

CAUSALITY IN LANGUAGE AND IN DISCOURSE*

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1. Introduction and Background

Studies of the principles underlying textual organization in narrative and non-narrative texts abound.¹ A variety of proposals have been made concerning coherence, hierarchical and thematic structure, centrality of events, degrees of narrativity and temporality, inter alia. Temporality has, in fact, been acknowledged as the most important organizational factor in narrative texts (cf. Labov 1972) and interesting suggestions have been made at explaining why this should be the case.² Among the attempts at unravelling the governing principles of textual organization we may find several which accord a significant status to the role of causality at both the local and global discourse levels. Causality has, thus, been claimed to serve as an organizing principle in narrative comprehension, summary and recall and attempts were made at explaining this state of affairs. (cf. Rumelhart 1975, Shen 1990 and Giora and Shen (ms.) inter alia.) The suggestion was made that properties associated with the causal organization, in fact, follow from a more general organizing principle in terms of Figure and Ground.³ In the present paper I will argue for the primacy of causality in certain linguistic and discourse domains. The significance of Causality in our cognitive apparatus in general and in the process of interpretation and in the linguistic module in particular, alongside its conceptual non-derivability, seem to advocate a position whereby it would be regarded as a *basic* organizing principle in our theory of narrative structure as well.