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Title: The Three Little Pigs: oral and written retellings by a child with autism

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Abstract:

In this paper we address the question: What does written narrative in comparison to oral retellings tell us about the cognitive processes relevant to narrative delivery in a child with autism?

Stirling & Barrington (forthcoming) present a qualitative analysis of uncommonly rich written story retellings produced spontaneously by a child with autism. They show that while the stories exhibit sophisticated episodic macrostructure and the ability to use a range of devices for managing perspective, they are nevertheless recognizably profoundly unusual in ways that can be modelled in terms of difficulties in the management of the relative knowledge states of characters, narrator, and audience.

We followed up these written narratives by eliciting oral retellings of the same story so as to examine the commonalities and differences between the two modalities. We focus here on three versions of ‘The three little pigs’: the original written retelling, and two oral versions, the first produced a year later and the second two months after that. All three versions are highly dramatised and polyphonic with extensive representation of the speech, thought and interaction of the characters, and the sequence of stories exhibits interesting development over time as the story content is elaborated.

One major difference between oral and written story retellings is that the written version tends to be an edited final product whereas the spoken version may index the process of narrative construction in a more revealing way: for instance in self-repairs, hesitations, blind alleys and restructuring. We investigate these phenomena, in addition to examining the representation of mental states, speech and thought, performative roles and the knowledge states of characters and narrator.

References:

Stirling, Lesley & Barrington, Graham (forthcoming) “Then I’ll huff and I’ll puff or I’ll go on the roff!” thinks the wolf: Spontaneous written narratives by a child with autism. In: Schalley, Andrea C. & Khlentzos, Drew (eds.) *Mental states: Language and cognitive structure*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

