

considerations on "time" in narrative discourse

Carmen Rosa Caldas *

Narrative is a feature of human experience. Language users develop from a very early age, notions or intuitions about what constitutes a 'story'. Children can understand and produce narrative structures, and through the retelling of their stories, they organise and interpret their world experience and reality, which will then be systematically ordered. Over the last two decades, the study of Narrative, in the field of Linguistics and in Literary Criticism, has developed greatly. French theoreticians, like Barthes, Todorov, Bremond and Genette, to name just a few, have concentrated on narratives in such a way that the term Narratology is now used to describe the analysis of narrative texts. Linguists like Labov, Grimes and Longacre have also been concerned with narratives. The study of spoken, factual and fictional narratives is promising both as a study of language and as a study of human experience.

I am going to adopt here Gerald Prince's suggestion (1980: 50) that a Narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence. I interpret 'events' as being actions or happenings which are represented as causing a change in state. The events must be reported as either having happened or in the process of happening. Chatman (1978:44) says that "an action is a change of state brought about by an agent or one that affects a patient". Van Dijk (1977), discussing the theory of action, says that "CHANGE" is a relation between, or an operation on, possible worlds or states of affairs. It implies a DIFFERENCE between world-states or situations and hence requires a TEMPORAL ORDERING of worlds." (p. 168) For him, changes can be minimal or several events can occur at the same time. A sequence of events would be a

* Mestre em Literatura Inglesa e Professora do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês e Literatura Correspondente - UFSC.

series of different events following each other linearly in time, in a dependent relationship. The story (diagesis — the telling) is the sequence of actions or expression or the way the content is communicated. In fact, events exist independently of any narrative presentation. The verbal representation, however, will order these events into narratives.

A narrative discourse is actor oriented, it is generally in the first or third person, there is a chronological linkage and the time is either past or present. We also assume a teller and a listener (reader). Through the existence of a narrator as locutor, the listener exists as interlocutor (F. Dali, 1980).

A minimum or simple narrative, for Bremond (1973:111,112) is "the string of events arranged in a mere chronological sequence and discussed from an outsider's point of view". He also says that the only criterion of coherence in a simple narrative is that the subject of the actions remains identical and consistent through the sequence of episodes. Labov and Waletzky (1967), in their analysis of oral versions of personal experience also suggest that, in the recapitulation of experience, the sequence of narrative elements relates to the actual sequence of events, in other words, the narrative units match the original temporal sequence of an experience. In a complex narrative, however, the string of events is not arranged in temporal order, there are many points of view and many subjects of actions. The teller or the writer has many options for structuring his information. It is the task of the analyst of written narratives to consider the relationship between a particular story, the discourse that recounts or creates it and the act of narrating.

For Genette (1980) the word narrative has three distinct meanings. It refers to:

"- the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events; - the succession of events, real or fictitious that are the subjects of this discourse, and their several relations of linking, oppositions, repetition, etc...;

- the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating taken in itself." ●
(p. 25-6)

For his analysis of Proust's À La Recherche du Temps Perdu, Genette is interested in the relationships of narrative in its second and third meaning, in other words, in the discourse represents the events told and in the relationship of this discourse and the act that produces it.

The only instrument of examination and therefore, the only one available for textual analysis, is the discourse. For Genette, only the discourse tells the reader about the events of a given story and the activity which gave birth to it.

"Our knowledge of the two (the events and the act of writing) must be indirect, mediated by the narrative discourse...; story and narrating thus exist only by means of the intermediary of narrative." (p. 28)

But he also says that the discourse can only exist if somebody tells a story:

"As narrative, it lives by its relationship to the story that it recounts; as discourse, it lives by its relationship to the narrating that utters it." (p. 29)

Genette adopts and expands the division put forward by Todorov (1966) for the analysis of the structure of narrative (Tense, Mood and Aspect) and arrives at the following basic categories borrowed from the grammar of verbs:

1. Tense - the temporal relations between narrative and story.
2. Mood - forms and degrees of narrative representation, i. e. the different points of view with which life or the action is looked at.
3. Voice - the way in which the narrating is implicated in the narrative, i. e. whether or not there is an explicit narrator and an explicit audience, whether the narrative is reported in the 1st or 3rd person and who tells the story.

Using Genette's classifications as a descriptive framework for the analysis of written narrative we see, that linguistically, distortions of time, different points of view, mimetic and

diagetic oppositions, implicitness or explicitness of narrator, different ways of reporting speech facilitate or complicate the task of the reader in understanding the underlying organisation of the text. Here I will only examine the category of Tense which Genette labels Order, and I will try to demonstrate, using examples from simple and complex narratives, my assertion that temporal linearity is one of the elements that simplify a narrative, and that distortions in the presentation of time sequence contribute to complexity in the organisation of a text.

Order ~ Narrative Time

We assume that there is a temporal order in narrative texts, unless the author, for particular effects, sabotages time. There is the time of the story and there is the narrative time, which is the time spent on reading the text. For Genette,

"the text exists in space and as space, and the time needed for consuming it is the time needed for crossing or transversing it. It has no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically from its own reading." (p. 34)

The time of the story, however, can be reported in various complex ways, according to the intentions of the writer. Seconds in the story time can be represented in many pages, and years in just a sentence or paragraph. It is the writer's choice to emphasize particular events, expanding them or not according to their significance to the story. I will concentrate here on the relationship between the chronology of events of the story, i.e. the underlying temporal order, and the surface sequence in which the events are recounted in the narrative discourse.

Genette calls the discordance between the narrative sequence and the temporal order anachrony. He says that:

"pinpointing and measuring the narrative's anachronies implicitly assumes the existence of a kind of zero degree that would be a condition of perfect temporal correspondence between story and narrative." (p. 36)

This reference point is the concurrence between diegetic sequence and narrative sequence. The zero degree is the

starting point in the developing narrative against which distortions of time are measured. But he also says that this point is more hypothetical than real. An initial task of the task of the analyst, therefore, is to determine the temporal order and the narrative sequence so that he sees the way the narrative has been constructed.

In many children's stories, the narrative sequence and the temporal order coincide, as in the extract from Mr Mean (1972) below:

"One day, Mr Mean was sitting in his gloomy kitchen having a gloomy meal. Suddenly he was interrupted by a knock at the door. He opened the door, and there, on his doorstep, stood a wizard.
'Hello', said the wizard, 'I wonder if... it's not too much to ask for a glass of water, please?'
'NO', replied Mr Mean rudely, and shut the door in his face. And went back into his kitchen to finish his meagre meal."

The starting point of the narrative is the one day on which the cluster of events will happen. The surface presentation of these events, which are narrated chronologically one after the other, matches the underlying temporal order. The relationship between the events in the story and the narrative can be represented therefore as: (following Genette)

A-1 B-2 C-3 D-4 E-5 F-6

labelling sequential narrative events alphabetically and sequential temporal events numerically. This implies, perhaps, (that authors assume) that children understand the story more easily if the presented sequence of appearance in the narrative matches the temporal order. This point can be confirmed by the work of Wilkinson (1980) on narrative structure in children's writings. He suggests that the matching of narrative sequence to events in time is a common feature in children's writings. He collected examples of personal writings produced by children of primary school age and he comments that the intention of the children's narratives was to recount a sequence of events in the order in which they happened. It seems that productively,

it is easier for children to report events as they happen. Receptively, it also seems that children understand more easily a story which presents events happening one after the other in a linear sequence of time. Wilkinson (ibid. 66) quotes the research done by McClure, Mason and Barnitz (1979) into the strategies children use in understanding written narratives. They discovered that children find it easier to order stories that present a matching relationship between narrative and events in time. Children were given the task of ordering two versions of the same story. Wilkinson (ibid. 66) transcribes the following example:

1st or setting version: (surface text features parallel story grammar structure)

"Joan took a seven day trip with her family. Her little dog got lost on the trip. A month passed. Then, one day, a scratching noise was heard at the door. There was the dog. He had walked 700 miles to return home."

2nd or conclusion version: (final sentence of the setting version now initiates the story - reorder of surface structure sequence of events.)

"Joan's little dog walked 700 miles to return home. He had gotten lost on a seven trip. Poor Joan could not forget about him, even when she came home. A month passed. Then, one day, a scratching noise was heard at the door. There was the dog." (McClure, Mason, Barnitz, ibid. 245)

According to the researchers, the ordering of the first version was easier for the children than the ordering of the second one. (I must say that the criteria used for the reordering of the second version seems very strange. Information is suppressed - 'the family', and added - 'poor Joan could not forget about him, even when she came home', verb forms are modified, and of course the presentation of events is played with.) They argued that the reason why children found the setting version easier was that in this version the first sentence matched the first event in the time sequence of the story, while in the conclusion

version, events were not presented in a time sequence. If McClure, Mason and Barnitz's and Wilkinson's findings were to be generalized, in children's experience of the world, there might be a matching relationship between the events in reality and their temporal ordering, and probably their concept of time is linear. Simple narratives, in Bremond's terms, then, are easier to be manipulated and assimilated by children. Adults, when producing oral narrative, also tend to report events as they happen. According to Labov and Waletzky (1967) one of the two basic elements identified in the recapitulation of personal experience is the referential, in other words, adults construct narratives which match the original temporal sequence of the experience. This matching relationship, however, is rarely found in adult written narratives, where story time and discourse time are almost invariably discordant.

Jorge Luis Borges, makes explicit to the reader this discordance, in one of his short stories, The Congress (1973: 23) when his narrator states in the 7th page:

"I feel that now, and only now, my story begins. The preceding pages have set down no more than the conditions that chance or fate required, so that the unbelievable event - perhaps the single event of my whole life - might take place."

In many texts, not even temporal indicators are explicit, and the reader has to supply them himself in order to derive the underlying organisation of text.

The narrator of Lawrence Durrell's Justine writes:

"At night when the wind roars and the child sleeps quietly in its wooden cot by the echoing chimney-piece I light a lamp and walk about, thinking of my friends - of Justine and Nessim, of Melissa and Balthazar. I return link by link along the iron chains of memory to the city which we inhabited so briefly together: the city which used us as its flora - precipitated in us conflicts which were hers and which we mistook for our own: beloved Alexandria. I have had to come so far away from it in order to understand it all." P. 11)

If we enumerate the sections according to their change in

position in story time, we will have:

section A - from at night to chains of memory to the city. Here, the temporal position would be now (1). The discourse markers are the verbs in the present (roars, sleeps, light, walk).

section B - from which we inhabited to beloved Alexandria. The temporal position would be the distant past (3). The verb forms are in the past simple. The past is predicted by the items - return, memory, of section A.

section C - from I have had to understand it all. The time is somewhere between now and once (2). The I have had to come implies a time after the living in Alexandria and before the actual present of the report. We have then, 3 layers of time and the relationship between the surface narrative and the story is:

A-1 B-3 C-2

The temporal order, thus, is not presented linearly; section B is retrospective and subordinated to section A. This extract exemplifies the discordance between story time and discourse presentation.

Returning to Genette's categories, I would like now to refer to his more delicate subdivisions of temporal distortion. He says that there are several possible temporal relationships: "subjective and objective retrospections, subjective and objective anticipations and simple returns to each of these positions" (Genette, *ibid.* p. 79). Analepsis is the evocation of an event that happened before the point the reader has reached in the story. It supplies information which has been omitted for structural reasons. Prolepsis is the evocation in advance of an event that will take place later in the story. By anticipating an event that will be told in full later on, a prolepsis provokes expectation. Anachronies are subordinated to a main or 'first' narrative, which can be embedded very complexly in some cases.

One Hundred Years of Solitude (1972) (OHYS from now on) by

Gabriel Garcia Marquez (*) is a good example of the exploiting of the anachronic technique. The complex treatment of time and the excavation of a given area of place time in layers recalls the events in the order in which they first become significant and in long analepses or prolepses, they are recreated. In texts like Marquez' or Proust's, as Genette has demonstrated with his analysis, it is extremely difficult to discover the underlying temporal order. The narrative strategies used by the authors will determine the complexity of the text in terms

(*) OHYS was first published in Argentina in 1967. Garcia Marquez, its Colombian author, is nowadays considered one of the most important contemporary Latin-American writers. OHYS has been internationally recognized as a masterpiece of the art of fiction for its complex and innovative narrative techniques and for its fascinating plot - the complete story of the fictional town of Macondo from its founding, the saga of its founders José Arcadio and Ursula Buendia and their offspring up to the 7th generation, to its complete destruction over a century later. Mário Vargas Lhosa (1972), another famous Latin-American writer and critic, writes about Garcia Marquez (my translation from the original in Spanish):

"OHYS narrates a world in its two dimensions: the vertical (the time of its story) and the horizontal (the planes of reality). In strictly numerical terms, the whole of this undertaking was utopic: the genius of the author lies in the fact that he found an axis or nucleus of dimensions contained within a narrative structure. The axis is a family, the institution which is halfway between the individual and the community. In the same way that the life of a body is refracted through its heart, so the entire story of Macondo is refracted through its own vital organ which is the genealogy of the Buendia family: both entities are born, blossom and die together, with their fates woven in all stages of a common history. OHYS is a total novel for its content, since it describes a closed world, from its birth to its death and all the parts that constitute it - the individual and the collective, the legendary and the historical, the ordinary and the mythical, and for its form, since its structure is characterized by an exclusive, inimitable and self-sufficient nature." (480/496)

of order and I assume that because the concept of linear time is distorted in the presentation, the text becomes challenging or more difficult for the reader.

I would like now to exemplify the way García Márquez deals with "Time" in order to demonstrate the complexity of his narrative. Only the text of the first chapter of the book will be referred to, since our scope here is a limited one.

Summary of the first chapter:

Macondo is presented as a small patriarchal, socialist and primitive community, founded by José Arcadio Buendía and 21 friends. At the beginning of the book, 300 people live in the village. Its people are hard-working and happy. Nobody has died up to that point and the oldest person is 30 years old. Isolated from the rest of the world, only the arrival of the gypsies puts the people of the village in contact with the outside, especially with foreign discoveries. The innovations brought by the gypsies cause admiration and surprise. For José Arcadio Buendía, the influence of the gypsies changes his life. At the beginning, he was a social and extroverted person who led a practical life, being the head of the community. After the contact with the gypsies, however, more particularly with the wise alchemist Melquiades, he becomes introverted, he lives locked in the house, devoting his time to his fantasy and imagination. By the end of the first chapter, the Buendía family consists of a father, José Arcadio, a mother, Ursula, active and hard working, and their two sons, José Arcadio, an adolescent, and Aureliano, still a child.

The events are not introduced sequentially in time and the chronological order is totally distorted. If we examine the first sentences of the first paragraph:

"Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." (p. 11)

the indefiniteness of time is immediately felt. 'Many years

later' than what? when did Colonel Aureliano Buendia face the firing squad? when was 'that distant afternoon'? are the questions that come to the readers' mind. From this opening sentence, where the layers of indefinite time are created, the whole narrative will be structured. The reader is projected from an indefinite future to an also indefinite past. Naturally, this future is only a future within the contained time of the narrative. From the title of the book, One Hundred Years of Solitude, we predict that the narrative will cover 100 past years. The narrator, exterior to the narrative, only refers to past events. He has the absolute omniscient memory, knowing not only about the past, but also about the future of this past. The time of the narrated, therefore, is a closed one with a beginning and an end, and the narrator has the power to manipulate the sequence at any time.

Reichenbach's description (1952) of tenses is a useful tool here to explain the complexity of the first sentence. He proposes three points in time:

- E - point of Event
- R - point of Reference
- S - point of Speech

He says that "the tenses determine time with reference to the time point of the act of speech" (p. 288). He arrives at 9 fundamental forms, suggesting the following terminology: "the position of R relative to S is indicated by the words 'past', 'present', and 'future'. The position of E relative to R is indicated by the words 'anterior', 'simple', and 'posterior', the word simple being used for the coincidence of R and E.

<u>Structure</u>	<u>New Name</u>	<u>Traditional Name</u>
E- R- S	Anterior Past	Past Perfect
E. R- S	Simple Past	Simple Past
R- E- S		
R- S, E	Posterior Past	
R- S- E		
E- S, R	Anterior Present	Present Perfect
S, R, E	Simple Present	Present
S, R- E	Posterior Present	Simple Future
S- E- R		
S, E- R	Anterior Future	Future Perfect
E- S- R		
S- R, E	Simple Future	Simple Future
S- R- E	Posterior Future	-

He also suggests that when a time determination is added (now, yesterday, etc.) it refers not to the event, but to the reference point of the sentence, and the reference point is used as the carrier of the time position.

In OHYS's opening sentence, we find the following structure:

Many years later	- Colonel A was to remember)	
(that)	- as he faced the firing squad)simulta-)neous)
<u>that distant afternoon</u>		
REFERENCE POINT	- when his father took him to discover ice	R-E-S shift from posterior to simple past E, R-S

The complexity of the sentence arises from:

1. The timing of the mental event (the remembering) is dependent on that of the focal event (the discovery of ice), from which the narrative will develop.
2. The initial position of the anaphoric 'many years later': it is referring forwards to something that has not been stated.

The imprecision is solved by the first verb form 'was to remember', which conceives the event point (his supposed death) at the time R (reference point) not yet realised but destined to happen. We know now, that although E1 (the remembering) is presented first, it is posterior in story time to E2 (the discovery of ice).

3. The omission of preceding text for "later", which should refer to something already stated. Here, nothing has been stated.
4. The vagueness of 'that distant afternoon'. We expect 'many years later' to refer to a specific point in time. However, it refers to another indefinite time. 'Many years later' is external to the proposition being made, 'that distant afternoon' is cataphoric, 'when' fulfills the cataphora, but all of them are imprecise.
5. The simultaneous presentation of the discourse markers 'later' (which projects the narrative forward, anticipating an event that will occur later on and causing expectation) and 'that distant afternoon' (which projects the narrative backwards).
6. The shift from posterior to past simple.

Furthermore, the reader is confused at the beginning of the novel, because he/she is put in the middle of an on-going narrative and has to decide when the narrative time and the story time coincide (the zero degree). In this first chapter, like in most important episodes, there is a strict and symmetrical structure — the narrative starts with one main event, jumps backwards and forwards in time and with the same first event. Like a circle, it finishes where it starts and starts where it finishes.

Garcia Marquez uses anachronies extensively in order to manipulate his narrative and apparently to disorient the reader. In chapter one of OHYS, there are 11 clusters of linear events (episodes) intertwined by 15 analepses, marked in the narrative discourse by the lexical items 'remember', 'memory', and by

the time structure E, R- S or E- R- S and by 5 prolepses, marked by later or the R- E- S structure. By deliberately alternating the linear temporal order of events with retrospection and anticipations, the narrative is decelerated. Apparently a similar method of narration is used in the book within the book:

"Melquiades (the gypsy who writes about Macondo and the Buendia family) had not put events in the order of man's conventional time, but had concentrated a century of daily episodes in such a way that they coexisted in one instant."
(p. 332)

So here we have the author explicitly referring to the structure of his book. It is the task of the reader, thus, to put the pieces together in order to understand the way text is organised.

The use of inexact time referents also gives the narrative a sense of atemporality or of dissolution of time. In the first chapter, for example, there are 17 occurrences of the word 'time'. Twelve occurrences are anaphoric references to an indefinite time: (some examples)

1. "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. At that time, Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses" (p. 11).
2. "In March (the reader does not know which one), the gypsies returned. This time, they brought a telescope and a magnifying glass the size of a drum..." (p. 12)
3. "When the gypsies came back (the reader does not know when), Ursula had turned the whole population of the village against them. But curiosity was greater than fear, for that time the gypsies went about the town making a deafening noise..." (p. 17)

We know, however, from our assumptions of the world that all stories have a time sequence, and that although G.G. Marquez tries to challenge or confuse the reader by his use of the

anachronical technique, linear temporality is the crucial element of OHYS. As I said before, the story has a beginning, a middle and an end. It could perhaps have been written linearly, but would it be as interesting as it is?

What I have tried to demonstrate is that one of the elements that contributes to the simplicity or complexity of a narrative is the relationship between story time and narrative time. In children's stories, the time of the narrated and the time of the narrative generally coincide. The underlying temporal organisation of the text is easily perceived. In literary texts, however, the writer generally plays with the temporal sequence of events for stylistic purposes. In G. Marquez's OHYS, the distortion of order is one of his major narrative techniques. The complexity of this treatment of time blurs the underlying organisation of the text, and the reader can either be challenged and enjoy this complexity or be confused and dislike it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Professor John Sinclair, Mike Hoey, Malcolm Coulthard and Martin Phillips for useful comments on previous drafts of this paper.

Birmingham, 1981

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BARTHES, R. "From work to text" in Textual strategies Perspective in Post Structuralist Criticism, Horori, J. (ed.), p. 73/81, Methuen & Co. Ltd., Cornell University, 1979.
- BORGES, J. L. The Book of the Land, Penguin Books, 1979.
- BREMOND, C. La Logique du Récit, Edition du Seuil, Paris, 1973.

- CHATMAN, S. Story and Discourse, Cornell University, Ithaca/
London, 1978.
- COULTHARD, R.M. Introduction to Discourse Analysis, Longman,
1977.
- DALI, F. Discourse Analysis: Direct Speech Presentation
and Point of View Modulation in the Narrative,
Ph.D. thesis. Universite de Tunis, 1980.
- DURRELL, L. Justine, Faber and Faber, London, 1979.
- FERNANDEZ-
BRASO, M. La Soledad de G.G. Marquez, Biblioteca Universal
Planeta Barcelone, 1972.
- GENETTE, G. Narrative Discourse, B Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.
- GREIMAS, A.J. "Narrative Grammar: Units and Levels", in
Modern Language Notes, 86, p. 793-806, 1971.
- GRIMES, J.E. "Narrative Studies in Oral Texts" in Current
Trends in Text Linguistics, Dressler, W. De
Gruyter, W. (eds.) Berlin, 1977.
- HARGREAVES, R. Mr Mean, London, 1972.
- LABOV, W. "The transformation of experience in narrative
syntax", in Language in the Inner City, B.
Blackwell, Oxford, p. 354-396, 1972.
- LABOV, W. &
WALETZKY, J. "Narrative Analysis: Oral versions of personal
experience", in Essays on the Verbal and Visual
Arts, Helm, J. (ed.), University of Washington
Press, p. 12-44, 1967.
- LHOSA, M.V. Garcia Marquez: Historie de um Deicidid, Barral
Editores, Barcelone, 1971.
- LODGE, D.J. "Analysis and Interpretation of the Realistic
Text - a pluralistic approach to Hemingway's "A
Cat in the Rain", in Poetics Today, Narratology
II, V. 1, n° 4, 1980.
- "Form in Fiction - A Guide to Analytical methods
and Terminology", unpub. mimeo, University of
Birmingham, 1980.

- LONGACRE, R.E. "Narrative versus other Discourse Genre", in Advances in Tagmemics, Brend, Ruth (ed.), North Holland, Amsterdam, 1974.
- LUDMER, J. Cien Anos de Soledad: una interpretation - Editorial Tiempo Contemporaneo, Argentina, 1972.
- MARQUEZ, G.Garcia One Hundred Years of Solitude, Quon Books, 1972.
- McCLURE, E.,
MASON, J. &
BARNITZ, J. "An exploratory study of story structure and age effects on children's ability to sequence stories", in Discourse Processes, vol. 2, p. 213/249, 1979.
- PRINCE, G. "Aspects of a grammar of narrative" in Poetics Today, Narratology: Poetics of Fiction - 1:3, Spring 1980.
- REINCHENBACH, H. Elements of Symbolic Logic, Maemillan, New York, 1952.
- SINCLAIR, J.M. "Planes of Discourse in Literature", unpub. mimeo, University of Birmingham, 1981.
- SULEIMAN, S.R.
& CROSMAN, I. The Reader in the Text, Princeton University press, 1980.
- WEBB, V. Personal Narrative as Experimental Organisation: A Linguistic Study with Philosophical Implications, M. A. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1979.
- WILKINSON, J. A piranha in the sewers: a narrative structure in children's writing and its implication for primary education, M. A. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1980.