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Remembrance of Things Parsed: Story Structure and Recall

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An analysis of the underlying structure of simple stories is presented. It is claimed that this type of representation of stories is used to form schemata which guide encoding and retrieval. A type of tree structure containing basic units and their connections was found to be adequate to describe the structure of both single and multi-episode stories. The representation is outlined in the form of a grammar, consisting of rewrite rules defining the units and their relationships. Some transformational rules mapping underlying and surface structures are discussed. The adequacy of the analysis is first tested against Bartlett's protocols of "The War of the Ghosts." Then a developmental study of recall is presented. It is concluded that both children and adults are sensitive to the structure of stories, although some differences were found. Finally, it is suggested that the schemata used to guide encoding and recall are related but not identical and that retrieval is dependent on the schemata operative at the time of recall.

This report presents an analysis of the underlying structure of simple stories and examines the implications of such structure for recall. We use the term "story schema" to refer to an idealized internal representation of the parts of a typical story and the relationships among those parts. It is claimed that people use this type of representation of stories to guide comprehension during encoding and as a retrieval mechanism during recall. To be successful, the theory must provide a clear and unambiguous parsing system which can be used to divide a story into structurally important units. To be interesting, it should also be able to predict which of those units people will tend to remember and which they will tend to forget.

Bartlett's pioneering study of memory (1932) suggested that people develop schemata of what stories are like. His most important use of this notion was to indicate that it could account for some of the recon-

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