Introduction: Narrative Discourse

> For every tragedy, there is a tying of the knot, a complication and an untying of it, a solution.
> (Aristotle, **Poetics**)

Barthes (1975) observes that narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society and in an infinite variety of forms (myth, legends, fables, tales, short-stories, epics, tragedy, drama, comedy, pantomime, paintings, stained-glass windows, films, local news, conversations).

> Narrative starts with the very story of mankind. There is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes of human groups have their stories... Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural. (p.237)

Over the last decades, the study of Narrative has generated a great deal of interest. Russian formalists, French structuralists, Anglo-American literary critics and linguists have categorised, analysed and interpreted this feature of human experience which is the ability to communicate through 'stories'.

Although, as Barthes points out, narratives occur in a variety of forms, listeners (from a very early age) and readers are able to recognize all the different subgenres as 'stories'. This is because all narratives, although directed to different audiences, produced with different purposes and by different people, share organizational features which cluster all of them in one type of discourse.

For Longacre (1974), **narrative** is one of five types of prose discourse genres, the others being drama, expository, hortatory and procedural. Callow (1974) adds 'argumentation' to the the list, observing that "argumentation attempts to prove something to the hearer and tends to exhibit frequent contrast between two

opposing themes"(p.13). Longacre says that

> drama is text which consists entirely of dialogue. Expository includes essays, scientific articles and descriptive material. Hortatory includes sermons, pep talks, etc... Procedural is how-to-do-it or how-it-is-done text. (1974:358)

Narrative, for him, covers the telling of a story and is the second most vivid kind of discourse after drama. It is distingushed from other discourse genres in the following ways:

1. narrative discourse is usually in the first or third person, while 'procedural' can employ a non-specific person, 'we' or 'you' or even a third person, depending on different options. 'Expository' discourse is usually in the third person and 'hortatory' generally involves a second person component;

2. narrative discourse is actor-oriented, while 'procedural' is goal-oriented, 'expository' is subject-matter oriented and 'hortatory' is addressee oriented;

3. narrative discourse encodes accomplished time, and chronological linkage is necessary; chronological succession is also important for procedural discourses, but not for expository or hortatory types, which are characterised not by chronological but by logical linkage;

4. narrative is also distinct from other genres because of 'plot'.

Longacre distinguishes the 'intent' of any discourse type as related to 'deep structure' (the notional or semantic structure) and the 'form', as related to the 'surface structure'. The primary aims of the different genres are different - **narrative** and **drama** aim at entertaining or informing; **procedural**, at telling how-to-do, or how-it-was-done; **expository** at explaining or describing; and **hortatory** at influencing conduct. He also says that the two structures do not always match up, ex.: a moral lesson which may be presented in the form of a story.

Not all monologue discourses, for Longacre, are of the same sort - there are broad categories and specific ones within each main category. The fairy tale, the novel, the short-story, for

instance, are all a kind of story-telling. There are, nevertheless, similarities between the other types of discourse:

> A first person novel may have much in common with a first person account of an informal sort. First person accounts, newspaper reporting and historiography all make pretentions to factuality. Newspaper reporting imposes a certain demand that the main content be given in the first opening sentences, and that in the rest of the story the details be given in successive sentences and paragraphs. Historiography is very similar in some ways to certain varieties of the novel. Essays and scientific papers share much in common as do sermons and pep talks. Food recepies have something incommon with how-to-do-it booklets, but the former are more stereotyped and restricted in content and application.(1983: 2)

In terms of Speech Act Theory, Longacre says that the purpose (or intent) or the notional structure of any type of discourse can be expressed in terms of performative verbs, so narration employs **I recount** in its notional structure, procedural discourse employs **I prescribe**, expository **I explain**, and hortatory discourse employs **I propose**, i.e., **suggest**, **urge**, **command** (p.12).

Any kind of narrative is a variety of the linguistic structure called 'report'. In the utterance: "I tell you that...", the first segment is the **reporting** clause, which is the statement of what the reporter is doing. The second one is the **reported** clause, which is the message. Narrative discourses are the message, in other words, what is reported. The narrator (the "I" in the discourse), explict or implicit, reports actions or events mainly prior to the reporting act, or in the process of happening. The events themselves,therefore, are in most cases marked by past tense selection. I interpret 'events' as being actions or happenings which are represented as causing a change in state. Chatman (1978:44) says that "an action is a change of state brought about by an agent or one that affects a patient." A **sequence of events** would be a series of different events following each other linearly in time, in a dependent relationship. The 'diagesis' - the telling,then, is the expression of a sequence of events; the way it is organized depends on the teller.

Events exist independently of any narrative presentation. The verbal representation, however, will order these events into narratives. The narrator, fictive or not, is in charge of organizing the sequence in which events will be reported, of giving background information and of keeping the point of the report. There is always a choice and a construction, therefore. The audience expects the narrator to tell something which is interesting and has a reason to be told. It should also be able to make judgements and evaluate what is being reported. If the narrative is complete, the audience is able to sense its completion. Narrative competence allows us to say what will be necessary (and likely) at a certain point in a story to make it complete.

A mere report of events of the kind: 'I got up at seven o'clock this morning, then I had breakfast, then I got dressed and went out to work' does not seem to constitute a complete narrative, since the listener or reader of this report could aks the question 'so what'? or 'Why are you telling me all this?'.

I would like then, to distinguish the terms: 'report' and 'story'. A report is a sequence of dynamic verbs that are temporally and causally related; a 'story',however, can only be abstracted from the whole of a complete textual narrative event, which is a report that has a beginning, a midlle and an end. It is the underlying meaning (the semantic structure) of a series of events (imagined, in the case of fiction, or real, in the case of fact) to which an author puts some kind of surface expression (the events can be represented through visual, verbal, etc., manifestations). This report, or this pattern, should be organized in terms of a situation, a problem, an evaluation of the problem (or of the situation) and a solution (Hoey, 1979, 1983). Labov (1967, 1972) arrives at a structural description of oral narratives of personal experience by categorizating the narrative text as divided into 5 sections, which in fact, are expansions of the situation/problem/solution pattern (these categories answer underlying questions - see Lira, in this volume):

1. abstract - what was this about?
2. orientation - who, when, what, where?
3. complicating action - then what happened?
4. evaluation - so what?
5. result - finally what happened?

Longacre (1976, 1983) also arrives at structural categories of narrative discourse which are in many ways comparable to Labov's, although, unlike Labov, he distinguishes two structures - the notional (the overall purpose of the discourse) and the surface (formal characteristics). For him, the notional structure is **plot**, which encodes confrontation-resolution. The surface structure determines different ways of telling the same plot. This is the same argument of the French structuralists, discussed below. The notion of 'plot' has been intensively discussed and theorized on [see Culler, 1975: 205 to 244]. I will take the position that plot is what the reader is able to summarize as the main events of a story - kernel events in Chatman's terms (1978).

The notional structure is characterized by:

1. exposition - information about time, place, local colour, participants;
2. inciting moment - the planned and predictable is broken up in some manner;
3. developing conflict - the situation intensifies or deteriorates;
4. climax - confrontation is inevitable;
5. denouement - a crucial event happens which makes resolution possible;
6. final suspense - details resolution;
7. conclusion - end of story. (1983:21)

For Longacre, the notional structure correlates with the surface structure. **Titles** and **formulaic aperture** are features of the surface only; **stage** corresponds to **exposition**; **inciting moment** and **developing conflict** in the notional structure encode as surface **episodes**. **Climax** and **denouement** correspond to **peak**. **Final suspense** encodes as one or more **post-peak episodes**. **Conclusion** has special marking in the surface structure **closure**. The formulaic **finis** is a surface feature only, according to Longacre.

A report, therefore, which presents only a problem, but not the solution (or Labov's 2, 3, 5 or Longacre's 2, 3, 4, 5 categories) can not be considered a 'story' in my terms. It will be simply a 'report'.

Newspaper discourse, or the presentation of factual events, for example, is mainly marked by the linguistic pattern of 'report'. Newspaper stories, however, are realized by the problem/solution/ pattern. The problematic event has always a final result. Since the underlying semantic organization can not for me be separated from the surface expression, 'narrative' discourse is the discourse that is a 'report' and constitutes a 'story'.

Most scholars, however, (see Barthes, 1975, Genette, 1980, Todorov, 1977, Labov, 1972, to quote just a few) do not distinguish the two terms since there is the assumption that all stories are narratives. Most authors do not consider that some reports **are not** stories. What they distinguish are the concepts of 'story' and 'discourse'. This dichotomy derived from Aristotle was emphasized first by the Russian Formalists (Tomashevsky, Shlovsky, Tynianov, Vinogrodov, Eichenbaum, Bogotyrev, Brik, between 1915 and 1930) in their description of literary works. The formalists differentiated 'fabula' (fable, tale) "that which has effectively passed" (or the total sum of events to be related in the narrative) from 'sjuzhet' (plot) "the manner by which the reader has gained knowledge" (or the story as actually told by linking the events together (Tomashevsky, 1925, in Lemon and Reis, 1965:68). The French structuralists adopted the basic formalist duality, labelling 'fabula' - story, and 'sjuzhet' - discourse. Scholars like Todorov, Genette and Chatman, however, in their various considerations, never make clear the distinction between 'story' and 'narrative', which on many occasions are used indiscriminately. Terms like 'story and discourse', 'literary versus non-literary narratives', 'narrative structure', 'natural narratives', 'the grammar of stories' are still being discussed and theorised on.

In the 80's, the interaction between reader and text, the communicative process involved when someone reads or listen to a story and the ideological positioning of text-producer and text-

receiver seem to be the main focus of analysis. Most of the studies done in the 60's and early 70's took as a point of departure not the text itself or its ideological implications, but, as Hendricks (1973) observes, a synopsis of the text. Todorov, for example, in his **Grammaire du Décaméron** (1969) says that he is interested more in the synopsis of the stories (deep structures) than in the stories themselves. It seems to me that,by summarizing a narrative discourse, what **readers** tend to do is to emphasize events according to their interpretation of what is important. Narratives can have different levels of generality. Kernel events (events that are essential for the development of a problem-solution pattern) when deleted, destroy the narrative logic, according to Chatman. These events are generelly present in most summaries, but satellite events, the ones that can be deleted without disturbing the logic - "Satellites entail no choice, but are solely the working out of the choices made at the Kernels" (Chatman, ibid.: 54),can be present, transposed to another situation, absent or even turned into kernel depending on the purpose of the reader/writer. Summaries, therefore, can reveal different aspects of the same narrative, since the narrative pattern handles deviation, digressions, flashbacks, flashforwards, etc. Sometimes, the surface level and the temporal linearity of the narrative coincide. In complex cases, however, they do not. But readers apply to the expression "the level of a given code or system of code and subcodes to transform them into the first level of content" (Eco, 1981:15).

If we take, for example,**King Lear** and one of its modern realizations in film,**Ran** by Akiro Kurosawa, we notice that the story, or the main plot (an old man who makes mistakes, suffers the consequences and learns about these mistakes, and his relationship with his family) is present in the modern version. The settings and the existents are different, however: old English times are changed to medieval Japan and the three daughters become three sons. Many of the subplots are also reinterpred by Kurosawa. If we were to summarize the two versions of the same story, perhaps we would arrive at different products.

Readers approach texts with specific purposes (every narrative is uttered in order to serve a precise purpose). Trying to categorize narrative structure through synopses of texts, therefore, does no seem to be a helpful system of analysis, especially now that the relationship between texts and readers should be an aspect to be considered in any analytical framework.

This issue of **Ilha do Desterro** is dedicated to different analyses of narrative discourse. Since 'stories' have the main purpose of displaying experience, this is an ecletic collection like experience itself. I tried to put together both literary and linguistic approaches to the same kind of discourse. We have therefore different interpretations of literary texts: Eden uses insights from structuralist theories to analyse Chaucer, Pessoa de Barros approaches a canonic text by Guimarães Rosa through semiotic perspectives, and Kopschitz analyses an anti-narrative text by Beckett. The linguistic analyses are both of factual and fictional narraties: Lira examines Labovian 'evaluation' in Brazilian oral narratives, Hoey looks at discourse organization in children's telling of jokes, and Darton examines written narratives produced by children and the pedagocial implications for the teaching of organizational features of narrative discourse.

The main purpose of this collection is to try to specify possibilities of textual analysis which may help readers to understand and interpret narrative discourse better. Because the world of stories is infinite, futher research into narrative is still needed. I hope some of the statements here can provoke new ideas and insights.

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Florianópolis - Dezembro de 1987.
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