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## COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF NATURAL NARRATIVE DISCOURSE PRODUCTION AND COMPREHENSION

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In recent decades narrative discourse research has enjoyed unprecedented level of interest of academia worldwide. This article makes an attempt to explore the process of narrative construction and narration (verbalization of narrative, or storytelling) as a cognitive-communicative event arising in a specific context. Drawing on seminal works of Teun van Dijk on event mental models and the role of the context in discourse production, Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner's blending theory and Ronald Langacker's ideas about cognitive construals, a theoretical analysis was performed with the aim to explain how a particular event may operate in a subjective event mental model of the speaker, who then, depending on the specific conditions (and often constraints) of the immediate context of a communicative event, makes certain choices on what and how to tell, relying on and employing an arsenal of cognitive construals. First, it has been necessary to discuss the mechanisms of event mental model construction, as well as to characterize its immediate components; secondly, it seemed to be necessary to review certain elements of the contextual model which might be relevant for the speaker in shaping their story (comprising the immediate communicative situation and wider span of socio-cultural parameters); and, finally, to discuss cognitive construals which are employed by narrators to either foreground, shade or even withhold certain details of the events they provide account of. As a result of the analytical discussion it has been established that narration as verbalization of a story about certain events arises as a result of work of cognitive construals (namely, specificity, focusing, prominence and perspective) which single out from the mental model of events some relevant elements and organize them in certain way into a story, this makes the story comprehensible to the recipient in compliance with the pragmatic goals of the speaker.

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## КОГНІТИВНІ АСПЕКТИ ПОРОДЖЕННЯ І СПРИЙНЯТТЯ ПРИРОДНОГО НАРАТИВНОГО ДИСКУРСУ

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**Ключові слова:** природний наратив, когнітивні операції конструювання, контекстуальна модель, ментальні моделі подій.

В останні десятиліття дослідження наративного дискурсу привертають надзвичайну увагу науковців по всьому світу. У статті досліджується процес конструювання наративу й нарації (вербалізації наративу) як когнітивно-комунікативної події, що виникає в певному контексті. Спираючись на впливові праці Тойна ван Дейка про ментальні моделі подій і вплив контексту на процес комунікації, теорію концептуальної інтеграції Жилія Фоконьє і Марка Тернера та ідеї Роналда Ленекера про когнітивні операції конструювання, провели теоретичний аналіз з метою пояснити, як може функціонувати конкретна подія в суб'єктивній ментальній моделі мовця, який потім залежно від умов (а часто й обмежень) безпосереднього контексту комунікативної події робить певний вибір щодо того, що саме і як розповідати, спираючись на арсенал когнітивних операцій конструювання. По-перше, необхідно було дослідити механізм побудови ментальної моделі події, а також охарактеризувати її компоненти; по-друге, розглянути елементи контекстуальної моделі, які можуть впливати на те, що саме розповідає мовець при конструюванні своєї оповіді (включаючи як безпосередню комунікативну ситуацію, так і соціокультурні параметри); і, нарешті, описати когнітивні операції конструювання, які використовуються мовцем, щоб вивести на передній план – експлікувати, імплікувати, або навіть повністю приховати певні деталі подій, про які вони розповідають. У результаті аналітичної розвідки встановлено, що нарація як вербалізація наративу про певні події виникає в результаті когнітивних операцій конструювання (а саме специфікації, фокусування, промінантності й перспективізації), які дають можливість мовцю виділити з ментальної моделі подій відповідні елементи й організувати їх певним чином у розповідь, що робить наратив зрозумілим для реципієнта відповідно до прагматичних цілей мовця.

**Problem statement.** At the present stage of scientific research narrative is understood as a specific means not only of representation but also of construction and interpretation of the reality. According to Brockmeier & Harre [1], narratives, first of all, are specific forms of discourse which are inherent to our means of both knowledge acquisition, as well as of conceptualizing, structuring actions and events, and ordering our experience. Moreover, they represent “models of the world and models of the self”, and “it is through our stories that we construct ourselves as a part of our world” [1, p. 47, 53–54]. These two ideas are closely connected with the interests of the cognitive science and the discourse studies.

Narrative discourse is a specific type of discourse, which is characterized by a set of categories, rules and constraints, which set it apart from other discourse types [2, c. 6]. In this paper natural narrative is understood as storytelling about certain events, produced in situation of real-life communication, and natural narrative is **the object** of this research. Here it should be noted that natural narrative arising in interaction, i.e. conversational narrative, differs from artificial narrative, a product of literary fictional work, which comprises such traditional genres as novel, short-story, fairy-tale or myth. **The subject** of this research is cognitive models underlying natural narrative discourse production and cognitive construals, which

facilitate verbalization and comprehension of such discourses.

**The purpose of this article** is to outline the process of narrative construction and its further representation to the recipient(s) where certain event(s) first become part of a mental model of the prospective narrator and then due to certain features of the context, pragmatic goals of the speaker and by mediation of cognitive construals result in strategic construction of narratives at the output. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the mechanism of event mental model construction; to review the elements of the contextual model; to discuss cognitive construals used as instrument for narrative production and comprehension.

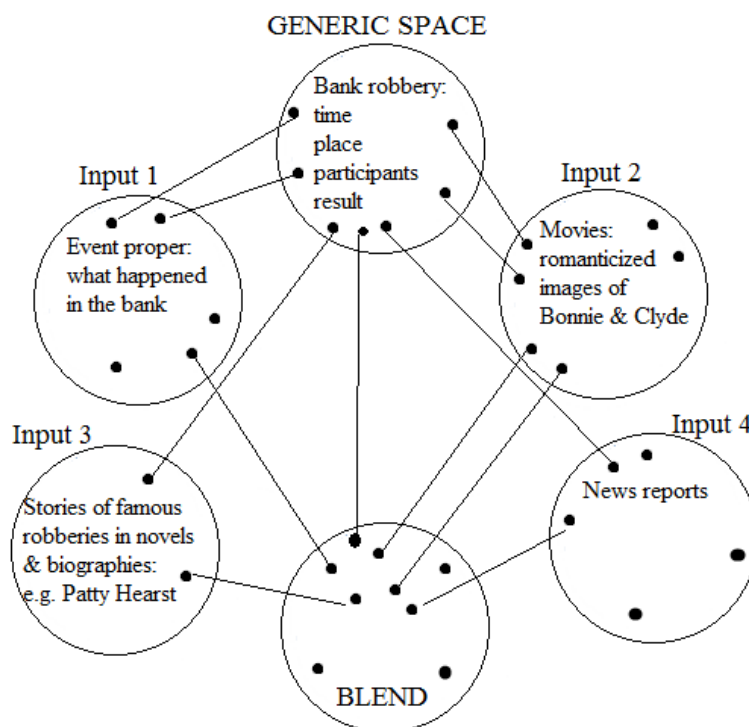
**Presentation of the material.** The central category in defining narrative is eventfulness; thus, a narrative is a story about certain events. However, according to van Dijk, not any and every account of some events is a narrative [3, p. 286]. For example, if the evidence of a defendant or a witness during interrogation can be qualified as a narrative, the police record of evidence cannot. Even though both of them may deal with the same events, the record of evidence is decontextualized. Stylistically it has to be inevitably devoid of emotions, evaluations, but rather fair and impartial, bare and logical, and thus can be compared at best with the plot of a narrative. Natural narrative, on the contrary, being a product of spontaneous speech, is inevitably connected with the contextual constraints, because it is “told in certain communication context, for a certain purpose” [4, p. 554].

If narrative is a story about events, about certain experience, about the past, it is produced on the basis of memories. And memories in their turn are stored in mind in the form of mental models, i.e. representations of events. Thus, according to van Dijk, the models of events become the “mental point of departure of all text and talk, from which relevant information may be selected for the strategic construction of their global and local semantic structures” [5, p. 189].

But here we face a logical question: how are these mental models organized and how do they emerge? From the point of view of van Dijk, mental models of events are made up on the ground of episodic, personal knowledge of the events and socially shared beliefs of groups to which a person (participant, witness, speaker or listener) belongs [5, p. 190]. This thought aligns well with the ideas of the founders of the Conceptual Blending Theory Fauconnier & Turner [6]. According to this theory, two or more input spaces and the generic space partially map onto the mental (conceptual) model, or emergent structure which contains some elements from both input spaces [6, pp. 40–44].

So, it is possible to assume, that if a certain person was, for instance, a witness or a participant of certain events, of a bank robbery, for example, one of the input spaces will be the event proper (with certain participants-agents, place, actions, atmosphere, consequences), the other input space may contain details or impressions from recently watched movies or detective novels read, news or jokes about bank robberies (see Figure 1).

All input spaces contain certain evaluative properties, which may give rise for contempt or hatred, or even sympathy with the robbers in the mind of the potential narrator. The generic mental space then contains what the inputs have in common (the roles of the participants, actions, place). The emergent structure (the final mental model of the event) will be a blend of all input spaces. Thus, it will contain both propositions of real facts of the event and propositions containing evaluations and judgments which entered the mental model from ‘outside’ the real event. It is possible to assume that similar propositions which occur in several input spaces are more likely to enter the emergent event model. However, the whole process is very subjective and some propositions, which do not intersect with any others coming from other input spaces, but bearing subjective emotional significance, may enter the emergent structure too. As van Dijk states, mental models are “subjective, and possibly biased representations of ‘reality’, and may also feature evaluations of events or situations (opinions), as well as emotions associated with such events” [7, p. 169].



**Fig. 1. The event mental model construction: Bank robbery**

It should also be stressed that a mental model of events is not only subjective, but an extremely dynamic formation, because updating of the mental model continuously goes on through addition of and merging with the fragments of sociocultural knowledge and experience, which in their turn emerge from the episodic models due to the processes of generalization, abstraction and decontextualization [7, p. 190].

Another feature of event mental models, on which any narrative is based, is that they are always much more detailed than the discourse generated on their basis. However, the biggest amount of information in mental model, remains implicit or untold, because, depending on the contextual constraints, the narrator knows about irrelevance of certain parts of this information (which can be already known to the recipient, or easily inferred from the previous talk or socially- and culturally-based experience), or deliberately suppressed by the teller. The omission of such information can be motivated by the face-keeping strategy or other pragmatic goals of the speaker [5, pp. 200–201; 7, p. 170]. And, therefore, the speaker makes the choice what to tell depending on their subjective understanding of the overall communicative context.

Modern linguistics tends to interpret the context as a cognitive phenomenon, a specific type of mental model which gives the possibility to bring together different kinds of context to schemes/models of perception and comprehension. From the perspective of narrative analysis, context is understood as a model of a given communicative situation in which actual narration takes place. Context model is made up of two levels. If the first level includes immediate, dynamic circumstances in which the communicative event takes place, the second level comprises more stable mechanisms and common sociocultural knowledge, within the scope of which the immediate events are interpreted [8, p. 463–465]. As noted by van Dijk, a contextual model embraces the following elements and their features: setting (time and place of the communicative event), social circumstances (previous actions of the communicants, social situation), institutional environment, overall goals of the interaction, the participants of the communication (with their social and communicative roles), current situational relations between participants, and group membership (gender, age, etc.) [5, p. 193]. Another constituent part of the context is ‘current discourse space’, which is defined by R. Langacker as “a mental space comprising everything presumed to be shared by the speaker and hearer as the basis for discourse at a given moment”, that is – everything which preceded this moment (already mentioned information in previous communicative turns and the turns expected) [8, p. 59–60, 281, 466]. It should also be noted here

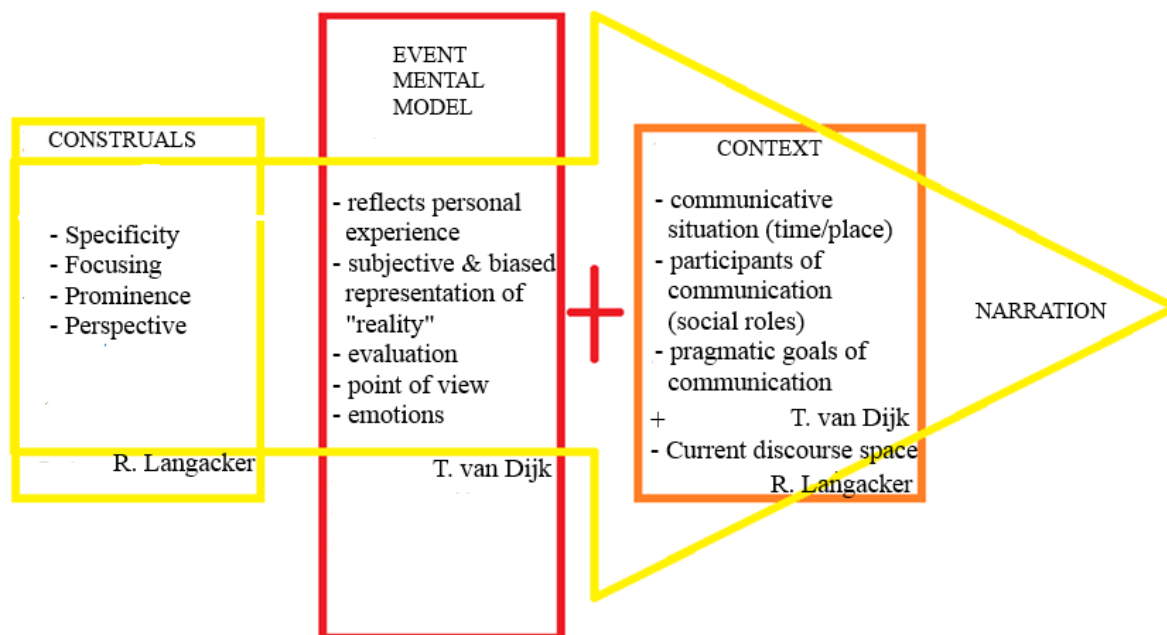
that the understanding of the context by the speaker and the hearer may differ, it may overlap to a certain extent, but can hardly be totally equivalent, as van Dijk puts it, “context models are episodic, personal and hence subjective interpretations and experiences of communicative event or context” [5, p. 194].

Another property of the context necessary for analysing communication is that it performs a constraining function, regulating not only the choice of topics and their change, but also the level of specification, the choice of style, vocabulary, syntactic structures, intonation, etc. [5, p. 198–200; 7, p. 170–171]. It also serves as a mediator between personal mental models of events, communicative situation, socio-cultural canons and the actual discourse, including narrative discourse [7, p. 163].

Having in mind certain event mental model and understanding the immediate context of the talk, the potential storyteller may proceed to narration. Narration as verbalization of a story about certain events arises as a result of cognitive operations (construals), which, depending on pragmatic goals of the speaker in a certain context, single out from the mental model of events relevant elements and organize them in certain way into a story (see Figure 2). Among the main construals (cognitive operations) R. Langacker [3] distinguishes: specificity, focusing, prominence and perspective.

Specificity and schematicity are equipollent mental operations which regulate the level of precision and detail at which a situation is characterized in the story about events [8, p. 55–57]. The speaker, thus, can always choose whether to produce an ‘ideal’ narrative, furnished with colourful descriptions, commentaries and evaluations, or to resort just to a minimal narrative.

Focusing includes both the selection of conceptual content of the event model for verbalization, as well as its arrangement by placing its components in the foreground and background [8, p. 58]. In narratives, for example, the static descriptions of actors and atmosphere or circumstances usually function as the background, while the events proper evolve in the foreground and can be referred to as a figure. The division of the discourse into theme and rheme (given/new) is also a result of focusing. According to Langacker, the figure or focus of talk and the background correlate with rheme and theme respectively in terms of text grammar [8, p. 59]. Background includes the notion of compositional path (that is all propositions which precede the verbalization of a certain phrase) [8, p. 61–62]. Another result of focusing is immediate scope versus maximal scope of information where maximal scope is understood as the background. Thus, the information which is immediately verbalized is a focus, and information which is present in the mental



**Fig. 2. Narration as a result of construals work on event and contextual models**

model, however, remains not verbalized (for whatever reasons), is the background [8, p. 62–65].

Prominence which includes profiling, and landmark and trajector alignment correlates with focusing, as anything which is highlighted by our attention becomes prominent. Langacker, when describing profiling, gives the definition of conceptual base and profile. Conceptual base – is a maximal scope of information which is activated by a sign. Profile is the part of the base, which forms the meaning of the given sign. Several expressions often activate one and the same conceptual base but differ in their profiles [8, p. 66–70]. For example, let us consider the following phrases: (1) *He is a spy*, and (2) *He is an intelligence officer*. The conceptual base is the same for them 'he is a secret service agent', and the profile is either: 'a foreign agent' or 'our agent'.

The utterances can profile objects or their relations. While profiling relations their participants have different levels of prominence and are characterized in the sense of trajector and landmark alignment. Trajector holds the primary semantic focus and, thus, is more prominent, and the landmark is characterized as the secondary semantic focus. Langacker suggests the following example: (1) *The other guests all left before we arrived*. And (2) *We arrived after the other guests all left*. In these two utterances the relations of temporal sequencing of events are profiled by the adverbs before and after. In the first example trajector (or the primary semantic focus) is: the other guests all left, and the landmark (the secondary semantic focus): we arrived, in the second example – vice-versa [8, p. 70–73].

Perspective includes construals which refer to spatio-temporal aspect of the mental model of the event and its representation in the discourse. The first and basic concept to consider here is viewing arrangement. It is the relationship between the viewer/witness of the events (speaker and hearer) and the event proper, which is being viewed. In archetypal arrangement both the speaker and the hearer are simultaneously located in the same place, from where they 'watch' the relevant happening, and discuss it. In interaction it is marked by the use of deixis, elliptical sentences, etc. [8, p. 73–75]. Vantage point is a component of viewing arrangement and includes following aspects of meaning construction: objectiveness, grounding, dynamicity and the reference point relationship. The speaker and the hearer are always a part of a certain conceptual substrate, a construal which underlies the semantic core of the utterance. Conceptual construals can be divided into two subtypes: subjective (where the viewer is implied and situated 'offstage'), and objective (where the viewer is 'onstage' and thus is simultaneously an object of viewing). These construals can find formal realization in the use of pronouns *you* and *I* in interaction [8, p. 75–78]. Ground, according to Langacker, includes the speaker and the hearer, the communicative event and its immediate circumstances (time and place of interaction). It becomes a sort of a platform for understanding the meaning of the utterances, and, thus, is present in every utterance (implicitly or explicitly), even if it is built with maximal subjectiveness [8, p. 78]. Dynamicity is an aspect of a mental model which is

responsible for comprehension and description of the events regarding the real course of events. Cognitive operation of conceptualizing events in dynamicity finds its realization in archetypal sequential and linear ordering of elements, where the theme precedes the rheme [8, p. 79–82]. However, the order of the elements in discourse does not always directly correlate with the order of elements on conceptual level. According to Langacker, in such cases a construal which is connected with the direction of mental scanning comes into play [8, p. 82–85]. In the example provided by the researcher [8, p. 83]: *Do you remember that surgeon we met at a party? His wife just filed for divorce.*, it is obvious that the focus in the mental model is on the second part of the utterance, but in the communication process the need arises to represent this event in such a way, so that the recipient can easily interpret information. It becomes possible due to the connection of the reference point – an element which is activated in discourse first (in our example – it is the surgeon who we are acquainted with), with the target which gets activated only thanks to and by means of the reference point.

All construals mentioned above take part in the production of narrative, since they help to organize the elements of the event mental model to make the story comprehensible to the recipient in compliance with the pragmatic goals of the speaker.

**Conclusions.** Natural narrative is extremely multifaceted discursive phenomenon. It is more than just a story about events. It is the key to understanding of identity, society, processes of experience and values representation.

As we have seen narrative arises as a result of correlation of the story, discourse and narration, i.e. of the event as the subject of narration, narrator's means of its internalization, and global, situational and interpersonal contexts of the event itself and the communicative situation in which the storytelling takes place. This article made an attempt to explain the process of narration as a cognitive-communicative event, based on a particular event mental model of the speaker, who depending on the conditions (and constraints) of the immediate context of communicative event, makes choices on what and how to tell, relying on an arsenal of cognitive construals. Thus, it was necessary to discuss the mechanism of event mental model construction, as well as to characterize its components; to review the elements of the contextual model which might be relevant for the speaker in shaping their story; and to discuss cognitive construals used by the speaker to either foreground, shade or even withhold certain details of the events they account of.

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