

# Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience<sup>1</sup>

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Most attempts to analyze narrative have taken as their subject matter the more complex products of long-standing literary or oral traditions. Myths, folk tales, legends, histories, epics, toasts, and sagas seem to be the result of the combination and evolution of simpler elements; they contain many cycles and recycles of basic narrative structures; in many cases, the evolution of a particular narrative has removed it so far from its originating function that it is difficult to say what its present function is.

In our opinion, it will not be possible to make very much progress in the analysis and understanding of these complex narratives until the simplest and most fundamental narrative structures are analyzed in direct connection with their originating functions. We suggest that such fundamental structures are to be found in oral versions of personal experiences: not the products of expert storytellers that have been retold many times, but the original production of a representative sample of the population. By examining the actual narratives of large numbers of unsophisticated speakers, it will be possible to relate the *formal* properties of narrative to their functions. By studying the development of narrative technique from children to adults, and the range of narrative techniques from lower-class to middle-class speakers, it will be possible to isolate the elements of narrative.

In this article, we present an analytical framework for the analysis of oral versions of personal experience in English. We first introduce definitions of the basic units

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of narrative and then outline the normal structure of the narrative as a whole. Finally, we present some general propositions about the relation of formal properties to narrative functions, based on our examination of a moderate body of data.

The analysis is formal, based upon recurrent patterns characteristic of narrative from the clause level to the complete simple narrative. We rely upon the basic techniques of linguistic analysis, isolating the invariant structural units, which are represented by a variety of superficial forms. From this analysis it is possible to derive a considerable amount of information on the syntax and semantics of English below the sentence level, but this direction of research will not be exploited here. We are concerned primarily with the characteristics of the narrative itself.

The analysis is *functional*: Narrative will be considered as one of constructing narrative units that match the *temporal sequence* of that experience, in particular, a technique of constructing narrative units that match the temporal sequence of that experience. Furthermore, we find that narrative that serves this function alone is abnormal: it may be considered empty or pointless narrative. Normally, narrative serves an additional function or personal interest, determined by a stimulus in the social context in which the narrative occurs. We therefore distinguish two functions of narrative: (a) *referential* and (b) *evaluative*.

In most previous studies of folk narrative, the basic unit for analysis has been a substantial piece of thematic material, defined at various levels of abstraction by the type of action referred to. Thus the work of Propp (1958) was devoted to the formal structure of such large semantic units. This study assumes as a basic task the analysis of narratives that might appear as fundamental, unanalyzable units in Propp's scheme. We are concerned with the smallest unit of linguistic expression that defines the functions in which phrases and words are relevant to evaluative function. Colby's work (1996) took as data the frequencies of individual words according to a semantic subcategorization; a linguistic approach is quite opposite in direction, focusing upon the syntagmatic structure of words and phrases operating in clauses and higher levels of organization. Schatzman and Strauss (1955) studied class differences in narrative technique by informal means; it is hoped that the methods developed in this discussion will permit a more reliable and objective approach to studies of this type.

We are dealing with tape-recorded narratives taken from two distinct social contexts. One is a face-to-face interview in which the narrator is speaking only to the interviewer, a person not a member of a narrator's primary group. In the second situation, the narrator is recorded in interaction with his primary group; he is speaking in margins of the group, who provides only a part of the stimulus for the narrative.

The following pages provide 14 examples of the data on hand, drawn from about 600 interviews gathered in the course of four linguistic studies.<sup>2</sup> The narrators include speakers from Black and White communities, rural and urban areas, and they range in age from 10 to 72 years old. In one respect the range is limited: There

are no highly educated speakers represented here; in fact, none of the narrators finished high school.

The ultimate aims of our work require close correlations of the narrator's social characteristics with the structure of their narratives, because we are concerned with problems of effective communication and class and ethnic differences in verbal behavior.<sup>3</sup> In this article, however, we are concerned with the narratives themselves, and so these 14 examples appear as anonymous narrations, arranged in descending order of the speakers' ages.

### Narrative 1

(Were you ever in a situation where you thought you were in serious danger of getting killed?) I talked a man out of—Old Doc Simon I talked him out of pulling the trigger. (What happened?)

Well, in the business I was associated at that time, the Doc was an old man ... He had killed one man, or—had done time. But he had a—young wife, and those days I dressed well. And seemingly she was trying to make me.

I never noticed it. Fact is, I didn't like her very well, because she had—she was a nice looking girl until you saw her feet. She had big feet. Jesus, God, she had big feet!

Then she left a note one day she was going to commit suicide because he was always raising hell about me. He came to my hotel. Nice big blue 44, too.

I talked him out of it; and says, "Well, we'll go look for her, and if we can't find her, well you can—go ahead, pull the trigger if you want to." I was maneuvering.

So he took me up on it. And we went to where they found her handkerchief—the edge of a creek—and we followed down a little more, and we couldn't find anything. And got back—it was a tent show—she was laying on a cot with an ice bag on her head. She hadn't committed suicide.

But—however—that settled it for the day. But that night the manager, Floyd Adams, said, "You better pack up and get out because that son of a

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<sup>2</sup>The materials include: 70 interviews with speakers from various occupations, ethnic membership, and ages on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts; 230 interviews with speakers representing a stratified random sample of the Lower East Side of New York City; 250 interviews of children and adults from our current research in Central Harlem; and 50 interviews from exploratory work in Cleveland, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Phoenix, and Beaufort County, South Carolina. The basic interview techniques are described in Labov (1964, 1966) and Labov, Cohen, and Robins (n.d.).

<sup>3</sup>In our current research in Central Harlem, we are concerned with the functional conflicts between standard English and the nonstandard English of Black and Puerto Rican children. Many of these children show great verbal ability in many areas, including the construction of narratives, but cannot read at all. One purpose of this work on narrative analysis is to show how children use language to carry out the functions that are important in their system of values.

bitch never forgives anything once he gets it in his head.”

And I did. I packed up and got out. That was two.

That was two.

After I came out from New York ...

### Narrative 2

I had dogs that could do everything but talk. And by gorry, sir, I never licked ‘em.

(When you have small kids, they’re always asking for one more thing, like a drink of water, to keep from going to bed at night. I wonder if you had that problem, and what you did about it?) Yeah, but—a lot of the children I’ve seen, that their excuse they’ve got to go to the bathroom, and they don’t have to go at all. (How do you cope with it. You can’t—you never know ... ) No. I don’t remember how we coped with it. I never believed a whole lot in licking. I was never—with my children, and I never—when it was with my animals, dogs; I never licked a dog, I never had to. A dog knew what I meant; when I hollered at a dog, he knew the—what I meant. I could—I had dogs that could do everything but talk. And by gorry, sir, I never licked ‘em.

I never come nearer bootin’ a dog in my life. I had a dog—he was a wonderful retriever, but as I say he could do everything but talk. I could waif him that way, I could waif him on, I could waif him anywhere. If I shot a crippled duck he went out after it; he didn’t see it in the water, he’d always turn around look at me, and I’d waif him over there, if the duck was there, or if it was on the other side of where we’re on, I could waif him straight ahead, and he’d turn and he’d go. If he didn’t see me, he’d turn around, he’d look at me, and I’d keep a-waifin’ him on. And he’d finally catch sight of him, and the minute he did, you know, he would bee-line and get that duck.

I was gunnin’ one night with that dog—we had to use live decoys in those days—a fellow named Jack Bumpus was with me; I was over at a place called Deep Bottom, darker than pitch. And—uh—heard a quackin’ off shore. And, I said to Jack, “Keep quiet. There’s one comin’ in.” And—uh—finally Jack said to me, “I think I see ‘im.” I said, “Give ‘im a gun. Give ‘im a gun. Try it.”

So he shot, and this duck went for the shore with his wings a-goin’ like that for the shore. Went up on the shore. Well this dog never lost a crippled duck on shore, he’d take a track just the same as a hound would take a rabbit track. And I sent him over. I said, “Go ahead.”

So he went over there. And—gone a while and come back and he didn’t have the duck. And that was unusual—I said, “You git back there and get that duck!” And he went back there; and he stayed a little while longer, longer than he did the first time, and he come back and he didn’t have that duck.

And I never come nearer shootin’ a dog. By gorry, I come pretty near. “*You git back there and get that duck!*” And that dog went back there, and



he didn't come back. And he didn't come back. By gorry, we went over there—I walked over there, and here he was; one of my tame ducks that I had tethered out there had got the strap off her leg, and had gone out there, and when this fellow shot, he hadn't hit the duck. The duck came for the shore, he hadn't hit the duck; but the duck was scared and had come for the shore. My dog was over there, and had his paw right on top of that duck, holdin' him down just as tight as could be, and—by gorry, boy, I patted that dog, I'll tell you if I ever walloped that dog I'd have felt some bad. He knew more 'n I did; the dog knew more than I did. He knew that was that tame duck; he wasn't gonna pick him up in his mouth and bring him, you know. He was just holdin' him right down on the ground.

### Narrative 3

(Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?) My brother put a knife to my head. (How'd that happen?) Like kids, you get into a fight and I twisted up his arm behind him.

This was just a few days after my father had died, and we were sitting shive. And the reason the fight started ... He sort of ran out of the yard—this was out on Coney Island—and he started talk about it. And my mother had just sat down to have a cup of coffee. And I told him to cut it out.

Course kids, you know—he don't hafta listen to me. So that's when I grabbed him by the arm, and twisted it up behind him. When I let go his arm, there was a knife on the table, he just picked it up and he let me have it. And I started to bleed like a pig.

And, naturally, first thing was—run to the doctor. And the doctor just says, "Just about this much more," he says, "and you'd a been dead."

### Narrative 4

... They didn't believe in calling the law or anything like that. They just took things in their own hands. (Did you ever see any shooting of that sort?) Oh, yes. I can remember real well. I w's just a girl. 'Fact, stayed with me quite a while.

Well, there's a fellow, his name was Martin Cassidy 'n' Bill Hatfield. Mr. Cassidy's mother gave him some money an' tell him to go get a bushel of peaches. An' he went down to Martin's house. An' Martin had some moonshine down there.

Back down there, they make their own liquor, you know. So—we call it moonshine. Today, they call it white lightnin'; but at that time we call it moonshine.

An' I remember real well what happened. Bunch of us kids was out there playin'; an no one meanin' any harm about it. But anyway, Mrs. Hatfield come down an took away her money from Mr. Hatfield, you know, for the

peaches, cause she know what he was gonna buy drinks with it. 'Nd Mr. Cassidy was laying out there in the yard.

And Mr. Cassidy just looked up and he said to Bill, just—just jokin', just in a kiddin' way, he said "Uh huh," he says, "that's—another dollar bill you won't get to spend for drinks, hunh?"

'Nd Bill said, "I'll fix you, ya so-and-so."

So he walked in Martin Cassidy's *house*, his own house, came out with a double-bitted axe, hit him down 'crosst the head once, turned over and hit him again, then threwed the axe down and run through the woods.

Just over two dollars that he was sent for peaches with.

#### Narrative 5

(Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?) Yes. (What happened?) I don't really like to talk about it. (Well, tell me as much about it as you can?)

Well, this person had a little too much to drink, and he attacked me, and a friend came in, and she stopped it.

#### Narrative 6

(Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?)

Yeah, I was in the Boy Scouts at the time. And we was doing the 50-yard dash, racing, but we was at the pier, marked off, and so we was doing the 50-yard dash. There was about eight or nine of us, you know, going down, coming back. And going down the *third* time, I caught cramps and started yelling "help!", but the fellows didn't believe me, you know. They thought I was just trying to catch up, because I was going on or slowing down. So all of them kept going. They leave me.

And so I started going down. Scoutmaster was up there. He was watching me. But he didn't pay no attention either. And for no reason at all there was another guy, who had just walked up that minute ... He just jumped over and grabbed me.

#### Narrative 7

(And what about the street fight?) Then—ah—well, street fight, the most important, lemme see. (You know, the one that you remember the most.) Well, I had quite a lot. Well, one, I think, was with a girl [laughter]. Like, I was a kid, you know.

And she was the baddest girl—the *baddest girl in the neighborhood*. If you didn't bring her candy to school, she'd punch you in the mouth. And you had to kiss her when she ['d] tell you. This girl was only about twelve years old, man, but she was a killer. She didn't take no junk. She whupped all her brothers.

And I came to school one day, and I didn't have no money; my ma wouldn't give me no money. And I played hookies one day. First time I played hookies, man, put sump'n on me, so I said, you know, I'm not gonna play hookies no more, 'cause I don't want to get a whuppin'.

So I says to myself, "Well, there's gonna be times my mother won't give me money because a poor family, and I can't take this all—and so, you know—every time she don't give me any money. So I say, well, I just gotta fight the girl. She gonna hafta whup me. I hope she don't whup me."

And I hit the girl: powwww!!

### Narrative 8

(Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?) I'm gonna die? When I was drownin', I didn't know—like, I was turnin' tumblesauts. But that was the only time.

I—I was in a fight downtown once. Like,—I went down to a party, and—this—this guy was a soldier—and this guy was a soldier, and he comes on, "gimme a cigarette."

I said, "I don't have any cigarettes"

"Well, lemme search you."

I said, "You're not gonna search me."

"Well—I'm a soldier, and I know judo."

I said, "Well, I don't—I don't care if you're a *cop* and you know karate, you're not gonna search me."

And he hit me, man, like I hit him. And like, I—I got next to the guy. He didn't get a chance to use nothing, and I put sump'm on him.

I had—had a couple of guys with me. So we walked around the corner,—after, you know, I knocked him down a couple of times. I said "Well, you know, we'll soon get it."

I walk around the corner about twenty guys come after us, down by the projects. And we're runnin'—and, like—I couldn't run as fast as the other guys. And they was catchin' up to me. And I crossed the street, and I tripped, man. And, like, when I tripped, they kicked me and they was on me and I said, "Like this is it, man"; I pulled a knife.

But—a guy I know from the projects came over and gave me a hand.

And that—that was it, you know. That was it.

### Narrative 9

(Did you ever have a feeling, or a premonition, that something was gonna happen, and it did?) Yes, I did. (Tell me about it.)

I was goin' with a girl, one time; we were layin' on a bed—we weren't doin anything, we were talkin'—and I don't know, I looked into her face and

I saw, like, horns coming out of her head. You know—like—I said, “You look like the devil!”

She said, “What do you mean, I look like the devil?”

“Don’t kid around.” I said, “I’m not kiddin’. I saw horns comin’ out of your head.”

And the girl got very angry and walked out. But we got together, and we went together for about four months.

And, like, this girl tried to put me in a couple of tricks. Like, she tried to get some boys to hurt me. You know. And she was a devil.

So, now, anything I see I believe it’s going to happen.

#### Narrative 10

(Did you ever see anybody get beat up real bad?)

I know a boy named Harry. Another boy threw a bottle at him right in the head, and he had to get seven stitches.

#### Narrative 11

(What was the last cartoon you saw on television?) I don’t know, I was watching the Sandy Becker show. (What was the story about?) About this pig. (What happened?)

See he—they threw him out, you know. So he wanted to get back in, ‘cause, you know, it was sn- raining hard. So he got on this boat and tried to—go somewhere else. And the boat went over. And he tried to swim.

So this other man was fishing in the rain. So he seen the pig, and went over there and, and picked the pig up and brought it back to shore, so he would land there.

And that was that.

#### Narrative 12

(What was the most important fight you remember?)

When I was in fourth grade—no it was third grade—there was this boy, he stole my glove.

He took my glove, and say that his father found it downtown on the ground. I told him that he—it’s impossible for him to find downtown, ‘cause all those people were walking by, and just his father is the only one that find it? So he get all upset. Then I fought him. I knocked him all in the street. So he say he give. And I kept on hitting him. Then he start crying and run home to his father. And his father told him, he ain’t find no glove.

#### Narrative 13

... See, Napoleon he took the ring and put it on the maiden. It was a statue of the maiden. Then he put it on her finger where the ring’s supposed to be,



and then he saw the place where the project was made at. And everything wh—the doctor who made it was dead.

So he came. He took him and the boy—the boy asked could he see it, and when the boy started to see it, he had this thing on—this patch or something—on his back. The Japanese leader could trace him by that patch because, you know, by radar.

And then—he started—so he took the patch off the boy and put it on the dog. And he took a stick and threw it in the water and the dog ran after it. And the radar—it went in the water with the dog.

And then—Napoleon and the dog started running—I mean Napoleon and the dog started running, and they started running to the place where the project was made. And they started running to the place. And then, when they got there, they found that all of it was dried up and everything.

So when they started to leave out, he had a Japanese man first tell him to surrender. And before he told him to surrender, the dog—the dog came in there. The dog had found them. And the Japanese man came and told ‘em to surrender.

See, they was inside the cave and the Japanese man was outside. And he told them to surrender. And he didn’t surrender. He first—he told them that he made a trap. Then he said, “You can come in and make sure the project is all washed up,” ‘cause it was no more there. And they came.

When he sent one of his men to India ...

#### Narrative 14

(Did Calvin do something that was really wild?) Yeah. We made Calvin hit—I say, “Calv—”

See, we—it was on a Sunday, and we didn’t have nothin’ to do after I—after we came from church. Then we ain’t had nothin’ to do.

So I say, “Calvin, let’s go get out—put our dirty clothes on so we can play in the dirt.”

And so Calvin say, “Let’s have a rock—a rock war.” And I say, “All right.”

So Calvin had a rock and we, you know—here go a wall and a faraway go a wall. Calvin threw a rock. I was lookin’ and—uh—and Calvin threw a rock. It oh—it almost hit me.

So I looked down to get another rock.

Say “Sssh!” and’ it pass me.

I say, “Calvin, I’m bust your head for that.”

Calvin stuck his head out. I th’ew the rock, and the rock and the rock went up, I mean it went up, came down, and say [slap], and smacked him in the head and his head busted.

These 14 examples cover a wide variety of types, from extremely short to relatively long, from highly organized structures to simple serial types. In addition

to the narrative themselves, enough preliminary quotation is given so that one can obtain some idea of the stimulus to which the narratives respond—a matter quite relevant to the functional analysis of narrative.

Some difficult questions arise as we examine these narratives:

1. Though each is presented as a single narrative, how in fact do we know whether one or more narratives are contained in a given example? Is narrative structure well enough defined that we can answer this question? For instance, is Narrative 5 a narrative or a fragment of a narrative? Is Narrative 13 a fragment of a narrative or three separate narratives?

2. The structural framework of the narrative cannot be studied profitably without saying something about the sequence of clauses in the narrative to the sequence of events inferred from the narrative.

We attempt to answer these questions in the following discussion.

## THE BASIC FRAMEWORK OF NARRATIVE

### Temporal Sequence

We have defined narrative informally as one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events that actually occurred. For example, in Narrative 5 we have four independent clauses that refer to four successive events or situations:

- (5)
- a. Well, this person had a little too much to drink
  - b. and he attacked me
  - c. and the friend came in
  - d. and she stopped it.

The temporal sequence of narrative is an important defining property that proceeds from its referential function. Narrative is not the only method for referring to a sequence of events; all recapitulation of experience is not narrative. For example, the events of Narrative 5 might have been presented in the following way:

- (5')
- c. A friend of mine came in
  - d. just in time to stop
  - a. this person who had a little too much to drink
  - d. from attacking me.

This form of presenting events depends on syntactic embedding. However, not all alternatives to narrative require this type of subordination. The following series of four independent clauses presents the same material in reverse order:

- (5'')
- d. A friend of mine stopped the attack.
  - c. She had just come in.
  - b. This person was attacking me.
  - a. He had had a little too much to drink.

Despite the fact that these two formulations are perfectly logical, orderly, and acceptable ways of representing a sequence of events, they are not narratives as we are about to define the concept. The basic narrative units that we wish to isolate are defined by the fact that they recapitulate experience in the same order as the original events.

However, inspection of the other examples shows that the relations between clauses and events is not simple. For instance, in Narrative 3:

- (3)
- d. and we were sitting shive.
  - e. And the reason the fight started ...
  - f. He sort of ran out in the yard—
  - g. this was out on Coney Island—
  - h. and he started talk about it;
  - i. and my mother had just sat down to have a cup of coffee
  - j. and I told him to cut it out.

The sequence of Clauses d through j does not match the sequence of events and situations inferred from the narrative. The situation described in g (“This was out on Coney Island”) certainly did not follow f (“He sort of ran out of the yard”); the event of i (“and my mother had just sat down to have a cup of coffee”) did not follow h (“and he started talk about it”)—rather, it preceded it; the referent of Clause e is not temporally ordered with relation to any of the events (“and the reason the fight started”). The clauses that do refer to events clearly in the sequence are:

- (3')
- f. He sort of ran out of the yard
  - h. and he started talk about it
  - j. and I told him to cut it out.

So far, we have discussed clauses in general as narrative units. But it can quickly be seen that only independent clauses are relevant to temporal sequence. Subordi-

nate clauses (like the embedded clauses seen in Example 5) may be placed anywhere in the narrative sequence without disturbing the temporal order of the semantic interpretation, as in the next example taken from Narrative 1:

- (1)
- k. Then she left a note one day
  - l. she was going to commit suicide
  - m. because he was always raising hell about me.

Here Clause l (“she was going to commit suicide”) is the familiar construction of indirect discourse in which we refer to the fact that a person in the past referred to an event that would occur sometime in the future. Clause m, on the other hand, refers to events prior to k. One can quote any number of examples to show that any subordinate clause is removed from the temporal sequence of narrative, even if it retains its own temporal reference.

These considerations illustrate the motivation for the definitions of the *narrative clause* to be developed later in this article. These elements will be characterized by temporal sequence: Their order cannot be changed without changing the inferred sequence of events in the original semantic interpretation.

### Displacement Sets

The following operations provide a formal basis for establishing temporal sequence among the independent clauses of a narrative. Each clause is assigned a sequential symbol (using lowercase letters), as in the next example from Narrative 8:

- (8)
- w. and they was catchin’ up to me
  - x. and I crossed the street
  - y. and I tripped, man.

Each clause is then tested for the potential range of displacement by examining the semantic interpretation that results when the clause in question is moved to all possible positions in the remaining sequence. For example, we find that x can be placed before w without changing the original semantic interpretation, because we can infer that the process of catching up extended throughout the sequence:

- (8')
- x. and I crossed the street
  - w. and they was catchin’ up to me
  - y. and I tripped, man.



But x cannot be placed after y without changing the original interpretation, as in:

- (8'')
- w. and they was catchin' up to me
  - y. and I tripped, man
  - x. and I crossed the street.

The result of these operations is indicated in the following system of subscripts. For the clause c, the symbol  ${}_a c_p$  indicates that c can be placed before any and all of the following p clauses without changing the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation.

The set consisting of the clauses before which c can be placed is the displacement set of c, symbolized DS(c).

Thus, for the partial sequence of w, x, and y discussed previously, we have

- (8''')
- |            |                                |                   |
|------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| ${}_0 w_2$ | and they was catchin' up to me | DS(w) = {w, x, y} |
| ${}_1 x_0$ | and I crossed the street       | DS(x) = {w, x}    |
| ${}_0 y_0$ | and I tripped, man.            | DS(y) = {y}       |

### Narrative Clauses and Free Clauses

Two extreme types of displacement ranges that result from this operation are

$${}_0 c_0 \text{ and } {}_{x-1} c_{n-x}$$

in which n is the total number of clauses in a sequence. The  ${}_0 c_0$  clause, with a displacement set of {c}, is locked in position in the sequence; it evidently functions as a narrative clause of the simplest kind, maintaining the strict temporal sequence that is the defining characteristic of narrative. The  ${}_{x-1} c_{n-x}$  clause, on the other hand, has a displacement set equal to the entire narrative and can range freely through the narrative sequence. This type may be termed as *free clause*.

### Coordinate Clauses

Although the free clause has no fixed relation to the temporal sequence, and the simple  ${}_0 c_0$  narrative clause is strictly ordered by temporal sequence, there are other types of clauses that have more complex relations to narrative sequence. We frequently find sequences of the type  ${}_0 c_1 {}_1 d_0$ , as in this extract from Narrative 14:

- (14)
- ${}_0 s_0$  [and the rock] came down

<sub>0</sub>t<sub>1</sub>      and smacked him in the head  
<sub>1</sub>u<sub>0</sub>      and say (slap!)

Clauses t and u might just as well been reversed:

(14')

<sub>0</sub>s<sub>0</sub>      [and the rock] came down  
<sub>0</sub>t<sub>1</sub>      and say (slap!)  
<sub>1</sub>t<sub>0</sub>      and smacked him on the head

Both t and u have identical displacement sets,  $DS(t) = \{t, u\}$ ,  $DS(u) = \{t, u\}$ , and they may be freely interchanged without any change in temporal sequence. Clauses with identical displacement sets may be termed *coordinate clauses*. (All free clauses are coordinate in this sense, because they all have the same displacement sets, but it is the primary coordinate nature of certain narrative clauses that is our primary concern.)

One can, of course, have three or more coordinate clauses in a single sequence, as in the following extract from Narrative 1:

(1)

<sub>0</sub>l<sub>0</sub>      He came to my hotel. Nice big blue 44 too.  
<sub>0</sub>m<sub>3</sub>      I talked him out of it,  
<sub>1</sub>n<sub>2</sub>      and says, "Well, we'll go look for her,  
<sub>2</sub>o<sub>1</sub>      and if we can't find her, well you can—go ahead, pull the trigger if  
             you want to."  
<sub>3</sub>p<sub>0</sub>      I was maneuvering.  
<sub>0</sub>q<sub>0</sub>      So he took me up on it.

Here Clauses m, n, and p are coordinate, with identical displacement sets (m, n, o, p), because they could occur in any of the six possible permutations without altering the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation. But none of these could be placed before l ("He came to my hotel") or after q ("So he took he up on it").

### Restricted Clauses

The narrative clauses that we have considered are of two general forms,  ${}_0c_0$  and  ${}_0c_0{}_1d_0$ , and appear to have one feature in common. Their displacement sets range from a left zero subscript to a right zero subscript, with no zeros in between. We also find in narratives a third type of clause that does not range freely over the entire narrative, yet has a wider range than the narrative clause. This type of clause has a displacement set that may range across several left or right zero subscripts. Such

clauses, which are neither free nor temporally ordered in the strict sense, may be termed *restricted clauses*.

It may be now helpful to consider a narrative as a whole to illustrate the nature of free clauses, coordinate clauses, and restricted clauses and to show how the displacement sets of such clauses are determined. Narrative 6 may be analyzed as follows:

(6)		
0a <sub>18</sub>	yeh I was in the boy scouts atthe time	DS {a-s}
1b <sub>17</sub>	and we was doing the 50-yard dash	“
2c <sub>16</sub>	racing	“
3d <sub>15</sub>	but we was at the pier, mark off	“
4e <sub>14</sub>	and so we was doing the 50-yard dash	“
5f <sub>13</sub>	there was about eight or ten of us, you know, going down, coming back	“
6g <sub>0</sub>	and, going down the <i>third</i> time, I caught cramps	{a-g}
0h <sub>0</sub>	and I started yelling “Help!”	{h}
0i <sub>1</sub>	but the fellows didn’t believe me, you know,	{i-j}
1j <sub>0</sub>	they thought I was just trying to catch up because I was going on or slowing down	{i-j}
0k <sub>1</sub>	so all of them kept going	{k-l}
1l <sub>0</sub>	they leave me	{k-l}
0m <sub>3</sub>	and so I started going down	{m-p}
13n <sub>5</sub>	Scoutmaster was up there	{a-s}
6o <sub>3</sub>	he was watching me	{i-r}
7p <sub>2</sub>	but he didn’t pay me no attention either	{i-r}
0q <sub>0</sub>	and for no reason at all there was another guy, who had just walked up that minute ...	{q}
0r <sub>0</sub>	and grabbed me	{s}
0s <sub>0</sub>	he just jumped over	{r}

Narrative 6 begins with six free clauses, all of which can range over the entire narrative; for each of these, the sum of the subscripts is 18. The third clause, “racing,” is in apposition with “doing” in the second clause, and is treated as derived from “we was racing.” It must be analyzed separately, because it is possible that such an appositive could be temporally ordered in respect to other clauses.<sup>4</sup> The situation and action described in these six clauses prevails throughout the entire

<sup>4</sup>As in, “We were running, walking, and then creeping down the road.” We might better say that an apparent appositive turns out to be a coordinate clause. Coordinate verbs are always analyzed separately

narrative: that is, the “8 or 9 of us” continue racing even when the narrator himself is in trouble.

The first narrative clause is *g*, with a displacement set of {*a, b, c, d, e, f, g*}, ranging from the left zero of *a* to its own right zero. Clauses *i* and *j* are coordinate clauses of the type just discussed, and so are *k* and *l*.

Clause *m* is a narrative clause with a displacement set ranging over the three following clauses. These following clauses are not in strict narrative sequence; the first one, *n*, is a free clause (“Scoutmaster was up there”). It should be understood that the test for displacement range must include a procedure for adjusting anaphoric reference. “Scoutmaster was up there” would be a strange utterance in initial position, but if we supply the referent of “there—at the pier” we have “Scoutmaster was up at the pier,” which could stand in initial position without changing the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation. The reverse situation would apply if a specific free clause in initial position, with several proper names, was displaced to a point later in the narrative: pronoun substitution would be made.

The second clause, *o*, (“He was watching me”) is a restricted clause, with  $DS(o) = \{i-r\}$  extending before *n*. It could have been placed at any point after *h* (“I started yelling ‘Help!’”), that is, after the action that called the scoutmaster’s attention to the narrator and logically motivated his action. It is worth following the logic of this argument in detail, because it is typical of the method for establishing the displacement sets of restricted clauses.

Although it is true that the scoutmaster’s job was to watch everyone, we interpret the statement *o* (“He was watching me”) to mean that there was a significant change at one point, from watching everyone to watching the narrator in particular. This interpretation hinges on the word “either”—this word coordinates the negation of “He didn’t pay me no attention” with some previous negative statement; the first preceding negative clause is *i* (“the fellows didn’t believe me.”). Therefore, we can conclude that both of these statements refer to events that responded to Clause *h* (“and I started yelling ‘Help!’”). Therefore, the displacement sets of *o* and *p* cannot include *h* without a change in the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation.

On the other hand, Clause *o* could range towards the end, at any point up to Clause *s*. If Clause *o* appeared after *s* then the same temporal inference that we now

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if they are independent, and in most cases in which they are subordinated to verbs of saying and telling. See Narrative 2, which follows: “I said, ‘You git back there/ and get that duck.’” If the narrator had cited himself as saying, “You get that duck and get back there,” he would have been reversing the inferred sequence of events—in this case, two utterances. The same argument holds for the example in Narrative 1 (cited previously), Clauses *n* and *o*. On the other hand, if someone says: “You try and get it,” we cannot understand these as two independent verbs, but rather the use of “and” is equivalent to an infinitive embedding, the same as “You try and get it.”



draw—that the scoutmaster began watching after the cry for help—would be altered. It would be the grabbing of the narrator by the “other guy” that would mark the beginning of the scoutmaster’s watching.

The same argument holds for Clause p, which is a restricted clause with the same range as o.

The rest of the narrative consists of simple (c) narrative units. Clause q (“for no reason at all there was another guy”) has the temporal status of a punctual act, “appearance”: the viewpoint is clearly that of the narrator.

Figure 1 is a graphic display of these statements about the displacement sets of the clauses concerned. Each clause is represented by a mark opposite the alphabetic symbol, and the vertical line running through this mark represents the displacement set. We will return to this diagram later in discussing the normal structure of narrative as a whole.

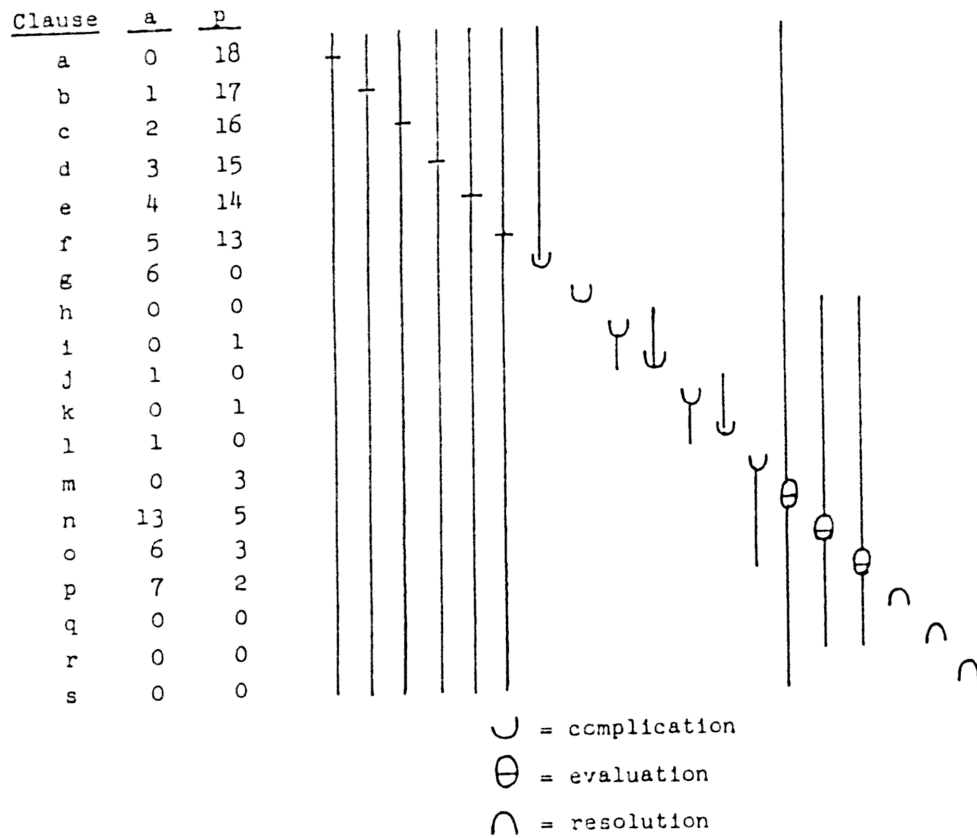


FIGURE 1 Displacement ranges of the clauses of Narrative 6.

### Temporal Juncture

If narrative clauses succeed each other in uninterrupted sequence, the zero subscripts alone would show the temporal segmentation of the narrative. But because any number of free or restricted units can intervene between two narrative clauses, we must define temporal relations between any two clauses in the narrative, not necessarily contiguous. We wish to define formally the condition under which any two clauses are ordered with respect to each other and cannot be interchanged without change in the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation. Such a condition is met when the displacement range of a given clause does not extend past the actual location of some following clause, and conversely, the displacement range of this following clause does not extend past the actual location of the given preceding clause. More concisely, their displacement sets do not include each other. Two such clauses are temporally ordered with respect to each other. Their displacement sets may in fact overlap, as in the example from Narrative 11, cited previously, but the displacement set of *c* will not include *d*, and that of *d* will not include *c* if *c* and *d* are temporally ordered.

Two clauses that are temporally ordered with respect to each other are said to be separated by *temporal juncture*. This juncture has no relation to any free or restricted clauses that may fall in between the temporally ordered clauses. In Narrative 6, given in full previously, we find temporal junctures between *g* and *h*, *h* and *i*, *j* and *k*, *l* and *m*, *m* and *q*, *q* and *r*, *r* and *s*. Because *i* and *j*, *k* and *l* are coordinate, we can best represent these junctures by the following diagram:

- g. I caught cramps
- h. and I started yelling
- i j. the fellows didn't believe; they thought I was
- k l. all of them kept going; they leave me
- m. I started going down
- q. there was another guy
- r. he just jumped over
- s. and grabbed me.

### Definition of the Narrative Clause

We can now proceed to define the basic unit of narrative, the narrative clause, in terms of temporal juncture and displacement sets. It is characteristic of a narrative clause that it cannot be displaced across a temporal juncture without a change in the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation. Therefore, if the displacement set of a given clause does not contain two clauses that are temporally ordered with respect to each other, then that clause is a narrative clause. More

simply, we can say that a narrative clause has an *unordered displacement set*. If the displacement set is ordered—that is, if some members are temporally ordered with respect to each other—then the given clause is a restricted clause or a free clause. If such an ordered set is equal to the narrative as a whole, the clause is a free clause; if not, a restricted clause.

We can restate these definitions formally in the following manner. A narrative  $N$  may be represented as a set of  $n$  clauses

$$c^1, c^2 \dots c^i \dots c^n$$

in which  $0 \leq i \leq n$ . Then

1.  $c^i \hat{=} DS(c^j)$  if  $c^i \dots c^j$  and  $c^j \dots c^i$  yield the same temporal sequence in semantic interpretation [or if  $c^i = c^j$ ]
2. If  $c^i \hat{=} DS(c^k)$  and  $c^j \hat{=} DS(c^k)$   
and  $c^i \nmid DS(c^j)$  and  $c^j \nmid DS(c^i)$ 
  - a. and  $DS(c^k) = N$ , then  $c^k$  is a free clause.
  - b. and  $DS(c^k) < N$ , then  $c^k$  is a restricted clause.
3. If Condition 2 does not hold,  $c^k$  is a narrative clause.

### Definition of a Narrative

We can now define quite simply those sequences of clauses that we will consider as narratives. Any sequence of clauses that contains at least one temporal juncture is a narrative. Thus

- (10)
- |                             |                                                      |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <sub>0</sub> a <sub>2</sub> | I know a boy name Harry.                             |
| <sub>1</sub> b <sub>0</sub> | Another boy threw a bottle at him right in the head, |
| <sub>0</sub> c <sub>0</sub> | and he had to get seven stitches.                    |

is a narrative, because a temporal juncture is found between b and c. A statement such as “I shot and killed him” would be a narrative because it contains a temporal juncture, but not “I laughed and laughed at him.” There are many ambiguous cases that allow two distinct interpretations: “I punched him in the head, the mouth and chest” the head, then in the mouth, and then in the chest. But the temporal interpretation is possible, and it is more likely in “I beat him up and stomped on him.”

The upper bound of narrative is not set by this approach, and the question of deciding between one narrative or two must be left to the section that deals with the overall structure of narrative.

## Narrative Heads

The finite verb of a narrative clause, which carries the tense marker of the clause, is the *narrative head* of that clause. Heads of coordinate clauses are coordinate heads

- (2)
- |      |                                                                 |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0u0  | And—gone a while                                                |
| 0v0  | and come back                                                   |
| 0w1  | and he didn't have the duck.                                    |
| 0x31 | And that was unusual—                                           |
| 1y0  | I said, "You git back there<br>and get that duck." <sup>5</sup> |
| 0aa0 | And he went back there;                                         |

Here the narrative heads are *gone, come, did-, was, said, said, and went*. The types of grammatical forms and categories that can function as grammatical heads are extremely limited. The principle forms are simple past and simple present. As a rule, no modals appear; abstractly considered, it is possible that could could function as a narrative head, though no examples have been found in our materials to date. The progressive (past and possibly present) does appear occasionally as a narrative unit:

- (1)
- |      |                                                      |
|------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 0u0  | and got back                                         |
| 21v9 | it was a tent show                                   |
| 1w1  | she was laying on a cot with an ice bag on her head. |
| 12x7 | She hadn't committed suicide.                        |
| 1y0  | But—however—that settled it for the day.             |

In this example, "was laying" is in temporal order; it can be displayed before the free unit *v* and after the restricted unit *x*, but not before *u* or after *y* without changing the temporal sequence of the semantic interpretation. There is considerable semantic and syntactic interest in the questions raised by this use of the past progressive,<sup>6</sup> and many other such issues are raised by the data of narrative analysis; however,

<sup>5</sup>As noted previously, the subordination of "get back there" and "get that duck" to "I said" is not the type of subordination that removes clauses from temporal sequence. We can consider the coordination: "I said, 'You git back there,' and I said, 'You get that duck.'"

<sup>6</sup>If "was laying" is accepted as a narrative clause, it cannot have the basic grammatical meaning of "simultaneous" as stated by Diver (1963). It would rather differ from the simple past *lay* by the feature "extended." The meaning of "simultaneous" can be supported by arguing that these clauses are equivalent to "When we got back, she was laying ... ." In other cases, Diver pointed out, the use of the past progressive may force a metaphorical interpretation "the action was so swift that it was as if it was



this article is confined to the description of the basic units and framework of narrative, and such questions are not pursued here.

In general, the present perfect does not appear in narrative.<sup>7</sup> The past perfect, as noted before, does not function as a narrative head. However, if the clause with the past perfect refers to an event developed in the narrative, rather than to some event preceding, as is the case in Clause *x* in Narrative 1. Although *x* would have been true in initial position, it would not have referred to the particular suicide threatened in Clause *k*. In its present position, *x* asserts that the threat of *k* was not consummated at some time prior to the moment in which *x* is stated—necessarily before the next preceding narrative unit. Therefore, *x* can be placed before the disclosure of *w*, at any point after *k*. It can also occur at any point after the disclosure *w* with no change in temporal sequence.

A series of past perfect narrative heads can be used to describe a set of events in temporal sequence, placing the entire set at some point prior to the preceding narrative unit.

(2)

<sub>0n</sub><sub>n</sub><sub>0</sub> I walked over there  
<sub>00</sub><sub>0</sub><sub>18</sub> And here he was;  
<sub>42</sub><sub>pp</sub><sub>17</sub> one of my tame ducks that I had tethered out there  
had got the strap off her leg,  
<sub>43</sub><sub>qq</sub><sub>16</sub> and had gone out there,  
<sub>30</sub><sub>rr</sub><sub>15</sub> and when this fellow shot he hadn't hit the duck.

It is true that the three clauses *pp*, *qq*, and *rr* are held in temporal sequence. But no permutation of their order will produce a different temporal sequence in semantic interpretation:

<sub>00</sub><sub>0</sub><sub>18</sub> and here he was  
<sub>28</sub><sub>rr</sub><sub>17</sub> and when this fellow shot he hadn't hit the duck  
<sub>43</sub><sub>qq</sub><sub>16</sub> one of my tame ducks that I had tethered out there  
had gone out there  
<sub>44</sub><sub>pp</sub><sub>15</sub> She had got the strap off her leg.<sup>8</sup>

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simultaneous with the preceding," as in "I was on the masthead; the ship gave a lurch; I was falling through the air; I hit the water." These and other interpretations can be subjected to an increasing number of empirical tests through the analysis of narratives such as the one given here.

<sup>7</sup>Diver (1963) showed this form in his narrative axis with the meaning of "present, before," and gives a constructed example: "All day the sun has warmed the Spanish steps . . ." One can find such examples in literary works that use historical present sequences freely, perhaps, but they have not occurred in the material we have examined to date.

<sup>8</sup>Here the usual adjustments in anaphoric reference have been made. It may be noted that this series of past perfect clauses is one answer to a difficult problem produced by a narrative of this type. The result would lose its surprising effect if these clauses were placed in narrative sequence with regular

As indicated by the subscripts, pp and qq are free clauses, and rr is restricted—it cannot precede the shot itself, but can follow at any later point.

### Related Narrative Sequences

The definitions we have given for narrative units are deliberately applied to linear sequence presented by the narrator. This linear sequence may be considered the *surface structure* of the narrative; there are often many narratives with rather different surface structures but with equivalent semantic interpretations. In the same way, there are many sentences with different surface structures that correspond to the same underlying string of formatives in the original phrase structure of the grammar:

- a. The rock say “shhh!”
- b. “shhh!” is what the rock say
- c. What the rock say is “shhh!”
- d. It’s a fact that the rock say “shhh!”
- e. The rock’s saying “shhh!”

In previous discussions, we showed that for each series of events described in a narrative, there are other equivalent means of verbal statement besides narrative. There are also equivalent narratives with the same semantic (temporal) interpretation. It is useful to relate all of these to a single underlying form, just as Sentences b through e are related to the simplest form, a. To do this, we must consider the fundamental semantic relation in narrative.

The semantic interpretation of a narrative, as we have defined it, depends on the expectation that the events described did, in fact, occur in the same order as they were told in. Thus the sequence

<sub>0</sub>a<sub>0</sub>      he attacked me  
<sub>0</sub>b<sub>0</sub>      the friend came in

with temporal juncture between a and b, is equivalent in its semantic interpretation to

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verbs. By placing the three clauses well out of temporal sequence, it is more difficult for the listener to follow the explanation and surprise is achieved at the risk of a certain awkwardness and confusion. Again, we find that even partial success signals the fact that the narrator of Narrative 2 is a practiced storyteller and has probably told this story many times. We do not take narratives of this type as primary data.

- <sub>0a</sub><sub>0</sub>     he attacked me  
              then  
<sub>0b</sub><sub>0</sub>     the friend came in

That is, the temporal juncture is semantically equivalent to the temporal conjunction *then*.

Of course, the a-then-b relation is not the only one at work in narrative. If it were, we would have only a succession of narrative clauses. One also finds implied relations between clauses such as a-and at the same time-b, or a-and now that I think back on it-b. But among these temporal relations, the a-then-b is in some sense the most essential characteristic of narrative. Some narratives (see Narrative 5) may use it exclusively, and every narrative must, by definition, use it at least once.

Though some of these relations are marked explicitly, the majority of them are implied by certain lexical and grammatical features. Moreover, these implicit markers are, in a given situation, often ambiguous: They may stand for more than one relation. Consider the following sequence from Narrative 4:

- <sub>1b</sub><sub>7</sub>     Martin Cassidy's mother give him some money  
<sub>2c</sub><sub>0</sub>     an' tell him to go get a bushel of peaches  
<sub>0d</sub><sub>0</sub>     an' he went down to Martin's house

Though both c and d are connected to the preceding clause by *and*, and though d is clearly ordered with respect to b, b and c are not clearly ordered. The lexical meanings of *give* and *tell* imply a possible simultaneity between b and c. If we substitute for *tell* a verb whose lexical meaning (virtually) denies the possibility or simultaneity with *give*, then b and c are unambiguously ordered:

- <sub>0b</sub><sub>0</sub>     Martin Cassidy's mother give him some money  
<sub>0c'</sub><sub>0</sub>     an' bring up a bushel of peaches from the cellar

One more important point can be drawn from this example. The two possible relations between b and c as they stand are b-then-c and b-and at the same time-c, not c-then-b. This again suggests that the x-then-y relation is the fundamental one in narrative, which is then added to or modified by marked lexical or grammatical forms.

### Isolating Primary Sequences

If we give primacy in narrative to the a-then-b relation, we may wish to select the narrative sequence with the most explicit statement of this relation as the basic underlying form and derive other equivalent narratives from it. Such a basic form

we term the *primary sequence*. As we will see, the derivation of other forms from the primary sequence has an important interpretation in the functional organization of the narrative structure as a whole.

The procedure for isolating primary sequence can be set out as four steps, as illustrated by the following operations on Narrative 6, previously analyzed in Figure 1:

1. A displacement range is assigned to each clause of the narrative.

0a<sub>18</sub> 1b<sub>17</sub> 2c<sub>16</sub> 3d<sub>15</sub> 4e<sub>14</sub> 5f<sub>13</sub> 6g<sub>0</sub> 0h<sub>0</sub> 0i<sub>1</sub>  
1j<sub>0</sub> 0k<sub>1</sub> 1l<sub>0</sub> 0m<sub>3</sub> 13n<sub>5</sub> 6o<sub>3</sub> 7p<sub>2</sub> 0q<sub>0</sub> 0r<sub>0</sub> 0s<sub>0</sub>

2. Free clauses are moved to the beginning of the narrative.

0a<sub>18</sub> 1b<sub>17</sub> 2c<sub>16</sub> 3d<sub>15</sub> 4e<sub>14</sub> 5f<sub>13</sub> 6n<sub>12</sub> 7g<sub>0</sub> 0h<sub>0</sub> 0i<sub>1</sub>  
1j<sub>0</sub> 0k<sub>1</sub> 1l<sub>0</sub> 0m<sub>2</sub> 5o<sub>3</sub> 6p<sub>2</sub> 0q<sub>0</sub> 0r<sub>0</sub> 0s<sub>0</sub>

3. Restricted clauses are moved to a point as early as possible in the narrative without changing the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation.

0a<sub>18</sub> 1b<sub>17</sub> 2c<sub>16</sub> 3d<sub>15</sub> 4e<sub>14</sub> 5f<sub>13</sub> 6n<sub>12</sub> 7g<sub>0</sub> 0h<sub>0</sub>  
0o<sub>8</sub> 1p<sub>7</sub> 2i<sub>1</sub> 3j<sub>0</sub> 0k<sub>1</sub> 1l<sub>0</sub> 0m<sub>0</sub> 0q<sub>0</sub> 0r<sub>0</sub> 0s<sub>0</sub>

4. Coordinate clauses are coalesced to single units.

0a-n<sub>9</sub> 1g<sub>0</sub> 0h<sub>0</sub> 0o-p<sub>5</sub> 1i-j<sub>0</sub> 0k-l<sub>0</sub> 0m<sub>0</sub> 0q<sub>0</sub> 0r<sub>0</sub> 0s<sub>0</sub>

The string of 10 symbols given here represents the primary sequence of the narrative, in which the a-then-b relation is developed most explicitly. The operation of moving free clauses and restricted clauses as far to the left as possible is a method of minimizing the total amount of delay in the statement of any given event or condition. We can, in fact, define both of these as a specific operation: the minimizing of left subscripts.

Formally, we consider a narrative  $c^1, c^2 \dots c^i \dots c^n$  with left displacement ranges  $a^1, a^2 \dots a^i \dots a^n$ , in which  $0 < i < n$ . A *left displacement function*  $y(N_{0i})$  is defined for each permutation  $N_1, N_2 \dots N_m$  of the clauses  $c^1, c^2 \dots c^n$  that preserves the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation:

$$y(N_i) = \sum_{l=1}^n a^l$$

When  $y(N_1)$  is minimal, any sequence  $c^i, c^j$  in which  $DS(c^i) = DS(c^j)$  is rewritten as  $c^k$  and displacement ranges reassigned. The resulting string is the primary sequence of the series  $N_1, N_2 \dots N_m$ .

We now proceed to show why in most narratives the linear ordering of clauses departs significantly from the order of the primary sequence. For this purpose, we will have to outline the overall structure of narratives as governed by narrative functions.

## OVERALL STRUCTURE OF NARRATIVES

### Orientation

Figure 1 shows a group of six free clauses occurring together at the beginning of Narrative 6. This is characteristic of most narratives to a greater or lesser degree. Of the 14 examples given in the beginning of this article, 11 have such groups of free clauses. When we examine these groups of free clauses in relation to referential function, we find that they serve to orient the listener in respect to person, place, time, and behavioral situation. We will therefore refer to this structure feature as an *orientation section*: formally, the group of free clauses that precede the first narrative clause. Not all narratives have orientation sections, and not all orientation sections perform these four functions. Furthermore, some free clauses with these functions occur in other positions. Finally, we find that the orientation function is often performed by phrases or lexical items contained in narrative clauses. Despite these limitations, the overall view of narrative shows that the orientation section is a structural feature of a narrative structure. When orientation sections are displaced, we frequently find that this displacement performs another function, evaluation, to be discussed later. Furthermore, we find that orientation sections are typically lacking in narratives of children and less verbal adults whose narratives fail in other ways to carry out referential functions, for example, to preserve temporal sequence. This is the case with Narrative 13, the narrative of vicarious experience from a television show, *The Man From UNCLE*. An interesting example is Narrative 5, in which the suppression of full narrative structure is plainly motivated by the explicit reluctance of the narrator to identify persons and places. Here, as in many of the critical issues discussed later, it is essential to preserve the context of the narrative. Because such originating context is often missing and cannot be reconstructed in traditional folk tales, it is more difficult to relate analysis to the originating functions.

### Complication

The main body of narrative clauses usually comprises a series of events that may be termed the complicating action section of Narrative 6 runs from Clause g to m.

In many cases, a long string of events may actually consist of several cycles of simple narrative, with many complication sections. This is the case with Narrative 2, the product of a practiced storyteller who is widely known in his community (Martha's Vineyard) as an expert in this traditional art.<sup>9</sup> The subdivisions of Narrative 2 are plainly marked by structural features to be discussed later, but in

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<sup>9</sup>As noted previously, Narrative 2 has many formal features that set it aside from the others and identify it as the product of a practiced storyteller. One can point to the embedding of an essentially anonymous "other" in the complicating action, frequent if traditional metaphor, the triple subcycle typical

Narrative 13, this task is much more difficult and must depend upon informal semantic criteria.

Despite the fact that features appear in this narrative that are distinct from the simpler examples, a formal analysis of Narrative 2 is possible only after consideration of the simpler narratives or, at least, a formal analysis based on such functional considerations as we have introduced.

The complication is regularly terminated by a result, as in the simple Narrative 5: clause d—or perhaps c and d—is the result that ends the complicating action of a and b, as shown in Figure 2.

To isolate the result in Narrative 5, we are forced to use semantic criteria that are often difficult to apply and seldom consistent. Without further functional analysis, it will usually be hard to tell when a narrative is actually over—when the result begins and when it has been given in full.

### Evaluation

Before proceeding to discuss the result of narratives, we would like to suggest that a narrative that contains only an orientation, complicating action, and result is not a complete narrative. It may carry out the referential function perfectly, and yet seem difficult to understand. Such a narrative lacks significance: it has no point. This is the case with Narratives 11 and 13. Narrative 11 is difficult to follow, although the complicating action and the result seem to be clearly stated.

(11)

- <sub>0a0</sub> See he- they threw him out, you know.  
<sub>0b0</sub> So he wanted to get back in, 'cause, you know, it was sn-raining hard.

<sub>0<sup>a</sup>0</sub> ∪

<sub>0<sup>b</sup>0</sub> ∪

<sub>0<sup>c</sup>0</sub> ∪ ?

<sub>0<sup>d</sup>0</sub>

∪

FIGURE 2 Overall structure of Narrative 5.

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of developed folk tales, strategic repetition, and the determination shown by the narrator in introducing the story. The preliminary material illustrates how a narrator of this sort will get the topic of his favorite stories into the conversation despite the fact that the interview theme was decided solely by the subject, and the actual stimulus for the narrative was his own.

- 0c<sub>0</sub> So he got on this boat
- 0d<sub>0</sub> and he tried to—go somewhere else.
- 0e<sub>0</sub> and the boat went over.
- 0f<sub>1</sub> And he tried to swim.
- 0g<sub>s</sub> And this other man was fishing in the rain.
- 1h<sub>0</sub> So he seen the pig
- 0i<sub>0</sub> and he went over there
- 0j<sub>0</sub> and picked the pig up
- 0k<sub>0</sub> and put it in the boat
- 0l<sub>0</sub> and brought it back to the shore. so he would land there.
- 0m<sub>0</sub> And that was that.

There are 13 independent clauses, and 12 of them are narrative clauses. A diagram of displacement ranges for this narrative offers little justification for any internal segmentation (see Figure 3).

Narrative 13 is actually a very detailed statement of a sequence of events and their results—a series of at least three narrative cycles. Yet, the overall effect of Narrative 13 is confusion and pointlessness. This is true for the whole narrative, which is actually 10 times as long as the extract.

Both Narratives 11 and 13 are examples of narratives of vicarious experience, not, as in other cases, of personal experience. They are lacking the evaluation section that is typical of narratives of personal experience. When we compare Narrative 13 with Narrative 14, a narrative of personal experience, we can appreciate the great difference between unevaluated and evaluated narration.

Narratives are usually told in answer to some stimulus from outside and to establish some point of personal interest. For example, among the narratives we are given here

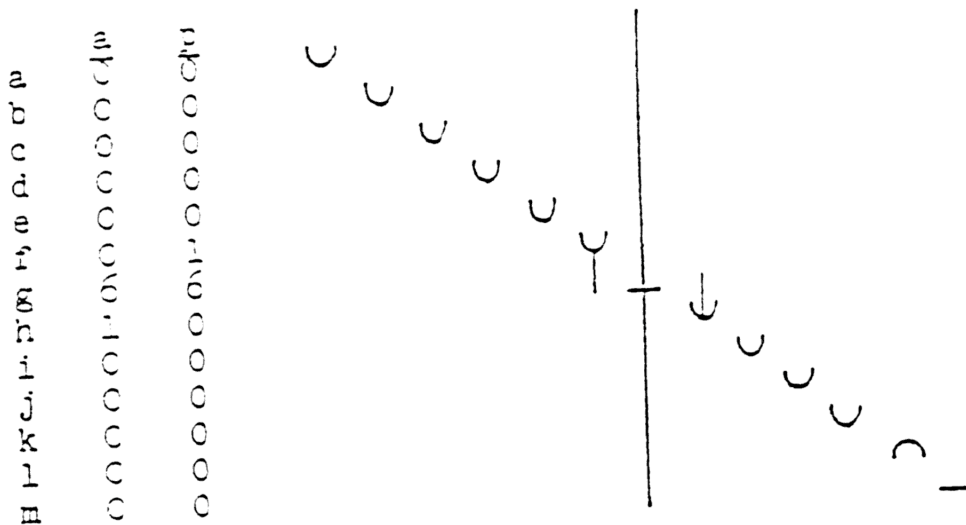


FIGURE 3 Overall structure of Narrative 11.

we find many examples of narrative dealing with the danger of death. When the subject is asked if he were ever in serious danger of being killed, and he says "Yes," then he is asked: "What happened?". He finds himself in a position in which he must demonstrate to the listener that he really was in danger. The more vivid and real the danger appears, the more effective the narrative. If the narrative is weak and uninteresting, he will have made a false claim. (See Narratives 1, 3, 6, and 8.)

Beyond such immediate stimulus, we find that such narratives are so designed as to emphasize the strange and unusual character of the situation—there is an appeal to the element of mystery in most of the narratives. (See Narratives 2, 3, and especially 9.). Then, too, many narratives are designed to place the narrator in the most favorable possible light: a function which we may call self-aggrandizement. (See Narratives 7, 8, and especially 12.)

The functions of narrative have an effect on the narrative structure. A simple sequence of complication and result does not indicate to the listener the relative importance of these events or help him distinguish complication from *resolution*. We also find that in narratives without a point it is difficult to distinguish the complicating action from the result.

Therefore, it is necessary for the narrator to delineate the structure of the narrative by emphasizing the point at which the complication has reached a maximum: the break between the complication and the result. Most narratives contain an evaluation section that carries out this function.

Many evaluation sections are defined formally. Multicoordinate clauses or groups of free or restricted clauses are frequently located at the break between the complicating action and the resolution of these complications. This is the case in Figure 1, for the Clauses n, o, and p. As the narrator is going down, in the water, the moment of crisis is suspended by three clauses that do not occur in this position by any necessity of temporal sequence. They are restricted clauses that could have occurred much earlier in the narrative—in fact, before the first temporal juncture. After these three clauses, the narrative moves swiftly to a conclusion.

In many narratives, the evaluation section is fused with the result: that is, a single narrative clause both emphasizes the importance of the result and states it. This is the case Narratives 3 and 12. In Narrative 3, the doctor's statement: "you'd a been dead" tells us simultaneously that the narrator was close to death and that he survived. The evaluation is here shown as related directly to the originating function—to demonstrate that the narrator was indeed close to death.

In the case of Narrative 1, we find more than one evaluation section. Narrative 1 begins with a long orientation section of 10 clauses.

(1)

0a30        Well, in the business I was associates at that time, the  
              Doc was an old man ...  
1b29        He had killed one man,



2c28 or—had done time.  
 3d27 But he had a young wife  
 4e26 and those days I dressed well.  
 5f25 And seemingly, she was trying to make me.  
 6g24 I never noticed it.  
 7h23 Fact is, I didn't like her very well, because she had—  
 she was a nice looking girl until you saw her feet.  
 8i22 She had big feet.  
 9j21 Jesus, God, she had big feet!  
 10k0 Then she left a note one day she was going to commit  
 suicide because he was always raising hell about me.  
 0l0 He came to my hotel. Nice big blue 44 too.<sup>10</sup>  
 0m3 I talked him out of it,  
 1n2 and says, "Well, we'll go look for her,  
 2o1 and if we can't find her, well, you can—go ahead, pull  
 the trigger if you want to."  
 3p0 I was maneuvering.  
 0q0 So he took me up on it.  
 0r0 And we went to where they found her handkerchief—  
 the edge of a creek—  
 0s0 And we followed down a little more,  
 0t0 And we couldn't find anything.  
 0u1 And got back—  
 21v9 it was a tent show—  
 1w1 she was laying on a cot with an ice bag on her head.  
 12x7 She hadn't committed suicide.  
 1y0 But—however—that settled it for the day.  
 0z0 But that night the manager, Floyd Adams, said, "You  
 better pack up  
 0aa0 and get out, because that son of a bitch never forgives  
 anything once he gets it in his head."  
 0bb1 And I did.  
 1cc0 I packed up  
 0dd0 and got out.  
 0ee0 That was two.

The first narrative unit is k ("Then she left a note one day ..."), followed by l ("He

<sup>10</sup>The phrase "Nice big blue 44 too" might as well be considered a narrative clause, derived from "He had a nice big blue 44 too." However, the status of *had* as the head of a narrative clause is still at issue, and it would be tendentious to use a deleted form as evidence. We have therefore been treating this phrase as subordinate to "He came to my hotel," equivalent to "with a nice big blue 44 too."

came to my hotel”) and m (“I talked him out of it”). We then have two clauses coordinated with m—Clauses n (“And says”) and o (“I was maneuvering.”). These multicoordinate clauses suspend the action at a critical moment—when the danger of death is greatest, and they contain an explicit statement of the attitude of the narrator. His coolness in a moment of crisis emphasizes the danger and reflects well on himself.

Five narrative clauses follow this suspension, resolving the crisis introduced by l and m. A second evaluation section occurs at a subsidiary point when the situation is further resolved—the fate threat to the narrator. The action is suspended at this point by the use of a free clause that might have occurred in the orientation section, v (“it was a tent show”), and a direct comment, x, that might have been inferred from w. The resolution is stated with some finality in y (“that settled it”). Finally, there is an added explicit evaluation of a third party that confirms the implications of the previous evaluation section, followed by a conclusion. The overall diagram shows how evaluation sections outline the structure of the narrative.

It should be apparent here that the evaluation sections are responsible for those deviations from the order of the primary sequence of the narrative that complicate the a-then-b relation of narrative. The functions of the evaluation section must be added to the primary narrative function in order to understand how the primary sequence is transformed into the more complex structure that we see here. All of the evaluation sections shown here are related to the originating function of the narrative. From a structural point of view, the first section is the major break in the complicating action.<sup>11</sup>

Not all evaluation sections have the structural feature of suspending the complicating action, as shown in the Figure 4. In many cases, the evaluation may be present as lexical or phrasal modification of a narrative clause, or it may be itself a narrative clause or coincide with the last narrative clause. For this reason, the fundamental definition of evaluation must be semantic, although its implications are structural.

The evaluation of a narrative is defined by us as that part of the narrative that reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as compared to others. This may be done by a variety of means: units as compared to others. This may be done by a variety of means:

Semantically defined evaluation:

1. direct statement: “I said to myself: this is it.”
2. Lexical intensifiers: “He was beat up real, real bad.”  
“I whapped that dude half to death.”

<sup>11</sup>The three evaluation sections of Narrative 1 raise the possibility that we can analyze this narrative as consisting of three distinct subcycles: that it is a complex narrative consisting of three structural units. This article is limited to the consideration of simple narratives, and this possibility must be postponed to a later study of subcycles and complex narratives.

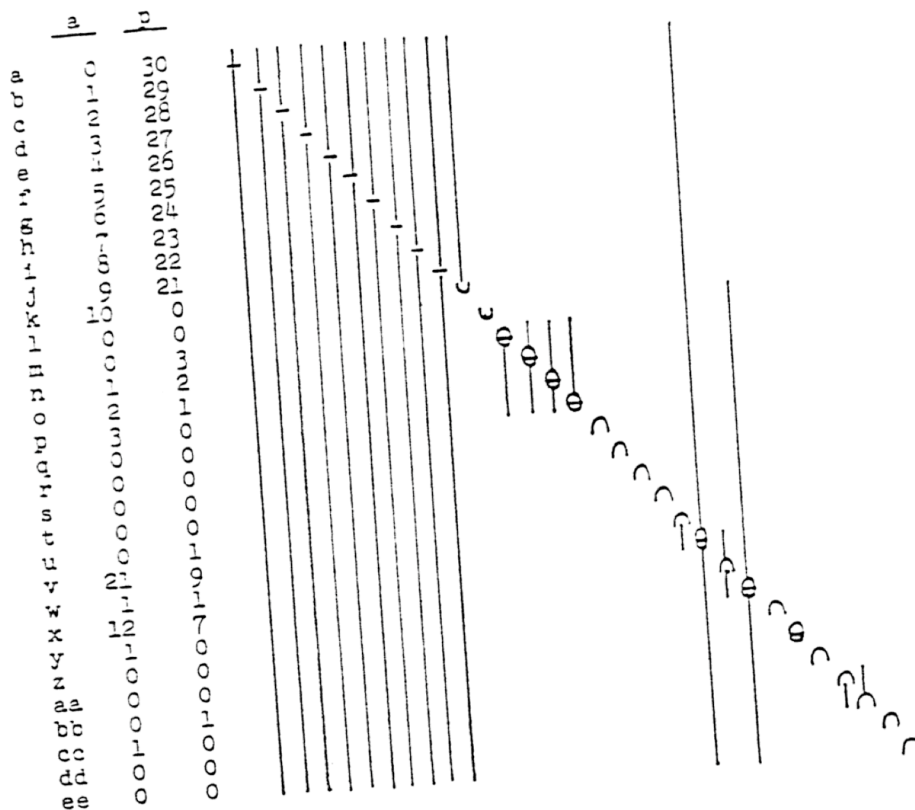


FIGURE 4 Please provide a caption for Figure 4.

Formally defined:

3. suspension of the action:
  - a. through coordinate clauses and restricted clauses: See Figure 1
  - b. repetition (subtype of the above): See Narrative 2, at the moment of crisis when the dog is gone for the 3rd time: "And he didn't come back. And he didn't come back."

Culturally defined:

4. symbolic action: "They put an egg on his door."  
"I crossed myself."  
"You could hear the rosaries clicking."
5. judgment of a third person: here the entire narrative is reported to a person not present at the narrative.

Narrative 12 is a heavily evaluated narrative that shows three of these characteristic forms of evaluation. It is typical of many fight narratives in its two-part

structure. The first subcycle deals with the events leading up to the fight, and its conclusion is the beginning of the second subcycle, the fight itself. In this case, the evaluation of the first section is a statement of the narrator:

o<sub>d</sub>o I told him that—it's impossible for him to find downtown,  
'cause all those people were walking by, and just his father  
is the only one that find it?

Although the very length of this closely reasoned argument serves to suspend the action, the structural criteria we have been using show it as a single narrative clause. We identify this clause as an evaluation on semantic grounds: It is an explicit statement by the narrator of his attitude towards the situation.

The conclusion of Narrative 12 is also an evaluative statement that coincides with the last narrative unit: The statement of a third person after the entire sequence of events is reported to him.

o<sub>j</sub>o Then he start crying  
o<sub>k</sub>o and run home to his father.  
o<sub>l</sub>o And his father told him, he ain't find no glove

In addition, we have the evaluation of the act of clause I

o<sub>h</sub>o So he say he give  
o<sub>i</sub>o And I kept on hitting him.

It is normal not to hit someone after he says "I give." This incident evaluates the narrative by indicating that the anger of the narrator was so great—due to excessive and unreasonable provocation—that he was carried away to the extent of violating this norm. The other boy had placed himself outside of normal sanctions by his behavior.

All of these forms of evaluation serve the function of self-aggrandizement, showing the narrator in a favorable position as compared to the other boy. It is evident that there are a great variety of evaluation types, more or less deeply embedded in the narrative. But this variety should not obscure the fact that unevaluated narratives are exceptional as representations of personal experience, and unevaluated narratives lack structural definition.

An important characteristic of narratives is the degree of embedding of the evaluation in the narrative framework. There is a wide range, from the most highly internalized type—a symbolic action or the evaluation of a third person—to the most external—a direct statement of the narrator to the listener about his feelings at the time. In the examples given previously, we find internalized evaluation in Narrative 1, in the dramatic statements of narrator and manager; and in Narrative 3, in the statement of the doctor, ("just about this much more," he says, "and you'd

a been dead.”). The last narrative, Narrative 14, has a dramatic statement of the narrator (“I say, ‘Calvin, I’m bust your head for dat.’”).

Sometimes the evaluation occurs in a statement of the narrator to himself, less well integrated into the narrative, as in Narrative 7: “So I says to myself, ‘Well, there’s gonna be times ... ’”.

The other end of the scale is shown by a comment at the end of the narrative directed towards the listener, as in Narrative 13: “Just over two dollars that he was sent for peaches with.” Still more direct is Narrative 2: “I’ll tell you if I had ever walloped that dog I’d have felt some bad.”

We might construct a scale of degrees of embedding of evaluation, following examples of the following sort:

#### Internal

1. And when we got down there, her brother turned to me and whispered, “I think she’s dead, John!”
2. And when we got down there, I said to myself, “My God, she’s dead!”
3. And when we got down there, I thought, “She’s dead.”
4. And when we got down there, I thought she was dead.
5. Later, the doctors told us she was close to death.
6. I think she must have been close to death.

#### External

7. You know, in cases like this, it’s clear that she was likely as not dead.

#### Resolution

With this definition of evaluation, we can now return to the problem of defining the result of a narrative. The problem is now quite simple. We can establish the break between the complicating and resolving action by locating the placement of the evaluation. Thus, the resolution of the narrative is that portion of the narrative sequence that follows the evaluation. If the evaluation is the last element, then the resolution section coincides with the evaluation. In the examples given previously, the complicating clauses are symbolized and the resolving clauses.

#### Coda

Many narratives end with a resolution section, but others have an additional element that we may call the *coda*.

The actual sequence of events described in the narrative does not, as a rule, extend up to the present. The coda is a functional device for returning the verbal perspective to the present moment. This is accomplished by a variety of means, so that the codas cannot be identified by such simple tag lines as “And they lived happily ever after.”

One device used in a coda is *deixis*. This is the linguistic category that points to a referent instead of naming it explicitly: In this case, it has the effect of standing at the present moment of time and pointing to the end of the narrative, identifying it as a remote point in the past.

- (1)  
 0aa<sub>0</sub> I packed up  
 0bb<sub>0</sub> and got out.  
 0cc<sub>0</sub> That was two.
- (7)  
 0bb<sub>0</sub> That was one of the most important.
- (8)  
 0gg<sub>1</sub> And that—that was it, you know.  
 1hh<sub>0</sub> That was it.
- (11)  
 0m<sub>0</sub> And that was that.

This use of the obviate deictic category—*that, there, those*—contrasts sharply with the use of the proximate in the body of the narrative—*this, here, these*. For example, we have the following proximate evaluation in Narrative 8:

- (8)  
 0bb<sub>0</sub> and they was on me and  
 0cc<sub>0</sub> and I said “Like this is it, man.”  
 0dd<sub>0</sub> I pulled a knife

Another device that can be used in codas is an incident in which one of the actors can be followed up to the present moment in actions that may not be totally relevant to the narrative sequence:

And you know that man who picked me out of the water?  
 he’s a detective in Union City,  
 and I see him every now and again.

The effect of the narrative on the narrator may be extended to the present moment:

I was given the rest of the day off,  
 and ever since then I haven’t seen the guy, ‘cause I quit.  
 I quit, you know.  
 No more problems.

It is interesting to note that all codas are separated from the resolution by temporal juncture. At the same time, it seems that some semantic criterion is necessary to identify codas: The fact that they are frequently not descriptions of events, or of events necessary to answer the question: "What happened?"

The overall structure of the narratives that we have examined is not uniform; there are considerable differences in the degree of complexity, in the number of structural elements present, and how various functions are carried out. However, a composite view of narrative performance leads us to posit a normal form for oral versions of personal experience; the degree to which any one narrative approximates this normal form is a significant fact about that narrative—perhaps more significant than any other in terms of fulfilling the originating function of the narrative.

The normal form is quite distinct from the primary sequence of the narrative. As noted previously, the need for an evaluation section motivates the transformation of the primary sequence into the more characteristic normal form that appears in the linear sequence presented in front of the narrator.

One can represent the normal form of narrative using the diagram in Figure 5. Here the originating function of the narrative is applied at the base of the diamond; we proceed up and to the left with the orientation section, then up to the apex with the complication. Frequently, but not always, the evaluation suspends the action at this apex, as represented by the circle. The resolution proceeds downward and to the right, and the coda is represented by the line that returns to the situation (point in time) at which the narrative was first elicited. The simplest possible narrative would consist of the single line of the complication, without a clear resolution; frequently we find minimal narratives that have both complication and resolution ("He hit me hard and I hit him back"). As we proceed to more complex narratives, told by speakers with greater overall verbal ability, we find a higher percentage of narratives that duplicate the exact form of this diagram. Perhaps the most frequent variant is the case in which the evaluation ends the resolution: jokes, ghost stories, and surprise endings take this form, as the story is reshaped by many retellings.

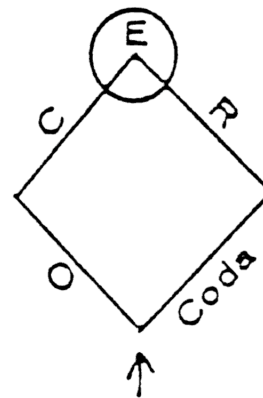


FIGURE 5 Please insert caption for Figure 5.

## CONCLUSION

This view of narrative structure helps us to answer the two questions raised at the beginning of this discussion. First, we have related the sequence of narrative elements to the inferred sequence of events in the experience that is being recapitulated, through the definitions of narrative units, restricted clause, free clause, and narrative clause. Secondly, we have outlined the principle elements of simple narratives that perform both referential and evaluative functions. We have shown that the evaluative function requires the transformation of the primary sequence, based on the a-then-b relation, into the more complex normal form of the narrative as presented by the narrator.

With this framework, we are beginning to analyze relative effectiveness and completeness of narrative structure among various subgroups of our population, and, furthermore, to analyze the more complex types of narration developed by skilled storytellers and preserved by oral tradition. It is clear that these conclusions are restricted to the speech communities that we have examined. This view of narrative structure will achieve greater significance when materials from radically different cultures are studied in the same way.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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