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Self, Narrative, Communication

Gábor, Szécsi[1]

[1]University of Pécs, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Education and Regional Development, e-mail: szecsi.gabor@pte.hu; Eötvös Loránd Research Network, Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute of Philosophy, e-mail: szecsi.gabor@btk.mta.hu

Abstract

This article examines how the concept of narrative crystallized within the framework of the philosophy of mind, cognitive linguistics and narrative psychology can shed light on the role of intentional state attribution in the process of communication. The primary aim of this investigation is to shed new light on the presupposition that narrative can be regarded as a tool of communicating representations of intentional relations and events between individuals by verbal and nonverbal means. The paper argues that by illuminating the meaning-creating role of conceptual relationships emerging within narrative frameworks, we can also grasp how to attribute intentional states (eg. intention, belief, desire, hope, or fear) to our communication partners using narrative-oriented interpretation schemes, and thus to infer their intentions in communication. Based on this tenet the present article suggests possible answer to questions like what basic types of narratives determine the effectiveness of everyday communication processes; and how this concept-meaning connection embedded in narrative structures can become a factor of self-creation in everyday discourse.

Keywords: narrative, communication, intentional states, intersubjectivity, narrative self

Introduction

The concept of narrative has become a cornerstone of disciplines like psychology, the philosophy of language, and contemporary linguistics targeting the facts of linguistic performance in relation to action, language and the mind.[1] In this article, I intend to investigate how the concept of narrative crystallised within the framework of the philosophy of mind, cognitive linguistics and narrative

[1] From the mid 1970-ies cognitive linguistics, as an emerging discipline within the field of cognitive science radically breaks away from the taxonomy-based traditions of linguistics using exclusively linguistic analyses. It examines linguistic phenomena that since they do not connect to the symbol-manipulation centered paradigm, can be described with methods in cognitive and brain sciences (Goldberg 1995, 2006; Lakoff 2008a, 2008b; Lakoff &Johnson 1999; Lakoff & Narayanan 2010; Langacker 1976, 1987, 2008; Talmy 1983, 2000; Ziemke et al. 2007).

psychology can shed light on the role of mental state attribution in communication. The primary aim of this investigation is to shed new light on the presupposition that narrative can be regarded as a tool of communicating representations of intentional relations and events between individuals by verbal and nonverbal means (Dennett 1985, 1987, 1991; Hutto 2007, 2008, 2009; Herman 2008; Scalise Sugiyama 1996;). I assume that by illuminating the meaning-creating role of conceptual relationships emerging within narrative frameworks, we can also grasp how to attribute mental states (eg. intention, belief, desire, hope, or fear) to our communication partners using narrative-oriented interpretation schemes and thus to infer their intentions in communication. Based on this tenet, I look for the answer to questions like what basic types of narratives determine the effectiveness of everyday communication processes; and how this concept-meaning connection embedded in narrative structures can become a factor of self-creation in everyday discourse.

With the argumentation and analysis below, I attempt to shed light on the mechanisms of the dual network of narratives. The starting point of this experiment is the general assumption that the simultaneous transmission and perception of an explicit and an implicit narrative in the communication process is a prerequisite for understanding. Every explicit, "told" story takes on a meaning concerning the underlying life stories and implicit narratives and becomes the basis for understanding and predicting behaviour. In other words, the meanings conveyed by the speaker of the communicative act can be made perceptible to the hearer in such a way that the tax makes clear to the hearer through an explicit and an implicit story the intentions, desires and attitudes leading to the communicative act in the given situation.

Narrative-oriented interpretation schemes in communication processes

Narratives that play a crucial role in everyday meaning formation and communication can also be identified as schemes for analysing situations or as data structures feeding from the rich system of relationships of the conceptual representation of actions and events. Therefore, narratives are nothing but conceptual networks functioning as frameworks of interpretation when identifying situations of action. The schemes of event structures activated by narratives can be regarded as patterns of interpretation present in all our conceptual representations and our experiences of problem-resolution actions. We rely on these when identifying the elements of situations of action, from the simplest forms of action to the most complex forms of communicative acts. Due to the internal relationship between the conceptual representations of narratives

and actions, the key to the structure of simple narratives guiding the understanding of everyday situations can be found in the structure of human action. When understanding narratives, we actually project our knowledge concerning interpersonal action on narratives guiding situation analyses. This observation is in harmony with the basic tenet of narrative psychology, a psychological meta-theory that sees our narrative and story-telling function as a general anthropological feature of the psyche, stating that the narrative form of thinking has a key role in the formation of the self and identity. This meta-theory gaining an increasingly significant role in the psychology of the self, sees narration as a process that gives sense and meaning to the mental construction of reality and hence examines the problem of identity in light of biographic narratives.

The hypothesis of constants that is consistent conceptual structures that form the gist of narratives, that are responsible for the "conservation" of emotions related to the elements of narratives, thus sheds light on the more general notion that narratives eventually capitalise on the cognitive structure shared by the members of the community in terms of human motivational factors, goals, emotions and action. This ensures that each member of the community has efficient schemes of situation analysis for the identification of communicative intentions and, therefore, ensures the interpersonal nature of communicative processes. The cognitive linguistic analyses targeting their emergence and functioning thus offer important contributions for the elaboration of models in the philosophy of language, focusing on the relationship of body, mind and language, that are based on the supposition of a mental world that determines the entire grammatical and semantic structure of language, unfolding before language acquisition. They also offer factors for the definition of the concept of the self that language philosophers, among them Davidson would like to use instead of the historically troubled, opaque and obscure notion of subjectivity (Davidson, 2001), one that is in harmony with the definition of Richard Rorty that "self is not something which 'has' the beliefs and desires but is simply the network of such beliefs and desires" (Rorty, 1991: 123).

In the practice of everyday communication, individuals in communicative relationships attribute intentions, desires, and beliefs to each other in a given situation in the light of recognised patterns of behaviour and interpret or predict each other's actions based on that. The predictive power of this folk or common sense psychology, our everyday way of rationalising intentional actions, lays the foundations for understanding, empathy and effective interpersonal strategies on the part of individuals in communicative relationships. This "naïve social

technology" (Dennett, 1987) serves as an everyday frame of interpretation for possible patterns of causation between perceptions, beliefs, intentions, and actions. It considers beliefs, intentions, desires, actions etc., as intentional events and states which are causally related to each other. These causal relationships can be described by general laws. As Dennett assumes, this type of common sense psychology is not an idealised rationalistic mode of calculus but a naturalistic, empirical descriptive theory that assigns to things the causal regularities revealed by a great many inductions about the experience (Dennett, 1985, 1987, 1991). These presumed regularities in the background of intentional causation suggest that everyday explanations of actions usually start out from the presumed rationality of interpreted actions. In other words, these explanations determine the causes of the actions by referring to the rationality of the actor. For this reason, we can consider folk or common sense psychology as a rationalistic interpretive and predictive calculus (Dennett, 1987). This rational calculus assumes, on the one hand, that the actions of the actor can be classified as true and relevant to the individual's cognitive needs and life history and, on the other hand, that the actor performs his action in the light of the facts relevant to his action plans.

Thus the explanations of actions referring to intentions, beliefs, and desires describe the mental processes leading to the performance of the acts by assuming the reasonableness of the actions; that is these explanations try to determine the real causes of the acts presupposing the rational behaviour of actors. As Jerry Fodor points out, "reasonable action" as a concept contains an essential causal element that all individuals in a given culture regard as a criterion of reasonableness (Fodor, 1975). This is why communicatively related individuals can approach each other as intentional systems, that is, as beings whose behaviour can be understood and predicted by attributing intentions, beliefs, and desires to them. These mental states, according to Dennett, are usually identified on the basis that individuals must possess them as a function of their life stories. In other words, when we understand the other person's behaviour, we assume that the mental states attributed to him are both true and relevant to his life as depicted in the narratives. Although Dennett does not analyse this process in detail, his explanations suggest that this process of interpretation takes place at the crossroads of narratives. The individual facing the other person's behaviour creates a narrative about the behaviour and its circumstances by attempting to reconstruct a life story that illuminates the relevance of the behaviour, thus serving as a kind of framework narrative for interpreting the narrative directly expressed by the behaviour. Based on this, he concludes that behaviour consists

of acts that are relevant and reasonable for the individual endowed with different mental states (beliefs, desires).

In my view, in communicative acts, individuals elucidate elements like role of action, background, conflict, main plot, resolution and corollaries using event-organizing actions offered by narratives. Obviously, we turn to narratives if we want to understand the motives in the actions of others and in the intentions, beliefs and desires feeding these actions. Thus, narrative-orientedness in thinking constitutes the main pillar of the mundane practice known as naïve- or folk psychology in the framework of which we understand others' actions and beliefs through attributing beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, and other mental states to them. The application and use of narrative explanatory schemes enable us to attribute desires, hopes and fears to others in our communicative acts, which in turn helps us understand the communicative intentions in the background of the messages conveyed. This is how we can see others' actions as being rational – provided they meet some given set of criteria for this – and predictable. In other words, the predictive force of folk psychology stems from the narrative nature of our mind and thinking, from our ability that when we understand the narrative of others, with our knowledge of the meta-narratives characteristic of our society that determine these personal narratives, we can actually predict which action the individual will most likely choose from among the potential options of actions that can be carried out in the given situation so as to achieve their goals. Such optional and potential acts to resolve problems are represented by community meta-narratives, while the individual represents their own relationship to meta-narratives with the help of autobiographical narratives through which they construct their self and identity. This is the framework in which their actions in a given communicative situation can be labelled as rational or irrational, with the tools of folk psychology, and this is how we can reconstruct the beliefs, desires, wishes or even the prejudice influencing their intentions. In the background of each narrative directly told, there is an immanent narrative whose task is to shed light on the reasons why in the given situation the narrator would choose the given communicative act from among the potential sphere of acts in order to convey the narrative at hand. The primary motive of the speaker, the individual carrying out a communicative act, is that the hearer should comprehend the narrative representing the speaker's intended choice in light of this hidden narrative. The primary condition for this is that the storyteller should also have information about the relationship of the potential actions acknowledged in society and the spheres of actions seen as possible by the hearer in the given situation; in other words, about the potential actions the hearer would take as a

reaction to the problem, the speaker desires to resolve, in the given situation. All in all, these pieces of information constitute the most important pillars of folk psychology operating in the given context. To understand the effects of narratives on our thinking, on our processes of comprehension, on our communicative acts, and our everyday actions to resolve problems, is therefore, not less than investigating the relationship of human nature and culture. Thinking in narratives is a natural ability that immanently defines our cognitive processes. As Roland Barthes says, narratives "like life, are just there" (Barthes, 1977: 79). Narratives function as a special meta-code embodying human essence in our everyday communicative processes that ensures that with the deciphering of communicative intentions the messages concerning the common world known for the hearer and the speaker can flow freely in the given culture, or between different cultures.

Narratives are not simply the condition of understanding, but they also constitute structures that shape meaning and create concepts. Our concepts, embedded in structures as they are, connect to each other, and become the building blocks of our knowledge. Just as our most essential experiences of action, our most complex mental constructions are also organised into narratives. In the process of cognition we create, convey narratives of ourselves and of the world, and with narratives we can make sense of our roles played in various situations of communication. In our communicative acts we process and display our personal experiences linked to communicative situations in the form of narratives. We communicate about our own selves and about our identity's social integration in narratives. Thinking in narratives connects us with other members of our community and enables us to understand the perspective of others in view of the relationship to our self. By acquiring the ability to produce and comprehend narratives, we also learn how to connect the beginning and the end of a series of events in a way to express our sense of belonging to a certain social-, ethical- or legal order, our cultural bonds and connections. Narratives structure our future and past; narratives make it possible for our past experiences to turn into the pillars of our plans and expectations for the future. Our concepts of right and wrong, of important and unimportant events are also organised into narratives. That is, we evaluate and organise our experiences with the help of narratives. Some experiences become salient and important as a result of the narratives they reside in, thus constituting the starting point of the evaluation and understanding of different entities and actions. Narratives also serve as a framework of the moral evaluation of actions. As Lakoff and Narayanan point out in their study,

"narratives enable us to function in the world in a sensible way, and to be central for our self-consciousness" (Lakoff & Narayanan, 2010: 24).

As a result of the above-mentioned claims, the statement that individuals experience their own life in the form of narratives has become the basic tenet of both narrative psychology and cognitive linguistics.2 They use and apply narratives for their own purpose, and projecting these onto the experience they have had, they search for a framework of interpretation, an explanation, so as to identify the reasons for the events they have experienced, and to find their own roles in these. The creation of our private, inner world is facilitated by autobiographical narratives in which the central figure of the narrator and the narrative activity is the same entity. We share different stories of our past, habits, motivation or planned future in the form of autobiographical narratives. Hence narratives like these are also of a somewhat intersubjective nature. Their source is a discourse between individuals, so they are inseparably linked to the intersubjective communicative situation.

As Lakoff and Narayanan claim, the event structures in narratives actually have several dimensions (Lakoff & Narayanan 2010: 24-25). Apparently, they have an important role in the transmission of ethical values and guidelines for the management of everyday life. Stories and fables that inherently comprise community meta-narratives, beyond their help in our understanding of the world around us, also offer solutions for moral and practical problems we might encounter. Narratives also constitute the basis of folk theories that shed light on the functioning and logic of events, the characteristics of humans, cause-and-effect relations, on plans that determine action and goals. Our life is nothing else but a series of consecutive narratives in the overlap that is fulfilled by people who play their roles – claims Erving Goffman, sociologist (1974). As Goffman suggests, each social institution and form of practice is like a drama with actors, dialogues, and fairly well-defined actions. Adapting to the needs of certain social situations is, after all, nothing else but the acceptance of relevant social roles, and the connected forms of action and behaviour.

[2] Views in narrative psychology claim that telling narratives significantly determines the nature of human thinking. As Jerome Bruner emphasizes, our thinking and sensible functioning has two forms, and each organizes experience and thus constructs reality in a different way (Bruner 1986, 1990). In this differentiation one is the traditional style of thinking, of a paradigmatic, logic-based, scientific nature, which leads to detailed analysis, logical verification, reliable argumentation, and the raising of rational corollaries. The other form, represented by narrative style thinking, results in historical narratives, reports, and inherently belongs to our psychological reality.

Narrative structures and self-creation in everyday discourses

It is reasonable to ask, then how narratives can shed light on intentions, desires, goals, and plans in the background of the connoted message in the process of communication. How can narratives become the basis of understanding, forming elements of efficient communicative act? How can individuals portray their attitude concerning their communicative partner, the communicative situation at hand, or the content of the message, with the help of narratives, and thus make their behavior and action understandable for their partner in their communicative act? In answering these questions we should start out from the supposition that the conditions of mutual understanding lie in the simultaneous transmission and processing of an explicit and an implicit narrative in the communicative situation. Each explicit story "told" gains meaning in view of the implicit narratives and life stories in its background, and thus it becomes the basis of predictability and understandability of action. In other words, the meanings conveyed by the speaker of the communicative act can be made accessible for the hearer by making the intentions, desires and attitudes in the communicative act in the given situation clear, with the help of an explicit and implicit narrative. The processing of both of these two forms of narratives can make it clear which motive dominated the actions of the speaker in choosing the particular communicative act when conveying the given message from among the potential sphere of communicative acts that are socially accepted and sensible; and also help us see what desire, belief and attitude lie in the background of this motive. The reproduction of this motive and of the desire, belief and attitude in its background is the condition for the hearer to see the speaker and the speaker's action as rational in the given situation, to attribute meaning to the communicative act at hand in the light of this attributed motive, and to see the speaker's behaviour and acts as predictable in similar situations. Explicit narratives shed light on the motives behind the action to resolve the problem at hand in the given situation with the help of verbal and nonverbal tools. With this, the speaker can reveal why they have chosen the given activity to be the most efficient to resolve the problem in the situation from among the sphere of socially accepted possibilities and to convey the message connected to the resolution of the problem. Explicit narratives, being mental schemes, thus enable the hearer of the communicative act to understand, through the event structure at hand, what intention motivated the speaker to choose the given act due to the emergence of the problem. With this the speaker wants the hearer to understand their reason for choosing the particular communicative act to solve the problem at hand, as observed by the hearer. At the same time, however, the speaker, with their behaviour and action, conveys an implicit narrative as well,

which primarily intends to map the general attitudes of the speaker in connection with the situation at hand and with the problem observed in the concrete situation. With this narrative displayed with both verbal and nonverbal signs, the speaker wants to make it clear to the hearer how they generally connect to the problem in the given situation and to events similar to the concrete situation. These implicit narratives (using different stylistic devices, gestures, metacommunicative signs, paralinguistic elements) show the hearer the actions and behaviors the speaker reacts with generally, to problems similar to the one in question, in settings similar to the concrete situation at hand. The speaker makes use of these implicit narratives in order to apply autobiographic narratives shaping their identity in revealing their communicative intent. The condition for the understanding of the communicative message is that the speaker simultaneously computes the intentions, desires, beliefs and attitudes expressed by the implicit and explicit narratives revealed by the speaker. That is, understanding why the speaker chose the action observed by the hearer to convey the message at hand in order to discern the general attitudes of the hearer connected to the situation and problem in the given situation. In other words, the explicit narrative that sheds light on the details of why the speaker chose the particular act to convey the message in the given situation, from among the possible sphere of actions known for both the speaker and the hearer, becomes comprehensible only in light of the implicit narrative that suggests and reveals how the speaker reacts generally, in situations similar to the one at hand, with problems similar to the one at hand.

Communicational narratives, in this dual framework, ensure the conditions of efficient communication, from the simplest interpretative processes of folk-psychology, to the deciphering of the most complex meanings. These reveal why the speaker chose the concrete action in question to resolve the given problem in the given communicative situation, from among the sphere of possible actions socially accepted. The criteria for this is that both the speaker and the hearer must possess more-or-less the same knowledge about the potential sphere of actions accepted by society concerning the problem at hand and that with the attribution of this shared knowledge they encode and decode the meanings embedded in the narratives. In simpler discourses of folk psychology this means that an individual attributes intentions, desires and attitudes to their communicative partner in a way that they, on the one hand, understand their explicit narratives, which reveal why they chose the given act from the possible sphere of actions, and on the other hand, that they observe implicit narratives as well, which mirror the general attitudes of the speaker connected to the situation at hand. This is how they

attribute rationality to their actions and become able to predict behaviour in a given situation.

The notion concerning the inner relationship of thinking, action and narratives places the concept of the self in a new light because, if we accept this premise above, then we have to hypothesise an inner relationship between the self and the narratives that determine its development. It is enough to think of the claim that narratives build on schemes of event-structures incorporated by conceptual representations that represent action situations, where these schemes store intentions and beliefs connected to the communicative situation in a way that these can easily be recalled again and again. As these intentions and beliefs have been "conserved" in the framework of the self–other–shared context triad linked to intersubjectivity in the event-structure schemes, they not only constitute a source of understanding but also feed the concept of the self. This is how the self itself can become a network of intentions and beliefs and the centre of narratives storing intentions and beliefs. In a more radical conceptualisation, we can claim that the self is actually a result of a narrative activity. In order to form a narrative construction, but at the same time to be able to experience mental states, feelings, senses, desires, thoughts, etc., the self needs a cognitive system in a wider context in which the self is not only the narrator of events, but it is, at the same time, the entity that experiences the narrated events as well.

The intentionality of the narrative self is not at all a derived concept since it acts, feels and thinks in the form of mental state networks that build on the narratives that construct the self itself. That is, we can claim that the formation of the acting self actually precedes the birth of the narrative (autobiographical) self, just as body use precedes language use. The acting self, however, does not disappear from the mind, but as Damasio (1994) and Johnson (2007, 2014) point out, it helps us in our everyday decision-making processes when we have to choose the adequate narrative from among a set of competing narratives. In this we heavily build on somatic markers (Damasio, 1994), that is, the bodily senses and feelings that accompany narratives. In view of this claim, Lakoff (2008a) also argues that the "action field" of narratives can be linked to different bodily networks in the context of embodied cognition. Lakoff sees narratives as conceptual frameworks with distinct scripts and gives a typology of the structure of narratives in the following way, suggesting two types: a) the dramatic structure of the narrative – this includes scripts of conceptual frameworks and the roles of conceptual frameworks as well; b) the emotional structure of the narrative – in this latter phase the dramatic structure of the narrative engages with emotional, sensorimotor and other bodily networks, therefore, the narratives actually have

an embodied dimension as well. Lakoff believes that narratives function in the same way as cognitive metaphors do, but in this case, the emotional structure of the narrative is seen as the source domain.

It is no surprise, therefore that the hypothesis stating that the formation of the self as embodied agent can be linked to narrative activity in cognition has become widespread among the thinkers theorizing on the notion of embodied cognition (Damasio, 2010; Gallagher, 2006; Gallagher & Zahavi 2012; Lakoff, 2008b; Menar,y 2008; Turner, 1996;).3 Narratives of self-creation in this conceptualization derive straight from the direct experiences of the embodied subject (Menary, 2008: 76). In the context of embodied cognition it is not verbal narratives that drive the experiencing of events, but, throughout the development of cognition, it is an experience that structures the organisation of narratives first, which, in turn, gives a framework for the use and realisation of verbal narratives. The self is, above all, an embodied mind that experiences the framework structure and chronology of events in bodily interaction with the world. The narrative structure of action in the world, in the framework of the embodied cognition hypothesis, necessarily shapes the structure of cognition, which later gives the basis of higher-order cognitive skills like language use and thinking. The narrative self, functioning at the level of reflections, later emerges in the verbal interactions of the intersubjective relationship between the triad of the self—other—shared context, as a result of the development of cognitive abilities, and then, turning into an inner speech, it enriches the self with the dialogues between the self and "ourselves".

In view of all of the above, the notion that individuals in fact experience their life in narratives has become a central claim both in narrative psychology and in cognitive linguistics as well. They make use of narratives that serve their own purposes, and projecting these parabolically onto the events they experienced,

[3] In order to understand how the conceptual representations of communicative situations become factors that determine meaning and thus factors that fundamentally determine understanding, we first need to see the role of situatedness in cognition. For this we can rely on the terminology of the notion of *embodiment* determining the development of cognitive linguistics, a terminology resulting from attempts to describe bodily, sensorimotor experience continually present in language and thinking. Being situated in the world, importantly, does not only mean being in any physical context, but it means that we actually keep in touch with conditions having bodily meaning. It is no surprise that cognitive science, in its rebirth with the notion of *embodiment* has been characterized by the intention to put being-in-the-world (Dasein) and its logical priority in the center of attention in methodological research on the mind, rather than examining how the mind works in general. As Margaret Wilson states: "cognition is not an activity of the mind alone, but is instead distributed across the entire interacting situation, including mind, body, and environment" (Wilson, 2002: 629-630).

they want to find a framework of interpretation, an explanation to understand the reasons for the events experienced, and to find their own roles in these. The understanding of the inner, private world is facilitated by autobiographical narratives in which the central figure of the narrator and the narrative are the same entity. We share different stories in the form of autobiographical narratives, in connection with our past, habits, motivations, or planned future. For this reason, autobiographical narratives actually have an intersubjective nature. They stem from interpersonal discourse, hence they are inseparably linked to intersubjective communicative situations.

Conclusions

With the argumentation and analysis above I intended to shed light on the mechanisms of the dual network of narratives. I hypothesize, how it penetrates the everyday worldview of the person building their communicative relationships and how narrative production and reception can become a pillar of human communication and cognition. With that, I primarily aimed to prove that such investigations can fruitfully contribute to the preparation of psychological, linguistic and philosophical models targeting the functioning and formation of narratives capitalising on the shared cognitive structures of actions, emotions, goals and human motivational factors. They, furthermore, offer a conceptual framework to illuminate the meaning-creating role of conceptual relationships emerging within narrative structures and the narrative pillars of mental state attribution in the process of communication.

This is how linguistic, psychological and philosophical models on the relationship between narrative and communication can help us shed new light on the results of investigations in semantics, pragmatics and the philosophy of language targeting the relationship of mind, action and language. We can, therefore, attempt to give a synthesis of theories describing the processes of meaning construction, conceptualisation, functioning and structure of the mind encapsulated in narratives from an interdisciplinary approach. A synthesis that yields a clear picture of the forces of how narrative-based communication shapes humans, communities, societies, and cultures.

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