Thin and thick narrative analysis

On the question of defining and analyzing political narratives

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The article explores how we can define the concept of political narrative and looks at the implications in terms of analyzing political discourse. The examination of the various strategies used to define narrative, leads to the suggestion that, at least in the context of political narrative analysis, we need structural definitions that stress the barest minimum for terming a message a narrative. Basing on the proposed strategy to define narrative, the article suggests that narrative analysis should operate on two levels: the "thin" level and the "thick" level. The thin level relates to events and situations described in a discourse and their order of appearance in the text. "Thick level" of analysis, relates to everything included in the "narration" and the relation between the components of the thin narrative. The article examines these two levels of analysis in the context of a short statement by Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, at a photo opportunity in the White House. The analysis demonstrates how to apply a combination of thin and thick analysis to political discourse, and how this dual perspective makes a contribution to the study of spatial construction in narratives.

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Recent decades have seen a considerable increase in the use of the concept of narrative by researchers in a range of disciplines. One now finds references to

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narrative in the fields of psychology, history, media studies, sociology, law, cinematography, and political science, in addition to the traditional use of the term by literary critics and narratologists. The concept's wide currency can be attributed to the assumption that human beings have a natural tendency to think in narratives. Psychological research has made an important contribution to this area by providing professional and empirical support for the notion that people think, understand, imagine and make moral decisions according to narrative-based structures (Sarbin, 1986). This endorsement has gradually led to the recognition that "[i]n a variety of ways, narratives provide evidence for the nature of the mind [...]" and, by inference, that "[...] narratives can be an important vehicle for mental research [...]" (Chafe, 1990, p. 79). Thus, we have empirical corroboration of the centrality of narratives in our lives; as Hardy puts it: "[...] we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" (Hardy, 1987, p. 1). Having recognized the importance of acquiring insight into the natural tendency of the human mind to create narratives (White, 1980, p. 1), studies attempted to analyze "how we 'story the world"' (Mishler, 1995, p. 117). Naturally, an apperception developed of the inherent potential of narrative analysis as a means of studying political events, systems and leadership (Buthe, 2002; Cornog, 2004; Ezrahi, 1997; Ku, 1999; Roe, 1994; Shenhav, 2004).

The question of defining and analyzing political narratives cannot be detached from its political context. In a world of global politics, where the boundaries between local, national and international crises are so fragile, the study of political narratives, whether produced in day-to-day contexts or during special events, can be a powerful method to study the different "voices" in politics. This notwithstanding, it seems that making use of political narratives to analyze political issues confronts us with the question of the concept's very definition. This confrontation directly affects how the term is used and its prospective usefulness.

This article discusses possible problems caused by the use of certain definitions of the term, stressing the implications of applying this notion in political contexts. Responding to this debate, I wish to suggest that we use a minimized structural definition of the term "narrative," at least in the political context. I also distinguish between "thin" and "thick" narrative analysis, based on the definitions of narrative proposed here.

The second part of the article attempts to capture this distinction through the example of a short statement made by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

in 2001. It also proposes an integration of the two analytical levels of narrative analysis and their application to the study of spatial construction, which is a key aspect in political narratives.

Political narratives

Comprised of two complicated concepts, "politics" and "narrative," the definition of political narratives rests upon the meaning given to each concept and upon the interaction between them. At this point we will roughly define "political narratives" as a text-type (written or oral) with specific properties which I will discuss later. Since political narrative is a subcategory of the broader and much more studied category of "political discourse," the difficulties in defining the latter concept ("political discourse") are relevant to those of defining the previous ("political narratives").

The concept "discourse" may be regarded as "political," either because of the thematic elements it addresses, or due to the context in which it arises. Following Wilson's discussion concerning the definition of political discourse (Wilson, 2001, pp. 398–399), there seems to be room to distinguish between formal and non-formal political discourse. Thus, formal political discourse can arise within political frameworks (parliamentary debate, cabinet discussion, public demonstrations, etc.), or alternatively is created by political figures to achieve political goals. Non-formal political discourse, on the other hand, is concerned with political issues or relates to themes normally considered political, such as power relations, collective decisions and social conflicts. In fact, the definition of non-formal political discourse can be fairly broad. It can even widen the definition of political discourse to include almost any kind of discourse.[1]

Obviously, our definition of "politics" will also affect our definition of political discourse, and by inference of "political narrative." For instance, it matters whether one defines politics narrowly as an activity which takes place in formal institutions, or if one defines it in its broader sense. Whatever the case, just as there are so far no rigorous criteria for defining politics, similarly no such criteria exist for deciding whether a discourse or a narrative is political.

1. For a detailed discussion of the definition of political discourse, see also Chilton and Schaffner (2002).

For the purposes of this discussion, the term "political discourse" is understood to mean a discourse created by politicians under formal political circumstances or a formal political "speech situation" (Hymes, 1974, pp. 51–52). Having said this, I also believe that the arguments proposed here may also be applied to much broader definitions of the term.

Three strategies for defining the concept of narrative

Unlike cinema or literature, where a narrative is generally based on a single text or cluster of recognizable texts, social science and philosophy will often refer as well to "grand," "master" or "meta" narratives. These are based on an inventory of texts and sometimes other material, created and narrated under differing circumstances. This element exacerbates the potential for confusion and fallacies, which already exists when dealing with narratives since the identification of the object under scrutiny has a tendency to become quite elusive. For this reason, we need to formulate an analytic method which can facilitate our examination of political systems and the conceptual breakthrough encouraged by the use of narratives in political science and other disciplines. In my opinion, it is thus very important to adopt a cautious and methodical approach in trying to understand what narrative actually is. This may help further the analysis of both formal and non-formal political narrative, of narrative based on clearly defined texts, and similarly of those based on a wide range of texts and other materials.

When we examine how narrative is defined by researchers in a variety of disciplines, we find differences not only in the definition of the term, but also in the strategies used in reaching those definitions. We can identify three important strategies to defining the concept of narrative. The following is a presentation of the three strategies, highlighting the one I consider to be the most appropriate for defining political narrative.

1. Minimalist structural definitions

This strategy of defining narrative involves identifying the unique elements of narrational discourse, which allows us to identify narrative as a specific text-type with specific properties. These definitions are often used by researchers in the fields of literature and narratology. The narrational texts to which these definitions relate are characterized by a clear time sequence. Prince (1982) provides one example of the minimalist structural definition: "Narrative, indeed

universal and infinitely varied, may be defined as the representation of real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence" (Prince, 1982, p. 1; see also Prince, 1980, p. 50). Prince proceeds to refine this observation still further, suggesting that "[...] narrative is the representation of **at least two** real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other" (Prince, 1982, p. 4).

An important contribution to the study and definition of "narrative" is proposed by Genette, who highlights the dynamic element featured in the transmission of a narrative (Genette, 1980, p. 27). Following Genette, Rimmon-Kenan suggests an entire system of concepts dealing with various aspects of the "narrative." This system identifies three components found in both fictional narrative and the non-fictional story form. One component is the "text," defined as "[...] spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, . 3). The second component is the "story," defined as "[...] narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 3). The third component is "narration", "a communication process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee [...]" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 2).[2] Thus, narrative is defined as the narration of a succession of events (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 2). This definition refers to the very act of narration as a kind of transmission, and in a way, of actualizing the "story" without necessitating a particular structure, method and effect of the narration. Rimmon-Kenan's attempt to provide a definition of "narrative" is reflected in another important aspect of her argument, namely that theoretically speaking, two events sharing a chronological relation to each other comprise a sufficient and necessary condition for the existence of a "story," which is the basis of narrative (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 19). Thus, Rimmon-Kenan's definition of narrative demands neither causal relation between events, nor reference to a constant set of characters, even though she is well aware that narratives lacking these elements will be characterized as loosely linked and even "odd" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, pp. 2–3, 19).

2. Rimmon-Kenan also understands "narration" to mean the verbal nature of the medium used to transmit the message. Thus, if we wish our definition of narrative to include non-verbal media, we should see the term in a broader sense as a description of the communication process in which the narrative as a message is transmitted by an addresser to an addressee (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 2).

Labov also asserts that a temporal sequence distinguishes narrative discourse from other forms of discourse. He defines a *minimal narrative* "as a sequence of two clauses which are *temporally ordered*: that is, a change in their order will result in a change in the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation" (Labov, 1999, p. 226).[3]

A similar argument lies behind Jaworski's and Coupland's definition, which conceives narrative as "[...] discursive accounts of factual or fictitious events which take, or have taken or will take place at a particular time [...]" (Jaworski & Coupland, 1999, pp. 29–30). Similarly, Blum-Kulka sees the "story" as an essential part of the narrative (Blum-Kulka, 1997, p. 103). However, according to her operative definition of narrative in the context of her study on dinner talk, narrative involves the recapitulating of past events, without imposing any further structural criteria, such as the number of events. Thus the recounting of a single past event is a narrative. This minimal requirement for defining the concept of narrative is, according to Blum-Kulka, necessary to capture the richness of conversational narratives in the study of dinner talk, "[b]ecause the perception of what constitutes a narrative may well differ from children to adults or across cultures [...]" (Blum-Kulka, 1997, p. 104).

In conclusion: the common denominator of this strategy of defining narrative is the time sequence. Although some of the definitions in this strategy refer to the narrational process, i.e., the process of transmission of the "story," they do not necessitate the method of narration, a specific effect of the narrative on its hearers, or even the plot structure. While this strategy may seem uninspiring, or even too technical, it nevertheless offers clear, somewhat flexible criteria for distinguishing between narrational and non-narrational discourse.

2. Additional criteria for the minimalist definitions

The second strategy for defining narrative is, in fact, a set of different substrategies or approaches which are based on the first strategy, with additional criteria. Most of the additions are concerned with particular narrative realms (e.g. historical, oral and conversational narratives).

In some instances, additions to the minimalist definition of the narrative may serve to highlight important elements in certain narrative candidates, or to clarify the contexts in which they are formed. However, it seems that in-

3. See also Labov (1997, p. 399); Labov & Waletzky (1967, p 28).

corporating these additions into the definition of the concept, and specifically with regard to political narrative, might affect our readiness to study various types of narrative.

Causality

This is a common additional criterion to define narrative. Mink (1987), for example, in a discussion of historical narratives, claims that narratives "[...] contain indefinitely many ordering relations [...]" (Mink, 1987, p. 198). Later, he mentions that a narrative "presumably in all cases contains a chronicle but adds to it other forms of ordering, for example causal relations." (Mink, 1987, p. 199).[4] The addition of causality (which gives rise to certain happenings) reflects a rejection of the belief that the sole criterion needed for a discourse to qualify as a narrative is the existence of a time line. While it is obvious that causality should be an important element in the study of oral and other types of narratives, it might be a problematic criterion for the definition of political narratives. One of the main reasons for this rests on the fact that establishing causal relation between events is often the bone of contention in the political debate. In fact, political discourse is one of the mechanisms to achieve collective agreement on causality. Thus it might be problematic to require a specific concept of causality for the assessment of whether or not a given text meets the narrative criteria. Moreover, it seems problematic to have a methodological premise that would disqualify as narrative the whole range of political texts in which we cannot identify causality.

As part of the attempt to sharpen the distinction of narrative from other types of discourse, we can find causality at the center of yet another additional criterion, which we can broadly dub as "a structure of unity."

Structure of unity

This well-established criterion for determining narrative, which has been applied in various ways, concerns the rule pertaining to the organizing principle underlying the narrative's events. For example, according to Mink, in addition to causal relations, "[...] A narrative must have a unity of its own; this is what is acknowledged in saying that it must have a beginning, middle, and an end [...]" (Mink, 1987, p. 197). White (1980) also refers to the narrative's need for

4. Similar definitions can be found in other works as well. See reference to this kind of narrativity condition in Riessman (Riessman, 1993, p. 17)

causal and structural organization, i.e., a "beginning, middle, and end," and consequently dismisses historical "annals" as a narrative form, since they lack "order of meaning" and "narrative closure" (White, 1980, pp. 5, 23). Similarly, he claims that the historical chronicle "[...] often seems to wish to tell a story, aspires to narrativity, but typically fails to achieve it [...]," and describes chronicles as "unfinished stories" that fail to achieve narrative closure (White, 1980, p. 5). The structural ideal requiring beginning, middle and end as the criteria for narrativity relates to the human aspiration for coherency and the role of the narrative in this regard (White, 1980, p. 23). However, we must pay significant attention to the obstacles that appertain to the use of this ideal and other parallel ideals, such as narrative closure and narrative coherence, for defining political narrative. The first problem is that it is doubtful that one can establish reliable criteria for substantiating the above (ideal) demands. Second, even if those criteria existed, the possible rejection of narrative candidates which failed to meet those criteria would narrow our scope to specific plot structures or genre conventions of narratives.

It is problematic to define as non-narrative any discourse lacking the structure of beginning, middle and end (including closure), especially if we believe that narrational structures are used to shape and express human complex identities which do not necessarily appear coherent in their own right.

The first problem is that political interaction obviously occurs without the knowledge of what the future will bring, and thus lacks any genuine ability to furnish endings and closures. This is due to the nature of politics as an "[...] activity by which groups reach binding collective decisions through attempting to reconcile differences among their members [...]," (Hague & Harrop, 2001, p. 3) which is one possible definition of the concept of politics. The very act of seeking to reconcile differences promotes the use of discourse whose goal, among other things, is to shape the future through a projection of identities and beliefs. While such discourse will meet the narrative criteria of the first strategy, the second strategy will not class them as such unless they meet the specific structural conditions referred to above, in addition to the time sequence criterion.

The second problem we must consider is that the structural feature of a beginning, middle and end with closure is actually not always relevant in political discussion. In addition to the empirical fact that these features are mostly absent from political interactions in the day-to-day discussions of policy makers, political groups or individuals may exist who do not view this kind of structure as an ideal, and will therefore not strive to produce it. Moreover, speakers may

deliberately avoid using narratives with closure, for instance, in order to leave an issue open-ended or to cultivate uncertainty.

If we examine the demand for a beginning, middle and end on the level of the "text," a perspective which I believe is less reasonable and less common than that of the "story," we encounter the intractable question of what constitutes an "end" in politics. While it is true that every act of speaking will obviously end at a particular point, these ending points are part of a continuing discussion, and so concepts such as "ends" or closures must be arbitrary. These structural criteria therefore cannot countenance the possibility of regarding political discourse as some kind of "never-ending story," which is a legitimate theoretical and ideological approach to the conceptualization of politics. This idea of politics as a never-ending story is expressed, for example, in US President George W. Bush's first inaugural speech: "We have a place, all of us, in a long story – a story we continue, but whose end we will not see [...]" (Bush, 2001).

At this point we can examine the narrativity of a brief response made by Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, to a journalist's question during a photo opportunity (2001; see appendix). An examination of the "story" embedded in Sharon's answer shows three central events that can be arranged thusly along a time line:

(1) Past events – references to the meeting between Ariel Sharon and George Bush (Sharon, 2001, lines 1, 3).

(2) Present event – References to the photo opportunity, when Sharon expresses his current thoughts and beliefs (Sharon, 2001, lines 1–9).

(3) Future events – References to the main objective: fighting terrorism to achieve Middle East stability (Sharon, 2001, lines 5, 9).[5]

It is clear, however, that Sharon's text moves from one issue to another without any recognizable "closure" or a structure of beginning, middle and end. This is clearly shown in a description of the issues he references in his answer. He begins with the issue of negotiating under fire that was raised in the ques-

5. I understand the general temporal expression that "one should never surrender to terror" (Sharon, 2001, line 5) as relating to all three temporal events. While the three events roughly represent the "story" embedded in Sharon's narrative, the "story" can be refined even further to include, for instance, the specific information Sharon provides regarding his meeting with Bush. Parallel to these three events are Sharon's references to United States policy, and the importance of resolution in the face of terror (Sharon, 2001, lines 2–10) – a consistent motif of the "story."

tion (lines 1–3); he continues by praising Bush's and America's policy on terror (lines 2–8); and he ends by stressing terror's threat to stability and calling for the free world and democratic states to be part of the struggle against terror (lines 7–10). As I argue later, these discursive moves are part of Sharon's rhetorical device to switch the question's agenda to his own political agenda. This example clearly indicates that some of the well-established conventions of narrative structure, in this case the concept of "closure," might conflict with common discursive needs of political speakers, in this case the desire to move from one issue to another. Therefore, unless we define the structure of beginning, middle and end or the concept of "closure" so generally that we remove all substance, it seems that this criterion applies only to a specific convention of storytelling. Thus despite the relative centrality of this convention, it should not be taken as a necessary criterion for defining political narrative.

Resolving problematic experiences

Some of the additional criteria for the definition of narrative are influenced by Labov's studies on the overall structure of narratives. Unlike Labov's own definition of *minimal narrative*, as described above, there are attempts to define narratives using components from the overall structure of fully formed narrative, e.g. Abstract; Orientation; Complicating Action; Evaluation; Result or Resolution and Coda (Labov, 1999, p. 227). For example, in their analysis of casual conversation Eggins and Slade bring the element of "complicating action" to the definition of narrative, maintaining that "[n]arratives are stories which are concerned with protagonists who face and resolve problematic experiences" (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 239). This articulation defines "narrative" quite narrowly and is only appropriate for certain plot types. Moreover, it can dispense with entire genres of political discourse, such as "political reports" concerning institutions, budgets, and bureaucratic issues, which are somewhat remote from the questions of protagonists and their problematic experiences.

Non-randomness

The last additional criterion that I will discuss here is Toolan's conception of non-randomness. In his discussion of a wide range of narratives, he suggests that we should consider narrative "a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events" (Toolan, 2001, p. 6). The lack of randomness, related either to the author of the narrative or to the narrative addressee, seems to raise certain methodological problems that are especially thorny in the context of political discourse. One such problem is that it is often impossible to identify a concrete

perception of the addresser and addressee of the narrative. This issue is especially problematic in political collective narratives, in which the perceptions of both addresser and addressee consist of myriad different factors. Thus, it is difficult to evaluate the real nature of the connections between the factors and elements that make up narratives. Further, randomness is certainly an inherent part of human experience. Thus, it may be difficult to exclude narrative discourse, according to the first strategy, simply because we identify random connections between the narrated events, or because there were random elements in the processes of constructing the narratives.

3. Impact of narrative on the audience: Integral component of the definition

The third strategy for the definition of narrative relates to attempts to include its impact on the addressee. For instance, according to Toolan's definition, it is essential for the addressee of the narrative to realize that he or she is faced with a narrative: "[...] narrative depends on the addressee seeing it as a narrative [...]" (Toolan, 2001, p. 7). Overtly, Coste refers to the effect of being exposed to narratives as an integral part of their definition. Thus, "an act of communication is narrative whenever and only when imparting a transitive view of the world is the effect of the message produced" (Coste, 1989, p. 4). He proceeds to point out that "[a] message is narrative not because of the way in which it is conveyed [...] but because it has narrative meaning [...]" (Coste, 1989, p. 5).

While the study of narrative's effect is very important, it seems that incorporating the effects of narratives into the definition of the concept itself is a problematic strategy. The issue is that it gives the addressee the power, or right of veto, over whether a discourse constitutes a narrative. This begs the question of whether we can legitimately look to the addressees, either in the political field or the field of academic political discourse analysis, to be the arbiters of whether one message with narrated events has a "narrative meaning" and the other does not. Furthermore, this raises an additional question: whether a political message that no one is willing to perceive cannot be regarded as narrative.

Pluralism in minimalist structural definitions

The inclination to use complex definitions of the concept of narrative may be the consequence of a difficulty in accepting the premise that simple, structural or "technical" definitions of a concept can capture the vast potential of complicated phenomena.

Despite the temptation to move on to more complex definitions of narratives, it seems that the adding of these elements to the definition of narrative can give rise to several problems of principle, particularly regarding the analysis of political narratives.

Beyond the methodological and value-related issues concerning the argument that narrativity does not apply to some discourses with a time line, an empirical problem exists relating to a conceptual question. By this I mean that the first strategy acknowledges political discourse as replete with narratives, while the second and third strategies do not relate to important areas in the arena of political discourse.

In many respects, when trying to define narrative we reach the point at which we must decide whether narratives are a well-constructed form of discourse, used only on specific occasions, or a common vehicle for human communication. A view of the narrative as a basic mode of thinking seems to encourage the latter perspective that would regard texts such as Sharon's (2001) statement as narratives even though they are not well constructed. Moreover adopting a minimalist structural definition reduces the bias on the part of political narrative analysts and political narrative addressees toward specific genres or aesthetic narrational conventions. Such a viewpoint stresses the boundaries both of the narrative form and of highlighting the succession-of-events dimension, providing an opportunity at the same time to study different styles, genres, themes and structures of narratives. This is especially important with regard to political studies, since they deal with collective identities in which the internal fabric of the narrational framework can be based on cultural, philosophical, ideological or aesthetic standards, which sometimes differ from those of the researcher. Unlike non-structural approaches (e.g. Ochs & Capps, 2001), the minimalist structural definition also gives a clear criterion for identifying a narrative discourse and for studying the unique features of a "narrative" way of thinking as opposed, for example, to a "paradigmatic" way of thinking.[6]

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6. The paradigmatic, or logico-scientific, way of thinking "[...] attempts to fulfill the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation [...]" (Bruner, 1986, p. 12),

Thin narrative and thick narrative: Two levels of narrative analysis

Notwithstanding the advantages of the first strategy for defining narratives, one cannot ignore the need to enrich the description of something so complex and central to human communication as the narrative.

I would contend that in order to define narrative we ought to adopt the definitions proposed by the first strategy, cf. Prince (1982), who suggests the representation of **at least two** real or fictive events, or a narration of a succession of events (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983).

However, narratives contain numerous features which, as argued here, need not be reflected in the definition of narrative, but rather in its analysis. There are apparently two levels of narrative analysis: the level of "the thin narrative," and the level of "the thick narrative." The distinction between thin narrative and thick narrative rests primarily upon Geertz's distinction between "thin description" and "thick description" (Geertz, 1994, pp. 213–231). Thin level analysis would include the basic elements that distinguish a narrative message according to the first strategy. Central to these elements is the narrational message containing a chronological component with two important features: the disposition of elements in the text, called the "text-time" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 45), and the time dimension of the "story" itself. The "thin" level of analysis refers to analysis of the organization of events in the narrative, or any analysis dealing with structural aspects of events' organization in the narrative. Propp's (1968) research on Russian folk tales, which explores the structure of organizing events in the texts, is one example of this level of analysis.

The "thick" level of analysis is concerned with an aggregate of components involved mainly in the storytelling process, or "narration," and the relation between them and the components of the thin narrative. A thick narrative analysis also includes the study of characterization and "focalization," although these aspects may also be used to describe the "story" in a thin level of analysis. It is most likely that this analytical perspective would include contextual viewpoints relating to the narrational process or narratives themselves.

In some ways, the distinction proposed resembles the formalist distinction between Fabula and Sjuzet. It may also embrace certain distinctions proposed by Labov and Fanshel between "narrative sequencing" and the "eval-

whereas the narrative way of thinking "[...] leads instead to good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily "true") historical accounts. [...]", and strives "[...] to locate the experience in time and place [...]" (Bruner, 1986, p. 13).

uative point of a narrative," which includes a variety of rhetorical and other devices (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, pp. 107–109). However, the distinction suggested here does not focus on an attempt to describe the fundamental structure of narratives, but rather on methodological perspectives or analysis levels which one may use for analyzing narratives. Each level of analysis – the "thick" and the "thin" – focuses on a different research perspective and has different tools. Nevertheless, there ought to be close interaction between the structural orientation at the thin level of analysis and the narrational orientation at the thick level, and we should accept that a "complete" analysis should present the balance between the two perspectives of narrative analysis.

Illustrating the difference in scope of thin and thick narrative analysis

To clarify the difference between the scope of the two suggested levels of analysis, we turn again to the text of Ariel Sharon (2001; see appendix). We shall discuss the importance of spatial construction to political narrative in the context of the dual perspective described above, emphasizing the contribution of the minimalist definition to the analysis of political narrative.

A thin level examination of the events that constitute the "story" embedded in Sharon's answer shows that besides the declaration that "[...] one should never surrender to terror [...]" (Sharon, 2001, line 5), the reference to the future (Sharon, 2001, lines 9–10) appears at the end of Sharon's answer (see Figure 1). From this, we can observe a general chronological movement from past to future in the text. The use of chronological movement may derive from run on the objective effect of narrating chronologies of events upon the addressees with regard to "imitating" the linear movement of time. The deviation from the chronological movement (line 5) stands at the text's half way point. This can be regarded as a kind of "center of gravity" of the narrative as it carries an eternal temporal perspective expressing the essence of Sharon's narrative: "never surrender to terror."

Thus we can see that beneath this short, unpolished answer lies a relatively symmetrical structure, wherein the main message that "[...] one should never surrender to terror [...]" (Sharon, 2001, line 5) is "wrapped" in a type of an objective-effect texts.

Analysis of Sharon's response in terms of thick level narrative analysis requires reference to the "communication process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee [...]," in other words, reference

to what Rimmon-Kenan (1983, p. 2) terms "narration." Here we can include rhetorical forms like deductive argumentation. For example facing the question of negotiating with the Palestinians under fire, Sharon's answer reminds the audience of the United States's policy on terror. In this way, he explains why it was unnecessary for him to talk to President Bush about the issue of negotiating with Palestinians under fire:

> I didn't have to talk to President Bush about that. I think what I understand the policy of this great democracy, the United States, is that one should not surrender to terror and pressure and violence. And therefore, I don't have to work too hard on this thing. I even didn't try. (Sharon, 2001, lines 1–3)

When deducting from the American policy toward *terror* rather than from the policy toward negotiating under *fire*, Sharon takes the concept of "fire" and switches it from a military neutral orientation to the negative context of "terror." At the very moment when Sharon's argument is accepted by the listeners (i.e. the refusal to negotiate with Palestinians can be justified by the American policy toward terror), its implied assumption that potential Palestinian negotiators are terrorists must be accepted as well. However, Sharon, avoids violating Grice's maxim of "relation," namely to "be relevant" (Grice, 1975, p. 46), since his entire statement on terror relates to the question he was asked. From this discursive perspective, it seems that the main function of referring to the past event – Sharon's meeting with Bush – is to justify his political messages, which are reflected in his remarks regarding terror and his hopes for the future. However, the connection between this justification and his messages on terror is rather loose, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

> But I understand, and I believe that they do, and I appreciate that respect that – to that approach that one should never surrender to terror, and that the free world should struggle against terror [...]. (Sharon, 2001, lines 4–6)

The attempt to avoid violating Grice's "relation" maxim results in the violation of other maxims. There is a violation of the maxim of "manner" (Grice, 1975, p. 46), since his words at this stitch-point are not very perspicuous, being in fact rather obscure. More obviously, Sharon's entire answer also violates the maxim of "quantity" (Grice, 1975, pp. 45–46). In this way, Sharon's narrative maintains a semblance of cooperative conversational interaction with his interrogator by avoiding violating the maxim of "relation," while at the same time violating other maxims. It seems that maintaining a semblance of conversational cooperation and thereby adhering to the maxim of "relation," while actually violating Grice's other maxims, is itself almost a convention of polit-

ical speaking. Thus, in the above example, the "story's" past event is mainly a vehicle which Sharon uses to expound his political vision, and consequently the discursive act of providing a relevant response to the question becomes secondary or even insignificant.

In order to extend the possible application of thin and thick analysis to the study of Sharon's text, I suggest that we focus on the construction of space in the narrative. The theoretical treatment of spatial aspects in narratives has generally been neglected, in contrast with the heavily theorized dimension of time. This discrepancy could stem from the fact that almost all definitions of narrative are based on a time line, making it quite natural for researchers to address the timescale of a narrative. This notwithstanding, attempts have been made to address the spatial dimension of narratives (Bachelard, 1969; Smitten & Daghistany, 1981; Zoran, 1984). Bakhtin's "chronotope" ("time space") conceptualization was an important development in that it attempted to combine the timescale and space dimensions mainly in the context of literary studies (Bakhtin, 1981).[7]

As a rule, the spatial aspect of the narrative takes the form of geographical references. These include references to specific localities such as countries, regions, towns, and neighborhoods, as well as semi-specific references, such as national or international. Space can also relate to entire spatial units, such as "a house," "a city," "a border" or "a state"; or spatial descriptions, such as "before," "after," "far," "near-by," "inside," "outside," "long," "short," etc. Understanding the way spaces are constructed in political narratives serves as an important analytical tool for exposing a speaker's political values and persuasions. The reason for this is that political speakers tend to refer to spaces, mainly geopolitical ones, in a way that can help us "map" their ideological and geopolitical positions.

The tool of thin analysis is useful for studying spatial construction in the spoken address – where the spoken text provides the reference point – and when studying the "story", another frame of reference. Figure 1 shows the three classes of past, present and future events in Sharon's text (2001), along the y-axis, and the text lines, along the x-axis. The figure also summarizes the main political spaces (i.e. spaces related thematically to political issues) in these two

7. Bakhtin defines the "chronotope" as the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84).

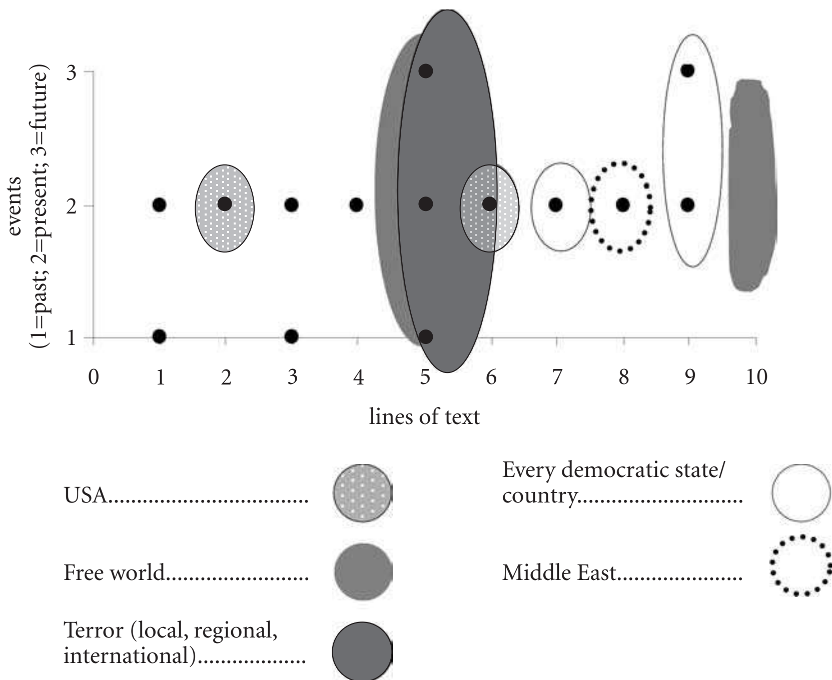

Figure 1. Analysis of events according to lines of text and political spaces in Prime Minister Sharon's response[8]

frames of reference, the spoken text and the events of the "story." The spaces in Figure 1 are designated by the larger circles.

Figure 1 shows how spaces are built into the text, starting with the space of the USA (Sharon, 2001, line 2), and ending with a repetition of the space reference "every democratic country" (Sharon, 2001, line 9), which previously appeared in line 7 (with "state" instead of "country"), and the repetition of the "free world" space (Sharon, 2001, line 10), which appeared in line 5. About halfway through the text (Sharon, 2001, lines 5–6), a conflict can be identified between two different spaces: the space of "local, regional and international" terror and the space of the "free world."

8. I interpreted "terror" as a space only in lines 5–6, where it is accompanied with the spatial descriptions "local, regional and international." All spatial references in the text are underlined in the Appendix.

Figure 1 also shows the process of spatial construction in the "story." An examination of this process places the clash in an intensified context since we find that it appears as a constant motif throughout the "story" (Sharon, 2001, lines 5–6). The other spaces all emerge when Sharon discusses his current thoughts and beliefs in the present time, i.e., the photo opportunity. The exception here is the space denoted by the phrase "every democratic country" (Sharon, 2001, line 9), which also appears in the future event.

Before we move on to discussing the thick perspective of the spatial analysis, it is worth pausing for a moment, midway between the thin and thick analyses. Based on Bakhtin's argument that "the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 85), one would expect to find ideological features in the spaces constructed by political speakers. In this regard, I want to suggest a third frame of reference that may be used in the study of spaces, in addition to the text and the "story." This frame of reference concerns the speaker's attitude toward the space, which we can expect to indicate the speaker's values and ideological views. When this frame of reference is applied, we find that all spaces appear to be embedded in three larger, more complex spaces. Thus: (1) the juxtaposition of Sharon (representing Israel) and the alliance of the "free world", i.e. the world's democracies, including the United States and Israel; (2) the "Middle East," the space where Israel, and by inference Sharon himself, is found, and (3) "local, regional and international" terrorism.

The value labels which are applied to the three spaces by Sharon exhibit a certain hierarchical order. Sharon's expressions when referring to the space of the "free world" and the "democratic states" reflect a supportive attitude. He achieves this mainly by including the democracies in the same group as the United States, a country he refers to in positive terms with phrases like "this great democracy" and "the United States leads such a struggle" (Sharon, 2001, lines 2, 6). Contextually, Sharon's attitude toward the Middle East space appears in connection with the need for stability: Sharon declares his support for the "[...] President's policy of keeping stability in the Middle East [...]" (Sharon, 2001, line 8). His attitude toward the terror space is obviously very negative: "[...] the free world should struggle against terror"; "[...] the United States leads such a struggle [...]"; "[...] the main danger to stability is terror. [...]" (Sharon, 2001, lines 5–6, 8–9.).

Since he is part of both spaces, Sharon himself represents the link between the first two spaces – the global space of the free world and the space of the Middle East. The space of "local, regional and international" terror is presented as an autonomous space that can develop anywhere.

By studying the speaker's value position regarding the various spaces, we can see that besides our frames of reference resting in the "story" and the text, there also exists an ideo-spatial continuum in which the spaces may be arranged. In the case of Sharon's statement, the continuum stretches from total rejection at one pole, through stability to a positive attitude at the other pole. Bearing in mind the values ascribed to the three "complex" spaces, let us now return to the question of spatial construction in the context of the text and "story" presented in Figure 1.

In Figure 1 we see that the text contains a sequence of spaces resembling major aspects of Labov and Waletzky's (1967) overall structure of event-telling which they labeled "orientation," "complication" and "resolution."

The opening sequence indicates a positive attitude to the space of "the United States." This sets the "orientation" for the spatial construction sequence of the text. The next step of the sequence is the "complication," namely, the clash between the "local, regional and international" space of terror that is found with the space of "the United States" and the "free world" (Sharon, 2001, lines 5–6). The sequence ends with the "free world" space, and provides a positive "resolution" to the "complication." While the textual perspective of spatial construction is based on this convention, a different picture emerges from the analysis of the "story," which, as I claimed earlier, emphasizes the permanence of the state of war between the free world and terror (see Figure 1, line 5).

The example we are dealing with clearly illustrates how a political narrative contains multiple layers of meanings and a variety of different structures. This is where thick analysis enters the picture. By allowing us to connect the very thin observation to the narrative and its spaces, thick analysis can help us, among other things, evaluate the inner tensions between the multiple meanings of political narratives, as emerges here from the study of spatial construction throughout the "story" and the text.

I would like to begin the thick examination of Sharon's statement by referring to a popular political view, held mainly by the Israeli political right and center, which is a contextual element echoed in Sharon's statement. According to this view, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict epitomizes a much larger conflict between the Arab world (or the Muslim world by some), and "western" civilization. After the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, adherents of this view began to place greater emphasis on the struggle between countries that sponsor terror and the "free world," regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a case in point.

Sharon's narrative constructs a geopolitical map which encapsulates this very shift. He presents a "spatial map" in which Israel is a pivotal factor, having one foot in the Middle East and the other in the "free world"; he thus points to a view of Israel as the personification of the clash between the free, democratic world and the Arab world. The detachment of the space of terror from the Middle East and its presentation as a separate entity threatening the international arena reflects a shift toward a view of Israel as an example of the international war on terrorism. In this context, Sharon adopts a conservative approach to the geopolitical situation in the Middle East, in which "stability" is proposed as a political remedy to the challenge of terrorism. Accordingly, with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict merely a specific case exemplifying an international crisis, the situation in the Middle East ceases to be the inevitable battlefield brought about by a clash of civilizations or religions. Instead, it becomes one more case in the wider battle between the free world and terrorism.

Despite the possible solution to the conflict in the Middle East by stabilizing the area, as mentioned above, the spatial construction also implies an ongoing struggle between the space of terror and the space of the free world. This ongoing struggle is expressed via the exhortation to never bow to terror. Terrorism is represented as an eternal evil, one the free world will always be forced to battle. Thus, on the one hand, the spatial construction in the narrative suggests the hope for stability in the Middle East as a remedy for the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, though on the other hand, it alludes to the interminable nature of this struggle.

When we examine the narrative as a whole, we see that these tensions are manifested as two dichotomous elements: an "active" element and a "non-active" or "passive" element. This polarity, which structuralists would dub "binary opposition," is seen in the repetition of the dichotomy between "struggle" (Sharon, 2001, lines 5, 6, 7) and "surrender" (Sharon, 2001, lines 2, 5). The layers of meanings in the narrative alternate between active element and passive element. Sometimes the passive element is presented positively, as in the quest for stability in the Middle East (Sharon, 2001, lines 7–9); other times it is expressed negatively, as in the call not to surrender to terror (Sharon, 2001, lines 2–5). The same alternation in value applies to the active elements, presented in a positive light when referring to the need for struggling against terror, while appearing in a negative light when referring to "pressure and violence" (Sharon, 2001, line 3). We now see that underlying Sharon's geopolitical mapping lies a primary confluence of inner tensions pointing to a basic polarity in the narrative structure.

To complete the discussion of the twofold perspective of narrative analysis and the importance of spatial construction, let us return to the question of the ideal definition for political narrative. From the case presented here, it is clear that even a brief, unpolished political text can contain multiple layers of meanings, representing the diverse elements of the political sphere to which the speaker relates. In light of this, therefore, one should not be surprised to see the inner tensions we identified earlier appearing in the narratives politicians construct. Given the nature of politicians' work, which calls on them to mediate and tackle different forces, data, strategies, demands, values and ideologies, it is hardly surprising that the narratives they spin mirror an inner tension of this type. Thus, despite politicians' efforts to avoid incoherence, an almost inevitable degree of incoherence is built into the "job" (excepting perhaps fundamentalist or extreme utopian narratives). Perhaps this is the more compelling reason why we should not define political narrative by its coherence and why it is important for the definition of political narrative to embrace qualifications such as those propounded by Prince – "the representation of real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence" (1982, p. 1) – or Rimmon-Kenan – the narration of a succession of events (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 2).

Conclusions

The study of political narratives, whether produced in day-to-day contexts or during special events, can be an effective lens through which to understand the construction and presentation of collective identities. The elaboration of conceptions, theories and techniques for understanding political narratives, advanced considerably in recent years by academic researchers, should also be applicable to the practical world of policy making. In times when science enables policymakers to reach almost anybody at any time and place with the force of military weapons, the scientific community should be no less engaged with the development of ideas and conceptions to foster mutual understanding and significant dialogue between different peoples and nations. Otherwise, the use of military force might dangerously overcome the use of nonviolent politics. While modern science provides the technologies for sophisticated weapons, it is a moral duty of the academic community to provide no less sophisticated methods and conceptions to elaborate policymaker's capability to maintain such dialogue.

The study of political narratives can definitely be one of these methods. This article has examined a number of issues regarding the definition and analysis of political narrative. By probing three strategies for defining narrative, we have obtained a better picture of why we need a minimalist structural definition of the elements that make a discourse a narrative. Thus, though I accept that political narrative requires a time line with at least two narrated events, in line with Prince's (1980, 1982) and Rimmon-Kenan's (1983) definitions, it is clear that the narrative form is far deeper and more complex than a minimalist definition would imply. However, this complexity should not affect our definition of narrative, since, as mentioned above, the use of certain elements in the defining procedure creates methodological and in some ways value-related problems. Mainly, it does not allow us to bring diverse political perceptions into our analysis of political narratives. Nevertheless, such elements must be considered in narrative analysis. In light of this, I contend that narrative analysis should be carried out on two levels – the thick and the thin – wherein the thin level relates to events in the discourse and their order of appearance, and the thick level concerns the narrational features of the text and their relation to the components of the thin narrative.

The article also discusses the importance of spatial analysis, particularly in political discourse, since the speakers' ideological and geopolitical standpoints may be deduced from the references they make to different spaces. The methodological distinction of thin versus thick narrative analysis can also help us in studying the spaces referred to in political narrative. This analysis involves examining spatial construction in the text and "story" using thin analysis, and working with the broader framework to examine narrational features using thick analysis.

To demonstrate how the proposed categories might add to the scope of narrative analysis, the article analyzes the text of a statement by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at a White House photo opportunity. In terms of spatial construction, the article suggests that in addition to the "story" and the text as our frame of reference, an ideo-spatial continuum exists along which the different spaces may be arranged and studied. These three perspectives, the "Story", the text and the ideo-spatial, facilitate the study of political speakers' perceptions through spatial analysis.

The analytical framework suggested here offers insight into the political speaker's explicit and implicit worldview. The combined use of structurally oriented analysis and in-depth textual analysis allows us to peel back the multiple layers in which political narratives can be construed. Thus, definitions of polit-

ical narratives that make minimalist structural demands are preferable to more complex definitions, since they allow us to identify the structural framework of the object under investigation and to delve into the fascinating and complicated picture that exists within that frame.

Appendix

A Remark by Israeli Prime Minister Sharon (2001) in a Photo Opportunity After a Meeting with the President of the United States[9]

Q Prime Minister Sharon, did you manage to convince the President Bush that you will not negotiate under fire? Do you think that this message is clear, and do you think that President Bush agrees with you about this issue?

1. PRIME MINISTER SHARON: I didn't have to talk to President Bush about that. I think what I
2. understand the policy of this great democracy, the United States, is that one should not surrender to terror
3. and pressure and violence. And therefore, I don't have to work too hard on this thing. I even didn't try.
4. But I understand, and I believe that they do, and I appreciate that respect that – to that approach that
5. one should never surrender to terror, and that the free world should struggle against terror, local, regional
6. and international terror. And I'm sure that the United States leads such a struggle, and we are a partner in
7. the struggle. I think that is in the interest of every democratic state, because in order to keep stability –
8. and I'm a great supporter of the President's policy of keeping stability in the Middle East – the main danger
9. to stability is terror. And that, I believe, will be – should be the common goal of every democratic country in
10. the free world.

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9. Segmentation of lines according to the original text in the White House internet site (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/03/20010320-3.html). I have underlined the geopolitical "spaces."

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