SysAdmin, Stories and Signing: Learning from Communication Experts

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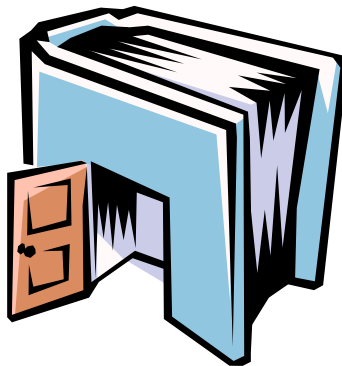LISA2002

Legal Warning

I am not a professional storyteller

I am not an ASL interpreter

But Let Me Start with a Story…

Ok, What Just Happened?

- The story and I sucked you in
- You learned a little bit about "me" and maybe judged "me."
- You may have put yourself in my place
- You grasped a potentially multivariate, complex scenario quickly (including several unknown factors)
- You may have learned one of several lessons (diagnostic order, solutions, etc)

Stories are Good for…

- Describing sequential or related events
- Making diverse information coherent
- Being a credible conduit for information
- Passing on lessons or exhortations
  - Frozen stories
  - Stories with a specific lesson/moral
  - Stories with a lesson the listener must find
- Fulfilling a number of social roles:
  - Establishing membership in a community
  - Establishing an individual's identity
  - Establishing a community's identity (shared interpretations)
- Making experience reproducible and reusable (safely)
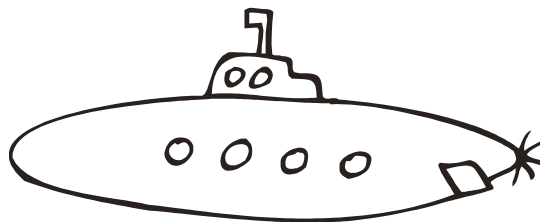
Story #2
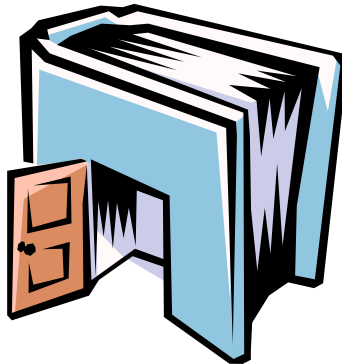
SysAdmin Stories

- Just listen to the people around you here
- They are telling one story after another to:
  - Describe/share experiences
  - Seek help
  - Training
  - Prove their sysadmin-ness/ability
  - Establish pecking order
  - Collaborate

- We need to learn how to be good storytellers

How to Tell A (Good) Story (Well)

- First answer from the storyteller community:
  Depends on who is listening
- Obvious factors:
  - age(s)
  - number of listeners
  - relationship to teller
- Less obvious factors, e.g. cultural expectations:
  - American stories are often plot driven
  - Asian stories are often spiral shaped
  - …
- No, you don't have to tell your Asian colleague a spiral story.
  - Just know people may have different expectations for information presentation or different "listening muscles"
- Levels of ellipsis

Dive Into the Storytelling Process

- Theory time, folks!

Storytelling Cosmology
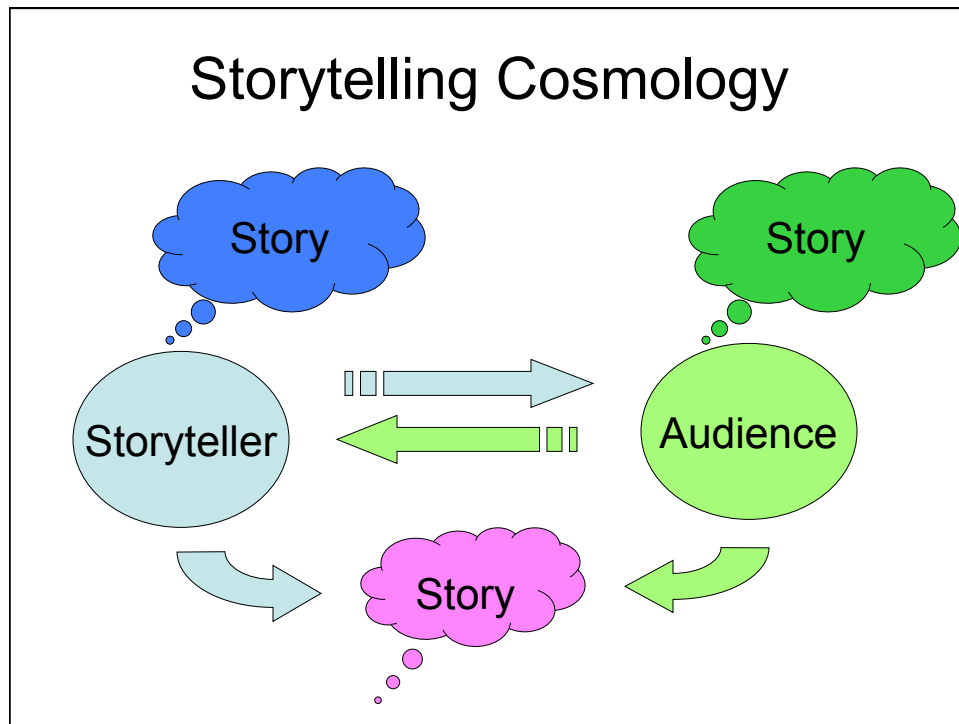
Nice PowerPoint-fu,
but what does it mean?

- This is a real-time process
- You are not the story, but don't isolate it within yourself
- The storyteller creates the story *in the members of the audience*
- Storytelling is a negotiation
  - The storyteller creates and manages a set of expectations
  - You can violate them, but you must do it in a safe way
- The storyteller must honor the two-way contract that has been created

Time to Give You A Few Tools

- Now that you are scared, let's help:
  - Three useful storytelling devices
  - A look at some of the structures you can use
  - How to know when things are going wrong
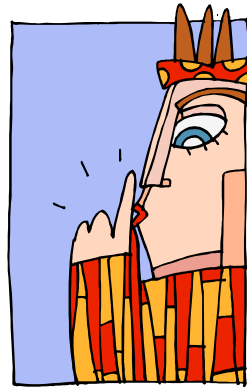 - How to start to fix them

Story Time

- No, I'm not going to give you milk and cookies.
- Different kinds of time in storytelling:
  - Presentation time
  - Narrative time
- Control your story time

Repetition & Silence

- Repetition provides:
  - Emphasis
  - Comfort

- Silence
  - Emphasis
  - Transition
  - Anticipation/Discomfort

- Both are too powerful for casual use. Be deliberate.

Story Structures

- May be invisible
- Lessons not adages
- Linear/chronicle
  - Episodic
  - Many variations
    - Winding, repetitions, pseudo-chronolog, …
  - Collections
  - Limited at times
- Embedded stories
  - Bridge lessons
  - Parallel phrasing, key words
  - Can't nest too deep

SysAdmins Need Layers

- This is the "complex multivariate" part
- Humans are good at layer processing
- Build with:
  - Known overlaps
  - Point out common points
  - Intonation
  - Body language
  - Deliberate words
- Ordering is still important
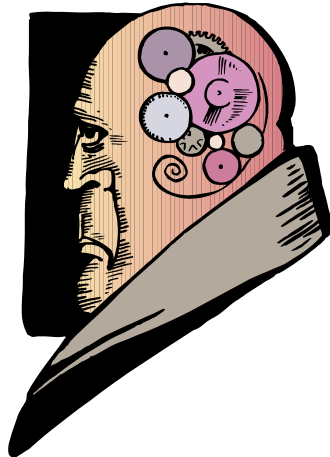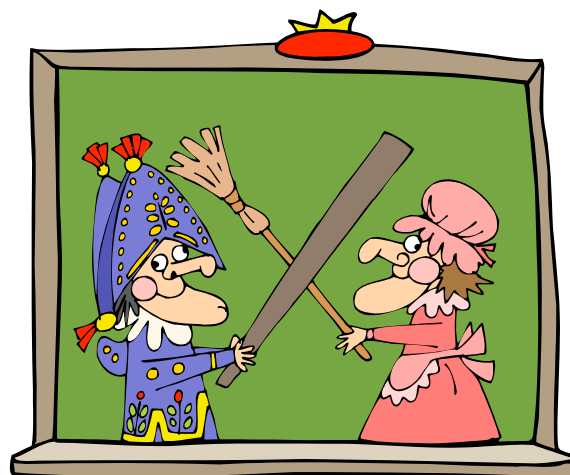- Test for stability, then go!
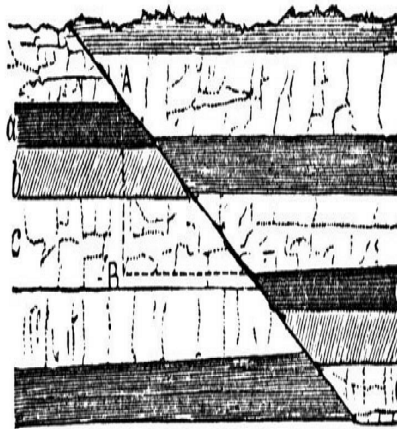
When Things Go Wrong

- How do you know?
  - Stay meta, watch yourself
  - Lack of reaction
- What not to do?
  - Ignore the situation
  - Talk faster
  - Gesture to add excitement
- Fixing it:
  - Shut up
  - Engage listener(s)
  - Change your expectations

Shifting Gears for Part Two

Communications Breakdown
A Drama in Two Acts

Act I

- Hello, I have a tier 2 or NOC problem.
- Tier1#1: What is it?
- …
- Tier1#1:Sending you to tier 2.
- Describe problem again, offer to show
- Tier2#2: Show me
- …
- Ok, let's escalate.

  Our hero goes off happy…

Act 2

- So, what happened with ticket #...?
- Tier1#2: ticket was closed, still having problems resolving hosts?
- Yes, what happened?
- Tier1#2: sending you to tier 2.
- Tier2#2: what's the problem?
- …
- Tier2#2: Why does that need to be fixed. What is that causing your service to do or fail to do?
- Many standard services refuse to talk to a client when their A and PTR records don't match up because that is usually a sign that someone is spoofing the DNS. Mismatched or missing records like this show a problem, it is not something you would do intentionally when setting up a DNS farm.
- Tier2#2: Gotta ask a simple question . . . Are you having a problem surfing, getting to sites, etc.?

Act 2, Part 2

- Tier2#2: Obviously you are not the "typical" subscriber, and has an above average understanding of networking, protocols, and perhaps maybe some Cisco training. Most of our customers do not have this information, or are anywhere near it. If you were one of these customers, why whould you be calling in or contacting us?
- Tier2#2: I have been informed that customers are not allowed the capability for reverse DNS lookup for security reason. (Got someone looking over my shoulder right now . . .)
- Reverse DNS works just fine. Nslookup…
- Tier2#2: Can't do it. it is beyond what we are allowed to do. i am unfamiliar with the command and cannot execute it. Just tell me what it does.
- It is not a command, it is just a setting within nslookup that tells nslookup which type of DNS records to query.
- Tier2#2: Okay, I understand that you understand what this does and how it works. However, you need to understand it is not a tool we have been shown how to use for troubleshooting customer issues. This goes beyond the scope of what we troubleshoot for customer issues.

Act 2, Part 3

- Tier2#3: alright what exactly is the problem again please
- Your DNS records are missing an A record for their PTR records for IP addresses handed out via DHCP.
- Tier2#3: alright why are you saying this is what I want to know?
- Because it causes all services that check for a matching set of records to fail.
- Tier2#3: please be more specific what type of services are you using?
- A myriad of standard supported protocols (HTTP, SSH, POP, IMAP, etc).
- Tier2#3: alright I will have to end this session unless you tell me what sites your able to get to or not able to get to, I need to know the problem, you have not game me any problems to look at and test to show these issues

Act 2, Part 4

- Tier2#3: so what is the issue?
- The issue is your DNS servers are misconfigured and so give back bad information when queried by any server that checks for DNS security issues.
- Tier2#3: are you having problems with getting to security sites?
- Again, this is not about specific web browsing issues. This is about a DNS server misconfiguration.
- Tier2#3: what is the problem then, if we have a problem, you have to be having a problem then, isn't it, if not, Is there anything else I can help you with?
- The problem is that the servers are misconfigured. The symptom is that any service/site that checks for this will fail.
- Tier2#3: all structures are different, we will let the network admins worry about that, Is there anything else I can help you with?

The End

Why Did that Fail?

- Bad communication mechanism?
Probably not.
- Lack of experience in techs?
No.
- Speaking a different language?
Yes, and...
- Different mindset?
Yes, and...
- Coming from a different background?
Yes, and…

Ok. Who can help us? Can we learn these skills/attentions?

Some American Sign Language Features

- ASL is not a "toy" language or signed English
- It is all spatially based
- Two hands, dominant/passive (+ facial expressions)
- 5 sign parameters:
  – Handshape
  – Palm orientation
  – Location
  – Movement
  – Other signals
- Verbs can be regular, directional and locational, can have agent markers
- "pronouns" placed in space

ASL Interpreter Challenges (Surface)

- Multi-sense problems (example from Cokely):
  Pat asked me to leave the party early.
  Pat asked me to leave the car at home.
  - (ASL has polysemous signs too)
  - Glossism (Cokely)
- Some things just don't translate
  - Elliptical remarks
  - Passive voice constructs
 - Embedded clauses
  - Indirect address

ASL Interpreter Challenges 2

- Density mismatches
  - Car & tree example
  - Fence example
- Context mismatches
  - describe location
- Sentence structures can be different
- Preserve register
  (frozen, formal, casual, intimate, consultative)
- Affect and Intent must be conveyed
  - Medicine question example

But that's not even the fun part…

Dive Into the Interpretation/Translation

- Theory time again, folks!
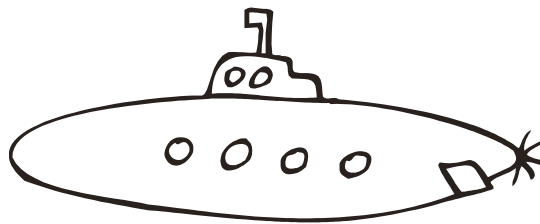
Interpretation

Interpretation is

the competent and coherent use of one naturally evolved language to express the meanings and intentions conveyed in another naturally evolved language for the purpose of negotiating an opportunity for successful communicative interaction in real time within a triad involving two principal individuals or groups who are incapable of using, or who prefer not to use, the language of the other individual or group. (Cokely)

Interpretation vs. Translation

- Lots of the translation theory holds true (and there is more of it)
- In case you are curious:
  - In interpretation, source text is only presented once
  - It is received in parts
  - Both source and target texts are transitory
  - Interpretation has texts being processed in same situation as actual communication (Nord)

Interpretation Cosmology
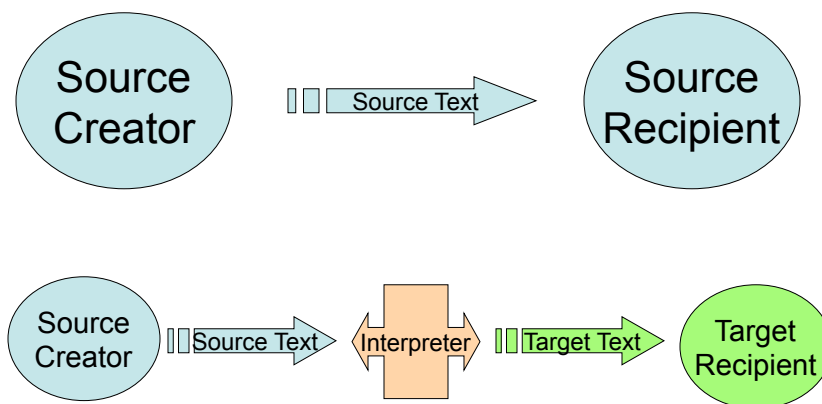
Ok, here's the meat of part 2

- Implicit vs. Explicit mismatch gets much, much deeper

- Equivalence vs. Functional interpretation

Culturally Rich Realities

"Hello, Thank you for inviting me here. Let me tell you a bit about myself. My name is Pat. *I can't hear* and my parents *can't hear*. I have one brother and he *is hearing*. I spent two years at *Gallaudet??* and then left to work with my father.

Cokely

Rich Points

"When you encounter a new language, some things are
easy to learn. You just patch on some new lexical items
and grammatical forms and continue listening and talking.
Other things are more difficult, but with a little effort the
differences from one language to another can be bridged.
But some things that come up strike you with their
difficulty, their complexity, their inability to fit into the
resources you use to make sense out of the world. These
things—from lexical items through speech acts up to
fundamental notions of how the world works—are called
*rich points*. (Michael Agar)

Skopostheorie

- *skopos* == purpose
- Hans J. Vermeer's translation theory
- Function over direct equivalence
- "Dethroning" of source text (*Entthronung*)

  Like any text, a text used as a source in a translational
  action may be regarded as an 'offer of information.'…
  Faced with this offer, any receiver (among them, the
  translator) choose the items they regard as interesting,
  useful or adequate to the desired purposes…a
  translation is thus a new offer of information in the target
  culture about some information offered in the source
  culture and language.

  (Nord, citing Reiss and Vermeer)

Decisions
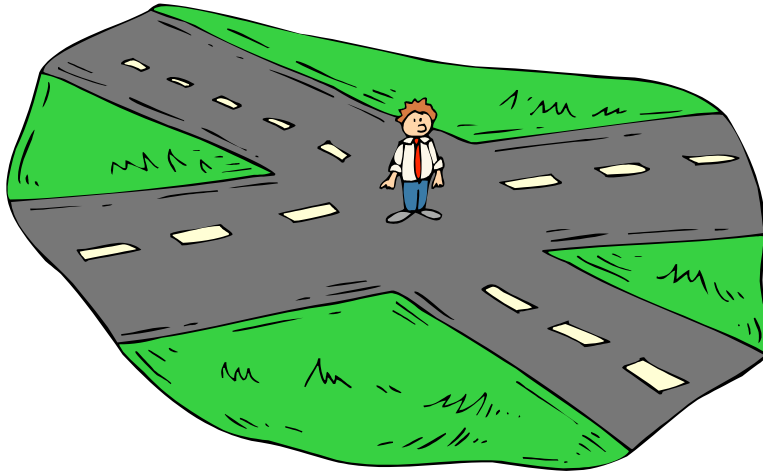
End of Theory
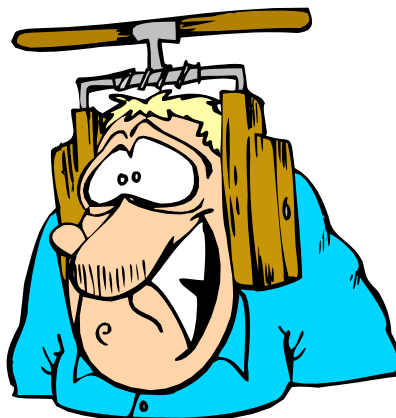
Have you mapped these ideas into SysAdmin headspace yet?

- Pretend you're an interpreter for a conversation between a SysAdmin and a naïve user.

- Create interpretation in users head
- Some things don't translate
- Explicit vs. Implicit issues
- Culturally rich items
- SysAdm rich points?

Dealing with Interpretation Problems

- Possible interpretation problems/miscues (Cokely):
  - Omissions
  - Additions
  - Substitutions
  - Intrusions (transliterations)
  - Anomalies
- Detection: backchannel
  - Backchannel information
  - Appropriate responses
- Recovery process:
  - Finding the place to undo the knot
  - w/ASL, can step out of role
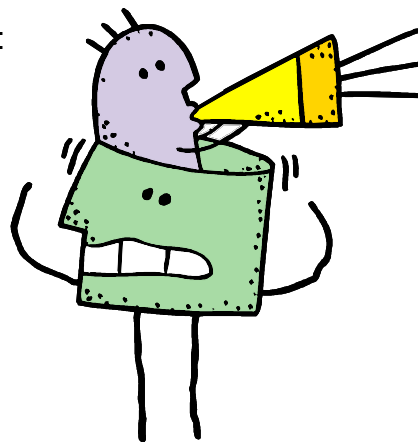
A few selections from:

A Taxonomy of Useless Support Email Requests

(a work in progress…)

Free Floating Malaise

Date: Sat, 28 Sep 1996 12:27:35 -0400 (EDT)
From: First Last <user@ccs.neu.edu>
To: systems@ccs.neu.edu
Subject: [Req #9531] printer help

something is wrong and I have know idea what

Where to Start

Date: Mon, 06 Nov 2000 09:47:26 -0600
To: webmasters@ccs.neu.edu
From: "First Last" <user@shawneelink.net>
Subject: how do i send e- mail to my friends

i am trying to send e- mailto my friends and
I don't know which icons to get on my computer.
can you tell me where to go on the keyboard.

Why I Love the Internet

Date: 11 Nov 2000 21:42:41 -0000
From: root@HostSystems.host.cx
To: root@murzim.ccs.neu.edu
Subject: hax0r

tell cycad and shit other lame college friends to
leave my boxen alone, before i hax0r you wif my
sunos 0day, and the others, i will do the same.

peace, 3l33t_handle

Catching a Thrown Sword

- Easier to describe than show.
- Following properties:
  - Usually very long
  - Have a great deal of detail
  - Have some combination of information and misinformation (or lack of information)

Wrong Number

From: "First Last" <user@dunn5.host.co.uk>
To: <webadmin@ccs.neu.edu>
Subject: weather for the past year
Date: Mon, 13 Nov 2000 19:23:04 -0000

We were just wondering if it could be possible if you could reply with information regarding the weather since spring 1999 following up to November 2000 in the area of Brest (north-west of France). As we are looking to buy property in the area.

Yours sincerely Firstname Lastname

Take Home

- From storytellers:
  - Value of stories
  - Storytelling process and where it takes place
  - Story tools we can use
  - Structures (layers)
- From ASL interpreters:
  - Decisions we make in our interactions
  - Implicit vs. explicit
  - Cultural realities
- From both:
  - Places to pay attention

References

- *Interpretation: A Sociolinguistic Model* by Dennis Cokely, ISBN 0-932130
- *Translating as a Purposeful Activity* by Christiane Nord, ISBN 1-900650029
- *The Social Life of Information* by John Seely Brown/Paul Duguid ISBN 0-87584-762-5
- *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* by Gary Klein, ISBN 0-262-112277-2
- *Talking about Machines: An Ethnography of a Modern Job* by Julian E. Orr, ISBN 0-8014-8390-5
- *Storytelling: Process & Practice* by Norma J. Livo/Sandra A. Rietz, ISBN 0-87287-443-5
- *Interpreting Culturally Rich Realities: Research Implications for Successful Interpretations* by Dennis Cokely, 2001 Journal of Interpretation
- *Knowledge of Deaf Community-Related Words, Symbols and Acronyms Among Hearing People: Implications for the Production of an Equivalent Interpretation* by Tracie N. Spingarn, 2001 Journal of Interpretation

Acknowledgements

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