9 The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax

IN the course of our studies of vernacular language, we have developed a number of devices to overcome the constraints of the face-to-face interview and obtain large bodies of tape-recorded casual speech.[1] The most effective of these techniques produce *narratives of personal experience*, in which the speaker becomes deeply involved in rehearsing or even reliving events of his past. The "Danger of Death" question is the prototype and still the most generally used: at a certain point in the conversation,[2] the interviewer asks, "Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed, where you said to yourself—*'This is it'?*" In the section of our interview schedule that deals with fights, we ask "Were you ever in a fight with a guy bigger than you?" When the subject says "Yes" we pause and then ask simply, "What happened?"[3] The

1. For a review of these techniques and quantitative analysis of their effectiveness, see "The Isolation of Contextual Styles" in *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. The present discussion is based upon the investigation of the structure and function of the language used in south-central Harlem; a preliminary version appears as section 4.8 in CRR 3288.

2. Our techniques do not utilize fixed questionnaires, but a schedule of topics with some transitions and questions specified in exact detail. It should be noted that the placement of the danger-of-death question is an important point. Ludicrous results are obtained when students introduce it in a mechanical way in the style of a conventional interview.

3. Note that the original question calls for only one or two words; this is a "Yes-No" question. The subject first becomes committed to a narrative by a simple 'yes'. He then becomes involved in the more detailed account of what happened as a necessary justification of the claim made by his first response. The initial impetus provided by the Yes-No question is an important element in this procedure. Many formal interviews use questions of the form "Can you tell me something amusing (dangerous, exciting, important) that has happened to you?" Though such questions will produce some response in some listeners, they are quite unsatisfactory as a rule to both speaker and interviewer; the reasons for their inadequacy make a nice topic for discourse analysis.

narratives that we have obtained by such methods form a large body of data on comparative verbal skills, ranging across age levels, classes, and ethnic groups. Because they occur in response to a specific stimulus in the interview situation, they are not free of the interactive effect of the outside observer. The form they take is in fact typical of discourse directed to someone outside of the immediate peer group of the speaker. But because the experience and emotions involved here form an important part of the speakers' biography, he seems to undergo a partial reliving of that experience, and he is no longer free to monitor his own speech as he normally does in face-to-face interviews (*Sociolinguistic Patterns*, chapter 3).

In a previous study we have presented a general framework for the analysis of narrative which shows how verbal skills are used to evaluate experience (Labov and Waletzky 1967). In this chapter we examine the narratives we obtained in our study of south-central Harlem from preadolescents (9 to 13 years old), adolescents (14 to 19), and adults to see what linguistic techniques are used to evaluate experience within the black English vernacular culture. In the earlier analysis we concentrated upon the placement of evaluative clauses in an "evaluation section" which suspended the action of the narrative at a crucial point; this discussion considers a wider range of evaluative elements, including the syntactic elaboration of the clause itself. An unexpected result of the comparison across age levels 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.

Before beginning the analysis, it will be helpful for the reader to be acquainted with the general character and impact of narratives in black vernacular style. We will cite here in full three fight narratives from leaders of vernacular peer groups in south-central Harlem who are widely recognized for their verbal skills and refer to these throughout the discussion to illustrate the structural features of narrative. The first is by Boot.[4]

1 (Something Calvin did that was really wild?)
Yeah.
a It was on a Sunday
b and we didn't have nothin' to do after I—after we came from church

4. Remarks in parentheses are by the interviewer. The initial questions asked by the interviewer are also given to help clarify the evaluative focus of the narrative.

c Then we ain't had nothin' to do.
d So I say, "Calvin, let's go get our—out our dirty clothes
on
and play in the dirt."
e And so Calvin say, "Let's have a rock—a rock war."
f And I say, "All right."
g So Calvin had a rock.
h And we as—you know, here go a wall
i and a far away here go a wall.
j Calvin th'ew a rock.
k I was lookin' and—uh—
l And Calvin th'ew a rock.
m It oh—it almost hit me.
n And so I looked down to get another rock;
o Say "Ssh!"
p An' it pass me.
q I say, "Calvin, I'm bust your head for that!"
r Calvin stuck his head out.
s I th'ew the rock
t An' the rock went up,
u I mean—went up—
v came down
w an' say [slap!]
x an' smacked him in the head
y an' his head busted.

The second narrative is by Larry H., the core member of the Jets whose logic was analyzed in chapter 5. This is one of three fight stories told by Larry which match in verbal skill his outstanding performance in argument, ritual insults, and other speech events of the black vernacular culture.[5]

2

a An' then, three weeks ago I had a fight with this
other dude outside.
b He got mad
'cause I wouldn't give him a cigarette.
c Ain't that a bitch?
(Oh yeah?)

5. See chapters 5 and 8 for other quotations from Larry.

d Yeah, you know, I was sittin' on the corner an' shit,
smokin' my cigarette, you know
e I was high, an' shit.
f He walked over to me,
g "Can I have a cigarette?"
h He was a little taller than me,
but not that much.
i I said, "I ain't got no more, man,"
j 'cause, you know, all I had was one left.
k An' I ain't gon' give up my last cigarette unless I
got some more.
l So I said, "I don't have no more, man."
m So he, you know, dug on the pack,
'cause the pack was in my pocket.
n So he said, "Eh man, I can't get a cigarette, man?
o I mean—I mean we supposed to be brothers, an'
shit."
p So I say, "Yeah, well, you know, man, all I got is
one, you dig it?"
q An' I won't give up my las' one to nobody.
r So you know, the dude, he looks at me,
s An' he—I 'on' know—
he jus' thought he gon' rough that
motherfucker up.
t He said, "I can't get a cigarette."
u I said, "Tha's what I said, my man".
v You know, so he said, "What you supposed to be
bad, an' shit?
w What, you think you *bad* an' shit?"
x So I said, "Look here, my man,
y I don't think I'm bad, you understand?
z But I mean, you know, if I had it,
you could git it
aa I like to see you with it, you dig it?
bb But the sad part about it,
cc You got to do without it.
dd That's all, my man."
ee So the dude, he 'on' to pushin' me, man.
(Oh he pushed you?)
ff An' why he do that?

gg *Everytime somebody fuck with me,*
why they do it?
hh I put that cigarette down,
ii An' boy, let me tell you,
I beat the shit outa that motherfucker.
jj I tried to *kill* 'im—over one cigarette!
kk I tried to *kill* 'im. Square business!
ll After I got through stompin' him in the face, man,
mm You know, all of a sudden I went crazy!
nn I jus' went crazy.
oo An' I jus' wouldn't stop hittin the motherfucker.
pp Dig it, I couldn't stop hittin' 'im, man,
till the teacher pulled me off o' him.
qq An' guess what? After all that I gave the dude the cigarette, after all that.
rr Ain't that a bitch?
(How come you gave 'im a cigarette?)
ss I 'on' know.
tt I jus' gave it to him.
uu An' he smoked it, too!

Among the young adults we interviewed in our preliminary exploration of south-central Harlem, John L. struck us immediately as a gifted story teller; the following is one of many narratives that have been highly regarded by many listeners.

3 (What was the most important fight that you remember, one that sticks in your mind . . .)
a Well, one (I think) was with a girl.
b Like I was a kid, you know,
c And she was the baddest girl, *the baddest girl in the neighborhood.*
d If you didn't bring her candy to school,
she would punch you in the mouth;
e And you had to kiss her
when she'd tell you.
f This girl was only about 12 years old, man,
g but she was a killer.
h She didn't take no junk;
i She whupped all her brothers.
j And I came to school one day
k and I didn't have no money.
l My ma wouldn't give me no money.
m And I played hookies one day,
n (She) put something on me.[6]
o I played hookies, man,
p so I said, you know, I'm not gonna play hookies no more
'cause I don't wanna get a whupping.
q So I go to school
r and this girl says, "Where's the candy?"
s I said, "I don't have it."
t She says, powww!
u So I says to myself, "There's gonna be times my mother won't give me money
because (we're) a poor family
v And I can't take this all, you know, every time she don't give me any money."
w So I say, "Well, I just gotta fight this girl.
x She gonna hafta whup me.
y I hope she don't whup me."
z And I hit the girl: powwww!
aa and I put something on it.
bb I win the fight.
cc That was one of the most important.

This discussion will first review briefly the general definition of narrative (section 1), its overall structure (section 2), types of evaluation and their embedding in narrative structure (section 3); we will then consider the basic syntax of narrative clauses and sources of syntactic complexity (section 4), and finally the use of complex syntactic devices in evaluation and developments with age (section 5). The main body of narratives cited will be from our work in south-central Harlem, but frequent references will be made to materials drawn from other urban and rural areas, from both white and black subjects.

1. Definition of Narrative

We define narrative as one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of

6. To *put something on someone* means to 'hit him hard'. See also aa, *I put something on it* 'I hit hard'.

events which (it is inferred) actually occurred. For example, a pre-adolescent narrative:

4
a This boy punched me
b and I punched him
c and the teacher came in
d and stopped the fight.

An adult narrative:

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.

In each case we have four independent clauses which match the order of the inferred events. It is important to note that other means of recapitulating these experiences are available which do not follow the same sequence; syntactic embedding can be used:

6
a A friend of mine came in just
in time to stop
this person who had a little too much
to drink
from attacking me.

Or else the past perfect can be used to reverse the order:

7
a The teacher stopped the fight.
b She had just come in.
c I had punched this boy.
d He had punched me.

Narrative, then, is only one way of recapitulating this past experience: the clauses are characteristically ordered in temporal sequence; if narrative clauses are reversed, the inferred temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation is altered: *I punched this boy/ and he punched me* instead of *This boy punched me/and I punched him.*

With this conception of narrative, we can define a *minimal narrative* as a sequence of two clauses which are *temporally ordered:* that is, a change in their order will result in a change in the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation. In alternative terminology, there is temporal juncture between the two clauses, and

a minimal narrative is defined as one containing a single temporal juncture.

The skeleton of a narrative then consists of a series of temporally ordered clauses which we may call *narrative clauses.* A narrative such as 4 or 5 consists entirely of narrative clauses. Here is a minimal narrative which contains only two:

8
a I know a boy named Harry.
b Another boy threw a bottle at him right in the head
c and he had to get seven stitches.

This narrative contains three clauses, but only two are narrative clauses. The first has no temporal juncture, and might be placed after *b* or after *c* without disturbing temporal order. It is equally true at the end and at the beginning that the narrator knows a boy named Harry. Clause *a* may be called a *free clause* since it is not confined by any temporal juncture.

Sometimes a number of clauses will seem to contain a narrative, but closer inspection shows that they contain no narrative juncture, and that they are not in fact narratives in this sense. For example, the following material was given in answer to the Danger of Death question by a member of the Inwood group:

9
(You ever been in a situation where you thought you were gonna get killed?)
Oh, Yeah, lotta time, man.
(Like, what happened?)
a Well, like we used to jump off the trestle
b and the trestle's about six-seven stories high.
c You know, we used to go swimmin' there . . .
d We used to jump offa there, you know.
e An' uh-like, wow! Ya get up there
f An' ya feel like
you are gonna die and shit, y'know.
g Couple a times I almost . . . I thought I was gonna drown, you know.

Because all of these clauses refer to general events which have occurred an indefinite number of times, it is not possible to falsify the situation by reversing clauses. Clauses *f* and *g* refer to ordered events on any one occasion, but since they are in the general present they refer to an indefinite number of occasions, so that it *is* the case

that some g followed some *f*. Clauses containing *used to*, *would*, and the *general present* are not narrative clauses and cannot support a narrative.

It is also the case that subordinate clauses do not serve as narrative clauses. Once a clause is subordinated to another, it is not possible to disturb the original semantic interpretation by reversing it. Thus John L.'s narrative:

3 d If you didn't bring her candy to school
she would punch you in the mouth.
e And you had to kiss her
when she'd tell you.

contains two sets of events, each of which is in fact temporally ordered: *first* you didn't bring the candy, *then* she would punch you; *first* the girl told you, and *then* you kissed her, not the other way around. But this is not signalled by the order of the clauses; a reversal does not disturb this interpretation:

d′ She would punch you in the mouth
if you didn't bring her candy to school,
e′ and when she'd tell you
you had to kiss her.

It is only independent clauses which can function as narrative clauses—and as we will see below, only particular kinds of independent clauses. In the representation of narratives in this section, we will list each clause on a separate line, but letter only the independent clauses. The internal syntax of the individual clauses will be the focus of sections 4 and 5; for the moment we will consider the clauses as a whole, classified as narrative and free.[7] The relative arrangement of these clauses is the aspect of narrative analysis considered in Labov and Waletzky 1967; we will deal with this only briefly before proceeding to the internal structure.

2. The Overall Structure of Narrative

Some narratives, like 4, contain only narrative clauses; they are complete in the sense that they have a beginning, a middle, and an end. But there are other elements of narrative structure found in

7. There are also *restricted clauses*, which can be displaced over a large part of the narrative without altering the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation, but not over the entire narrative.

more fully developed types. Briefly, a fully-formed narrative may show the following:

10
1. Abstract.
2. Orientation.
3. Complicating action.
4. Evaluation.
5. Result or resolution.
6. Coda.

Of course there are complex chainings and embeddings of these elements, but here we are dealing with the simpler forms. Complicating action has been characterized in section 1, and the *result* may be regarded for the moment as the termination of that series of events. We will consider briefly the nature and function of the abstract, orientation, coda, and evaluation.

2.1 *The Abstract*

It is not uncommon for narrators to begin with one or two clauses summarizing the whole story.

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

When this story is heard, it can be seen that the abstract does encapsulate the point of the story. In 12 there is a sequence of two such abstracts:

12 (Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?)
a My brother put a knife in my head.
(How'd that happen?)
b Like kids, you get into a fight
c and I twisted his arm up behind him.
d This was just a few days after my father died . . .

Here the speaker gives one abstract and follows it with another after the interviewer's question. Then without further prompting, he begins the narrative proper. The narrative might just as well have begun with the free clause *d*; *b* and *c* in this sense are not absolutely required, since they cover the same ground as the narrative as a

whole. Larry's narrative (2) is the third of a series of three, and there is no question just before the narrative itself, but there is well-formed abstract:

2 a An' then, three weeks ago I had a fight with this other dude outside.
b He got mad
'cause I wouldn't give him a cigarette.
c Ain't that a bitch?

Larry does not give the abstract in *place* of the story; he has no intention of stopping there, but goes on to give the full account.

What then is the function of the abstract? It is not an advertisement or a warning: the narrator does not wait for the listener to say, "I've heard about that," or "Don't tell me that now." If the abstract covers the same ground as the story, what does it add? We will consider this problem further in discussing the evaluation section below.

2.2 Orientation

At the outset, it is necessary to identify in some way the time, place, persons, and their activity or the situation. This can be done in the course of the first several narrative clauses, but more commonly there is an orientation section composed of free clauses. In Boot's narrative (1), clause *a* sets the time (*Sunday*); clause *b* the persons (*we*), the situation (*nothin' to do*) and further specification of the time (*after we came from church*); the first narrative clause follows. In Larry's narrative (2), some information is already available in the abstract (the time—*three weeks ago;* the place—*outside of school*); and the persons—*this other dude and Larry*). The orientation section then begins with a detailed picture of the situation—*Larry sittin' on the corner, high.*

Many of John L.'s narratives begin with an elaborate portrait of the main character—in this case, clauses *a–i* are all devoted to *the baddest girl in the neighborhood,* and the first narrative clause brings John L. and the girl face to face in the schoolyard.

The orientation section has some interesting syntactic properties; it is quite common to find a great many past progressive clauses in the orientation section—sketching the kind of thing that was going on before the first event of the narrative occurred or during the entire episode. But the most interesting thing about orientation is its *placement.* It is theoretically possible for all free orientation clauses to

be placed at the beginning of the narrative, but in practice, we find much of this material is placed at strategic points later on, for reasons to be examined below.

2.3 The Coda

There are also free clauses to be found at the ends of narratives; for example, John L.'s narrative ends:

cc That was one of the most important.

This clause forms the *coda.* It is one of the many options open to the narrator for signalling that the narrative is finished. We find many similar forms.

13 And that was that.
14 And that—that was it, you know.

Codas may also contain general observations or show the effects of the events on the narrator. At the end of one fight narrative, we have

15 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.

Some codas which strike us as particularly skillful are strangely disconnected from the main narrative. One New Jersey woman told a story about how, as a little girl, she thought she was drowning, until a man came along and stood her on her feet—the water was only four feet deep.

16 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.

These codas (15–16) have the property of bridging the gap between the moment of time at the end of the narrative proper and the present. They bring the narrator and the listener back to the point at which they entered the narrative. There are many ways of doing this: in 16 the other main actor is brought up to the present: in 15, the narrator. But there is a more general function of codas which subsumes both the examples of 15–16 and the simpler forms of 13–14. Codas close off the sequence of complicating actions and indicate

that none of the events that followed were important to the narrative. A chain of actions may be thought of as successive answers to the question "Then what happened?"; "And then what happened?" After a coda such as *That was that,* the question "Then what happened?" is properly answered, "Nothing; I just told you what happened." It is even more obvious after the more complex codas of 15 and 16; the time reference of the discourse has been reshifted to the present, so that "what happened then?" can only be interpreted as a question about the present; the answer is "Nothing; here I am." Thus the "disjunctive" codas of 15 and 16 forestall further questions about the narrative itself: the narrative events are pushed away and sealed off.[8]

2.4 *Evaluation*

Beginnings, middles, and ends of narratives have been analyzed in many accounts of folklore or narrative. But there is one important aspect of narrative which has not been discussed—perhaps the most important element in addition to the basic narrative clause. That is what we term the *evaluation* of the narrative: the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its raison d'être: why it was told, and what the narrator is getting at. There are many ways to tell the same story, to make very different points, or to make no point at all. Pointless stories are met (in English) with the withering rejoinder, "So what?" Every good narrator is continually warding off this question; when his narrative is over, it should be unthinkable for a bystander to say, "So what?" Instead, the appropriate remark would be, "He did?" or similar means of registering the reportable character of the events of the narrative.

8. The coda can thus be seen as one means of solving the problem of indicating the end of a "turn" at speaking. As Harvey Sacks has pointed out, a sentence is an optimal unit for the utterance, in that the listener's syntactic competence is employed in a double sense—to let him know when the sentence is complete and also when it is his turn to talk. Narratives require other means for the narrator to signal the fact that he is beginning a long series of sentences which will form one "turn" and to mark the end of that sequence. Many of the devices we have been discussing here are best understood in terms of how the speaker and the listener let each other know whose turn it is to talk. Traditional folk tales and fairy tales have fixed formulas which do this at the beginning and the end, but these are not available for personal narratives. It can also be said that a good coda provides more than a mechanical solution for the sequencing problem: it leaves the listener with a feeling of satisfaction and completeness that matters have been rounded off and accounted for.

The difference between evaluated and unevaluated narrative appears most clearly when we examine narrative of vicarious experience. In our first series of interviews with preadolescents in south-central Harlem, we asked for accounts of favorite television programs; the most popular at the time was "The Man from U.N.C.L.E."

17
a This kid—Napoleon got shot
b and he had to go on a mission.
c And so this kid, he went with Solo.
d So they went
e and this guy—they went through this window,
f and they caught him.
g And then he beat up them other people.
h And they went
i and then he said
that this old lady was his mother
j and then he—and at the end he say
that he was the guy's friend.

This is typical of many such narratives of vicarious experience that we collected. We begin in the middle of things without any orientation section; pronominal reference is many ways ambiguous and obscure throughout. But the meaningless and disoriented effect of 17 has deeper roots. None of the remarkable events that occur is *evaluated.* We may compare 17 with a narrative of personal experience told by Norris W., eleven years old:

18
a When I was in fourth grade—
no, it was in third grade—
This boy he stole my glove.
c He took my glove
d and said that his father found it downtown on the ground.
(And you fight him?)
e I told him that it was impossible for him to find downtown
'cause all those people were walking by
and just his father was the only one
that found it?
f So he got all (mad).

g Then I fought him.
h I knocked him all out in the street.
i So he say he give.
j and I kept on hitting him.
k Then he started crying
l and ran home to his father.
m And the father told him
n that he ain't find no glove.

This narrative is diametrically opposed to 17 in its degree of evaluation. Every line and almost every element of the syntax contributes to the point, and that point is self-aggrandizement. Each element of the narrative is designed to make Norris look good and "this boy" look bad. Norris knew that this boy stole his glove—had the nerve to just walk off with it and then make up a big story to claim that it was his. Norris didn't lose his cool and start swinging; first he destroyed this boy's fabrication by logic, so that everyone could see how phony the kid was. Then this boy lost *his* head and got mad and started fighting. Norris beat him up, and was so outraged at the phony way he had acted that he didn't stop when the kid surrendered—he "went crazy" and kept on hitting him. Then this punk started crying, and ran home to his father like a baby. Then his father—his *very own father* told him that his story wasn't true.

Norris's story follows the characteristic two-part structure of fight narratives in the BE vernacular; each part shows a different side of his ideal character. In the account of the verbal exchange that led up to the fight, Norris is cool, logical, good with his mouth, and strong in insisting on his own right. In the second part, dealing with the action, he appears as the most dangerous kind of fighter, who "just goes crazy" and "doesn't know what he did." On the other hand, his opponent is shown as dishonest, clumsy in argument, unable to control his temper, a punk, a lame, and a coward. Though Norris does not display the same degree of verbal skill that Larry shows in 2, there is an exact point-by-point match in the structure and evaluative features of the two narratives. No one listening to Norris's story within the framework of the vernacular value system will say "So what?" The narrative makes its point and effectively bars this question.

If we were to look for an evaluation section in 18, concentrating upon clause ordering as in Labov and Waletzky 1967, we would have

to point to *d–e*, in which the action is suspended while elaborate arguments are developed. This is indeed the major point of the argument, as shown again in the dramatic coda *m–n*. But it would be a mistake to limit the evaluation of 18 to *d–e*, since evaluative devices are distributed throughout the narrative. We must therefore modify the scheme of Labov and Waletzky 1967 by indicating E as the focus of waves of evaluation that penetrate the narrative as in Fig. 9.1.

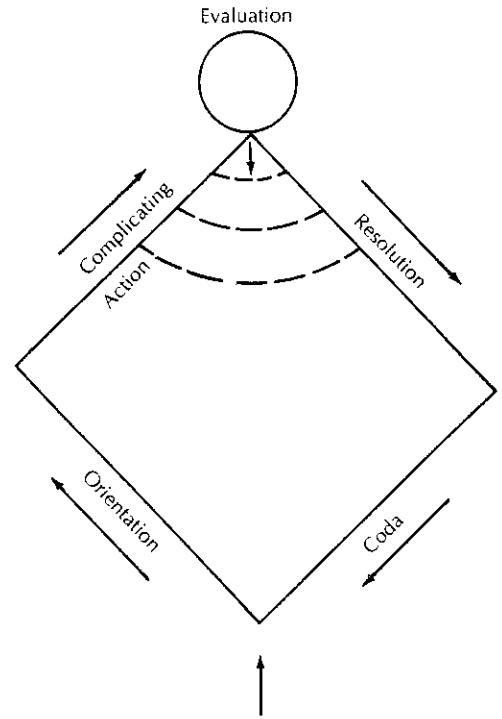


Fig. 9.1.

A complete narrative begins with an orientation, proceeds to the complicating action, is suspended at the focus of evaluation before the resolution, concludes with the resolution, and returns the listener to the present time with the coda. The evaluation of the narrative forms a secondary structure which is concentrated in the evaluation section but may be found in various forms throughout the narrative.

In the following sections we will see how that penetration is accomplished through the internal structure of narrative clauses as well as the ordering of those clauses.

We can also look at narrative as a series of answers to underlying questions:

a. Abstract: what was this about?
b. Orientation: who, when, what, where?
c. Complicating action: then what happened?
d. Evaluation: so what?
e. Result: what finally happened?

Only *c*, the complicating action, is essential if we are to recognize a narrative, as pointed out in section 1. The abstract, the orientation, the resolution, and the evaluation answer questions which relate to the function of effective narrative: the first three to clarify referential functions, the last to answer the functional question *d*—why the story was told in the first place. But the reference of the abstract is broader than the orientation and complicating action: it includes these and the evaluation so that the abstract not only states what the narrative is about, but why it was told. The coda is not given in answer to any of these five questions, and it is accordingly found less frequently than any other element of the narrative. The coda *puts off* a question—it signals that questions *c* and *d* are no longer relevant.

3. Types of Evaluation

There are a great many ways in which the point of a narrative can be conveyed—in which the speaker signals to the listener why he is telling it. To identify the evaluative portion of a narrative, it is necessary to know why this narrative—or any narrative—is felt to be tellable; in other words, why the events of the narrative are *reportable.*

Most of the narratives cited here concern matters that are always reportable: the danger of death or of physical injury. These matters occupy a high place on an unspoken permanent agenda. Whenever people are speaking, it is relevant to say "I just saw a man killed on the street." No one will answer such a remark with "So what?" If on the other hand someone says, "I skidded on the bridge and nearly went off," someone else can say, "So what? That happens to me every time I cross it." In other words, if the event becomes common enough, it is no longer a violation of an expected rule of

behavior, and it is not reportable. The narrators of most of these stories were under social pressure to show that the events involved were truly dangerous and unusual, or that someone else really broke the normal rules in an outrageous and reportable way. Evaluative devices say to us: this was terrifying, dangerous, weird, wild, crazy; or amusing, hilarious, wonderful; more generally, that it was strange, uncommon, or unusual—that is, worth reporting. It was not ordinary, plain, humdrum, everyday, or run-of-the mill.

In this section we will consider briefly some of the large-scale, external mechanisms of evaluation and then turn in section 4 to a more detailed examination of the syntactic devices within the clause which carry out this function.

3.1 External Evaluation

The narrator can stop the narrative, turn to the listener, and tell him what the point is. This is a common trait of middle-class narrators, who frequently interrupt the course of their narrative. For example, a long story told by secretary about a trip from Mexico City in which the plane almost didn't get over the mountains. She frequently interrupted the narrative with such comments as

19 gg and it was the strangest feeling
because you couldn't tell
if they were really gonna make it
hh if they didn't make it,
it was such a small little plane,
there was no chance for anybody.
. . .

xxx But it was really quite terrific
yyy it was only a half-hour's ride to Mexico City
. . .

aaaa But it was quite an experience.

Other narrators would be content to let the narrative itself convey this information to the listener—to give *them* the experience. But this speaker finds it impossible to remain within the bounds of the narrative. Such external evaluation is common in therapeutic interviews, where it may form the main substance of an hour's discussion. The narratives themselves may serve only as a framework for the evaluation.

There are a number of intermediate steps in providing external evaluation for a narrative which do not overtly break the flow of narrative clauses. The simplest is for the narrator to attribute an evaluative remark to himself at that moment. A black woman raised in North Carolina was telling about a near-accident on the roads on her way to a funeral:

20 j I just closed my eyes
k I said, "O my God, here it is!"

But feeling that the full reason for her fright would escape the listener, she steps out of the narrative to explain what was in her mind with this external evaluation:

l Well, 'cause you have heard of people
going to a funeral
and getting killed themselves
before they got there
m and that is the first thing
that came to my mind.

3.2 *Embedding of Evaluation*

The first step in embedding the evaluation into the narrative, and preserving dramatic continuity, is for the narrator to quote the sentiment as something occurring to him at the moment rather than addressing it to the listener outside of the narrative. The paradigmatic form "This is it!" appears in 20 and in our original danger-of-death question. In John L.'s narrative (3), the action is suspended by the evaluation of the reasons he has to fight the baddest girl in the neighborhood, expressed as what he said to himself at the time, in *u–y*. Of course it is unlikely that all of this internal dialogue took place between the time the girl said *powww!*[9] and the time that he hit her back, but listeners are willing to accept this dramatic fiction.

A second step towards embedding evaluation is for the narrator to quote himself as addressing someone else. Boot expresses his moral indignation at Calvin's wild behavior in 1 as

q I say, "Calvin, I'm bust your head for that!"

9. In BEV, objects that do not speak but that make noises are not said to *go* X but to *say* X. In Boot's narrative 1, the *rock say shhh!* and in 3 *the girl says powww!* whereas in white vernacular, people *go powww!* with their fists.

And Larry's most elaborate evaluation of the problem with the last cigarette is expressed as three rhymed couplets, supposedly addressed to the dude in *x–dd*. Larry's role of provocateur is brilliantly maintained by the use of an apology in the form of rhyme: since sincere apology is supposedly spontaneous, nothing could be less sincere than this elaborate ritual.

The next step inward is to introduce a third person who evaluates the antagonist's actions for the narrator. A 74-year-old man who had worked in carnivals all his life told a story about a man who threatened to kill him because he thought his wife had committed suicide on the narrator's account. He concludes:

21 z But, however—that settled it for the day.
aa But that night the manager, Lloyd Burrows, said, "You
better pack up and get out
because that son of a bitch never forgives anything
once he gets it in his head."
bb And I did.
cc I packed up and got out.
dd That was two.

The narrator might just as well have attributed this evaluative comment to himself, but it carries more dramatic force when it comes from a neutral observer. It should be emphasized that this technique is used only by older, highly skilled narrators from traditional working-class backgrounds. Middle-class speakers are less likely to embed their evaluative comments so deeply in the narrative and are in fact most likely to use external evaluation.

3.3 *Evaluative Action*

A further step in dramatizing the evaluation of a narrative is to tell what people *did* rather than what they said. A lower-class youth from the Lower East Side told what happened at maritime training school when a rope broke and left him hanging on the masthead:

22 I never prayed to God so fast and so hard in my life!
(What happened?)
Well, the boys came up
and they got me.
I couldn't touch nuttin'.
I was shakin' like a leaf.

In the story about the airplane flight from Mexico City (19), there are many striking examples of actions that reveal the tension of the actors. Though this speaker uses a great deal of external evaluation, she is also capable of maximal embedding of the evaluation:

z and we were sitting with our feet—
just sitting there
waiting for this thing to start.
people in the back saying prayers, 'n
everything . . .

nnn and when we saw that he was really over
ooo and then everybody heaved a sigh of relief
ppp and everybody came to
qqq and put away their prayer beads

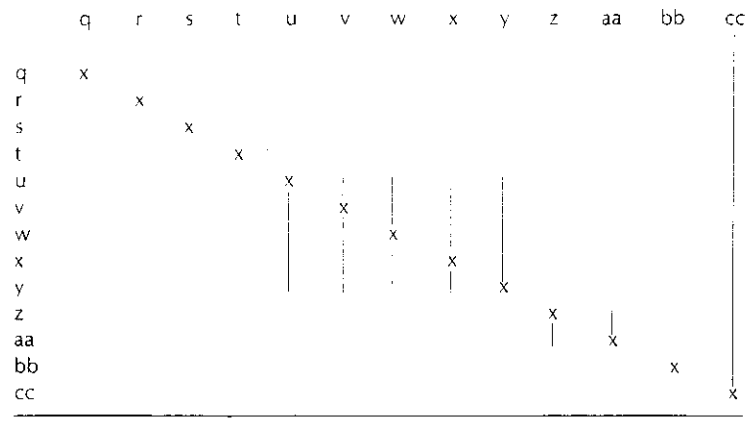
. . .

sss and when we realized
that we were really out of danger
then we found out
that we had been so tense
that our feet were up against the panel, you know
and we were holding on to everything.

3.4 *Evaluation by Suspension of the Action*

Most of the evaluative devices mentioned so far will have the effect of suspending the action of the narrative. The emotions that are expressed may have been instantaneous or simultaneous with the action at the time, but when they are expressed in separate sentences, the action stops. Stopping the action calls attention to that part of the narrative and indicates to the listener that this has some connection with the evaluative point. When this is done artfully, the listener's attention is also suspended, and the resolution comes with much greater force. Thus as we have noted in John L.'s narrative (3), there is a major suspension of the narrative in between the time the girl hit him and the time he decided to hit back. This suspension can be diagrammed as in Labov and Waletzky 1967 by indicating the displacement sets of all narrative clauses as in Table 9.1. The horizontal axis represents the occurrence of the narrative clauses in narrative sequence; the vertical axis the range of clauses which could

TABLE 9.1.
DISPLACEMENT SETS FOR JOHN L.'s NARRATIVE
ABOUT THE BADDEST GIRL IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD



have been placed before or after any given clause without changing the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation. The vertical lines show such *displacement sets* for each clause. This particular narrative begins with a long character sketch of the antagonist, consisting of free or restricted clauses, and then after the first narrative event introduces a flashback. We then return to the first narrative event with *q*: Table 9.1 shows the main sequence of the narrative *q–cc*. There are four narrative events in narrative clauses, each of which forms its own displacement set—q, r, s, t. We then have a displacement set of five evaluative clauses, *u–y*, all one narrative pseudoevent. We then pass to the resolution in *z–bb* and the coda *cc*. John L.'s narrative therefore fits the paradigm of Fig. 9.1, with a long orientation section *a–p*, complicating action *q–u*, evaluation *v–y*, resolution *z–bb*, and coda *cc*.

4. Departures from Basic Narrative Syntax

The narrative clause itself is one of the simplest grammatical patterns in connected speech. The surface structures are for the most part quite simple and related in a straightforward way to an equally simple deep structure. It will be useful to describe this structure as a series of eight elements, without hierarchical phrase structure; the

first of these eight is the sentence adverbial, the second the subject-noun phrase, the third through eighth the verb phrase. The linear display to be used here is not a statement of grammatical relations but only a device for calling attention to the appearance of more complex elements when they do occur.

1. Conjunctions, including temporals: *so, and, but, then.*
2. Simple subjects: pronouns, proper names, *this girl, my father.*
3. The underlying auxiliary is a simple past tense marker which is incorporated in the verb; no member of the auxiliary appears in the surface structure except some past progressive *was . . . ing* in the orientation section, and occasional quasimodals *start, begin, keep, used to, want.*[10]
4. Preterit verbs, with adverbial particles *up, over, down.* (These particles will occasionally be placed under 6 or 7 by transformations not shown.)
5. Complements of varying complexity: direct and indirect objects.
6. Manner or instrumental adverbials.
7. Locative adverbials. Narrative syntax is particularly rich in this area.
8. Temporal adverbials and comitative clauses.[11]

The first preadolescent narrative (4) cited as a paradigm of simplicity may also be seen as an example of this basic syntax:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
a		This boy		punched	me		
b	and	I		punched	him		
c	Then	the teacher		came		in	
d	and			stopped	the fight		

10. The quasimodals produce many problems which are not fully resolved. There are some very close to the "true" modals in meaning, like *needs to, ought to;* though they do not flip-flop, they are basically sentence modifiers of the *It ought to be that . . .* type, and they are plainly evaluative. The situation is less clear with *start* and *keep (on).* The inchoative *start* does not seem to function as an evaluative element, but *keep* is almost always so; "I kept on hitting him." But in this sense, *keep* is surely an intensifier, not a comparator.

11. It seems clear that there is a temporal slot before the subject, filled by *then* or *when* clauses. But when a temporal phrase such as *ever since then* is introduced at this point, it seems heavily marked.

Many long preadolescent fight narratives are confined almost entirely to this basic syntactic pattern. We get sequences of narrative clauses such as 23:

23

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
m		I		hit	him		in the jaw.
n	So	we		went			up on the sidewalk
o	and	we	start	fightin',			
p		I		knocked	him		down
q	and	we	was	rolled over			in the gutter.
r	And	he		took	some doodoo		
s				rubbed	it		in my face
t	and	I		took	some		
u	and			rubbed	it	all	in his mouth.
v		We	was	fightin'			
w	Then	a man		came			
x	and			grabbed	me		by my shirt
y	and			pulled	me		off
z	and	he	hadda	get up			
aa		I		thought *			
	*	he	had	kicked	me		in my back
bb	So	I		turned			around
cc	and			kicked	him		in the knee

Each of the columns is filled by a set of simple and regular structures (except the temporal slot 8 which is not represented in this extract). We have occasional right-hand embedding with *that* complements after verbs of saying or infinitive complements after verbs such as *try.* This is indicated here by asterisks; no rearrangement of the linear order is required.

The fundamental simplicity of narrative syntax is not confined to the stories of preadolescents. Large sections of narratives told by adults will show the same pattern. Narrative as a whole contrasts sharply with ordinary conversation, which shows a much more complex structure. The simple auxiliary structure of narratives is the most striking point. In ordinary conversation, we hear a rich

variety of modals, negatives, *have*'s and *be*'s before the verb, and a great many transformations and embeddings not found in these narratives. Given the existence of this simple organization of narrative clauses, we can ask: where, when, and with what effect do narratives depart from it? Since syntactic complexity is relatively rare in narrative, it must have a marked effect when it does occur. And in fact, we find that departures from the basic narrative syntax have a marked evaluative force. The perspective of the narrator is frequently expressed by relatively minor syntactic elements in the narrative clause. Investigations along these lines have led us to classify the evaluative elements in narrative under four major headings: *intensifiers, comparators, correlatives,* and *explications*. These four headings each include six to ten subtypes, depending on the syntactic devices used to carry out the functions involved.

4.1 *Intensifiers*

The major modifications of narrative clauses can best be understood in relation to the following basic scheme:

This indicates a linear series of events which are organized in the narrative in the same order as they occurred. An *intensifier* selects one of these events and strengthens or intensifies it:

There are many ways in which this intensification can be carried out; most of them involve minimal departures from basic narrative syntax. We will proceed from the simplest to the most complex from the syntactic point of view.

Gestures usually accompany a deictic *this* or *that* in the tape-recorded narrative. From a fight story of Speedy, the leader of the Cobras:

24
g He swung
h and I backed up
i and I do like *that*
. . .
q Then all the guys start hollerin',
"You bleedin'
you bleedin'
Speedy, you bleedin!"
r I say (sound) like that.

Sometimes the gesture is used instead of a sound, as in Boot's narrative (1): *and the rock say (slap!)*

Expressive phonology is superimposed upon other words of the clause. One of the most common modes is to lengthen vowels. In another of Larry's narratives he emphasizes:

25 And we were fightin' for a lo-o-ong ti-i-me, buddy.

Most punches are described with *powww!!* It is long and usually devoiced throughout. Such verbal devices are much more common than simple manual gestures and are usually conventional; but see Boot's way of describing the rock's passage: *it say shhhh!*

Quantifiers are the most common means of intensifying a clause, used by narrators of all age levels. The intensifier *all* is often inserted at a critical point in preadolescent narratives; from a fight narrative of one of the Aces:

26
g and then, when the man ran in the barber shop
he was all wounded
h he had cuts all over

In Norris's fight narrative (18) we have a similar use of *all*:

h I knocked him all out in the street.

Some operations with quantifiers are fairly mechanical. If two guys jump someone, that is bad; but if six guys jump him, that is an event of another degree of magnitude and calls for a different kind of action.

The device of *repetition* is relatively simple from the syntactic point of view but is effective in narrative in two senses: it intensifies a particular action, and it suspends the action. We have seen above many examples of such repetition. In Boot's story about the rock, he says "The rock went up—I mean went up." In the extract from Speedy's narrative given above, we have an exceptionally effective use of repetition: "You bleedin', you bleedin', Speedy, you bleedin'!" A narrative by a well-known story teller on Martha's Vineyard involves a bird dog who was sent over to bring back a duck that had been shot down. He came back twice without it, and he was sent again with strict instructions to "go over there and git that duck;" the narrator reports

27
Well sir, he went over there a third time.
And he didn't come back.
And he didn't come back.

In fight narratives there are many *ritual utterances* which do not contain any overt markers of emphasis—neither taboo words, nor quantifiers, nor expressive phonology. Yet a knowledge of the culture tells us that these apparently unexpressive utterances play an evaluative role: they are conventionally used in that position to mark and evaluate the situation. In an adult narrative from the Harlem series, a black man raised in New York City told about a fight with "a great big guy in the back alley."

28
f And I went to pieces inside, you know?
Before I know it
g I picked me up a little rock,
h hauled off,
i and landed me a David and Goliath.
j I hit him up with that rock.
k An' he grabbed his head
l An' I grabbed *him*,
m told him "Come on right back up the back stairs."
n And there it was.

Clause *n* is a ritual utterance; it can be read as 'and then the real action started' or 'and the shit was on.'

Intensifiers as a whole do not complicate the basic narrative syntax. But the other three types of internal evaluation are sources of syntactic complexity.

4.2 Comparators

The simplicity of narrative syntax should not be surprising if we take the opposite point of view: why *should* narratives require syntactic complexity? Why should the auxiliary contain anything but simple preterits and quasimodals? If the task of the narrator is to tell what happened, these will serve very well. What use has he for questions, or what reason does he have to speak of the future, since he is dealing with past events? And why should the auxiliary contain negatives? What reason would the narrator have for telling us that something did not happen, since he is in the business of telling us what did happen?

We can approach this problem by re-examining the negative. The use of negatives in accounts of past events is not at all obvious, since negation is not something that happens: rather it expresses the defeat

of an expectation that something would happen. Negative sentences draw upon a cognitive background considerably richer than the set of events which were observed. They provide a way of evaluating events by placing them against the background of other events which might have happened, but which did not. Comparators, including negatives, compare the events which did occur to those which did not occur. In terms of the narrative scheme:

comparators: → → → - - - → →

As we look down the auxiliary column at the various instances of negatives, futures, and modals, it can be seen that they typically occur at the point of evaluation, either in co-occurrence with other evaluative elements or carrying out this function alone.

Instead of considering each of these possibilities separately, let us examine the auxiliaries of some of the narratives already studied in the light of this proposed function of modals, futures, and negatives.

Boot's narrative about the rock war has a few negatives in the orientation, which plainly have a referential function—*we ain't had nothin' to do*, along with the planning imperatives of *Let's go*. Then there is a past progressive *I was lookin'* in the first evaluation section where Boot suspends the narrative for a moment to emphasize what a close call it was. All the rest of the verbs are preterits[12] except one future *I'm bust*. In speaking of an event which has not yet occurred, Boot explicitly marks it as an evaluation of Calvin's wild act: it is for *that* that the head busting will (and eventually did) take place.

The adolescent fight narrative of Larry is much richer in auxiliary structure. The abstract contains a negative question at the outset that is clearly evaluative and is repeated in the coda: *Ain't that a bitch?* It is in fact an abstract of the evaluative component of the narrative. The orientation section contains *d–e* which are progressives and copulas, as we would expect. We then have a series of modals and negatives, which are best shown by isolating the auxiliary column 2 for the narrative clauses alone and neglecting verbs of saying and the tense marker:

12. *Say* cannot be considered an historical present form, since it is regularly used for the past in the black English vernacular when no other present tense irregular forms occur.

		Aux	
f	He		walked over to me.
g	"I	can	have a cigarette?"
h	He		was a little taller than me . . .
i	"I	ain't	got no more, man . . .
j	I	ain't gon'	give up my last cigarette . . .
k	"I	don't	have no more."
l	He		dug on the pack.
m	"I	can't	get a cigarette?
	We	supposed to	be brothers . . ."

This series contains a question with a modal, several negatives, a negative future, a negative with a modal, and the quasimodal *supposed to*. We can turn from this highly evaluated narrative to the narrative of vicarious experience that we cited as 17.

		Aux	
a	Napoleon		got shot
b	he	had to	go on a mission
c	this kid		went with Solo.
d	they		went
e	they		went through
f	they		caught him.
g	he		beat up them other people
h	they		went
i	he		said
j	this old lady		was his mother
k	he		say
l	he		was the guy's friend.

The auxiliary column is blank except for a single *had to* in what might pass for the orientation of this narrative. Again, let us contrast this absence of comparators with the highly evaluated narrative of John L. The initial characterization of the baddest girl in the neighborhood is given in terms of things that *would* happen if other things didn't happen.

			Aux	
a	Well	one		was with a girl.
b	Like	I		was a kid . . .
c	And	she		was the baddest girl in the neighborhood . . .

			Aux	
d	If	you	didn't	bring her candy to school*
		she	would	punch you in the mouth
e	And	you	had to	kiss her*
	*when	she	would	tell you.
f		This girl		was only 12 years old
g	but	she	didn't	take no junk.

In rapid succession we have three modals and two negatives in the auxiliary column. The flashback which follows explains the reason why John L. came to school with no money; it is also stated in terms of what was not the case and what he did not want to happen. We then have the narrative proper which was examined in Table 9.1:

		Aux	
q	I		go to school
r	This girl		says*
	*"Where		's the candy?"
s	I		said*
	*"I	don't	have any."
t	She		says: powww!

There are no comparators in the main verbs of the four narrative clauses, but the quotation in s has a negative. How should such embedded comparators be analyzed? In the light of our general discussion of the embedding of evaluation, we must accept it as evaluative in the same sense as those in *a–i*. The speakers are in fact evaluating the situation: the girl who does not see the candy makes a demand in the form of a request for information about some unseen state of affairs, presupposing the existence of the candy; the boy denies her expectation. They are dealing with a level of expected and unrealized events which go beyond basic narrative sequence. For this sequence of four narrative clauses we have one negative and one intensifier. Let us now examine the evaluation section that follows:

			Aux	
u	So	I		says to myself,*
		*"There	's gonna	be times*
		*my mother	won't	give me money*

			Aux	
	* because	we		're a poor family
v	and	I	can't	take this all, every time*
		she	don't	give me any money."
w	So	I		say,*
	* Well,	I	just gotta	fight this girl.
x		She	gonna hafta	whup me.
y		I		hope*
		* she	don't	whup me."

This set of six clauses are bound together as the remembered evaluation of the situation by the narrator. They contain four futures, four negatives, and three modals—a total of eleven comparators—as well as the intensifier *this all.*[13] Clearly the evaluation section contains a much higher concentration of these evaluative devices. The resolution returns to basic syntax.

z	I hit the girl: powww!
aa	I put something on it.
bb	I win the fight.

Reviewing these three narratives, we have seen some evidence that negatives, futures, and modals are concentrated in the evaluative sections of the narrative. It also seems that when such elements occur, they have an evaluative function as comparators. We can now consider other types of comparators, of a higher degree of syntactic complexity.

The quoted question in r of John L.'s narrative suggests that *questions* are also comparators. When the girl asks "Where's the candy?" she is asking about an unseen state of affairs, presupposing the existence of the candy; but on a higher level, she is making a request for action, and in light of previous experience, it is heard as a threat: *hand it over, or . . .* If we consider the compelling character of all questions (*mands* in Skinner's terminology), it is clear that all requests, even the most mitigated, are to be heard against an unrealized

13. There is also a complex embedding here which has evaluative force. Though we do not count single right branchings as evaluative, a structure such as that in clause *u* is counted as a correlative below.

possibility of negative consequences if they are not answered. In Larry's narrative there are many examples of such implied threats. Most of these are embedded in the speech of the actors. Questions that are more openly evaluative are posed directly to the listener. These brief considerations show us that the evaluative force of questions cannot be assigned on the basis of their superficial interrogative form. A deeper study would require the analysis of each quoted speech act in terms of the hierarchical series of actions being performed: e.g. *request for information* → *request for action* → *challenge* → *display*. Overt questions that are not embedded in the dramatic action, but asked directly of the listener, have a direct evaluative function. Thus Larry, assuming a false innocence in his role of provocateur, addresses the listener:

ff An' why he do that?
gg *Everytime somebody fuck with me,*
Why they do it?

These questions ask for an evaluation of the dude's actions. He in turn asks for an evaluation of Larry's action when he says, "What you supposed to be, *bad* an' shit?" And Larry in turn asks for an evaluation from the listener at the end:

qq An' guess what?
After all that, I gave the dude the cigarette,
after all that.
Ain't that a bitch?

The *imperative* is also a comparator, since the force of the command in narrative is frequently: 'you do this or else . . .' A Lower East Side taxi driver told a long narrative about a passenger that he was sure wanted to hold up the cab and kept giving him directions to out-of-the-way places. Luck was with him, though, and he managed to get out of it. At the end:

29	mm	and	I		said,*
			* "I	can't	run around with you all night.
	nn	Now		let's	put an end to this.
	oo	This			is the fare,
	pp		You		go your way
	qq	and	I	'll	go mine."
	rr	so	I		got out of it that way.

The close connection between the imperative and the future appears in *nn*, *pp*, and *rr*; both of them involve unrealized events that are weighed in the balance.

The suggestion so far is that negatives, futures, modals, questions, and imperatives are all comparators and all involve comparison. The paradigmatic comparison is of course the *comparative* itself in its various forms: as the grammatical comparative and superlative in clauses with *as*, in prepositional phrases with *like*, in metaphors and similes. Among the various syntactic forms that give younger speakers trouble, the comparative is foremost, and in our "strange syntax" file we have collected a great many odd problems with complex comparative constructions. Of the various comparators, it is the comparative itself which reaches the highest level of syntactic complexity.

There are no comparatives in Boot's rock war narrative. In 2, Larry uses a fairly complex comparative which has great weight in establishing the meaning of everything that follows:

h He was a little taller than me, but not that much.

The comparative is used by John L. at the same point in 3 to evaluate the meaning of the following events by characterizing the opponent—in this case in the superlative form:

c And she was the baddest girl, *the baddest girl* in the neighborhood.

John L. also uses the superlative in his final evaluation:

ee That was one of the most important.

As we examine the narratives of older, highly skilled narrators, we find a proliferation of comparisons which are quite beyond the normal capacity of an adolescent. In the dog story cited above (27), the following evaluation is made when the dog returned without the duck:

27 And that was unusual.
He'd track a duck same as a hound would take a rabbit track.

To show how exasperated he was with the dog;

I never come nearer bootin' a dog in my life.

And at the end, he finds that the duck in question wasn't a wild duck at all—it was a tame decoy that had broken loose and the dog was holding him down with his paw.

By gorry sir, that that dog knew more than I did.
If I had booted that dog, I'd a felt some bad.

One of the most dramatic danger-of-death stories was told by a retired postman on the Lower East Side: his brother had stabbed him in the head with a knife. He concludes:

30 And the doctor just says, "Just about this much more," he says, "and you'd a been dead."

Comparators then include negatives, futures, modals, quasimodals, questions, imperatives, *or*-clauses, superlatives, and comparatives, more or less in increasing order of syntactic complexity.

4.3 *Correlatives*

A comparator moves away from the line of narrative events to consider unrealized possibilities and compare them with the events that did occur; correlatives bring together two events that actually occurred so that they are conjoined in a single independent clause.

Correlatives: 

This operation requires complex syntax; it quickly goes beyond the syntactic range of the younger narrators. In order of their increasing syntactic complexity, we can list:

1. *Progressives* in *be . . . ing* which are usually used in narratives to indicate that one event is occurring simultaneously with another, but also may indicate extended or continued action. Most of these occur in orientation sections; some can actually form narrative clauses.[14] But *was . . . ing* clauses also are found suspending the action in an evaluative section, as we have seen in Boot's narrative.

2. *Appended participles:* One or more verbs in *-ing* are aligned, with tense marker and *be* deleted; the action described is heard as occurring simultaneously with the action of the main verb of the

14. The past progressive *was . . . ing* cannot be taken as an addition to basic narrative syntax in many cases, since it seems to serve as a narrative clause. While *was . . . ing* is usually simultaneous with other events, it is occasionally only extended, and can act as the head of a narrative clause. For example: 'And [we] got back—it was a tent show—she was laying on a cot with an ice bag on her head.'

sentence, which itself may be a progressive. Such doubled progressives are frequently used in orientation sections; in Larry's narrative we find:

d I was sittin' on the corner an'shit,
smokin' my cigarette, you know.

Here the progressives characterize the setting for the narrative as a whole. But more often such devices are used to highlight and evaluate the event of a particular narrative clause. From another narrative of Larry:

31

e	So	the dude		got smart.	
		I		know*	
	*	he		got smart	
	'cause	I	was	dancin'	with her,
					you know,
	'cause	I	was	dancin'	with her,
				talkin'	to her, an'
					shit,
				whisperin'	in her ear,
					an' shit,
				tongue kissin'	with her,
					an' shit.

Such multiple participles serve to suspend the action in an evaluative section; they bring in a wider range of simultaneous events while the listener waits for the other shoe to fall, as in this example from the evaluation section of the airplane flight (19):

z	and we	were sitting	with our feet—
		just sitting there,	
		waiting	for this thing to
			start
	people in		
	the back	saying	prayers, 'n'
			everything.

Another type of correlative is the *double appositive*, which is relatively rare; it is used to heighten or deepen the effect of a particular description. From a preadolescent narrative:

32
f and I knocked 'im down
g and one of them fought for the Boys' Club
h I beat him.
i and then, they gave him *a knife, a long one, a dagger,*
j and I fought,
k I fought him with that . . .

We find that *double attributives* are as rare as double appositives. One would think that such noun phrases as *big red house* and *cold wet day* would occur often enough but the fact of the matter is that they are uncommon in colloquial style. In subject position, even a single attributive is uncommon (other than demonstratives, articles, and possessives), as inspection of the narratives quoted here will show. Some adults use such complex noun phrases more than others; one working-class man from the Harlem adult sample introduced his narrative with this clause:

33
a You see, a great big guy in the back alley,
He tried to make them push him on the swing
by him pestering them
or trying to take advantage of them.

This double attributive is associated with the very complex syntax that follows. Some practised, adult narrators naturally run to such combinations and use other correlatives such as *left-hand participles*. For example, we find the following complex structure in narrative 29 cited above:

j and suddenly somebody is giving me a destination
k I look in the back
l There's *an unsavory-looking passenger* in the
back of the cab
who had apparently gotten into the cab
while it was parked
and decided he's gonna wait for the driver.

The phrase *an unsavory-looking passenger in the back of the cab* might be paraphrased as several narrative clauses: I looked into the back of the cab/I saw this character/I didn't care for the way he looked. The left-hand participle then does a great deal of work in characterizing the antagonist in this narrative—more concisely perhaps, than the elaborate descriptions given by John L. in 3. It is not

accidental that some of the most complex syntax is used in describing the principal antagonist, who is the chief justification for the claim that the narrative is reportable. Note that one reason for this complex form is that it is coupled with three other propositions about the antagonist so that it is quite helpful to get this descriptive material out of the way in attributive, left-hand position.

The emphasis on *left-hand* vs. *right-hand* is motivated by the fact that the former is far more complex for speaker and listener alike. Absolute right-hand embedding is a simple matter for most children, as we see in "The House that Jack built." It is one thing to add a right-hand participle to qualify an action, as in this example from an adult narrative:

34 But some reason every day after school
this kid was come
and slap me side o 'my head,
impressin' this girl.

It is another to build up participles as attributives before a noun, keeping the syntactic structure open while the equivalent of an entire sentence intervenes between other modifiers and the head:

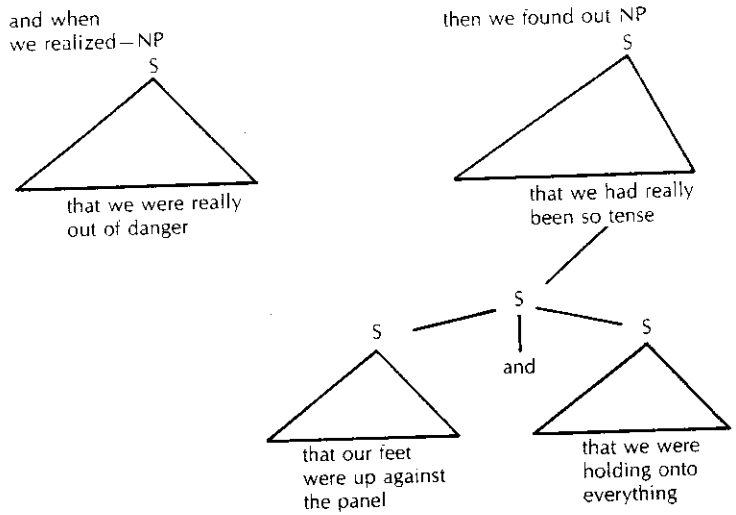
35 She was a big, burly-looking, dark type sort of girl, a real, geechy-lookin' girl

This complex construction with two left-hand participles and multiple attributives is used to enrich and deepen the characterization of the chief antagonist in a fight story.

4.4 *Explicatives*

Some of the evaluation and explication of a narrative is necessarily done in separate clauses, appended to the main narrative clause or to an explicit evaluative clause. These may be *qualifications* connected with such conjunctions as *while, though;* or *causal,* introduced by *since* or *because*. We further distinguish three types of attachment to the main clause: simple, complex, and compound. By *simple,* we mean that there is only one clause; by *complex,* that a clause is embedded in a clause which is in turn embedded in the main clause; and by *compound,* that two clauses are embedded at the same point in the matrix clause. We do not count here embedding on verbs of saying and knowing, since the use of absolute right-hand embedding with verbs of this type is universal and automatic among

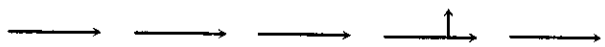
all speakers. The diagram below shows one such embedding on *realize* followed by one on *found out* and two deeper explications that are both compound and complex.



Note that these two last *that* clauses are embedded on the comparative mode so. At first glance, it would seem that such embedded finite clauses differ only technically from the nominalizations and participles classified as correlatives. In the correlatives, we have additional transformations which delete the tense markers and combine this material into single clauses, while in the explicatives, complete clauses are added. This is usually treated as a trivial difference; for example, the three complementizers *for-to, possessive + -ing,* and *that* are often considered as a set—three equivalent ways of attaching embedded sentences to the matrix sentence. But for our purposes there is a crucial difference in the deletion of the tense marker after *for-to* and *ing.*[15] No separate time distinction can be made with infinitives and gerunds; they necessarily are considered coextensive with the main verb as far as temporal sequence is concerned. That is not the case with the finite clauses which have *that* complementizers. Here we can explain an event by referring to something

15. For other reasons to discriminate these complementizers, see Kiparsky and Kiparsky 1970 and chapter 4. The dimension which distinguished these three complementizers is essentially three degrees of [FACT].

that happened long before or long after. This is the case with 19, where the tenses of the explicative clauses are overtly realized and refer to points much earlier in the narrative. Thus explicatives do not necessarily serve the evaluative function of bringing several actions together. The action of the narrative is suspended, but the attention of the listener is not maintained at that point in time—it may be transferred backward or forward, or into a realm of abstract speculation wholly unrelated to the narrative. We may represent explicatives in the narrative scheme as

Explicatives: 

The explication of the various complications inherent in the narrative situation may serve an evaluative function—e.g., to explain why a person was frightened or how big someone was. But explication may itself be required only to describe actions and events that are not entirely familiar to the listener. We would then expect that the distribution of explications would be very different from that of the other sources of syntactic complexity, and in the next section it will appear that that is the case.

In this discussion of the sources of syntactic complexity in narrative, we have set out a classification of the various ways in which the minimal syntactic pattern is developed. There are many other technical devices used in narrative which might have been discussed here: *deletions*, which include claims to ignorance; the use of the *passive*, and *ellipsis*; *reorderings*, which include monologues, flashbacks, and displacement of orientation. There are also dysfunctional aspects of narrations: confusion of persons, anaphora and temporal relations. This discussion has been limited to those evaluative devices which involve the internal structure and syntactic complexity of narrative units.

Some of the syntactic features discussed here occur in clauses which have a purely referential function: they clarify for the listener the simple factual circumstances surrounding the narrative. But most occurrences of these features are closely linked to the evaluation of the narrative: they intensify certain narrative events that are most relevant to the main point; they compare the events that did occur to those which might have but did not occur; they correlate the linear dimension of the narration by superimposing one event upon another; and they explicate the point of the narrative in so many words. The examples we have cited above illustrate, but do not prove, this association between syntactic complexity and evaluation. In the next

section, we will present certain quantitative data which will make this association more evident and show the growth of syntactic complexity with age.

5. Development of Evaluative Syntax with Age

It is often said that a child coming to school at the age of five has already learned most of the grammar of his language. This proposition may be a healthy corrective to those who argue that they are teaching the child to speak the English language in the first grade, but it is easy to overstate. In the course of our study of narrative structure and syntactic complexity, we made a comparison of stories told by black preadolescents (age 10–12), adolescents (age 13–16), and adults from the Harlem sample in order to see what development actually takes place in the use of the evaluative devices outlined above. It is clear that every child is in possession of the basic narrative syntax: it is also true that children know how to use gestures, quantifiers, repetition, negatives, futures, modals, and *because* clauses. The question is whether they know how and when to use these devices for specific purposes in the course of telling a story.

Ten fight narratives were chosen for each group: the basic pattern emerges with great clarity from this small set. Table 9.2 shows the use of the four major types of evaluational devices for the three age groups. The first column shows the raw totals; the second column the totals corrected for the average length of the narrative measured as the number of independent clauses. This average length is longest for the adults (Ad)—27.4 clauses—slightly less for adolescents (TA), but much shorter for preadolescents (PA).

TABLE 9.2.
TOTAL USE OF EVALUATIVE CATEGORIES IN NARRATIVE BY AGE

	PA		TA		Ad	
	Tot	*Tot/L*	*Tot*	*Tot/L*	*Tot*	*Tot/L*
Intensifiers	12	1.23	51	2.05	88	3.20
Comparators	12	1.23	71	2.85	113	4.10
Correlatives	1	.12	12	.48	23	.84
Explicatives	1	.12	12	.48	20	.73
L:	9.6		24.8		27.4	

L = Average number of independent clauses.

The figures for all four evaluative categories show a regular and marked increase from preadolescents to teenagers and another large increase from adolescents to adults. The intensifiers show the shallowest slope, roughly 1 to 2 to 3; the comparators are somewhat steeper in their rate of growth; and the correlatives and explicatives show the sharpest rate of all, about 1 to 4 to 8. Looking at this table, we can assert that the preadolescents still have a great deal of language learning ahead of them. The ability to use negatives, futures, and modals in ordinary conversation is not equivalent to the ability to use them in narrative.

One can ask whether this is a syntactic ability, a question of verbal skill on a broader sense, or a growth of cognitive ability. In any case there is a major aspect of development in narrative itself which takes place long after the basic syntax of the language is learned, and it is quite possible that some of the more complex comparators and correlatives are outside of the linguistic capacities of the preadolescents.

Table 9.3 shows the use of the various subtypes of evaluational

TABLE 9.3.
NUMBER OF NARRATORS USING
EVALUATIVE DEVICES AT LEAST ONCE

Intensifiers	*PA*	*TA*	*Ad*	*Comparators*	*PA*	*TA*	*Ad*
Gestures	0	1	1	Imperatives	1	3	6
Phonology	0	5	3	Questions	1	4	4
Quantifiers	4	6	10	Negatives	4	7	10
Lexical items	0	5	7	Futures	0	1	2
Foregrounding	1	1	2	Modals	2	4	7
Repetitions	0	5	3	Quasimodals	2	6	7
Ritual	3	1	5	Or-clauses	0	3	2
WH-exclamations	1	3	1	Comparatives	1	6	6
Total	9	27	32	Total	11	34	44
Correlatives				*Explicatives*			
Be . . . ing	0	3	0	Simple: qual.	0	3	3
Double . . . *-ing*	0	1	0	Simple: caus.	1	3	5
Double appositive	1	1	2	Complex: qual.	0	0	2
Double attrib've	0	1	2	Complex: caus.	0	1	1
Participle: rt.	0	1	5	Compound: qual.	0	0	0
left	0	1	1	Compound: caus.	0	1	2
Nominalizations	0	1	2	Total	1	8	13
Total	1	9	13				

devices as the number of narrators who used each device at least once. The numbers range from 1 to 10: it appears that the only 100 percent categories are the use of negatives and quantifiers by adults.

As far as intensifiers are concerned, we see that the preadolescents are most apt to use quantifiers; the adolescents show a much richer use of expressive phonology and marked lexical items. Among the comparators, the most striking correlation with age is in the comparative itself. The correlatives as a whole are practically outside of the range of the preadolescents sampled here: the only item used with any degree of frequency by any group is the right-hand participle used by adults. Explicatives show the same distribution by age; the most frequent item is the simple causative clause.

We compared these narratives of black speakers from Harlem with our white working-class control group, Inwood. Six fight narratives told by the Inwood adolescents show the following use of evaluators:

	Total	*Tot/L*
Intensifiers	29	1.26
Comparators	23	1.00
Correlatives	4	.16
Explications	0	.00
L = 23.3		

The values for this small group of white teenagers are comparable to those of the black preadolescents, rather than to the black adolescents, though the length of the narratives is typical of this age. The profile for the four types of evaluators is approximately the same as for the Harlem preadolescents. It is perhaps too much to assert from this small study that the black speakers are more advanced in narrative skills than the Inwood group, but they are certainly not behind or backward in this respect. On the contrary, there is evidence here to support the proposition we advanced earlier that the highest concentration of verbal skills is to be found in the black English vernacular culture.

The late development in the use of evaluative syntax appears to be general to all subcultures, though we have not yet investigated systematically age levels in white working-class and middle-class groups. It is surprising that this use of complex syntax in narrative should fall so far behind competence in ordinary conversation. The

contrast appears most sharply with comparators; there is no question that preadolescents are thoroughly skilled in the use of other devices such as modals, questions, or futures. But they do not call upon these elements as freely as adults in presenting their own experience. The skilled adult complicates his representation of experience, moving back and forth from real to imaginary events. Children complain, question, deny, and worry, but adults are more aware of the significance of this activity and more likely to talk about it.

In reporting their own experience, adults have developed the ability to evaluate their own behavior with more complex linguistic devices. In middle-class speakers, this process often gets out of hand, and many narrators can lose the point of their story entirely in an excess of external evaluation and syntactic elaboration. But when these devices are concentrated and embedded deeply in the dramatic action, they can succeed in making the point. Many of the narratives cited here rise to a very high level of competence; when they are quoted in the exact words of the speaker, they will command the total attention of an audience in a remarkable way, creating a deep and attentive silence that is never found in academic or political discussion. The reaction of listeners to these narratives seems to demonstrate that the most highly evaluated form of language is that which translates our personal experience into dramatic form. The vernacular used by working-class speakers seems to have a distinct advantage over more educated styles. We have not been comparing black and white vernaculars; but in this respect, it should be clear that the black English vernacular is the vehicle of communication used by some of the most talented and effective speakers of the English language.

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