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Review of Jean Quigley, *The Grammar of Autobiography: A Developmental Account*

Abstract
In *The Grammar of Autobiography*, Jean Quigley makes a claim that one often hears nowadays - that the self is constructed in autobiographical narrative discourse. Two things distinguish her analysis of narrative self-construction from many other treatments of the subject. First, she offers a genuinely interdisciplinary account, drawing on functional linguistics, theoretical and developmental psychology, and accounts of language development. Second, she studies a particular category of linguistic forms, modals, as the key to narrative self-construction.

Comments
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JEAN QUIGLEY, *The grammar of autobiography: A developmental account.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000. Pp. xiv, 232. Hb $49.95.

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In *The grammar of autobiography*, Jean Quigley makes a claim that one often hears nowadays: that the self is constructed in autobiographical narrative discourse. Two dimensions of the work distinguish her analysis of narrative self-construction from many other treatments of the subject. First, she offers a genuinely interdisciplinary account, drawing on functional linguistics, theoretical and developmental psychology, and accounts of language development. Second, she studies a particular category of linguistic forms – modals – as the key to narrative self-construction.

Quigley focuses on what Labov & Waletsky 1967 call the "evaluation" narrators do in telling autobiographical stories. A coherent narrative has a point, and this point often positions the narrator in some socio-ideological space. Quigley argues, convincingly, that autobiographical narrators use subtle linguistic cues like modals to position themselves with respect to salient others, or with respect to controversial issues in their social worlds. This positioning creates the narrator's self, she claims, because selves are the kinds of things that are created "on line" in social interaction.

This account already draws on both linguistics – grammatical and discourse analyses of modals – and on psychology, for theories about the self. Quigley integrates one more perspective into her account, exploring how children develop narrative competence and how this developing ability to tell stories might interact with their developing selves. Instead of analyzing how particular instances of narrative discourse might partly construct a particular narrator's self, Quigley analyzes how children's use of modals develops, and how these developing linguistic resources might facilitate the narrative construction of self. This addition of developmental psychology to her account of narrative self-construction makes Quigley's approach relatively unusual.

Any linguistically sophisticated account of narrative self-construction must describe how linguistic tokens influence or constitute psychological entities. The first step is to describe how speech creates patterns that can then influence the self. Quigley rightly emphasizes the creative power of speech, but she does not define precisely what it is that speech creates. She claims that speech "actually brings about certain types of discourse and contexts" (p. ix), but she does not develop an account of the many aspects of "discourse" and "contexts." Sometimes she claims that "information" is the crucial product of speech: Narrators presuppose information about their beliefs and attitudes, and such presupposed information plays the critical role in narrative self-construction. At other times,

she claims that narrators accomplish speech acts and that such verbal actions do the essential work of self-construction.

As Quigley herself says, both presupposed information and verbal action undoubtedly play some role in narrative self-construction. But a full account will have to specify more precisely *how* the various functions of narrative discourse (denotational, conative, interactional, textual, etc.) create cognitive, interpersonal, or some other sorts of patterns that can then influence the self. Quigley considers, but does not clearly choose among, various possibilities. She claims that grammatical categories create possible worlds for speakers. This Whorfian idea has been elaborated systematically by Lucy 1992, and it offers one possibility for how language might create a pattern that could influence the self. Quigley also claims that a narrator "emplots himself or herself in an autobiographical storyline" (15). Labov & Waletsky 1967, among others, describe how linguistic devices create plots, and this offers another possible linguistic mechanism for narrative self-construction. Quigley proposes that narrators can position themselves with respect to their characters and the social voices that these characters represent. Hill 1995 and others use Bakhtin to describe systematically how narrators speak with and ventriloquate voices, and this offers yet another type of linguistic device that might contribute to the self.

Quigley would probably argue that all these linguistic devices can contribute to narrative self-construction, and I would agree. But she too often claims simply that "modals" do the essential work, without specifying which type of linguistic mechanism she is talking about – modals, after all, constitute grammatical categories, contribute to representations of plots, voice and ventriloquate characters, and more. A more compelling account will have to describe in detail how particular aspects of language work together to create patterns that contribute to the self.

Describing the relevant linguistic mechanisms is only the first step in an account of narrative self-construction. Whatever cognitive or interpersonal pattern gets created through narrative discourse must then influence the self. Any theory of narrative self-construction also presupposes an account of what "the self" is and how it can be influenced. Quigley does address this issue. She draws on social constructionist accounts of self (e.g., Harré 1995), claiming that the self is a "working concept" that is constructed "on line" while speaking. I agree with Quigley that a broadly constructionist approach to the self can support her account of narrative self-construction, but her theoretical discussions are quick and sometimes puzzling. Does she really mean that the self has no enduring aspects, but is created anew in each interaction? Is our sense of self-coherence merely an illusion? One could argue on both sides of these questions, but Quigley does not articulate any clear position. At times, she seems to be a radical constructionist (unlike Harré 1995), denying any metaphysical status to the psychological self beyond what gets projected from discourse in particular interactions. At other

times, she seems to support more traditional psychological theories of the self, like that of Damon & Hart 1988, who posit seven universal domains of the self and four universal developmental stages for each domain.

Quigley's data are a corpus of autobiographical stories, prompted by and told to an interviewer, narrated by 36 children aged 5, 8, or 12. The cross-sectional design yields some interesting findings. For example, the 5-year-olds use all the basic forms and functions that Quigley finds central to self-construction in narrative – though with varying frequency – so there seems not to be a qualitative developmental leap in the narrative construction of self. Younger narrators also tend more consistently to use one form or class of modals for a particular area of meaning (e.g., obligation or ability), while 12-year-olds have mastered the multifunctionality of particular forms. And, despite the stereotypical view of autobiography as concerned with the past, about one-third of the narrative utterances in this sample describe the future.

Such findings must be interpreted a bit skeptically, however, because of methodological concerns. Quigley does not provide any statistical significance tests for her quantitative conclusions. She simply gives percentages for each of the three age groups, then moves right to interpreting the differences. In many cases, the differences are clearly significant, but significance can be hard to gauge without calculating. In another puzzling methodological omission, Quigley calculates the mean number of modals per child (9.8 for 5-year-olds, 13.3. for 8-year-olds, and 18.7 for 12-year-olds). Then she gives an important qualification: 12-year-olds may not in fact use more modals, because they may simply have talked longer. But then she refuses to calculate the frequency of modals per minute or per utterance, saying this is "neither necessary nor desirable" (62). Although it's of course not necessary, it would have allowed the reader to see whether older children do in fact use more modals.

Further methodological questions arise from Quigley's coding system. Some of her categories are illuminating and not controversial. She counts, for example, the person and number of the subjects used with modalized predicates, the frequency of reported speech, the transitivity of the main verbs. But she also creates some categories herself, without clear theoretical rationale, like the "discourse goals" of the modalized utterances. There are eight such goals, including problem-solving, reporting, prescribing, "interpersonal narrating functions," making theory-of-mind statements, and referring to unreal states. These eight are subdivided further, so that interpersonal narrating functions include apologizing, dismissing, boasting, dramatizing, accusing, blaming, and so on. Such coding schemes notoriously depend on the native language and social position of the categorizer, as shown in the lists of English verbs created by speech act theory. There is also the problem of overlap between these particular categories.

These various methodological concerns might lead a reader to agree with Quigley's claim that "the case made in this book is primarily theoretical rather than empirical" (109). Her central theoretical point – that narrators partly construct

themselves through systematic linguistic patterns in autobiography – is in fact a convincing one, but we need more empirical and theoretical work to realize the promise of her approach.

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BERNARD SPOLSKY & ELANA SHOHAMY, *The languages of Israel: Policy, ideology and practice*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999. Pp. 299. Pb $49.95.

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Well known for its creation and adoption of modern Hebrew as its national language, Israel is still one of the most linguistically heterogeneous societies in the world. Bernard Spolsky and Elana Shohamy delve into this complex reality and describe a coherent picture of it, drawing from an updated model of linguistic policy which they elaborate. I found no few weaknesses in the book in regard to the sociological interpretation of sociolinguistic facts, but its major interest resides in the description of Israel's linguistic diversity and evolution. It is one of the very few attempts to date to do that, and it merits attention.

Following the revival of Hebrew and its adjustment to the modern era during the first decades of the 20th century, Israel's goal in linguistic policy since the creation of the state in 1948 was to ensure the acquisition of the language by Israelis – as a first language by the Jewish majority, and as a second language by the Arab minority. This effort has been successful. It has established Hebrew not only as a language capable of being used for the widest range of functions, but also as one that is effectively so used by the large majority of Israelis. This is the language that dominates public space, cultural life, politics, the arts – and especially literature. It is also the language most used in private, in the family and among friends. Moreover, what is true for the majority of the adult population is even more so for the young. Even Israel's Arab population, for whom Arabic is a first language, are bilingual in large part. Furthermore, whereas Hebrew was a marker of Jews in this country in earlier decades, opposing them to Diaspora