

# The Structural Organization of Events

**Week 7**

**MA Course on Narratology**

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# The Structural Organization of Events

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# Explicit and Implicit Information

**Narrated information can be presented through three ways:**

**1. Through the narrator's own self:**

John had a heart attack and died on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September.

**2. Through a character:**

“John had a heart attack and died on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September”.

**3. Through the text itself:**

The Topeka News: “John had a heart attack and died on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September”.

## Explicit and Implicit Information

If information is explicitly asserted, it can be questioned or denied through interrogation and negation:

Paul went to the movies.

Did Paul go to the movies?

Paul did not go to the movies.

# Explicit and Implicit Information

Implicit information can be suggested through contextual, rhetorical, connotative, or other means rather than being asserted. Implicit information may be stated in terms of:

## 1. Cause:

(It's raining out) implies (I don't like going out) (causal implicitness)

## 2. Consequence:

(John is very friendly. Did he have a lot to drink?) implies that John is friendly because he is drunk.

## 3. Syntactic Structure:

(Go and get me a pastrami sandwich) the command form implies that the speaker is superior to the listener.

## Explicit and Implicit Information

4. Implicit information may involve knowledge of the world, of social customs, or generic conventions:

John and Peter boxed ineffectually for six rounds then, in the middle of the seventh round, John knocked Peter out with a left hook. After the fight, John told the reporters **“He gave me a lot of trouble”**.

John’s statement may be understood by many as **(I had a lot of difficulty connected)** but to others, the statement could refer to **(I had to carry him for more than six rounds)**

# Explicit and Implicit Information

**Assessments:** two different assessments of what information a text carries implicitly may be more or less

1. Valid, more or less reasonable:

(John owned six yachts): John was probably very rich (more reasonable than) John was twenty-seven years old.

2. Interesting:

Peter insists on driving a huge Cadillac even though he has no money (perhaps more interesting to infer) Peter is a show-off than Driving a Cadillac requires a lot of money.

3. Coherent in themselves and consistent with other information imparted by the text:

John had no money. He went into a restaurant and he ordered a caviar.

So (he ordered caviar) implies (he had a lot of money) and to disregard the idea of having no money.

# Explicit and Implicit Information

## Simultaneity:

1. Two narrated events or situations will be taken to occur at different times if their order cannot be changed without changing the inferred sequence of events in the origin of semantic interpretation. They will be taken to occur at the same time if their order can be changed without modifying the original interpretation:

John saw Mary and fell (the events are not simultaneous).

Mary drank a lot but she ate very little (simultaneous).

John was happy and he was rich and he was handsome (simultaneous).

2. If two sets of events are not simultaneous, event A will be taken to precede B in time:

Peter went to class, saw a movie and treated himself to a chocolate sundae.

Bill went class after he had dinner.



# Explicit and Implicit Information

## Space:

The setting of a set of events may be the same unless the text explicitly indicates otherwise:

**John drank his scotch and Mary drank her beer.** (The events are contiguous for the space of John's drinking is the same as the setting for Mary's Drinking).

## Result

Two events (A and B) can be perceived as a process of result which is explicitly stated:

**It was raining very hard. John got wet.**

Or Implicitly:

**It had snowed all week. Mary and Elizabeth were in a foul mood.**

# Presupposed Information

Presupposition is a semantic element common to the statement, its negation and its corresponding yes-no question:

John came can be presupposed by Mary knew that John came and the semantic element to this statement is that (Mary did not know that John came) or (Did Mary know that John came?)

It can be said that a statement often imparts explicit information on two different levels carrying meaning in two different ways.

# Presupposed Information

There are differences between posed and presupposed information. There are also differences between presupposed information and implicit information.

1. The implicit information is not stated, whereas the presupposed information is stated though not directly.
2. The implicit information always depends on an explicit one, if and only if the latter is understood first, while the reverse is not true. If I do not understand the explicit meaning, surely I will not understand what possible implicit meanings they have.
3. Understanding the explicit meaning clearly does not guarantee the understanding of the implicit meaning. With presupposition, this is not the case since it is part of the explicit meaning. For example: someone understands (John still makes many mistakes) is equivalent to saying that someone understands (John made many mistakes in the past) and (John made many mistakes in the present).

# Presupposed Information

## Presupposition and Narrative

1. The notion of presupposition can help characterize the way information is presented in a given narrative.
2. It can lead to better understanding of a narrator's stance with regard to his narratee, his narration and the narrated.
3. When a narrator presupposes something, he puts himself in the position of someone whose audience knows that which is presupposed (Presupposition of existence: **the man ate neatly and quickly**: presupposes that there is a man).
4. The narrator indicates the premises of his narration, shared with his narratee: **The young man was rich** presupposes that the man has already been identified. Hence, the narratee is made into an insider of the world to be presented, familiar with parts of it at least.
5. The narrator may choose not to postulate some sort of initial intimacy with the narratee as in the opening sections of fairy tales because these tales are in no way intended to be realistic.
6. A narrator may choose to surprise us by contradicting what is presupposed by violating the very elements he introduced as inviolable.
7. Using presupposition to introduce certain kinds of information implies that this information is not new, that is known or could be known by all, not a product of the narrator's imagination or his personal opinions.

# Stative and Active Events

1. Events can be defined as stative (when they constitute a state : when they can be expressed by a sentence of the form NP V (be) NP (**John was Happy**). Events can be active or dynamic expressed by the form NP V-ing NP (**John was eating an apple**).
2. A narrative recounting a certain number of situations and events expresses propositions analyzable as a topic-comment structure about the world.
3. A proposition is a topic-comment structure expressible by a sentence, where a sentence is taken to be the transform of at least one, but less than two, discrete elementary string.

**John was happy** (The situation expresses one proposition: **topic** (john) and **comment** (being happy)).

**Mary ate an apple** (The event expresses one proposition: **topic** (Mary), and **comment** (eating an apple)).

**Shirley was good then she drifted into a life of crime** (expresses two propositions (topic: Shirley, comment: being good/ drifting into a life of crime).

**The sun**, which Du Barthes, that classic ancestor of periphrasis, had not styled “the grand duke of candles”, **shone forth brightly and cheerily**. (“The sun shone forth brightly and cheerily” expresses a proposition about the world of the narrated. The rest does not refer to that world but to its representation and is made up of narrating signs.

# Stative and Active Events

4. A story in which most events are stative will be less dynamic than one in which most events are active.
5. **Realistic novels**, where long descriptions of characters and settings abound, and **romantic novels**, where local color is important and fifty pages can be devoted to the description of Paris, are more static than **adventure novels** where descriptions are kept to a minimum and where it is mainly the action of various characters that matters.
6. In some narratives, a balance between stative and active events is maintained throughout.
7. In others, stative or active events clearly predominate in certain sections. For instance, the initial section differs from the rest of the other parts since the initial part is devoted to exposition and to give the reader background information.

# Temporal Relations

The events recounted in a narrative are organized along a temporal axis:

1. Some of these events may be simultaneous: (At eight o'clock, John got up and Mary went to sleep.)
2. One event must precede another at a time: (John ate, then Mary ate, then Bill ate.)
3. Two events may be temporally adjacent (As soon as he arrived, he started to cry)
4. Two events may be approximate (At 8:00 p.m., John got up, at 8:30 p.m., he stepped out on the front porch)
5. Two events may be distant (Joan was born in Italy in 1925. In 1976, she left her native country for the United states)
6. The duration of two non-synchronous events may or may not be equivalent: (John ran for an hour, then she ate for an hour; Joan ran for two hours, then she ate for three hours)

# Spatial Relations

1. Events may occur in the same space: In the living room, John was reading and peter was playing solitaire.
2. Events may occur in different spaces: John had a beer at Jiggys's then he had another beer at Murray's.
3. Different spaces may be adjoining: John walked from Ave X to Ave Y and Peter walked from Ave Y to Ave A.
4. Different spaces may be very near one another: John lived on Ave X and Peter on Ave Z.
5. Different spaces may be very far apart: John travelled through the United states and Vera travelled through Australia.



# Causal Relations

1. Two events or series of events may be related causally: **John was depressed therefore he started to drink; May felt bad because she had overslept.**
2. Causality is a characteristic of many narratives.
3. The causality principle is numerous and significant in realistic novels.
4. The causal links established between events may reflect a psychological order: **a character's actions are the cause or consequences of his hate of mind.**
5. The causal links established between events may reflect a philosophical order: **every event exemplifies the theory of universal determinism.**
6. The causal links established between events may reflect a political and social order.

# Modifications

1. Given two propositions pertaining to the same topic, one comment may be the inverse of the other: **John was very happy then he was very sad; Mary ate a lot then she ate a little.**
2. One event may be its mere negation of the other: **Mary slept well then she did not sleep well.**
3. One event may be a repetition of it (may be) at a different time, in a different space: **John kissed Mary at seven then he kissed her at nine.**
4. There are modifications related to manner (**quickly, slowly, happily**): **John worked very efficiently then he worked a little less efficiently.**
5. There are modifications related to modality (**wish may be fulfilled, intention realized, a promise respected**): **Mary wanted to meet Olga and she met Olga. Mary intended to read Ulysses and he did. Peter promised to go and he went.**

# Relevance

1. Events can be distinguished in terms of their relevance to the chronological sequence, where the sequence is taken to be non-simultaneous topic-comment structures the last one of which constitutes a modification of the first. Thus any event which is neither the one modified nor the modified one is less relevant than any event which is:

John ate a hearty meal, then he took a little nap, then he went to work. He was feeling very happy and he met Bill who invited him for a drink and he accepted because he liked Bill. Then he met Bob and Bob was very nasty to him and , as a result, he felt very unhappy.

The entire string can be reproduced even when deleting:

2. John ate a hearty meal, then he took a little nap, then he went to work)

John's transformation from being happy into unhappy could be recounted even if the following part is eliminated:

3. He met Bill who invited him for a drink and he accepted because he liked Bill.

Thus 2 is less relevant than 3 in relation to 1.

# Relevance

- 1. Events have different degrees of relevance which allows us to extract a story line (plot) from a narrative and to summarize the latter.**
- 2. Those events which are not relevant may be omitted from an account of the story line. The first event and the last event of the sequence as well as the cause of the modification may not be eliminated:**
  - a: It was nine o'clock and the birds were singing and the bells were ringing and John felt strong, then he saw Mary and he felt very weak.**
  - b: John felt strong then he saw Mary and he felt very weak.**
  - c: It was nine o'clock and John saw Mary.**

**b could be an adequate summary of a; whereas c would not.**

# Aggregates of situations and Activities

In a given narrative, various events constituting more or less heterogeneous situations and activities may, when combined, constitute larger situations and activities:

**He went skating, then he had ice-cream, then he watched a movie.**

This implies that:

1. He had a lot of fun.
2. He wasted a lot of time.

This explanation is useful to make summary of any narrative. Another example:

**John suddenly punched Jim, then Jim kicked John, then they threw bottles at each other, then they calmed down and went out to have a drink and became friends once again.**

The first three events can summarize a fight between Jim and John. The last three events can be referred to as 'Reconciliation between Jim and John':

**There was a fight between John and Jim followed by a reconciliation between them.**

# Character

1. We usually call a character a topic or logical participant. The character as a topic is common to a set of propositions predicating of it at least some characteristics generally associated with human beings.
2. Two propositions may be related because:
  - A. They refer to same topic though they assert different things about it: **John was tall and he was handsome; Mary went to the movies then she went to home.**
  - B. They refer to different topics although they assert the same thing about them: **John was red and Peter was red; England went to war and so did France.**
3. The logical participant may be endowed with certain human physical attributes such as thinking, will, speaking, laughing, etc.
4. The nature of the logical participant is clearly not all important. Though it is usually identified as a person, a horse could be portrayed as philosophizing, or a table may be described as thinking and speaking. They both would constitute characters.

# Character

5. For a logical participant to function as a character, it must be foregrounded at least once in the narrative rather than relegated to the background and made part of a general context or setting:

**There were thousands of people at the fair, talking, laughing and shouting, and John was having a lot of fun. He walked over to one of the arcades and played the pinball machines.**

6. Characters can be defined in terms of their actions, by their words or by their feelings and so on.

7. Characters can also be defined according the functions they perform or fulfill such heroes, villains, helpers, donors, etc.

8. Characters may be classified according to textual prominence and simply distinguish between main and secondary characters.

9. A major character is not only referred to by the greatest number of propositions, but also qualitatively different from other characters.

10. The major character has distinctive ways of expressing himself. He has a name. He is the only one to be associated with certain moral attitudes.

11. The major character's appearance in the narrative may correspond to strategically important points, like the beginning or end of various sequences.

12. Characters can be dynamic or static; round or flat, complex or simple; multidimensional or unidimensional, capable of surprising us or incapable of it.

13. Some of the attributes of a given character, such as his physical appearance, his intellectual and moral qualities, may be introduced contiguously, in set-piece presentation. Or such attributes may be scattered one by one through the narrative.

14. The presentation may be orderly: physical attributes are described before the psychological ones, past actions are presented before the present ones, etc. or disorderly.

# Setting

1. Setting refers to the background with a set of propositions of spatial and temporal complexity.
2. Text may be textually prominent or negligible.
3. Setting may be dynamic or static, consistent or inconsistent, vague or precise.
4. Setting may be presented in an orderly fashion such the front of a house is described from left to right, wall is shown from top to bottom, a castle is castle from inside to the outside or vice versa or disorderly.
5. The attributes of setting may be presented contiguously or scattered one by one in terms of description.



# Theme

1. A theme is a general thought or idea of which a set of propositions is taken to be an illustration.

2. Events can be related in that they pertain to the same theme:

**John loved Mary and Peter loved Nancy.**

**France waged war on England and Germany waged war on France.**

**He liked to cut the wings off flies and she enjoyed looking at people suffer.**

3. A theme may be more or less fundamental, more or less prominent, more or less articulated and its distribution in a given narrative may vary.

# Functional Relations

- 1. Events which may or may not have obvious characteristics in common can be connected in terms of their function.**
- 2. We may find that certain disparate situations and activities are fundamentally equivalent in that they constitute a difficult task to be fulfilled or a lack of its liquidation, an interdiction or its violation:**

**It was forbidden by the gods to go to the movies but John went to the movies. (John went to the movies)**

**It was forbidden by the government to work hard but Peter worked hard. (Peter worked hard)**

**Both have the same propositions.**

# Multiple Sequences

1. There are many narratives with more than one sequence.
2. In a given narrative, there may be an indefinite number of sequences have more or less in common in terms of characters, themes, settings, etc. and combined in various ways. Thus one sequence could be joined with another one as in:

Jane was happy, then she met Mary, then she was unhappy, then she met Joan, then she was happy again.

3. One sequence may be embedded into another one:

Jane was happy and Mary was unhappy, then Mary met Peter, then she was happy, then Jane met Joan, then she was unhappy.

4. One sequence may be made to alternate with another one:

Jane was happy and Mary was unhappy, then Jane met Joan and Mary met Iris, then Jane was unhappy and Mary was happy.