The narrative sequence : history of a concept and a research area.

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The discourse analysis developed by Adam is not a specifically narrative theory but a theory that includes narrative as one of its objects. (Pier 2011)

The framework of French discourse analysis and Franco-German text linguistics casts a particular light on the narratological issues under discussion here. To refer to "a redefinition of the sequence in postclassical narratology" is tantamount to presupposing the existence of a widely-accepted, self-evident concept of "narrative sequence" and is, moreover, to oppose a "classical narratology" to a so-called "postclassical narratology", an antagonism that Gerald Prince (2006) has not hesitated to call into question.² John Pier (2011) has explained with perfect clarity why I situate myself not within this intra-narratological debate, but in a broader linguistic, discursive perspective in which the concept of "sequence" occupies an important theoretical place. My studies of narrative (Adam 1981 to 2011), which have been considerably influenced by French poetic and semiotic narratology, German text linguistics and French discourse analysis, parallel the history of the concept of sequence.

1. Premises of the notion of *narrative sequence*

1.1. Unity of action in Aristotle's *Poetics*

Narrative theories of sequence all derive more or less explicitly from the definition of "a single action, whole and complete" (Part XXIII) to be found in several passages of the *Poetics*. With this notion, Aristotle defines a unit of textual construction of narrative meaning:

some other thing follows it. A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles (ibid.: Part VII).

This definition enables Aristotle to distinguish narratives from historical compositions and annals: "historical compositions [...] of necessity present not a single action, but a single period, and all that happened within that period to one person or to many, little connected together as the events may be" (ibid.: Part XXIII). Aristotle roughly sets the limits of these textual units: "we may say that the proper magnitude is comprised within such limits, that the sequence of events, according to the law of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad" (ibid.: Part VII). These notions of "beginning" or "exposition", "knot" or "development" and "conclusion" or "denouement" were to be systematically re-appropriated by the classical period.

1.2. Boris Victorovitch Tomashevsky 1925³

Tomashevsky gives the following definition of the dynamic structure of all narration:

Here, in order to get the story going, a dynamic motif destroys the initial peaceful situation. The aggregate of such motifs, disturbing the tranquillity of the initial situation and provoking action, is called the *exciting force*. Usually the nature of the exciting force determines the whole course of the story, and all the intrigue is reducible only to the various motifs which determine the basic conflict introduced by the knot. This change is the *peripety* (the movement from one situation to another) (1965: 72).

Besides the fact that the exposition of the initial situation may be delayed, Tomachevsky stresses an important component: "The increase in tension is proportionate to the proximity of a great change of fortune. Tension is usually achieved by preparing for the change in the situation" (1965: 72).

2. The *sequence* in classical French narratology

2.1. Tzvetan Todorov 1968-1973⁴

In a continuation of his *Grammar of the Decameron* [Grammaire du Décaméron] (1969), Todorov returns to his article on "The analysis of the literary text" ["L'analyse du texte littéraire"] published in *What is structuralism*? [Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme ?] (1968), and, after defining the unit which he terms "the proposition", adds that propositions are organized in sequential cycles:

A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as

The author wishes to thank Rodney Coward for his comments and contribution which went well beyond his assignment as translator from the French of the present lecture.

² See also Herman (1997), (1999); Nünning (2010).

 ³ For a more detailed analysis see Baroni (2007: 74-90) and, in particular, his schema, p. 85.
 ⁴ Adam (1994 [1985]: 31-32, 39-43).

The propositions do not form infinite chains, they are organized into cycles that every reader recognizes intuitively (one has the impression of a completed whole) and that analysis identifies without too much difficulty. This higher level unit is called a *sequence*. [...] The complete sequence is composed — always and only — of five propositions. An ideal narrative begins with a stable situation that some force will perturb. From which results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in a converse direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is quite similar to the first, but the two are not quite identical. Consequently there are two types of episodes in a narrative: those that describe a state (of equilibrium or disequilibrium) and those that describe the transition from one state to another (1981 [French edition 1973]; 51).

After stressing that a sequence may also comprise complimentary propositions which are only secondary constituents, Todorov distinguishes three types of sequential combinations: *embedding*, *enchaining*, and *alternation* or *interlacing* (1981: 53). He thus further develops the definition of the text of the folk tale given by Propp in *Morfologia skaski*:

One tale may have several moves [sequences], and when analyzing a text, one must first of all determine the number of moves of which it consists. [...] Singling out a move is not always an easy matter, but it is always possible with complete exactitude. [...] Special devices of parallelism, repetitions, etc., lead to the fact that one tale may be composed of several moves (1968: 92).

2.2. Claude Bremond 1973⁵

In his *Logique du récit*, Bremond re-examines Todorov's propositions, and refines his "ideally complete narrative sequence" (1973 : 119), adding causal relationships or motivations which pave the way for alternatives and the principle of narrative possibilities:

A relation of motivation may introduce a relation of desire which itself may introduce a relation of hypothesis (intended to explicate the conditions under which the desire may be fulfilled); there would follow then the transition to the act (in the form of one of the following verbs a [= the aim of the action is to modify the situation], b [= to act reprehensibly, to sin, to transgress a law], c [= to punish]); there would finally come a relation of result, which would describe the consequences of the action. We would then have a unilineal sequence of functions [...] (1973: 119-120, cited in Adam, trans. Yael Schneerson, 1982: 162).

Bremond's major contribution remains the question of "narrative possibilities" which grounds narrative in the potential bifurcations of any series of actions and the chain connections which may or may not result from successive choices. The Aristotelian triad leading, for instance, from *misfortune* to *happiness*, thus becomes an open-ended series:

 Improvement
 >>>> Absence of a process of improvement
 >>>> ø

 to be obtained
 or >> Process of improvement
 >>>> Success: improvement achieved or >> Failure: absence of improvement

 Dysphoria
 >>>> Process of improvement
 >>>> Euphoria

 Euphoria
 >>>> Process of improvement
 >>>> Euphoria

2.3. Paul Larivaille 1974⁶

In a decisive, significant revision of the proposals formulated by Propp, Bremond and Greimas, the specialist in Italian studies Paul Larivaille (1974: 386-387) offers the most highly-developed model of the narrative sequence which he grounds in the embedding of two actional triads:

| Ι | | II | | III |
|---------------|-------------|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| BEFORE | | AFTER | | |
| Initial state | Transfor | mation (effectuated or un | idergone) | Final state |
| Equilibrium | | Dynamic process | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Provocation | Action | Sanction | |
| | (detonator) | | (consequence) | |
| | (trigger) | | | |

In this definition of the sequence, (4) is a result of (3), and is separate from the final equilibrium (5) which, potentially, leads on to a new sequence. Larivaille (1974: 386) thus separates the closure of the process and the completion of the action (4) from the final state (5). His conception of (4) is appreciably different from that of Todorov, for whom it is not a result, but a dynamic element leading to the final situation; this is the position which I myself have adopted.

3. First linguistic approaches to the question of the sequence.

3.1. Sociolinguistics: William Labov and Joshua Waletzky 1967⁷

In 1967, at the annual congress of the American Ethnological Society, Labov (Columbia University) and Waletzky (Harvard University) presented a seminal paper: "Narrative analysis: oral versions of personal experience". They considered as "fully formed" narratives which comprise five elements: 1. *Orientation*, 2. Complication, 3. *Evaluation*, 4. Result and 5. *Coda* (1967: 41). In 1972 the terminology is slightly different and somewhat vaguer: 1. *Abstract*, 2. *Orientation*, 3. Complicating action, 4. *Evaluation*, 5. Result and 6. *Coda* (1972: 363). The clauses labelled in italics are "free clauses" and only (Complication) and (Result) are purely narrative. "Free clauses" are pragmatically the most highly determined, being those in which the articulation of the text with the context of utterance-narration is the most clearly marked. The *Abstract* and the *Coda* link the narrative to the verbal context of the ongoing

⁵ Adam (1984: 30-38), (1994 [1985]: 20-30).

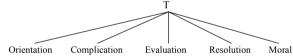
⁶ Adam (1984: 69-73), (1994 [1985]: 32-33).

⁷ Adam (1981), (1994 [1985]: 176-186).

interaction, the present world of the interactants and the past or fictional world of the story which is being told. The purpose of the *Abstract* is to give the audience a reason to listen, by generally highlighting the interest of the narrative. The *Orientation* is the transitional space in which the world of the factual or fictional narrative is situated, while the *Coda* brings the interactants back to the point where they found themselves before entering the world of the narrative. The central *Evaluation* serves as a transition between the two properly narrative clauses; it suspends the action at a crucial juncture in order to allow an appraisal of the state of the situation. Free evaluative clauses can, moreover, be found inserted at any point in the narrative, so as to facilitate interpretation and keep the audience's attention; this is the purpose of explanatory and exclamative pauses. In the work undertaken in collaboration with Fanshel (1977: 104-110), Labov demonstrates that a narrative may be no more than the backdrop to a vast procedure of external evaluation, and considers the multiplication of external evaluative pauses as a characteristic of the genre of the therapeutic interview.

3.2. Text grammar: Horst Isenberg 1972⁸

The proposals advanced by Labov and Waletzky were to influence the text grammars taking shape in both parts of Germany in the 1970s. This was particularly true of the work of Horst Isenberg, who offers a model of the narrative text in which the *Coda* is replaced by a *Moral* (in the form of a final evaluative clause) and the *Abstract* is left aside:



Between the surface sentences and the text, these five narrative nodes fulfil communicative functions:

The structural elements described by Labov-Waletzky (1967) show considerable similarities to the communicative functions described in single-sentence texts. In both cases, we are dealing with communicative elements which are not directly part of the properly semantic structure of the surface sentences, but which appear as nodes which dominate them (Isenberg 1972: 73).

It was on this rudimentary model, developed from very simple narratives, that I leaned, in *Linguistique et discours littéraire* (Adam-Goldenstein 1976: 203), in order to describe the narrativity of a short text in *Histoires Naturelles* by Jules Renard. Research in the 70s was dominated by "generative text models" and, parallel to the early development, in Germany, of

⁸ Adam (1984: 35-37).

textual pragmatics, the ambition of text grammars was to extend the sentence model of generative transformational grammar to narrative and non-narrative texts. The principal shortcoming in this model lies in the failure to take into account the dual nature of Labov and Waletzky's clauses: narrative clauses, on the one hand, and free pragmatically overdetermined clauses, on the other. The other major shortcoming of such a simple model as this resides in the fact that the five nodes are directly attached to sentences (S). The elementary texts analyzed fostered the illusion of a direct transition from the sentence level to that of the text. It was in reaction to this over-simplification that I developed my own model of the narrative sequence, though not without taking into account the advance represented by Teun A. van Dijk's proposals.

3.3. A cognitive-linguistic perspective: van Dijk 1972-1984

Van Dijk's first studies (1972 & 1973) leaned towards German text grammars, but introduced the concept of (not exclusively narrative) *sequence* between the sentence and textual levels: "The difference with sentential grammars, however, is that derivations do not terminate as simple or complex sentences, but as ordered n-tuples of sentences (n1), that is as SEQUENCES" (1973b: 19). In the later perspective of the textual theory which he was developing in the 1980s, van Dijk (1978, 1981, 1984) no longer referred to sequences but to "superstructures" which he compared to "schema" theory, reserving the semantic notion of "macro-structure" for the theme or overall topic of a text:

Superstructures [...] are schema-like global structures. Unlike macrostructures they do not define global content, but rather the global form of a discourse. This form is defined, as in syntax, in terms of schematic categories (1981: 5).

If I have abandoned van Dijk's term of *textual superstructures*—which I was still using in my studies in the 1980s—, it is because this notion encompasses textual units which are far too different in nature. He uses the term *superstructure* when referring not only to narrative, argumentation or the scholarly article but also to the sonnet. On the other hand, I have retained his original definition of superstructures, which introduces the key concept of the "macroproposition": "The macropropositions, at least those of a rather high level, will further be organized by the schematic categories of the superstructure" (ibid.: p. 10), and he cites as examples Toulmin's narrative schema and his argumentative schema (Adam 2004). I have also retained his conception of superstructures as textual structures which are "superimposed" upon grammatical structures (1984: 2285).

Since Remembering (Bartlett 1932), numerous studies of written productions have

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confirmed the role of schemas available in the long-term memory in planning and revision activities. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1982 and 1987) have demonstrated that novices and non-experts, who fail to automate a certain number of low-level skills (graphic, orthographic, syntactical), do not have such schemata at their disposition and therefore need to devote a large part of their cognitive activities to resolving micro-linguistic problems, to the detriment of macro-textual composition. Of course, prototypical schemata cannot, by themselves, explain all the aspects of the comprehension and production of textual sets. Knowledges of various types come into play in both these operations: socio-pragmatic knowledges, a knowledge of the worlds represented and of actional scripts, a representation of time and causality, etc. In production or comprehension tasks, the knowledge of prototypical schemata merely endows interpreters and producers with a set of problem-solving strategies. As Kintsch notes: "As with other strategies, it is possible to do without them, but being able to use text-specific organisational strategies can be a great help to the comprehender" (1982: 96).

4. Sequences in the theoretical apparatus of text theory and discourse analysis

My theorisation of the narrative sequence was developed in the continuation of research in the fields of cognitive psychology and textual psycholinguistics into narratives such as the work of Kintsch and van Dijk (1975), Denhière (1984) and Fayol (1985). These studies were already, in 1984 and 1994, central to the second edition of my books on *Le récit* [Narrative] and *Le texte narratif* [The Narrative Text]. In these works, I was at the time taking quite explicitly what has since been dubbed the "cognitive turn" of narratology. The influence of textual psycholinguistics (Coirier, Gaonac'h and Passerault 1996) upon my own conception of textuality and of units and levels of processing has proved decisive.

I consider the *sequence* (in general, and the narrative sequence in particular) to be a preformatted relational structure which is additional to narrow and broad syntactic units (respectively, sentences and periods); it is "a textual schema" which is situated between the sentence- and period-level structuration of clauses and the macro-textual organization of *text plans*. Sequences are pre-formatted structures of typed and ordered groupings of bundles of clauses. One of the roles of text linguistics is to explore and theorize this intermediate level of structuration, without neglecting the complex interplay of low-level (bottom-up) transphrastic constraints and higher-level (top-down) discursive and generic constraints. A sequence

comprises two hierarchical compositional levels: *clauses* are grouped together in a limited number of *macropropositions*, specific to each type of *sequence*, and these *macropropositions* are themselves grouped together and articulated with each other in the textual unit formed by the *sequence*. In other terms, an elementary structure valid for all sequential groupings: [Sequence [macropropositions [clause(s)]]]. These *clauses* are interpreted as components of higher-level units, *macropropositions*, which themselves can only be defined as constituent units of the different types of *sequence*. This definition of each unit as a constituent of a unit of a higher level of complexity, made up of lower-level units, is the basic condition for a unified approach to textual sequences (Adam 2011b); it is also the condition for the transformations of the meaning of the clauses by integration into the semantic unit of a given macroproposition and sequence, a macroproposition perhaps actualized, at the surface level, by one or more clauses. This mode of functioning is the basis of the various broad types of sequential groupings. Knowledge of (proto)typical schemata facilitates the operations regrouping information in processing cycles, both in production and reception-interpretation.

The elementary sequences seem to come down to a limited number of utterance formats. In the present state of the theory, I have retained only five prototypic sequences: *narrative, descriptive, argumentative, explicative* and *dialogal*, which are generally intermingled, even in short texts. I have proposed a re-reading of the ternary and quinary propositions of classical narratology in the light of the linguistic notion of *process* and the five constituent moments (m) of aspect (see also Bres 1989: 81). We thus obtain a linguistically- and culturally-founded model capable of explaining the double ternary structure of narratives: *Before* the process, the *Process* itself, *After* the process, on the one hand, and, on the other, the breakdown of the actual *process: Beginning* (also called the "beginning" in Aristotle), *Unfolding* (Aristotle's "middle") and *End* (also the "end", in Aristotle).

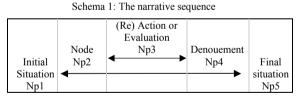
| Moment m1 = BEFORE the process (action is imminent) | = Np1 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| • Moment m2 = BEGINNING of the process (beginning to, undertaking) | = Np2 |
| • Moment m3 = DURING the process (continuing to) | = Np3 |
| • Moment m4 = END of the process (ceasing) | = Np4 |
| • Moment m5 = AFTER the process (recently completed) | = Np5 |

The completeness of a unified series forming a *sequence* is a *narrative* transformation of an aspectual series of moments actualizing the time-image of m1, m2, m3, m4 and m5 in textual units of clause groupings: the narrative macropropositions (Np). The technical concept of the "macroproposition" is also used by Umberto Eco: "In narrative, the breathing is

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derived not from the sentences but from broader units [the macropropositions], from the scansion of events" (1994 [1983]: 42). Moment m1 is transformed into a unit serving as a narrative's *initial situation*-Np1 establishing a world with or without tension; moment m2 into node-Np2 which interrupts the *initial situation* and literally sets the narrative process in motion through an intentional or non-intentional action, an event, or even through the revelation of a cognitive shortcoming (knowing/not knowing, a secret yet to be revealed, curiosity); moment m3 into *re-action* or *evaluation*-Np3, on the plane of the characters' action and/or on the cognitive plane, responsibility for which is taken by a character or the narrator; moment m4 into *denouement*-Np4 which allows the narrative process to draw towards its (definitive or provisional) end; and moment m5 into the *final situation*-Np5 in which the initial tension or that introduced by *node*-Np2 is dissipated or maintained in order to leave the narrative with the possibility of rebounding. It will be seen that, in Isenberg's model. Np5 is exterior to the world of the narrative (story-fabula). Instead of having a Np5m5 integrated into the process, one leaves the narrative world to declare its closure (Labov and Waletzky's coda) and draw a lesson from it (Isenberg's "Moral"). In the sequential structure, Np3 is the consequence of Np2 and Np5 the consequence of Np4.

In order to move on from a simple linear, temporal series of moments to a fully-figured emplotment, a hierarchisation needs to be introduced linking macropropositions semantically in a structure in which the first (*initial situation*-Np1) and fifth (*final situation*-Np5) echo each other, as do the second (*node*-Np2) and the fourth (*denouement*-Np4). This is represented in Schema 1:



This definition of the sequence as the basis of emplotment allows us to distinguish a mere chronological succession from a narrativized construction (Revaz 1997). This schematisation stresses the hierarchisation of the propositions along with the relationships of correspondence. The (*re*)*action*-Np3 or *evaluation* (if, instead of acting, the narrator or a character evaluates the situation created by the *knot*) is central to the mechanism; it is a direct result of *node*-Np2 and it is the *denouement*-Np4 which once more sets the narrative in

motion. The first macroproposition, the *initial situation*-Np1, is one form of orientation or narrative exposition which describes the initial stage of the characters' "world" and their relationships; it sets out the constitutive elements of the story being told. Not only are the characters obliged to act according to the laws of this world, but "the narrator is a prisoner of his own premises" Eco (1984: 28). Put otherwise, a semantic logic of the represented world is thus superimposed upon the compositional logic of emplotment.

This schema of the basic narrative sequence needs to be completed (Schema 2) with the opening and closing pragmatic macropropostions of the narrative text envisaged by Labov-Waletzky and Bakhtin. In a footnote to *Speech genres and other late essays*, identifying the particular nature of these interactive propositions whose role is to ensure the transition from conversation to narrative, Bakhtin describes "these first and last sentences of an utterance" as "so to speak, sentences of the 'front-line' that stand right at the boundary of the change of speech subjects" (1986: 89). Furthermore, he underlines two important facts: the link between such sentences and genre, on the one hand, and the role of intonation, on the other: "Special grammatical intonations, and so forth" (ibid.: 90). He reserves a particular place for narrative intonations (interrogative, exclamative and imperative), one which is very close to Labov and Waletzky's "free clauses".

The process of textualization is made possible by the combinational possibilities of sequences. As Todorov proposed, a more complex unit can be formed either through the *linear coordination* of sequences [Seq. 1 *and* Seq. 2 *and* Seq. 3 *and* Seq. n]: what was thought to be terminated is in fact not; or by the *embedding-insertion* of sequences one within another [Seq. 1 [Seq. 2] *continuation of* Seq. 1]: a sequence is momentarily interrupted; or through a *parallel-alternating assemblage* [Seq. 1 / Seq. 2 / *continuation of* Seq. 2]: in the latter, sequences are alternatively suspended and taken up again. These three principles merely go to form a compositional matrix which serves as the basis for an infinite variety of textual realizations. These highly flexible rules of composition are governed, in the last resort, by the cognitive limits to the processing of large-scale verbal aggregates. It should, moreover, be noted that such successions, embeddings and parallelisms link sequences which are rarely homogenous: for dialogues, descriptions, argumentative or explicative moments are structurally intermingled.

| 0000 | 2 | | ГЬа | narrat | ino | toyt | |
|------|---|-----|------|--------|-----|------|--|
| ema | 2 | ÷., | i ne | narrat | ive | text | |

| | NARRATIVE SEQUENCE(S) | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Entry-point-preface | [series of n. sequences] | Final evaluation |
| and/or Abstract Np0 | Np1 Np2 Np3 Np4 Np5 | Moral and/or Coda NpΩ |

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I do not have the space, in the present article, to further develop the theoretical framework in which I am working. I would simply like to stress that while the sequence is an instrument for textual interpretation and description, it is only one component (L2) of a multi-layered structuration which is summarized in Schema 3:

Schema 3 : Modular model of textual discourse analysis DISCOURSE ANALYSIS SOCIO-DISCURSIVE INTERACTION SOCIO-DISCURSIVE LANGUAGE FORMATIONS ACTION(S) INTERDISCOURSE (LANGUAGE(S), INTERTEXTS & GENERIC SYSTEMS) E X Т Т Texture Compositional structure Semantics Discursive acts & Enunciation (phrastic & (sequences & (discursive (enunciative argumentative transphrastic) text plans) representation) responsibility & orientation polyphonic cohesion) L1 $L_2 \longleftrightarrow L_3$ <----→ L4 → L5 TEXT LINGUISTICS

The components of narratology in its entirety may be redistributed, in my opinion, within this theoretical apparatus. Levels L1 and L2 correspond to the "Subject" of the Formalists, and Genette's "Narrative". Level L3 is that of fictional or factual semantics, of the divergences or convergences between worlds (the "fable" of the formalist narratologists and

Genette's "story"). Level L4 is that of enunciation in general and that of narrative enunciation in particular, i. e. the extent to which responsibility for the narration is assumed, together with questions of point of view (the locus of the alternation of "voices"). Level L5 corresponds to the force of action and the argumentative value of the narrative (L4 and L5 permit a detailed examination of Genettian "narration"). The discrepancies between levels L3 and L1-L2 allow an analysis of the complex problems of narrative "order", and the upper part of Schema 3 enables us to link the context to linguistic surface markers.

The components which Baroni reproaches text linguistics with excluding from its conception of the sequence, put briefly, *pathos* in general, as already postulated by Aristotle, do not in my opinion have anything to do with the sequential module (L2), but rather with the semantic (L3), enunciative (L4) and illocutive-argumentative (L5) modules, governed by the generic module and by intertextuality. This is the way the sequential plot is densified and dramatized. Lastly, it is the modular nature of this theory of text and discourse that explains why, unlike Baroni, I do not situate the thymic elements within sequential structure.

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