What is narrativity?

Interestingly, there is no consensus on a minimal definition of what constitutes narrativity when it comes to texts. How we know if a given sequence of tokens is to be understood as **narration** is something that has not been definitively addressed. Our goal in this project is to better understand the linguistic conditions that contribute to the degree of narrativity that readers identify in text passages.

For this project, you will be asked to annotate passages of text as to how strongly you feel they capture the act of narration (i.e. contain "narrativity"). To assist you in your annotations we are going to provide a working definition of narrativity and then a guide on how to annotate.

1. Working Definition

According to our definition, narrativity can occur when:

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   A       B       C        D        E          F          G        H
Somebody tells someone that │ someone did something(s) [to someone] somewhere at some time
       J
for some reason.
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Thus what defines the presence of narrativity are the following seven criteria:

- A. teller
- B. mode of telling
- C. recipient (listener, reader, viewer)
- D. agent
- E. one or more (connected) actions
- F. potential object
- G. spatial location or context
- H. temporal specification or duration
- J. rationale

Note that the elements to the right of the bracket represent the "diegetic universe" of the story, also known as the *fabula* or *story* (i.e. what happens). The elements to the left of the bracket would thus represent the extra-diegetic elements that construct the story, also known as the *sujet* or *discourse*.

Note as well that any of these criteria may be implied, i.e. not explicitly mentioned in the narrative unit, but all are *necessary* with the exception of the object of the action. For a narrative to occur there has to be someone who tells it (in a particular way), someone who receives it, someone who does something or has something done to them, which has to take place somewhere (real or imaginary) at some time (again real or imaginary), with the goal of explaining *why* this thing happened.

In order to assist you in your annotations we are going to reduce these numerous dimensions down into three primary aspects which we will ask you to annotate. These are:

- Agency
- Event Sequencing
- World Making

The narratologist David Herman posits: "Narrative roots itself in the lived, felt experience of human or human-like agents interacting in an ongoing way with their cohorts and surrounding environment." Thus for Herman what matters *most* about narrativity is: the centralization of one or more agents; the sequencing of events and thus time; and finally, the idea of "lived experience in an environment." We approximate these three dimensions through the above terms which we will define more fully here.

Agency. Narrative is first and foremost a story about someone doing something. Are there a limited number of agents who are clearly foregrounded and experiencing something in this passage? I.e. is there a protagonist or two primary characters that run through all the actions? The more centralized and consistent one or more agents are and the more coherent their identities, then the stronger "agency" is as a quality. Jumping from one entity to the next would constitute low agency, even if each of those agents does something. How focalized is the passage around a central figure(s)?

Event Sequencing. Narrative is also about time and process. This occurs through the sequencing of events. How clearly do you see a sequence of events in your passage? I.e. can you put "then" into the sentences easily (then this, then this)? They may be temporally out of order (I tell what happened last first) or there may be gaps between their happening (I walk into a restaurant and then go home), and there may be simultaneity (something happens at the same time as the thing before it), but there is an underlying temporal relationship between the events that are mentioned in the passage (i.e. they connect to each other in an *experiential* way). While narrativity allows for digressions, reflections, evaluations, etc., the more strongly structured a passage is around event sequences, the higher this score should be. Can these actions be *experienced*?

World Making. As we are seeing, narratives are about lived experience. Thus they require the construction of a world in which sequenced actions undertaken by agents can transpire. Think about this as "inhabitability" -- can you *inhabit* what is happening in your "mind's eye"? Can it be *experienced*? Also key here is the unity of the world -- the actions all make sense as part of a unified coherent space, even if this is a fantastic space. Things are happening *together*. World making isn't exclusively about description -- very underdescribed worlds can be very concrete in terms of their inhabitibility. A fairy tale "kingdom" conjures a clear world even if it is not particularly well described. Key is that there is a "thereness" to the actions and events being invoked.

Rather than conceptualize narrativity as a binary -- either it's a story or not -- we want to capture how narrativity can be a more or less intensely felt quality of text passages. We'd like to get your sense of the *strength* of narrativity across the three dimensions mentioned above. We will explain the rating scheme in the next section.

In order to identify a text's "narrativity" we are going to ask you to rate passages according to our three dimensions mentioned above in terms of how strongly you agree with the following three statements:

"This passage foregrounds the lived experience of particular agents."

"This passage is organized around sequences of events that occur over time."

"This passage creates a world that I can see and feel."

Your answers will be given according to the following 5-point scale:

> 1. Strongly disagree
> 2. Somewhat disagree
> 3. Unsure
> 4. Somewhat agree
> 5. Strongly agree

Thus you will receive a table of 1 passage per row. Your job is to add scores to the appropriate columns for each passage.

As you proceed, we'd like you to keep in mind the following biases that contribute to scores not adequately reflecting people's underlying feelings. Wherever possible, please try to reflect on whether your score reflects one of these biases or your actual feelings about the passage.

a. **Central tendecy bias** = people sometimes like to avoid using extreme response categories, especially out of a desire to avoid being perceived as having extremist views (also an instance of social desirability bias). Don't be afraid to use strong values when you think the response warrants it.

b. **Acquiescence bias** = people sometimes are inclined to agree with statements to avoid conflict. Don't be afraid to disagree. One way to help with this is to think of disagreement with the statement, "This passage creates a world I can see and feel," as a form of agreement with the statement, "This passage does not create a world I can see and feel." You can be agreeable by being disagreeable :)

c. **Fear of being wrong** = people sometimes disagree more often because they think this might make them look smarter, i.e. it is the opposite of acquiescence. See above for helping you avoid this. Disagreeing is another way of agreeing! It doesn't matter either way, just try to think about how you feel about the passage.

d. **Faking good** = people sometimes put more extreme answers than are warranted because this will indicate that they have strong opinions and are thus smarter / stronger. This is the opposite

of the central tendency bias. While we don't want you to be afraid of having strong opinions, ask yourself if they are truly warranted. If so, then no problem!