

Mixed viewpoints from a diachronic functional perspective: A case of biblical translations

José Sanders
Radboud University Nijmegen

An important aspect of Point of View (PoV) in narrative is the responsibility for discourse content and coherence: are they attributed to the narrator, to a character, or to both? In direct quotes, the responsibility for both is separated, whereas in free indirect discourse, these responsibilities are shared between the two. This paper aims to offer insights into such problems of PoV that arise both at the global and local level of narrative interpretation. It applies the concept of a Basic Communicative Spaces Network (BCSN – Sanders, Sanders & Sweetser, 2009, 2012) to account for a recursive patterning which represents how not only the narrator, but all characters in the narrative can, by their presence, as Subject of Consciousness (SoC's) generate their own Mental Spaces, and how these spaces can be blended with the mental spaces connected to other SoC's.

BCSN starts with the deictic anchoring of the speech event (I-here-now, Bühler 1934), relates this to the content and epistemic spaces, and accounts for the relationship between subjectivity and domains of use in terms of blending of mental spaces. As such, it integrates Multi-Domain theory (Sweetser, 1990), Mental Space Theory (Fauconnier 1985) and Subjectivity theory (Lyons 1977, Traugott 2010). Its fundament is a "space network" with a distinction between the representation of the Speaker's here-and-now Deictic Centre and the Content Domain of the utterance, which, in narrative discourse, is distant from the Deictic Centre. BCSN enables us to explain how, especially in narrative discourse, the intertwining of the narrator's voice with that of narrative Subject of Consciousness (character) can be heard: the narrator's and the SoC's spaces may be blended, constituting cases of free indirect speech and thought.

The SoC–narrator blending of Mental Spaces may account for ambiguities in language use and for rhetorical effects on readers; and such complex blending of spaces is not genre-specific to contemporary fictional narratives, but possible in other genres as diverse as news texts, internet interactions, and translations of biblical narratives. Thus, BCSN accounts for separate or mixed viewpoints in narratives of different age and function. To illustrate this, functional differences and diachronic changes in mixing narrative PoV are analyzed for various biblical translations. Such translations offer excellent material, because they are overall loyal to their source texts, yet different in age and translation goal (Van Silfhout, Evers-Vermeul & Sanders, 2012).

Dutch and English translations of the 17th and 21st century, aimed at varying degrees of comprehensibility, were compared with respect of the representation of biblical characters' speech, thoughts and beliefs. The original Hebrew and Greek source texts were also taken into account. The results show that space building is increasingly complicated in modern, "comprehensible" translations. Reasoning by characters (as SoC's) is represented in epistemic spaces that are accessed by modal and cognitive verbs and causal connectives; such embedded epistemic spaces are blended with the narrator's own epistemic space in the Deictic Centre, resulting in intertwined thoughts, shared reasoning, and ambiguous PoV's. By contrast, "old" characters are more direct AND more distant, represented by separating space builders.

References

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