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### **The occasioning and structure of conversational stories**

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#### **Orientation**

What do we mean by a story? Recent usage has turned almost everything, even the non-verbal, into a narrative.<sup>2</sup> For example, Ochs and Capps (1996) have a remarkably inclusive definition of narratives of personal experience as “verbalized, visualized, and/or embodied framings of a sequence of actual and possible life events.” The absence of a common guiding framework has led to the blossoming of criteria by different narrative researchers for identifying their respective units of study. When one looks for personal experience stories in natural conversations, the most striking fact is that they are not always clearly recognizable by traditional narrative-internal criteria such as the presence of a protagonist and events creating conflict, reference to events in the past, presence of a climactic complicating action, or closure of the storyline with a resolution. Further, the onset of conversational stories does not always clearly demarcate the narrative segment from the preceding talk. Some stories are explicitly introduced into the ongoing conversation with a preface like “do you remember when...” or “did I tell you about...,” or are elicited by instructions to tell a story. But as one listens to children’s talk or talk between adults, there appear to be many marginal cases.

Our focus is on identifying a conversational story and how it is occasioned. Given that the story is part of discourse and the storyteller a participant in an interaction, some of the structural organization of the story is directed to its function in a particular conversation. “Narrators linguistically shape their tellings to accommodate circumstances such as the setting as well as the knowledge, stance, and status of those in their midst,” (Ochs and Capps 1996). We intend to examine how the embedding contexts of the tellings alter the internal structure and features of conversational narratives, attending to the issues raised by Jefferson in her classic study of the conversational embeddings of stories (1978).

#### **Narrative genre vs. narrative production**

Now that we have the video and audio technology to look at conversational sequences, we have the possibility of two different levels of analysis in every aspect of the study of talk. One level is the study of live interaction, negotiated on the spot in dialogue or through listener response. Another level is that of talk about talk, classification by speakers and listeners or even by coders, and reference during talk to something said before or about to be said, using genre and speech act vocabulary: “she told a story about...”, “he told me to...” “he asked me to...” This is what Hymes referred to in his development of an ethnography of communication (1972) or what is sometimes called metapragmatics. This level includes our category and prototype system for talk. There is a similar distinction in the study of speech acts like requests--what happens in real-time circumstances can differ from what is retrospectively recognized, remembered, reported, or judged, and therefore from what enters into speech act theories --the recall of speech acts in tranquillity (Ervin-Tripp, Strage, Lampert & Bell 1987.)

There are thus two forms we could call a story. One is the social genre that has prototypes and ideal forms and provides a model for what we expect when we ask “Tell me that story about when...” The genre is talked about and has a cultural existence in member instruction and evaluation. The second is whatever happens when people talk about the past, the future, or recurrent events or practices in ordinary conversation. When we look at conversational events in a transcript, we do not know how much notions of prototypic genres affected performance, or even whether the speaker considered what was said to be a story. Very little work has addressed the relation between talk about talk and the interactional events such talk refers to. One exception is the work of Bauman (1993), who examined a speaker’s “metanarrational comments” and “disclaimers of performance on the grounds of insufficient knowledge” (p.188) as an indicator of the speaker’s construction of genre conventions. However, although Bauman emphasized the relevance of such metapragmatic comments for the analysis of the features of narratives that embed them, he did not attempt to relate speakers’ notions of prototypic narratives to what gets said in ongoing talk. It seems obvious that interactional events as remembered have some bearing on talk about talk. But do the

prototypes and genre classifications have any effect on ongoing talk? When we cannot interview the tellers we have to make inferences from the narrative features, evaluations, and changes under conditions of evaluative monitoring.

Some theoretical approaches<sup>3</sup> view narrative genre as a “dynamic expressive resource, in which the conventional expectations and associations that attach to generically marked stylistic features are available for further combination and recombination in the production of varying forms and meanings” (Bauman, 1992, p. 127). In short, the two notions of narrative--narrative as a recognizable social genre or norm and narrative as a spontaneous, often ambiguous conversational event--may converge or diverge from one another, depending on the occasioning conditions which influence narrative features.

### **Standard narrative**

The standard characterization of personal narratives in social science research grew out of the Labov and Waletzky analysis (1967). Labov's first elicited stories came from his “danger of death” sociolinguistic survey question, which itself was designed to produce style shifts toward the vernacular variety of the speakers, in the heat of emotional recall. Eventually more than 600 adolescents and adults were posed the standard question “were you ever in a situation where you thought you were in serious danger of getting killed?”. As a result, Labov elicited tellings of near-death experiences that got rendered in fully formed narrative structures, upon which Labov and Waletzky later built their theory. They proposed it is only spontaneous accounts of past personal experience, “not the products of expert storytellers that have been re-told many times” (p. 12), which could provide a window to the most fundamental forms of narrative structure. However, the methodology they used in order to obtain narratives is not appropriate for either spontaneous first-time narratives. On the contrary, danger of death stories are likely to be retold, to be seen as attention-grabbing and entertaining to listeners, and to be thought appropriate for prototypic performance occasions. A human protagonist is at the center, and usually there is some kind of conflict and suspense even in brief tellings. Thus, what Labov and Waletzky pursued in personal experience narratives, that is, first tellings of thematically dramatic experiences involve a contradiction in terms: the inherent ever-present conversational relevance of such stories makes them amenable to repetition and stabilizes their structures. In spite of the specificity of the so-called “invariant structural units which are represented by a variety of superficial forms to this very limited genre of danger of death stories, the internal features which Labov and Waletzky found have been taken as fundamental in most narrative research since. Labov (1972) defined narrative as “one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to a sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred. ... We can define a minimal narrative as a sequence of two clauses which are temporally ordered....there is temporal juncture between the two clauses, and a minimal narrative is defined as one containing a single temporal juncture(pp. 360-361).” The narrative clauses, he pointed out, had to be coordinate, not subordinate or conditional, as are clauses used in representations of practices or recurrent events, or in backgrounding of information. The Labov and Waletzky narrative can be taken as typical of a certain culturally defined type of narrative that optimally occurs under elicitation.

Peterson and McCabe, beginning their study of narrative development in 1974, also opted for eliciting spontaneous personal narratives (summarized in McCabe, (1996). Their strategy for collecting narratives is to have a familiar interviewer engage the child subject in a conversation. During those informal conversations, the experimenters use what they call a conversational map, a series of short, deliberately unevaluated narratives about things that supposedly happened to themselves and could possibly have happened to the child (e.g., getting a bee sting). Such a methodology carries considerable ecological validity since it is the naturally occurring conversation, at least from the perspective of the child participants in the study, that occasions the topics of narration. However, adults could push their agenda of obtaining data quite strongly in such elicitation contexts, sometimes not giving children enough chance to select or expand on their own favorite topics. As a result, it becomes difficult to strip off the effects of heavy narrative scaffolding from the outcome structure.

The elicitation method, which is employed most commonly to obtain comparable narratives from different subjects in developmental studies, folklore, and sociolinguistic interviews, demonstrates that stories are cultural constructs. If we are asked for stories, we know what is meant, and we are able to

identify good stories and good story-tellers. Most research on narratives has relied on elicited stories or prefaced stories, those most likely to be identified by both speakers and audiences as fitting the cultural prototype.<sup>4</sup>

### A boundary case.

As opposed to elicited stories, stories occasioned in the conversational situation often do not exhibit many of the prototypical narrative genre cues that are thought to be embedded in the structure of a story. The example below illustrates the kind of marginal case of classification that occurs in conversation when stories are spontaneous, not elicited. After the Loma Prieto earthquake, a student taped a conversation that included two brothers and other student friends. He had received an assignment to tape and analyze about an hour of naturally occurring interaction.

### (1) Earthquake story<sup>5</sup>

Albert and Ned are two brothers. Olga is Ned's friend, Cynthia her roommate. All are college students.

53 Al :you know that-  
 54 that \*nice \*glass \*china \*display case in our \*dining room?  
 55 Ned:=in the \*dining room=  
 56 Cyn:=o-o-oh= =  
 57 Al:\*\*trashed/  
 58 Cyn:=forget it/=  
 59 Ned:=\*absolutely= trashed/  
 60 Al: whole thing a=bsolutely..yeah =  
 61 Ned: =\*every \*single bit= of \*glass and  
 62 \*pottery in th-  
 63 Olg: and \*crystal?  
 64 Ned: \*all the crystal..\*trashed/  
 65 Al: crystal  
 66 Ned: \*everything ..\*trashed/  
 67 Cyn: =o-o-oh my go-o-o-d=  
 68 Al: =oh a er \*antiques \*genuine= \*antiques  
 69 Ned: =and the \*amount of \*money= we have lost  
 70 is going to be \*\*astronomical/

UCDisclab:QUAKE

**Features.** This example does not meet the usual criteria of narrative. There is (a) no animate protagonist, (b) no sequence of events, (c) no temporal juncture, (d) no temporal connectives, (e) no conflict. Why does this seem to people who hear it to be a story? There is the introduction of the "protagonist," a piece of furniture, by a "common ground" preface (53). There has already been an event in time, an earthquake, so the story is about an implicit temporal sequence, an earthquake followed by the outcomes of the earthquake. Most important, the rhythm of the telling, the alternation between ellipsis and expansion, the lexical and syntactic repetitions, the evaluation by the listeners (56, 67) and by the tellers (68-70) and the probing by participants (63) is appropriate to the excitement of a dramatic story, so it seems to listeners to be a story.

**Context of telling.** Example (1) occurred in a series of *rounds* about different facets of the earthquake experience in a spontaneous conversation. To have restated the obvious first in each temporal sequence, to have given a temporal, causal sequence such as "we were in the classroom and suddenly it shook" would have made no sense because everyone present already had experienced the beginning. The highly salient experience of the earthquake established the common ground for the round participants to reveal their individual observations in the immediate aftermath of the shared disaster.

Stories of disasters recently experienced by everyone in the room probably have these common properties--they often occur in rounds, and they are both semantically and syntactically elliptical, building on common knowledge and conversational sequences leading up to the story. As told later when the common knowledge is forgotten, or to audiences who don't share the same history, the stories must be reshaped to provide both orientation and temporal sequences to fill in what is not shared.<sup>6</sup> In fact, when Luebs (1992) interviewed 14 people two months after the Loma Prieto quake, the speakers provided extensive orientation and full-fledged narrative structures. Moreover, since the narratives were not part of

naturalistic conversation, but were elicited by the researcher, most of them included codas, that is, verbal or nonverbal ways of showing that a narrative is over. Luebs' data confirm that elicited narratives move closer to the prototypic genre features.

### Databases for study

**Adult data.** The UC Disclab adult data consist of 180 transcripts collected in a variety of contexts, but primarily from informal natural groups taped in natural settings by students<sup>7</sup> in California, with 500 lines of transcription archived using the Gumperz and Berenz (1993) notation.

**American school data.** Ten UC Disclab transcripts were obtained by creating a non-task waiting room context for best friends to tape natural sociable conversation at seven and ten. Because it was a California public school the children were varied ethnically and some were bilingual.

**Family data.** The Ervin-Tripp family data consist of 38 transcripts from 8 multi-child California families with at least one child 3 years old, some of them videotaped over a period of 18 months in their homes. Contexts observed were primarily meals or child free play with siblings and a visiting peer, with the goal of differentiating the social marking features in children's speech with peers, siblings, and adults.

**Turkish preschool data.** Child-adult conversations were obtained at preschool sites<sup>8</sup> in Istanbul, Turkey. Both of the preschools had 3 to 5-year-olds, providing around 40 children from which different kinds of elicited and spontaneous extended discourse were collected. Classroom environments, various organized and spontaneous play groups, and casual chats brought about by the informal preschool system provided multiple settings to search out the occasions of the early deployment of narrative skills. For the examples included in this paper, around 60 hours of audiotaped talk were analyzed.

### Locating narratives in transcripts

In order to identify candidate instances of narrative segments, we employed several methods: computerized search for predefined linguistic markers such as temporal connectives, reading over the datasets for larger level indicators of narrative such as reference to irrealis events or past events, prefaces by narrators, promptings by audiences, or audience evaluations. No single method is adequate by itself for identifying all the segments of talk that are of interest. This problem brings us back to the definitional problem we discussed in the beginning of the paper. If, for definitional or analytic purposes, we have to determine what constitutes stories, we are probably better off in conceptualizing the narrative genre as a continuous cline, consisting of many subgenres, each of which may need differential research treatment. Since there currently exists no single model that includes identificational criteria for encompassing all the range of oral narrative forms, we need to approach the problem employing different tools.

Once we identified narratives, the next step was to look back at the antecedent context to find how the narratives were situated and occasioned by what was said before. We were surprised at how often this context changed the interpretation of the narrative.

### Observed features and contexts of conversational narratives

We found that using judges to identify proto-narratives in the family transcripts produced a wide variety of short descriptive utterances like *when I was little I lived in San Francisco*. When we looked for *temporal connectives* that identified temporal junctures in the family and the adult data, we found reports of events that have occurred--including dreams--, fantasies, projections of future events, descriptions of regularities, and reports of conversations. It was important in the case of young children to use a linguistic criterion for choosing text materials, so as not to impose categories that are not in the system of the child. If we used temporal connectives as a criterion--such as *when*, *while*, *after*, *before*, and *and then*--we found that they first appeared in child speech in commands and in planning for future coordinated action, rather than in experience or fantasy narratives (Ervin-Tripp & Bocaz 1989). In other words, planning displays some narrative qualities in child usage. The temporal clause in such sequences defines the relation between two activities of a single actor or between two actors' activities.

"I'm going to make a garbage can when I'm all through with the train lid." (3.0)<sup>9</sup>

Temporal clauses occurred both in reference to **simultaneous events** such as "you listen while I read" (3.3), and to **successive events**, as in "can I have your worm when you get finished (3.1).

Young children describe sequences of actions in elaborate future plans, including directorial planning of complex dramatic play with coordinated scenarios that are temporally detailed. There is especially rich past and future reference whether the child plays the director planning the actions, or an actor undertaking the script. Outside of dramatic play, young children talk less often about the past than adults do. Among the narrative-like sequences we found were generic descriptions of scripted events, describing what happens on a regular basis, or if you do something, what results.

The following dramatic play enactment illustrates an occasioning of talk about the past. The actor playing the patient is preparing a command to operate on her leg, but describes a personal experience in the past to account for the injury. We see from other child texts (see 3 below) that injuries are usually asked about and are explained by a story of what happened. So this common type of topic sequence is here lifted into dramatic play.

## (2) Doctor-patient play of 4-5 year olds

1 Kit: pretend there's something wrong with my leg. my leg--  
 2 let's pretend that I tell you that my leg's--um--  
 3 let's pretend I tell you-- first, you operate on it.  
 4 um, but before you operate on it,  
 5 let me tell you something, okay nurse?  
 6 Jill: um, 'kay.  
 7 Kit: um, when I was walking down the street,  
 8 I saw this piece of glass and I picked it up,  
 9 then I didn't see too well, then it goes way up to here.  
 10 see now. it's--now it's over there.  
 11 can you--can you operate on it, nurse?  
 12 Andy: I can.  
 13 Kit: can you not--I said--um--  
 14 somebody has to operate on- on- on it.

Ervin-Tripp Family Transcripts: Bowyer5

This segment begins in the directorial voice (1-3) that switches without any marking into enactment in the patient's voice (5). The story is prefaced by a request for the floor (4,5) that is acknowledged (6), and the story begins with a subordinate backgrounding clause (7) establishing the place of the event and the protagonist's activity at the time of an action (8) by the protagonist, reported by a telic verb. There were gestures showing the injury (9,10). There is a sequence of events (9). The story provides the explanation of an injury needing repair in the dramatic medical scenario planned at the beginning (1-3), so it is an inserted elaboration before the medical scenario unfolds (11).

We made similar form-based searches in our extensive database of adult materials, looking for markers of temporal juncture<sup>10</sup> as a way to locate story sequences. We found relatively few extended stories. Those referring to the past often were brief, as in the examples to follow. They were stimulated by the sight of objects, pictures, people or television. While the children relied often on the setting as a source for talk, in the adults, we found more stories which continued prior talk, either in story rounds, or in stories to support or challenge conversational claims. There were scripts, that is stories about customary events, and stories which reported dialogue only. The focus of much of the students' social talk was on character, on the implications of events rather than on the events themselves, and on daily problems that they could not solve. In the last type of interaction, the problems discussions, we can expect some of the kinds of sequencing Jefferson (1988) has reported for troubles talk.

Unlike Labov and Waletzky's narrators, our tellers of un-elicited stories did not take a long time to build to a high point. It was rare that stories involved drama or suspense. The character anecdotes usually presented a brief event, and the problem situations began with a single event to initiate a topic, with interchanges about alternative outcomes. These stories in young adults are analogous to the stories Ochs, Smith and Taylor (1989) have found in American families, in which reports become problems and alternative outcomes are proposed. These speakers did not seize the floor for a long performance of a story with suspense.

### **Elicited/Prefaced narratives**

It is elicited or prefaced stories that best demonstrate that the structure of stories is strongly related to the circumstances of their telling. They are likely to fit some paradigm of a good story, since the prototype is evoked for tellers on these occasions. The elicitation signals that the respondent has to undertake a performance. The preface signals that the teller is willing to identify what is to be said as a story. They are, in some sense, accountable to the public standards for a story.

While adults may preface or volunteer stories to entertain, in many of the examples we found there was questioning from the audience to prompt the teller, and to give the teller the floor. But a question can focus a reply on a narrow issue rather than on a full story, thus altering the temporal ordering in the story relative to the order in the events being reported. The following reply to a question illustrates such a shift in narrative ordering.

### **(3) Broken foot elicitation.**

Melody is 4;7, Lisa is 2. Dave and Georgette are researchers in the home of the children making a videotape. There is an overlapping hosting conversation by the father that interweaves the two sets of speakers.

4 Dav: OK. in the course of the next months,  
 5 :we hope to be out here a few more times.  
 6 Geo: what happened to your foot, Lisa? Fa: /would/ you like anything  
 7 Mel /um/ [to G] she, she /cut it/ to eat or drink?  
 8 in the wheel. D: /not me/ [to Fa]  
 9 : she cut. Fa: /Georgette do you?/  
 10 /when.when/, /when the/ G: /no thank you/  
 11 friend was next door, then, then  
 12: then, then, then, then she was pushing her on the bike,  
 13 and it got caught in the spoke or the wheel.  
 14 G: oh boy  
 15 M: and she broke a bone.  
 16 G: oh boy.  
 17 L: a bone. (Melody) I broke this  
 18 : /(it go slip) / [to G] Fa: /what kind of/ sandwich would  
 19 : (The bone slipped) [to G] you like to eat, Melody?  
 20 M: Uh, um what kind do you have?  
 Ervin-Tripp Family Transcripts: Fleurs11

The focus of Melody's reply was specifically selected by a narrow "what happened to your foot?" question, which propels Melody to a summary (7) and then backwards in time to the circumstances that brought this result (10-13). As a story, it gets audience reaction (14,16). The disruption of the real time temporal order in the story results from the specificity of the eliciting question.

Most children observed in the Turkish nursery schools by Aylin Küntay did not produce stories for other children, who gave them no prompts. Children's elicited stories were often supported by adult prompts at crucial junctures, to get started, and to continue. In the following example, Emde has been talking to the adult researcher (Ad) about a children's entertainment center that he visited over the weekend:

### **(4) Alligator game prompting [Translated from Turkish] (Age: 4;11)**

1. Emde: there is a scoreboard, shows our score

- 2.>Ad: is that so? how did you-- did you make a lot of points?  
 3. Emde: (I) did  
 4.       *but* once I won a lot of things  
 5.       that alligator-shooting game did not give us  
 6.       because some part of it was broken  
 7 >Ad: is that so? what happened?  
 8. Emde: got broken  
 9.       we had won a lot of shillings  
 10.      at that time it got broken  
 11 Ad: my gosh!  
 12 Emde: *but then-- but* at that time then you know  
 13.      those people who are at Piramit {entertainment center}--  
 14      those people who control Piramit-- they fixed that  
        and *then* we got all that shilling.(4;11)

Aylin Küntay: Eryavuz preschool

This story has a classic construction with a high point and resolution, but the temporal marking appears to be affected by the adult prompting. The adult question (2) takes the child from a description to a specific event. In answering the question, the child begins by a short reply to the question., yet the *but* signals a newsworthy issue or violation of expectation, (4) even as the story is beginning, marked with *once*. The story then begins. The resolution does not immediately follow the complicating action, but the flow is interrupted by the question of the adult (7). At this point the child repeats and moves back in time to recapitulate the sequence of winning before the equipment broke, even using a pluperfect affix to mark anteriority before the time evoked by the question, and then points out the problem with a *but then* marker. While *eliciting* seems to bring out prototypic stories, *prompting* can alter the temporal sequence by its focusing effect.

### **Rounds of stories**

In many conversational settings, stories implicitly invite related stories from other participants. Goffman (1974) states that "an illustrative story by one participant provides a ticket another participant can use to allow the matching of that experience with a story from his repertoire" (p. 510). Adults, in their interactions characterized by a series of stories, pick out some features from previous stories and work them into their ongoing story without bothering to frame each story anew (Ryave, 1978), much as speakers in sequential self-introductions use the same frame repeatedly. Umiker-Sebeok (1979), analyzing preschool children's narratives produced spontaneously within natural conversation with other children, found that the most common response to narratives were narratives which contained some element similar to one found in the preceding narrative. At age three, response narratives in Umiker-Sebeok's data did not seem to advance the conversation "as a conjoint elaboration of a conversational topic" (p. 107), but appeared as "dangling narratives" which generally concerned the same general topic.

In the following Turkish preschool example, Candegger initiates the series of narrative contributions by establishing the theme to be visits to the doctor's office. One statement initiations, which do not go beyond minimal event representations, are very common in this younger age. Also, they await the teacher's interested reaction before building upon their original one-line narratives. In this particular example, the teacher demonstrates interest by saying "is that so, dear?" (2). Such a reaction sets up the topic of visits to the doctor's as interesting for all of the children.

### **(5) Visits to the doctor**

Beril: (4;00) is one of the two girls in a seven student class. Osman is 4;00. Candegger is 3;07. It is breakfast time, and all of the children are sitting around a table, with their Teacher (Teach) and the researcher (Res) present.

- 1 Cand:       my mother took me to the doctor  
 2 Teach:      is that so, dear?  
 3 Beril:      my mother took me to the doctor, too  
 4 Cand:      shall I say what (*he/she*) said  
 5 Cand:      (*he/she*) said let him eat waffles a bit later

6 Teach: said let him not eat too much waffles, right?  
 7 Cand: said let him bite in teeny-weeny bites with his teeth  
 8 and then also pickles..  
 9 Teach: did you get a shot Candegger?  
 10 no:  
 11 Cand: (I) don't really like  
 12 Teach: let him eat little  
 13 little by little  
 14 let him not eat much  
 15 xxx would you like biscuits? {to Res}  
 16 Res: no, thanks  
 17 Beril: Teacher, the doctor told me don't eat anything  
 18 Teach: the doctor?  
 19 but if we don't eat we can't grow  
 20 Beril: no (he/she) said have breakfast but  
 21 don't eat those that your mother brings  
 22 Teach: is that so?  
 23 Osman: my mother did not take me to the doctor's  
 24 Teach: because you aren't sick, right?  
 25 don't get sick, ideally

Aylin Küntay: Ubaruz preschool

Beril, after replicating Candegger's one-liner in line (3), follows on Candegger's subtopic about his doctor's nutritional advice. Aside from demonstrating thematic continuity, Beril's story features formal similarities to Candegger's with respect to employing quoted speech of the respective doctor. Osman feels the urge to contribute (23) by reporting non-occurrence of the topical event in his life. Second narrators frequently claimed to have exactly the same experience as first narrators, down to the same details.

Since the overarching motivation for rounds in Turkish children's classroom settings seems to be to gain the teacher's interest, they usually try to top other children's stories with their own versions. If an initiation story attracts the attention of the teacher, other children select out of the thematic possibilities of the original story to construct their own. Usually, some of the thematic content gets replicated in the following stories. As Cortazzi (1993) suggests, usually "later narratives are highly pre-specified, showing marked parallels of topic, theme, character of events with preceding narratives" (p. 32-33).

Rounds allow for the ellipsis of presupposed information or the use of information from earlier stores.. To understand how the Earthquake narrative (1) was produced, we will examine how it was produced in such elliptical form below. There was a series of rounds with successively changed protagonists. Students began by telling where they were when the earthquake happened, and what they and people around them did. They added second-hand stories about what other people did. Then they began talking about what happened to their pets and then to their houses and apartments. The protagonists thus descend on an animacy hierarchy. After a discussion about the behavior of their dogs, Cynthia said that nothing of hers fell down, turning the topic to inanimate objects, with the immediate cues in the room in which the taping occurs.

#### (6) Earthquake round

1 Cyn: ==yeah our room our room looks like nothing happened at all,  
 2 Dom: == I was I was worried about this [pointing at empty beer  
 3 bottles on shelves] i-i-it's like coming home to find a big  
 4 pile of lads. [lads refers to empty bottles]  
 5 Ned: this is the first this is the first indication  
 6. that this was something  
 7 because the last one that happened was like a six  
 8 [referring to Richter scale] in Los Gatos and/ I was /sitting  
 .....  
 16 Ned: and then Al and I come back and we are just all \*oh my  
 17 /\*god there it is tilted nearly fallen off just hanging/



18 Al: /yeah.. instant hand up supporting them because they are just-/

The three who were present here co-produce a description of the state of the beer bottles. At this point Dom continues a round of reports on each person's room, including non-effects.

34 Al: nothing happened in my room.  
 35 Cyn: ==things were moved.  
 36 Ned: [to A] yeah funny thing Al/your room is a m-/  
 37 Geo: /you couldn't tell/  
 38 if something happened to your room.

There is an acceleration (39) as Ned emphasizes the extent of damage in their house, summarized by Al (43). At this point the two brothers overlap in two dramatic descriptions Al with exaggerated generalization (43), Ned with emphatic prosody in (44).

39 Ned: oh my mum and dad cannot get to Pete's room  
 40 to see what it's like../ they ca\*n't/ get to George's  
 41 Al: / yeah /  
 42 Ned /all the book-/  
 43 Al /natural disasters/ just do not stop happening at \*our house.  
 44 Ned ==\*all the \*bookcases \*everything \*fucking c-  
 45 our \*house is \*\*chaos.  
 46 Al ==yeah.  
 47 Ned it's \*chaos../the bookcases/  
 48 Olga: /the bookcases/ came off / the wall?/  
 49 Al: [to O] /Olga /  
 50 Ned: ==the bookcases all fell down/ \*books \*everywhere \*furniture/  
 51 Al: /you know/  
 52 Ned: \*moved/

The dramatic example here turns out to be a specifying of the more general description. What has happened is that Albert's general characterization (43) is fleshed out by Ned who describes the bookcases. Eventually Albert gets to the worst case of all, the shelving containing the antique crystal, and the brothers produce a duet narrative.

53 Al :you know that-  
 54 that \*nice \*glass \*china \*display case in our \*dining room?  
 55 Ned: /in the \*dining room/  
 56 Cyn: /o-o-oh/ /  
 57 Al: \*\*trashed.  
 58 Cyn: /forget it./  
 59 Ned: /\*absolutely/ trashed.  
 60 Al: whole thing a/bsolutely..yeah /  
 61 Ned: /\*every \*single bit/ of \*glass and  
 62 \*pottery in th-  
 63 Olg: and \*crystal?  
 64 Ned: \*all the crystal...\*trashed.  
 65 Al: crystal  
 66 Ned: \*everything ..\*trashed.  
 67 Cyn: /o-o-oh my go-o-o-d/  
 68 Al: /oh a er \*antiques \*genuine/ \*antiques  
 69 Ned: /and the \*amount of \*money/ we have lost  
 70 is going to be \*\*astronomical.

The round thus began with what happened to items on shelves in each of the participant's campus rooms, moving from a vivid local example in the immediate environment, through another male's room to the most extreme case personally known, the parental home of Albert and Ned. At this point what triggers the dining room narrative is the two strong generalizations in (43, 44). To illustrate the generalization, Ned and Albert move emphatically through a coordinated but elliptical description, with considerable rhythmic emphasis. The line length is shorter, with stronger stress and more focus on predicated descriptors, compared to the beer bottle description where more action is mentioned and there are human participants. The final evaluation by Ned, in a longer, syntactically complex sentence, changes the rhythm to summarize the major outcome.

Rounds can also lead to conventionalized story-telling, since they can provide occasions to be given the floor and to produce a tale that can use prior models as scaffolding and the obligation of mutual appreciation as support<sup>11</sup>. In the following example, a group of women at a Senior Center were discussing what they thought of changes in clothing fashions, and moved into the topic of making graduation dresses. The following is an excellent example of the frequent feature in all-female groups of women telling real-life narratives of their own embarrassing experiences to create amusement.

### (7) Making grade school graduation dresses

Setting: Senior Center

1 Ann: We had to \*sew our own dress in elementary school.

2 Bev: Yeah.

Ann told a story about how hard it was to finish in time which ended with an evaluation.

14 Ann: I remember I was so traumatized with that dress [laughs]

After general laughter, Bev started her own story on a similar theme.

16 Bev: what did \*I pick but an Indian \*linen..

Bev's story quickly moves into a problem. Her laughter (31) suggests that she already had the intention of making a humorous report on her solution. Deb's laugh (33) collaborates in the key.

29 Bev: and I uh if you did not leave enough yeah?

30 for your seams you know and then

31 uh, I had [laugh] all but one sleeve for puffed sleeves?

32 and one was not gonna be as full as the other one so-o

33 Deb: [laugh]

34 Bev: my grandmother used to bring a lot of things from overse-

35 you know, from uh, Europe, she used to travel a lot, my

36 dad's mother? and she had some beautiful ribbon

37 so I used it for the sash I remember it was an orchid.

38 sash. and uh, that- that dress did up, but uh,

39 what was I to do about the sleeves.

40 so I walked crooked up the stage.

41 All: [laugh]

UCDisclab: WCON1

Here, Deb reports a situation that for a young girl would be a painful dilemma, the lack of fabric for making the dress sleeves symmetrical for a major public event. Her story about the sash (32-38) sustains the suspense; "*but what was I to do about the sleeves?*" takes the listeners explicitly to her problem of a crooked dress, and then she states the punch line, the embarrassing solution of walking crookedly (40). This story is typical of women's humorous narratives about themselves (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert 1992), and it is clear that Deb knew at the start that she would present a problem narrative with a witty outcome. This is a prototypic narrative.

Adult round participants use prior models as scaffolding, with the possible aim of developing mutual appreciation as similar events. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1979) studies "story-dominated conversations" of Eastern European Jewish adults finds "in these story-dominated events, there is a preoccupation with narratives as things in themselves. For this reason, and because the narratives are preformulated and relatively self-contained (they can be understood without reference to any preceding conversation or narration), there is a tendency for story-dominated events to be organized like beads on a string" (p. 291).

In sum, rounds are a type of a speech context which can be heavily affected by notions of genre because the model are given by others is followed. Thus there can be cycles of jokes, cycles of humorous personal narratives, cycles of stories of one's room in an earthquake. To the extent that rounds provide a mutually cooperative audience that allows floor to the speaker, there is the possibility of elaborating a performance in terms of the cultural norms. Rounds can thus involve continuity of genre, continuities of latent topic, continuities of key, emulation of form, and presupposition or ellipsis.

### **Environmentally cued narratives**

More common than rounds in the conversational data are story triggers in the local environment. Here unlike rounds, there are no models provided in the preceding conversation. There is considerable variability of structure.

#### **(7) Bird burials**

1 Ellen: don't look...there's a dead bird.  
 (20 turns)  
 21 Ellen: a-a-aw let's bury it.  
 22 Dina: /let's/ not [laugh]  
 23 Bill: /I - I/ don't think so! some cat will probly /get it /  
 24 Ellen: /my dad/ always  
 25 did it for us  
 26 /[laugh] /we'd put it in a shoebox and bury it.  
 27 Dina: /[laugh]/ how sweet.  
 28 Bill: a-aw  
 29 Ellen: then we'd make crosses out of popsicle sticks.  
 .....  
 33 Dina: that's cute though...that's really nice.  
 34 Ellen: we'd have a funeral for it and everything.  
 we'd say a prayer [laugh] and bury the thing.  
 UCDisclab: LCON2

This is an example of the reminder report, which describes scripts rather than presenting a conflict with a resolution. There is a serial connective *then*, but the use of *would* marks this as a description of customary practice. There is, however, audience evaluation (24, 33) in this case, as if this were a narrative.

Children's conversations often include refer to what is in their immediate environment, since their activities tend to build on available resources for play. The following is an example of environment-cued fantasy of ten-year-olds in California. The imaginary characters and the disruption of order are characteristic of boys' stories as early as four (Nicolopoulou, Scales, and Weintraub 1994).

#### **(8) Microphone story**

Two ten year old boys alone in a testing room eating lunch notice the microphones strung from the overhead light.

1 Sam: what's this for?  
 2 Jer: it's a microphone  
 3 [S & J start to sing into microphones]

Singing or other stage performances are frequent reactions to microphones at this age. At this point, Sam begins to build up a scene of disorder.

4 Sam: [laughing] I was screaming!  
 5 [laughing} (hey..I'll be acting like this)  
 6 hey Jeremy Jeremy Jeremy I'm gonna be laughing in this  
 7 and the light falls down [laugh]  
 8 what would you do if the light fell?

The past tense (4) marks irrealis and a possible story beginning. In (5-6) the tense is moved to the future and in (8) to the conditional setting the stage for more fantasy. In (8) we see the imaginary disruption of order, which creates a problem to be solved by the fantasy narrative.

9 Jer: I'll be under the table  
 10 Sam: [laugh] no.. and you did it!  
 11 Jer: I'd be outta this class [laugh]  
 <5>  
 12 Sam: it'll hit you on your head! [laugh]  
 13 Jer: you know what I'd do,  
 14 I'd be Superman and catch it.  
 15 be Superman and get squashed like a pancake.  
 16 Sam: I'll be Flash and get the fuck out.  
 UCDisclab: GFIVE3

In this sequence, Sam changes his position from challenger (10, 12) to capping with a character shift (16). In addition to being fantastic responses to an environmental stimulus, these stories show how posing alternative outcomes can be part of collaborative/competitive bouts of story-telling.

### Narratives presenting problems

As opposed to stories that resolve the complicating situations they set up in the course of being told, some narratives invite audience participation in a possible problem-solving process by formulating problematic situations and/or protagonist behavior. Ochs, Smith, and Taylor (1989), who studied what they call “detective stories” during dinnertime talk, find that such problem-solving narratives can be characterized by interactive negotiation of the incomplete resolution.

The two most frequent contexts for temporal series in young adults’ talk in the data are personal characterizations and problem situations. The problem situations are presented in terms of potential endings, which participants co-construct. These differ somewhat from “troubles talk” (Jefferson 1988) in that they do not necessarily refer to chronic problems but one time events.

A Taiwanese engineering student is conversing with two Asian-American women about the topic of race relations.

### **(9) Asian women**

1 Hel: you know...I was talking with a friend about  
 2 that asian caucasian dating thing...  
 3 and my complaint to {[p] to my friend}  
 4 is that that is that asian guys just don't ask  
 5 =y'know?=  
 6 Min : = yeah = they're not as (xxx) as (xx)  
 7 Hel: do you agree?  
 8 Yuan: totally agree  
 9:Hel: so then if that's true then how come when you guys  
 10 get like mad at at \*us  
 11 if we go out with caucasian people  
 12 then you guys don't ask..  
 13 you guys don't get off your butts

14 <1>\*answer me  
 15 Yuan: it's becau:se..  
 16 Hel: <1> you expect us to wait  
 17 Yuan: ==\*ri:ght  
 18 Hel: ==\*yeah=  
 19 Yuan: \*ri::ght  
 20 Hel: no, seriously  
 21 Yuan: <4> hm I don't know I don't what to say  
 22 Hel: ==yeah..i don't know either

This segment poses a problem of tension between Asian men and women, in which Helen presents a challenge to Yuan in the *you guys* form (12,13) and pressures him (14) to answer the challenge, then herself providing the answer (16). In the conversation, Asian males are accused of causing the problem about which they are angry (10) both by their behavior (12,13) and by their unrealistic expectations (16). The topic of male anger triggers a description from Min in which the theme is Asian male anger. The story is basically in the form of a long quotation.

23 Min: ==did you guys see in the Daily Cal  
 24 about stuff..about the vandalism in Dwinelle  
 25 I actually like saw it..but um..there's this..  
 26 there's this like group of people who call themselves  
 27 the <1> Asian Male something or other they like  
 28 wrote like all over spray painted or marked =all over=  
 29 Yuan: =o:h AMU?=  
 30 Min: ==\*yea AMU..they like wrote kill whitey and then like  
 31 in the girls' bathroom downstairs they're like like y'know  
 32 : basically just slamming on asian woman  
 33 for dating caucasian men  
 34 : like stay within your own kind..stay within your own  
 group..  
 35 know what I mean? and it was just  
 36 Min: scrawled \*all over the stalls and the walls was writing  
 37 Yuan: hm-mm  
 38 Hel: I was like like when I saw that..I was just like...  
 39 god.those people are \*really angry [laugh] y'know ?

Helen's evaluation (39) explicitly refocusses the topic again on anger, and triggers a story from Yuan which begins with the response marker *well* (40), suggesting he intends the listeners to find a continuity from the topic to his story.

40 Yuan: well, I just met a caucasian guy yesterday  
 41 and we were just talking right?  
 42 and he he he speaks a little bit of Chinese  
 43 and he got a job uh got a job with a company like  
 44 uh doing tradings and stuff  
 45 and he was just telling me  
 46 yeah...you know...some Asian women...man  
 47 some Chinese women you just take them and  
 ....[clarification of bam~bang]  
 48 bang them...you know  
 49 like <2> have sex with them  
 50 yeah bang them...and then yeah so y'know  
 51 I'm just going to work here a couple of years  
 52 and then go back to Taiwan and get a wife  
 53 you know what am I supposed to response-  
 54 to response to that?  
 55 Hel: you can bop him  
 56 Yuan: all I can say is you know

57 Min: tell him you're pissed  
 58 Yuan: all I can say is being in this world  
 59 there's somebody who like to hit other people  
 60 and there's somebody who like to get hit...you know  
 61 so < 1> what can you say?  
 62 Hel: did you hit him?  
 63 Yuan: no  
 64 Hel: why not?  
 65:Yuan: cause whoever the girl that wants to go out with  
 66: him, that's her problem...that's not my problem.  
 UC Disclab: ASDAT

This story picks up the racial anger theme, identifying the speaker with the anger of the graffiti writer implicitly by an example of what could produce that anger, white men's disrespect for Asian women. The story here has a structure of a prototypic narrative involving a conflict, but the conflict is unresolved. The narrator evidently did not show his anger to the caucasian antagonist, and was left feeling dissatisfied. The businessman's statement (46-49) is presented without comment. There is a possible narrative transition marker *then* (50) but no overt reply is reported, and the action shifts to interior reflection. Yuan describes information about his own plans (51-52) implying a conflict with the stance of the businessman.<sup>12</sup> He leaves the story with a question about what he should have done (61). In the context of the graffiti topic, the two women have no hesitation in assuming Yuan's anger, and provide an answer to his question (55,57). It is not until Helen (62) elicits a story completion that we find out what actually happened, and only in the negative with an account of his reasoning when prompted (64-66). Thus the story has two unusual features, the failure to report the ending, which had to be prompted, and the solicitation by the teller of alternative outcomes. These mark the story as a problem situation.

### Narratives as performances

Every narrative, insofar as it attempts to get some point(s) across, has an evaluative aspect. However, only some narratives receive a very animated and dramatic enactment so that a performance aspect is attributed to them (e.g., Bauman, 1986; Hymes, 1972). In such cases, the evaluative component of the story is foregrounded, with less emphasis placed on the events comprising the story. Cortazzi (1993), in contrasting performance narratives to interview narratives, asserts that performance becomes highlighted if the topic is appropriate to the audience and participants have reciprocal relationships and shared norms for evaluation. Schiffrin (1981) talks about one feature, that is, usage of historical present tense, that "makes the past more vivid by bringing past events into the moment of speaking..." (p. 58). Among some of the other common features that are employed as tools for highlighting the evaluated point of the story are direct speech and animated intonation.

The following segment coming from two sisters sitting in a cafe demonstrates how quoted speech can be used to constitute a story. Sara is a topic change; she is involved in Mimi's job hunt. Bringing her up brings up also talk about her personality, first a descriptor from Mimi "standoffish" and then a carefully staged mocking mimicry from Lina, which was launched (9) before Mimi's comment about weirdness (10) and is therefore an independent but perhaps corroborating expression. The mimicry is a "story", in the form of a quoted dialogue. But it is only a fragment, with no event sequence.

### **(10) Sisters in a cafe talking about a job search**

5 Lina: /xx/so you decided to call Sara?  
 6 Mimi: yeah. it's weird cause she's kinda..I don't know  
 7 don't you think that she's kinda standoff-  
 8 she's kinda-  
 9 Lina: she left this message  
 10 Mimi: her and Jill are both kinda weird I think  
 11 Lina: /she always goes she goes/  
 12 Mimi: / they're/ /  
 13 Lina: [slow whiny]" I'm calling for Mi-i-mi-i"  
 14 Mimi: ..she's- she /calls me Mi-i-mi-i /

15 Lina: /did you hear her message?/  
 16 Mimi: yeah.  
 17 Lina: she goes [slow whiny]"I'm calling for Mi-i-mi-i.  
 18 um if you want you can work at the video store.  
 19 um tell her to call me, bye Mi-i-mi-i" [laughs]

UCDislab: SISTRS

Lina establishes the frame for her mimicry (9) while Mimi is still doing general description, the second line of which overlaps Mimi (11,12). It is not until (17) that Lina gets the floor for a full quotation mimicking Sara's voice, a production she appears to be planning by (11). While in terms of conversational tactics this example corroborates and illustrates the points made by Mimi, the urgency of her production, and her overlaps while accelerating till she gets the floor, suggest another feature, a goal of achieving a good performance, in this case of a witty mimicry. Also, as obvious from the content of the conversation, not much of what the story conveys is new information. The only conversational purpose of the story appears to be to display a shared assessment of a third person in a vivid way.

In the child database, totally "spontaneous" narratives that result from a natural impulse or tendency on the part of the child were not very common. Teachers, at times explicitly, disallowed children to tell stories outside of the time allotted for story-telling. When interviewed, a teacher reported that she really does not like it when Hasan, who told (10) breaks into his "quite fantastical and irrelevant" stories in the middle of "serious" group activities. But even without encouragement, children occasionally told some stories that were not precipitated by any remark, question, or topic in the preceding conversation. What seemed to trigger such narratives is probably the tellability attributed to the events by the storytellers. The content of such stories tend to be not banal, but out-of-the-ordinary events, which lend themselves to highly theatrical performances that attempt to build and uphold some suspense in the audience. Labov (1972) proposes that eventfulness is an intrinsic aspect of events and is expressed by evaluative devices: "evaluative devices say to us: this was terrifying, dangerous, weird, wild, crazy; or, amusing, hilarious, wonderful; more generally, that it was strange, uncommon, or unusual-- that is, worth repeating. It was not ordinary, plain, humdrum, everyday or run-of-the-mill" (p.371). They also tended to repeat such narratives, and consolidated highly elaborate structures through repetition. As Goffman (1974) aptly writes "effective performance requires first hearings, not first tellings" (p. 508). The following narrative is from a 4-year-old boy replaying a particularly dramatic experience of near-death of a (nonexistent) sibling<sup>13</sup>.

### (11) Brain-washing.

During a gymnastic session at the preschool, a four-year old boy spontaneously launched into a dramatic story about his nonexistent younger brother. When Hasan was asked to retell the story the second telling was very like the first.

1 Res: tell (*it*) again.  
 2 Hasan: my sibling opened medicine/medicine box-- took (*it*)? {self-correction}  
 3 was able to open (*it*)?  
 4 broke that lid?  
 5 ate them up  
 6 ate all all all (*of them*) up?  
 7 Res: a-ah! [=expressing surprise]  
 8 eee? [=so then?]  
 9 Hasan: ate them?  
 10 (*the ones*) which were mine?  
 11 (*he/she*) deserved so got sick  
 12 Res: then?  
 13 Hasan: then (*we*) took (*him*) to doctors  
 14 Res: what did (*they*) do at the doctor's?  
 15 Hasan: what's this? {re: taperecorder}  
 16 Res: this-- (*we*) will listen (*to it*) later

- 17 Hasan: are *(you)* going to listen *(to it)*?  
 18 Res: hı hı [=yes]  
 19 what did *(they)* do later at the doctor's?  
 20 Hasan: doctors ehh.. ee tube-- *(they)* inserted a tube towards  
 21 *(his/her)* belly  
 22 Res: hmmh  
 23 Hasan: and after that e eh.. *(his/her)* stomach-- e *(they)* cleansed  
 24 *(his/her)* brain.  
 25 Res: Uuuuh! [=expressing astonishment]  
 26 Hasan: yes!  
 27 Res: is *(he/she)* fine now?  
 28 Hasan: ee if *(they)* hadn't washed *(his/her)* brain,  
 29 he/she would have died {postposed pronoun}  
 30 Res: god forbid!  
 31 now *(he/she is)* fine, that means  
 32 Hasan: *(they)* washed *(his/her)* brain  
 33 after that *(he/she)* got well  
 34 and never took medicine without permission again.

Aylin Küntay: Istanbul preschool

From the perspective of the 4-year-old boy, the events are so impressive that he seems to be carrying them around in a story-package that waits to be opened up in every appropriate occasion. The exigency of conveying the story gets reflected in the animated tone of voice he uses to tell the story. In turn, such enthusiasm may have led to the development of a full-fledged narrative structure. The temporal sequencing of the orienting events into a personally evaluated complicating action (1-11), the building up of suspense through an extended resolution (20-26), which also receives an evaluation by the presentation of a counterfactual event (26)<sup>14</sup> and the usage of a narrative-ending coda to return to the present time (31) depict all the essential elements of a Labovian story structure.

Not all the out-of-the-blue stories exhibited the Labovian elements in a very straightforward fashion. For example, first-person fight stories, while constituting a major portion of the boys' spontaneous tellings, never attained structural complication. There seems to be two main reasons for this: 1) young narrators do not necessarily take on the task of using the sequential unfolding events strategically for the purpose of creating suspense, and 2) the action structure of fight stories which reinforce a self-aggrandizing story is so predominant in the minds of the speakers that they do not go beyond elaborating on the manner of their participation in a fight.

### Tactical narratives

Many conversational narratives are produced to support requests, claims, positions in an argument, or gossip about the character of others. A most vivid example of the tactical use of narratives was Goodwin's (1990, p. 243ff) instance of a story told in the midst of a dispute in order to humiliate the opponent. Support may be in the form of a description, or of a single vignette, as in **10**. Structurally, such narratives are often highly abbreviated, containing only enough information to support the position. Also, they may begin in the middle of a sequence. Example (**13**) contains a narrative but it does not conform to Labov's criterion of temporal iconicity.

In another context of a long conversation, Emde has been telling the adult researcher about some horror movies. The adult states (1) a generalizing conclusion that he does not get scared of anything if he can watch such violent movies, a statement Emde challenges by an story. Here the child provides a continuous narration demonstrating an instance of a personal history narrative brought in to support a reply which runs counter to the assumption behind the question. The result is an elaborate narrative with extensive presentation of emotional reaction.

### **(12) Scary films** (Age: 4;11)

- 1Ad: so you don't get scared of anything?  
 2Emde: get scared--



3           for example I get scared of *sey* [how do you say]  
 4           in the cartoon very good--  
 5           at first there was a very ugly man  
 6           I didn't get scared of him  
 7           but then he got uglier in the film  
 8           I didn't watch it  
 9           and then I left the TV without turning it off  
 10          since I got so much frightened  
 11          my mother was in the kitchen  
 12          I immediately ran to the kitchen

Aylin Küntay: Eryavuz Preschool

The narrative is introduced clearly as an example (3) of the generalization (2) and is constructed as a contrast between a stimulus and non-response (5-6) in agreement with the adult's assumption, and a contrasting (*but then--*) stimulus and fear responses (7-9) in disagreement with her generalization. The next line (9) *and then* escalates to a more vivid example of fear. He provides explanations (10, 11) in the form both of motivational evaluations and place information before the climax and marks the ultimate challenge to the adult's generalization by illustrating his flight (12) as occurring *immediately*. The evaluation (10) can also be seen as a reply to (1) tying the example back to its prompt. Thus the narrative follows a direct reply, is marked as an example, and is punctuated with recurrent challenges to the stimulating question. It never loses its marking as a reply.

In the following example, the conversational topic had begun with questioning of Ann about her plans to become a feminist therapist, which she illustrates with a quotation narrative. The relevant conversation is reported in full in the appendix. In the first narrative, Ann introduced a report of a conversation telling about repeated, customary harrassment, told in generalized terms, without specifics. Her point relating this story to her career goals never was completed, because Cathy interrupted with a specific narrative.

### (13) Temper

8   Cath:                                 ==wo-o-h   =  
 9           you wanna hear about \*harrassment from a \*guy  
 10          (like) \*right after we \*saw you,  
 11          this guy grabbed my \*butt, on my way to dinner, on the  
 sidewalk//  
 12   An    \*o::h =my \*go:::d   =  
 13   Iris:         =oh my \*go:::d=  
 14   Cath: ==\*\*no:: it was kind of funny though.  
 15          I- you- you know I  
 16          =knew him from the \*\*party         = the night be\*fore.  
 17   Tere: =you \*\*knew who he \*\*was, right/=  
 18   Cath: \*but.. and he's nice looking  
 19          and he's a nice guy/  
 20          but it was just kind of {[fast] \*weird  
 21          because I didn't recognize him at first}  
 22          I \*had to turn around and like,..  
 23          \*actually it took me about a \*block to even =make = the  
 24          connection/

In this report, Cathy identified her story as an example of the general topic introduced by Ann, and the relevance as confirmation. She uses a preface (9) to take the floor, identifies the location of the event (10) and moves directly to the high point. The audience reaction (12, 13) confirms the appropriateness of the story and gives her warrant for holding the floor later to speculate about her own reactions. . The orientation, evaluation, and her resulting behavior all follow. The audience even collaborates and confirms (17) This story presents a problem, given the topical context. This story was followed by a round of harrassment stories.

64 Cath: ==(well you know what \*maybe)  
 65 it's kind of \*cool sometimes  
 66 if you're in the right frame of mind.  
 67 I \*\*really have to be in the right frame of mind,...  
 68 \*\*drunk. {[laugh] ( )} ...  
 69 \*no, I \*really- I \*do have to be in  
 70 =the right frame of mind. \*Simon was just =  
 71 Tere: =guys do it to me all the \*ti:me,.. I mean guys I \*know=  
 72 Cath: lucky I didn't \*backhand him for that....  
 73 that's \*all I have to \*say about it..  
 74 it was there- I mean if it had been,..  
 75 if \*that had been say like mid\*week last week when I was  
 76 really up\*set about stuff,..  
 77 \*I would've turned around and- and...  
 78 \*\*nailed the guy,.. I swear to god  
 79 I would've \*kicked his nuts through the roof of his mouth,  
 80 Iris: ==umhm,  
 81 Cath: ==\*\*anybody who fucks with me that way last week I  
 82 would've killed.

Cathy shifts the topic from harrassment to the relationship of mood to harrassment, in contrasting situations, a shift not followed by the other women (71). She then creates hypotheticals about her willingness to retaliate when in a bad mood (77-79), building to an extreme (82). Her anger about the unresolved event even leads to an ambivalent reply to Teresa's teasing (93) which may have been based on a misinterpretation of Cathy's laugh (92, 95)<sup>15</sup>

91 Cath: I have a \*temper \*anyway but  
 92 [laugh] I \*really have a temper wh=en (a guy) =  
 93 Tere: ={{[high] \*\*do you=  
 94 \*\*really?}  
 95 Cath: [laugh] \*\*Terry that was not even funny,..  
 96 \*yeah it was but...\*it wasn't. <3>  
 97 \*well, yeah.

Next Cathy produces a story, but it is not built up temporally as a narrative, but presents the high point (100) which provides proof of her claims to a fiery character (99).

99 Cath: =\*you= guys wanna see me in one of my bad moods,  
 100 \*Iris saw me sh- throw my shoe through my window.  
 101 Iris: [laugh] oh \*yea::h I {[laugh] remember that.}  
 102 Cath: \*I don't remember what I was ma:d about,  
 103 I \*broke my window with my shoe.  
 104 Tere: \*\*go:d,  
 105 Iris: \*\*I remember what you were mad about....  
 106 you were \*gonna uh- um..  
 107 you had been waiting all \*day to ga- go out,..  
 108 your mom said she was gonna be back in the \*morning,..  
 109 = and she didn't come back,)=  
 110 Cath: ==\*.... and left = me without a \*car.  
 111 Iris: ==yeah....  
 112 Cath: \*that was when I was sharing a car with my \*mo:m.  
 113 that was like my-..  
 114 \*that was a while ago....  
 115 that was like my \*junior year in high school  
 116 or something

What turns out to be a story about a temper tantrum was not presented as a narrative. Cathy, whose conversational focus is on her own personality and capacities, says she remembers only her own burst of temper and its outcome, not what caused it. It is left to her friend Iris to go back in time (105), and reconstruct the context for the outburst. So we do not have, in any sense, the iconicity of temporal series in the story and in the event, the build-up of conflict to a high-point, and the resolution that one sees in a full narrative. Rather, a speaker seizes a piece of a past sequence for her local conversational needs and gives a fragment of the event sequence.

### **Conclusions**

When we see data from other societies, we recognize that there are conditions where long, well-structured, personal experience narratives are heard frequently. Alves (1994), for example, found that even Portuguese village children speaking to other children can tell such stories spontaneously, because, he says, such tellings are encouraged and modeled. Americans ask “have you heard this before?” as if retellings to the same audience is undesirable, thus ruling out the practice that elaborates the descriptive, dramatic or humorous features of stories. Ochs, Smith and Taylor (1989) have recorded families in which long personal narratives are not modeled and parents do not report their personal experiences as narratives, instead treating children’s reports of the past as problem situations.

Audience participation norms are culturally variable, as we have seen from Watson-Gegeo and Boggs (1977) and others. In our data there is some evidence of occasional backchannel encouragement. Among the questions to be considered in cultural information are these: Can a story be retold or must we ask if it is new? Under what conditions is retelling authorized, and how? Does the story-teller have to demand the floor by prefacing or do listeners recognize and orient to cues of upcoming narratives? Are there occasions and people who can be expected to produce elaborated stories?

Many of these cultural factors have their effect through altering the very performance conditions which we have proposed affect the prototypical structure in narratives. There are **production conditions** which facilitate longer and more elaborated stories.

(a) Repetition: the opportunity to rehearse and reshape a story. Stories that are retold already have a basis in form, and a reteller has the knowledge of how the first occasion was evaluated by the audience. Even a story that is someone else’s gives the teller this advantage.

(b) Stories are likely to be less elliptical where less shared knowledge can be presupposed, and orientation must be supplied. Stories across generation are like this.

(c) On the other hand, shared experience can be motivating of shared interest, as we see in the stories shared by family members or veterans. Prompts, collaboration, and evaluations from an audience can indicate that it is attentive and willing to hear a long story, leading the speaker to turn what could have started as a tactical move into a performance.

(d) Elicited, prefaced or audience-prompted stories can be seen by tellers and audience as held to an aesthetic standard involving the cultural norms for the genre to be entertaining, amusing, and so on. In addition, these occasions, unless they are daily routines, are likely to draw on the tellers’ most shaped, retold, and dramatic experiences. If the speaker is free to choose a rehearsed and reshaped story, there is likely to be more elaboration than in conversationally occasioned novel accounts.

(e) Stories that are told in response to narrow questions, or to make particular conversational points, are more likely to select a time in the narrative to begin which does not entail a build-up or elaboration. They may involve just the high point, or just a quote, or just a description. Stories which are told to illustrate a problem can lack resolutions, and in fact alternative outcomes may be solicited from or volunteered by the participating group.

Our point then is not that the prototypical story structure is not an unrealized ideal, but that the presence and absence of its features can be systematically related to the conversational circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup>The junior author's dissertation concerns both spontaneous and elicited narratives of children in two Turkish preschools.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper, the terms "narrative" and "story" will be used interchangeably. However, the distinction between narrative and story is a valid one, which is central in some accounts. For example, Rimmon-Kenan (1983) has a three-way distinction between "story", "text", and "narration", where **story** refers to a series of of logically and chronologically related events, and **narration** is the manner of talking about these event sequences. The origin of the story/narrative bifurcation comes from the Russian formalists' split between *fabula* and *sjuzhet* (Propp, 1968) and gets disseminated into other researchers' work (for example, Chatman's (1978) distinction between story and discourse). Such accounts strive to isolate a paradigmatic core from actual narrative versions, by moving away from the surface language phenomena towards a deeper structure. Since our main concern in this particular study is only the actual use of language in extended discourse, the distinction will not be honored in the writing.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the rhetorical approach (for e.g., Abrahams, 1968, 1976; Bauman, 1986; 1992; Ben Amos, 1976; Hymes, 1971), which grew out of the folkloric tradition as a challenge to structuralist approaches, regards stories not as highly confined and named entities in a given culture, but as parts of situated face-to-face communicative events and interactional sense-making situations.

<sup>4</sup> In fact different prototypes appear when one compares elicited stories from people of different cultural backgrounds. For example, Minami and McCabe (1991), Michaels (1981), and Rodino et al (1991) have compared elicited stories from different cultural sources, and have shown contrasts in children's story organization in terms of high points, the degree of focus on events or on people's characteristics, and audience encouragement of elaboration or brevity of presentation. So even if we are talking about the prototypic story, we need to identify what features and structural components are commonly highlighted or ellipted in a given culture.

<sup>5</sup> Transcriptions are based on Gumperz and Berenz (1993). \*is stress; = overlap; == latched response; ...pauses; < > seconds of pause; { } feature boundaries; / falling terminal juncture.

<sup>6</sup> This takes us to another issue, what is even tellable to outsiders, since some backgrounding is too difficult to make explicit, so only can be shared with co-participants (Fussell 1975).

<sup>7</sup> These data were obtained by assignments to students, so they are age-biased to ages 18-30 with a few exceptions involving families or senior centers.

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<sup>8</sup> Eryavuz Center and Ubaruz Center will be used as pseudonyms for the two preschools. Although social class is not one of the factors that is explored systematically in the study, an attempt was made to include children representative of families of different socio-educational backgrounds. Almost all of the children in Eryavuz Center came from higher-middle to upper-class families. Ubaruz Center catered to the children of the staff of a major university, and therefore included children of all backgrounds, mostly lower-middle class and middle-class.

<sup>9</sup> Ages are given after quotations in the case of child speakers.

<sup>10</sup> Looking only for marked sequences leads to the omission of stories like the earthquake event.

<sup>11</sup> The kind of structural elaborations found by Nicolopoulou (in press) when children have audience support in pre-school narratives-for-drama suggest that many other manipulations of audience relations to story-telling could alter structural complexity.

<sup>12</sup> Linda Young (1994) has described an Asian communication pattern in which backgrounded information is presented, allowing inference.

<sup>13</sup> Later interview with Hasan's father showed that, first, he doesn't have any brothers or sisters. However, the father reported that their neighbor's son, to whom Hasan may be referring as a sibling, was hospitalized recently for swallowing some headache pills.

<sup>14</sup> Such usage of postposed of third-person pronouns is very rare in Turkish. In this context, it signifies some ambivalent attitude/emotion on the part of the narrator towards the protagonist-- empathy mixed with disapproval and antagonism.

<sup>15</sup> Laughter is common in women's self-critical and revealing speech (Ervin-Tripp & Lampert 1992).