Narrative Theory and Narrative Development: The Labovian Impact

Article · January 1997

CITATIONS
15

READS
4,784

7 authors, including:

Randolph Potts
Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare
11 PUBLICATIONS **728** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Ruth Berman
Tel Aviv University
67 PUBLICATIONS **1,610** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

hold of the stories they most want to tell and the audiences to whom they most want to tell them.

Labov and Waletzky argued that we needed to find the lines of continuity between the casual and spontaneous stories people tell one another in every day settings and the stories that are preserved, in writing or orally, as exemplars of a community or culture. In the last 15 years or so, it has become apparent that of equally consuming interest are the lines that connect the first fragments of stories shared by some toddlers and their parents, the written and spoken stories of the ordinary adult, and the revered stories of accomplished authors or tellers.

REFERENCES

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Bruner, J. (1996). Unpublished lecture to the Colloquium on Legal Interpretation and the Theory of Practice, New York University School of Law, New York.

Engel, S. (1995). *The stories children tell.* New York: Freeman.

Feldman, C., & Kalmar, D. (in press). Autobiography and fiction as modes of thought. In D. Olson & N. Torrence (Eds), *Modes of thoughts: Explorations in culture and cognition.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Forster, E. M. (1927). *Aspects of the novel.* New York: Harcourt Brace.

Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (this issue). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In J. Helm (Ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual arts: Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society* (pp. 12–44). Seattle: University of Washington Press. (Original work published 1967)

Miller, P., Mintz, J., Hoogstra, L., Fong, H., & Potts, R. (1992) The narrated self: Young children's construction of self in relation to others in conversational stories of personal experience. *Merrill–Palmer Quarterly, 38,* 45–67.

Searle, J. (1970). *Speech acts.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

JOURNAL OF NARRATIVE AND LIFE HISTORY, 7(1–4), 235–244

Narrative Theory and Narrative Development: The Labovian Impact

Ruth A. Berman
Department of Linguistics, Tel Aviv University

It is a pleasure for me to join in honoring the contribution of William Labov to the emergence of narrative as a field of study for linguists. In personal terms, this homage takes me back over 30 years, when we shared graduate classes at Columbia University, and Bill interviewed me for his sociolinguistic research on pronunciation. Academically, Labov and Waletzky's (1967/this issue; henceforth L&W) seminal work on oral narratives has exerted a profound influence on my thinking about the relation between narrative theory and narrative development, a field I came to almost by accident some 10 years ago, when Dan Slobin and I decided to embed our study of the development of temporality in different languages in the discourse context of the picture-storybook, *Frog, Where Are You?* (Bamberg, 1987; Berman & Slobin, 1994). Since then, Labov's ideas on the nature of narrative discourse have been at the core of much of my work, as well as that of my students and colleagues.

One major reason for this impact is suggested right at the outset of L&W's pioneering paper. They start by explicitly stating that "the analysis will be *formal*" and "the analysis is *functional.*" Analysis of linguistic form–narrative function interrelations was a crucial motivation for our study of how children and adults relate the events presented in a picture storybook in different languages. This orientation to narrative analysis is at the core of my own work on narrative development in Hebrew, as summed up in Berman (1995), concerning: tense–aspect and connectivity (Berman, 1988), null subjects (Berman, 1990), verbalized perspectives on a scene (Berman, 1993), uses of the form *and* (Berman, 1996a), expression of "setting" elements—L&W's "orientation"—(Berman, 1996b), reference to characters in a picture-series (Berman & Katzenberger, in press), and narrative clause-linkage in different languages (Berman, 1997).

Requests for reprints should be sent to Ruth Berman, Department of Linguistics, Tel Aviv University, Gilman Building, Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv 69978, Israel. E-mail: rberman@post.tau.ac.il

The form–function approach to narrative analysis pioneered by L&W has clearly proved broadly generalizable. It has been effectively extended from personal-experience accounts to other narrative genres and elicitation settings, from Black English to other languages, and from older children and adults to preschoolers. This article starts with a survey of the developmental research inspired by Labov's work, specifically in the domain of *evaluation*, ending with a suggestion for how narrative theory might be adapted to characterize the course of narrative development.

STUDIES OF NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Labov's ideas have had a crucial impact on a range of studies on children's developing narrative abilities. Foremost among these is the "high-point" analysis applied in Peterson & McCabe's (1983) large-scale study of children's personal-experience narratives. Other studies have shown that the ability to relate to a high-point and to proceed with formulating a resolution and sometimes a coda, too, has proved to be an important criterion of children's narrative abilities in different contexts and elicitation settings. The topic focused on here is the role of what L&W was the first to identify as evaluative elements in narrative discourse.

Labov (1972) explicitly noted the developmental relevance of narrative evaluation as follows: "An unexpected result of the comparison [of evaluative elements] across age levels [preadolescents aged 9 to 13 years, adolescents aged 14 to 19, and adults] is that the use of many syntactic devices for evaluation does not develop until late in life, rising geometrically from preadolescents to adolescents to adults" (p. 355). This echoes a central theme of the work of Dan Slobin and our colleagues (cf. Berman & Slobin, 1994) on the development of narrative form–function relations, as well as in the analyses of Maya Hickmann (Hickmann, 1995) in regard to the expression of reference: Many linguistic forms are early to emerge, but the ability to deploy a full range of rhetorical options, and to integrate them appropriately to meet a range of narrative functions, has a long developmental history, often lasting through to adulthood. Furthermore, the challenge implied by Labov's developmental observation has been taken up in a range of studies on the role of evaluation in developing narrative abilities among children from as young as 2 years old (Miller & Sperry, 1988).

Taking Labov's ideas as a starting point, researchers on children's narratives have devised various schemes for analyzing evaluative elements at different developmental phases. In the course of their high-point analysis of personal-experience accounts from children aged 3 to 10 years, Peterson and McCabe (1983) isolated 21 types of evaluation, reorganized here into seven groups: (a) *Interactive elements:* attention-getters like "Listen to this" and expression of narrator affect like "I hate people like that"; (b) *Prosodic devices:* for example, onomatopoeia, emphatic stress, vowel elongation; (c) *Rhetorical devices:* for example, exclamation, repetition, similes, and other metaphors; (d) *Lexical devices:* for example, intensifiers (including "gratuitous terms" like *very, just, really*) and evaluative modifiers like *ugly, exciting, accidentally;* (e) *Irrealis modality:* for example, expression of hopes, desires, and intentions, of hypotheses and inferences, and negation; (f) *Causal elements:* motivations for character's actions and results of narrative events; and (g) *Internal states:* cognitive and affective states attributed to the protagonist(s). They found clear developmental differences in how much children favored some types of evaluators, for example, gratuitous terms and stressors. Although overall incidence of evaluation did not change with age, older children used a larger variety of such devices (p. 59).

Narrative evaluation has also been analyzed for the "frog story" picture book narratives. Building on Labov's (1972) distinction between external and internal evaluation, Bamberg and Damrad-Frye (1991) identified five lexical categories of "evaluative commentary" for stories told by 5-year-old, 9-year-old, and adult speakers of American English: (a) *Frames of mind:* reference to affective or cognitive states, for example, *scared, thinking;* (b) *Character speech:* direct or reported speech quoting from or attributed to characters in the story; (c) *Hedges:* distancing devices that lessen narrator commitment to a proposition, for example, *kind of, probably;* (d) *Negative qualifiers:* for example, *not, un- ;* and (e) *Causal connectors:* items that relate two or more clauses causally, for example, *because, so.* They found that adults used significantly more evaluative devices than 5- and 9-year-olds and the latter more than younger children. Only 9-year-olds and adults made wide use of reference to frames of mind (similar to the Berman & Slobin, 1994, English and Hebrew frog story texts; pp. 73–82), but for the children this was typically confined to a local level, whereas among adults evaluative devices served a global narrative function.

Reilly (1992) added paralinguistic dimensions to her analysis of frog stories told by other groups of American English-speaking children aged 3 to 11 years, identifying six types of "affective expression": (a) *Characterization or quoted speech:* narrator speaks in the role of a character; (b) *Evaluative comments:* affective and cognitive states and character traits attributed to a character; (c) *Facial expression:* for example, a smile or frown; (d) *Gestures:* relating to a particular utterance; (e) *Prosodic features:* pitch, length, volume, and voice quality; and (f) *Lexical-phonological stress.* Reilly found a clear advance with age in reliance on explicitly linguistic devices for expression of affect and other evaluative elements. Bamberg and Reilly (1996) proposed a synthesis between these two descriptive frameworks, with evaluative comments, including narrator attribution of emotions or mental states to the characters and evaluation of the character's actions from the narrator's point of view. They found that even young children use affective expressions, but with age this ability undergoes reconstruction from a local to a global level of organization; ultimately reference to emotions and the expression of affect serve "to orient the audience in a more integrated fashion toward the story and its narrator as a unit" (Bamberg & Reilly, p. 335).

These findings combine to show that the ability to flesh out narrative events with evaluative commentary develops with age both qualitatively and quantitatively. As Labov (1972) indicated, adolescents and adults are better able to deploy a variety of syntactic and other linguistic devices for evaluation. Developmental research further shows that, with time, children acquire the cognitive ability to adopt a narrator stance, which includes both attributing motivations to characters and expressing their own attitudes to and evaluation of the events described in their narrations. Moreover, these developments are consistent across different elicitation procedures. For example, Katzenberger's (1994) analysis of texts produced by 4- to 6-year-olds, 10-year-olds, and adults based on short picture series revealed that only the adults provided some elements of evaluation. In longer texts, however, older children as well as adults embed their evaluative comments within a hierarchically organized, global "action structure," rather than confining them to the linear, local level of narrative organization (Berman, 1995; Shen & Berman, 1996).

Another group of largely unpublished studies revealed that evaluation provides an important criterion of children's storytelling abilities not only across time but across populations. One such factor is cultural background. For example, Küntay and Nakamura's (1993) analysis of frog story texts in Turkish and Japanese revealed that children in these cultures avoided making explicit reference to the psychological or mental states of the characters. This contrasts with the findings of Bamberg and Damrad-Frye (1991) and of Berman and Slobin (1994) for the category of frames of mind in the frog story narratives of English- and Hebrew-speaking children. The Küntay and Nakamura study also suggested gender differences, with girls seeming to become more engaged in the task, producing longer, more elaborate stories. This is confirmed by findings of Hebrew-language studies. Ten-year-olds and adults asked to make up a story about "a dream that came true" revealed no significant sex differences for overall amount of evaluation, but they did differ in type of evaluation: Girls and women referred to more characters, and they used significantly more intensifiers and affective expressions than the boys and men, but not more reference to nonaffective cognitive states. An analysis of stories written by 4th-graders about an imaginary trip showed that the girls' stories were three times longer on the average than those of the boys, and they contained a much higher proportion of evaluative elements and a wider variety of such elements. Other studies indicate that use of evaluative devices also differentiates between the stories produced by children from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

These studies suggested that narrative abilities could be extended to compare not only developmental phases, but also genders, text types, and populations of different sociocultural background across three interrelated dimensions: (a) *overall narrative structure:* the narrative components defined by L&W as abstract, orientation, complicating action, result or resolution, and coda; (b) *narrative quality:* storytelling skills defined by amount, type, and location of evaluative elements; and (c) *narrative syntax:* forms of linguistic expression used in producing a coherent and cohesive text.

A PROPOSAL FOR INTEGRATING EVALUATION WITH NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The studies reviewed in the previous section indicate that researchers have expressed a need for refining categories of evaluation beyond Labov's original insights. My proposal in this connection is twofold: first, to distinguish between evaluative form and function by a tripartite distinction between linguistic form, semantic content, and narrative function; and second, to divide narrative components into three types of elements: eventive, attitudinal-evaluative, and factual-informative.

Categories of Evaluation

A problem common to the various classifications of kinds of evaluative elements is their tendency to confuse form–function criteria. Thus Reinhart (1984, 1995) rightly notes that Labov's criteria are syntactic-structural rather than semantic-contentive. Her proposals suggest the need for a clear distinction between linguistic form, semantic content, and narrative or textual functions. In my interpretations, "form" refers to linguistic and paralinguistic devices used to express semantic content and to perform narrative functions, the full range of what Berman and Slobin (1994) defined as "expressive options." Linguistic devices include affixes and clitics, closed and open class lexical items, set expressions, syntactic constructions (e.g., relative clauses, passive voice), and syntactic operations (e.g., word order changes, elision). Paralinguistic devices include facial expressions, gestures, and prosodic elements such as stress and intonation. The heading of form would thus cover Labov's (1972) four subtypes of internal evaluation, Peterson and McCabe's (1983) prosodic and rhetorical devices, Bamberg and Damrad-Frye's (1991) character speech and negative qualifiers, and Reilly's (1992) six types of devices for affective expression. *Semantic content* refers to the referential import of these different forms and includes: stative predicates versus activities and events, with internal states subdivided into affect, cognition, and perception; physical attributes *(tall, purple)* and internal states *(hungry, tired)* as well as traditionally evaluative descriptions *(nice, helpful);* comparisons between objects and events; modality, and other classes of irrealis reference like negation or generic aspect; and semantic categories of predicate modification such as causatives, manner, and degree. *Narrative* or *Discourse functions* refer to the purposes fulfilled by forms that carry these different meanings in a given text along several interrelated dimensions.

These include rhetorical functions in expressing relations between parts of a text; story-embedded functions in attributing qualities, motivations, states of mind and feeling to the characters and situations in the narrative; and communicative functions in expressing the narrator's stance and attitude to the characters and events in the story and relating explicitly to the audience.

Some classes of expression will cut across categories. For example, repetition seems an important evaluative device, one which subsumes formal linguistic repetition of identical elements, syntactic parallelism, and semantic correspondences. Reinhart (1995) noted all of these as important means of fleshing out the narrative skeleton in both literary texts and personal experience accounts. Analysis of frog story texts of different age groups shows that repetition follows a distinct developmental path: Initially it marks online disfluencies or local-level intensification; later it has the role of a global-level rhetorical device (Berman, 1987). Detailed analysis of evaluative elements along these different dimensions is beyond the scope of this article, but noting these distinctions should serve to highlight the complex array of factors involved in narrative evaluation.

Elements of Narrative Structure and Content

Reinhart (1984, 1995) proposed a further elaboration of the Labovian distinction between narrative-referential clauses and evaluative elements. For her, both informative background and Labov's (1972) evaluative elements constitute the nonnarrative, atemporal material that creates the background elements of a narrative text. Evaluation gives a story its "meaning" by specifying the status of the information conveyed in the story and defining how the story is to be interpreted, whereas narrative or referential elements simply convey a sequence of events. Along these lines, I propose the following tripartite analysis of narrative texts.

1. Narrative clauses: Sequential elements or eventives correspond to Labov's referential clauses and describe events in temporally ordered clauses;
2. Evaluative elements: Interpretive elements or "attitudinals" reflect the narrator's perspective on and subjective interpretation of events;
3. Informative elements: Descriptive elements or "factuals" provide information about the external or physical circumstances in which events take place.

The label *eventive* focuses on the dynamic facet of Labov's narrative elements. These eventive elements are typically expressed propositionally in clauses, each of which constitutes a distinct, unified prediction (Berman & Slobin, 1994, pp. 6, 660–663), and they share certain properties across narrative genres. First, they represent the chain of events that constitute the story's "plotline" (Berman & Slobin, 1994, pp. 44–51) and serve to report what happens as the story unfolds. Second, these propositions are related by ties of temporal sequentiality and follow one another along the time axis, in an order that corresponds to how the events occurred. Narrative elements are thus bound by the constraint of temporal ordering and so meet Reinhart's (1984) criterion of "narrativity" or temporal continuity for foreground material. Third, the other, nonnarrative elements are mainly stative rather than dynamic or active, related by ties of nontemporal contingencies such as cause, purpose, or concession and by nonsequential temporal relations like simultaneity, in which events cooccur in time, or retrospection, wherein clause-sequence is counter to order of events.

Evaluative elements, in contrast, present the narrator's interpretation of these events. They include the narrators' subjective commentary on their attitude towards the events they are reporting and on how they assume the protagonists relate to these events in terms of the motivations, emotions, and mental states that narrators attribute to these protagonists.

Factives are informative or descriptive elements that differ from both sequential eventives and evaluative attitudinals. They provide additional factual information about the characters and circumstances within which events take place and as such are included partly under the heading of evaluation in Labov's analyses. They take account of Reinhart's proposal for a distinct category of informative background, which together with evaluative material constitute what she defined as the background component of narrative texts. Informative elements describe physical or material attributes of the characters and locative or temporal properties of events. Like evaluative material, they do not add new events to the plotline chain of events; unlike evaluation, these descriptive elements are factual, rather than inferential or attitudinal. They occur most typically in the setting or orientation openings to narratives, and they include the when, where, and who (but not the why) of any narrative. Developmentally motivated analyses of very young children (Peterson, 1990) and among older children and adults (Berman, 1996b) show that these elements emerge relatively late.

In sum, narrative clauses constitute the action structure in which events are sequentially organized from the initial enabling event through to its resolution (Giora & Shen, 1994); evaluative elements reflect the perspective of the narrator and of the characters on events; and informative or descriptive elements take into account what the addressee might want to know or needs to know. This three-way division of narrative elements allows us to construct an integrated framework for analyzing narrative structure and its development, incorporating two distinct dimensions: the different constituents of narrative structure as proposed by various structural analyses since the 1970s (e.g, Mandler, 1982; Rumelhart, 1975; Shen, 1989) and how these are realized in different categories of narrative content, as first proposed by Labov (1972) and extended here. This framework is set out here (a plus in parentheses "(+)" stands for optional elements, and a slash "/" stands for elements that may but need not cooccur, indicating that particular structural

components either must or may be expressed by one or more of these three categories):

Constituents of Narrative Structure	Categories of Narrative Content
Orientation [=setting]	Information (+ Evaluation)
Initiating Event	Narrative Clause/s
Episode(s) [=attempts; complicating action]	Narrative Clause/s (+Eval/Info)
Resolution [=outcome]	Narrative Clause/s (+Eval/Info)
Coda [=wrap-up]	Eval (+Info)

In developmental perspective, each of the three narrative functions noted here reflects specific types of cognitive abilities: (a) knowledge of sequentiality—for the construction of temporally ordered narrative clauses and developing action structure; (b) consideration of audience knowledge—in order to provide listeners with necessary background information and descriptive elements; and (c) the ability to give expression to narrator and character perspective—fleshing out the narrative with evaluative interpretation. That is, in acquiring narrative knowledge, children need to gain command of the structural elements that make up the plotline events and actions, and they need to learn to embed these events and actions in a network of informative description and evaluative commentary as part of telling a "good" story (Reilly, 1992). Second, in producing a narrative text, children must not only do what Bruner (1986) defined as constructing two landscapes simultaneously—both "a landscape of action," in which the constituents are the arguments of action and a "landscape of consciousness," relating to what those involved in the action know, think, or feel (p. 14). They must also, and simultaneously, integrate all the diverse facets of narrative structure and narrative content in realtime, online processing. Ultimately, they need to integrate the use of appropriate linguistic forms to meet the three narrative functions of eventivity, interpretation, and informativeness. The task of mapping various linguistic forms to a given discourse function and concurrently employing these same linguistic forms to meet a range of discourse functions constitutes a heavy cognitive load for children, and so the integration of linguistic form–discourse function is a lengthy process.

The challenge to research on narrative development emerging from Labov's ideas on narrative theory is to characterize how these different abilities interact and realign across time among children of different ages and from different sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Yeshayahu "Shayke" Shen for his helpful comments, and to Judy Reilly for her important input on narrative development. Errors and inadequacies are mine alone.

REFERENCES

Bamberg, M. (1987). *The acquisition of narrative: Learning to use language.* Berlin: Mouton.

Bamberg, M., & Damrad-Frye, R. (1991). On the ability to provide evaluative comments: Further of children's narrative competencies. *Journal of Child Language, 18,* 689–710.

Bamberg, M., & Reilly, J. S. (1996). Emotion, narrative, and affect: How children discover the between what to say and how to say it. In D. Slobin, J. Gerhardt, A. Kyratzis, & J. Guo (Eds.), *Social interaction, social context, and language* (pp. 329–342). Mahwah: NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Berman, R. A. (1987). *Repetition and recurrence in the Hebrew "frog story."* Unpublished manuscript, University of California, Berkeley.

Berman, R. A. (1988). On the ability to relate events in narrative. *Discourse Processes, 11,* 469–497.

Berman, R. A. (1990). Acquiring an (S)VO language: Subjectless sentences in children's Hebrew. *Linguistics, 28,* 1135–1166.

Berman, R. A. (1993). The development of language use: Expressing perspectives on a scene. In E. Dromi (Ed.), *Language and cognition: A developmental perspective* (pp. 172–201). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Berman, R. A. (1995). Narrative competence and storytelling performance: How children tell stories in different contexts. *Journal of Narrative and Life History, 5,* 285–313.

Berman, R. A. (1996a). Form and function in developing narrative skills. In D. Slobin, J. Gerhardt, A. Kyratzis, & J. Guo (Eds.), *Social interaction, social context, and language* (pp. 343–367). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Berman, R. A. (1996b, July). *Setting the narrative scene: How children begin to tell a story.* Plenary Lecture, VIIth International Association for the Study of Child Language, Istanbul, Turkey.

Berman, R. A. (1997). Typological perspectives on connectivity. In Z. Penner & N. Dittmar (Eds.), *Erst- und Zweitsprachenerwerb* [First and second language acquisition]. Bern, Germany: Peter Lang Ag.

Berman, R. A., & Katzenberger, I. (in press). Cognitive and linguistic factors in the development of picture-series narration. In A. G. Ramat & M. Chini (Eds.), *Organization of learners' texts: SILTA.*

Berman, R. A., & Slobin, D. I. (1994). *Relating events in narrative: A crosslinguistic developmental study.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Giora, R., & Shen, Y. (1994). Degrees of narrativity and strategies of semantic reduction. *Poetics, 22,* 447–458.

Hickmann, M. (1995). Discourse organization and the development of reference to person, space, and time. In P. Fletcher & B. MacWhinney (Eds.), *The handbook of child language* (pp. 194–218). Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.

Katzenberger, I. (1994). *Hayexolet lesaper sipur al pi sidrat tmunot: Hebetim kognitiviyim, leshoniyim vehitpatxutiyim [Cognitive, linguistic, and developmental factors in the narration of picture-series].* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel.

Küntay, A., & Nakamura, K. (1993, July). *Evaluative strategies in monological Japanese and Turkish narratives.* Paper given at VIth International Congress for the Study of Child Language, Trieste, Italy.

Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (this issue). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. In J. Helm (Ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual arts: Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society* (pp. 12–44). Seattle: University of Washington Press. (Original work published 1967)

Mandler, J. (1982). Some uses and abuses of a story grammar. *Discourse Processes, 5,* 305–318.

Miller, P. J., & Sperry, L.L. (1988). Early talk about the past: Origins of conversational stories of personal experience. *Journal of Child Language, 15,* 293–315.

Peterson, C. (1990). The who, when, and where of early narratives. *Journal of Child Language, 17,* 433–455.

Peterson, C., & McCabe, A. (1983). *Developmental psycholinguistics: Three ways of looking at a narrative.* New York: Plenum.

Reilly, J. S. (1992). How to tell a good story: The intersect of language and affect in children's narratives. *Journal of Narrative and Life History, 2,* 355–377.

Reinhart, T. (1984). Principles of gestalt perception in the temporal organization of narrative texts. *Linguistics, 22,* 779–809.

Reinhart, T. (1995). Mi-tekst le-mashma'ut: Emtsa'ey haha'araxa [From text to meaning: Strategies of evaluation]. In Y. Shen (Ed.), *Hebetim kognitiviyim shel mivne hanarativ* (pp. 4–37). Tel Aviv, Israel: Tel Aviv University, The Porter Institute.

Rumelhart, D. E. (1975). Notes on a schema for stories. In D. G. Bobrow & A. Collins (Eds.), *Representation and understanding: Studies in cognitive science.* New York: Academic.

Shen, Y. (1989). The X-Bar grammar for stories: Story grammar revisited. *Text, 9,* 415–467.

Shen, Y., & Berman, R. A. (1996). Me-ha'irua habobed lemivne hape'ula: Shlabim behitpatxut hanaravit [From isolated event to action structure: Phases in narrative development]. In Y. Shimron (Ed.), *Psycholinguistic studies in Hebrew: Language acquisition, reading, and writing.* Jerusalem: Magness.

JOURNAL OF NARRATIVE AND LIFE HISTORY, 7(1–4), 245–250

Narrative Units and the Temporal Organization of Ordinary Discourse

Björn Wiemer
Department of Linguistics, Universität Konstanz

In their famous paper, Labov and Waletzky (1967/this issue; henceforth L&W) coined the term *narrative units* (sentences), which "recapitulate experience in the same order as the original events." Beforehand, they made it clear that "narrative will be considered as one verbal technique for recapitulating experience, in particular, a technique of constructing narrative units which match the temporal sequence of that experience." Since that time, discussions have not stopped as to defining what counts as narrative discourse and what is but an artificial "surrogate" of it. L&W formed the basis for investigations into narratives of "ordinary life" (cf. Gülich & Quasthoff, 1985, for an overview). However, it seems that, first, narrative discourse is a gradable phenomenon that also pertains to more "artificial" genres like renarrations of picture stories, in which the plot to be related is already given, as well as to (pretended or real) personal letters and similar kinds of written communication. Units of narrative sentences are not dependent on factors like involvement,[1] because they are inherent in any coherent piece of monologic discourse. Secondly, the temporal structure of narrative-like discourse, as belonging to its referential level, demands further scrutiny with regard to specific classes of linguistic paradigms and lexemes.

In this article I want to show how L&W's definition of narrative unit fits into some recent work on the temporal organization of narratives or narrative-like discourse (both written and oral) in Polish and German. For this purpose I wish to give a very brief summary of some empirical results that cast light on aspects of narratives that have remained rather unnoticed, though they, by and large, corroborate L&W's findings.[2]

Requests for reprints should be sent to Björn Wiemer, Universität Konstanz, FG Sprachwissenschaft-Slavistik, Postfach 55 60, D 179, D-78457 Konstanz, Germany. E-mail: bjoern.wiemer@uni-konstanz.de

[1] For this term see Tannen, 1982.

[2] The data derive from my own research (Wiemer, 1997a). A shortened English version is Wiemer (1997b).