

Annotating Narrative Levels: Review of Guideline No. 4

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Reviewer's note

In the following I briefly detail my comments on the submitted guidelines for the annotation of narrative levels in the "SANTA 4 Annotation Guidelines".

The submission documents a comprehensive and thorough approach to annotating narrative levels, going for a theory-driven perspective. The guidelines themselves are well thought through. However, they should be more transparent with regard to theoretical premises and terminology, as well as more practically applicable through (1) more examples and (2) possibly an integration of the sections "premises" and "annotation guidelines." The link to computational application should receive more explicit attention.

Formal remarks: It is advisable, where possible, to use "international references" (published in/translated to English). Also, to use a gender-neutral language (e.g., establishing coreference to "narrator" not just by "he"). The text should be slightly revised for style and English idiomaticity. I would like to encourage the authors to be less tentative in their formulations. The shared task is not the place for discursively exploring complexity but for solving problems through straightforward guidelines - taking a positively reductive approach.

[I have provided more detailed remarks in the submitted guidelines for the authors' convenience].

Theoretical Introduction

Within the context of the interdisciplinary scope of the shared task, the conceptualization should strike a better balance between brevity and a broader, but clearly delineated scope. Therefore, within the limits of an annotation manual, the authors should briefly situate and elucidate the particular concepts within the larger field (thus not limited to Genette only; and within an international frame). The terminology should be more precise, and more transparent through examples. Through this, the reader will get a first working knowledge and the particular approach taken will be motivated (“narrative”, “narrator”, and “narrative level”).

Terminology & Concepts

The authors should flag out more precisely which theory they refer to (not tacitly assuming expert knowledge of reader). So far, formulations such as “we use the terms first-, second-, third-, ... degree narrative as an alternative terminology” leave open which specific theoretical frame is referred to.

Experiencing space

The authors propose the useful term “experiencing space”. However, its definition “subsumes features of the narrative level with regard to its time, its space and its characters” (p. 6) is relatively vague. It should be further specified and accompanied by annotation criteria and one or more examples. Subsequently, in the part “premises” (p. 7: 4a-d) “experiencing space” appears as a good heuristic concept for annotation. It should be systematically applied in the procedure, but so far is not mentioned in 4b.

Premises

The authors should define more precisely their “search” (“We search for all narrative levels in a given narrative text.” p. 6). By close reading on a word-by-word basis? By more loosely skimming the text? Are annotators allowed to use external references in this search, and if so, which (e.g., lexica—or Wikipedia etc.)?

The operational definition of story is “a self-contained action whose events and happenings are causally linked and cause a change of state.” (p. 7) Is a “story” really reducible to an “action” in your definition? What is the difference between “events” and “happenings”? As for “change of state” whose state does this refer to? The authors don’t mention actors, objects, etc.

The definition of story/level is given in 4d (p. 7). I suggest to provide it earlier, possibly together with that of the concept “experiencing space”. This would

solve the problem the reader confronts in 4c: without 4d, 4b leaves open how the authors distinguish narrating self and experiencing self practically. Also, 4c remains unclear as to whether “a new story” (new narrator/same narrator) is identical with “a new narrative level” - and thus whether a change of narrative levels needs a new narrator.)

Where addressing “embedding,” the authors may want to define the particular (spatial) model of levels—do they use Genette, “working up,” or others that work “down”? (the authors say “Embedded stories can be functionally related to their superordinate narrative level, their frame stories. Possible functions are ¹)” (p. 8). Generally, the model should be maximally precise - are “interlaced” (p. 9) and “sequential” two types of “embedding”?

Guidelines

For annotation of “non-narrative parts”, the tag E for “exegesis” may sometimes not be adequate (as the authors have pointed out themselves). Non-narrative passages do not necessarily have to be linked to the exegesis. The “teller level” may be named “level 0”, for conceptual, but also for practical reasons.



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¹ Cf. Silke Lahn and Jan Christoph Meister, *Einführung in die Erzähltextanalyse* (Stuttgart und Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2008), 83-84.