

Investigating World View Through Narrative Analysis

by *Shelley Ashdown, D. Miss.*

Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics and SIL International

Abstract:

This paper demonstrates the value of analyzing narrative texts for world view and cultural understanding. In particular, Self narratives are shown as a rich resource for individual and cultural assumptions about reality. The paper includes a research model for analyzing narratives based on Halliday & Husan's four levels of textual interpretation: Metafunctional Construct of the Text; Context of Situation; Context of Culture; and Intertextual Context.

Introduction

World view is an unconscious structural mechanism which organizes and defines the nature of reality, the interpretive process of reality, and the behavioral mechanism to cope with this perception of reality. World view is that which the person understands to be naturally so, and beliefs are based upon these mostly unconscious assumptions. The framework for world view is an integrated structure of interconnecting concepts which means learning assumptions in one category will tell you something about other cultural categories. Kearney (1984) refers to this as the concept of Logico-Structural Integration and applies the concept to what he believes is the fundamental organizational pattern of all world views (see Figure 1). His structure is comprised of seven universals: Self, Other, Relationship, Time, Space, Classification, and Causality. Each of these universal

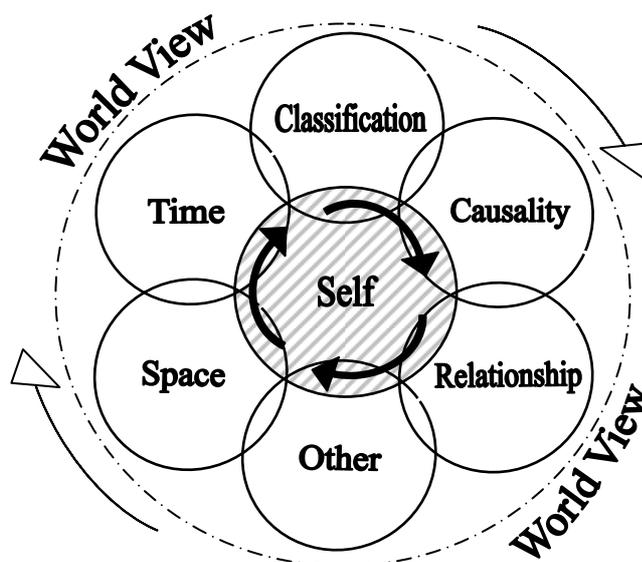


Figure 1: Relationship of World View

categories exists as an arrangement of ideas and behavior specific to each culture as a means of making sense of the life experience. It also means that learning what a people think of the individual Self will, in turn, add to our knowledge on how they view others and the relationships Self has with others whether it be supernatural Other, community Other, or earthly Other.

This has important implications when applied to the translation context. Terms and concepts are not isolates operating independently from culture and its members. Rather, the whole of world view is woven together in a tangled pattern. When you pull on the string of one color invariably another thread of a different color unravels. Key terms and concepts can tell us much more than one defining cultural attribute and value

by their relationship with other variables. Gaining understanding in one area will translate into increased understanding in other aspects of culture.

The Self universal is an excellent source of investigation because of its pivotal role in the organizational model of world view. The category of Self is considered the axis of world view. Self is both a physical and non-physical entity (Witte 1990); and as such, it is the composite nature of a person consisting of multiple physical and non-physical components allowing Self to function as a distinct human person (Coloques Internationaux du C.N.R.S. 1993). The non-physical Self is that metaphysical aspect a person believes to be innately a part of himself. It is those intrinsic qualities comprising the elemental nature of Self such as soul, spirit, breath, effort, emotion, understanding, perception, desire, will, decision, personality, character, honesty, and conscience. Not all the possible elements of Self are included or carry the same significance in every culture and, not surprisingly, elements have different definitions across cultures. Exploring Self elements then is an exciting way to learn about a specific group's notions on individual accountability, social accountability and role, individual relationship with the supernatural, causal forces, and so forth.

So, how does one go about getting at unconscious assumptions in regard to Self? You can't exactly observe one's soul in action. A very useful and practical method is narrative analysis. Generally people love to talk about themselves or share cultural folktales. Most translation projects already have many such stories on file just waiting to be honed for cultural meaning. Language as the principal semiotic system of a culture is perhaps the most important phenomenon by which a people frame, express, and advance their world view. Thus the analytic purpose of considering language in world view research is an exploration of how language reflects important cultural and social ideals, understandings, and patterns of thought.

Narrative Texts

Personal/Self narrative reveals the person and society, it is a "window on truth" and a "mirror to nature" (Gergen & Gergen 1988; Steffen 1998). Self narratives are an excellent source of firsthand, personal experience from an eyewitness point of view. Notions about the non-physical Self are depicted from actual, real life examples. In this way, personal narratives serve as behavioral examples from every day experiences. Narratives offer concrete illustrations of individual and cultural assumptions about reality and, as Steffen aptly notes, consideration of narrative goes beyond the "what" question of main stream world view and social structure studies toward answering the "why" question.

Myths are also universal and therefore can be addressed in every culture. Mythology is an important cultural medium which influences the formulation of self concept because "they provide a culturally significant and coherent model of the self" (Pandian 1991:133). Myths provide cultural discourses on the nature of self identity within a particular culture.

To gather myths, folktales, and personal narratives can easily be accomplished by having a list of suggested topics to which an informant may respond, such as:

- ◆ Creation Story:
Does your tribe have a story of how the earth was created?
- ◆ Origin of the Person's Tribe:
Does your people group have a story of how your tribe came to be?
- ◆ Favorite Folk Hero:
Would you tell me a story about your favorite hero in your tribe's history?
- ◆ Saddest Personal Experience:
Would you tell me a story of when you were the saddest in your whole life?
- ◆ Luckiest Personal Experience:
Would you tell me a story of the luckiest experience you ever had?
- ◆ Unluckiest Personal Experience:
Would you tell me a story of the most unlucky experience you ever had?
- ◆ Most Afraid Personal Experience:

- Would you tell me a story of when you were most afraid in your whole life?
- ◆ Most Sick Personal Experience:
Would you tell me a story of when you were the most sick in your whole life?
 - ◆ Personal Experience of God's Protection:
Tell me a story of when you knew that God protected you.
 - ◆ Most Angry Personal Experience:
Tell me a story of when you were the most angry that you have ever been.
 - ◆ Proverb with Metaphorical Symbol of Self:
Here is a proverb from your people group...can you explain it through a personal story or folktale?

Construct of a Text

Once you have story in hand, the question then becomes how to analyze it. An excellent theoretical framework whereby to analyze narrative texts is a model given by Halliday and Hasan (1989) in their book, *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective*. Their premise very simply put is this: to understand a people you must study their *language*, to understand their language you must study their *texts*, to understand their texts you must study the *context*. A text may be written or spoken and is defined as language serving some function in a context. To analyze the text, the model considers (see Appendix A):

Four Levels of Textual Interpretation

- ◆ Metafunctional Construct of the Text
- ◆ Context of Situation
- ◆ Context of Culture
- ◆ Intertextual Context

A fascinating folktale told with differing variations throughout Eastern Africa will be used here as an example of how to apply the contextual model to narrative analysis. This story sheds light on the way in which the spirit element of Self is viewed along with other features with intriguing cultural values. The text taken from the Maa speaking Ndorobo tribe of Kenya will be the version used for analysis. The narrative begins with the characters of Water and Fire, and these animals: Lion, Elephant, Snake, Hare, and Hyena.

The seven friends had joined together for a successful cattle raid but were raided themselves, leaving their food supply severely depleted. Hare began to think about this and it occurred to him the larger, more powerful animals would eventually kill the smaller members to increase their share of cattle. Hare formulated a plan to cause all others in the party to fight each other until he was the only one left alive. One by one, Hare spoke to each animal planting the seeds of mistrust.

Folktale: The Clever Hare

Long ago there was Water and Fire and these animals: Lion, Elephant, Snake, Hare, and Hyena. Water, Fire and the animals went to raid cattle. They stole cattle but their enemies in turn grabbed some cattle from them. One day Hare was thinking about this and said to himself that he leads this group and of our number we know that Lion will kill us. Lion and Elephant are big and will refuse to let us have cattle and will kill us. What should we do?

Hare talked to himself about his problem. Hare said, "I will cause all the animals to fight each other until I am the only one alive." Hare plotted with Hyena, and Hyena bit the male lion and it died the next morning.

Again Hare said to himself that he would do to Elephant what he did to the male lion. He told Snake to go inside the nose and bite Elephant with poison. At sunrise Elephant died. Hare said to himself that Snake is still remaining.

Snake and Hare went and went along driving cattle, and then they went to sleep. After they slept, Hare told Snake, "We need to do something about

Lioness because she will grab the cattle. They discussed what to do and Hare told Snake to bite Lioness inside the ear and make her die.

Hare said to himself, "What will I do with Snake as I am afraid of it?" Hare said to himself this is what I will do. Hare told Fire, "We need to do something because Snake will grab the cattle we have." Hare said, "When we go to rest, you light a flame in the bottom of the tree because we will climb to the top and the flame will come up. When Snake falls down from the smoke, do not let it escape but burn it." Fire did what Hare told it.

Now Hare looked around and said, "All that remains are Fire, Water, Hyena and me." Hare said to himself, "What should I do? Which one can defeat us?" Hare said again to himself that Fire can defeat us so Hare went and saw Water. Hare told Water that Fire will grab our cattle. This is what we will do about Fire. Hare told Water to go to a steep place. "What you should do when you get to the steep place is roll down and hit Fire and cover it all with water." Water did as it was told.

When Water finished, Hare talked to himself about what to do next. Hare said to Water, "Will Hyena grab the cattle?" Hare again said to Hyena that Water will grab the cattle. So Hare said to himself that he would go and see Water and tell him to kill Hyena and we both can have the cattle. "You should enter the stomach of Hyena and bloat it so he is unable to find a solution." When it was bloated, Hyena died at sunrise. Hare was very happy when this was done. After it was done Hare only had to think and decide what to do with Water.

Hare said, "Let's go, take Water and climb a mountain." When they got to the mountain, Water was not able to climb up the mountain and the cattle went and went, climbing up to the top. Water waited and tried for a long time to climb up but could not. Eventually, Water left, and Hare brought the cattle down from the mountain.

Metafunctional Construct

The first level of analysis addresses four metafunctions or aspects of the language in a narrative text (see Table 1). By understanding these meanings or functions of language, it is then possible to identify specific features of the Self universal: a) how Self is viewed as different from Other, b) how Self communicates with Other, and c) how Self is culturally described and enacted in the social community (see Appendix A).

The Hare character brings into view that aspect of life which makes it a risky, unpredictable experience. A person must always be alert for potential enemies and also be clever and cunning to survive. Surprisingly enough, Hare is considered the hero of the story and symbolizes wisdom by his clever plan. He was not obligated to the others, because they were not hares; thus, they were not members of his community to whom he must remain loyal. Taking from competition to ensure self preservation is always appropriate. It is not necessary to share with the others because not enough cattle was available for everyone to benefit. Thus the need to care for Self first. A person must find ways of preserving Self and the community, and the spirit element within a person helps direct the way. Hare possessed a good spirit which is characterized as a guardian spirit.

Good spirits are not individually created but are taken from the living Spirit of God and are considered still a part of his spirit essence. The role of guardian spirits is threefold: (a) initiate and maintain life with inhaled breath, (b) serve as the causal force of all good on earth, and (c) protect and save a person from evil. The ideas and creativity to outsmart others are directed by the good spirit element in a person. The spirit element has controlling power over personality and in the case of Hare, this causal action produced an abundant food source and protected Hare from the treachery of the others.

Table 1: Four Metafunctions of Language.

METAFUNCTIONAL CONSTRUCT	
EVERY TEXT IS COMPOSED OF FOUR MEANINGS	TEXT INTERPRETATION INVOLVES UNDERSTANDING THREE FUNCTIONS
<i>Experiential</i> Meaning phenomenal aspect of life symbolic reality processes & participants	<i>Ideational</i> Function (learning, thinking, process)
<i>Logical</i> Meaning sequence of events relationship of processes valued end point	
<i>Interpersonal</i> Meaning attitudes	<i>Interpersonal</i> Function (judgments)
<i>Textual</i> Meaning thematic structure	<i>Textual</i> Function (information focus)

Because the thoughts and ideas of a person are greatly influenced by the spirit element, the role of the spirit element influences all aspects of individuality. The spirit element literally controls the person by consent of Self because the heart is controlled by the spirit element, and the heart controls Self. In the case of Hare, the good spirit entity caused right emotion, desire, and behavior by cultural standards of morality. While interpersonal relationships are important, it is the prevailing sense of personal and community survival above all else which governs motive and behavior.

The valued end point of the entire narrative is twofold: 1) Use your intelligence to overcome problems; 2) Avoid challenges and conflict by outsmarting others. The value of human life, be it insiders or outsiders, demands high respect since life is given by God himself. The tendency is to flee in the face of danger to protect Self and the use of trickery to slip away from an enemy threat. Cleverness and the use of tricks are highly valued because these offer a way of escape without threatening life force. At the very least, a cunning plan will reduce casualties and that effort is noted by the divine.

The interpersonal and textual meaning of the story mirror one another. The common thread of tribal identity which lumps Hare with his community of Hares differentiates the Hare Self from earthly Other. Those outside the Hare tribal community are thought of in terms of Them vs. Us. Earthly Other are viewed as living the life experience on a parallel course toward the finality of death but just that - parallel. A proverb teaches, "Enemies cannot get to know each other," and the enemy is anyone outside the community. Self and earthly Other are headed in the same direction and probably with the same desires for happiness, but the two cannot and will not meet. Loyalty is given only to the tribe even if others share the same geography.

Context of Situation

Every text, indeed all language, has a context. Context of Situation is the second level of analysis and "serves to interpret the social context of a text, the environment in which meanings are being exchanged" (Halliday & Hasan 1989:12). It is the immediate environment in which the text is functioning. The conceptual framework of Context of Situation includes three features as can be seen in Table 2. By understanding Context of Situation with its three features, it is possible to explain why certain ideas and facts have been spoken or written on a particular occasion and what other ideas and facts could have been verbalized or written but were excluded (see Appendix A).

Traditionally, raiding cattle and stealing were considered a legitimate means of economic survival. The modus operandi was survival by any means necessary. However, taking from another community member is taboo and self-defeating to community vitality, ergo the custom of stealing from earthy

Table 2: Three Features of Context of Situation.

CONTEXT OF SITUATION	
Field of Discourse	<i>What is happening?</i>
Tenor of Discourse	<i>Who is participating?</i>
Mode of Discourse	<i>What is the role of language?</i>

Other became the norm. Pillaging from outsiders to improve one's own situation is thought to be clever even today. Earthy Others are to be exploited while community Others are to be supported. The story revolves around: Who has the resources and how can I get them?

Traditionally the actors, Lion, Lioness, Elephant, Snake, and Hyena, are considered enemies of man. Each of these animals possess an evil spirit element and each represent evil and danger. Water and Fire have a double-sided nature which makes each unpredictable. Cattle are viewed as blood-wealth and valued by other economies besides herders. Each animal and element represent a separate group or tribe. The characters in the story are participating in exploiting others and eliminating competition.

Self has a defensive relationship with earthy Other. The world outside the community is hostile and seeks to encroach upon an individual and his community at any given time. Hare participated with earthy Other (Lion, Lioness, Elephant, Snake, Hyena, Water, Fire) as long as it benefited him to do so but his relationship was always one of mistrust. A proverb warns, "No one is so clever that he cannot be cheated." Anyone can be swindled, however chicanery goes both ways. One can cheat others no matter how powerful or clever they may be, and one can fall victim to thievery by a multiplicity of others.

The purpose of the story is to be a didactic tool illustrating the relationship of Self to earthy Other. This relationship is marked by a seemingly endless series of plots and counterplots to contend against or prevent the schemes of community outsiders. Self and earthy Other relate around the dance of exploitation. The steps are measured to see who can exploit who first and for how much. Yes, you can win but only by recognizing a potential calamity and implementing a plan through the cleverness of deceit.

Context of Culture

The text and its context operates within the broader scope of the culture – the Context of Culture, the third level of analysis. Any Context of Situation setting the stage for a text to function is not an arbitrary fabrication of random features, but a representation of the total culture (see Table 3). By understanding the Context of Culture, it is possible to gain insight on the cultural ideology that gives value to the text and provides boundaries for interpretation. Furthermore, Context of Culture describes the cultural assumptions made in the context and in what way these determine how a text is interpreted in its Context of Situation (see Appendix A).

Historically, hunters shot the nose of an elephant to kill it – the skin is softer and it bleeds easily. The ear is a weak part of a person or animal. For a snake to bite the ear would make it die quickly. The skin is thin inside the ear and poison quickly flows to the heart. Hare and took

Table 3: Features of Context of Culture.

CONTEXT OF CULTURE	
Broad Cultural Background	<i>History, Tradition</i>
Specific Cultural Information	<i>Values, Attitudes, Beliefs, Roles, Norms</i>

advantage of each member's weakness and followed a traditional tactic of eliminating competition without actually *doing* any of killing. The first survival tactic of smaller, less powerful tribes is to avoid conflict by all means possible or get others to do the fighting for you. Hare is considered wise because he recognized a future problem and allowed his spirit element to instigated a plan without actually getting his hands dirty.

It is believed that the spirit element of a person can actually be hungry itself in the sense that no matter what good or evil a spirit entity has caused, a spirit is never satisfied. Good spirits hunger to display more goodness and evil spirits hunger for more evil action. Spirits perpetuate their nature in the actions of the individual and the cycle is unending. The Hare character possessed a good spirit so it is fitting he found a way to preserve himself from the evil actions of others.

The cultural attitude concerning Self implicit in the narrative is in terms of something shared by others in the community. The Self is more than something unique to the individual, indeed this uniqueness in and of itself would only leave the person incomplete and dysfunctional. One's community has priority over each person as an individual, and this suggests a person is defined more in accordance to their membership within the relational scheme of the community than according to private individuality. The underlying social role of Self is to survive and assist community Other in their survival.

The cultural norm says it is natural to desire more in life. Can anyone ever truly be satisfied with his station in life? A proverb states, "The hide of your calf is not enough for you," meaning a person is never satisfied with his own possessions. This being the case, "Do not ever tempt warriors with cattle." Never leave cattle unguarded if warriors from another group are near because the cattle will surely be stolen. Always remember, it is in-group vs. out-group, tribe vs. not tribe.

Intertextual Context

Part of the textual environment also includes other texts which have been drawn from and incorporated into the text. As the fourth level of analysis, Intertextual Context is an unconscious awareness by participants of the continuity between texts and their shared understanding (see Table 4). By understanding Intertextual Context, it is possible to identify significant cultural themes, values and relationships as well as cultural continuity and discontinuity (see Appendix A).

We have mentioned a few proverbs throughout our discussion that have supported certain notions of world view. Others relevant to the story are: 1) When fingers are burned in a fire, each person will save their own, 2) Strength does not conquer everything, and 3) Desires/will are ability

Table 4: Feature of Intertextual Context.

INTERTEXTUAL CONTEXT	
Assumptions in the Text	→ found in other stories, proverbs, etc.

and power. By collecting several narratives it is possible to sketch a cultural portrait of world view following analysis and additional interview follow-up questions.

Concluding Remarks

People tell their lives as stories. The essence of human thought is found in the stories we use to inform and indoctrinate ourselves to define reality. Tell me your story and I will learn what kind of person you are. "We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" (Hardy 1968:5). Many of the things we want to learn about people are not visible to the unperceiving eye. However, most events are rendered socially visible through narratives. Take advantage of what people will tell you about themselves – it is a gold mine for world view understanding.

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Appendix A: Questions for Narrative Analysis

I. MetaFunction of a Text

- A. What is the Meaning of the Experience described in the story?
 - 1) What event, action or process of the person's life is expressed?
 - 2) What symbolic features represent reality in this culture?
 - 3) What process is described?
- B. What is the Logical Meaning of the Experience described in the story?
 - 1) What are the sequence of events in the story?
 - 2) What is the relationship between one event and another in the story?
 - 3) What is the main point of the entire story to the storyteller?
- C. What Meaning does the story have between those Listening and Interacting?
 - 1) What attitudes and judgments are given or assumed in the story?
 - 2) What rhetorical examples are used?
- D. What Meaning does the Text express about the Experience described in the story?
 - 1) What is the focus of the information?
 - 2) What is the thematic structure?

II. Context of Situation

- A. Field of Discourse (What is going on)
 - 1) What kind of activity is happening?
 - 2) What is the nature of the social action taking place?

- 3) What are the participants engaged in?
- B. Tenor of Discourse (Who is taking part)
 - 1) Who are the participants?
 - 2) What are the status and roles of the participants?
 - 3) What kinds of role relationships exist among participants?
 - 4) Are there socially significant relationships among participants?
- C. Mode of Discourse (What is the role of language?)
 - 1) What is the role of the text?
 - 2) What is the function of the text?
 - 3) What is the channel of the text?
 - 4) What is the purpose of the text?
- III. Context of Culture
 - A. What is the broader cultural background that gives meaning to the story?
 - B. What specific information further enlightens the meaning of the story?
 - 1) Cultural values?
 - 2) Cultural attitudes?
 - 3) Cultural beliefs?
 - 4) Cultural roles?
 - 5) Cultural norms?
- IV. Intertextual Context
 - A. What is the text's relation to other texts?
 - B. What assumptions from this narrative are found in other stories or proverbs from this culture?