



DEVELOPING A 'PERFECT' METHODOLOGY

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OUTLINE

1. The challenge: How to investigate the perfect aspect cross-linguistically
2. Storyboards: The method and its advantages
3. A ‘perfect’ storyboard: “Miss Smith’s Bad Day”
4. Discussion
5. Conclusions

THE CHALLENGE

DEFINING THE FOCUS OF INVESTIGATION

The challenge:

- No cross-linguistic definition of what ‘counts’ as a perfect
- Criteria for identifying the perfect
 - Semantic
 - Pragmatic
 - Morphosyntactic (no!!)
- What are we investigating when we (are trying to) target the *perfect*?
- How can we investigate grammatical constructions that fall within the category of *perfect*

DEFINING THE FOCUS OF INVESTIGATION

Our response:

- *Family of diagnostics* approach
 - Does not rely on a specific set of **necessary criteria**
 - Looks at a wide **range of features**
- To detect
 - **Patterns**
 - **Clustering of properties**
 - **Implicational relations**
- Focusing on semantic criteria

THE CHALLENGE OF COLLECTING CROSS-LINGUISTIC DATA

- Tension between two goals:
 - Replicating results
 - using the same stimuli across languages
 - Flexibility to identify and respond to language-specific properties
- Various methods
 - Surveys/questionnaires (e.g., Dahl's 1985 seminal work)
 - Replicable across languages, speakers, researchers, elicitation sessions
 - No information about the tense and aspect **system** of a language
 - Traditional elicitation methods (sentences in isolation, paradigms, translation tasks)
 - Flexible
 - Hardly replicable

STORYBOARDS

Flexible and replicable!!

THE STORYBOARD METHOD

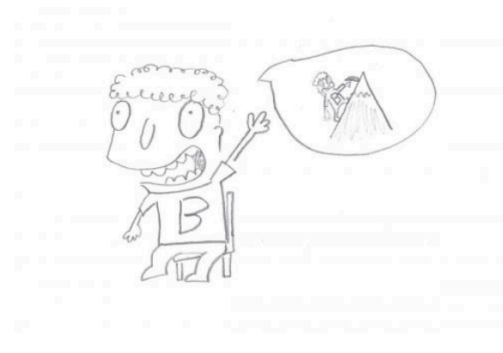
- A storyboard is a series of pictures (cartoons) designed to elicit spontaneous speech, while targeting specific constructions (Burton & Matthewson 2015, <http://www.totemfieldstoryboards.org>).
- Hypothesis driven
 - Not just any story
 - Does not elicit free narratives
 - Crucially different from the Pear Stories (Chafe 1980) or the Frog Stories (Berman and Slobin 1994).

THE STEPS FOR A 'PERFECT' STORYBOARD

- Research question: what form is used where the perfect is used in English and Niuean (for instance) (i.e. is there a perfect, what is it, how is it used?)
- Experiential readings, resultative readings (and their restrictions)
- Design and illustrate a story which contains
 - Targeted contexts for these readings
 - Targeted restrictions



4. Miss Smith asks the kids "Who has ever climbed a mountain?"



5. Bob says "I've climbed a mountain!"

THE STEPS FOR A 'PERFECT' STORYBOARD ELICITATION

1. Introduce the story to the consultant
 - Without written text on the images
2. Consultant tells the story in their own words.
3. Data treatment
 - Transcription et al.
4. Follow-up elicitation
 - negative data
 - alternative forms

OVERVIEW OF THE ADVANTAGES

- Storyboards combine the advantages of collecting oral narratives...
 - fluent, natural speech
 - limited contact language interference
 - forms appear in context
- with the advantages of elicitation
 - target specific forms
 - negative data (through follow-up elicitation)
- Replicable across languages.
 - Consistent stimuli speakers, researchers and languages
- They are fun, and easily transferable to materials for language teaching.

CONTACT LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE

- The problem:
 - Tasks involving direct translation (surveys, sentences in isolation)
 - emphasise the structure and meaning of the contact language
 - may yield unnatural sentences in the target language.
- The Storyboard solution:
 - provides rich contexts
 - forms arise naturally in narrative without a contact language prompt

CONTEXTUALISATION

- The problems (with sentences in isolation):
 - Highly context-dependent can never be fully felicitous or accessible
 - e.g. when experiential readings are possible or obligatory
 - Verbally provided contexts
 - misunderstanding
 - attention lapses
 - lack of standardization across researchers
 - vague and ambiguous
 - force the consultant to fill in the gaps silently

CONTEXTUALISATION

- The storyboard solution:
 - Contexts are provided visually
 - does not overload verbal memory
 - Forms are elicited within a rich narrative context
 - minimizes the possibility of context repair

REPLICABILITY

- The problem:
 - Variation across fieldworkers in how the elicitation is conducted
 - Different questions
 - Different contexts
 - Different assumptions about what is expected
- The Storyboard solution
 - Same stimuli for every one (consultants and fieldworker) in every language.

FLEXIBILITY

- The problems:
 - European linguistic bias influences the form of the prompt (in questionnaires, in elicitation sessions)
 - Creates interference from the contact language
 - Difficulty in detecting unexpected categories.
 - Different languages:
 - Have widely different inventories of structures and functional morphology.
 - Employ different structures to achieve the same communicative goals.
- The Storyboard solution:
 - Not linguistically restricted
 - Contexts are widely applicable across many different languages

A 'PERFECT' STORYBOARD

Miss Smith's Bad Day

[http://www.totemfieldstoryboards.org/stories/
miss_smith/](http://www.totemfieldstoryboards.org/stories/miss_smith/)

GOALS OF MISS SMITH'S BAD DAY

To test several properties of the perfect aspect which have been observed in various languages (Matthewson et al. 2015):

- experiential readings
- continuous perfect readings
- past adverbial restrictions
- lifetime effects
- recency effects
- ongoing readings (Niuean)
- inchoativity effects (Niuean)
- past perfect

THE STORY

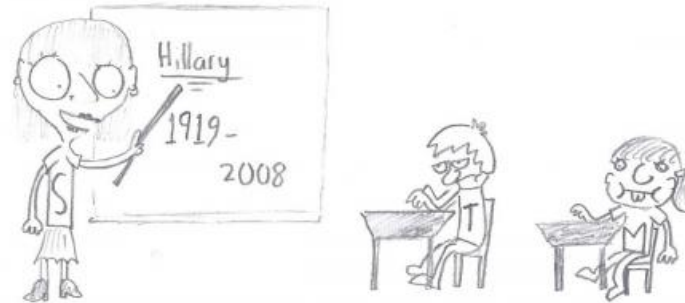
Miss Smith's Bad Day



1. This is Miss Smith. She is a teacher.

THE STORY

Miss Smith's Bad Day



2. She's teaching the children about Sir Edmund Hillary today.

THE STORY

Miss Smith's Bad Day



3. One of the children, Tom, is naughty and is already pulling Mary's hair.

THE STORY

Experiential

Miss Smith's Bad Day



4. Miss Smith asks the kids "Who has ever climbed a mountain?"

THE STORY

Experiential



5. Bob says "I've climbed a mountain!"

THE STORY

Experiential

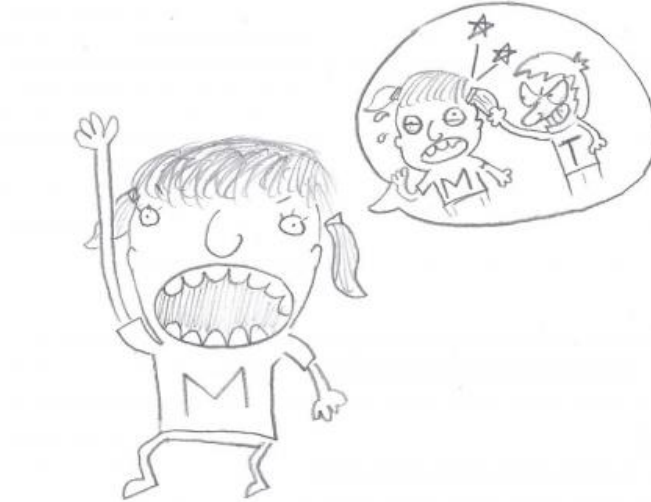
Dead subject/Lifetime effect



6. Miss Smith tells the kids "Well, Hillary climbed to the top of Mount Everest."

THE STORY

Ongoing



7. Mary interrupts to complain “Miss Smith, Tom has been pulling my hair since the class began.

THE STORY



8. Miss Smith says to Tom, "Go to the principal's office!"

THE STORY

Past perfect



9. Miss Smith tries to teach again. She says “On the way down, it was dangerous. Snow had covered the climber’s tracks.

THE STORY

Result state/inchoativity



10. Mary interrupts to say "Miss Smith, Bob has fallen asleep!"

THE STORY

Result state

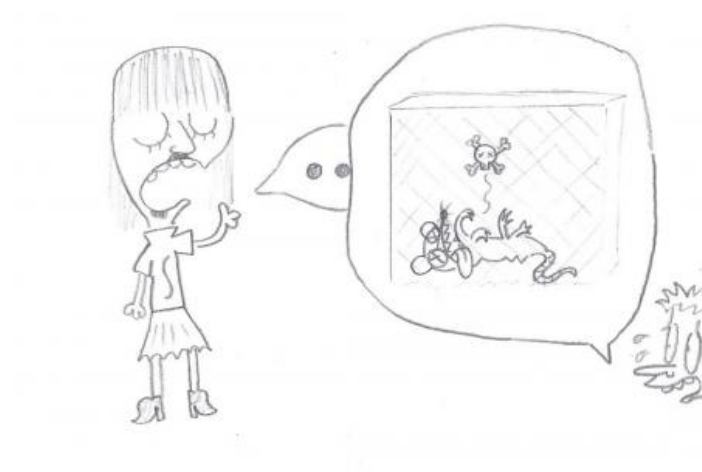


11. Miss Smith has become frustrated.

THE STORY

Recency

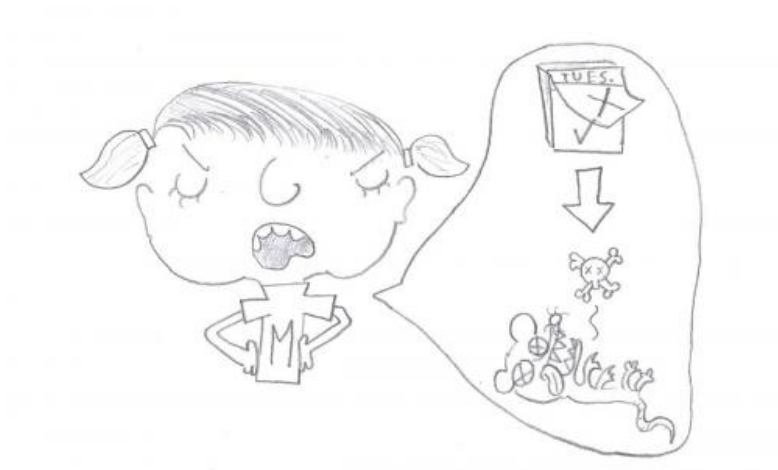
Miss Smith's Bad Day



12. Miss Smith is about to talk again, but another kid interrupts to say “Miss Smith, the class pet rat has just died!”

THE STORY

Past adverbial restrictions



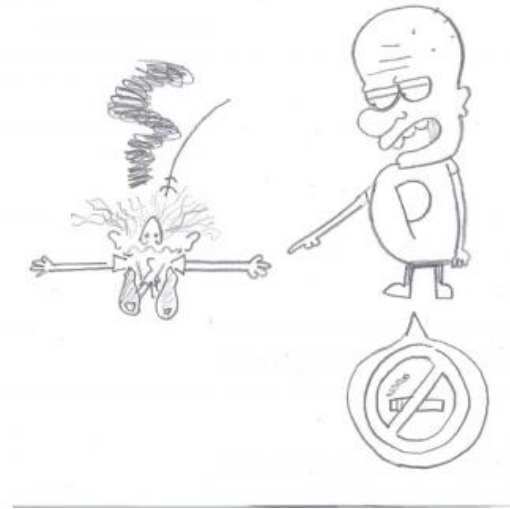
13. Mary says “That’s wrong! he died yesterday!”

THE STORY



14. Miss Smith is so angry now.

THE STORY



15. The principal comes in and says "No smoking in the school, Miss Smith."

EXAMPLES OF PERFECT PROPERTIES

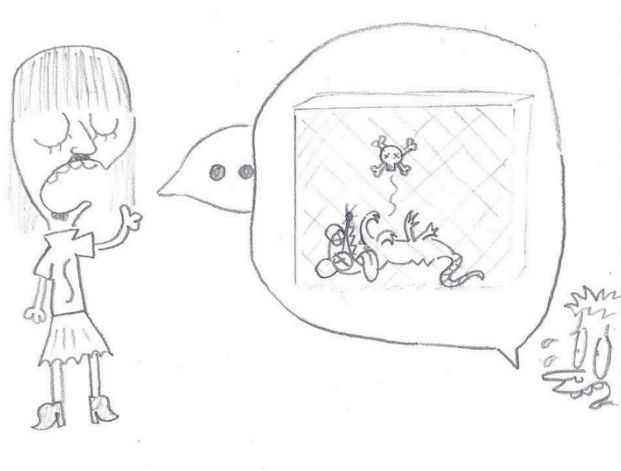


Who has ever climbed a mountain?
(EXPERIENTIAL)



Hillary climbed Mount Everest.
(LIFETIME EFFECT)

EXAMPLES OF PERFECT PROPERTIES



Our pet rat just died! (RECENCY/
HOT NEWS)



No, it died yesterday!
(DEFINITE PAST ADVERBIALS)

DISCUSSION

Challenges for storyboard
elicitation

NEGATIVE EVIDENCE

- Follow-up elicitation to collect negative evidence is a crucial part of the storyboard methodology.
- No perfect in the story doesn't mean no perfect in the language!
 - Languages may have multiple methods for expressing perfect
 - Other salient properties of the context may compel speakers to use different constructions, potentially obscuring an expression of perfect
 - E.g. many speakers of languages with a continuous perfect do not produce it with Miss Smith's Bad Day
- Follow-up elicitation is easy
 - Consultants easily remember the story context.

REPETITION AND POTENTIAL PRIMING

- Challenge:
 - Stimuli which elicit the same construction many times in a row can result in priming of the speaker towards certain forms.
- Solution:
 - Storyboards don't automatically alleviate the priming issue, but
 - Often have built-in 'fillers'

LANGUAGE-SPECIFIC CONTEXTS

- Challenge:
 - Some contexts may not elicit the perfect cross-linguistically
 - Designed around contexts targeting properties of the **English** and **Niuean** perfects
 - Miss Smith's Bad Day in Brazilian Portuguese did not elicit *ter* 'have' plus past participle
 - an *iterative* context is needed for this construction, Schmitt 2001
- Relates to the independent analytical issue of **which criteria to include in one's family of diagnostics**
 - New storyboards can be created based on findings

BROAD VS. FOCUSED TARGETS

- Challenge:
 - Miss Smith's Bad Day looks at a **broad range of phenomena** related to the perfect.
 - Elicits only **one data point for each criterion**.
 - Data is more robust when there is more than one example for each property!
- Solution:
 - Create more 'perfect' storyboards that **focus on specific perfect criteria**
 - Repetitions within a unique storyboard
 - Deeper exploration

MISS SMITH'S CONTINUOUS BAD DAY

- Goal:
 - To test a specific perfect property in more depth
 - Continuous perfect readings.
1. Miss Smith is going to school to teach her class.
 2. The bus doesn't come.
 3. Mr Jones arrives. He asks Miss Smith 'Where is the bus?'
 4. Miss Smith says 'I don't know. I've been waiting here a long time.'
 5. Miss Smith says 'Lots of buses have gone by in the wrong direction.'
 6. Miss Smith says 'I've been standing for a long time and my feet are sore.'
 7. Miss Smith says 'It's been too hot ever since I got here..'
 8. Miss Smith says 'Some kids have been playing loud music since this morning.'
 9. Mr Jones says 'What a pleasure to talk to you, Miss Smith! I hope the rest of your day is wonderful.'

MISS SMITH'S CONTINUOUS BAD DAY

- Features of this storyboard:
 - elicits four potential continuous perfects
 - tests both states and events
 - includes one non-continuous perfect for comparison and minimal pairs

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

- The storyboard method allows the elicitation of cross-linguistic data about the perfect which:
 - is natural
 - is replicable across languages using identical stimuli
 - is embedded in a rich context, which is clear to the consultant
 - minimizes contact language interference
 - provides contexts which facilitate the elicitation of negative data
 - lends itself easily to the ‘family of diagnostics’ approach
- Miss Smith’s storyboard can be modified
 - To be culturally adequate while retaining the contextual constraints
- All comments can be sent at inquiries@totemfieldstoryboards.org

THANK YOU

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