

## **An experimental investigation of the interaction of narrators' and protagonists' perspectival prominence in narrative texts**

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In this paper, we present the results of an experiment investigating the effect of different narrative situations on the availability of locally prominent protagonists as anchor for Free Indirect Discourse (FID). FID is often used in narrative texts to express thoughts or opinions belonging to a protagonist mentioned in the preceding text. It differs from Direct Discourse (DD) and Indirect Discourse (ID) in that instead of explicitly marking its content as representing a thought or utterance via quotation marks or embedding it under a propositional attitude verb, FID instead relies on its content, context and certain linguistic cues for its interpretation and is dependent on having a suitable, prominent anchor to function as its perspectival center. While normally the speaker of an utterance will serve as the assumed perspectival center of the expressed thoughts, things differ in narrative texts due to the necessary distinction between the narrator telling the story and prominent protagonists appearing in it who often function as the anchor for FID instead. While the narrator may be prominent on a global level, a protagonist can become prominent locally, with respect to a single sentence or text segment. According to Zeman (2020), this feature of narrative texts installs them with a potential for multiperspectivity absent from everyday conversation.

The most popular line of analysis proposed for FID (see Schlenker 2004 or Eckardt 2014, for example), is that sentences can not only be interpreted with respect to a single context *C*, which is the context of the speaker (in oral conversation) or the narrator (in fictional texts), but also with respect to an additional context *c*. *c* is the context of some protagonist that has been made prominent by the preceding linguistic context. In contrast to DD and ID, which are fully interpreted either with regard to *c* or with regard to *C*, respectively, FID is partially interpreted with regard to both contexts; pronouns and verbal tense markings are interpreted with regard to *C*, while all other context-sensitive expressions are interpreted with respect to *c* whenever *c* has been introduced.

While there have been experimental investigations on the availability of locally prominent protagonists in narrated texts featuring a third-person narrator (Hinterwimmer & Meuser 2019) or a homodiegetic first-person narrator (Bimpikou 2020), a protagonist's availability as anchor in the presence of a prominent heterodiegetic third-person narrator has not been investigated experimentally. A deeper understanding of the influence the narrator's perspectival prominence has on the availability of protagonists as perspective takers is crucial for our understanding of how perspective taking in narrative texts works, however.

Therefore, we conducted an acceptability rating study and created items in three conditions: condition A featured a neutral third-person narrator, condition B a homodiegetic first-person narrator and condition C a prominent, evaluative third-person narrator. All items consisted of four sentences and ended with FID from a locally prominent protagonist's point of view. Participants had to rate the acceptability of the FID sentence on a scale from 1-7. Condition B received significantly lower ratings than the other two conditions, whereas there was no significant difference between conditions A and C. This indicates that a prominent third-person narrator does in fact not have a strong effect on the protagonists' availability as anchor for FID, while a homodiegetic first-person narrator does.

A forced-choice study using the same setup, in which participants had to choose if the thought expressed by FID belonged to the narrator or the protagonist, was meant to ensure that participants were actually interpreting the final sentence as FID and not as a comment by the

narrator in condition C. Its results proved that there was a strong tendency to choose the protagonist as perspectival center in all conditions.

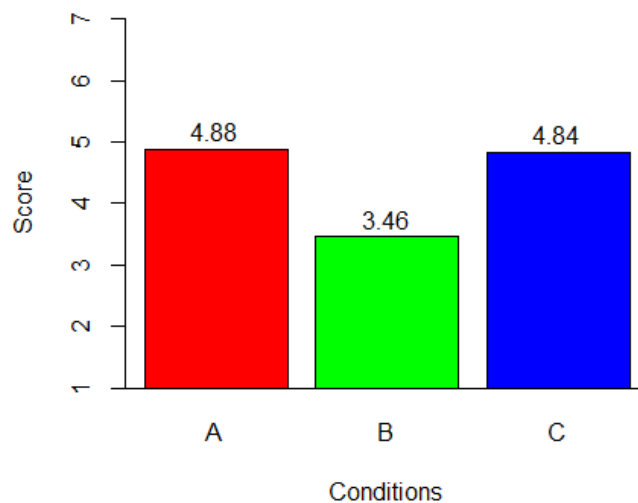
Our experiments thus managed to confirm that locally prominent protagonists can function as potent perspectival anchors for FID even in the context of a globally prominent narrator and prove that narrative texts indeed possess an inherent potential for multiperspectivity.

**(1) Exemplary test item in conditions a), b) and c):**

a)/b) Als Julia, komplett mit Reithelm und Gerte ausgerüstet, in den Stall kam, war Tarek/ich dabei, ein Pferd zu satteln. Er/Ich legte dem sonst so nervösen Hengst in kürzester Zeit den Sattel an und das Tier beruhigte sich sofort und ließ sich von ihm/mir streicheln. Sie sah ihm/mir erstaunt vom Rand der Box dabei zu. Wow, dieser Schönling kannte sich ja echt gut aus mit Pferden!  
*When Julia arrived at the stable, fully equipped with riding helmet and riding crop, Tarek/I was busy saddling a horse. He/I put the saddle on the usually very nervous stallion in no time at all, and the animal immediately calmed down and let itself be petted by him/me. She watched him/me in amazement from the edge of the stall. Wow, this pretty boy really knew his way around horses!*

c) Als Julia - ein etwas schüchternes Mädchen leider - in den Stall kam, war Tarek dabei ein Pferd zu satteln, der blöde Wichtigtuer. Er legte dem sonst so nervösen Hengst in kürzester Zeit den Sattel an, und das war echt ein wildes Vieh, da kann man nichts sagen. Sie sah ihm erstaunt vom Rand der Box dabei zu. Wow, dieser Schönling kannte sich ja echt gut aus mit Pferden!  
*When Julia - a somewhat shy girl, unfortunately - came to the stable, Tarek was saddling a horse, the stupid blowhard. He put the saddle on the usually nervous stallion in no time at all, and it really was a wild beast, there is no question about it. She watched him in amazement from the edge of the stall. Wow, this pretty boy really knew his way around horses!*

**(2) Results of acceptability rating study:** Mean ratings of all three conditions (ratings stem from a scale of 1 to 7)



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