

Discourse Patterns in *Lord Randall*, a Traditional English Ballad: Storyline and Information Structure

แบบแผนสัมพันธสารในลำนำนิทานภาษาอังกฤษเรื่องลอร์ด เรนดัล: การดำเนินเรื่องและโครงสร้างสาระ

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Abstract

This paper discusses selected discourse patterns in the English ballad Lord Randall (LR). From a discourse analysis perspective, there are lots of words and so little narrative information so the natural question is: “How does the listener follow the storyline” This paper is an inquiry into how the information is patterned in relating the storyline events in the eight stanzas of closed conversation in this ballad. After a quick survey of the ballad’s structure, the storyline, the information structure, participant reference and the Peak of the ballad are described. Rather than following Longacre’s typical English storyline schema (e.g. Longacre 1996:24-26), in this ballad the listeners must infer and build their own sequential line of events from questions and answers in a dialogue between LR and his mother. The traditional English simple past tense is only marginally helpful in constructing the ballad’s storyline. The repetitious stanza (and information) structure is an indicator of where the audience must find its clues of new information in building the storyline. The break in information pattern at the Peak is a signal that the information crucial to constructing a coherent narrative is concentrated at the end of stanza seven. This ballad is

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another example of how the discourse analyst must look beyond a typical canonical storyline to arrange the sequential events of this narrative.

Key words: discourse analysis, narrative storyline, discourse information

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์แบบแผนสัมพันธ์สารคัดสรรในลำนำนิทานบัลลาดภาษาอังกฤษเรื่อง *ลอร์ด เรนดัล* จากแง่มุมด้านสัมพันธ์สารวิเคราะห์ ลำนำเรื่องนี้ใช้คำจำนวนมาก แต่มีเนื้อหาในการเล่าเรื่องค่อนข้างน้อย ดังนั้นจึงมีคำถามว่า “ผู้ฟังจะติดตามการดำเนินเรื่องได้อย่างไร” บทความนี้ ตั้งคำถามว่า สารของเรื่องมีรูปแบบที่สอดคล้องกับการดำเนินเรื่องอย่างไรในบทสนทนาแบบปิดในลำนำนิทานบัลลาดที่มีอยู่แปดบท หลังจากสำรวจโครงสร้างลำนำอย่างรวดเร็ว ผู้วิจัยได้วิเคราะห์เชิงบรรยายในด้านการดำเนินเรื่อง โครงสร้างสาร การอ้างอิงผู้ร่วมเหตุการณ์ และจุดเด่นของลำนำ และพบว่าโครงสร้างเหตุการณ์ของลำนำนิทานดังกล่าว ไม่ได้เป็นไปตามผังภูมิการดำเนินเรื่องแบบลำนำภาษาอังกฤษทั่วไปตามแนวคิดของลองเอเคอร์ (Longacre 1996: 24-26) ในลำนำเรื่องนี้ ผู้ฟังต้องอนุมานและลำดับเหตุการณ์เองจากบทสนทนาถามตอบระหว่างลอร์ด เรนดัลกับแม่ การใช้อดีตกาลในภาษาอังกฤษแบบดั้งเดิมเป็นเครื่องช่วยในการดำเนินเรื่อง บทลำนำ และโครงสร้างสารที่เข้าไปเข้ามาเป็นตัวบ่งชี้ว่าผู้ฟังต้องหาตัวชี้แนะไปสู่สารใหม่เพื่อสร้างการลำดับเรื่องจากที่ใด การแบ่งแบบแผนสารที่จุดเด่นของเรื่องทำหน้าที่เป็นสัญญาณบ่งชี้ว่าสารสำคัญในการสร้างสัมพันธ์สารเรื่องเล่าที่มีความสัมพันธ์ต่อเนื่องกันรวมอยู่ที่ตอนท้ายของลำนำบทที่เจ็ด ลำนำเพลงนี้เป็นตัวอย่างที่ทำให้เห็นว่านักสัมพันธ์สารวิเคราะห์ต้องพิจารณาโครงเรื่องมากกว่าที่เป็นแบบฉบับดั้งเดิม เพื่อลำดับเหตุการณ์ในสัมพันธ์สารเรื่องเล่าขึ้นนี้

คำสำคัญ: สัมพันธ์สารวิเคราะห์ การดำเนินเรื่องเล่า ข้อมูลสัมพันธ์สาร

1. Introduction

“The best way to get to knowing any bunch of people is to go and listen to their music.” Woody Guthrie 1912-1967.

All discourse, and thus all songs, have structure. The many genres of the many languages and cultures of SE Asia exhibit a wide range of discourse patterns. By understanding and appreciating some of the possibilities in how the English ballad *Lord*

Randall (LR)ⁱ presents new information and tells its story, perhaps researchers will be able to identify similar patterns in SE Asian songs. And perhaps we can grow to appreciate and understand the “bunch of people” who sing and listen to those songs. In a personal communication, Stephanie Wong comments: “the form of such sparse language still allows the singer to functionally achieve precise communication. Despite minimal explanation and atypical structure, the text is dense with clear meaning (even if it takes time to puzzle out, discern, and calculate). The invoking of language with indirect meaning itself reveals both an indirect culture and a culturally-accepted way of language processing.”

This paper is an inquiry into how the information is handled in relating the storyline events in this ballad. After a quick survey of the ballad’s structure, the storyline, the information structure, participant reference and the Peak of the ballad are described.

Lord Randall (LR) is a traditional Scottish border ballad, usually sung in the Scots dialect of English.ⁱⁱ Versions of LR have been attested since the 1600s in many languages (including adult and even children’s renditions) in German, Danish, Italian, and more. There are many English versions, with variation even in the name: “Lord Randal/Randall/Rendel”, as well as other versions that have a different name of the main character.

LR can be found as song #12 (out of 305 total in 10 volumes), in “Part Third Romantic Ballads” (which begin on p. 179 of the original) of Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*.ⁱⁱⁱ

It can also be found as song #10 (out of almost 200,000 total) in another numbered, more modern collection: the Roud Folk Song Index.^{iv}

LR is a traditional dialogue folk song. In the many versions of the song, LR is a young man who has just returned to his mother after being away and eating a meal that someone has just fed him. Each stanza is composed of a question asked by the mother, and a short reply by LR that ends in something like “make my bed so I can lie down in it.” Gradually more detail is revealed of LR’s meal and what the future holds for him as the song progresses. The song resembles the common folk song *Billy Boy*^v, but LR’s fate differs from Billy’s.

I perused some of the websites listed in the footnote 4, looking for the intertextual influences and variations among the versions for a small sampling of elements from the tradition as a whole. *Italics* represent words found in one version of the ballad or another.

- LR has just eaten a meal prepared by *his (true) love, sweetheart, step-mother (-mommy, -mammy^{vi}), wife or grandmother (-mommy, -mammy)*;
- LR has just returned from *hunting or fishing and fowling in the wild-wood, the greenwood*, or some unspecified location;
- LR's *dinner, supper, or breakfast* consisted of *eels, or (small/wee) fishies/fishes*, that had been caught *in the kitchen garden, black ditches, gutter-hole or among the heather hills*, and then *boiled in a brass-pan/billy-pot with broth, or fried (with butter) in a pan or made into an eel pie*; and
- LR was accompanied by his *bloodhounds, hawks and hounds, greyhound, little-dog*, but they/it did not return with him from his wanderings.

This paper does not survey all that has been written about LR, and certain does not discuss the complex intertextuality associated with the different versions or the echoes throughout many cultures. The song has been performed by many singers over the centuries, and 'covered' by several modern artists ranging from amateur and traditional to operatic; a solid traditional rendering by Ewan MacColl (1915-1989) at YouTube.^{vii} The simple goal of this paper is to identify some textual features of the version of LR that can be found on the Battlefield Band's CD *Out For The Night*^{viii}; this version has some intriguing structures and patterns worth considering. A discourse analysis of the music alone^{ix} could also be done, but this paper does not pursue that option.

1.1 Discourse Background

This paper investigates selected discourse^x features of the ballad LR. Discourse (or textlinguistic) analysis^{xi} includes many perspectives on a communication event. Among various things, what struck me about the ballad when I first heard it from a CD have to do with Discourse perspectives like Storyline and Information Structure. A few discourse observations are given as background before addressing storyline and information structure.

There are 2 participants in the discourse event of the song's performance: the song performer and the audience. As the performer sings the song, presenting words, notes, inflections, etc. word-by-word in a linear fashion, the first-time hearers in the audience listen to the song in linear fashion, processing and building the whole story bit by bit. Each performance by each singer is different at some level. For this analysis, I will assume an encounter with the song like mine, listening to a recording of the song from a CD, where visual clues are missing other than the album cover and its words. The

discourse event (between the music produced and recorded by the performer on the one hand, and us, the listeners on the other hand) has a text, and it is the text that is examined below.

The whole text of the ballad is a “closed conversation,” with only two participants. Each stanza is a conversational exchange. In general, the structure of each stanza is for the first two lines to present a question asked by Lord Randall’s mother, and the second two lines to indicate Lord Randall’s response. In the story as told by the conversation, LR is joined by two additional participants in the events narrated, but they do not participate in the conversation: a step-mother and a greyhound dog. There are several props as well.

The participants in the narrative song are never named. We find out LR’s name only from the title, and never find out his mother’s, his step-mother’s or his greyhound’s name. This is a communication pattern represented in many cultures. Although a child may be addressed with his name, his parents are almost always referred to by relational kinship terms. In the song, LR addresses his mother as “mommy” /mami/ in the repeated formula, indicating the proper kinship relation with deference and respect (e.g. Bequette 2008: 62). The mother repeatedly calls him ‘you(r)’, as well as the endearing terms in the formula: ‘my own dear darlin’ boy’ and ‘my own dear comfort and joy’. However, outside of the repeated formula, only in stanza 6 do mother and son change their reference strategy. The mother, who has been referring to herself in the first person ‘my’, talks about herself in the third person ‘your own mother’, and LR continues by referring with the third person pronoun ‘her’.

Technically, the form can be called a *Drama*, because there are no quotation formulae in the text, such as “she said: ‘...’ ”. In a typical prose narrative, dialogue is usually reported with speech quotation formulae, like: *she said, “Hi.”* Sometimes there is a section of a prose narrative that is written in Drama format, where the quotation formulae are not used (Longacre 1996: 11-12, 14). Usually ballads relate a story utilizing typical narrative form, and often those ballads often use quotation formulae. However, in dialogue songs (a sub-genre of story-telling songs), use of a quotation formulae is rare.^{xii} Dialogue songs relate a conversation in drama format; behind the conversation is a story (a narrative) for the audience to construct simply from the speakers’ words.

1.2 General Structure & Segmentation of LR

The ballad consists of 8 stanzas that have a parallel structure in terms of syllables and melody line. Melody line and sounds of words set up patterns that are repeated throughout the song (Merriam 1964: 188). The eighth stanza is a repetition of the first. As primarily an oral communication, and a poetic and musical one at that, there is a great deal of repetition, although at first glance the repetition of this ballad may seem excessive. The repetition provides the structure (the normal pattern) of a stanza, which can be outlined as follows:

Mother's Question, 'my own dear darlin' boy?'

Mother's Question repeated, 'my own dear comfort and joy?'

Lord Randall's Response, 'make my bed mammy do,'

'O make my bed mammy do.'

This pattern holds for all of the stanzas, except for stanza 7, the Notional Climax and Surface Peak of the narrative (discussed below).

2. Storyline

Each coherent discourse has a mainline that serves to hold the text together. The mainline of a narrative can be called the storyline. So how does the audience recognize the storyline, the narrative mainline? The storyline is the set of chronologically ordered events that form the backbone of a narrative portraying the events in sequence. Normally, the storyline in an English narrative is told with simple past verbs, including the speech act verbs in quotation formulae but not the content of the quotations, e.g. "she did this ... and then she did that", etc. or if told in the first person, "I did this ...".

An oversimplified construction of the surface storyline of LR takes into consideration that in the formal structure there are no quotation formulae with speech act verbs; the structure is a series of quotations related in a drama format. At the 'highest' level, the implied (and rather boring) storyline would be an exchange of "She said to him [two lines], and then he said to her [two lines]" for each stanza; continue this pair-pattern for 7 exchanges and then repeat the first exchange. The two people talking (LR and his mother) can be identified from the vocatives inside the quoted material. The audience will easily identify this higher level storyline, perhaps without even consciously remarking it.

But how does the audience recognize the "real" storyline, i.e. discover the story of what happened to LR? The first time audience needs to follow the mother's bit-by-bit

discovery of what happened to LR. Each stanza gives enough information embedded in the quotations for the audience to construct the narrative storyline of Lord Randall. The mother's question in the first two lines of each stanza provides a frame to construct first the background information, then the events that have happened, and finally the events that will happen.

At this next level down from the constructed dialogue, the bare-bones story is told in LR's quoted material in response to and interrupted by his mother's questions. After the setting is explained in stanza 1: "*I've been out with my step-mother*", LR relates: "*I got fish and I got broth ... Hedges caught [the fish] and ditches sought them ... I gave [the fish bones] to my greyhound ... [The greyhound] swelled and there he died.*" Implied information indicates that subsequently LR left where he was with his step-mother and is now talking with his mother in a different location from where these narrated events occurred.

But even this is only the barest part of LR's story, part of the answer to the question the audience is asking: "What happened?" As each member of the audience listens to the story, he or she builds the storyline by processing the information in each quotation, filling in blanks from LR's statements, his mother's frames to those statements, and inferred information.

Gradually this story emerges from Lord Randall's responses and his mother's frames. They are related below as a third person narrative.

- 1^{xiii}. Where has LR been? LR has been out with his step-mother all the day.
2. What did the step-mother give for supper? She gave LR fish and broth.
3. Where did the step-mother get the fish that she gave LR? She caught them in hedges and sought them in ditches^{xiv}.
4. What did LR do with the fish bones from the broth? He gave them to his greyhound dog.
5. What did LR's greyhound do after he ate them? The greyhound swelled, and there he died.

So what happens next? What can be expected to happen to LR? These questions are not asked and must be inferred by the listeners in the audience.

This is the basic plot, or storyline, of the narrative so far. One of the next un-reported events is that LR left step-mother's house and went to a place where he is carrying on this conversation with his mother.

Then the narrative switches to a future time, and the events have yet to happen.

6. What will LR leave to his own mother? He will leave her his house and land.

7. What will LR leave to his stepmother? He will leave her a rope to hang her from the nearest tree.

Up to this point in the narrative (and in fact in the conversation and even the ballad itself), what happened after the dog died and what will happen to LR is still left unsaid. More rhetorical power is given to LR's fate because an essential part of the information is still delayed, and part of the information is even left unsaid. Eventually the first time listeners to the song will realize how the words of the song hint at the events in LR's story and think something like: "Oh, so that's what happened!"

It is in LR's response in the two last lines of stanza 7, where the audience finally gets the delayed part of the information. The standard stanza pattern is broken. Where the normally twice-repeated refrain "*O make my bed mammy do*" has been appearing, the ballad explicitly states what the audience is gradually becoming awakened to. What did the stepmother do? Why should she be hanged from the nearest tree? "For the poisoning of me [LR]." The audience begins to understand what LR means by his repeated refrain: "*O make my bed mammy do*".

8. [No new information but a word-for-word repetition of stanza 1.]

The last two lines of stanza 7 are the surface Peak of the narration. The Notional Climax and Surface Peak of the narrative are discussed after the section below on information. To have "a reasonable abstract" of the story^{xv} (Somsonge 1991:17), the listener will have to use more than just the simple clauses of LR's speech. The mother's questions supply important information, and the main spoken (sung) event (the notional Climax) is delayed and syntactically understated in a subordinate clause. And LR's fate, the final event that these events lead to, is left for the listeners to infer. The last time we hear anything from LR he is answering his mother's last question.

3. Information Structure

Information Rate, an aspect of Information Structure, refers to how much new information is related in each line in relationship to the old information that the listeners have been given earlier in the narrative.

The rate of new information coming at the audience in this ballad is rather slow, what with so much repetition thrown in. One of the functions of repetition is to slow down

the amount of new information that is presented over a certain amount of text. Repetition also serves to reinforce the older information. The structure of the stanzas quickly enables the audience to be able to identify exactly where the new information will be located in the stanzas.

A change in the rate of new information will alert the audience that a Climax is being reached in the plot. An increased information rate is an indicator of surface Peak for this song.

In the table that follows, new information is indicated in **bold** font. *Italic* font is used for the repeated formula that provides the stanza pattern. On the CD dust jacket is a title: “**Lord Randall**”, and a line of explanation: “**A classic Celtic ballad about strange dialogue between a mother and her son**” are printed but they are not sung. Since the focus of this paper is on what is sung, i.e. what the audience hears, no more will be said about these two lines, except that they represent entirely new information if the words on the dust jacket are considered part of the text. (Note that some non-standard English words and structures are present in the ballad.)

Table 1: New and Old Information

1 22 new info words	<i>Where have you been all the day my own dear darlin’ boy?</i> <i>Where have you been all the day my own dear comfort and joy?</i> <i>I’ve been out with my step-mother, make my bed mammy do,</i> <i>O make my bed mammy do.</i>
2 10 new info words	<i>What did she give you for your supper my own dear darlin’ boy?</i> <i>What did she give you for your supper my own dear comfort and joy?</i> <i>I got fish and I got broth, make my bed mammy do,</i> <i>O make my bed mammy do.</i>
3 7 new info words	<i>Where did she get the fish that she gave you my own dear darlin’ boy?</i> <i>Where did she get the fish that she gave you my own dear comfort and joy?</i> <i>Hedges caught them and ditches sought them, make my bed mammy do,</i> <i>O make my bed mammy do.</i>
4 10 new info words	<i>What did you do with your fish bones my own dear darlin’ boy?</i> <i>What did you do with your fish bones my own dear comfort and joy?</i> <i>I gave them to my greyhound , make my bed mammy do,</i> <i>O make my bed mammy do.</i>

5		What then did your greyhound do my own dear darlin' boy?
7	new	<i>What then did your greyhound do my own dear comfort and joy?</i>
info		There he swelled and there he died , <i>make my bed mammy do,</i>
words		<i>O make my bed mammy do.</i>
6		What will you leave to your own mother my own dear darlin' boy?
7	new	<i>What will you leave to your own mother my own dear comfort and joy?</i>
info		I leave her my house and land , <i>make my bed mammy do,</i>
words		<i>O make my bed mammy do.</i>
7		What will you leave to your stepmother my own dear darlin' boy?
17	new	<i>What will you leave to your stepmother my own dear comfort and joy?</i>
info		I'll leave her a rope to hang her from the nearest tree
words		For the poisoning of me.
8		0 new info words [Repeat, all old information]

3.1 Information Summary

Certain information patterns in the song can be discovered. Old information is information about things, events, etc. that have already been related in the narrative. Old information is found in the repeated stanza formula in the second and fourth lines, except for S1 (the first use of the formula) and S7 (where the pattern breaks). All possessives in the narrative are old information, except for the introduction of the mother. The pronouns have antecedents (thus by definition are *anaphoric*), except for 'you' and 'my' in the first line, which are thus *cataphoric*. The listener must infer that these first-line pronouns refer to the mother and son who are carrying on the conversation. The pronouns follow the expected "you" / "I" alternation as the dialogue progresses. No proper names are given; LR is named in the title but his name is not sung. Besides pronouns, relationship roles are indicated by noun phrases (NP): 'my own dear darlin' boy' (i.e. 'son') refers to LR, 'mammy' refers to his mother, and 'step-mother' is used three times.

After the first line of the song, new information is generally found in the first line and third line. Stanza 1 introduces the participants in the conversation, as well as giving information about the relationships between the participants in the vocatives. In addition, new information helps the listener infer certain attitudes and emotions that characterize those relationships. As is typical of setting the Stage in a narrative, Stanza 1 is the highest concentration of new information with 22 words of new information (WONI).

The following stanzas have much less, 10 (2 times) and 7 (three times) WONI, until Stanza 7. Stanza 7 lines 3 & 4 break the pattern, by presenting all new information except for repeated participants referred to by short pronouns. This stanza has 17 WONI, and the following stanza ends the song with a word-for-word repetition of Stanza 1—and 0 WONI.

3.2 Participant reference and information management

Part of managing the information rate is how one identifies the participants—in both their introduction and in continued reference to them. The next few paragraphs reference this participant reference. Only a few grammatical subjects of sentences are new information: stanza 1 line 1 introduces LR as ‘you’; in stanza 3 line 3 ‘*hedges*’ and ‘*ditches*’ are personified as ‘*catching*’ and ‘*seeking*’ the ‘*fish*’.

The questioning mother introduces herself as ‘*my*’. From then on ‘*my*’ will refer to the mother in the repeated stanza formulae or to LR when he is talking. LR is introduced as ‘*you*’ in the mother’s first question in the first line of the song.

There are two other introductions of participants. The one who is eventually revealed as the villain of the story is introduced in a NP^{xvi} ‘*my step mother*’ as the object of a preposition in stanza 1 line 3.

The only other animate participant is the ‘*greyhound*’ dog, a rather passive and ill-fated participant. He is given the bones, (it is implied that he ate them,) and then he swelled up and died. He is introduced by LR as a NP object of the preposition ‘*to*’, the indirect object of the ditransitive clause in Stanza 4 line 3, referred to as ‘*my greyhound*’. The dog is referred to again in stanza 5 by the mother as ‘*your greyhound*’, and then by LR as ‘*he*’ as the subjects of two clauses.

Props (other identified ‘items’ as opposed to animate participants) include: the ‘*fish*’ (introduced as a N and maintained as a N) and ‘*broth*’ (1 time) for ‘*supper*’ (1 time), the ‘*hedges*’ (1 time) and ‘*ditches*’ (1 time), the ‘*bones*’ (after the introduction referred to as ‘*them*’), the ‘*house*’ (1 time) and ‘*land*’ (1 time), the ‘*rope*’ (1 time) and the ‘*tree*’ (1 time), and in the background the thing ‘*poison*’ (1 time) is made into a verb ‘*poisoning*’. LR’s ‘*bed*’ is mentioned as a N in the stanza formula in every stanza except for stanza 7 (another indicator it is the Peak). For the most part, props are introduced as grammatical objects. They are new information when they are introduced.

The mother asks the questions that make up Lines 1 & 2 of every stanza. However in the actual words of the song, the only time she is a grammatical subject is in the repeated imperative asking her to make the bed for LR, except for S6. In her question,

she refers to herself as ‘*your own mother*’ as the indirect object of the verb ‘*give*’, and LR keeps using the third person pronoun with ‘*her*’ as the direct object.

The actors in the storyline are represented by ‘*you*’ in the mother’s quotations and ‘*I*’ in LR’s quotations, and ‘*she*’ (i.e. the step-mother) once each of the participants are introduced.

LR is referred to in the mother’s speeches in the first two lines of every stanza: ‘*you*’ 2X; and ‘*my own dear darlin’ boy*’ and ‘*my own dear comfort and joy*’ in the formula in every stanza. In addition, ‘*your*’ 2X in stanzas 2, 4, 5 and 6. In LR’s speeches in the second 2 lines formula, LR is referred to by ‘*my*’ 2X in every stanza except for stanza 7.

3.3 Information related to what the audience discovers

So far, new information has been discussed from the viewpoint of the audience; in other words, “What does the audience know when?” Another aspect of new information is expressed in the question: “What do the participants inside the narrative know when?”

Below, the presentation of new information to the mother is summarized. The mother is:

- S1: curious and perhaps concerned where LR has been and discovers he has been ‘*out with his step-mother*’;
- S2: concern increases leading to questions following a suspicious trail from the ‘*supper*’ of ‘*fish and broth*’; to
- S3: suspicious of the ‘*fish*’, she asks ‘*where did she get them?*’ and is answered ‘*hedges*’ and ‘*ditches*’, neither of which is a normal place to find fish; then to
- S4 looking for clues, she asks what happened to the ‘*bones*’ and LR answers he ‘*gave them to his greyhound*’ dog;
- S5 perhaps she hopes the dog is still healthy, but she has to know so she asks what happened to the dog next, with the answer he ‘*swelled*’ up and ‘*died*’ right there;
- and now she has confirmed why her son keeps asking his mother to make his bed so he could lie in it;
- and she has confirmed her growing suspicion of what LR seems to know from the beginning—LR will die in that bed; in
- S6 she switches her focus from past events to the future, asking what she will receive as an inheritance from LR and receives the answer ‘*house*’ and ‘*land*’; and in

- S7 she asks a strange question because—Why should the step-mother receive anything? but
- the last two lines of S7 make the whole thing clear to anyone who has not figured it out yet. She is really asking how the step-mother should be treated, and the answer: *‘hung by a rope from the nearest tree’*, and finally
- line 4 of S7 makes it unavoidably clear that LR was *‘poisoned’* by *‘her’*.

At the highest level of the discourse, the audience is construed by the performers as being first time listeners gradually figuring out what is happening. By S6, where the mother is sure what has happened with LR, the attentive first time listener will also be pretty sure. But a member of the audience might well ask: Why is she asking about a future gift to the mother from LR? By the end of S7 even a less ‘clued-in listener will have figured out what is happening.

Of course, the original audience would have lived in an oral society in the northern British Isles over 200 years ago. Performances would have been addressed to an audience where many people would already know the story and the song. The performer starts, and if he has not announced his song, some of the audience react with something like: “Oh, he’s going to sing LR.” When did the members of the audience first hear the song? For at least some when they were too young to figure out what the story line was, i.e. what was going on in the story behind the song plot.

So perhaps the original audience would have been a mixed group with different experiences of the song:

- Members who know the story already might enjoy the building suspense to the revelation at the end in the same way that modern readers might enjoy reading a story they have already read before (or they might think “Oh no! He’s going to sing LR again”),
- Members who are partially familiar but have never figured out what was happening in that song (e.g. a 10-year-old thinking “I can never figure out what’s happening in that song), and
- Members who are hearing the song for the first time (e.g. beginning with “What’s going on? Who are these people? Why is the mother asking all these questions?”).

4. Narrative Peak

The ballad consists of 8 stanzas that are parallel in structure in terms of syllables and melody line. However, the grammatical and information structures are not identical in each of the stanzas. If one looks at the structure of new information, the amount of new (unknown) information in relation to old (known to the audience) information, one stanza stands out.

It is unusual also in English narrative information presentation to put the crucial new information, which is the cause underlying all of this exchange, in a subordinate clause as in LR's response in stanza 7. The naive processing of this sentence (guided by its syntax) would indicate that: first, the sentence is about leaving a rope to his mother; second, that the purpose of this rope is to hang the stepmother; and third, that the reason she should be hanged is because she poisoned LR. But this is LR speaking!

All of a sudden the repetitious grammatical, informational and storyline patterns are broken in stanza 7, and the rate of new information jumps significantly. The stanza is packed with new information. The mother's question is in the same frame, perhaps leading the audience to expect another stanza of the same structure. However, Lord Randall's response completely breaks the pattern, as he uses no repetition.

"I'll leave her a rope to hang her from the nearest tree

For the poisoning of me."

Once one knows where the Peak^{xvii} of the story is in the text, it is natural to listen to what the performers do to emphasize this Peak. However, the music itself does not vary from the pattern to indicate a Peak musically. Rather the music treats each stanza the same, like an episodic story lacking a Peak (Longacre 1996: 38). The Peak can be found in the text, in contrast with the patterns established in the earlier stanzas of the song. For instance, LR's response doesn't use the set formulae. A more complex clause structure is used, where the motivation for the statement is positioned at the end in a gerund phrase. This is the only time that a motivation for an action is given. The new information is concentrated yielding a higher information rate. After the Peak, the text resumes the predominant word pattern of the song (in fact repeating Stanza 1 word-for-word) but offers no new information.

The surface textual Peak coincides with the notional Climax. The Climax is the place in the events of the story when the tension is highest, where the situation of the main participant seems the most hopeless. After the Climax, a hopeful positive narrative

proceeds on to the Denouement, where the central participant escapes and begins the return to a stable situation. However, after the Climax in LR there is nothing left to say, and the ballad ends with a repetition of the first stanza.

5. Conclusion

Part of what intrigued me from the beginning is how the ballad LR breaks all the ‘rules’ of telling an English-language story, such as storyline clauses reporting events in third person simple past, e.g. “LR sat down to eat.” The music certainly allows some of this, as does the traditional setting where a significant portion of the audience would have heard the ballad before. But what linguistic devices make this text in the English language work?

A quick survey of the ballad’s structure is followed by a description of the storyline, the information structure, participant reference and the Peak of the ballad. Rather than follow Longacre’s typical English storyline schema (e.g. Longacre 1996: 27), in this ballad the listeners must infer and build their own sequential line of events from questions and answers in a dialogue between LR and his mother. The traditional English simple past tense is only marginally helpful in constructing the storyline. The repetitious stanza (and information) structure is an indication of where the audience must find its clues of new information in building the storyline. The break in information pattern at the Peak is a signal that the information crucial to construct a coherent narrative is concentrated at the end of stanza seven. This ballad is another example of how the discourse analyst must look beyond a typical canonical storyline to construct sequential events of this narrative.

6. List of Abbreviations Used in Paper

- LR Lord Randall
- N noun
- NP noun phrase
- S stanza
- WONI words of new information

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ⁱ A list of abbreviations can be found in section 6 at the end of the paper.

ⁱⁱ A good, general source for background information and lyrics relating to the many versions of LR, with many web-links to follow, can be found in the Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Randall. The very short introduction and background in this paper is common academic knowledge gleaned from many sources—printed and web-based.

ⁱⁱⁱ A digitalized copy of the Child's ballad and some of its variations, (originally printed as Robert Chambers' *The Scottish Ballads* between 1787 and 1803 in *The Glen Collection of Scottish Music*) can be found at: <http://digital.nls.uk/special-collections-of-printed-music/pageturner.cfm?id=87742141> reflecting contents on pages 323-325. It is *A digital scan of the version of the original publisher Edinburgh: Printed by Ballantyne and Company for William Tait, 78 Princes Street MDCCCXXIX; (later re-issued Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1882-98)*. Several other versions of LR that have been keyboarded the *English and Popular Ballads by Francis James Childs [1882-1898]* website can be found at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/child/ch012.htm>. Links to several on-line versions of Child's Ballads, as well as related Wikipedia entries, can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_Ballads. (All accessed 25 November 2014).

^{iv} url: <http://library.efdss.org/> which redirects to <http://www.vwml.org/> and a link to the EFDSS is at the top of the page. The Roud Indexes are available from the website of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library <http://www.vwml.org/search/search-roud-indexes?roudredirect=1> (Accessed 25 November 2014).

^v E.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fuJz2u7oCM. Accessed 9 February 2014

^{vi} For versions writing 'mammy', the intended sung pronunciation would likely be 'mommy' (/mami/), not the typical American pronunciation with the vowel /æ/.

^{vii} url: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0l-bCT0OedQ>. Accessed 25 November 2014.

^{viii} Temple Records, Shillinghill, Temple, Midlothian, Scotland EH23 4SH. www.templerecords.co.uk, cf. <http://www.battlefieldband.co.uk/>. Both accessed 25 November 2014.

^{ix} Performed music is also a discourse, cf. Nattiez (1990) and Agawu (2009); "Musical compositions have passages that can be considered to be introduction, inciting incident, development, climax, and denouement much as in a narrative. A composition has parts which advance it and parts which serve as background" (Longacre 2000: 176).

^x "A discourse is an instance of language use whose type can be classified on the basis of such factors as grammatical and lexical choices and their distribution in main versus supportive

materials, theme, style, and the framework of knowledge and expectations within which the addressee interprets the discourse.” Glossary of linguistic terms, SIL.

^{xi} “a linguistic study of texts, whether written or spoken, monologue or dialogue” (Hwang 2010:xi). “A textlinguistic analysis will not automatically deliver to us the meaning and intent of a text and its parts, but it should constrain within plausible bounds our possible interpretations of it.”

TL $\xleftarrow{H} \rightarrow$ Text “i.e. Textlinguistics provides a practical hermeneutic of the text” (Longacre 2000: 173).

^{xii} Another well-known (non-narrative) dialogue folk song in drama format without quotation formulae is: “Reuben/Rachel, Reuben/Rachel, I’ve been thinking” e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbEORhS0IFM> accessed 7 January 2015. A similar song can be found in Johnstone (2002: 52).

^{xiii} The numbers in the list refer to the stanza number in the song.

^{xiv} What kinds of fish does one find in a hedge-row or a drainage-ditch?

^{xv} Longacre notes that a typical Storyline can function as “a reasonable abstract” of the story (Longacre 1996: 28-29).

^{xvi} N = Noun; NP = Noun Phrase.

^{xvii} “Action peaks relate to the underlying (notional) structure of a narrative in that the surface-structure peak correlates with the climax or with the denouement of a narrative” (Longacre 1981: 347). “The peak episode is often a zone of analytical difficulty with unusual features” (Hwang 2010: xiii). cf. Longacre 1996: 37-48 for a discussion of both Peak and Climax).