The Semiolinguistic Theory of Narrative Structures

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[Note: the author did not have the opportunity to proof the text before publication.]

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I would like to begin by commenting on the title of my presentation. Note that I have not titled it simply "Theory of Narrative Structures." My title implies that I will deal with one particular theory, namely a "semiolinguistic" one. The term *semiolinguistics* is one in widespread usage; hence it is a term in obvious need of explication. This can be best accomplished, I believe, by a discussion of one of the major differences between my conception of narrative and that of other researchers.

First, however, it will be helpful if I briefly indicate some of the features my approach shares with a number of current approaches. The semiolinguistic theory of narrative belongs to what is sometimes very loosely referred to as the "Structuralist" or "Neo-Formalist" school. No school is ever homogeneous, and the Structuralist school is no exception. However, all of the "charter members" have this in common: they were stimulated by the pioneering work of Vladimir Propp on the structure of the Russian tale. Propp published his work, in Russian, in 1928. However, his work did not become widely known until after its translation into English in 1958 (2nd ed., 1968). This translation had the greatest immediate impact in France, where a number of scholars published some key articles in the mid 1960s devoted to proposals for refining and generalizing Propp's approach. These included Lévi-Strauss (1960), and issues 4 and 8 of the journal *Communications* containing articles by Bremond, Greimas, Barthes, Todorov, and others.

My own interest in narrative analysis was likewise stimulated by the first English edition of Propp's work. I independently came across the *Morphology of the Folktale* in late 1963, when I was beginning work on my doctoral dissertation (Hendricks 1965). As I will shortly point out, some of the features of what I now term the semiolinguistic theory of narrative can be traced back to the dissertation. However, there have been a number of influences on my work in the past decade, including the work of the French scholars just cited. Part of my conception of narrative structure is, in fact, a synthesis of aspects of their work. (See especially Hendricks 1975.)

My attempts at synthesis extend beyond the framework of the structuralist approach. I have also attempted to integrate aspects of the traditional literary theory of narrative, which extends back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. The structuralist approach is sometimes seen as antithetical to the literary approach. However, I think it fair to say that most scholars in the structuralist framework pursue their work without serious reference to the literary tradition. Their direct inspiration, as I have noted, was Propp; and Propp was a folklorist who was in ultimate pursuit of

^ linguistic structure of the sentences that constitute ^ the narrative text. Note that

goals intrinsic to the discipline of folklorists. Folklorists are just as eager as literary scholars to maintain the separateness of their discipline. Both would assert that folklorists study folklore, critics study literature; and never the twain shall meet.

Many of the scholars stimulated by Propp were not themselves folklorists, but neither were they literary critics. While they talked about generalizing Propp's method, many of them still retained the assumption that the narrative objects most amenable to their approach were somehow simpler, less complex structures than those of primary interest to the literary critic. (Such an assumption is present in Todorov 1969; see the discussion in Hendricks 1973: 149ff.)

It is my belief that folklorists and literary scholars study essentially the same phenomena, and that the distinctions they draw mask underlying similarities that are more important than the differences. The important similarities exist at the level of compositional principles; these principles can be exemplified in both oral and written narratives, in putatively "simple" as well as "complex" structures; and so on. I have argued this point at length elsewhere (Hendricks 1973), and I do not want to go over these points here. It is true that this is one respect in which my semiolinguistic conception of narrative differs from most other approaches; but it is not a difference which in itself can best exemplify the essence of what I mean by a "semiolinguistic approach." However, it can provide a point of departure for this discussion.

Although there may be disputes about the ultimate structural identity of the works investigated by structural folklorists and literary critics, a fact which is usually overlooked is that both groups share some fundamental assumptions or tenets that guide their practical analyses of narrative discourse. I will focus here on one, which will be of major importance for the balance of our discussion. I will try to phrase this tenet in its most acceptable form – a form I can largely accept.

All approaches to narrative analysis proceed on the assumption that narrative structure "underlies" the narrative text, in the sense that narrative structure is distinct from the linguistic means whereby the story is presented to its readers/listeners. In short, narrative structure is not to be confused with the ^ linguists talk of "deep" semantic structures underlying the surface structures of ^ sentences; but the linguist's underlying structure is distinct from the narrative structure which is said to underlie the text.

This tenet is implicit in the criticism the Neo-Aristotelian school of critics made against the *'verbal'* "vernal" analyses of the New Critics. The Neo-Aristotelian Elder Olson, for instance, has argued that "the profundity ... in poetry which so much interests Empson is due primarily to action and character, which cannot be handled in grammatical terms, rather than to diction, which can" (Olson 1952: 59). Essentially the same sentiment is expressed by Propp, in the context of his enumeration of the areas in which the storyteller is not constrained. Propp states: "The storyteller is free in his choice of linguistic means. This highly rich area is not subject to the morphologist's study. The *style* of a tale is a phenomenon which must be studied separately" (1968: 113). Likewise, Lévi-Strauss, in an article he wrote before becoming familiar with Propp's work, says of myth that "Its substance does not lie in its style, ... or its syntax, but in the *story* which it tells" (1955: 431).

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It would be easy to cite other passages from analysts in the Proppian tradition, e.g., Todorov (1969: 16); Greimas (1971: 794), and so on.

My own analytic work with narrative has confirmed that there is a highly indirect relation between the basic units of plot and the constituent sentences of the narrative text. Let me cite one brief example. The basic unit of plot in my approach is called the "narrative proposition"; in form it corresponds to the proposition of modern symbolic logic. For example, one of the units that constitute the representation of the plot structure of William Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily" is the following:

$$c(PR, E)$$

This proposition consists of the function c, which stands for a relationship of confrontation. Entering into this relation are the "dramatis personae" symbolized by PR and E; these units are classes of characters (one class, E, having only one member, Emily Grierson). The classification and their semantic characterization constitute the analysis of character. I cannot go into more detail here about this representation of narrative structure. (See Hendricks 1976a; 1976b.) What I want to emphasize here is the disparity between this single unit and the sentences of the narrative text. The narrative proposition can be verbalized as follows: "Members of the present generation directly confront Miss Emily." Although the narrative unit can be expressed as a sentence in English, such a sentence does not actually occur in the story. Narrative propositions are distinct from sentences of the text. However, it is possible to correlate this, or any other narrative proposition, with a portion of the text. The proposition cited above may be said to represent the portion of the text of "A Rose for Emily" that begins about in the middle of Section I of the story (as delineated by Faulkner), namely, the paragraph beginning "They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed ...." The relevant portion of the text continues through the end of Section I, thus comprising a number of paragraphs covering a page and a half of printed text.

The case for a distinction between narrative structure and the sentences of the text is strengthened by the fact that the relation between the two varies considerably within one and the same story. For example, the narrative proposition that follows the one just cited in the representation of the plot structure of the story is:

$$r(E, PR)$$

It may be verbalized: "Emily repulsed the present generation." This narrative proposition corresponds to less than a sentence in the text —part of the sentence that opens Section II of the story. I could cite other evidence for the indirect relation between units of narrative structure and sentences (and paragraphs and sections) of the narrative text, if space permitted.

Up until now I have stressed the similarities between my conception of narrative and that of other researchers. Now, however, I want to begin emphasizing how my approach differs; and why it is characterized as a "semiolinguistic" theory. The basis for this discussion, as I have indicated, will be the shared conviction that a distinction must be made between the units ^ of the narrative text. Other investigators use the undisputed fact of a "gap" between narrative structure and the

^ of narrative structure and the units

language of the text as the warrant to totally bypass the narrative text in their analysis and theorizing. Thus, we find Todorov explicitly stating that his point of departure is not the narrative text itself, but a paraphrase or synopsis (1969: 16). Lévi-Strauss has said, in effect, the same thing much earlier (1955: 432). (Basing analysis on a synopsis may also be said to be Propp's implicit procedure; see Propp 1968: 113.) No attention is paid as to how the synopsis is obtained, it being assumed that the operation is totally self-evident and not requiring any special attention. In other words, no attempt is made to correlate narrative structures with linguistic structures.

Although the relation between the two is highly indirect, an indirect relationship is nevertheless a relationship; and correlations, as I have informally demonstrated, can be established. This type of analysis, furthermore, is totally distinct from an analysis of style or of the "poetic"/rhetorical features of a text. The assertion that the study of the sentences that constitute a narrative text is a matter of stylistics is based on the demonstrable error that every aspect of sentence structure is a matter of style. (I am using the term *style* in the precise sense, a differential manner of linguistic expression.) As I have shown elsewhere, even some stylisticians have confused stylistic features with linguistic correlates of narrative techniques and devices (see Hendricks 1976).

From the beginning of my work on narrative, I have been concerned with the problem of the relation between the language of the narrative text and the narrative structure which "underlies" it. This was, by necessity, a major theme of my dissertation, which I wrote for a degree in linguistics. At that time I formulated the goal of bridging the gap between language and narrative structure by means of a loose adaptation of selected aspects of Zellig Harris' method of discourse analysis (see Harris 1963). The task of bridging the gap was thus approached in terms of a set of operations for processing the narrative text so as to achieve a representation of narrative structure. Only a very limited success was achieved. In any case, it is clear to me now that a set of procedures for processing a text cannot take the place of a theory or hypothesis concerning the nature of the relation between sentences of the text and the narrative structure.

One may well wonder why it is so important to establish the nature of this relationship. An answer would be that only this type of investigation can lead to the resolution of a paradox: plot and character seem to transcend language, yet it is only through language that we have access to the "world" of the narrative (cf. Sayce 1957: 120). However, this answer would not satisfy everyone, for not all researchers would agree that such a paradox exists. Consider in this respect the following remarks by the American folklorist Alan Dundes, who has been influenced by Propp: "Of course, it is extremely interesting to study both the folkloristic (e.g. narrative) *and* the linguistic structural aspects of text.... However, it is important to remember that folklore structure can be analyzed *without* reference to a particular language" (Dundes 1964: 49).

Dundes' remarks imply a position that goes well beyond the claim that narrative units have only an indirect relationship to the syntactic units of the narrative text. It is the claim of autonomy of narrative structure with respect to linguistic structure; this amounts to a claim that narrative structure is "a-linguistic." Given such a claim, it is clear that narrative offers no paradox.

A number of narrative analysts in the Proppian tradition confuse the claim that narrative structure is autonomous with the claim that the relation between narrative

and linguistic structure is indirect. Some of the evidence they cite in support of the ~~latter~~ actually pertains to the ~~former~~ claim. Let us review some of this evidence.

We will begin with Dundes' claim that narrative structure can be analyzed without reference to a particular language. Dundes has in mind the fact that the "same" folktale, from the perspective of its underlying structure, can be found in cultures speaking different languages. Alternatively, it is noted that a given item of folklore can be translated into another language without undergoing any change in its "folkloristic" structure, whereas the language itself will change. This does not, to my thinking, demonstrate autonomy of narrative structure. After all, single isolated sentences can be translated into different languages. Does this show the autonomy of linguistic structure with respect to different languages? Actually, it is not always that easy to translate a sentence into another language; and the problems are compounded when sequences of sentences comprising a text are involved.

Another argument for the autonomy of narrative structure is the "fact" that one and the same narrative structure can be manifested verbally as a story or novel; visually as a movie or painting; kinetically as a ballet; etc. So far as I know, people have only asserted this as a possibility —no one has actually demonstrated it. My feeling is that any attempt to demonstrate this "a-linguistic" status of narrative structure would have to specify the narrative structure in an exceedingly gross way. We are all painfully aware of what typically happens when a favorite novel of ours is made into a movie.

If we reject the claim that narrative structure is autonomous with respect to linguistic structure, then it seems to me that we are committed to the claim that narrative structure is ultimately "linguistic" in some sense. Before trying to clarify in what sense narrative structure can be linguistic, without denying the indisputable fact that a disparity exists between units of narrative structure and linguistic units of the textual surface, I want to point out some of the problems that are posed by the claim that narrative structure is a-linguistic. They are such that I think they leave us no choice but to grapple with the problem of specifying the linguistic nature of narrative structure.

First, a theoretical problem is posed for those structuralists who claim to pursue a "linguistic" approach to the analysis of narrative, that is, those who claim to offer a "grammar" of the narrative in the strict, non-metaphoric sense. (If an analyst uses the notion of "grammar" in a loose, metaphoric sense, then he is excluded from the rigor to be derived from the advanced state of linguistic science.) Greimas, to cite one instance, claims to present a narrative grammar; but he also asserts that "narrative structures enjoy a certain autonomy with regard to linguistic structures and are not to be confused with them" (1971: 794). Greimas does refer to narrative structures being realized "by languages other than the natural languages (in cinema, dreams, etc.).. (793). However, linguists have developed strict criteria for distinguishing language from non-language. Dreams, cinema, etc., insofar as they exist independently of a natural language, are not themselves "languages," save in an extremely loose sense of the term. Of course, one could claim that narrative structure is in some way similar or comparable to linguistic structure. If so, then one is obliged to make these similarities explicit. Then the question may arise whether such similarities are not, in fact, identitites.

I should note that this theoretical problem does not exist for Propp (and some of the post-Proppians). He did not adopt a linguistic methodology. Of course, it is up to scholars who attempt to refine Propp's work to specify the exact nature of the structures he uncovered —we cannot be content simply to label them "folkloristic" structures, with the implication being that they are sui generis. It seems to me that the nature of narrative structure cannot be fully understood without an understanding of the relationship between narrative structure and the narrative text.

Some additional problems posed by the a-linguistic conception of narrative structure can be thrown into relief by pursuing some of the implications of the Neo-Aristotelian critic's insistence on the non-linguistic status of narrative. His conception of narrative implies a total transparency of the linguistic means; or, more strongly, a claim that the linguistic medium fades into the background and becomes in effect non-existent. I am sure all of us have experienced this seeming disappearance of the medium, once we have become caught up in the unfolding of the narration. The discrete series of words and sentences of the text give way to a sort of image, or series of images. Note that some definitions of the narrative stress that it evokes, or represents, a chronological series of events constituting one unified action.

This conception of narrative lends itself to a confusion of narrative and "reality," the realm of physical events-in-themselves. What we see in the "mind's eye," by means of the narrative, is assimilated to our experience of perceiving reality first-hand. However, no one analyzing narrative wants to claim to be dealing with events-in-themselves. But if one clings to an a-linguistic conception of narrative, the only alternative would seem to be an assimilation of verbal narration to a type of iconic representation. Iconic representations par excellence are paintings.

This move may solve one problem, but it raises another one. Paintings pose a serious problem for analysis, in that a pictorial representation is not easily segmented into discrete parts that can combine in determinate ways. If one person divides a painting into smaller parts, it is not likely that these parts would be identical to the parts other people might divide the same painting into.

Language, in contrast, is easily segmentable. Speech may be a continuous flow of sound, but native speakers do not hear it as such —they hear discrete sounds and words. The linguist Edward Sapir noted that even speakers of a language lacking a writing system could dictate sentences to him "word by word". The discreteness of human language is not restricted to sounds and grammatical units. It is recognized that our vocabulary, our semantic concepts, super-impose a grid over extralinguistic reality. Reality itself does not come in discrete units. The classic example of this is the color spectrum. A continuous gradation of colors exists in nature, but all languages divide up the spectrum into a small number of color terms; and the way one language divides up the spectrum is not the same, necessarily, as the way another language does.

Countless analyses of narrative have demonstrated that narrative, like language, can be segmented into recurrent units that combine in determinate ways. Plot, as Aristotle stated in the *Poetics*, has a definite beginning, middle and end —unlike the stream of behavior occurring in life. All of this suggests that narrative and language are at the very least isomorphic structures.

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This assertion may seem to fly in the face of what I presented earlier as an indisputable fact —namely, that a distinction must be made between the language of the narrative text and the narrative structure. I do not want to deny this fact. We thus seem to be confronted with the paradox I mentioned earlier. This is precisely the point where the notion of semiolinguistics can come to the fore, for it evolved precisely in order to resolve this paradox.

The term *semiolinguistics* is what a linguist would call a "blend," a word produced by combining parts of words in an unusual way. The constituent terms of this blend are the terms *semiotics* and *linguistics*. Semiotics is most often defined as the science of signs and systems of signs, with linguistics being defined as the study of one particular type of sign system, that of human verbal language. In this conception semiotics is more general than linguistics; and in fact semiotics is sometimes defined specifically as the study of all non-linguistic sign systems. However, I regard semiolinguistics as a type of linguistics —but representing an extension of linguistics that transcends the limits of the sentence. It may be objected that the neologism *semiolinguistics* is unnecessary, in that other terms exist to refer to extensions of linguistics beyond the sentence; e.g., terms such as *discourse analysis*, *text grammar*, etc. The problem with these terms is that they are understood, particularly in the United States, as referring to the investigation of intersentence linkage, the various ways one sentence can be connected to sentences which immediately precede or succeed it; e.g., by anaphora, lexical cohesion, etc. In other words, the investigation does not transcend what I have been terming the "textual surface." Semiolinguistics transcends the sentence in the sense of attending to strata of structural organization that are distinct from that of the sentences comprising the text. But semiolinguistics, to reemphasize, is considered to be a part of linguistics; it investigates an aspect of human language. To clarify this point, it will be necessary first to define some key terms in semiotics which apply to verbal signs.

Since semiotics is the study of signs, it is obviously necessary to define the term *sign*. It is typically defined as "something that stands for something else." An example is the word *tree*, which stands for a particular type of physical object, which is said to be its *referent*. A sign itself is a complex entity —it has two inseparable parts— inseparable in a way analogous to the inseparability of the front and back of a sheet of paper. Consider the word *tree*. It consists, on the one hand, of a sequence of sounds, which are represented by the letters *t, r, e, e*. These sounds are units from the expression plane of language; they have no meaning in themselves. The other half of the sign *tree* is its meaning, the concept "tree," which is a unit from the content plane of language. The expression part of the sign is called the *signifier*; it is the physically perceptible part of the sign. The content part is called the *signified;* it is the mental part. It is very important to keep the referent of a sign distinct from its sense (its signified). One well-known example that makes the distinction clear is the pair of expressions *morning star* and *evening star*. These terms can refer to the same object, but they do not have the same meaning —*morning* is not a synonym for *evening*. Another example is the word *unicorn*. This is not a meaningless word, it has a sense which can be paraphrased, as in the typical dictionary entry for the word. However, the word lacks a referent —no such animal

has ever existed. One final term that enters into semiotic and linguistic discussions is *code.* It can have different meanings, but the primary one, in the present context, is that of the rule or social convention that correlates a signifier with a signified. It is this correlation of elements from the planes of expression and content that results in signification.

Consider for a moment the implications of regarding a narrative as a single complex verbal sign. Using the terms defined above, we can say that the traditional view of narrative as a re-presentation of reality, of a chronological sequence of events, treats the narrative text as, in effect, a signified which is directly related to the referent. The narrative text is regarded as a totally transparent window on the world. From the perspective of semiotics, however, it is the relation of the signification that is of primary concern; that is, the relation of the signifier and signified. What we term narrative structure, in this conception, is thus a complex signified, a semantic phenomenon. One implication of this view of the narrative is that the distinction between fact and fiction is not of immediate concern to the semiotician. The question of factuality is a question of the referent of the narrative "sign," not a question of the relationship between signifier and signified. (Cf. Barthes' 1970 discussion of historical discourse.)

Our discussion so far is only a small step toward resolving the problem of the relation between narrative structure and language. To call the narrative text a sign, with the language of the text being the signifier, and the narrative structure a signified, is not an analysis that will hold up to close scrutiny. For one, this conception leaves no room for linguistic meanings apart from the meaning of narrative units. Also, language is not pure expression, but a correlation of expression and content. However, the semiotic conception can be refined so as to overcome these shortcomings. What is required is the conception of a (verbal) semiotic system whose expression plane is itself a semiotic system. Precisely such a conception is to be found in the closing pages of the book *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1961), by the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev. Hjelmslev calls such a complex semiotic system *a connotative semiotics* (1961: 114). It is "complex" in that it is a matter of two overlapping semiotic systems. The two can be distinguished by referring to them as the first-order system and the second order system. The following diagram will clarify their relationship.

2nd-order signification	E_2	C_2
1st-order signification	E_1 $\quad$ C_1	

This model does not posit the necessary existence of a one-one relation between units on the two levels or strata. That is to say, a second-order unit does not necessarily correspond in size to a first order unit. A long stretch of units of the

first order may correlate with a single unit of the second order.

At this point, it may seem that this model corresponds exactly to the requirements of narrative theory. To make the above diagram represent narrative discourse, we need only add labels as follows.

Narrative structure (plot and character)	E_2	C_2
Language of narrative discourse	E_1 C_1	

Before elaborating on this diagram, I should point out that this interpretation of the notion of connoted semiotics is quite different from that of Hjelmslev. His conception of the second-order signified, in the words of Barthes (1967: 91), is at once general, global and difuse; it is, if you like, a fragment of ideology: the sum of the messages in French refers, for instance, to the signified "French": a book can refer to the signified "Literature." Hjelmslev also regarded various styles as second-order signifieds; e.g., individual style, functional levels such as high, middle, and low; as well as the tone of writing, etc. (Hjelmslev, 115).

It is my belief that the notion of a connated semiotics does not add much to a theory of style —or, more exactly, it adds too much; it is too powerful a notion. (On my approach to style, see Hendricks 1976.) The power of the notion of a connoted semiotics is best utilized in the domain of narrative discourse.

Let me elaborate upon the above diagram and point out how it helps to resolve the paradoxical relation of narrative structure and the language of the narrative text. Note that, according to the diagram, the units of narrative structure are units of content (signifieds) with respect to the language of the narrative text— but the content is distinct from the content of the sentences that constitute the narrative text. We use the arbitrary subscripts "1" and "2" to differentiate the two. The signifier of this second-order signified, it should be noted, is not just the words and sentences of the text considered as formal, as grammatical units; it includes the meaning of these sentences as well. (In this respect the units of the first-order signifying system are signs of the second order content.) Narrative structure is thus a meaning of a meaning.
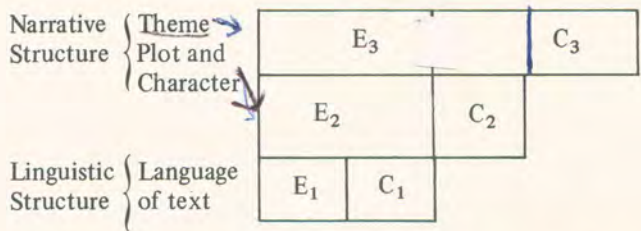
Consider, as an example, the following sentence from Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily": "So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder." This long sentence is, from the perspective of linguistics, a coded correlation —with syntax being the code— of a semantic representation (content) and a surface structure (expression). The content (meaning) of this sentence pertains to a particular event or behavior sequence. (I am not referring here, it should be remembered, to the referent, the physical action.) Rather than talk about external events, the linguist would talk

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anything

about language-internal sense relations (e.g., paraphrase, etc.).

None of the above observations says nothing about the narrative of which the sentence forms a part. The linguist's analysis pertains to this sentence in isolation, and not as part of a sequence of sentences constituting the short story "A Rose for Emily." Of course, to be able to say anything about the story, it is necessary to first process or decode this sentence, to know what it means. But this meaning, in turn, is itself a complex signifier, which has to be decoded; that is, it has to be correlated with a (second-order) content. More exactly, the first-order content of the sentence is only part of the signifier of a unit of narrative structure, for there is typically a many-one relation between sentences of the text and units of the narrative structure. Thus, the one long sentence we have just quoted from "A Rose for Emily" does not in itself signify a narrative unit. Several sentences together would signify one plot unit.

Although plot and character are content with respect to the language of the narrative text, they are not what most people have in mind when they talk about the "meaning" of a narrative. Rather, they have in mind "thematic" or "symbolic" meaning. We have to recognize theme as one aspect of narrative structure. It can easily be accommodated within the framework of the semiolinguistic model, as follows. Thematic meaning would be situated on a third-order plane of content, with plot and character structures constituting its signifiers, or its plane of expression. Thus, the elements of plot and character, which are content with respect to the language of the narrative text, are elements of expression with respect to thematic content. We can make this relationship clear with the following diagram:

I will not say anything further here about third-order signification since it is the least developed aspect of the semiolinguistic conception of narrative. In fact, no structuralist approach yet offers a satisfactory treatment of thematic structure. In my view, much more work remains to be done with increasing our understanding of plot and character as constituting a second-order semiotic system. The rationale for assigning priority to plot and character over theme is that the semiolinguistic theory of narrative is an "interpretative" theory and not a "generative" one. That is, the narrative structure (consisting of plot and character) is assumed to provide the basis for a thematic interpretation. The first step in analysis is the description of plot and structure. The second step is the thematic interpretation of the narrative structure. The generative approach, in contrast, would begin with a specification of the global theme, or thematic structure, of a narrative and use it as a basis for

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deriving the plot and character structures. (For this alternative approach, see Sceglov and Zolkovskij 1976.)

The semiolinguistic conception I have sketched here represents the state of my thinking until very recently on the nature of the relation between narrative structure and the language of the narrative text. The bulk of my past work has been more concerned with the elaboration of the nature of narrative structure and with techniques for its analysis. However, I have become increasingly aware of a number of questions my model leaves unanswered or deals with only in a vague way. My research activity in the immediate future will be devoted to trying to make the semiolinguistic conception more explicit on a number of points. For the balance of this presentation, I want to give some idea of how the semiolinguistic conception can be improved.

I will briefly discuss here two major questions that need to be answered. I. In what sense can the language of the narrative text be said to be a "sign" of the narrative structure? Are we justified in claiming that the meanings of the sentences of the narrative text are signifiers of the second-order signifieds? 2. What is the exact nature of the second-order signifieds? We reject the Hjelmslevian conception that they are "vague and diffuse," in effect being a supplemental aura about the primary, first-order meanings. It should be noted that my practice of representing narrative structure by means of logical propositions actually assumes that there is no difference in kind between the two orders of meaning. Some linguists use basically the same type of notation to represent the underlying semantic structure of sentences. We therefore need to present an argument for this essential identity in kind of the two orders of meaning. If this point can be convincingly established, we face the task of justifying their separability. What, in other words, would be the rationale for recognizing two orders of signification?

Let me repeat that I cannot offer any definite answers to the above questions, for I have only recently raised them in my own mind. I will try to provide some tentative answers, which should be taken as indicators of the direction my research will take.

Let us turn to the first question raised above: in what sense can the first-order signifieds of the narrative text simultaneously be signifiers of the narrative units, which are second-order signifieds? A rationale for this interpretation, I believe, can be found in the literature on the "philosophy" or "logic" of action. (In summarizing some of this work, I rely to a large extent on van Dijk's 1976 discussion.) A fundamental distinction made in the philosophy of action is that between "doing" and "action" proper. Doings are extensional objects, physically perceptible bodily movements. Action, in contrast, is an intensional object, a mental state. This mental state includes an element of intention or purpose. By saying that a doing is physical and an action is mental, we imply that an action can only be inferred from a doing. We can see what someone is doing, but we cannot see inside the person's head. We can, however, make inferences about intent on the basis of observable indicators.

Let me give one example that illustrates the distinction. Suppose we see a man pick up a gun, aim it at his wife, and pull the trigger. The wife drops over dead. We might say that the man has murdered his wife, but murder is an action, an inference;

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and all we actually saw was a doing, the aiming of the gun and so on. The man himself can deny that he murdered his wife; that is, he can deny that it was his intent to murder his wife. He can offer the excuse, "I didn't know the gun was loaded." (J. L. Austin's paper "A Plea for Excuses" is a valuable source of insight on this matter. See Austin 1970.)

Now, note that the distinction between doing and action corresponds to the two aspects of a sign. The sign itself is a correlation of the physically perceptible and the mental, which is imperceptible. Doing can thus be characterized as a signifier, with action the signified. Of course, the philosophy of action is concerned with either actions in reality or description of "real life" action; but this analysis is readily transferable to the domain of narrative discourse. First, I might point out that we can establish a direct correspondence between doing and action, on the one hand; and Propp's distinction between the plot unit he termed the *function* and the specific acts that occur in particular tales. Propp conceived of the function as generic, encompassing a range of specific events that occur in individual tales. However, Propp's notion of function can be better understood if it is conceived as an intended action, with the specific detail narrated in each fairy tale being a narration of doings.

Just as one "doing" can be interpreted as different "actions," likewise Propp noted that one and the same narrative event can be analyzed as different functions, depending on the narrative context. One example he cites (1968: 21) is of the hero receiving a sum of money. This can be either an instance of the function "Provision or receipt of a magical agent" or of the function "Wedding" (monetary reward instead of the princess' hand in marriage; see Propp, 64). Propp also recognizes that different events, occurring in different tales, can all be instances of the same function. Likewise, in discussions of action theory, it is recognized that the same action can be described in different ways.

Note that the view of action proper as intention, or as a plan that can control a complex sequence of "doings," provides an explanation for the disparity between the extent of the units of the two orders of signification. One "action" will typically require a sequence of "doings" to effect it.

Let us return to the Faulkner sentence cited earlier in order to see how we can apply the distinction between doing-signifiers and action-signifieds to narrative analysis. For convenience, I repeat the sentence here: "So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily's lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brick work and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder." Any native speaker of English will have no trouble apprehending the basic sense of this sentence, out of context. This sense is a first-order signified. But the native speaker would nevertheless say that the sentence makes no sense. That is, the basic first-order sense of the sentences does not signify anything significant; it does not "mean" anything, in the meaning of "meaning" that is a matter of intent or purpose or aim.

Note that the single Faulkner sentence does not fully make sense even as a "doing." The reason is that a "doing" can involve a sequence of related movements, etc. All we have here is a fragment of a "doing." The sentence immediately

following the one I have cited is as follows: "They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there ...." We know now that the doing is the activity of sprinkling lime. But we still do not know the significance of this first-order meaning of the sentence for the plot as a whole. Placed in the context of "A Rose for Emily," this event can be seen to signify the outcome of a conflict between the town's graybeards and a "member of the rising generation," all of whom are members of the Board of Aldermen. The conflict is over the proper way to handle complaints from the townspeople about a bad smell emanating from Emily's house. The young member wanted to order Emily to clean her place up. In this context, the doing "spreading lime" thus signifies the following plot structural unit:

$$r(PS, PR)$$

It is verbalizable approximately as "The old order defeats the new order." (For more discussion, see Hendricks [1977] [a].)

Now let us turn to the second major question I raised earlier about the semiolinguistic model. This question, it will be remembered, concerned the exact nature of the second-order signifieds, and in particular their relation to the first-order signifieds, which are the usual object of investigation by linguists and semanticists. I believe that we can shed some light on this matter by considering a comparable phenomenon in language.

It is not unusual for an utterance to be interpreted differently in a particular extralinguistic situation than it would be if considered in isolation from any specific situation. Consider, for example, the sentence *I'm hungry*. If you ask someone for the meaning of this sentence in itself, he will give you a paraphrase such as "I want or need food." This sense of the sentence is a function of the dictionary meaning of *hungry* and the normal rules of syntax and semantics. Now consider the same sentence, as uttered by a young child when told by his mother that it is bedtime. If the mother responds not by giving food, but by putting the child into bed, then it is obvious that the mother has interpreted the utterance differently in this concrete situation than she would if she was simply asked for the meaning of the sentence *I'm hungry*.

This example comes from the book *Language* by Leonard Bloomfield. He refers to it as "displaced speech" (1933: 142); and as instances of it he mentions not only lying, irony, and so on, but "narrative fiction" as well. Particularly interesting, in light of present-day trends, is the following remark Bloomfield makes about this phenomenon: "As soon as we know the dictionary meaning of a form, we are fully able to use it in displaced speech .... The displaced uses of speech are derived in fairly uniform ways from its primary value, and require no special discussion ...." (142).

Bloomfield is one of the giants of linguistics, so it is surprising to read these lines in his classic book. Examples of displaced speech all seem to have meanings that in themselves are not different in kind from the ordinary, "non-displaced" meanings of sentences. For example, if someone ironically says *That's fine*, we interpret this to mean that something is "terrible"; but this meaning is itself the "dictionary meaning" of the sentence *That's terrible*. Likewise, the child at bed-time could have said the ordinary sentence *I don't want to go to bed now*. So

the problem posed by this phenomenon is how the "displaced" meaning is derived from the dictionary meaning. More exactly, it is the question of how one dictionary meaning is "displaced" from a word to another word that is normally not regarded as semantically similar. Thus, although reference is made to "dictionary meaning" and "derived meaning," we do not really have two types of meaning, but two types or stages of decoding. Attention should therefore focus on the supplementary rules of decoding.

This is precisely the problem that is commanding the attention today of a number of philosophers and linguists. They refer to the phenomenon, not as "displaced speech," but as "indirect speech acts." Some (but not all) researchers handle such phenomena by attempting to formulate, in explicit fashion, general rules of inference for construing the meaning of utterances in situational context. (For a succinct discussion, and a few pertinent references, see Searle 1976.) Particular attention has been paid to everyday conversation and to therapeutic interviews (e.g., dialogue between a psychotherapist and a patient). These rules may be characterized as a code that relates what is said —questions, statements, imperatives, etc.— to "what is done" —requests, refusals, assertions, etc. (cf. Labov 1972: 301).

This distinction between "what is said" and "what is done" clearly corresponds to the distinction, made in theory of action, between physical "doings" and "action" (intent). It also corresponds to the two layers of signification recognized in our semiolinguistic model. Note that researchers in the area of indirect speech acts recognize that the derived meaning in effect is a point of departure for the further interpretation. In other words, the "literal" or dictionary meaning becomes a signifier, with the indirect meaning the second-order signified.

I want to stress at this point that I am citing this work in indirect speech acts only because narrative phenomena seem to be sufficiently similar so that the rules of inference developed by speech-act theorists can serve as a model for formulating rules that correlate first-order meanings of narrative sentences with the second-order meanings that are the units of narrative structure.

There is at least one aspect of narrative discourse in which the work of speech acts would seem to be almost directly applicable. A narrative usually includes some amount of dialogue; and this is a clear-cut case where we have things "said," from which we have to infer what is "done," in terms of plot advancement, character delineation, etc. Interpreting dialogue as plot events is an obvious necessity if one wants to analyze the plot of a play or of a story that approaches drama by consisting almost exclusively of dialogue.

However, there are some important differences even in the area of fictional dialogue that do not permit a literal, direct application to narrative discourse of the research on indirect speech acts. First, we have to modify the claim that we take the dialogue of, say, Emily Grierson and try to interpret her intent, her "action." Emily is not an autonomous being, she is a component of a narrative; hence our interpretation of dialogue attributed to her is ultimately an interpretation of its contribution to the teleology of the narrative structure itself. We are ultimately concerned with internal plot dynamics. (Cf. in this light our earlier discussion of the example of spreading lime.) Also, it goes without saying that in analyzing plot and

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character, we are not concerned with the ultimate utterer of the narrative sentences, the author himself.

A second difference between narrative dialogue and that of real life would seem to be that the former is deprived of context, in the sense of sociophysical setting. All we have are words on a page. However, essentially the same type of information about setting that enters into rules for interpreting everyday conversation, etc. can play a role in narrative analysis. This is possible due to the phenomenon that has been termed *intratextual contextualization* (Spencer and Gregory 1964: 101). The writer, by means of language, can create a "context of situation" within the work itself. This is the element of narrative that is usually termed "setting" or "scene."

Reference to intratextual context reminds us that the literary work, after all, has an "extratextual context;" that is, the text has an author who produced it at a given place and time, and readers who read it at a given place and time. Spencer and Gregory note that part of the reader's willing suspension of disbelief consists in allowing the "real" context of situation to recede into the background, and the intratextual one to come into the foreground. Of course, one factor that allows the extratextual context to recede is the fact that, unlike the situation with respect to most oral conversation, the sender and receiver of messages are not physically present in the same setting. For example, I can sit down in my home and read a novel written by Balzac in France in the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the novel was written by someone at a given point in time and space, and it has me (among others) as a reader; it does not exist in a vacuum. However, the conception of narrative that I have outlined here proceeds as if the work did exist in a vacuum.

This points up the major difference between the research on indirect speech acts and the use that I have proposed making of that research. The investigation of indirect speech acts falls within the scope of "pragmatics," one of the major divisions of semiotics (the others being syntactics and semantics). Pragmatics is generally defined as the study of the relation between signs and their users, i.e., the senders and receivers of signs. Pragmatics broadens the inquiry beyond the discourse itself so as to encompass the situational context. My feeling is that pragmatic research complements the type of semiolinguistic research that I carry out, which would be classified as an instance of "syntactics." My approach focuses on the internal organization of the narrative text, the internal functioning of the constituent parts. Pragmatic research focuses on the work as an indivisible unit and considers its functioning in the extratextual situation.

Some scholars would challenge the neat compartmentalization I have just articulated. That is, they would claim that we cannot understand the internal structure of a text without taking the extratextual context of situation into account. I am willing to concede that some text-internal features can be fully understood only in the light of pragmatic research, but I do not feel that this is generally the case, particularly with respect to the structures of plot and character. They constitute formal "syntactic" properties (in the extended, semiolinguistic sense) that are not amenable to an external-functional explanation.

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In conclusion, I should emphasize that my presentation has focused on only one aspect —though a key one— of the semiolinguistic conception of narrative. This aspect is that which attempts to clarify the relation between plot and character structures and the constituent sentences of the narrative text. Other aspects of the theory include a specification of the nature of plot and character structures, the means for representing these structures, and so on. Although my own work has focused on text, and not sociocultural context, I have tried to indicate in my closing remarks that the semiolinguistic conception can encompass contextual study.

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