Narrative approaches in language sciences: what light do they shed on temporality?
Answer from a corpus of stories collected by accounting students from chartered accountants

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Plan

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III. Ricœur’s hermeneutic approach: emphasis on a retrospective explanatory temporality

IV. Interactive approaches to narrative: emergence of an emotional dimension

I. Emotional dimensions of temporality

Notion of "emotional temporality" (Carcassonne 2004, 2007, Carcassonne and Servel on 2009): recounted periods are associated with an emotional dimension


Notion inspired by 3 wider approaches:
- phenomenological (Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty):
  - time reaches consciousness through "emotion",
  - time is conveyed to the subject who is affected by it
- semantics (Greimas and Fontanille, Augustyn and Grossmann)
“more or less" "long-lasting" temporal dimension of emotional terms:

- hope: waiting patiently
- irascible: quick to get angry

spatial dimension of emotional terms (due to changes of states):

- il "nage dans la joie : French expression « his heart is brimming over with joy »
- anger is rising

-textual analysis (Bakhtine): distinguishing novels according to their "chronotopes" = association within the same discursive envelope of spatial, temporal and emotional or ideological aspects:

road / literary salon

chance encounter/ unaccidental encounter

Known world/unknown world

characters separated by social hierarchy / strong social hierarchy

no influence of the power of money/ place epitomizing the power of money

II. Structuralist approaches to narrative: emphasis on protracted temporality with mounting tension

2.1. A quasi-identical structure in one hundred tales (Propp, 1928)

- characters' actions can vary from one tale to the other but
- they are recurrent,
- they appear in the same order,
- they play the same function in the plot progression

E.g at the beginning of the tale:

- character in a state of "deprivation" (old, sick, poor, unlucky in love, etc.),
- deprivation plays a function in triggering the "sending of a hero"

(Propp (on 1965 [1928]: 31 and suiv.)

2.2. Criteria of the five stages in the rising of tension up to stage 3

in bold type = «state»

Not in bold type: changing from one state to another

1-Stable situation->2-Disturbing element ->3-unstable state->4-Reverse force->5-New stable situation

stage 3: mounting tension

- Then gradual unwinding
- Down to a new balance in stage 5.

Gülich et Quasthoff 1986, Adam 1992, Revaz 1997:

tension structures the temporality of the narrative which is protracted towards its end (suspense), by a backward form of determination:

« The primary temporality has to be carried away by this tension –the backward determination which protracts the narrative towards this final situation, structuring it around the final situation » (Adam 1992 : 46).
Baroni (2009) : a tension « produced by delaying the important delivery of a piece of information concerning the past, the present or the future of the story being told. » (2009 : 10).

- To compensate for this « reluctant characteristic » of the narration, the reader produces "uncertain anticipations" concerning the story development

- faced with this reluctance, the puzzled person gets hooked to the puzzling game/agent and tries to answer the question "how will the story end?" (Ibid. : 11)

Mr. D's « heroic » narrative (excerpts on distributed sheet)

- « reluctant » pieces of information « (l. 15-16-17)
  - create a surprise effect
  - tell of a "missing element" which triggers Mr. D's decision to create his own accountancy office
- numerous « emotional » and « axiologic » terms about Mr D :
  - « enthousiastic young person » (l. 2) ; « competent » (l. 24) « I was appreciated by many clients (l. 3), « They liked the way I…. » (l. 6), etc.
- discursive move opposing 2 chronotopes :
  Internship chartered accounting firm /firm created byMr D.
  Making money, short-term view / bring to the clients/ long-term view
<-> emotional temporality : pride
self dramatizing to impress the two girls students

III. Ricœur’s hermeneutic approach : emphasis on a retrospective explanatory temporality

3.1. The concept of « the plot pattern » (mimesis II : Ricœur )
- The sequential dimension of narrative : sequences follow each other in line with the irreversible order of time common to physical and human events
- The configuring dimension : inverse temporl lines ; ; the successive events must be able to be together "seized" in a retrospective way :
  « The configuring arrangement transforms the succession of events into a signifying whole which is the correlate that assembles the events and ensures that the story can be followed (.). By reading the end in the beginning and the beginning in the end, we learn how to read time itself backwards, as the recapping of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences ». (Ricœur, 1983 : 130)

This retrospective reading still allows room for projects to be mentioned :

«Among the facts told in the past tenseast, there are projects, expectations, anticipations, by which the protagonists are directed towards their mortal future (...). In other words, the narrative also tells us about the worrying. (...) That is why there is nothing absurd about speaking of the narrative unity of a life, under the sign of narratives which show how to narratively articulate the backward and forward looking» (Ricœur, 1990 : 192-93).

NB : here an allusion to an emotional temporal dimension, that of the worry (about the future)

3.2. The notion of narrative identity : reconciling sameness (constant core of the self) and otherness (differences from self to self) in and through narrating

Narrative identity : allows to reconcile, through narrating, two aspects of the same process
- sameness (idem) : permanent and invariant core of self
- otherness (ipse) : changeable and unstable aspects of self
The process is always unfinished: each narrative can become the pretext to
- a new plot
- a new retrospective look explaining the chain of events or the reasons for action,
  - a new discursive configuration between "otherness" and "sameness".

3.3. "Identity-related processes" which are being told and renewed with each narrative, by finding afterwards new links between the events

= an invention dimension d’invention ; according to Bourdieu = a « biographic illusion »

In a situated conception of language (and not in a representational conception) (Boutet, Vion, Mondada), language does not « reflect » experience but rather « reconstructs » it,

Any language situation = a social practice allowing speakers "to work out" meanings and thus to (co) produce them.

Linguistic activity is always "situated" in a given social context ; each speaker says what he has to say at first and foremost according to the addressee,

and more generally according to the way he interprets the situation in which he is

Our corpus: interviewees tell about their career paths

by showing that they interpreted the interview situation

as being a request for help and advice with a view to fitting soon into the workplace

14 l.16-18 : « it is a job which I recommend / by the way now it’s too late / you've had it / you are here mmh / It's too late to try to put you off »

<-> keep silent or overlook the negative aspects of their career paths or their activities

B1. l. 1-3 : « I began with auditing / with C / I was fired / (1 sec) / because mmh / I forgot why euh:::/ < disenchanted tone > <I didn’t fit in with the culture at "C " / xxxx I think so>

B49 : « the culture at C » can be defined as: Being centered on profitability, and neglecting any form of socializing with the clients, while having a repetitive and specialized activity; which is the opposite of working in a small office (not a « big four » firm)

In all the interviews:

Working in a small office is more diversified, friendlier and less stressful than in a big firm. This is due to the absence of hierarchy: which makes up for being less well paid and working longer every day

To work in a big firm is nevertheless advised for the "training" and "authority-building" aspects.

IV. Interactive approaches to narrative : emergence of an emotional dimension


Narrative = not a "result" but an activity of narrative co-construction, closely linked to the context of data collection: a clustering of narrative ways, according to what is to be told, of the addressee, of absent addresses whose expectations are supposed, of the place and the time available, etc.

- « Conversational narrative »:
  - fusion of the discourse type « narrative » into the conversational type of interaction:
    - narratives get the conversational characteristic of « preserving the social link »: are not always «terribly easy to tell»
    - have a playful function (rather than an intriguing or explaining function)
    - Ochs et Caps: variable numbers of narrators, sometimes very low on moral stance, linear development or temporal organization sometimes, etc.

- Narrative in interviews (« life stories», « biographic interviews », « narrative interviews »)
  - 2 levels of narrative: punctual / global (sum of punctual narratives)
  - addressee = co-narrator: can question the «blanks», point to what he finds odd, re-order some contents, go back on a theme, etc.

  - concern for the activity of narrative co-construction

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**Slide 11**

Narrative in interviews: concern for the activity of narrative co-construction (questions of time organization become secondary)

- What is inferred by one or the other of the addressees to co-build the narrative,
  - What is inferred by the data collection situation itself?
  - What allows "to discover" the linear analysis of the discursive moves (transition between speakers or within the same speech)?

In our corpus: temporality is not above all characterized by the fact of being "organized" by the (co)narrators but by a paradoxical emotional dimension:

**Interviewees all insist**

(i) on independence and freedom of enterprise = 2 values guiding their professional life,

(ii) on the lack of time compared with the workload. This lack of time means that they have to work permanently and to live a life which is finally **very dependent on this strong time constraint**

= emotional temporality characterized by freely giving in to a highly time-consuming working activity that dominates all other aspects of the life of the interviewee

= temporality which takes shape when contents evoked at a distance are brought together: reinterpretation

**All interviewees « limit» this inconvenience**

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**Slide 12**

**The second excerpts of Mr D. (on distributed sheet)**

the « pride emotional temporality» (firt excerpt) is reconfigured in this 2nd excerpt
A regret about family life is told between the lines,  
in a more generic speech,  
with fewer enunciative marks of subjectivity

Other excerpts (on distributed sheet): in all interviews:

advantages of «independence» / inconveniences of the hourly constraint

CONCLUSION
- 3 theoretical approaches to narrative / 3 dimensions of temporality
- Diversity of the narratives forms
- Interactive approach to the narrative in interviews:
  - Emotional narrative temporalities are delineated in the dynamic of the interview
  - Some are specific to the interviewees, one is common to all

- In our interpretative mode:
  - content + way of saying it + its relation to the context + its effect on the recipient: work together
  - the narrative (as any form of wording) is always a discursive reconstruction of experience, and not its mere "reflexion"

Opening question

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