

# Does Catchment Constrain Referential Acts?— Cartoon Narrative by Native English Speakers

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We have already reported that when asked to retell the story *Canary Row*, an episode from the Sylvester and Tweety cartoon series (Warner Brothers, Inc.), most Japanese narrators avoid mentioning a particular piece of information from the story. We found that they avoided mentioning some information because they might collapse the catchment. Catchment is the recurrence of one or more useful gesture features used in discourse and, in fact, is used for reference maintenance, because the recurrent features suggest a common discourse theme. The question we address in the present paper is whether the same holds true for speakers of languages other than Japanese. We have analyzed the videotaped English narrative data at the McNeill Gesture Lab at the University of Chicago, and our answer to the question above is going to be positive. We conjecture, just as we did for the Japanese narrative data, that speakers of English also avoid mentioning the information probably for the same reasons.

The avoided information in question is the direction in which Sylvester, the cat, escapes from Granny in the punch line of the fifth episode. Up to that point, the episode ends with Sylvester being thrown out of the building either through the window of Granny's apartment or through the entrance door of the building. The movement of Sylvester on the screen, when he is thrown out, is from the left to the right (The vertical dimension is ignored here). In the fifth episode, Sylvester escapes from the right to the left, deviating from the consistent pattern that had been established up to then. The irregular pattern could possibly call for special attention as new information, but it is actually often dropped from the narrative. We explain this phenomenon in terms of catchment, which in many narrations of this particular story materializes as the default positions of the cartoon characters, direction of movement, etc., and is used to maintain references. If the narrator collapses the catchment by mentioning the deviant spatial pattern to be more precise, he or she would not be able to use the catchment for reference maintenance again. Thus, for many English speakers as well as for the previously studied Japanese speakers, priority was put on easy reference maintenance by keeping the catchment intact. This also accounts for why many speakers mention

the deviant spatial pattern in the final scene, because the narrator no longer has to maintain a reference after talking about the final scene. Other explanations referring to a lack of memory capacity or other cognitive limits on the part of the speakers may sound plausible, but they will prove to be inadequate.

With the English and Japanese narrative data, we now have cross-linguistic evidence that supports our argument that catchment not only serves to achieve cohesiveness in discourse, but also may constrain the selection of information to be discussed. In the future, we are going to have to investigate how universal this phenomenon is, while looking into when children start exhibiting the phenomenon during development.