

How to Tell a Good Story: The Relevance of Clarkian Layering in ‘Storytelling’

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Undergraduate Linguistics Association of Britain

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WHAT

- What aspects of LANGUAGE are utilised when storytelling?
- Where does LAYERING come in?
- Is ICONICITY in language(s) good or bad?

1. Introducing: Layered Actions
2. The Third Layer
3. Drawbacks and Practical Usage

INTRODUCING LAYERED ACTIONS: LAYERING (CLARK, 1996)

- Entering different DOMAINS, or DIMENSIONS, of talk
- Layer 1 is OMNIPRESENT; the ‘base or foundation’. Layer 2 is described as a ‘THEATRICAL STAGE created on top of it’
- Further layers would be further ‘theatrical stages’ on top of the previous layer

INTRODUCING LAYERED ACTIONS: LAYERING (CLARK, 1996)

Example 1: Argument with a Policeman – Coded

¹< = Layer 1

²< = Layer 2

³< = Layer 3

Kate: ¹<It was when he used to cycle to work so like²<he was cycling through the park which he probably shouldn't have been doing so then this policeman just stepped in front of his bike and he went mental he was like³<*why would you do that I almost crashed!*³>²>¹>

INTRODUCUING LAYERED ACTIONS: LAYERING (CLARK, 1996)

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INTRODUCING LAYERED ACTIONS: LAYERING (CLARK, 1996)



Layer 1 / **Layer 2** / **Layer 3**

Sonny: Where... is Scott Lang?

Luis: Well, see, that's complicated, 'cause when I first met Scotty, he was in a bad place. And I'm not talking about cell block D. His wife had just filed for divorce. And I was like, "Damn, homie, she dumped you while you were in lock-up?". And he was like, "Yeah, I know. I thought I was gonna be with her forever, but now, I'm all alone". And I was like, "Damn, homie, you know what? You gotta chin up, 'cause you'll find a new partner. But you know what? I'm Luis". And he says, "You know what? I'm Scotty. And we're gonna be best friends"

INTRODUCING LAYERED ACTIONS: STAGING THEORY (CLARK, 2016)

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- Depictions are REAL, physical scenes
- Staged for other people to utilise in creating the IMAGINARY WORLD/SCENE that is being depicted
- *RE-PRESENTING* something/one that already exists



INTRODUCING LAYERED ACTIONS: 5 FORMS OF DEPICTION (CLARK, 2016)

- Iconic gestures
- Facial gestures
- Spoken quotations
- Full-scale demonstrations
- Make-believe play



Description = WHAT is said

Depiction = HOW it is said

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THE THIRD LAYER: 'SCENE' CREATION (CLARK, 2016)

- 'PROXIMAL' scene
 - *here-and-now*
- 'DISTAL' scene
 - *there-and-then*
- Embodiment

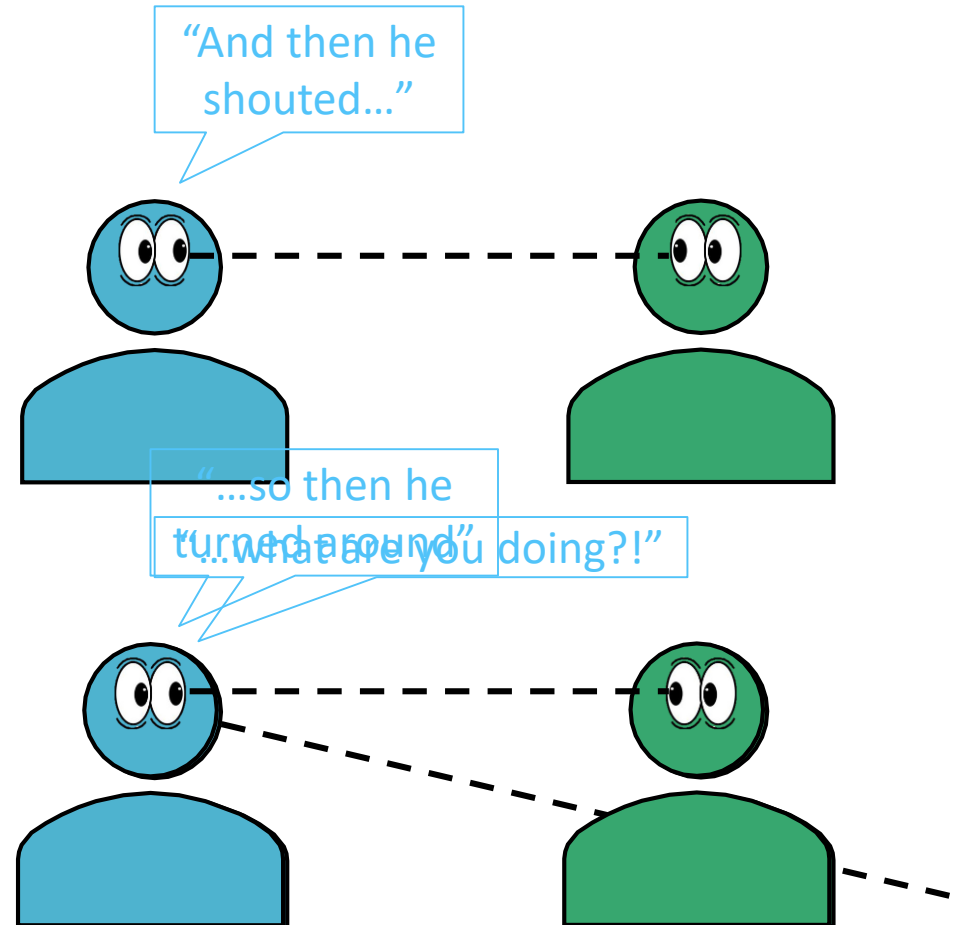


THE THIRD LAYER: 'SCENE' CREATION (CLARK, 2016)

- Recipient's goal = fit the distal scene to the real world
- Similar to 'framing' (Goffman 1974)
 - 'principles of organization which govern events [...] and our subjective involvement in them' (10)
- Every setting has a set of *rules*

THE THIRD LAYER: 'SCENE' CREATION - GAZE (MANDELBAUM, 2012)

- During a depiction, storytellers generally gaze away from addressee(s)
- Returning recipient(s)' gaze is a 'crucial resource' for recognition that depiction has shifted back to description



THE THIRD LAYER: *SHOW NOT TELL* (MANDELBAUM, 2012)

- Patients use depiction to ‘encourage the doctor to witness [...] the suffering they have incurred’ (Heath 2002: 598)
- Should gesture in spoken languages be analysed *as language*, not a language supplement/aid?

THE THIRD LAYER: ICONIC DEPICTION (LUPYAN & WINTER, 2018)

- Iconic crossmodal correspondence
 - Correlation between *sound* and *inferred meaning*
- Shorter/higher vowel sounds
smallness/cuteness
- Subtle layering



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DRAWBACKS & PRACTICAL USAGE: ICONICITY

- Drawbacks lie in Staging Theory's real world application
- 'Cosmetic'
- 'The iconic potential of language is substantially greater than what is realized...'
- 'increased iconicity in English would lead to a substantial growth in systematicity'
(Lupyan & Winter 2018)

DRAWBACKS & PRACTICAL USAGE: ICONICITY

- Systematicity = ‘statistical relationship between the patterns of sound for a group of words and their usage’ (Dingemanse et al. 2015)
- Language development is becoming *lazier*
- Iconic words are ‘too linked to specific referents and contexts, and so are less well suited for expressing abstractions’ (Lupyan and Winter, 2018)
- Prescriptivist attitudes

DRAWBACKS & PRACTICAL USAGE: ICONICITY

- Literature mainly analyses English
- British Sign Language? A (mostly) iconic language that is widely used
- BSL 'role shift' indicates reported speech



DRAWBACKS & PRACTICAL USAGE: SHARED LAYERS OF ACTIVITY

- During a depiction, people ‘jointly engage in two simultaneous layers of activity’ (Clark 2016)
- There will always be confusion
- Proximal scenes can be shared, distal scenes can never be truly shared



DRAWBACKS & PRACTICAL USAGE: SO WHAT?

- Storytelling in different contexts
- Third layer use in doctor-patient interaction
- Importance of *show over tell*

DRAWBACKS & PRACTICAL USAGE: WHAT NEXT?

- Layering in instruction/direction giving
- Better defining layers
- Practicality of different layers
- Directly incorporating iconicity



- Depiction = language accompaniment?

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