

**Language in narrative and song:  
Dedicated grammar, linguistic creativity and endangered oral traditions**

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This workshop focuses on linguistic phenomena that occur in folktales, stories, oral traditions and narratives; and the methodological challenges that come with them. While oral traditions are getting lost, so are the specific data and phenomena they entail. This limits our knowledge about the breadth of features that may occur in language, because some aspects of grammar and language use only occur in oral traditions. Elicitation, but also naturalistic spoken dialogue data, are often insufficient to uncover *all* grammatical aspects of a language. The language used for everyday conversations may differ in important ways from the language used in oral traditions, which often contain constructions not found in other contexts.

Similar to how language games and secret languages (see for example Ka (1988) on the Wolof-based secret language Kàll) have long been used to find evidence for syllabification, stories can shed light on language change or reveal certain lexical items that otherwise are not used. A striking case in point is shown by Nikitina (2018) in Wan (Mande). Ideophones for describing actions without verbs and logophoric pronouns for switching between the roles of the narrator and characters stories, are among other phenomena, exclusive to oral traditions and these phenomena are getting lost with the demise of storytelling. Thus, even though Wan is generally not classified as an endangered language and is even gaining speakers, they represent a case of language attrition. Another example of how oral traditions may inform our knowledge of the grammar of a language is shown by Turpin (2005), who has found that in Central Australian songs in Arandic languages, certain consonants and vowels are realized differently than in everyday speech, that there are special song registers; and that, through the use of archaic forms, songs can teach us about the diachrony of the languages involved.

An understudied and undertheorized aspect in the documentation of narratives is how to best capture and understand their variety. Some narratives are naturalistic and spontaneous, such as narratives of people's life events, whereas others are highly staged, such as folk stories performed by professional storytellers. Although Himmelmann (1998) explicitly includes the whole spectrum of highly staged, non-spontaneous speech to spontaneous, non-staged verbal art among the genres that should be included in language documentation, spontaneous speech is often prioritised by fieldworkers. As Jakobson (1960) already noted, of the various functions of language, its poetic function often flies under the radar of linguists. Nevertheless, a wide range of discourse elicitation methods have been proposed, with the purpose of eliciting various types of narrative data. These include visual prompts (e.g., Frog Stories (Mayer 1969), Pear Stories (Chafe 1980), the picture task designed by San Roque et al. (2012)), the labovian strategy of asking people to recount dramatic life events (Labov 1972), or asking people (both professional storytellers and laypeople) to recite folktales.

To the best of our knowledge, however, few attempts have been made to compare the narrative data produced following these methods and their relation to spontaneous speech and conversational data. Bickel (2003) has used the Pear Stories to show cross-linguistic differences in the frequency of overt noun phrases in narratives. But even having the same prompts does not necessarily lead to comparable narratives, as Clark (2004) has shown for Frog Stories. For example, the temporal sequence between the pictures is not always made, or the function of the frog is not interpreted the same way across participants. Furthermore, picture tasks are also used online nowadays; is there a difference in the output produced by online versus on location picture tasks? In order to understand the value of grammatical analyses based on narratives, such questions need to be answered.

The issue of data compatibility is related to corpus compatibility, since research in storytelling often requires the use of corpora. Levshina (2021) has recently pointed out several challenges in corpus-based typology. While corpora are a good way to get quantificational data for, for example, language universals, there is still eurocentrism in the availability of corpora, and different corpora made by different people are not always straightforward to compare with each other. We aim to connect typology to the narratologist literature as a way of matching properties of various corpora. Thus, we will be paying special attention to comparing corpora and data compatibility issues.

We invite typological and descriptive studies using narrative data, covering cross-linguistic linguistic phenomena found in such data and different linguistic areas. The current list of abstracts covers Oceania, Australia, Eurasia, Africa and the Americas.

Additional submissions to the workshop may include, but need not be limited to:

- Methodological issues in the study of narrative grammar. How can we make corpora compatible for comparison? Does the use of the same prompts yield comparable stories in different cultural and linguistic settings?
- Terminological issues: what we consider stories are sometimes histories for the tellers involved, even if they have the same grammatical properties as personal narratives. How do we define stories?
- What is the relation between information structuring devices and narrative structure? Which linguistic elements are used for certain strategies for driving the plot and structuring the narrative? Examples of different ways of expressing such strategies include head-tail/tail-head linkage and other bridging constructions (see De Vries 2005, Aikhenvald (2019), Guérin and Aiton (2019), i.a.), converbs, clause chaining (for example Robert 2010 for Wolof).
- How are characters linguistically represented in stories? For example: personification, reference tracking, representing inner worlds of characters and reported speech.
- The continuum between purely grammatical elements and rhetorical strategies. Is there such a thing as a special narrative grammar? Examples of narrative grammar could be special word forms that only occur in narratives. For example, narrative aspect and narrative tense verb forms, or special story registers. What are their properties and how are they used?
- What is the role of interjections, discourse markers, onomatopoeia and other ‘peripheral’ word classes in storytelling?
- What is the role of formulaic expressions in stories?

- Are there differences in language use or prosody in different parts of the story, i.e., the set-up, the culmination?
- What are some language/culture-specific elements in the structure of narratives, and how do they influence the way we can make generalizations or compare narratives on a cross-linguistic level? For example, most Australian Aboriginal narratives are 'travel stories' following various locations in the landscape, which often makes them quite inaccessible to hearers unfamiliar with the geographic context (Rumsey & Weiner 2001).
- What are the roles of other media and extra-linguistic cues in stories? For example special intonation, or the use of visual media, such as in Central Australian sand stories (Green 2016)?
- We often find that in songs within narratives other languages than the language of the narratives itself are used, as are invented words, unintelligible speech and pseudowords. What is the significance of these foreign or unintelligible portions, how are they used, and can we trace back their origin? For example, synchronic pseudowords could be mondegreens from another language that no-one in the community speaks anymore.

**Keywords:** storytelling, corpora, typology, narratives, folklore, language documentation

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