

Annotating Narrative Levels: Review of Guideline No. 5

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The guideline is based on a clear and plausible distinction between narrative levels and narrative acts. Narrative levels make up the vertical axis of the developed tagset, on which there can be n narrative acts on each of its levels. The narrative acts in turn form the horizontal axes of the tagset. The amount of narrative acts (n) on each level (which can be embedded, framed, juxtaposed) is principally unlimited. This general distinction takes into account the fact that a change of speaker/narrator can take place without the changing of narrative level, i.e., can happen in the same diegesis.

The main theoretical foundations of the proposed tagset are Gérard Genette's works on narrative levels (1983: *Narrative discourse: An essay in method* and 1988: *Narrative Discourse Revisited*) and Marie-Laure Ryan's framework for the actual and/or virtual forms of crossing narrative boundaries (i.e. illocutionary or ontological) as proposed in *Possible worlds, artificial intelligence, and narrative theory* (1991). Both contributions stem from classical narratology (Ryan's with a more transmedial angle to it than Genette's) and are well-established in the field. Despite their respective complexity, the guideline aptly explains the theories, and - more importantly - takes them as they are without criticizing them for aspects that could be seen as inconsistent or unintuitive (for example the fact that a first level narrator for Genette is "extradiegetic by definition"); a pragmatic decision which clearly puts the focus of the guideline on the operationalization of narrative levels as discussed in theory rather than letting it become a contribution to

these theoretical discussions.

A point that could be stated more clearly is that the guideline decidedly tries to operationalize only selected parts of the discussed theories and e.g. does not consider every crossing of an illocutionary boundary as outlined by Ryan as a case in which “indeed a new narrative act is realized” (p. 3). At the bottom of this specific choice there seems to be a differentiation between speakers and narrators. The underlying understanding of narrativity, however, unfortunately remains rather unspecified.

A very useful differentiation is established with regards to narrative acts: the guideline considers embedded and framed narratives to both be cases of several narrative acts alternating in different ways. Whereas embedded narratives are considered to be shorter narratives within a larger story, framed narratives are described as a longer story that is framed by a short narrative (which e.g. narrates the situation of the telling). Since there does not always have to be a definite border between inner and frame narratives, the comprehensible aim of the proposed tagset is not to identify techniques or functions of embedding or framing.

A further positive aspect of this guideline are the cross-categorial properties that allow the annotators to justify their decisions during the annotation process and to exemplify possible relations between narrative levels and narrative acts (i.e. the specific way of boundary crossing, the respective narrative act of the former level, the speakers’ - or narrators’? - identities, types of narrative-like direct speech acts, quotations of a literary work, letters etc., metanarration and metafiction as well as metalepsis). Genette’s differentiation between homo- and heterodiegetic narrators occurs as properties as well; the difficulties that these supposedly binary categories can bring (or even the different understandings that exist within academic discussions), however, are not reflected upon and thus these two properties could lead to irregularities in the annotation process and lower inter-annotator agreement.

The intelligible, theory-based guideline frequently operates with examples from literary texts, which makes it much easier to capture the explained categories and in return enhances the usability of the proposed tagset. The properties in practice should help to tell whether the annotation of narrative acts helps to identify narrative levels or not, and how the manifold relations between acts and levels can be used to operationalize the detection of narrative levels.



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