
Temporal dynamics and linguistic patterns in discourse modes: The case of narrative passages

Hanna Schmück, Sonja Zeman, Annemarie Friedrich, Claudia Claridge
Universität Augsburg
[anna.schmueck, sonja.zeman, annemarie.friedrich, claudia.clardige]
@uni-a.de

What features are expected to occur in a text unfolding over time? Our paper approaches this question via discourse mode analyses. Discourse modes are text passages characterized by clusters of linguistic features and form parts of a text – such as Narrative, Description, Report, Information and Argument (Smith 2003). These text types help to describe the linguistic structure of unfolding text and hence to understand genre and register differences. One feature distinguishing discourse modes is the progression between situations. Two reasons motivate our focus on the Narrative mode: First, narratives on the text level have been described by means of their temporal sequence (see e.g. Labov & Waletzky 1967). Second, in the Narrative mode, “events and states are related to each other in time; the text progresses with bounded events interpreted in sequence, and/or time adverbials” (Smith 2003: 243). We present our preliminary results on identifying features of Narrative passages in different (narrative and non-narrative) texts.

Our contribution examines English and German texts from 1700-1900. These are annotated with respect to situation entity types (e.g. EVENTS, STATES, GENERIC SENTENCES, or GENERALIZING SENTENCES, QUESTIONS, and IMPERATIVES) and discourse modes in the sense of Smith (2003) on the basis of a revised version of existing annotation schemes (Friedrich and Palmer 2014; Friedrich et al. 2016). To our knowledge, our project represents the first large-scale, cross-linguistic approach to empirically validate theoretical discourse mode distinctions through diachronic and linguistically diverse corpora and to create and benchmark computational models of dynamic textual progression on the basis of this. The evaluation of first exemplary annotations demonstrates the framework’s twofold potential for insights on the interdependence of grammatical features in the unfolding text: First, it helps to expose patterns with respect to the distribution of discourse modes within a text, i.e. whether discourse modes pattern differently within different text types or genres. Second, it explains the connection between the temporal progression of a narrative and the aspectual features in the text.

References: • Friedrich, A., & A. Palmer (2014). Situation entity annotation. *Proceedings of the 8th Linguistic Annotation Workshop (LAW VIII)*, 149–158. • Friedrich, A., Palmer, A. & M. Pinkal (2016). Situation entity types: Automatic classification of clause-level aspect. *Proceedings of the 54th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (Volume 1: Long Papers)*, 1757–1768. • Labov, W. & J. Waletzky (1967). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In J. Helm (ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual art*, 12–44. University of Washington Press. • Smith, C. (2003). *The modes of discourse. The local structure of texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.