newspapers was collected, divided into sentences (N = 3,923) and subsequently analyzed by two independent coders on two variables. First, the space in which each sentence was anchored was determined (Reality Space; Narrative Space; Intermediate Space; κ = .88). Second, all sentences marking a shift from one space to another space were identified (N = 648) and analyzed on the type of linguistic element signaling the shift (temporal adverb or tense shift; speech or thought report; other; none; κ = .92).

Results show that shifts between spaces were significantly more often linguistically marked (86,6%) than not marked (13,4%). Furthermore, the type of linguistic marker differed significantly across the various shifts (p < .001). Shifts from the Narrative Space to the Intermediate Space were most often marked by a speech or thought report, whereas shifts from the Intermediate Space to the Narrative Space were typically *not* linguistically marked, thus requiring readers to draw pragmatic inferences in processing the narrative progression. Shifts from the Intermediate Space to the Reality Space were mostly marked by a temporal adverb or tense shift, whereas shifts from the Reality Space to the Intermediate Space were most often marked by a speech or thought report. Finally, shifts from the Narrative Space to the Reality Space and vice versa were in the vast majority marked by a temporal adverb or tense shift. These findings demonstrate that the marking of shifts between mental spaces in news narratives follows clear linguistic patterns, thereby enabling readers to smoothly move through the dynamic mental spaces network. As such, this study advances our understanding of the relation between the linguistic and the cognitive representation of narrative discourse.

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References

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