

Narrative Modalities*

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Many academics keep busy by erecting artificial barriers between linguistics and literary theory; on the other hand, from the time of antiquity, various intermediary disciplines (such as rhetoric, poetics, stylistics) have achieved considerable success in bridging the gap between the two semiotic disciplines. At present, a new and vigorous “mediator” has made its appearance; it is called *text theory* (or discourse analysis). Text theory is especially suited for its mediating role, because it pursues a twofold aim: not unlike linguistics, it aims at formulating abstract rules of text structures (rules of text grammar and text typology); at the same time, it reveals idiosyncratic features of individual texts which is in line with one of the basic aims of literary analysis.

Text theory would fail in its mediating role, if it were conceived as a mere application or extension of current linguistic models. The autonomy of text theory can be justified only if *specific* text properties, i. e. properties distinguishing text structures from language structures, are posited as its explicandum. It is now widely acknowledged that one of these properties is *text coherence*. Already Harris (1952: 3) pointed out that texts are not aggregates of “stray words or sentences”, but rather coherent verbal structures. In his recent contributions to text theory, van Dijk (1972; 1973) proposes a text grammar which accounts for text coherence on two levels: “The constraints upon the concatenation of sentences in a coherent sequence are of two different types. A first set determines the immediate, linear transition relations between the sentences. . . . We will call these constraints microstructural constraints or *micro-constraints*. Our hypothesis about the form of a text grammar, however, is much stronger. We claim that the coherence of sequences is also determined by what may be called *macro-constraints*. These have the whole sequence as their scope” (van Dijk, 1973: 20). Van Dijk has also observed that micro-constraints are, at least in part, identical with the rules which govern the relationship between phrases or clauses in complex and compound sentences; in other words, these textual micro-constraints are identical with those studied by linguistics (syntax)¹. The textual macro-constraints, however, have no counterpart in language structures and, therefore, their study belongs exclusively to text theory. We can say that the study of macro-constraints or macro-structures represents the core of text theory. Final justification and future development of this discipline depends on the success of our search for textual macro-structures.

This search is well advanced in the theory of narrative texts. It has been recognized that some of the basic components of narrative texts – such as the story (“*récit*”, the acting characters, etc. – are to be conceived of as textual macro-structures. In the last decade, major progress has been made especially in the study of the global organization of the story; various systems of “narrative grammar” have been proposed to account for the macro-structural story coherence.

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