Narrative Revisited
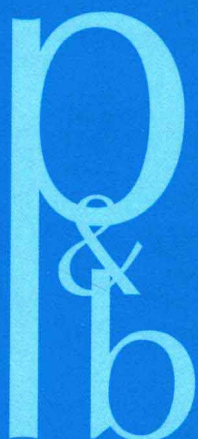
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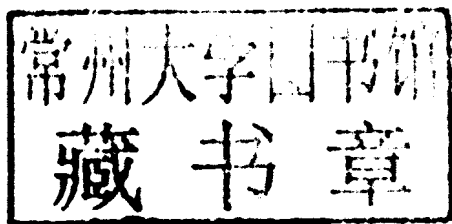
Metalanguage in Interaction

Hebrew discourse markers

Yael Maschler
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Narrative Revisited

Pragmatics & Beyond New Series (P&BNS)

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Volume 199

Narrative Revisited. Telling a story in the age of new media
Edited by Christian R. Hoffmann

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Acknowledgments

In July 2007, the Department of English Linguistics at the University of Augsburg was proud to host an "International Conference on Narrative Revisited: Telling a Story in the Age of New Media" to honour Professor Dr. Wolfram Bublitz on the occasion of his 60th birthday. In many respects, what you are holding in your hands is the final written residue of this event, compiled, discussed and revised with the help of many. Naturally, I owe several people who have taken part in the conference or contributed to the genesis of this reader a debt of gratitude. First and foremost, I would like to thank both the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)* and the *Gesellschaft der Freunde der Universität Augsburg* for their generous financial support. At the same time, my thanks go to Anita Fetzer and Isja Conen at Benjamins for encouraging and helping me publish the book. Secondly, I would like to thank the many "helping hands" which greatly contributed to making the conference such a scientifically enriching and socially memorable experience. I'm particularly indebted to Wolfram Bublitz, Gudrun Nelle, Volker Eisenlauer, Jenny Arendholz, Julia Reif and Elisabeth Fritz for their ongoing support while planning and organizing the conference and its ensuing publication. Thirdly, I would like to pay tribute to all invited speakers at the conference and authors of this volume. Your compelling talks and challenging voices have certainly moulded the design and conception of this reader. Last but not least, my thanks go to all hearers, over-hearers and eavesdroppers at the conference who likewise attended the conference and sometimes contributed their part in panel discussions and side-line talks in the hallways.

At the end of the day, this book can only be a comprehensive reflection of our shared interest in the virtue of storytelling, its manifold structures, contexts, applications and purposes. The enigmatic appeal of this text genre in both old and new media has – in the editing process – allowed me to learn much more about the way we think, create, use, perceive and interpret stories in our times. I can only hope that, while browsing through the following pages, you will be able to relive some of that experience.

Christian R. Hoffmann
Augsburg, May 11th 2010

modify narrative concepts formerly used to look at monomodal (verbal) text patterns. For narrative scholars, in particular, the multimodal extension of texts makes necessary the re-modelling of existing methods of analysis, and most contributions of this reader are actually presenting different ways to achieve this aim.

In line with these two objectives, narratives will be examined generically in their formal (linguistic), functional (pragmatic), social (sociolinguistic) and medial (forms of communication) dimension. This multi-dimensional approach guarantees theoretical access to a rich collection of narrative genres, ranging from non-verbal means which contribute to storytelling (e.g. Hübler) and spoken narratives in political speeches (e.g. Fetzer) to new media storytelling on websites and weblogs (e.g. Jucker, Djonov and Stengling, Schubert, Arendholz) and film narratives (e.g. Janney, Bateman and Tseng). As such, the volume offers compelling insights into the way stories are told today, emphasising the parallels and differences between narratives in changing contexts as well as within different medial configurations.

2.   Scoping narrative

Defining the scope of the term *narrative* is always a first compulsory step of any scientific approach to the phenomenon. It seems viable at this point to establish some common ground which links up the different contributions of this reader, not least because narrative definitions are and will plausibly remain one of the most hotly debated (and unresolved) issues within linguistics and across scientific fields.[1]

The topical variety of narratives which are assembled in this reader appear to complicate the specification of characteristic narratives features which may be central to the concept under investigation. To this end, Prince's classic view of narratives is used as a springboard for further explorations. He defines a narrative as "the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes nor entails the other" (Prince 1982: 4). We may note that his definition is not constrained by the use of any particular semiotic mode, so narratives do not necessarily have to be written or spoken. In fact, they can come in any kind of semiotic shape. Furthermore, according to Prince, narratives are not limited by causal relations connecting story segments to each other. What

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1.   "[...] nothing like a consensus has been reached on that subject. Some theorists and researchers believe that everything is a narrative; others maintain that everything can be; and still others contend that, in a sense, nothing is (because narrativity is culture-dependent and context-bound)." (Prince 2003:1)

seems most viable (at least to Prince) in defining a story, is the criterion of *tempo-ral sequence*, and we may call it the most salient characteristic of any narrative that comes to mind.[2] Temporal sequence does not entail that stories must neces-sarily be depicted, produced or organised in a precise temporal order. It only claims that narratives are, by nature, minimally composed of two story events or facts which are *perceived* as being linked through temporal sequence. A narrative can thus not fully dispose with temporal sequence altogether although stories may very well be fragmented and displaced in the process of writing or reading. This identifies temporal sequence as the most common characteristic of narra-tives and, in fact, most narrative definitions seem to embrace it in more or less explicit terms (cf. Ochs and Capps 2001:4). It is thus likely that the feature is most deeply entrenched in our socio-cognitive belief of what stories are, or rather, what they ought to be.

Next to temporal sequence, narratives are usually composed of story events linked by causal relations. However, one might argue that, contrary to temporal sequence, narrative parts need not necessarily be induced by causal logics. Hence, unlike temporality, causality is a sufficient, yet not necessary, criterion for stories. Mostly, we should concede, causality does play an important role in connecting narrative segments to produce coherent, unified wholes. It is a great tool in con-struing larger narrative components out of single unrelated story facts.

Next to these two most central narrative properties, a third characteristic now comes into play. Just as the previous two, it is assumed to be imperative to the act of storytelling, i.e. *evaluation*. A narrative does not only give testament to a series of events but usually (if not always) includes and transports some kind of personal stance or evaluative investment in the story events. In a sense, evaluation does not relate to the denotative content of the narrative (as temporality and causality) but rather connects to its subjective appraisal by a certain individual (or group of in-dividuals). It represents the emotive and interpersonal level and the way it semi-otically enters into the narrative act. With these three characteristics, i.e. temporal sequence, causality and evaluation, I can now define the conceptual essence of any type of narrative. What about additional criteria? Although other characteristics (thematical, functional, social or cognitive) have been proposed by scholars, these seem somewhat less feasible to grasp the conceptual core of storytelling which I aim for in this introduction (cf. Greimas 1983, Bal 1985, Ryan 1992).[3] Still, it is

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2.   In post-modernism, the question of whether such a sequence may always be text-bound or be suspended in the eye of the beholder is currently still subject to ongoing debate in literary theory. Still, the criterion of sequence seems most appropriate in view of the different articles of this reader.

3.   The discussion of narrative properties bears an overt similitude to the ongoing debate of principles of textuality in linguistics.

beneficial to at least name some approaches which have tried to incorporate other features in narrative schemes. Toolan (1989:4), for instance, makes a convincing case for using more remote narrative features in his description of stories. He also expects a narrative to endorse these peripheral characteristics only by degrees rather than by common cause.[4] Among them, he identifies the following potential key tenets: *artificial fabrication* (validity or truth value of a story), *prefabrication* (re-telling of a story), *teleology* (thematical development of a story), *duality* (shared common ground between teller and addressee) and *displacement* (of story segments, cf. Toolan 1989:4). It seems only appropriate that the different contributors of this reader apply these additional characteristics if they help to explain the conceptual surplus of the stories they are considering.[5] I advise readers to explore and follow the various extensions of my own basic view of stories in the following chapters (cf. Hübler, Bazzanella and Stenglin and Djonov). For now, it is more important to devise a general description which unites the different approaches and methodologies assumed by all authors of this volume. It is by no means a disadvantage but a merit that, as you are leafing through this reader, your concept of "narration" is unavoidably going to change.

Put briefly, the criteria of temporality, causality and evaluation, we are now able to rank with a view to their prototypical centrality to the concept of narration: *1. temporality, 2. causality, 3. evaluation*. The properties of *narrative sequence* (chronology and causality) and *evaluation* are thus considered essential to narratives albeit to differing degrees. All of them capture *in toto* the elementary features to which narrative texts in this reader usually subscribe in one way or another.

3.   Looking back – previous linguistic research

With discourse analysis and text typology, linguistics has developed two vivid strands of narrative research in the last four decades.[6] Although one of these two

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4.   Cf. Prince (2008:22).

5.   More recent approaches to narrative analysis (e.g. Ochs and Capps 2001) prefer to use *narrative* as an umbrella term in order to address "a cognitively and discursively complex genre that routinely contains some or all of the [...] discourse components." (Ochs and Capps 2001:18). Generally speaking, such models of *scalar narrativity* enable us to ascribe to narrative genres (e.g. commentaries, diaries, fairy tales or jokes) a specific, multi-levelled status along a virtual continuum of narrative expression.

6.   Note that the term *discourse analysis* is sometimes used a superior term for the analysis of discourse regularities in spoken face-to-face interactions as well as in written text. In such a view, text typology would obviously be considered as a part of discourse analysis.

fields (text typology) is considerably older than the other (discourse analysis), both disciplines share a pronounced interest in the description and analysis of narratives. In fact, the research on how we tell stories has by now assumed a pivotal role in both of them as we can deduce from the considerable narrative research in both scenes (cf. Georgakopoulou 1997, 2007, Schegloff 1997, Ochs and Capps 2001, Linde 2001:518). While text typology can be said to primarily take an interest in finding a set of prototypical properties (lexis, syntax, morphology, word formation, text linguistics) of the narrative as a text type or genre, discourse analysis more specifically aims at the purpose(s) narratives fulfil in a range of discourse contexts. I will next review previous research in both fields, focussing first on text typology and then on discourse analysis.

Early typological research, as conducted by Werlich (1975, 1983) or Biber (1988), did not specifically target narratives *per se* but rather searched for linguistic text types on a more general plane of text classification. Still, this strand of research excavated some recurrent linguistic 'markers' of narrativity, which were first based on intuition and later on corpus-based, empirical proof (cf. also approaches by Swales 1990, Martin 1992, Miller 1994). Werlich (1975), for instance, clearly defined the chronological sequence of adjacent clauses as a constitutive feature of the narrative text type. Moreover, he finds the temporal sequence underscored by linguistic markers such as temporal conjunctions in initial position or adverbs which specify the type of the respective verbal action. He equally identifies narrative verb groups as *activity* and *process verbs* ('*Verben der Veränderung und des Handelns*') which occur in past tense form, e.g. walked, bought, crashed, threw, etc. A decade later, Biber (1988) would describe additional narrative features which, this time, were based on are empirical, corpus-driven approach to narrative texts. He added to the pending list of linguistic characteristics a frequent occurrence of third person pronouns, perfect-aspect and public verbs (e.g. say, tell. etc.), synthetic negations and present-participle clauses.[7]

We should note that both Werlich as well as Biber attribute specific texts the status of "narrative text type" primarily on formal grounds although attempts are made to align the theme and purpose of the narrative as a text genre to the prototypical formal characteristics found in narrative corpora. In other words, the methodological approach to analysing narrative text types is based on the assumption that frequent linguistic features are attributable to discourse purposes

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7.   Interestingly, he distinguishes reports from classic narratives in regard to their noticeable presence or absence of past tense verbs. In line with its integrative view, both sub genres (report and classic stories) will be covered by this reader's conception of narrative.

(illocutions).[8] The efficacy of this convergence of narrative form and function, however, stands to be questioned.

Here, the second strand of linguistic narrative research, discourse analysis, comes into play.[9] Discourse analysis is less interested in specific narrative forms as in revealing their social function or purpose within the single act of narration. Already, introductions to discourse analysis (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 1997, Schubert 2008) specifically dedicate considerable parts of their books to the description of narratives. In so doing, they at least partly comply with the prototypicality of linguistic features as proposed by text typology but strive to go beyond its formal basis. Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (1997:52), for instance, distinguish a narrative from a non-narrative mode of discourse by relation to six palpable criteria for their distinction, e.g. *ordering* (temporal vs. multiple temporal, logical sequencing), *particularity* (particular events vs. generic truths), *normativeness* (disruption and re-establishment of equilibrium vs. stating what the norm is), *reference* (reconstructed vs. verifiable events), *perspective* (personal vs. impersonal) and *context* (negotiated vs. permanent).

Another branch of narrative analysis has been concerned with the structuring role of narratives for institutional discourse. As Linde (2001:518ff.) explains, this strand of research unites two differing methodological approaches. One approach describes how narratives may help members and non-members of institutions to carry out their daily work, the other one reveals how recurring narratives strengthen and reproduce the identity claims and "power structures of institutions" (Linde 2001:518). Wodak (1996), Kunda (1992) and Orr (1990) provide some clues as to how narratives are used in companies to build up a common frame of knowledge interlocutors use to solve problems at work to construe an aura of community between the company's employees. Other work by Conley and O'Barr (1990) focuses on specific contexts of narrative production. They show that, in legal and medical discourse, interlocutors can have different formal and functional expectations as to how long narratives should be as well as to their formal presentation and purpose they must serve. This has been shown in research committed to narrative presentations of eye witnesses in court rooms. While witnesses usually

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8.   Whereas literary theory has to my knowledge defined the concept "genre" in more general terms, in linguistics, the term "text type" usually refers to texts which exhibit similar sets of linguistic features or elements. A linguistic *genre* (cf. Swales 1990), on the other hand, addresses texts which only share a similar text function or purpose, regardless of their formal specification. For comprehensive discussions of this issue, see Hatim and Mason (1990) and Bathia (1993) and Hoffmann (2010).

9.   I should point out that there is in fact a third strain of narrative research which blossomed alongside the two areas of study elaborated above, concerned with stylistics both in literature and linguistics (cf. Stubbs 2008:5)

respond to questions with emotional, sometimes quite lenghty accounts of what they experienced, prosecutors will often interrupt them, demanding shorter and fact-related reports. In a similar vein, medical doctors, about to elicit medical histories from their patients, have to filter out relevant information from their patient's background stories (Frankel 1983, Todd 1981). Linde (1993) explored the sociological interpenetration of personal and institutional identity which is shown to be established, reproduced and adopted through narratives by the members of specific social groups. By adopting, quoting and retelling (fictitious or true) stories about a group (e.g. a company), people affiliate not only with it, its history and implied set of values but also with fellow co-workers with whom they build a *knowledge collective*. Narratives are thus elementary discursive tools used to co-construct the identity and affiliation of social groups and their members.

Another popular model for the segmental analysis of oral narratives was introduced in the late 1960s by William Labov and Joshua Waletzky. It remains one of the most influential linguistic accounts of narrativity to this day. The concept schematizes the discursive staging of successive narrative phases which the authors have shown to recur in numerous accounts of spontaneous oral storytelling. Despite their formalistic bias, which the model would later be often accused of, its six major narrative steps in the act of oral storytelling can still be considered one of the conceptual "bedrocks" of linguistic narrative research. Within their narrative scheme, Labov and Waletzky examine a certain narrative core of 'non-reversible chronological sequences of utterances', also named *temporal junctures*. Beside Labov's work, other linguists have attempted to synthesise general frameworks for the formal or semantic description of stories. Most notably perhaps, van Dijk and Kintsch (1977), who proposed a model of "macrostructures" and "macrorules" designed to show how stories are perceived and processed by recipients (cf. Johnstone 2001:639). The authors thereby purposefully switched from a productive position (adopted by Labov) to a hermeneutic, recipient-oriented approach. Others (Fillmore 1982, de Beaugrande 1982, Polanyi 1981, Hymes 1981) created similar schemes in an effort to generate a more context-sensitive story syntax.

Later studies have not only criticised the Labovian approach in its primary concern for narrative structure, but also because it was dismissive of the recipient's active role in storytelling. Especially in oral narration, the hearer or reader often contributes considerably to the creation and meaning negotiation of story segments. Ochs and Capps, in this context, recognize that "telling a story to another and telling a story with another" are two different affairs (2001:2). This interactional turn shifts the attention from narratives as content and structure, as it were, to narratives as "tools for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life" (Ochs and Capps 2001:2). This change of perspective reverberates in the dynamic, interactive orientation of narrative

analysis conducted by conversation analysts from the 1970s onward (cf. Schegloff 1997, Norrick 1997). With a view to narration, discourse analysis was now held to be primarily interested in the joint construal of narration as well as its communicative purpose in different contexts, e.g. *manipulation, authentification, explanation, apology,* etc. Its viewpoint also emphasized the *social value* of narratives. In a sense, the study of narratives turned into an analysis of the interactive negotiable act which precedes or generates story structure. Also, storytelling (whether spoken or written) could no longer be simply regarded as a private, reflective, solitary practice but as a collaborative, dynamic, transient endeavour; a collective activity in which story meaning would be produced on-line:

> The general aspects of the meaningful structure called "story" [...] should not be metonymically equated with the domain of narrativity, for the latter is characterized by two additional features: the act of narration and the mode of representation, one additional meaning structure of its own.   (Jannidis 2003:43)

It is palpable now that the structural approach of the early research era and the "social" approach of later discourse analysis are two differing paradigms, following disparate conceptions of the narrative as such. As Schmid puts it:

> In structuralism, the defining characteristic of narration is not a feature of discourse or communication but rather a feature of what is narrated.
>
> (Schmid 2003:18)

Therefore, discourse analysis – as opposed to earlier text typological approaches – has focused more on the discursive and socio-linguistic scope of storytelling than on the decipherment of the narrative 'infrastructure'.[10] This does not imply that discourse analysts forego structural analyses altogether. On the contrary, the analyst first elicits the functions which a specific narrative fulfils in context in order to evaluate and classify (in an a posteriori manner, as it were) the role of its narrative agents, stages, forms and elements. In other words, the directionality of narrative analysis has been reversed, from Labov and Waletzky to Sacks and Schegloff, changing the bottom-up conception into a top-down processing model. Research connected to the functional side of storytelling includes Schiffrin's work on how storytellers individuise themselves in social groups through the narrative choices they make. Ethno-methodological approaches to discourse analysis have repeatedly looked at how narratives contribute to social cohesion, especially in smaller social organisations (cf. Scollon and Scollon 1981, Bauman 1986, Coates 1996). On a more general plane, recent research has explored how social power

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10. "Narrating is a form of natural, ordinary interaction; it is embedded in interaction and partially structured by it. It is physically anchored in a concrete situation and constituted not only verbally but also nonverbally." (Hübler, this volume)

relations impose on storytelling. For instance, Ochs, Smith and Taylor (1992) elicited how stories in families help to replicate and sustain the "patriarchal role of the father" (Johnstone 2001:643). In a somewhat different approach, Ong (1982) portrayed socio-historical differences between oral and written storytelling, while Goody and Watt (1968) showed intercultural differences in the collaborative nature of narrative actions. All of these different strands of linguistic narrative research have so far entered in a more general interdisciplinary research on the subject matter. Ryan et al's comprehensive encyclopedia of narrative theory (2005) pays tribute to the complex and colourful narrative scene which has arisen in the humanities in the last fifty years.

4. On modes and media

Having looked at previous linguistic research on narratives, we shall now embark on a different journey, namely the evolution of computer-mediated communication in the last two decades. As this volume focuses on the new opportunities and constraints of storytelling in new media, it seems beneficiary to investigate some of the main developmental steps of the Internet. In many respects, Internet change reflects the change narratives have undergone both in form and function. However, before we do so, some important terminological remarks are necessary. These concern the often cited but notoriously ambivalent concepts of *medium, mode* and *form of communication*.

Over the last two decades, different writing spaces have taken shape on the Internet, e.g. *e-mail, website, weblog, chat, message board*. They largely answer to the communicative exigencies of the computer medium as well as to the expressive constraints and goals of individual authors.[11] We can locate forms of communication between a material storage device, i.e. the *medium* (e.g. *voice, book, computer*) and semiotic resources we use to express ourselves, i.e. the *modes* (e.g. *spoken and written text, pictures, moving images*).[12] Figure 1 illustrates the complex web of relations which hold between these socio-medial scopes as they impose on

11. Note that the contributors of this volume may choose different labels for this concept, such as "meta-genre" (Stenglin and Djonov); the conceptual implications, however, remain the same.

12. Holly (forthcoming) uses the term *forms of communication (Kommunikationsformen)* to define "media-conditioned cultural practices [...] set up by the medial arrangement of network computers. These practices are established with a view to the specific socio-cultural exigencies of certain groups of users" (Holly, forthcoming). Weblogs, websites or message boards are therefore not functionally or topically-determined genres which is why we call them forms of communication instead of genres, which are culturally more constrained, e.g. personal weblogs, corporate weblogs, sport weblogs, etc.

mediated discourse on the Internet. With a view to these different contextual fields, Internet authors create stories. To this effect, they may not only select one (verbal) semiotic mode but choose multiple co-occurring modes as offered by a specific form of communication. While some forms of communication may invite authors to make use of a broad range of different semiotic resources, others constrain their use. Chat-rooms, for instance, commonly deny their users the application of video streams, hyperlinks or pictures. In contrast, websites and weblogs usually allow their authors to incorporate verbal, pictorial, electronic and filmic modes. Hence there is a fundamental bond between the medium we use for certain means and purposes (paper, computer, mobile phone, etc.), the communication form we adopt on these media (letter, email, chat, website, etc.) and the semiotic modes (pictures, music, verbal text, film, etc.) made available and selected by authors and readers.[13]

Especially in new media, the use of multimodal discourse is paramount.[14] We should think that narratives are not only derived from the perceptive qualities of one expressive mode alone but need to be interpreted through the co-assessment of additional semiotic modes. The latter likewise engage collaboratively in the meaning-making process. On this note, Kress, Leite-Garcia and van Leeuwen 2003:257) explain that today "it has become impossible to read texts reliably by paying attention to written language alone [...]". In most forms of communication,
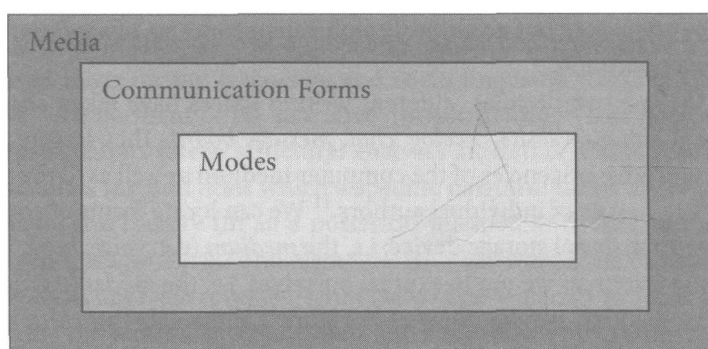

Figure 1. Interactive Constraints on Narrative Discourse

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13. This perspective, which links up individual expression with social motivation, is perhaps best described by social semiotic accounts of language (Hodge and Kress 1988). Accordingly, any language use is necessarily motivated by social goals and behavior. Likewise, any use of media is equally grounded in motivated social behavior.

14. This is a characteristic of new media because the use of multiple modes is facilitated and encouraged in most new media applications. In fact, technology firms do not cease to use the concept as a marketing strategy so it has become widely known among customers as "multimediality".