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Irina Tivyaeva
Tula State University

Representation of retrospective memory and communicative context

The present paper examines language forms used by speakers to provide a report about past experiences reconstructed from memory. While previous research focused mainly on narratives as verbal representations of memories, the current study presents a novel view based on the communicative approach. The author argues that results obtained in the course of experimental studies do not reflect the reality as participants report their memories in the manner and under the circumstances prescribed by the experiment framework. The present paper examines linguistic forms representing individuals' memories on the basis of empirical data illustrating natural communication in various situations. Having accepted the concept of language as a material container of cognitive content and the thesis about the patterned nature of communication, the author proposes hypotheses about a standard set of linguistic forms employed by speakers for recall reports and a certain correlation between the cognitive-communicative context and linguistic features of the mnemonic utterance.

Keywords: retrospective memory; recall reports; retrospective utterance; situation of recall.

1. Introduction

Cognitive linguistics treats memory as an integral part of the single information-cognition system which unites language, consciousness and thinking, all of the components of the said system being closely interconnected (Iskhakova, 2009). Past experiences constitute the main material for reflection while each autobiographical event both mirrors the past and serves as a stimulus for future actions. The function of the natural language in this system is that of codifying



mnemonic images into verbal symbols representing memories and intentions in a person's consciousness and making it possible to share them in the process of human communication. Therefore, the language is equally important both as a means of expressing past mnemonic experiences and describing future plans and designs.

Although an enormously large number of philosophical, psychological, linguistic, historical, and cultural studies have previously been devoted to memory, its mechanisms and operations, verbal representation of its processes and specifics of coding mnemonic images by means of natural languages have unjustifiably been in the periphery of scholarly interest while choosing to go down these unexplored avenues can provide us with valuable information about the general mechanism of the encoding process (i.e. the choice of language structures and wording) and a complex set of internal and external factors influencing it as well as help identify unique national components determined by cultural and linguistic differences. In this study an attempt has been made to find out how retrospective memory is represented by means of a natural language in the course of human communication.

Verbalization of past occurrences has already been studied in connection with development of autobiographical memory, specifically, several attempts have been made to find out how preverbal experiences are referred to verbally when recalled later in life (Eisenberg, 1985; Fivush, 1987; Hudson, 1990; Peterson and McCabe, 1982). Recent research in the subject indicates that verbal reporting of mnemonic images is determined by language skills available at the time of the experience (Peterson and Whalen, 2001; Simcock and Hayne, 2002). Other findings suggest that when verbally referring to past occurrences, young children seem to be dependent on the concurrent adult discourse in structuring and organizing events for subsequent retrieval (Haden et al., 2001; Tessler and Nelson, 1994). It has also been established that maternal narrative styles influence the narrative structure of reminiscing used by their children (Haden et al., 1997; Peterson and McCabe, 1992). Whatever goals may be pursued by specific studies, the evidence clearly indicates that recalling an event in retrospect requires some kind of linguistic scaffolding.

It is noteworthy that when examining the role of linguistic competence in providing verbal details about past experiences, psychologists and cognitive scientists refer to recall reports as narratives thus implying that a narrative is the standard language form used by speakers to communicate their memories (Chafe, 1986; Welch-Ross, 1995; Rathbone et al., 2011; Fivush et al., 2011; Lorenzetti and Lugli, 2012; and others). However, what is natural to psychologists and cognitive



scientists leaves a linguist doubtful since simple observations of natural day-to-day communication do not seem to support this implication. While interaction between a researcher and experiment participants is mostly limited to narrative interviews, it can be assumed that partners exchanging communicative messages in a natural setting are likely to have a wider range of language structures to choose from when sharing their memories as they are not guided by any questions or procedures in their linguistic decisions. This assumption determined the direction of the current research.

It has been established by G.M. Suchkova that verbal interaction between participants in the communication process can be represented as a set of patterns (Suchkova, 2008). In other words, verbal communication in certain communicative situations develops on the basis of a standard scenario, or pattern. The number of patterns is finite and corresponds to that of various communicative situations while the number of their specific representations is unlimited. These findings make it possible to study verbal representation of meanings from the perspective of the communicative approach identifying correlations between communicative contexts, specific scenarios and language structures. The communicative approach opens new avenues for studying relations between language and memory as it allows the researcher to apply the concept of communicative patterns to describe linguistic aspects of memory verbalization and determine how mnemonic messages are encoded verbally. Another justification for the use of the communicative approach in studying relations between language and memory is the concept of memory as a form of communication advanced in this work and relying on M. Karson's views who, theorizing about memory as the behavior of remembering, claims that "remembering, when it leads to a report of what was covertly seen, is also a form of communication" (Karson, 2006: 45).

The current study is particularly focused on retrospective memory since this type, functioning as a treasure box of past experiences, offers greater volumes of information to process and verbally communicate to other individuals and, therefore, seems a better choice for soil probing. When activated, retrospective memory triggers the mnemonic operation of recall, the latter regarded by many scholars as a process of interpreting old data kept in memory and constructing new facts based on old ones (Neisser, 1967; Petkov and Kokinov, 2009). Neisser claims that recall involves the process of reconstructing past events intertwined with the current setting and context (Neisser, 1967). This conception was further supported by Tulving (1982) and used as the basis for the model of cued recall proposed by G. Petkov and B. Kokinov. M. Karson states that "*all* remembering, like all other behaving, has communicative aspects that vary with circumstance" (Karson, 2006:



44). In the current research the conception of contextually determined recall is extended to the language form it takes when reported verbally and serves as a theoretical foundation for the second hypothesis under test.

The principal goal of this work was to identify specific language structures into which recall experiences are encoded and examine their general communicative properties, so I began by posing the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1

The mnemonic process of retrieving information from memory has a finite number of verbal representations – retrospective utterances.

Hypothesis 2

The choice of a specific structural form of the retrospective utterance is context-dependent and correlated with the level at which communication is conducted.

In summary, this paper is an attempt to investigate whether natural languages offer a standard set of verbal forms to represent reports of recall and whether there is any correlation between the type of the verbalizer utterance and communicative context. My prediction was that retrospective utterances are recurrent language structures stably replicated under identical communicative conditions while their structural form is not freely determined by the speaker's intentions or preferences but rather dependent upon the level at which communication is conducted.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Methods

To test the hypotheses, a database of retrospective episodes amounting to about 5,000 items was collected. Retrospective episodes used as material in this study are text fragments representing verbal interactions between partners in communicative situations of recall. Utterances produced by participants in such situations and representing the mnemonic process of retrieving information from memory were considered retrospective utterances. The situation of recall serving as the basis for identifying retrospective utterances is a specific type of the mnemonic situation, which has been efficiently used by Russian linguists Yu.N. Rogachova and R.F. Iskhakova as a tool for analyzing linguistic features of verbs and their functional equivalents expressing mnemonic operations (Rogachova, 2003; Iskhakova, 2009). The mnemonic situation is defined as a variety of communicative situations focused on representing mnemonic processes. The choice of the situational context



as the primary criterion for identifying retrospective utterances among other linguistic structures agrees with the communicative perspective determining the present line of research. The importance of the ambient setting of language use for the linguistic analysis of communication has been accentuated by many scholars starting from Philipp Wegener, who insisted that language is not a merely linguistic phenomenon but should be regarded as a function of a human being integrated into the communication process (Wegener 1885). The concept of situation is of high value in the study of verbal communication, for communication begins, quoting Daniel C. O'Connell and Sabine Kowal, "with *a situation* in which people interact" (O'Connell and Kowal, 2012: 82).

As mnemonic situations are a variety of communicative situations, it seems logical to resort to key properties of human communication when describing them. The latter include the following: continuity, contextuality, mediatedness, and interactionality. Continuity of the communication process allows interpreting an exchange of messages as a macro event developing in time and divisible into discrete micro events (communicative acts) that can be analyzed using methods of linguistic pragmatics. The processual nature of communication presupposes both synchrony and asynchrony in communicative actions of participants as well as their being in identical or different temporal planes. Contextuality points at the correlation between the meaning of the message being communicated and the external circumstances under which the interaction occurs while the obligatory use of a code for encrypting and decrypting messages and a channel for their transmission is indicative of the mediated nature of all communication processes. When the information being communicated is encoded by means of a natural language, communication is understood to be verbal and the message transmitted via the communication channels has the form of an utterance. Communication can be both direct (taking place when there is a person-to-person contact between participants) and mediated (presupposing the use of various electronic or other devices for sending and receiving messages). Interactionality of communication manifests itself in obligatory involvement of all participants into the process. The number of communicators can vary from one person to thousands and millions. Accordingly, four levels of communication can be differentiated: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and mass communication.

When applied to the notion of the mnemonic situation, these parameters produce the following set of features:

1. mnemonic situations are discrete episodes of the communication process representing a verbal exchange of mnemonic experiences;



2. an exchange of mnemonic experiences can occur in real-life mnemonic situations (participants are in direct contact and take consecutive turns) or virtual mnemonic situations (participants exist in different planes and their communicative turns are not synchronized);
3. participants verbalizing their mnemonic images are agents of the mnemonic situation while participants to whom mnemonic utterances are addressed are recipients; in case of autocommunication one participant shifts the roles.

Mnemonic situations have a number of obligatory components, which include the mnemonic process being verbalized, the agent, information coming from an external source and being subjected to various cognitive operations, the cue triggering the mnemonic process, and the mnemonic utterance (Iskhakova 2009; Tivyaeva, 2011; Tivyaeva, 2013).

The following episodes illustrate different types of mnemonic situations:

- (1) *“Laura, you’re stuttering. I’m surprised at you. You ridicule people who stutter. Show me how you ridicule them. No, never mind. I can’t stay too long. I brought you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a glass of milk. You used to eat that every day in grammar school. Do you remember that?”*
“Yes... yes.”
“I’m glad you remember. It’s important that we don’t forget the past. Now I’ll allow you to use the bathroom. Then you may eat your sandwich and drink the milk.” (Clark 2004)

Episode 1 represents interaction between two participants in the mnemonic situation of storing information in memory. The dialog is an example of direct face-to-face interpersonal communication between two participants sharing some common memories. A special kind of food served by one of the communicators is perceived as a cue triggering the work of retrospective memory. The recall process is launched when the initiating party asks the other participant whether she remembers her past eating habits, thus sending a verbal stimulus to check on safekeeping of certain mnemonic experience in the agent’s memory. The positive reaction to the stimulus takes the form of an utterance produced by the addressee on taking her conversational turn.

In (1) participants are involved in a real-life communication process and exchange utterances in synchronized mode, but this does not mean that mnemonic situations are confined only to direct contact episodes. Cases of participants interacting virtually, that is, by means of technical devices or using traditional epistolary forms also meet the conditions outlined above for mnemonic situations,



the only difference being in greater time intervals between conversational turns and indirect mediated contact. Example (2) is illustrative of such situations:

- (2) *Boys. Childhood is the most intense period of our lives because most of what we do then we are doing for the first time. I have little to offer here but a memory, but that memory seems to underscore the infinite value we place on friendship when we are young, even very young. I was five years old. Billy, my first friend, entered my life in ways that elude me now. I remember him as an odd and jovial character with strong opinions and a highly developed talent for mischief (something I lacked to an appalling degree). He had a severe speech impediment, and when he talked his words were so garbled, so clogged with the saliva buildup in his mouth, that no one could understand what he said—except little Paul, who acted as his interpreter. Much of our time together was spent roaming around our New Jersey suburban neighborhood looking for small dead animals—mostly birds, but an occasional frog or chipmunk—and burying the corpses in the flower bed along the side of my house. Solemn rituals, handmade wooden crosses, no laughing allowed. Billy detested girls, refusing to fill in the pages of our coloring books that showed representations of female figures, and because his favorite color was green, he was convinced that the blood running through his teddy bear’s veins was green. Ecce Billy. Then, when we were six and a half or seven, he and his family moved to another town. Heartbreak, followed by weeks if not months of longing for my absent friend. At last, my mother relented and gave me permission to make the expensive telephone call to Billy’s new house. The content of our conversation has been blotted from my mind, but I remember my feelings as vividly as I remember what I had for breakfast this morning. I felt what I would later feel as an adolescent when talking on the phone to the girl I had fallen in love with. (Auster et al., 2013: 16–17)*

A fragment from letter by Paul Auster, an American writer, translator and playwright, it is one in a series addressed to John Coatzee, a Nobel Prize winning novelist from South Africa. Letters of two renowned authors to each other were published in 2013. In the letter dated July 29, 2008, from which (2) is an extract, Paul Auster touches upon the theme of friendship and shares his thoughts on the subject with his addressee referring the latter to examples from his personal life and literary works. The fragment discussed here is devoted to Auster’s memories about his childhood friend and should therefore be considered as an utterance verbalizing the mnemonic process of recall. The author of the letter takes on the role of the agent in the mnemonic situation while his friend is the recipient of the retrospective



message who originally triggered the work of the recall mechanism in his previous letter dated July 14–15, 2008 being the information cue in the mnemonic situation under consideration.

Real-life mnemonic situations involving interaction in synchronized mode constitute the predominant communicative type in the collected database. Specifically, their number amounted to about 68% of all samples, however, it can be presumed that the volume of virtual mnemonic situations will be on the rise in the upcoming years as the recent breakthrough in communication technologies has extended our technical possibilities and thus could not but influence the traditional forms of human interaction.

It should also be noted that situations of recall, in which I am particularly interested in this study, are not the only variety of mnemonic situations singled out on the basis of the cognitive criterion. As it was mentioned above, one of the obligatory components of mnemonic situations are mnemonic processes, at least four types of which are generally differentiated by psychologists and cognitive scientists: inputting information to memory, storing information in memory, retrieving information from memory, and loss of information. Accordingly, four cognitive types of mnemonic situations can be discriminated, situations of recall being most common in all of the collected samples and constituting about 52% of all registered cases. The occurrence rate for the other types is presented in the following figure:

Table 1. Cognitive types of mnemonic situations and their occurrence rate.

| Cognitive type of mnemonic situation (in accordance with mnemonic process being verbalized) | Occurrence rate |
|--|------------------------|
| Mnemonic situation of memorizing (inputting information to memory) | 7% |
| Mnemonic situation of remembering (storing information in memory) | 28% |
| Mnemonic situation of recall (retrieving information from memory) | 52% |
| Mnemonic situation of forgetting (loss of information from memory) | 13% |

As indicated by the figures above, reporting mnemonic images related to past prevails over other verbal activities in mnemonic situations, which also contributes to timeliness of studying it. Situations of recall as a specific type of mnemonic



situations inherit all of their principal features and components. The mechanism of interaction in situations of recall can be described in the following way:

Step 1. Every individual stores a certain amount of information accumulated on the daily basis as a result of day-to-day activities (information input can be both deliberate and non-deliberate) and is a carrier of discrete mnemonic experiences and, therefore, a potential agent of the situation of recall.

Step 2. In a series of interactions a cue (explicit or implicit, sensory or verbal, self-initiated or coming from an external source) launches the recall process, that is, triggers reconstruction of events stored in retrospective memory, thus creating a situation of recall.

Step 3. The product of the mnemonic process of recall is transmitted to the communication partner(s) by means of the verbal code, in other words, it takes the form of a retrospective utterance.

An example of a mnemonic situation of recall is presented below:

(3) *To his astonishment, he found himself looking at an almost identical, real-life version of the tree on Nat's paper.*

'That's incredible!' he exclaimed. 'Goodness.' He looked at the page again, and back at the tree. 'Well, you can obviously draw, can't you?'

'I suppose,' said Nat, shrugging slightly. He continued shading, and Hugh gazed at him silently, feeling a strange emotion rising; a memory tugging at his thoughts.

'Your mother can draw, too, can't she?' he said abruptly.

'Oh yeah. Mum's really good,' agreed Nat. 'She had an exhibition in the church, and three people bought one. And they weren't friends or anything.'

'She drew me once,' said Hugh. As he met Nat's dark eyes he felt a flicker of exhilaration at the risk he was taking, sharing such a secret memory with this child. 'She drew a sketch of me, with a pencil. It only took a few seconds . . . but it was me. My eyes, my shoulders . . .'

He paused, lost in memories. His bedroom, shaded from the afternoon light. The frisson as Chloe's eyes had run over his body; the sound of her pencil on the paper. 'You know, I'd completely forgotten about that until just now,' he said, attempting a light laugh. 'I don't even know where the picture is.'
(Wickham, 2001)

In this fragment Hugh, a character of "Sleeping Arrangements" by M. Wickham, has accidentally seen a drawing made by a child and associated it with a sketch of him drawn by a girl he used to be in love with. The drawing serves as an



external cue launching the mnemonic process of retrieving information from memory. Overwhelmed by emotions, Hugh, the experiencer and agent of recall, shares his memory with the girl's child whose role in the situation is that of the recipient partner. Referring to past occurrences takes the form of a retrospective utterance representing the recall process by means of a verbal code.

Thus, being an obligatory component of all situations of recall, a retrospective utterance can be regarded as the verbalized end product of retrospective memory. It should be noted, however, that speaking of verbal representation of retrospective memory, I refer, above all, to the process of encoding recall experiences into messages by means of a natural language. Transmission of such messages can be either exteriorized or interiorized, that is, verbalization of retrospective memory cannot be equaled to exteriorization. For instance, in case of autocommunication, as illustrated in (4), the agent of the recall process does not necessarily express his or her memories aloud, which does not testify to non-obligatoriness of the retrospective utterance as a component of the situation of recall, but rather signals that interiorization is the case. In the example below, which is a fragment from S. Kinsella's "The Undomestic Goddess", the narrator is trying to recollect her recent conversation with a young man, a potential love interest. Daydreaming while talking to him, she missed what he was saying and is now trying to revive her memories and reconstruct the situation. Asking herself questions and stimulating the recall process, the narrator plays both the part of the agent and the recipient in the intrapersonal mnemonic situation. Thus, the retrospective utterance produced in this situation is verbalized, but not exteriorized. In other words, the retrieval process is encoded using means of a natural language, but the resulting message does not get transmitted via any audio or visual channels. All in all, a retrospective utterance can be defined as an exteriorized or interiorized utterance representing the mnemonic process of retrieving information from memory which is produced in the situation of recall by its agent.

- (4) *Was he saying something really heartfelt and meaningful? Was he making some sort of speech of love? And I missed it?* (Kinsella, 2005: 271)

Numerous attempts have been made to examine possible correlations between the reconstructed mnemonic content and various internal and external factors accompanying the retrieval process, such as the nature of the recalled content, the prompt type and the situational context. A recent study carried out by K. Karlsson et al. suggests a dependence of the semantic representation of sensory cued autobiographical events on the modality of retrieval cue generating the semantic content (Karlsson et al., 2013). Other researchers investigated the effects produced



by different types of cues on the retrieval process and the nature of evoked events. The significance of the context and its influence on cognitive functions has long been known to scholars. A few studies focused on finding correlations between mnemonic processes and situational context. In this paper I also aim to examine the role of the communication level in verbal representation of retrospective memory if any such role could be determined.

2.2. Procedure

To elicit retrospective utterances from text arrays, a special identification procedure was developed on the basis of three criteria: functional, semantic, and structural. The functional criterion governs the sphere of occurrence, which is limited strictly to situations of recall. The latter, however, have quite an extensive area of discourse functioning, including memoirs, diaries, TV interviews, examination of witnesses, sacrament of confession, etc.

The semantic criterion requires that the retrospective utterance explicitly represent reconstruction of past events by the agent of the situation of recall. The semantic criterion complements and elaborates the functional one since an utterance produced in the situation of recall is not necessarily a retrospective one. For instance, a flow of memories can be interrupted by a commentary or remark not related to events of the past. Such fragments cannot be considered retrospective utterances.

In accordance with the structural criterion, a retrospective utterance should be characterized by a specific set of formal markers (both lexical and grammatical) associated with its semantic content and functional context. A characteristic lexical feature that sets off retrospective utterances from other language structures is a common use of mnemonic verbs and their contextual synonyms (e.g. verbs of movement, thinking, knowing, etc.) as well as nouns and adjectives of the same semantics. Grammatical markers of retrospective utterances include prevalence of past verbs and an extensive use of temporal adverbials allowing for spatial and temporal localization of events being reconstructed.

Thus, an utterance was registered in the database as a retrospective one if it met the following requirements: 1) occurrence in the situation of recall; 2) conformity with the semantics of retrospective memory and remembering; 3) structural integrity.



2.3. Data

Empirical data was collected from various sources available in textual form both in print and on the Internet, including recent autobiographies and memoirs, newspaper and magazine articles, media interviews, public speeches, Internet diaries, blog posts and comments, tweets and social media posts as well as fragments from works of fiction by contemporary authors writing in English. Modern fiction was chosen as a source of empirical material on the basis that it can and should be regarded as an analog of natural speech since fiction texts created by writers of the 21st century closely represent true-to-life conditions of the communication process. Tweets were included into the data collection as they are regarded as utterances marking conversational turns in a virtual communicative situation, the latter term being used to describe a new field of language functioning in the social media setting.

As it has already been mentioned, the current study focuses on the natural communicative context in which people interact, therefore the said data sources were chosen deliberately over conducting an experiment with participants. I had considered recording speech actions and utterances produced by communicators in the process of natural interaction and using thusly obtained material as an alternative source, however, rejected the idea due to the following reasons: 1) in this case the researcher's role is restricted to that of a passive observer waiting for a cognitive-communicative event of scholarly interest; 2) recording all cases of verbal recall reports would require round-the-clock monitoring of participants' verbal activities, which is quite problematic, while irregular and non-systemic observation, on the other hand, could lead to unreliable results; 3) being observed day-and-night could make participants feel restrained and embarrassed and, thus, exhibit intensive control over their speech behavior, which would result in breaking the natural flow of communication.

Another factor supporting the choice of empirical research material is the fact that using fiction or opinion-journalism samples is a common practice in communication studies resorted to both by linguists (e.g., Suchkova 2008) and researchers working in the field of social sciences (Watzlawick et al. 2011). In this respect, I share the opinion of G.G. Khisamova who claims that “depicted communication, although not identical to natural communication, cannot be essentially different from it as fictional reality is constructed by analogy with the real world” (Khisamova, 2011: 721; my translation).



3. Results and discussion

A qualitative analysis of the collected empirical data permitted to draw conclusions as to the number of patterned language structures representing the recall process and their correlation with the ambient setting. When testing the first hypothesis, I analyzed the structure of utterances elicited on the basis of the three criteria outlined above, namely, the situational context, semantic integrity, and lexicogrammatical markedness. The results showed that reconstructed events of the past are reported in various forms that can be classified into three types in accordance with the format of the communication process. The three types are as follows: 1) retrospective monologic utterances, 2) retrospective dialogic utterances, and 3) retrospective narratives.

The retrospective monologic utterance is a first-person account of past events retrieved from memory and presented by a single individual either in private or in public. In case of a private delivery retrospective monologic utterances function as an element of autocommunication; they are self-addressed and often interiorized. However, when addressed to another individual or a group of individuals, they are always exteriorized and can be presented either orally or in writing. As the retrospective monologic utterance is a result of an individual's cognitive performance in the situation of reconstructing events from retrospective memory, it seems plausible to refer to it as a 'retrospective monolog', thus using the term already established in linguistics.

In this regard, it should be mentioned that until now retrospective monologs have not been regarded by researchers as a form of presenting mnemonic images, but were assigned the modest role of a literary device used to reflect a character's inner speech. As such, only a specific variety of retrospective monologs has been in focus of late – interior retrospective monologs expressing a character's analytical perception of self and self's past. However, the results of the current study have shown that their area of occurrence should be extended to include public speech discourse, computer-mediated discourse, media and social media discourse along with works of fiction traditionally deemed as their typical incidence.

The example below is a fragment from "Occupation Diaries" by R. Shehadeh, a Palestinian lawyer and human rights activist. The record in his diary dated October 19, 2010 deals with negotiations between Israel and Palestine regarding some disputed territories. Sharing his impressions, the author recalls an episode from his youth and describes it in his diary. The retrospective monolog is produced in the intrapersonal situation of recall, the author of the utterance being both the subject to some mnemonic experience and the recipient of the message representing the



experience. The self-communication process in the situation of recall under consideration is conducted via a mediated channel, the diary functioning as a kind of an interlink and message transmitter.

- (5) *Around 1979, when I **used to defend** cases at the Ramallah Military Court, I remember being impressed by the well-produced Israeli poster of 'Protected Plants', which **had** the names in Arabic and Hebrew, and photographs of wild flowers and herbs it **was prohibited** to pick. The poster **was** in a prominent place in the office of the secretary of the Israeli court, alongside another poster about kibbutz life, showing intellectual farmers taking a break to read a book. During the long hours I **spent** waiting for the prosecutor and the judge to come so that we could proceed with my cases I **would** carefully **study** the poster. One day I **noticed** the young secretary in army uniform looking at me as I **did** so, but it **didn't occur** to me then how self-righteous it must have made her feel to be sitting right under this chart, proof if proof **were** needed of the superior standards of her people, who **paid** such attention to the preservation of nature. This **was** before the 250-plus settlements **had wrought** so much destruction on the landscape.* (Shehadeh, 2012: 89-90)

The results obtained are also suggestive of a general tendency towards a specific morphological structure of retrospective monologs which manifests itself in their temporal organization. The choice of tenses used to reconstruct events kept in memory correlates with the narrative form (direct or inner speech) and the semantics of retrospective monologs which presuppose consequentialism and the retrospective nature of actions. Prevalent verb forms (marked in bold) include all past tenses, the past indefinite form being the predominant one.

Retrospective dialogic utterances represent the verbal output of the recall process in the form of a conversational installment. Unlike retrospective monologs, retrospective dialogic utterances seldom occur on their own. The results indicate that they typically function as part of larger retrospective dialogic unities consisting of at least two conversational turns, one cuing the recall process and the other(s) delivering retrieved memories. The number of conversational moves in retrospective dialogic unities can amount to over a dozen, each new turn further stimulating the recall process. Cue installments can be easily identified in any dialogic exchange of recall experiences since, having the interrogative form and a specific intonation contour, they are marked both pragmatically and intonationally. For example, in (6) illustrating verbal interaction of communicators in the mnemonic situation of recall, the communicative exchange takes the form of a



retrospective dialogic unity in which the utterance produced by the first speaker is an interrogative triggering the recall process.

- (6) *He nodded seriously, and then his jeweled eyes glittered with interest. "It seems like we did something right with the morphine this time. **Tell me, what do you remember of the transformation process?**"*

I hesitated, intensely aware of Edward's breath brushing against my cheek, sending whispers of electricity through my skin.

"Everything was... very dim before. I remember the baby couldn't breathe..."

I looked at Edward, momentarily frightened by the memory. (Meyer, 2008: 294)

Semantically, retrospective dialogic utterances are different from retrospective monologs in being focused mostly on past events and circumstances under which they developed rather than a detailed lookback analysis of facts and their consequences. In the example above the information sought for by the initiating party is of specific nature: the speaker is interested in particular details of some process experienced by the other communicator in the past. While both retrospective dialogic utterances and retrospective monologs occur in situations of recall, the former have a greater potential in verbalizing information retrieved from retrospective memory as they permit multiple agents to play an active role in a memory-sharing session. Participants engaged in a communicative exchange of retrospective messages can easily switch roles, each individual sharing his or her memories. Conversely, retrospective monologs transmit information retrieved from memory to a single or multiple recipients in a single-agent situation of recall.

The retrospective narrative is another verbal product of the recall process generated in a single-agent situation. It is a first-person account of reconstructed events presented from the narrator's perspective and highlighted in his or her memory in accordance with their role in shaping the narrator's current outlook on life. Retrospective narratives can function as a complete whole or be part of a larger literary form. The two varieties are presented in the examples below:

- (7) *It was I, however, who was closest to it. I'm fifty-seven years old, but even now I can remember everything from that year, down to the smallest details. I relive that year often in my mind, bringing it back to life, and I realize that when I do, I always feel a strange combination of sadness and joy. There are moments when I wish I could roll back the clock and take all the sadness away, but I have the feeling that if I did, the joy would be gone as well. So I take the memories as they come, accepting them all, letting them*



guide me whenever I can. This happens more often than I let on. It is April 12, in the last year before the millennium, and as I leave my house, I glance around. The sky is overcast and gray, but as I move down the street, I notice that the dogwoods and azaleas are blooming. I zip my jacket just a little. The temperature is cool, though I know it's only a matter of weeks before it will settle in to something comfortable and the gray skies give way to the kind of days that make North Carolina one of the most beautiful places in the world. With a sigh, I feel it all coming back to me. I close my eyes and the years begin to move in reverse, slowly ticking backward, like the hands of a clock rotating in the wrong direction. As if through someone else's eyes, I watch myself grow younger; I see my hair changing from gray to brown, I feel the wrinkles around my eyes begin to smooth, my arms and legs grow sinewy. Lessons I've learned with age grow dimmer, and my innocence returns as that eventful year approaches. Then, like me, the world begins to change: roads narrow and some become gravel, suburban sprawl has been replaced with farmland, downtown streets teem with people, looking in windows as they pass Sweeney's bakery and Palka's meat shop. Men wear hats, women wear dresses. At the courthouse up the street, the bell tower rings... (Sparks, 2004)

The fragment in (7) is an extract from the prolog to “A Walk to Remember”, a novel by N. Sparks. “A Walk to Remember” is a tragic love story narrated by Landon Carter, a popular high school student who fell in love with Jamie Sullivan, a daughter of the local priest. In his thoughts Landon goes back in time recalling events that took place forty years prior to the moment when the narration starts. Initially the time reference point is set in the present (“It is April 12, in the last year before the millennium”), however, it is already in the first chapter of the novel that time leaps backward and the plot develops around the events of forty years ago of which the reader becomes a silent witness. Thus, the verbal results of the recall mechanism are presented in the narrative form.

(8) *Some time ago, when I was six or seven or eight years old, it would occasionally happen that I'd walk into a room and certain people would begin to cry. The rooms in which this happened were located, more often than not, in Miami Beach, Florida, and the people on whom I had this strange effect were, like nearly everyone in Miami Beach in the mid-nineteen-sixties, old. Like nearly everyone else in Miami Beach at that time (or so it seemed to me then), these people were Jews – Jews of the sort who were likely to lapse, when sharing prized bits of gossip or coming to the long-delayed endings of stories or to the punch lines of jokes, into Yiddish;*



which of course had the effect of rendering the climaxes, the points, of these stories and jokes incomprehensible to those of us who were young.
(Mendelsohn, 2006: 3)

The extract above is the beginning of “The Lost. A Search for Six of Six Million”, an autobiographical novel by Daniel Mendelsohn. The author’s personal memories form the basis of the retrospective narrative. Occupying the initial position in the text, the extract functions as a reader attractor focusing on the past and creating an intrigue around the events to be revealed later on.

Like retrospective monologs, narratives are produced by a single person and provide an in-depth insight into events of the past, but unlike the other types of retrospective utterances, they do not presuppose any feedback on the part of the recipient. First-person presentation and addressee-orientation make retrospective narratives very similar to retrospective monologs. Moreover, some researchers use the two terms interchangeably or employ one meaning the other. For instance, when dwelling upon the fictional form of Kazuo Ishiguro’s novels, Ch. Hitchens describes it in the following way: “Both novels take the form of unmediated retrospective monologue. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, the narrator is Masuji Ono, a Japanese painter from a bourgeois background. In *The Remains of the Day*, the raconteur is ‘Stevens’ – we never learn his first name – a devoted butler in an English country house” (Hitchens, 2002: 320), although the form in question is definitely the narrative. The results demonstrate that retrospective monologs and retrospective narratives are two independent forms of verbal recall reporting that differ semantically (the former are usually devoted to a single episode from the past while the latter presuppose a discursive recountal of events and situations retrieved from the narrator’s memory), structurally (retrospective narratives can either be part of a larger whole or a completed text, retrospective monologs are always a fragment of verbal interaction) and communicatively (different communication channels are employed to transfer mnemonic messages).

The results yielded by qualitative analysis were also supported by statistical data. Each of recall reports registered in the database could be qualified either as a retrospective monolog, a retrospective dialogic utterance, or a retrospective narrative, the former being the predominant type of retrospective utterances and the latter being the least common one. The following figure represents the occurrence rate for each type in accordance with the obtained results:



Table 2. Structural types of recall reports and their occurrence rate.

| Retrospective utterance type | Occurrence rate |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Retrospective monolog | 47% |
| Retrospective dialogic utterance | 41% |
| Retrospective narrative | 12% |

Thus, empirical data analysis supports the first hypothesis regarding the finite number of recall report forms that are recurrent under similar communicative conditions.

In the second stage of the study an attempt was made to examine retrospective utterances as regards possible correlations between the choice of the specific form of verbalizer utterances and the communicative context in which information gets retrieved from retrospective memory. The communicative context is shaped by various factors, such as the number of participants, the communication channel used to transfer messages, synchrony of conversational turns, feedback options, and others. The second hypothesis tested in the current study suggests that the number of participants involved in the situation of recall, in other words, the level at which communication is conducted (autocommunication, interpersonal communication, group communication, and mass communication), to some extent determines the structural form of the utterance verbalizing the mnemonic process of reconstructing information stored in retrospective memory. Results of the qualitative analysis performed in the course of research confirmed the hypothesis.

It has been established that retrospective messages into which the recall process is encoded are expressed by different language structures depending upon the level at which communication is conducted. In case of autocommunication, i.e. communication in a situation of recall where there is only one participant playing the role of the agent and recipient at the same time, the recall output is verbally represented as a retrospective monolog which is typically self-addressed and feedback-oriented. Example (4) above illustrates the situation.

In case of person-to-person and group communication the natural way to express one's memories is by taking conversational turns being led by cues coming from the party that has initiated or otherwise encouraged the retrieval process (as exemplified in (6)), the only difference being that at the group level dialogs can easily become polilogs with multiple members of the group taking part in the conversation. When interpersonal or group communication is conducted in writing or when specific social conditions apply, the preferred way to convey mnemonic



images to other participants is to objectify them into the monologic form. The two fragments below demonstrate use of retrospective monologs as recall verbalizers in person-to-person and group communication respectively:

(9) *“Well, there was one thing we did together. Just after she had Saoirse, she brought me out to the field, lay down a blanket, and set down a picnic basket. We ate freshly baked brown bread, still piping hot from the oven, with homemade strawberry jam.” Elizabeth closed her eyes and breathed in. “I can still remember the smell and the taste.” She shook her head in wonder. “She chose to have the picnic in our cow field, so there we were in the middle of the field, having a picnic surrounded by curious cows.”*

We both laughed.

“But that’s when she told me she was going away. She was too big a person for this small town. It’s not what she said, but I know it must have been how she felt”. (Ahern, 2006: 155)

(10) *You know, when I was down on the tracks, I remember the sound of the horns. I remember the sparks around my head. I remember holding onto that man, saying, “Please don’t push me, because if you do, I’m going to be the one that going to get it,” ‘cause I’m on top. And told him something really simple with the train rolling over our head: “Don’t move.”* (Autrey, 2007)

Example (9) presents a retrospective monolog produced by a character of *If You Could See Me Now*, a novel by C. Ahern. Talking to the narrator, the character shares her memories about some past happenings. As the narrator prefers the position of a passive listener, avoiding any verbal cues stimulating the flow of memories, the recall report produced by her conversation partner takes the form of a retrospective monolog in which the speaker gradually reveals the reconstructed events.

The extract quoted in (10) is a fragment of the speech delivered by Wesley Autrey at the CNN Heroes Award ceremony on December 9, 2007. Autrey, an American construction worker, Navy veteran and father to three children, became a national hero after he saved a student fallen onto the tracks in New York City Subway. Speaking at the ceremony, Autrey described the moment when he and the student who had suffered a seizure found themselves in a drainage trench between the tracks with a train car passing over them. The awardee shares his memories with a large audience that gathered to honor him and other heroes. The communicative context dictates the choice of the retrospective monolog as the only available recall verbalizer form as the audience, being the passive group recipient,



has limited response options, such as applauds or cheers.

It is noteworthy that retrospective monologs turned out to be the only utterance type registered as a recall verbalizer at all levels of communication, including mass communication (see (11) below), which is indicative of their universal nature as a verbal product of the retrospective memory mechanism.

- (11) *We remember with reverence the lives we lost. We read their names. We press their photos to our hearts. And on this day that marks their death, we recall the beauty and meaning of their lives; men and women and children of every color and every creed, from across our nation and from more than 100 others. They were innocent. Harming no one, they went about their daily lives. Gone in a horrible instant, they now “dwell in the House of the Lord forever.”*
We honor all those who gave their lives so that others might live, and all the survivors who battled burns and wounds and helped each other rebuild their lives; men and women who gave life to that most simple of rules: I am my brother’s keeper; I am my sister’s keeper. (Obama, 2009)

Above is a fragment from the 9/11 Pentagon Memorial Speech delivered by Barack Obama on September 11, 2009 in Arlington, Virginia. Although speaking in the presence of dozens of people, Obama obviously holds the whole of U.S. nation as his target audience, thus the memory-sharing session takes place under the conditions of mass communication which do not presuppose any immediate feedback options, so the retrospective monolog is but a natural choice in the situation.

At the level of mass communication the only alternative to retrospective monologs occurring mostly in oral interactions is constituted by retrospective narratives (examples (7) and (8)) which allow sharing memories with a large number of recipients whose role in the situation of recall is only passive as retrospective narratives typically do not presuppose any feedback.

Thus, the results permit to draw the conclusion that the communication level can be regarded as a factor contributing to the choice of the verbalizer utterance expressing the recall process. A result summary is presented in the following table:



Table 3. Correlation between level of communication and structural types of recall reports.

| Communication level (number of participants) | Corresponding utterance type |
|--|---|
| Intrapersonal communication (one participant) | Retrospective monolog |
| Interpersonal communication (two and more participants) | Retrospective dialog unity Retrospective monolog |
| Group communication (small and large groups) | Retrospective dialog (polilog) unity Retrospective monolog |
| Mass communication (multiple participants) | Retrospective monolog Retrospective narrative |

4. Conclusion

In the course of the communication process natural languages perform their basic function – that of transmitting experience and knowledge stored in the human consciousness due to the work of memory. Messages transmitting information can also carry additional comments about the mnemonic status of the information being communicated, i.e. it can be specified whether information is kept in memory, has just been retrieved, cannot be accessed, was lost or needs to be placed for long-term storage, etc. Such commenting utterances can be regarded as verbal products of the mnemonic mechanism. In this paper I examined a specific type of mnemonic utterances – retrospective utterances representing the recall process. The results confirmed the original hypotheses regarding a specific set of language structures used as verbal representations of the recall process and direct correlations between the type of the verbalizer utterance and the communicative context it is produced in. It is noteworthy that the pattern of results is consistent with previous research stating that numerous extralinguistic factors contribute to the choice of recall reporting styles, but it also hints that findings of previous studies may be limited to one type of recall utterances due to restrictions imposed by experimental procedures.

An important implication of the current study is that the concept of mnemonic situation when applied to studying memory and language has a significant potential in helping to identify how different types of mnemonic experiences can be reported in the natural context of human communication.



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Author's address:

Kafedra lingvistiki i perevoda (Department of Linguistics and Translation Studies)
Tul'skij Gosudarstvennyj Universitet (Tula State University)
Prospekt Lenina, 92
Tula
Russia 300012
E-mail: tivyaeva@yandex.ru

REPREZENTACIJA RETROSPEKTIVNE MEMORIJE I KOMUNIKACIJSKI KONTEKST

Rad se bavi jezičnim oblicima koje govornici koriste da bi izvijestili o prošlim iskustvima rekonstruiranim iz pamćenja. Dok su se dosadašnja istraživanja koncentrirala pretežno na priče kao verbalne odraze sjećanja, ova studija predstavlja novi pristup temi, zasnovan na komunikacijskome pristupu. Autor smatra da rezultati dobiveni eksperimentalnim istraživanjima ne odražavaju pravo stanje stvari, budući da ispitanici izražavaju svoja sjećanja na način i pod uvjetima propisanim postavkama istraživanja. Ovaj rad analizira jezične oblike koji predstavljaju sjećanja pojedinaca na temelju empirijskih podataka koji odražavaju prirodnu komunikaciju u različitim situacijama. Prihvatajući poimanje jezika kao materijalnog spremnika za kognitivne sadržaje i tezu o komunikaciji kao procesu koji se odvija po obrascima, autor predlaže hipoteze o standardnom skupu jezičnih oblika koje govornici koriste za izvještaje o sjećanjima te određenu korelaciju između kognitivno-komunikacijskoga konteksta i jezičnih odlika mnemoničke izjave.

Ključne riječi: retrospektivno pamćenje; izvještaji o sjećanjima; retrospektivna izjava; situacija prisjećanja.