

# **Converging Evidence in Language and Communication Research**

Linguists have taken a broad view of language and are borrowing methods and findings from other disciplines such as cognitive and computer sciences, neurology, biology, sociology, psychology, and anthropology. This development has enriched our knowledge of language and communication, but at the same time it has made it difficult for researchers in a particular field of language studies to be aware of how their findings might relate to those in other (sub-)disciplines.

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**Thematics**  
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## Table of contents

Preface	ix
Introduction	1
<i>Max Louwerse and Willie van Peer</i>	
<b>Part I. Structure and processing</b>	
<i>Section 1. Theoretical approaches</i>	
1. Psychological and computational research on theme comprehension	19
<i>Arthur C. Graesser, Victoria J. Pomroy and Scotty D. Craig</i>	
2. Situation models and themes	35
<i>Rolf A. Zwaan, Gabriel A. Radvansky and Shannon Whitten</i>	
3. Conditions of updating during reading	55
<i>Herre van Oostendorp, José Otero and Juan Miguel Campanario</i>	
<i>Section 2. Experimental and corpus linguistic approaches</i>	
4. Evaluation devices as a coordinating mechanism for story points	77
<i>Yeshayahu Shen</i>	
5. Responding to style: cohesion, foregrounding, and thematic interpretation	91
<i>Catherine Emmott</i>	
6. The definite article as cue to map thematic information	119
<i>Morton Ann Gerrisbacher and Rachel Robertson</i>	
7. Thematic management in Korean narrative	137
<i>Myung-Hee Kim</i>	
<i>Section 3. Computational approaches</i>	
8. On the notions of theme and topic in psychological process models of text comprehension	157
<i>Walter Kintsch</i>	

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## CHAPTER 4

# Evaluation devices as a coordinating mechanism for story points

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Various theories invoke the notion of "point" to distinguish between "narratives" in general and "stories", defining the latter as narratives with a point (e.g., Brewer and Lichtenstein, 1981; Labov, 1972; Wilensky, 1982). The point of a story is its *raison d'être* (Labov, 1972), what makes its set of events meaningful and significant, and hence worth being told as a story, rather than in some other format. A closer look at the theories that have addressed this issue (e.g., Brewer and Lichtenstein, 1982; Wilensky, 1982) reveals two fundamental approaches to the definition and description of the notion. The first concentrates on the point as a *construct* or a *product of the reading process*. That is, working on the assumption that readers construct the point of the story as they read, questions are asked as to the nature of this construct, its components, how it relates to other story components, and so forth. (Obviously, the point driven reading of a story is not the only motivation for reading it; for other motivations see László, 1995; Vipond and Hunt, 1984.)

The second approach focuses on *the linguistic-textual devices that function as "point markers"*, i.e., those elements by which the producer of the story marks its intended point (notably, Labov's, 1972 theory of evaluation devices).<sup>3</sup>

Each of these approaches has developed separately as part of various theories of narrative, without any systematic attempt to integrate them or even demonstrate the relations between them. Typically, those interested in the point as a construct (many of whom are either literary critics or cognitive psychologists) have not provided a reasoned account of the linguistic-textual markers that assist the reader in constructing the point of the story; most discourse analysts and linguists interested in the study of such linguistic devices have not developed theoretical tools for describing the constructs marked by the former. Most accounts of such constructs have been, typically, developed by literary critics (e.g., Perry 1985) and/or semioticians (e.g., Greimas, 1966).

3. See also Foregrounding Theory, Reinhart (1982) and Wallace (1987).

The present chapter constitutes an initial attempt to integrate these two components into a theory of story structure. The first section describes three basic kinds of point constructs that can be identified in stories and have been discussed in the literature, while the second section considers Labov's theory of evaluation devices or point markers. It is proposed in the third section that evaluation devices actually mark the three different kinds of points. Furthermore, it is suggested that different features of the evaluation devices, as well as their distribution throughout the text, function differently in terms of signaling each of the three different kinds of story points.

## 1. The point as a construct

### 1.1 Various senses of the concept "point"

What is the point of the story in the first place? This has been a question that several theories have attempted to answer, either directly or indirectly, partially or in a more complete manner (see e.g., Wilensky, 1982; Vipond and Hunt, 1984). I will not provide a detailed survey of these studies here. Rather, I will focus on several fundamental senses in which this notion may be, and has been used. To this end, let us consider the following story taken from Labov (1972). In it the speaker relates a life experience, telling about a fight in which he was involved. Although I have chosen this narrative to illustrate my arguments throughout the chapter, I believe that what I am suggesting here is equally valid for literary stories (see for a related argument László, 1995; Reinhart, 1995; Shen, 1985).

- A An' then, three weeks ago I had a fight with this other dude outside.
- B He got mad 'cause I wouldn't give him a cigarette.
- C Ain't that a bitch? (Oh yeah?)
- D Yeah, you know, I was sittin' on the corner an' shit, smokin' my cigarette, you know
- E I was *high*, an' *shit*.
- F He walked over to me,
- G "Can I have a cigarette?"
- H He was a *little taller* than me, *but not that much*.
- I I said, "I ain't got no more, man.
- J 'cause, you know, all I had was *one left*.
- K An' I ain't gon' give up my *last cigarette* unless I got some more.
- L So I said, "*I don't have no more*, man."
- M So he, you know, dug on the pack, 'cause the pack was in my pocket.
- N So he said, "Eh man, I can't get a cigarette, man?"

- O *I mean—I mean* we supposed to be *brothers*, an' *shit*."
- P So I say, "Yeah, well, you know, man, *all I got is one*, you dig it?"
- Q *An' I won't give up my las' one to nobody*.
- R So you know, *the dude*, he looks at me,
- S An' he — I 'on' know — *he jus' thought he gon' rough that motherfucker up*.
- T He said, "*I can't get a cigarette*."
- U I said, "Tha's what I said, my man."
- V You know, so he said, "What you supposed to be *bad*, an' *skill*?"
- W What, you think you *bad an' shit*?"
- X So I said, "Look here, my man,
- Y I don't think I'm *bad*, you understand?
- Z But I mean, you know, if I had it, you could git it
- AA I like to see you with it, you dig it?
- BB But the *sad part* about it,
- CC You got to do without it.
- DD That's all, my man."
- EE So *the dude*, he 'on' to pushin' me, *man*. (Oh he pushed you?)
- FF *An' why he do that*?
- GG *Every time somebody fuck with me, why they do it*?
- HH I put that cigarette down,
- II An' boy, let me tell you, *I beat the shit outa that motherfucker*.
- IJ *I tried to kill 'im — over one cigarette!*
- KK *I tried to kill 'im. Square business*
- LL After I got through stompin' him in the face, man,
- MM You know, *all of a sudden I went crazy!*
- NN *I jus' went crazy*.
- OO An' I jus' *wouldn't stop hittin the motherfucker*.
- PP *Dig it, I couldn't stop hittin' 'im, man*, till the teacher pulled me off o' him.
- QQ *An' guess what? After all that I gave the dude the cigarette, after all that*
- RR *Ain't that a bitch?* (How come you gave 'im a cigarette?)
- SS I 'on' know.
- TT I jus' gave it to him.
- UU An' he smoked it, too!

In one sense, the point of this story is the conflict between the narrator and his rival, which makes it worth telling, since, so the common sense argument goes, conflicts involve dramatic situations. Note that this particular conflict has to do with the goal structure (see, e.g., Wilensky, 1982) of the story in question, because it is the conflict between the goals of the two boys that may arouse the interest of readers or listeners. In this sense, it can be defined as a "structural point", related

to the (goal) structure underlying the events represented in the story. (We will return to this notion later).

In another sense, the point of the story is related to its theme. Thus, a reasonable point of the above story might be a theme like "the absurdity of the action taken", "acting inadequately", etc. It would concern the discrepancy between the demand for a cigarette, and the narrator's near attempt to kill his opponent, ending eventually in his giving him the cigarette. Thus the point here is that there was, in fact, no point in this absurd fight over a cigarette. This is a "thematic point" in that it provides the thematic dimension (e.g., absurdity) that colors the conflict between the two boys. The difference between the structural and thematic senses of the concept of point may be clearer if we consider the difference between this and similar fight stories. In another story collected by Labov, an identical conflict is introduced. The initiating event involves an attempt to get candy from the narrator by threatening to beat him up. A fight ensues which the narrator wins by hitting the girl who threatened him. Clearly, this story is very similar to the one above, in terms of structural point: they share a very similar set of events and an identical kind of conflict and consequence. However, the stories differ radically with respect to thematic point, in that the candy story relates to themes such as injustice, the thematic contrast between the thief and her victim, etc., rather than the absurd pointless fight over a cigarette. Two stories can therefore exhibit a similar structural point, but still differ with respect to their thematic point, explaining the need to distinguish between these two senses.

In yet a third sense, the point of telling the above stories may be the suspense they create as the events unfold. Here we are dealing with the affective function of the story, which is independent of, though obviously related to, the previous two senses. It would seem reasonable to describe the point of relating the events as a desire to entertain the potential receivers by creating affective responses such as suspense or surprise, and perhaps also deeper ones, such as identification with the protagonist (see, e.g., Brewer and Lichtenstein, 1982). In short, then, it is possible to distinguish at least three senses of the concept of point, structural, thematic, and affective. Indeed, each of them has been incorporated into theories of stories. Let us consider a few representative examples.

## 1.2 Structure

Structure is, perhaps, the single most extensively studied aspect of stories. Research in this area has yielded several models aimed at a formalization of story structure and comprehension (see Shen, 1989, for a detailed survey of the models; see also ; Mandler and Johnson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1975, 1977; Shen, 1988, 1989; Thorndyke, 1975). Most of these studies seek to identify structural regularities and

the hierarchical organization of story events by means of a variety of psychological tasks, particularly recall and summarization.

The theories describe "action" or "goal-driven" structures as typically underlying events in stories. However, they have been criticized for being too general in scope, that is, as applying to event description in general, rather than only to those narratives that can be characterized as stories. As a result, subsequent attempts have been made to identify goal-driven or action structures that can be characterized as salient.

One such effort is the Story Point Theory proposed by Wilensky (1982). This theory assumes that stories must have some point of interest. The story point is a structure which defines the things that a story can be about. Points characterize those contents that constitute reasonable stories and thus items to be communicated. It is assumed that the main goal of the reader is to determine the points of a story and to structure what is remembered in terms of them. Wilensky distinguishes between external and internal points, the former including goals such as convincing a listener of something, impressing someone, and so on. The more important points, however, are the internal ones, relating to the "human dramatic situation" (see Wilensky, 1982), based on the idea that the actors in the story encounter difficulty in achieving their goal. Wilensky offers detailed descriptions of a wide range of possible goal structures that generate such human dramatic situations. His theory aims to account both for readers' intuition as to the "storyhood" of a given story as for the processing and storage of stories in memory. Thus here, the story point is a certain structure which involves some sort of goal conflict or goal competition that produces a dramatic human situation. Certain action configurations, notably the conflicting goals of two parties, therefore yield the point of the story.

A related theory of story comprehension, proposed by Lehnert (1981) is the Thematic Abstract Unit theory (see also Colleen *et al.*, 1986; Dyer, 1983). Here underlying stories are structures termed thematic abstract units (TAU) which capture the theme(s) of a given story, that is, why a story is significant or worth telling in the first place. Each TAU represents an abstract goal plan situation in which an expectation or goal failure arises due to an error in planning. For example, TAU-POST-HOC refers to the situation in which an actor fails to prevent a goal failure because preventive measures are implemented only after their corresponding enabling conditions no longer hold. Other TAUs include hypocrisy — as in "the pot calling the kettle black" — and incompetent advice — as in "the blind leading the blind" (see Colleen *et al.*, 1986).

The most important characteristic of this theory from the standpoint of the present study is the role played by the TAU: it serves as a major means of indexing and storing stories in memory. Since TAUs are abstract, two very dissimilar stories

are often indexed under the same one, while two very similar stories are often indexed under different ones. This can be seen when a subject is presented with a story and asked what other story he or she is reminded of, or asked to classify a set of stories into categories of similar narratives.

As in Wilensky's point structure theory, the TALU theory assumes that the point of the story resides in certain configurations of action and action structures. In sum then, the basic assumption of structural theories is that point structures are a subset of various action structures underlying the organization of events in stories. These structures can be either very general, such as conflicting goal paths, or more specific, such as hypocrisy, incompetent advice, or acting too late. A story relating a set of events demonstrating such a structure is assumed to carry the corresponding point.

### 1.3 Theme

Theme has been analyzed extensively by literary critics (see e.g., Greimas, 1966, 1971; Perry, 1985) whose theories typically define minimal semantic units (sometimes called "semes"; see e.g., Greimas, 1966; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983) or dimensions and define the theme of a given story relative to those values. The dimensions are usually defined on the basis of semantic oppositions, such as internal-external, life-death, and so forth (see Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 11-13, for a survey of the relevant theories in this area).

The relation between the theme(s) of a given story, constructed through the process of interpreting the story, and the other elements in the text (e.g., characters, plot, verbal descriptions, etc.) is highly intricate and complex, and the exact manner in which theme is constructed is far from being understood. However, it is commonly agreed by researchers in the field that characters, plot units, and so forth "actualize" or "initiate" certain general thematic dimensions (cf. Greimas, 1966; Perry, 1985).

### 1.4 Affect

The affective level of stories has recently received attention (e.g., Andringa and Davis, 1994; Brewer and Lichtenstein, 1982), with some researchers (e.g., Davis and Andringa, 1995) referring to a distinction proposed by Ed Tan between two kinds of affects involved in readers' responses to stories. These are artistic emotions, which are aroused by artistic manipulations of the text designed to create suspense, etc., and non-artistic emotions, which rely on the content of the story itself.

Typical emotional reactions are reflected in the following authentic responses of readers to the events and characters in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"

(taken from Davis and Andringa, 1995): "I still feel sorry for her despite it all but I don't find her appealing", and "I get very angry here about the whispering of the old people".

In the context of theories dealing with the emotional responses of readers, the point of telling a story is associated with the affective states it generates. This issue is addressed for example, in Brewer and Lichtenstein's (1982) Structural-Affect Theory of stories that defines stories as a subclass of narratives primarily designed for entertainment. Their entertainment function is fulfilled by the arousal of particular affective states in the reader (e.g., suspense, surprise, curiosity), produced by the inclusion of certain types of events and the arrangement of the discourse form with respect to them. Other theories pertain also to non-artistic or world type of emotions (Davis and Andringa, 1995). Thus from the perspective of affect, the point of a given story is defined in terms of the affects it gives rise to in readers' minds.

## 2. Point markers: The case of evaluation devices

Having introduced the various levels at which the notion of point as a construct has been discussed in the literature, we turn to the second major issue: how do stories, or rather story texts, signal their reader to construct the story point? Although various discourse analysis have considered this question (e.g., Grimes, 1978; Meyer, 1975), Labov's (1972) theory is the most fully developed and influential, and can be regarded as representative of related theories as well.

Labov deals with the structural formal description of stories presented orally. According to his analysis, relating the sequence of events is not the only function the story fulfills. "Another function is evaluation, i.e., conveying to the reader the purpose or aim of the story, its point or *raison d'être*, why it is being told, and what the narrator intends (see Labov, 1972).

### 2.1 Types of evaluation devices

Labov develops a detailed description of the set of evaluation devices (mostly linguistic) whose main function is to mark or signal the point of the story. As he explains: "There are a great many ways in which the point of a narrative can be conveyed — in which the speaker signals to the listener why he is telling it. To identify the evaluation portion of a narrative, it is necessary to know why this narrative — or any narrative — is felt to be tellable; in other words, why the events of the narrative are *reportable*." (p. 371).

For the sake of readers unfamiliar with Labov's notions, allow me to specify the evaluation devices, along the lines suggested by Reinhart (1995), who classifies them into two main groups, *external* and *internal* evaluations.

*External evaluation* refers to the narrator's direct commentary on the importance of a certain event. For example, in the above cigarette story, the narrator stops at segment II and speaks directly to his audience saying: "An' boy, *let me tell you, I beat the shit outa that motherfucker*". By directing his comment to the listener the narrator signals the importance of the event he is about to relate.

*Internal evaluation*, following Reinhart (1995), consists of two main groups, *equivalence* and *comparatives*.

1. *Equivalences* are of two sorts: (a) semantic equivalences, e.g., synonyms, and (b) repetitions, e.g., lexical repetitions of the same lexical, syntactic or prosodic item. These repetitions stress certain meanings which are thus marked and can be assigned to the neutral events in the story. This is the main equivalence device used in the cigarette story. There is a very large number of lexical, syntactic and semantic repetitions distributed throughout the story. For example, sentences JJ through QQ are full of such repetitions:

JJ I tried to kill 'im — over one cigarette!

KK I tried to kill 'im. Square business

MM You know, all of a sudden I went crazy!

NN I jus' went crazy.

OO An' I jus' *wouldn't stop hittin* the motherfucker.

PP Dig it, I *couldn't stop hittin* 'im, man, till the teacher pulled me off o' him.

2. *Comparatives* are also of two sorts: (a) metaphorical expressions in which there is a comparison between two states or objects, one of which actually exists, and (b) modalities, or comparisons between an actual state and a state which is wished for, feared, happened in the past, is morally condemned, etc. In both metaphorical expressions and modalities, the actual situation (state or event) is evaluated by means of comparison with the non-existing situation. For example, an actual event is interpreted not merely as a neutral event — which would be the case without the comparison but rather as one which has never happened or is highly desirable, etc. This is the sense of evaluation used here.

Although this type of evaluation device is used less frequently in the cigarette story, it can be found in the following sentences. When the "dude" says:

O I *mean—I mean* we supposed to be brothers, an' shit . . . "

he is in fact comparing the actual state (in which the narrator refuses to share his last cigarette with him) and a state he wishes for (in which the narrator would

share it with him). Furthermore, this sentence also uses a metaphorical comparison between the relation he expects to have with the narrator and that of brothers. Another example is the repeated statement in which the narrator tells his opponent that he wished to see him have a cigarette (e.g., Z and AA). Another comparison appears in FF and GG, where the narrator compares the actual situation and other similar situations he was previously involved in.

## 2.2 Distribution of evaluation devices: The evaluation focus

Another major characteristic of the use of evaluation devices concerns their distribution: in the text, Labov points out that they tend to be concentrated in specific regions of the story, notably between the complicating event and its resolution. These concentrations are termed "the evaluation focus" (see Labov, 1972, Reinhart, 1995). For example, in the above story, we can easily see that the most dense region of evaluation devices begins right after the complicating event (when the rival starts pushing him in order to get the cigarette) and continues until the resolution of the fight (when the narrator wins and makes the gesture of letting his opponent smoke the cigarette), that is, between sentences FF and QQ. Here we find:

— external evaluations

II An' boy, *let me tell you, I beat the shit outa that motherfucker*.

— equivalences and repetitions

JJ I tried to kill 'im — over one cigarette!

KK I tried to kill 'im. Square business.

MM You know, *all of a sudden I went crazy!*

NN I jus' *went crazy*.

— comparatives

GG *Every time somebody fuck with me, why they do it!*

## 3. Evaluation devices and the point of the story.

While Labov specifies in great detail the various evaluation devices by which the narrator signals the intended point to his or her listener (or reader) he fails to provide a clear definition of the notion of point itself (see Reinhart, 1995). If we compare his explicit definition of point and the implicit conception of it that can be drawn from his analysis, we soon become aware of a certain ambiguity. It is my

*contention that this ambiguity corresponds to the various senses of points discussed in the previous section.* Let us consider several excerpts from Labov that relate to the point of a story.

The first time the term is introduced, Labov defines it very vaguely as "the *raison d'être*". Later he illustrates the point of a certain story about a fight over a glove by saying that "the point is self-aggrandizement. Each element of the narrative is designed to make Norris [the narrator] look good and 'this boy' look bad" (p. 368). We can therefore deduce that the point has to do with value judgments (good and bad), defined in terms of certain semantic dimensions. Clearly, this notion of 'point' easily falls under the heading of *thematic point*. Labov's underlying assumption is that there is a large number of such abstract semantic dimensions in the reader's store of knowledge, and the evaluation devices signal which of these are to be selected and applied to the story in question, its events and actions, the nature of its characters, etc.

Later on (Labov, 1972:371), however, we learn that evaluation devices also serve a somewhat different purpose than evaluating the actions in terms of their moral value or thematic significance: "The narrators of most of these stories were under social pressure to show that the events involved were truly dangerous and unusual, or that someone else really broke the normal rules in an outrageous and reportable way. Evaluation devices say to us: this was terrifying, dangerous, weird, wild, crazy, or amusing, hilarious, wonderful" (p. 371). Here we can see that at least part of the function of evaluation devices is to signal and create certain *affects* in the receivers, which is clearly a different function from the previous one.

Furthermore, given that evaluation devices tend to concentrate around an evaluation focus, typically between the complicating event of the story and its resolution, two other senses of 'point' are suggested by Labov. One involves generating *suspense* in the reader: When the action stops attention is called to that part of the narrative and indicates a connection with the evaluation point. The listener's attention is also suspended, and the resolution comes with greater force (see Labov, 1972).

These two types of affect seem to correspond roughly to the two emotion types defined in the previous section, namely artistic and non-artistic (Davis and Andringa, 1995). Thus we see that evaluation devices signal and create affect states in the reader or listener as well, a function also conceived of as the signaling the story point. Needless to say, this is a totally different kind of 'point' than the thematic one.

Yet another sense of 'point' which is signaled by evaluation devices is indicated by Reinhart (1995), who suggests that their function is to mark the *important* (or *central*) events in the story. These events are also marked by what was earlier called an evaluation focus, i.e., a concentration of evaluation devices that underline the

significance of a given section of the story. Note that it is not the content of the events that is important (although this might also be true in some cases), but rather the position they occupy in the structural organization of the story. For example, in many of the stories analyzed by Labov, the central events revolve around the action(s) which directly reflect(s) the *conflict* between the narrator and his or her opponent. As noted above, this idea of conflicting goal paths is a prime example of a 'point structure' proposed in Wilemsky's (1982) theory.

Furthermore, Shen (1985), analyzing the role played by evaluation devices in signaling the structural organization of events in stories, argues that in some cases the same set of events can be organized along two (or even more) goal structures, with the evaluation devices signaling to the reader which is the relevant one, and thus disambiguating the story. Readers in this study were presented with a story containing such a structural ambiguity. The story (a Jewish folk tale in the oral tradition told by a Libyan-Jew) relates the attempt of a group of Arab fishermen to kill a Jewish fisherman named Halafu. One day, they invite him to go fishing with them, and abandon Halafu at sea when he is in the water in pursuit of a big fish. He begins to drown, but after an hour and a half of fighting the stormy sea, he suddenly recalls the Jewish prayer, "The Song on Crossing the Red Sea", and starts to recite it. He is saved. The Jewish fisherman in Halafu's village takes the Arab fishermen to the court and they are punished.

It was hypothesized that this set of events could be organized into two possible structures: 1. a religious miracle structure, in which the initiating event is the attempt to drown the Jewish fisherman, and the resolution is his salvation through prayer; and 2. An 'evil-is-punished' structure, in which the initiating event is the attempt to kill the Jewish fisherman and the (main) outcome is the punishment meted out by the court.

These two structures would yield a different structural point for the story, corresponding roughly to the type of point structures described by the Thematic Abstract Unit Theory (see above). However, the evaluation focus of the story marks the first of these alternatives as the main structure of the story (for details, see Shen, 1985). In order to test the influence of the evaluation devices on the disambiguation of the story, Shen presented two groups of subjects with different versions of it; one with evaluation devices and the other without (identical to the first version, save for the fact that the evaluation devices were completely removed). The subjects were asked to identify which of the two possible structures was more central. The findings clearly showed a strong tendency on the part of subjects who read the original version for a clear-cut and decisive determination of the central structural organization compatible with the one signaled by the evaluation focus; in contrast, subjects who read the story without the evaluation focus were less decisive in their judgment.



#### 4. Conclusion

The main contention of the present chapter is that integrating the distinction between the three senses of point into Labov's theory of evaluation devices and their function may provide us with a more comprehensive and adequate theory of the concept of story point.

We have seen, on the other hand, that theories that can be classified under the paradigm 'point as a construct' provide a relatively refined and detailed specification of the nature of point itself, but lack the textual-linguistic mechanisms for its construction. On the other hand, the theory of evaluation devices describes such a point making mechanism, but lacks an adequate description of the various senses in which stories can have a point, as well as a thorough explanation of the multifaceted function of evaluation devices. Clearly, a theory which integrated these two aspects in a unified framework might very well yield a more comprehensive and adequate understanding of story point. Such an integrative theory should reduce the ambiguity with respect to the notion of point in Labov's and related theories by providing a more refined description of point markers, and consequently provide a more adequate depiction of the function of evaluation devices than currently exists. Similarly, such a theory could supply the definition of point marking mechanisms lacking in the point as a construct paradigm. The present chapter suggests one approach to such an integration, whereby the close relation between the surface level of the discourse, i.e., the textual-linguistic level, plays a central role in determining the deeper or constructed levels on which the point as a construct should be defined.

This approach raises the question of the relation between the surface or expression level of a story text (on which the evaluation devices appear) and the deeper level of the underlying organization of the events depicted (where the point of the story resides). In most theories of narrative (particularly, but not exclusively, those in the structuralist tradition), these two levels are divorced from each other in that the event organization is independent of its verbal realization. Thus the same story can be realized in many ways, in fact in different media, while still remaining the 'same' story. Prince (1973), for example, states explicitly: "A grammar of stories does not have to be concerned with the description of the expression side of the stories" (p.13). In the same spirit, Rimmon-Kenan (1983) defines the notion of story as "the narrated events and participants in abstraction from the text" (p.6).

According to this widely held view, a story is therefore "an abstraction, a construct" (p.6), whose point is constructed by the reader without reference to the text. However, the above analysis of the role played by evaluation devices in signaling and establishing the various aspects of the point of the story shows that

the features of the expression level substantially contribute to the construction of the point. Indeed, we have seen that two story texts may share the same set of events and participants, but nevertheless differ considerably with respect to their point. This seems clearly to indicate that the study of those elements which functionally contribute to the signaling of the story point should be a central part of the study of event organization, supporting the claim of a need for an integrative theory.

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## CHAPTER 5

### Responding to style

#### Cohesion, foregrounding and thematic interpretation

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Stylisticians<sup>4</sup> have often argued that meaning is lost when a literary text is paraphrased or summarized. However, the important contribution of style to global meaning has received relatively little attention in some of the major text-processing models produced by cognitive psychologists, particularly those which adopt a propositional approach (e.g. van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983; Kintsch, 1988, 1998). Even in literary discussions of thematics (e.g. Sollors, 1993; Bremond *et al.*, 1995; Trommler, 1995) there has been little use made of recent findings in stylistics. In this study, I argue that style not only plays an important role in conveying themes, but that it may do so in a way that is quite different from the explicit statement of a theme. I look particularly at stylistic "foregrounding" (Mukarovsky, 1964<sup>5</sup>), a

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4. Stylisticians combine the techniques of literary and linguistic forms of analysis (e.g. Leech and Short, 1981; Fowler, 1996). Although many of the texts studied by stylisticians are literary, there is an increasing emphasis on style in a broad range of other texts, including, for example, advertisements and newspapers.

5. As noted by van Peer (1986), the notion of foregrounding can be attributed to Mukarovsky, but the term itself derives from Garvin's (1964) translation of Mukarovsky's work.