

CONVERSATIONAL NARRATIVE

AMSTERDAM STUDIES IN THE THEORY AND HISTORY OF LINGUISTIC SCIENCE

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Neal R. Norrick

Conversational Narrative. Storytelling in everyday talk

CONVERSATIONAL NARRATIVE

STORYTELLING IN EVERYDAY TALK

NEAL R. NORRICK

Saarland University

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For Swen, even without pictures

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Preface

This book aims to advance narrative theory in two ways. First, it includes types of storytelling not previously treated in the literature. Second, it integrates perspectives on narrative usually kept separate. By analyzing a more diverse collection of data, and by comparing different narrative types from a range of perspectives, I seek new insights into the forms and functions of storytelling. By treating storytelling in a broad array of contexts, this monograph also contributes to conversation analysis. I initially envisioned a book consisting of approximately half transcribed narratives and half sample analyses. The analytical component has grown in proportion to the data, but my original orientation toward exemplification and away from theorizing will still be evident in parts of the book.

My research began with the collection of conversational data. This phase of the project took place at Northern Illinois University, where I worked and taught from 1985 till 1997. During that time I had the pleasure of mentoring some excellent, highly motivated graduate and undergraduate students. Several of them shared their recordings and their transcriptions with me. I would like to express my gratitude to members of this Northern Illinois group: Mary Jandek, Amy Julian, Jason Turner, Shelley Synovic, Ed Leidl, Todd Laufenberg, A. J. Grant, Steve Marsden, Sandra Anderson, Lynne Pantano, Katharine Parr, Than Than Win, and, especially, Kelli Lyon. Virginia Robinson served as an undergraduate research assistant to me in the spring of 1997, and she produced first drafts of many of the transcriptions consulted and used. Bill Baker of Northern Illinois University worked along with me in the early stages of developing the treatment of Beckett's "Endgame" in chapter six. I would like to express my gratitude to Katharina Barbe and Don Hardy for reading and commenting on earlier versions of portions of this book as well.

The second phase of the research took place at Saarland University in Saarbrücken, Germany. In my present position as chair of English Linguistics, I have continued to collect oral narratives and to transcribe stories from my store of tapes. I would like to express my ongoing gratitude to the staff here in Saarbrücken. Cornelia Gerhardt, Claudia Bubel, Alice Spitz, Nicole Valentin,

Jens Harder, Oliver Naudorf and Sylvia Monzon have all been involved in various phases of the project, transcribing stories from tapes, compiling bibliography, producing and proofreading several drafts of the manuscript.

In the spring of 1996, I presented the basics of my approach to co-narration in a paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics in Chicago. I first aired my ideas on the Nurse's story from Shakespeare's "Romeo & Juliet" in a panel I organized at the International Association of Literary Semantics conference in Freiburg, Germany, in September 1997. I discussed aspects of the jokes analyzed in chapter six in a panel on humor and cognition organized by Victor Raskin at the annual conference of the International Society for Humor Studies in Oakland, California, in June-July 1999. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Wally Chafe for extensive comments on my work-in-progress. Input from anonymous reviewers has led to numerous improvements in the final version as well. Remaining weaknesses are, alas, due to my own shortcomings.

Saarbrücken, February 2000

Transcription Conventions

Each line of transcription contains a single intonation unit.

She's out.	Period shows falling tone in the preceding element.
Oh yeah?	Question mark shows rising tone in the preceding element.
well, okay	Comma indicates a continuing intonation, drawling out the preceding element.
<i>Damn</i>	Italics show heavy stress.
bu- but	A single dash indicates a cutoff with a glottal stop.
says "Oh"	Double quotes mark speech set off by a shift in the speaker's voice.
[and so-]	Square brackets on successive lines mark beginning and end of overlapping talk.
[Why] her?	
and=	Equals signs on successive lines shows latching between turns.
=then	
(2.0)	Numbers in parentheses indicate timed pauses.
{sigh}	Curly braces enclose editorial comments and untranscribable elements.

These conventions are presented in detail in chapter one.

CHAPTER 1

Approaching Storytelling in Conversation

Stories only exist in stories
(whereas life goes by without the need to turn into stories)
Wim Wenders “The state of things”

Introduction

This study describes the forms and functions of storytelling in everyday conversation. It aims at a fuller picture of conversational storytelling than has hitherto been available, both through analysis of a wider range of data than previous research, and through an integrated approach to both the internal structure and the contextual particulars of stories in everyday talk. Conversational storytelling assumes special importance in narrative studies, just as narrative passages thrive in conversation, and this investigation of conversational storytelling seeks to contribute both to narrative research and to conversation analysis.

Under appropriate conversational conditions, participants engage in storytelling for a range of purposes. Generally, one conversationalist becomes the storyteller, while the others become listeners. The teller introduces the story so as to secure listener interest, gain control of the floor and ensure understanding. Then the teller must shape remembered materials into a verbal performance designed for the current context. This may include interruptions and comments from listeners; indeed, recipients may seek to redirect the story line, to reformulate its point or even to become full-fledged co-tellers of the story. In any case, story recipients can apparently understand and evaluate the story they hear rapidly enough to respond appropriately to it, perhaps with matching stories of their own. A description of these processes is a fundamental goal of any complete account of language in use.

The tradition in narrative theory pioneered by Labov & Waletzky (1967) provides a method of analyzing the internal structure of stories, but it requires extension to describe the conversational emergence of stories, since it is based on interview-style stories. Labov & Waletzky treat oral narrative as a decontextual-

ized phenomenon rather than as a conversational strategy for accomplishing some interactional end. Their data consist only of stories elicited in interviews from a single teller with a particular question, either about an important fight or a close encounter with death. Storytelling by a single individual naturally differs from the polyphonic storytelling typical of conversation. Especially the lack of listener response during and at the end of the narratives, and the lack of hesitations, hitches and so on results in what one might consider "an academically hybridized form" (Schegloff 1997: 104). We must distinguish not only interview-style narration from conversational storytelling, but also spontaneously told stories from those solicited explicitly, and those related in response to some general request from those related in response to other stories. We should also differentiate stories told for their own sake from those told for a specific purpose such as explaining a position or illustrating a conversational point, as well as separating the story proper from the storytelling performance. Research on conversational storytelling should concentrate on the interactional achievement of a story between teller(s) and listener(s), observing the differences between first-time tellings, retellings and often-told stories as well. Finally, we must make an effort to include in our purview stories on a range of topics and with different functions: personal anecdotes told for humor or solidarity, put-down stories told for self-aggrandizement, family stories told to ratify membership and so on.

Observing these principles leads to a better understanding of the interrelated roles of verbalization and remembering in conversational storytelling. I hope to show that we can profit from treating tellings and retellings as purposeful contextualizations of something remembered. Certainly memory must play a role in storytelling, and its interaction with telling strategies in concrete contexts represents an important research topic. My data persuade me of this all the more when I find verbatim repetition of descriptions and dialogue in two versions of what is ostensibly the same story told by a single speaker on separate occasions. Hence, I study real conversational stories, indeed a wide array of types, including inchoate and marginal examples, noting why they are told and how they are negotiated in the concrete context, while I look for common ground between stories and versions of stories as well as recurrent verbalization patterns.

Labov & Waletzky take a remembered sequence of events as the pre-existing substructure of personal narrative. But stories from genuine conversation show tellers recreating their memories of past events to fit the present context. Far from simply recapitulating past experience, storytellers often seem to relive, re-evaluate and reconstruct remembered experience. Furthermore, the sequential organization in the stories we tell and hear does not necessarily entail that tellers remember events as a set of ordered states and actions. After all, we routinely

impose sequential order in verbalizing future events; we serialize instructions and travel directions, convinced this is the natural order; and we serialize items in lists and arguments in talk, as if they, too, were ordered in time. Storytellers may thus simply verbalize memories in sequential order to simplify interpretation for listeners accustomed to this mode. In fact, if temporal sequencing represents a principal strategy for producing stories, then tellers can concentrate on other features in remembering and performing them. And if temporal sequencing is a predictable property of stories, recipients can also orient themselves to more salient organizational features. My own conversational data exhibit storytellers organizing their performances around repetition and formulaicity as much as sequence; they also illustrate more stability in evaluation and dialogue than in the sequence of events in retold stories. The comparative salience and stability of recurrent features in stories will be of central interest in what follows.

For an understanding of teller strategies we must take seriously the micro-analysis of storytelling and its integration into turn-by-turn talk. Chafe's (1994) work on discourse and consciousness and Tannen's (1987a, 1989) research on the 'poetics of talk' demonstrate that the structures behind teller strategies and listener comprehension are accessible through meticulous analysis of real conversational data. Formulaicity, repetition and disfluencies such as false starts with abrupt cutoffs and restarts or self-corrections loom large in spoken language, by comparison with written language (see Chafe 1982, 1985; Ong 1982). These same features play a prominent role in the organization of conversational stories. They enhance coherence and contribute to involvement in Tannen's sense; and they facilitate verbalization and remembering, as described by Chafe. Since tellers and listeners must apportion limited cognitive resources to constructing and understanding stories respectively, they rely on repetition, formulaicity and disfluencies to gain planning time, focus attention, segment story sections, reinforce evaluations and so on. These features help organize the storytelling performance, ensure comprehension, guide interpretation and facilitate remembering.

Previously related stories may possess a degree of verbal stability, but the exigencies of real-time verbalization for an active conversational audience usually render the actual performance discontinuous and polyphonic. This concrete performance makes up the input listeners must rely on for their understanding of the story, yet they respond in ways that demonstrate understanding almost immediately. We can gain insight into the forms and functions of narrative through assuming this recipient's point of view, working from the storytelling performance to an underlying framework. Distilling a 'primary sequence' of narrative clauses (Labov & Waletzky 1967) or proposition types (Polanyi 1981)

represents a plausible approach to analyzing narrative structure from the point of view of a recipient who must make sense of a polyphonic storytelling performance. We have no direct access to the remembered forms of storyteller consciousness except through introspection, but we can examine the spoken record captured on tape from the perspective of teller strategies as well. The contributions of the story recipients, including polyphonic co-narration, must receive careful attention in this regard. Micro-analysis of oral storytelling is necessary to describe the significance of such phenomena as hesitations, false starts and repetition, for instance, in differentiating between those stories which report experiences for the first time and those which represent retellings. A major goal of this book consists in developing an account of how a listener might reconstruct a coherent story structure from a diffuse, polyphonic conversational narrative performance.

Reception Theory is suggestive at this point, because it stresses the role of the recipient in constituting the text and the fundamentally interactive nature of meaning. According to Ingarden (1973) and Iser (1978), the text presents only a skeleton of 'schematized aspects' from which the reader must construct a consistent and cohesive aesthetic object. Then the recipient fills in the blanks at points of indeterminacy in the text in order to be able to respond appropriately. But the recipient of a conversational storytelling must work even to actualize a narrative skeleton from the often disjoint, polyphonic performance. The basic narrative structure proposed below represents an attempt to model the construction of a coherent underlying skeleton. The recipient of a conversational storytelling then goes on to fill in the blanks in the story, as in the interpretation of any text.

The teller of a story is also a listener of a special kind. Each performance of a story helps solidify its form for the teller, but it may also affect the memory of events in subtle ways. Bartlett's famous experiments on remembering showed such effects on story form over time (Bartlett 1932). Tellers may use verbalization to relive past experience. Retelling can put them back in touch with details and emotions they could not access otherwise. Questions and comments from their auditors may also influence their perception and evaluation of past events. Psychotherapy presumes that retelling personal stories can give us new insight into our self-understanding. And we all use verbalization of experience to better understand what happened and why. Therefore, we must reject Labov's definition of narrative as a method of recapitulating remembered experience, insofar as it entails that the memory of the past experience remains unchanged by the telling.

In the interview situation, the method of elicitation pre-selects specific narrative genres with clear boundaries; by contrast, conversational data presents the researcher with questions about what occasioned a particular narrative, what

sort of genre it represents and where to draw the boundary between narrative and non-narrative talk. Ervin-Tripp & Küntay (1997) recently showed a systematic relation between conversational circumstances and the presence or absence of certain story features. Conversational storytellers reconstruct remembered events in words for a particular audience and for some contextual purpose. In order to understand these spontaneous stories, we must investigate the conversational contexts which occasion them and the purposes they fulfill. But the frequent appeal to stories elicited in interviews and the focus on temporal sequencing and narrative clauses in much past research has tended to narrow the data base, excluding diffuse and collaborative stories as well as unsuccessful or incomplete stories, and marginal, narrative-like exchanges. I will seek to remedy this situation by including a wide range of conversational storytelling, particularly types which have received little or no attention in the study of narrative so far. Personal and third-person anecdotes and tales of trouble, put-down stories and dream reports are analyzed and compared. Communal tellings of family stories and common experiences show participants fitting separate versions of a story together, while collaborative fantasies show participants inventing a storyline *ab ovo* rather than verbalizing events from memory. Response stories and sequences of stories receive special attention, as do borderline pseudo-narrative exchanges like accounts of recurrent past experiences and diffuse stories, which require considerable reconstruction by auditors. Consideration of flawed narrative performances, marginal stories and narrative-like passages throws into relief the interpretive processes recipients must perform. In addition, the immediate reactions of participants to these borderline narratives give us direct access to the storytelling process and the perceptions of narrative by auditors.

An investigation of everyday talk also reveals a wide array of occasions for storytelling, where research based on elicited stories postulated narrow conditions on tellability. We will see how tellers employ prefaces and abstracts in order to gain the floor for their stories and to signal what sort of response is expected. These prefaces and abstracts sometimes establish tellability through claims of either originality or topical relevance, but they sometimes simply announce a story of current interest or a familiar story, offering the possibility of co-narration. Moreover, conversationalists manipulate topical talk and stories in progress to segue into stories of their own. The net effect of analyzing a wide variety of authentic data will be a much fuller picture of conversational storytelling than has hitherto been available.

Consequently, I propose to supplement the structural description of the narrative structures underlying stories with a micro-analysis of teller strategies, to develop a rhetoric of conversational storytelling along with a description of the

contexts which occasion conversational stories and the effects they have on the surrounding interaction. I will explore the functions of repetition and formulaicity in the organization of the narrative performance. Frequently retold stories, co-narration of familiar events, and spontaneous conversational retellings of the same basic story provide special windows on the recall and verbalization of experience. I will enrich the data base with a variety of narrative data in order to determine how stories emerge from non-narrative talk and how they affect interaction. The resulting description of conversational storytelling with regard to both internal structure and contextual integration will then provide the basis for an investigation of related genres like anecdotes and jokes, and literary representations of storytelling. Fludernik's (1996) 'natural narratology' similarly advocates working from conversational narrative toward an account of literary narrative.

Remembering and verbalizing in narration

One of my main research questions concerns how we remember and verbalize stories. How do memory and telling strategies interact in the process of verbalization? Do we simply rehearse a sequence of events experienced in the past and committed to memory? Or do we recall stories at least partially in verbal form? To what extent is our verbalization governed by the local context of foregoing talk and the other participants?

Labov & Waletzky (1967) seem to assume that past experiences are remembered as sequences of events. These events are verbalized as the 'primary sequence' of a story, generally introduced by an orientation and accompanied by evaluation of various kinds. Their definition of narrative in terms of sequential ordering of clauses follows from the assumption that narrative is a "method of recapitulating past experience." Smith (1981), however, argues that memories are shaped into sets of sequential events only through the process of verbalization itself. Middleton & Edwards (1990) stress the influence of the local context and social norms on how an individual verbalizes remembered events. M. Goodwin (1997a, 1997b) demonstrates that the context of reporting past events influences how characters and their actions are portrayed. Further, Chafe (1994) has demonstrated the significance of various linguistic factors besides sequence in the organization and remembering of stories. Hopper (1997) questions the ontological assumptions behind a posited underlying sequential order of discrete events in memory which are recapitulated in storytelling. Indeed, Bamberg (1994) argues that events, scenes, actors and actions are products of more global discourse

activities rather than prerequisites for them. Moreover, the storytelling process acts as a catalyst to activate memory rather than simply extracting information from it and arranging it for inspection. Telling and retelling can deepen our understanding of a story, and put us back in touch with details and relationships presumed forgotten. Ferrara (1994) documents the expansion of a story from an initial telling through the two following ones. Ochs & Capps (1997) also raise serious doubts about the correctness of recall as reconstructed in narrative form.

If we cannot remember discrete events except within the narrative framework, perhaps words and phrases underlie our narrative performances. Of course, there is no shortage of evidence that we can memorize texts word for word, given sufficient time. Professional actors commit entire plays to memory. Many people can recite extended passages from favorite books and authors as well as whole poems, to say nothing of the current texts from popular songs and advertisements we memorize apparently without special effort. While reproduction of such texts sometimes seems like replaying material etched into a plastic disk, it probably depends on fitting words and phrases into structural and prosodic patterns.

More to the point for present purposes, many of us can produce a serviceable performance of a joke or anecdote after a single hearing — and this may include verbatim duplication of a punch line or piece of dialogue at the end along with some pivotal phrasing in the build-up. We can hear or read a news story and organize that into an accurate retelling as well. A retelling could, of course, borrow phrasing directly from such a source. Moreover, once we have verbalized an experience, we have better recall of at least portions of the verbalized text along with or in place of the original, pre-verbal memory of the experience. Many of the stories I have recorded and many of those investigated by other researchers are previously verbalized in this sense, though this aspect of the narrative performance has rarely been addressed. Some stories bear clear marks of previous telling: The teller may actually say she is telling “the story of so and so” or she may ask whether her auditors have already heard about the time she did such and such. We will consider these matters in greater detail in the chapters to come.

Bartlett in his monumental *Remembering* (1932) tested his subjects’ ability to reproduce stories they had read after various time intervals. His data run somewhat counter to my focus here, first because his subjects read stories and reproduced them in writing, whereas I work with stories told in spontaneous conversation, and second because he chose unconventional types of stories to test how subjects schematize information for recall, whereas my tellers base their stories on their own past experience. Bartlett’s subjects apparently restructured

unusual plots into more familiar narrative patterns before committing them to memory. Their regularization processes were magnified through repeated retellings, so that their productions allowed Bartlett to draw conclusions about the role of schematization in memory. One major finding of importance for the present study was that the form of a story remained fairly constant once a subject got it into a particular shape after a few replications. Still, this tendency might reflect either memory alone or in combination with stable narrative strategies. In fact, it seems two different kinds of schematization must be at work: first, understanding of events according to familiar patterns, and second, organization of event descriptions into familiar narrative patterns. These two separable types of schematization are embodied in current versions of Frame Theory.

Frame theory — also variously called schema theory or script theory — has its roots in the thinking of Bateson (1953, 1972) and Goffman (1967, 1974). Fillmore (1976, 1985) championed frame theory within linguistics as an account of semantics. But it was Tannen (1978, 1979; cf. Tannen, ed. 1993) who showed how frame concepts account for expectations about story patterns themselves as well as for relations between the elements of a narrative. Quasthoff's (1980) narrative macro-structures accomplish much the same things. Frames encode prototypes for objects, sequences of events, and causal relationships, which facilitate recognition, categorization and memory of stories; in addition, they guide tellers in what sorts of stories are appropriate and what to include in them as well as suggesting to hearers what to expect and how to respond to stories.

Also of great significance for the present investigation of verbalization strategies is the notion of chunking introduced by Miller (1956) in his famous article on 'the magical number seven'. Miller shows that we can remember ever larger amounts of information by chunking them into manageable units, which then act as a single bit of information on the next higher level. We employ various strategies for chunking information of different kinds. In this book, I explore some of those strategies, namely the ones we use to organize narratives in conversation. Certainly the imposition of temporal sequence counts as one sort of chunking strategy in this sense, but there are others as well. Hence I will be investigating stories apparently told for the first time as compared with often repeated stories, separate retellings of the same story, and group co-narration of familiar stories. I will develop methods of description which foreground organizational elements, and seek to demonstrate the significance of hesitations, false starts, repetition, formulaicity and dialogue in verbalization.

Chafe (1982, 1994) has investigated conversational data, suggesting certain teller strategies for remembering and verbalization of narratives. He has demonstrated the importance of the information unit in narration versus the sentence in

writing. In a recent article, Chafe (1998) analysed two spontaneously produced tellings of the same story for clues to the nature of memory and verbalization. In my published comments on his article (Norrick 1998b), I contrasted Chafe's interest in clusters of ideas in consciousness with my own focus on teller strategies evident in the verbal performance. Where he sees repetition of a phrase as evidence of a teller preoccupation, I look for its organizational function in the narrative performance. In each of Chafe's stories,¹ the teller says she was "eating a popsicle" to set the scene. Again in both, she says she was "*just* eating *my* popsicle" to indicate duration and to segue into the Complication of the story. Then her finishing the popsicle leads to disposal of the stick and the confrontation of the initial Climax. Whether the popsicle counts as a preoccupation or not, its repeated mention clearly serves identical demarcation functions in the paired stories, so that I consider it as evidence of a teller strategy.

In order to test for stability of narrative structures, I have collected versions of typically oral children's stories from a wide range of informants. In each case I asked subjects to tell "The three little pigs" and "Goldilocks" as if for a child listener. Then I compared the taped results.² Although the narratives varied considerably in the ordering of events and even in the presence or absence of whole sub-plots, certain features remained quite constant, for instance the houses of straw, sticks (or wood) and bricks (or stone), but most conspicuously the dialogue. All tellers who said they knew the story of "The three little pigs" included essentially verbatim the words of the (big bad) wolf: "Little pig, little pig, let me (come) in," the response of each successive pig: "Not by the hair of (or *on*) my chinny chin chin," and either the wolf's threat: "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down" or a parallel description of his action: "And he huffed and he puffed and he blew the (little pig's) house down" or both. This dialogue and repetition served to frame the action in each version. Clearly, word-for-word memorization and reproduction of the dialogue was a precondition on telling "The three little pigs" for the subjects in my sample. Dialogue regularly functions as a framing device and recurs unchanged from one telling to the next in many stories I have inspected.

These reflections on remembering and verbalizing in narration have consequences for my analysis of conversational storytelling. They also suggest consideration of data where memory plays different roles, for example, collaborative verbalizations of shared experience, co-narration of familiar stories and creative fantasies with no basis in memory.

Narration in the conversational context

In order to concretize the discussion at this point, I would like to consider two initial examples, one an elicited story and the other a genuine conversational narrative. A comparison of the two should bring out the complex interrelations between the teller, the recipient and the context in conversational storytelling. At the same time, this first look at data will illustrate something of my approach and themes to be developed in more detail in the chapters to follow.

The story below was elicited during the first session of a graduate seminar in English at a large midwestern American university. The students were asked to take turns telling stories until each had told two or three. The teller, whom I call Tammy, had related a dog story as her first contribution. Others had also related personal narratives, but otherwise no coherence with the context was evident.

Barn Burning

- 1 I guess the only time
- 2 I've ever really seen my father cry
- 3 was when I was a child,
- 4 and it was August
- 5 and it was very hot and dry.
- 6 and we had the family habit of every night
- 7 uh we'd drive into town to the Dairy Queen
- 8 and get a special treat.
- 9 and this particular night
- 10 as we were driving home,
- 11 we could see the glow in the western sky
- 12 and it shouldn't have been there.
- 13 and the closer we got to home,
- 14 the more we realized
- 15 that there was an awful big fire someplace.
- 16 uh, that big fire turned out to be our barn
- 17 which was a humongous affair.
- 18 it- it housed the kennels,
- 19 it housed ah cattle
- 20 and horses and a couple of sheep
- 21 and all kinds of things
- 22 as well as the equipment.
- 23 and by the time we got there
- 24 the thing was engulfed in flames.

25 um, the animals were still in it.
26 and there was one act of tremendous kindness,
27 a a stranger from off the highway,
28 who was driving by
29 happened to see the flames.
30 and he had gone in
31 and gotten the horses out
32 and gotten one dog out,
33 but we had to listen to all those other animals die.
34 and I was so interested,
35 the fire was all gone,
36 and nothing but ash and the foundation left
37 to see my dad sit out on the porch and weep.
38 ah, I think that
39 was one of the most heartrending things
40 I'd ever seen.
41 somehow, when your father cries
42 it's ten times worse tragedy
43 than when somebody else does.
44 and, I think that still sits very strongly in my mind.

I follow Chafe (1994) in presenting spoken language one intonation unit (prosodic phrase) per line, rather than trying to reorganize it into the sentences so important in written texts. This form of representation brings out other characteristics of spoken versus written language as well. It highlights the frequency of units beginning with *and*. This characteristic in turn reflects the additive character of spoken language by contrast with the subordinative character of written language (see Chafe 1982, 1985; Chafe & Danielewicz 1987; Ong 1982; Tannen 1982, 1989; Halliday 1987 among others).

Yet even in this transcription, Tammy's story does not look so different from a written narrative. Presumably, Tammy had told the story on previous occasions. The passage contains few disfluencies such as the false starts "it- it housed" and "a a stranger" in lines 18 and 27 and the filled pauses such as "um," "ah" and "uh." Otherwise, the individual intonation units match grammatical clauses for the most part. Still, phrases like "an awful big fire" in line 15 and "a humongous affair" in line 17 suggest an informal spoken performance rather than a written text.

The story is carefully organized. Tammy begins and ends with her father's weeping. She uses the present perfect to introduce the theme: "the only time I've