

Unspeakable Sentences

Narration and Representation in
the Language of Fiction

Ann Banfield



Routledge Revivals

Unspeakable Sentences

First published in 1982, this title grew from a series of essays on various aspects of narrative style; the result is a finished product that melds literary theory with linguistic methodology. It is argued that, where linguistic theory intersects with literary theory, it is narrative that provides the crucial 'experiment' for deciding between a communication and a non-communication theory of language and, by extension, of literature. Chapters discuss such areas as subjectivity in direct and indirect speech, the absence of the narrator, and the development of narrative style. With a detailed introduction to the subject, this reissue will be of value to students of linguistics and literature with a particular interest in narrative style and linguistic theory.

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Erratum

p. 25, line 6 should read: 'This should not be taken, however, as an argument against the need for a transformational component in the grammar'.

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To Alfred T. Banfield and Rita Simoneit Banfield

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Preface

This book grew out of a series of essays on various aspects of narrative style. In the course of writing them, I became increasingly aware of the logical interdependence of the theoretical positions I had adopted in them. In order to demonstrate their connectedness a book-length format seemed appropriate. The present work thus does not consist of a collection of articles but attempts an integrated theory of narrative whose evidence is literary and whose method of argumentation is linguistic.

The major part of the work which went into the making of the book was carried on in the intellectual isolation of the American university, far from the climate of open debate and dialogue which linguists trained in the late 1960s were fortunate enough to experience. But, happily, it was begun in an exchange with S. -Y. Kuroda, and the controversy which has since developed around the hypotheses I presented in those earlier essays has provided some foretaste of that internationalist utopia which is the ideal for any intellectual community. For this I now have the hindsight to thank my critics as well as my supporters. I need not distinguish between the two – who knows, perhaps some of the former have changed sides – in naming Mieke Bal, Julian Boyd and Zelda Boyd, Joseph Butwin, Dorrit Cohn, Joel Fineman, Käte Hamburger, Mi-Jeung Jo, David Lodge, Brian McHale, Carlos Otero, Roy Pascal, Claude Perruchot, Carlos Piera, Mitsou Ronat, Nomi Tamir-Ghez, Hayden White, all the participants in the Synopsis No. 2 of the Porter Institute of Semiology in Tel-Aviv and especially Joseph Emonds, S. -Y. Kuroda and Jean-Claude Milner, with whom I have been able to break the silence imposed by writing with discussions or correspondence on questions relevant to the content of the book.

As a linguist working within the Chomskyan paradigm, I have kept

as my goal to account for ‘all and only the sentences of the language’ — that task everywhere reiterated by Chomsky. But such an ideal is deceptive in its simplicity. Every linguist searching in practice for the elegant solution to some empirical problem has surely felt at some point the anxiety of Beckett’s Molloy, aiming for his ‘say sixteen’ sucking stones each ‘to have been sucked once at least in impeccable succession, not one sucked twice, not one left unsucked’ (*Molloy*, 1965, p. 73). He suspects the absurdity of the task he has set himself and realizes the impossibility of concluding but the necessity of stopping.

Now I am willing to believe, indeed I firmly believe, that other solutions to this problem might have been found, and indeed may still be found, no less sound, but much more elegant, than the one I shall now describe, if I can. And I believe too that had I been a little more insistent, a little more resistant, I could have found them myself. But I was tired, but I was tired . . . (*Ibid.*, pp. 72-1).

Berkeley, California, 1980

Author’s note

Chapters 1 and 2 include material, revised and expanded, from Banfield (1973) and (1978a), Chapter 3 incorporates the discussion of the echo question from Banfield (1978a), Chapter 4 is a revision of Banfield (1979), the first part of Chapter 5 is a revision of Banfield (1981) and the first half of Chapter 6 is a revision of a portion of Banfield (1978a).

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Is not a great linguist thus one who succeeds in making generally accepted a new figure of the evidence, that is to say, at the same instant an unforeseen trace of his excitement? (Jean-Claude Milner, *L'Amour de la langue*, p. 129)

their essential character was that I was not free to choose them, that such as they were they were given to me. And I realized that this must be the mark of their authenticity. I had not gone in search of the two uneven paving-stones of the courtyard upon which I had stumbled. But it was precisely the fortuitous and inevitable fashion in which this and the other sensations had been encountered that proved the trueness of the past which they brought back to life, of the images which they released, since we feel, with these sensations, the effort that they make to climb back towards the light, feel in ourselves the joy of rediscovering what is real. (Marcel Proust, *The Past Recaptured*, p. 139; *Le Temps retrouvé*, pp. 178-80)

Introduction

When the recent history of the human sciences comes to be written, the 1960s will be known as the decade of theory and the 1970s as that of anti-theory. In literary studies, this history will have to record how narrative has become what the lyric was for the New Criticism: the embodiment of the prevailing conception of the literary and, as such, the site for the testing of the very possibility of a literary theory. In that it attempts a theory of the language of narrative fiction, the present book is, then, an anachronism. But it is only in the context of both these past two decades that its genesis and goals can be understood, and such an historical account forms the natural prologue to and justification for its linguistic approach to literary problems.

The search for explanatory theories in the 1960s was based on a widespread optimistic conviction that fresh discoveries were possible in areas like anthropology, psychoanalysis, history and literary theory. And, as was everywhere reiterated, its model was linguistic.¹ This faith in an intellectual progress inspired by linguistics is recorded in Roland Barthes's 1966 essay *Critique et vérité*, where Barthes defends what was then 'la nouvelle critique' with the passion of one convinced of success. In this, he spoke for his time. Nowhere is this confidence more apparent than in the section entitled 'La Science de la littérature':

Its model will obviously be linguistic. Faced with the impossibility of mastering all the sentences of a language, the linguist is reduced to establishing a *hypothetical model of description*, out of which he can explain how the infinite set of sentences of a language can be generated. Whatever the adjustments one might be led to make, there is no reason for not attempting to apply such a method to the works of literature. . . . In other words, linguistics can give to literature this generative model which is the basis of all science, because

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it is always a matter of being able to invoke certain rules for explaining certain results. The science of literature will hence have as its object, not explaining why a particular meaning must be accepted, nor even why it has been . . . , but why it is *acceptable*, in no way by virtue of the philological rules of the letter, but by virtue of the linguistic rules of the symbol. Here once again we encounter, transposed to the level of a science of discourse, the task of current linguistics, which is to describe the *grammaticality* of sentences, not their meaning. In the same manner, one aims at describing the acceptability of works, not their sense. (1966a, pp. 57-8)

But there are two models of linguistics. European structuralist poetics derived its notion of a theory largely from Saussurian linguistics; terms and notions like 'the arbitrariness of the sign,' the 'sign' itself, 'diachronic' and 'synchronic,' 'binary,' the 'phoneme' and 'morpheme' and related neologisms ('sememe,' 'narreme'), all entered the terminology of various disciplines from Saussure and with the emphasis on taxonomic analysis they had within structural linguistics.

In Barthes's language, however, there are echoes of another linguistics than Saussure's. In 1957, Chomsky had published *Syntactic Structures* and introduced a new conception of grammatical theory antagonistic to the behaviorist and empiricist assumptions of structural linguistics. In periods when major theoretical breakthroughs have been made in one area, creative activity increases in related domains. Such was true in physics at the beginning of this century. Such also was the case in the 1960s. Chomsky's ideas served to create an atmosphere in which, it was felt, old problems could be approached with new solutions; and the ferment generative grammar inspired in linguistics quickly spilled over into other fields, literary theory included. Structuralist poetics, however, could only issue prophecies of what the influence of linguistics might accomplish. Barthes, maintaining that 'a *certain* science of literature is possible,' quickly adds, 'if it is to exist one day' (1966a, p. 57) and Todorov similarly refers to 'what we may one day call "the science of literature"' (1977a, p. 236).

Literary criticism no longer keeps Barthes's faith in the fruitfulness of analogies between literary and grammatical theory. An anti-theoretical reaction now reigns, where what goes under the guise of theory typically reduces to a critical activity consisting in the dismantling of a system to demonstrate its incompleteness, the flaw in

its structure, without offering any counter-theory.² Although generative grammar continues to make advances, this no longer has general repercussions beyond linguistics. 'Today linguistics hardly arouses interest any more and is even thought boring,' Jean-Claude Milner has recently written (1978b, p. 124). Critics like Barthes admitted that the project of a literary science on a linguistic model had failed. Hence Barthes's retreat, first signalled in *S/Z*, into criticism as opposed to theory.³ But there has been no real assessment of this failure of a structuralist poetics, modelling itself on linguistics, to produce the promised 'science of literature.' If the vocabulary of generative grammar was taken over, often alongside that of structural linguistics without any recognition of incompatibility, the principles of Chomskyan practice, which moved a generation of linguists to participate in the research he inaugurated, were never really grasped and put to use by structuralist critics, nor did they come to terms with Chomsky's criticism of the empiricist biases of structural linguistic methodology. This is because these principles, unlike structuralist methodology, can only be grasped *in* practice, in trying to solve linguistic problems; structuralism's failure is the failure to see in linguistic practice anything but the taxonomic methodology.⁴

The best apology for the linguistic argumentation of the book which follows lies in an explanation of Chomsky's practice as counterposed to structuralist methodology; the best justification for my conviction that the relevance of generative grammar for literary theory has not yet been exhausted will be its success in contributing, not just a new vocabulary to traditional views of literature, but some non-trivial notions not discoverable by any other means than linguistic argumentation.

1 Dividing up the surface vs. isolating the formalizable beneath the surface

Structuralism equated the task of constructing a literary theory with that of formulating a methodology, a set of "discovery procedures," those techniques of segmentation and classification to which Saussure referred' (Chomsky, 1968, p. 22). These are methods of induction which either guarantee the proper organization of the data independent of intuition or chart the route from data to generalization, prior to practice. The task of the linguist is only to apply these methods to any new set of data and compute the results automatically, with the consequent emphasis on data-collecting.

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The linguistic model was thus reduced to a methodology assumed to 'always involve segmentation, classification and the formulation of oppositions and rules of combination' (Culler, 1975, p. 27). (See note 4.) This essentially taxonomic notion of linguistic method underlies the structuralist vocabulary; the *morpheme*, the *phoneme*, even the *sign* designate the units which Saussure saw as posing the central problem for linguistics, and literary theory was to follow suit.

The surface of narrative was thus analyzed into its constituent parts – into the motifs of Proppian 'morphology' (Greimas), into the levels of discourse and modes of presentation in Barthes, Todorov and Genette, but the principles uniting its parts still eluded the grasp of an analysis into binary oppositions and a grid of possible combinations. To draw forth the figure in the evidence of narrative demanded another conception of scientific praxis which went beyond an analysis of the surface.

Chomsky offers no alternative to a methodology conceived as discovery procedures but what is exorbitant to scientific theory, the notion of an 'intuitive leap'.⁵ The mechanism of the mental act of discovery, Chomsky insists, may be forever beyond the grasp of the theorist; the interval in which discovery occurs remains a blank about which nothing can be said. This is everywhere observed in the commentary on scientific praxis. 'Scientific praxis is always prior to any explanation of its procedures,' Feyerabend points out (1978, p. 31). Thus, for the scientist, as Peirce long ago saw, 'nothing but imagination . . . can ever supply him an inkling of the truth. He can stare stupidly at phenomena; but in the absence of imagination they will not connect themselves in any rational way' (1955, p. 43). This is beautifully set forth in Einstein's 'Principles of Research': 'The supreme task of the physicist is to arrive at those elementary laws from which the cosmos can be built up by pure deduction. There is no logical path to these laws; only intuition, resting on sympathetic understanding of experience, can reach them' (1934, p. 4). The result is a 'methodological uncertainty,' because 'there is no logical bridge between phenomena and their theoretical principles.'

There is thus no generative 'method' to apply to literature. The truth is that no discipline can be simply 'applied' to another. It requires an intuitive leap as well to discover the relevance of one discipline for another. If there is methodological uncertainty, however, this does not mean that Chomskyan linguistic theory renounces all claims to any degree of certainty and, hence, offers no model of a practice to literary

theory. But this practice lies elsewhere than in an inductive methodology. In generative grammar, the substitute for, if not the counterpart to, the notion of discovery procedures is the linguistic argument. The logical bridge may not be constructable in the inductive direction ahead of time, but the logical steps connecting phenomena and their hypothetical principles should be retraceable from the deductive direction in the arguments supporting the latter. Within the linguistic argument theory and evidence, principles and phenomena, are joined in a new configuration and both redefined. The principles are made subject to falsification. But given 'the highly tentative character of any attempt to justify an empirical claim about linguistic structure' (Chomsky, 1965, p. 26), the optimal theory is not simply the one with no counter-evidence to it, for, as Feyerabend points out, 'there is not a single known theory that agrees with all the known facts in its domain' (1978, p. 31). The best theory is the one which explains the most evidence with the greatest generalizations, and the linguist tries to multiply the arguments in its favor.

Can a literary theory adopt this practice? Another way of phrasing this question is whether there is not something systematic in literature which will submit to formal representation. For the initial gesture of any empirical theory is the classic 'demarkation' of the object of study, separating what is representable within the theory from the infinite set of observations which can be made about it. In Chomsky, as we have seen, this is not done by imposing a system of classifications inductively but by intuitively seizing the systematic within the data by means of an hypothesis, to be then justified by argumentation. There is something necessarily circular in this isolation of just that data for which a formalization is feasible and arguing from it,⁶ but the circle is broken by the notion of 'independent justification,' whereby an explanation or some proposed aspect of one (a category symbol mentioned in a rule, for instance) comes to explain something other than the phenomenon for which it is proposed – and ultimately by its full integration into a more complete theoretical system.⁷

Whatever the conceptualization of the representable under the proposed theory, it is only in contra-distinction to the non-representable that it can be elicited; whether it be the Saussurean distinction between *langue* and *parole* or the Chomskyan one between competence and performance, the theory assigns a name to what it can say something about and to what it cannot.⁸ The linguist must 'decide which questions he can legitimately hope to give a general explanation for and which he

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must – for the time being – renounce as beyond the scope of theoretical solution’ (Chomsky, 1957, ch. 9). This is in no way a gesture unique to linguistic science. ‘In regard to his subject matter,’ Einstein explains, ‘the physicist has to limit himself very severely: he must content himself with describing the most simple events which can be brought within the domain of our experience; all events of a more complex order are beyond the power of the human intellect to reconstruct with the subtle accuracy and logical perfection which the theoretical physicist demands’ (1934, p. 3).

Such an initial elimination of the unformalizable is then the constitutive act by which literary theory would become at once empirical and theoretical, on the model of generative grammar. Notice that this is not equivalent to simple formalizing. Structuralism constructed highly formal systems, but these often attempted to categorize everything. (See note 7.) In never really determining in practice what is formalizable in the literary, it never provided any means for testing its formal categories. Empiricist, it never became truly empirical, and hence, its formalizations were often rightly taken by literary critics as sterile. On the other hand, a literary theory which succeeds in isolating the formally representable, far from reducing the literary to its formal representation, as is so often assumed by the anti-formalists among critics, continuously bears witness to what it cannot encompass, to what escapes formalization. But the demands of formalization insure that hypotheses will be rigorously stated and hence what its empirically testable claims are. ‘My pencil is more intelligent than I,’ Einstein is supposed to have said (cited in Popper, 1972, p. 225).⁹

Is there then something systematic in the literary which can be represented in a literary theory which does not stop at the classification of surface units? Answering this question requires finding an equivalent for the notion of linguistic competence as it functions in generative theory, that is, a conceptualization of the formalizable. This can be accomplished if we make style, not the individual work and its value or interpretation, our object of study. Style provides the required idealization, equivalent to competence, for Barthes’s ‘hypothetical model of description, which aimed to explain what was ‘acceptable’ in the language of the text. The confusion presently reigning in literary studies is largely between texts and style; the setting aside of the former, akin to eliminating performance, is the first step toward theory.

But is style in any way distinct from language itself? The converging work of several linguists suggests a way in which it is. This research has

focussed on various constructions which pattern together and thus arguably represent a separable aspect of language. These can all be grouped under the rubric of subjectivity in language and include exclamations, insults, personal pronouns and deictics, among others.¹⁰ These must all be referred to the speaking subject for interpretation, yet the subject remains what Milner (1978a) calls the 'exorbitant term' because it cannot be captured within a formal grammar:

the givens of language can be described, provided one keeps at it, without invoking the blunt fact that they only depend upon by their being uttered by a subject. From this fact, the notation to which, from the modern perspective, science in the last analysis is reduced does not have to incorporate a term which is defined precisely by its not being representable within science. (p. 18)

Until recently these constructions have not been included in the domain of the linguistically formalizable as well, i.e. from what can be predicted by grammatical rules, but once they have been subjected to linguistic analysis, it can be demonstrated that they show underlying syntactic regularities like other, non-subjective constructions. i.e. they belong to linguistic competence. This is Milner's argument for the insult and exclamation:

But the exclamation and the insult, once it is recognised they belong to language, must, as we shall see, be referred to this exorbitant term. Nevertheless, – and it is at this point that the circle of language is closed – these movements in which at times so much passion is invested are far from being without a distinct form. On the contrary, their expressions are circumscribed by regularities and give rise to a writing in every way comparable to any syntactic notation. (*Ibid.*)

To the presence or absence of this subjective aspect of language we can assign the term 'style'.¹¹ Out of this linguistic analysis, other, more surprising conclusions can be drawn which revise our traditional views of expression and style. It has been generally assumed that subjectivity in language is properly located within a theory of the communicative act and intention. This assumption is treated as axiomatic and not as subject to empirical verification. Language, this position holds, is a form of communication; and this concept exhausts the possible linguistic

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functions, i.e. fundamental structural properties of language can be deduced from the communicative function.¹² This assumption is largely based on the observation that in normal speech the other functions of language cannot be separated from the communicative act. In speech, for instance, we do not normally express our point of view without automatically communicating it to any interlocutor who happens to hear. But then, language is defined tautologically as communication because the case where language is obviously marked by the communicative intent is taken as paradigmatic of all uses of language.

Such reasoning cannot attain the status of linguistic argumentation because, on the one hand, it neither rigorously defines its terms nor formalizes its claims and, on the other, its conclusions are not empirically testable. They are either trivial – i.e. the predictions they make do not add to our knowledge of language – or they are so vague as to be unfalsifiable. If the hypothesis that language is communication is to be non-trivial, language and communication will have to be defined independently of one another and the cases of language use which do not readily conform to the communication model considered. Foremost among such uses is the literary.

2 The evidence of narrative

Ultimately, whether or not language is equivalent to communication is an empirical question, and its answer awaits the crucial evidence. This is because argumentation must not only justify any theoretical position adopted, but also reveal and interpret the evidence – ‘the only relevant evidence is the evidence anticipated by a theory, and *empiricalness (or scientific character) and theoretical progress are inseparably connected*’ (Lakatos, 1970, p. 123). Once the data – what is given – finds its place in an argument and is thereby endowed with a regularity, it becomes evidence for something. This is the significant difference between ‘data’ and ‘evidence’ and the progress from one to the other implied by their difference in meaning. The data is given – that unalterable reality which could not have been foreseen, those properties ‘which can in no way be deduced, but must be simply noted’ (Milner, 1973, p. 25, fn. 12). It confers the limits on a theory wishing to be empirical. It is ‘the world of phenomena’ which ‘uniquely determines the theoretical system’ (Einstein, 1934, p. 4). Evidence, on the other hand, is always evidence *of* something and exists only in the

context of a theory which predicts it. It explains the data, transforming it from the unpredictable to the predicted outcome of underlying principles. The data exerts its force at the intuitive level, appealing to what Einstein called 'sympathetic understanding of experience'; when the flash of insight comes, theoretical principles and data now turned evidence are simultaneously revealed.

The fact that the evidence itself comes under the jurisdiction of the intuitive leap is most clearly seen in those cases in the history of science when proposed theories had to await – perhaps for decades – the discovery of crucial experiments to test them. The experiment itself then qualifies as a discovery. The vision revealing the evidence is tied to the mental act by which the scientific process is constituted. This is precisely what happened in generative grammar in the case of Chomsky's insistence on the relevance of native speaker intuitions. Consequently, as Milner has pointed out, in Chomskyan linguistics 'the only experiment which is valid is the judgment which, based upon his or her intuition, a subject can pronounce upon a given sentence' (1978a, p. 20).

The crucial role accorded the evidence – primarily syntactic or phonological evidence – in linguistic argumentation is another point where Chomskyan practice was never fully appreciated and integrated by a structuralist poetics. It is the perfect fit of the evidence to the argument which is called 'prediction'; that matching of the two is the goal of the linguist's search, ultimately to predict 'all and only the sentences of the language,' in Chomsky's formula. The danger of overlooking the important role of evidence in Chomsky is underscored by Milner:

Nothing moreover is easier for anyone who reads a linguist, than not to watch for this imperceptible crack where something of a thrill is perhaps transcribed, for it is presented under the very features of demonstrative certitude. Furthermore, if the transcription succeeds, the instant when the meaning arises should be nowhere else than in the moment when the linguist has pushed the evidence to the point of conclusion. It is in this same evidence, which justifies the conclusion and demands assent, that the source [*l'ombilic*] of the linguist's excitement should be sought, by whoever knows how to read it. (1978b, p. 129)

One must then have crucial evidence for deciding the relevance of the communication model for all uses of language, and, in particular, for

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the category we have been calling 'subjective' and for that known as the 'literary'. Indeed, can one establish a connection between the two on empirical grounds? Here a problem of linguistic theory intersects with one of literary theory, and the site of their convergence is precisely narrative, for it is narrative which provides the crucial 'experiment' for deciding between a communication and a non-communication theory of language and, by extension, of literature. Such is the 'evidence' presented in this book, evidence long grown overly familiar under the name 'point of view,' the term for subjectivity as a feature of narrative style.

It was precisely a linguistically inspired literary theory – initially a structuralist poetics taking its cue from Russian formalism – which made narrative the source of its evidence. From our later perspective, we might speculate that the reasons for the Formalists' original recognition of the centrality of narrative lies in the curiously retarded historical appearance of the Russian narrative, that moment when Russian and all East European literary history witnessed the meeting of two cultures, one literate and the other oral, a moment in West European literature identifiable only in retrospect, located somewhere between the Renaissance and the eighteenth century, when the novel eclipsed the epic. For it is in the language of narrative fiction that literature departs most from ordinary discourse and from those of its functions which narrative reveals as separable from language itself. In narration, language can be studied not as a system of signs or of communication but in itself. In narration, language attains the fullest exploitation of its possibilities and reaches their limits. In the predictions of the 'end of literature,' significantly it is rarely poetry or the drama which is foremost in mind; it is the end of the novel which figures as the end of literature.

Hence, the problems which contemporary criticism raises are specifically those of the language of narrative: the importance of the representation of consciousness and the complex 'shifting of point of view' possible only in narrative style, with the concomitant withdrawal of the author as a voice in the text and the resultant creation of the autonomous text. All this comes down to the fact that in narrative, subjectivity or the expressive function of language emerges free of communication and confronts its other in the form of a sentence empty of all subjectivity. While there have been numerous attempts to submit narrative to the communication paradigm by positing a narrator addressing a reader for every text, once communication is defined non-tautologically in rigorous linguistic terms, this position cannot be maintained.

There are thus at present two possible alternative theories of narrative style, one which is subsumed under communication theory where every sentence has a speaker and every text a narrator and hence every sentence is subjective, and another which divides the sentences of narrative into those with a subject and those without. As a consequence of the latter, every text cannot be said to have a narrator. What makes possible a crucial experiment for deciding between these two alternatives is that the required imaginative leap has taken place and material long familiar in the theory of the novel has been looked at afresh. The initial step was taken, it seems to me, in Kuroda (1973). There it is argued from grammatical evidence in Japanese that there exists a literary style which 'transcends the paradigm of linguistic performance in terms of speaker and hearer.' Kuroda's argument involves an epistemological distinction between two functions of language: indicating facts and expressing the speaker's state (cf. Russell, 1940, pp. 195ff). Thus, a 'sensation' adjective like *sad* can be used with a first-person grammatical subject to express the speaker's state as well as to convey the fact of this state, or it can be reported of another person only to indicate his state. While this difference is only implicit in English, it is explicit in Japanese: 'in Japanese certain words of sensation exist in pairs, one member of a pair being morphologically an adjective and the other a verb, and this morphological distinction corresponds to the epistemological one'¹³ (1973, p. 3).

While sensation adjectives only occur with a first-person subject in normal Japanese declaratives, a Japanese speaker accepts them with third-person subjects in sentences understood as what Kuroda calls the 'non-reportive' style. He then shows that sentences in this style with the third person cannot contain morphemes indicating the first person. For instance, a construction which signals the presence of a speaker, *yo*, translated as 'I am telling you,' cannot appear in a sentence in which a sensation adjective is predicated of a third-person subject. It follows that such passages cannot be construed as the voice of a narrator but present the unmediated point of view of a character. Kuroda concludes:

I started this article with a problem in epistemology and ended in a problem of literary art. Both of these problems have been found to have direct reflection in Japanese grammar. They both represent such fundamental features in the two basic aspects of human mental life relating to language, i.e., knowledge and literary art, that one

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might expect that they cannot fail to imprint their shadows on the grammar of any language. This distinction of the reportive and nonreportive styles might also be found in English grammar, perhaps in a more concealed way. (1973, p. 389)

This distinction between the reportive and non-reportive styles does exist in the grammar of English, as well as of the other European languages; but, as Kuroda suspected, it reveals itself elsewhere than in a morphological distinction between sensation adjectives and verbs. It manifests itself rather in the grammar of reported speech. The English (and French and German) counterpart of Kuroda's 'non-reportive' style in Japanese is a literary style known to modern grammarians under the French term *style indirect libre* and the German *erlebte Rede*. Since there is no well-established English term – evidence of the almost total ignorance of the style as a specific grammatical form in Anglo-American criticism until recently – I will call it 'represented speech and thought,' for reasons which will become apparent in the discussion which follows.¹⁴

When Kuroda originally identified the 'non-reportive style,' represented speech and thought and the literature on it were unknown to him.¹⁵ This makes more striking his prediction that the distinction between a reportive and a non-reportive style which he observed in Japanese might exist in the grammar of other languages. The characterization of this style in English within a grammar of direct and indirect speech was the subject of Banfield (1973), where I argued that it furnished crucial evidence against the hypothesis that every text has a narrator and hence conforms to the communication model. Since the publication of that article, a debate has already developed around this style. At the theoretical level, the controversy centers around the appropriateness of the communication model for a theory of narrative. At the methodological level, the attack on my attempt to integrate this style into a generative grammar revised to accommodate it has tended to deny the possibility of giving a formal account of what is claimed to be the constantly shifting data of literary style. The object of literary theory is 'not susceptible of linguistic definition' (Culler, 1978, p. 612). It 'cannot be defined in purely formal terms' (Dillon and Kirchhoff, 1976, p. 413). 'We will only succeed in coming near it if we give up trying to bring it under the banner of unity, whether logical or synthetic, that of being or that of meaning' (Perruchot, 1975, p. 254). Instead, it belongs to 'rhetoric' or the 'literary,' notions which become,

by a circular reasoning, what cannot be defined linguistically or formally.

These criticisms raise at once empirical issues and meta-theoretical questions about the very possibility of a literary theory along the lines of the model provided by generative grammar. They are best answered by the success of the analysis of narrative which follows. Little progress has been made by a poetics armed with the methodological assumptions of structural linguistics, but the inability of a line of inquiry to suggest a formal solution to an empirical problem should not be confused with an inherent property of the object of inquiry. However, a few remarks about the status and use of literary evidence in an argument based on narrative style are in order.

The evidence presented in this book in the form of sentences and constructions is essentially syntactic, and like the classic syntactic evidence of generative grammar, is both positive and negative, appealing to judgments of acceptability and non-acceptability. For part of what was suddenly brought into focus in the radically new Chomskyan conception of the evidence was the existence of negative evidence in the form of strings judged unacceptable by the native speaker, those non-sentences marked with asterisks in the conventional notation. These came to play a crucial role as the logical consequence of the requirement that the grammar account for all and *only* the sentences of the language.

The evidence presented here is restricted primarily to data from English and French, for, as Chomsky argues, universal claims can be made as well on the basis of one language, studied in depth, as from a comparative study covering a wide range of languages. French offers a special category of evidence making explicit what remains hidden in English. But there is no pretence that other languages might not offer fresh insights into narrative not to be gained elsewhere, as is the case with Japanese sensation words.

However, this evidence differs, at least superficially, from ordinary linguistic examples, which are normally elicited from the speaker, for it is mostly taken from novels and other narrative texts. Its status must therefore be clarified – does its force still rest on the speaker's intuition about acceptability or non-acceptability, extended to cover some notion of 'acceptable in a specified literary context' or does it rest on occurrence, taken as the infallible guide to acceptability? Can we assume that in literature, as in language, not just anything goes, that there is a distinction between a possible narrative sentence and an

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impossible one? Or is each writer free to innovate without limits? And, even if there are limits, can the general reader recognize the genuine stylistic innovation from what is not? Here we have returned to Barthes's grasp of what is essentially of relevance in generative grammar for the study of literature.

For any attempt to construct a literary theory must begin with the assumption that not just anything written is literary. The alternative is untenable, rendering any generalizations about language, any literary theory, impossible because there is no basis for distinguishing between what is intuited as literary and a random collection of words. What literary theory must seek at the present to do is define the limits of the literary. That any theory purporting to do this might not be able to predict the form of future innovations should not be disturbing – the prediction it aims at is theoretical, not historical.¹⁶ New writers will continuously discover new possibilities inherent in language and hence novel evidence for the constant revision of a theory of its limits.

Here we must reinvoké the notion of style as a counterpart of linguistic competence, representing at once the writer's internalized knowledge and what in it can be captured within a formal theory. That writers may sporadically violate principles of style, as speakers may violate grammatical rules, presents a problem which cannot be ignored but which must be set aside until these principles have been established. These violations may be recorded in the text, which is a fixed and finite entity, an object, and an instance of 'performance.' But the text is only one repository in which evidence may be found; actually occurring examples, once identified, can always be supplemented by ones deliberately and freely constructed on the basis of the same internalized principles which allow identification. From the text the evidence for the style can be taken, but the possible sentences of the style are infinite and, as such, not all contained in one place. In any case, to isolate them, whether from the text or elsewhere, the reader's intuition must be invoked, i.e. the text is not an incontestable document containing only acceptable sentences of the style. And acceptability, of course, is only the form of the evidence: 'the notion "acceptable" is not to be confused with "grammatical." Acceptability is a concept that belongs to the study of performance. . . . Grammaticalness is only one of many factors that interact to determine acceptability' (Chomsky, 1965, p. 11).¹⁷ Furthermore, unacceptable sentences will have to almost always be constructed, since they are precisely those we are not likely to find freely occurring in texts.

Sporadic violations may of course be a deliberate part of the text, to be judged as a whole, just as sporadic grammatical violations may be necessary to communication (e.g. *The boy that I destroyed your letter from (him) will blame you; *John or Bill is coming, aren't they?) They may also eventually lead to a new style or grammar, respectively. Of course, the theorist of style will expect that intuitions about the acceptability of various literary forms and constructions and the body of examples contained in the existing texts will largely converge, his working hypothesis being that occurring examples are products of the writer's possibly unconscious competence, the internalized rules of his grammar (a competence, however, subject to performance error, deliberate violations of rules and other factors). The linguist makes a similar assumption. When this does not turn out to be the case, a further explanation, in terms of a better, more comprehensive, formalized theory of style, or a theory of some other interacting factor, is always possible. But if no other such *theory* is available, discrepancies between the predictions of the theory and acceptability judgments are simply noted, possibly related to other phenomena, but do not have any further 'refutational force,' in the sense of Lakatos (1970).

Furthermore, intuition will invariably encounter problematic cases, whose adherence to the set of examples illustrating the style cannot be decided on this basis alone. There is no reason why extremely subtle judgments might not be sought from sophisticated readers – the value placed on the 'naive speaker's' immediate responses is misplaced, for the appeal to the speaker's judgments 'is not a question of a survey of opinion and it does not suffice, as is too often the case, that the subject react naively' (Milner, 1978a, p. 21). But finally these may be the cases which, as in linguistics (Chomsky, 1957), must be left to the grammar to decide, i.e. according to whether or not the rules proposed for the unquestionable examples predicts them also.

In principle, this might not raise objections, but in practice, of course, there is no clear-cut procedure for deciding ahead of time which strings furnish real counter-examples and which show an irregularity to be explained by some extraneous factor foreign to the theory. It is a particular theory, as we have already stressed, which identifies the counter-example, and the theory which does so clearly is more highly valued than one which doesn't. But the counter-example in and of itself does not invalidate the theory. 'There is no falsification before the emergence of a better theory,' Lakatos insists (1970, p. 119), for "crucial counter-evidence" . . . can be recognized as such among the

scores of anomalies only *with hindsight* in the light of some superseding theory' (p. 120), and this revision of Popper aptly describes the assumptions of Chomskyan practice. The important thing is that the possible counter-examples are unmistakably identified so that eventually either the theory is revised to accommodate them or a counter-theory is proposed which explains the evidence the original theory explains, in addition to the counter-examples to it.

However, while the procedure by which examples of a style are constructed by the linguist is entirely valid, I resort to it only occasionally, assuming that those actually occurring in literary texts have a privileged status. But if I have chosen, as far as possible, to provide such examples, the reader should not be thereby led into concluding that their force rests primarily on their occurrence. In every case, the example appeals to the intuition about its status of a reader who is familiar with and has the ability to recognize and judge various facets of narrative style. Without such competence on a reader's part, the explanations provided must remain to some extent unappreciated. (How – and even whether – a reader develops this ability will be discussed later; at this point, it is only assumed that he possesses it.)

3 The argument from narrative

The new configuration of the data discoverable in narrative can only be elicited by linguistic argumentation, as is apparent from the example from Kuroda. This governs the presentation of the book and its findings. There is no way to skip over the stages of an argument and the attendant marshaling of data, without not only weakening its persuasiveness but also depriving its conclusions of their full significance.

The first five chapters are concerned with elaborating a grammar of narrative style. Each analyzes and gives a principled explanation for a sentence type out of which the sentences specific to narrative will be isolated. The first chapter is strictly linguistic, proposing a revision of the 'extended standard theory' of Chomsky (1970) to accommodate the syntax of subjective expressions. It specifically focusses on direct and indirect speech; in the differences between the two the subjective can be distinguished grammatically from the non-subjective. These sentences are in no way specific to narrative, however. Chapter 2 turns to a sentence unique to narrative: represented speech and thought, that style for representing consciousness which has almost become synony-

mous with novelistic style and which allows us to locate precisely the course of subjectivity. Chapter 3 further refines the non-communicative character of represented speech and thought by contrasting it with direct speech, which, it is argued, has the linguistic features of communication which the former can then be shown to lack. In Chapter 4, another strictly narrative sentence is defined which is the counterpart to represented speech and thought. This is the sentence of narration *per se*, a revised version of what Benveniste (1966) calls *histoire*. The two sentence types – represented speech and thought and narration – represent the two poles of narrative style. The sentence of narration can be the realization of pure objectivity, linguistically speaking; in narrative fiction it confronts its opposite, the sentence representing and thereby ‘foregrounding’ subjectivity. Chapter 5 treats a sentence which has become the center of controversy because it seems to combine features of both narration and represented speech and thought and, it has been argued, therefore undermines any attempt to give a formal account of narrative style. In particular, according to critics of earlier versions of the theory of represented speech and thought presented here, it provides the counter-evidence to any such theory rejecting the claim that such sentences contain two points of view, both character’s and narrator’s. The original narratorless theory of represented speech and thought is defended in arguments claiming that this supposedly intermediate sentence type should be also analyzed as representing consciousness, but another, non-reflective level of consciousness in contradistinction to the reflective level of represented thought. The distinction between levels of consciousness permits us to give a formal account of the grammatical features of the sentence of non-reflective consciousness.

This grammatical account of narrative style prepares the ground for a theory of the historical development of both represented speech and thought and narration and, by extension, of the linguistic origins of narrative fiction; this theory is set forth in Chapter 6. The concluding chapter defines narrative fiction within the linguistic theory developed here, which opposes two basic types of uniquely written or literary sentences. The linguistic division between subjectivity and objectivity becomes possible only when the hold of the communicative intent over language guaranteed by the dominance of speech over writing is broken. Once divided, their conjunction – because it does not assimilate one to the other – allows them to be grasped as the two faces of knowledge contained in language. Seen thus as this conjunction of an objective and

a subjective sentence, neither congenial to any characterization in terms of a rigorously defined notion of communication, a conjunction whose history coincides with the history of the novel, the nature of narrative fiction is finally to be sought in the cognitive processes externalized by what we call 'narration' and 'representation.' An analysis of the complex of ideas surrounding each hidden in the ordinary language of criticism and elucidated by the distinction between two kinds of narrative sentences takes us to the limits of a study of narrative governed by the logic of linguistic argumentation.

It should be clear that, throughout, we are not attempting a taxonomy of narrative sentences. Instead, such sentences are analyzed within the grammar in such a way that the various possibilities they represent follow from principles of the grammar. I say 'the grammar,' and not 'the grammar of narrative,' because, as will become apparent, it is not necessary to establish any special rules or principles to predict the sentences of narrative. The fact that they occur in a written and not an oral context suffices to motivate their differences from ordinary discourse, as their history reveals. What is offered, rather, is an explanation of how a style and from it an entire genre develops linguistically and the nature of its rapport with language itself.

Yet narrative style in no way follows automatically from the grammar as elaborated only in the absence of the evidence narrative offers; incomplete grammatical theory could not be applied to the language of narrative to yield certain predictable results. Arguments taking into account the evidence of narrative justify adjustments in the grammar. The study of narrative thus bears not just on literary theory but on linguistic theory as well. The intersection of the two lies in that place outside both where the subject of consciousness — no longer the speaking subject — is located. And narrative is the site where the subject, face to face with its opposite, the purely objective sentence of narration, no longer defined as speaking and yet defined by language, is revealed. The exploration of this site will yield unexpected finds — not something which will leave the grammar, treated only as a tool, essentially intact, nor something which will allow literary criticism to confirm all the expectations it has unaided by linguistics, but something which will force both grammatical and literary theory to recognize some hitherto unformulated truths about the relation of language to the literary, of linguistics to literary theory.

It will be observed that making the evidence of narrative texts subject to linguistic argumentation is tantamount to treating it as if it

were linguistic evidence. That is, it becomes difficult, once this approach is adopted, to decide where the boundary between linguistics and stylistic theory falls. In some sense, what is at present formalizable in the literary is equivalent to what can be thereby incorporated into linguistics. But should this be so surprising, since we have tentatively called what in the literary can be formally represented 'style,' a dimension having specifically the *language* of the text in view? Like the concept of language itself as defined by generative theory, style is not a fixed object, but the principles which generate an infinite set of sentences with certain features.

Including the language of narrative as part of the data of linguistics is not just an arbitrary decision to extend the boundaries of this discipline; it is an unexpected consequence of the theory of narrative style: there is in fact no internal basis for excluding such sentences, for, as we shall see, there is no way to explain them by extra-linguistic devices, i.e. without having recourse to the grammar itself.¹⁸ Moreover, the language of narrative offers the crucial evidence for deciding certain classic linguistic issues.

Does the foregoing mean that a study of the grammar of narrative style will be of interest only to linguists? This book aims to show that the answer to this question is negative. If the attentive reader, whether or not fluent in generative grammar, follows the arguments presented here, the nature of the specifically literary character of narrative will emerge from the backdrop formed by the different language of ordinary discourse and be revealed in its very essence — its very *linguistic* essence.

This in itself should provide some intellectual satisfaction for those who seek to understand the nature of literature. Yet the hypotheses adopted here to explain the syntax of narrative have other consequences which impinge upon more general questions about language and literature, albeit not in necessarily traditional ways. These logical consequences are non-trivial because they follow from propositions not immediately available to direct observation but are themselves the result of linguistic argumentation; often they are 'unintended consequences,' in Popper's (1972) phrase, bold, unexpected, 'wildly speculative,' as Einstein put it, or 'wildly incredible,' as Peirce did, and even counter-intuitive. Whence, I believe, the hostility already shown earlier versions of the theory presented here and, in particular, to my contention that there are texts without narrators. Science puts no particular value on credibility or probability. (For one statement of this, see

Peirce, 1955, p. 54.) Indeed, it is precisely the incredibility, the 'improbability,' as Popper calls it, of this and other of the positions to be argued in the following chapters which, along with their falsifiability, insures their contribution to literary theory, whether or not they must ultimately be rejected.

Thus far, however, no competing theories which deal with this data in anything approaching formalization have appeared. If the linguistic analyses I propose are essentially valid – or such that better ones will have to incorporate them – then they should also be rich in untapped implications. For any theory pretending to say something not previously evident, all its implications should not be readily apparent. This is the more so when these are implications for other domains than the theory expressly covers. These further implications I can only hint at here. No doubt many I do not see myself. The hypotheses proposed by any one individual, if they make any claims to describe an empirical reality, do not remain the property of that individual, when once made public. They take on an objective life of their own – witness the fact that their subsequent denial by the one who initially proposed them is not sufficient to invalidate them. 'As it happens with our children, so it does with our theories: they tend to become largely independent of their parents' (Popper, 1972, p. 148). Hence, the working out of these implications can be left to later work and to others. In fact, I deliberately resist exploiting all their possibilities, not wanting to reduce them to pedestrian and worn-out notions determined on ahead of time. A new theory deserves the respect of recognizing its limits. No doubt there will be those who feel that I do not draw some obvious conclusion or that I do not attempt to answer many related questions important to literary criticism. But, because I have chosen to speak here as a literary theorist working with the assumptions and argumentative method of the generative grammarian, I draw only those conclusions which, given the data, these assumptions and methods warrant, and raise only those questions which are relevant within such a framework. I believe these are conclusions and questions which could not have been reached by an unaided literary theory, and even when they reexamine familiar problems like point of view, they do so in novel ways.

It would be a mistake to assume, however, that I, in my capacity as linguist, recognize or work from no other approaches. But by this we would pass beyond the orbit of linguistics, i.e. beyond the formally representable. It would be less than honest to adopt positions on

literary matters which in no way follow from the work presented here, even when they are positions I hold. Speaking as a linguist, I must fall silent when linguistics has nothing to say. The theory I present here, I hope, will continue to speak in my place in ways I might not ultimately recognize, and eventually help to reinstate within literary studies a theoretical speculation modelled on linguistics.