

# DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE SPOKEN AND WRITTEN VERSIONS OF A SHORT NARRATIVE

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- **ABSTRACT:** This article begins by looking at the concepts of text, discourse, genre, speech event and the context of situation. Next the oral and the written narratives are presented, and examined from an ethnographic perspective and from the perspective of Labov's model of narrative analysis. Following this, differences between spoken and written discourse are discussed. The article concludes with implications for the language classroom.
- **KEY-WORDS:** Anecdote, Oral Narrative, Discourse Analysis.

## 1 Text and discourse

Many distinctions between text and discourse have been proposed. Some European linguists have used "text" to refer to both speech and writing, while other authors have restricted themselves to the term "discourse." Beaugrande & Dressler (1981, p.3), for example, use "text," which they define as a "communicative occurrence" to cover both speech and writing, and present data ranging from newspaper articles over to recorded conversations. For Criper and Widdowson (1975, p.200) "text" is a series of connected sentences, the study of these connections being the object of text analysis; "discourse" in contrast, refers to "*the relations between sentences and social meanings and actions,*" discourse analysis being the study of these relations.

Enkvist (1987) points out that a distinction has often been made between text linguistics and discourse analysis, the former usually referring to the study of cohesion and coherence within a text, and the latter to the study of interactional and

situational contexts. Coulthard (1985) draws a distinction between "written text" and "spoken discourse," which he considers to be rule-governed behavior above the sentence level, one of the major aims of discourse analysis being to discover the rules of coherent speech and to describe the conversational structures that they generate. Another aim proposed by Coulthard, one which is even more relevant to the present work, is to explore the relationship between discourse and its producer and receiver.

For Brown & Yule (1983) while "discourse analysis" involves syntax and semantics, it is primarily the study of language in use or pragmatics. The discourse analyst studies a corpus of data called "text," which they define as "*the verbal record of a communicative act*" (p.6), thus covering both oral and written texts.

For this study, I shall consider "text" to be a series of connected sentences, spoken or written, which are the linguistic representation of a communicative act or event. "Discourse," in contrast, will be taken to be the "text" as the entire communicative event involving all of the elements of the context of situation which pertain to its production and comprehension. Since I will be looking at the language of an oral narrative in terms of its social meaning within a communicative event, my view of "text" will be quite closely connected to "discourse."

## 2 Genre, speech event, and the context of situation

The organization of speech at the sentence level is much more fully developed in linguistic theory than is the organization at the discourse level. Classifying sentences into different types based on their syntactic organization is more straightforward than classifying discourse into *genres* such as sermons, debates, fairy tales, anecdotes, etc. Some genres have a

readily recognizable organization such as style and structure, the knowledge of which forms a *schema*, which in turn guides our comprehension of the producer's message (Rumelhart, 1975; Adams & Collins, 1979). When we hear the opening of a fable, for example, our schema for fables is activated, and as a consequence we know at least in general terms what to expect. We know, for instance, that fables use animals to depict the follies of short-sighted people, and that there is usually a moral to the story presented at the end.

Hymes (apud Coulthard, 1985) stresses the need to distinguish between the genre itself, which has its own internal structure and organization, versus the "doing" or "performing" of it, in Hymes' terminology the *speech event*. I shall try to demonstrate later on the significance of the fact that speech events take place in a *context of situation*, combining verbal and nonverbal activities.

The idea that speech must be studied within the context of situation has only gradually emerged in linguistic theory. It entered through the influence of J. R. Firth (1957/1973) who was in turn influenced by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1923, 1935). Firth, a key linguist in the British Systemic-functional school, argued that language should be studied in its "context of situation... as part of the social process [the objective being] to state facts systematically and especially to make statements of meaning" (p.15-6). In contrast, American linguists, first under Bloomfield and later under Chomsky, stopped at the sentence level and focused their attention on linguistic forms. But in the 1970's, mainstream linguistics began to adopt a more functionalist approach and reestablished the connection with Firthian linguistics. Again, a main source of inspiration was anthropology, this time in the work of Dell Hymes who, criticizing Chomsky's theory of competence as being too narrow, proposed that the object of linguistic study should be *communicative competence*, the production of

utterances that are situationally appropriate and not just grammatically correct (Hymes, 1972a). Hymes (1972b) proposed a new linguistic science, *the ethnography of speaking*, a sociolinguistic approach which would focus on the participants and the social context and not merely on the formal properties of utterances.

The speech event I shall examine is the telling of an anecdote which can be defined as “a usually short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident” (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1993). For a more detailed characterization, I shall apply (a) an ethnographic approach (section 4) and (b) Labov's model (sections 5 and 6).

### 3 The texts

The first data sample, text [1], is a short oral narrative which has been transcribed into a written text for the purpose of analysis. One of the teachers from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the Federal University of Santa Catarina was asked to recount an interesting episode from everyday life. She was given a tape recorder and left alone in her office to make the recording. Approximately one month later she was asked to provide a written version of the story she had told. This constitutes the second text, [2].

#### 3.1 The oral narrative<sup>1</sup>

- [1.1] uh a friend of mine
- [1.2] who was in her mid-to-late forties
- [1.3] decided that uh
- [1.4] she didn't want to spend

<sup>1</sup> The line division roughly reflects the series of “tone groups” in the sense of Halliday (1967).

- [1.5] the rest of her days
- [1.6] being considered a teacher
- [1.7] and being called “professora”
- [1.8] she was about to retire
- [1.9] and retirement meant
- [1.10] a completely different kind of
- [1.11] um outlook for the rest of her days
- [1.12] so um
- [1.13] she decided
- [1.14] looked at herself in the mirror
- [1.15] and decided she needed a change
- [1.16] uh had her hair cut
- [1.17] changed style completely
- [1.18] changed color
- [1.19] um bought an entirely new set of clothing
- [1.20] different style
- [1.21] and um nothing very very proper
- [1.22] but colorful and feminine
- [1.23] looked at herself in the mirror
- [1.24] decided that glasses would have to go
- [1.25] made an appointment
- [1.26] for uh with an eye doctor
- [1.27] and had a prescription for contact lenses
- [1.28] changed herself completely
- [1.29] and was uh pretty much
- [1.30] pretty much happy with what she looked like
- [1.31] with the changes in herself
- [1.32] at least to the apparent changes
- [1.33] uh somehow people still continued to call her  
“professora”
- [1.34] psych psy psychoanalysis might help
- [1.35] so she made appointments
- [1.36] and uh after a couple of months
- [1.37] she was pretty much happy
- [1.38] that she was not looking at herself
- [1.39] at least she was not seeing herself
- [1.40] as a “professora”
- [1.41] as a teacher anymore
- [1.42] a trip here and there
- [1.43] meeting new people
- [1.44] and things were going on pretty smoothly

- [1.45] in terms of her outlook  
 [1.46] of her view of herself  
 [1.47] one day as she was talking to some friends after dinner  
 [1.48] the doorbell rang  
 [1.49] and this friend of mine walked to the door  
 [1.50] uh to discover that there was  
 [1.51] uh not a beggar  
 [1.52] but a man there  
 [1.53] asking for money or for some food  
 [1.54] a piece of bread  
 [1.55] as they usually do here  
 [1.56] and uh she said  
 [1.57] "no no no  
 [1.58] I just don't  
 [1.59] don't have anything right now  
 [1.60] I'm busy I'm sorry"  
 [1.61] and the guy looked at her and said  
 [1.62] "mas professora, tou com fome"  
 [1.63] and at that very moment  
 [1.64] she realized that the man was blind  
 [1.65] at that point she couldn't resist  
 [1.66] and she asked him  
 [1.67] "but why did you call me 'professora'?"  
 [1.68] to which the man replied  
 [1.69] "it's all in the way you talk"

### 3.2 The written narrative

- [2.1] A friend of mine who was about to retire decided she didn't want to spend the rest of her days as a teacher, that is, being called "professora" by everybody.  
 [2.2] After buying a completely new set of clothes – more modern than her usual tailored suits and more colorful – she changed her hair style and substituted contact lenses for her old gold-rimmed eyeglasses. [2.3] She was indeed feeling very happy with the new image she had built for herself.  
 [2.4] One day the doorbell rang.  
 [2.5] It was an old man asking for some food.  
 [2.6] When my friend said that there were no leftovers that day, the old man insisted:

- [2.7] "But, professora, I'm really hungry."  
 [2.8] Seeing that the old man was blind, my friend couldn't resist asking why he had called her "professora."  
 [2.9] "It's all in the way you talk," was the man's reply.

## 4 An ethnographic approach

We shall now examine our speech event from an ethnographic perspective, using as a basis the work of Coulthard (1985) and Brown & Yule (1983). Here we shall look at the participants, setting, purpose, key, channel, and the topic of our narrative.

### 4.1 Participants

In addition to the two universally recognized members of a speech event, the *speaker* and the *hearer*, Hymes (in Coulthard, 1985) recognizes two other roles, the *addresser*, the originator of the sentiments or thoughts, and the *addressee*, the intended *audience*, which is not necessarily the same as the hearer. The words, thoughts, sentiments or ideas may be expressed by another person, who in this case is the speaker and not the addresser. This fact is manifested linguistically by the use of the lexical term "spokesperson." A similar distinction can be made between "addressee" and "hearer." Thus in a political interview, a politician can be speaking to an interviewer (the hearer), and in reality be addressing the voters. In many situations this pair of roles converges with the speaker and the hearer, but by no means always. When pairs of participants diverge, Beaugrande (in press) recommends that the current communicative event be termed the *framing text* and the original event the *framed text*. From a linguistic standpoint the formal technique of framing may appear quite complex, but the participants' knowledge of how social interaction is usually arranged suffices to make it clear who might be speaking,

addressing, and so on, or in other situations the identity of the participants may deliberately left vague as is often the case in political discourse (Coulthard, 1985; Faircloth, 1992). In our speech event, however, these potential distinctions between roles are not problematic.

In the analysis of any speech event, the participants and their relationships should be characterized (Wolfson, 1983). The identity of the participants in our speech event is quite straightforward. The narrator<sup>2</sup> is a female Brazilian university English teacher, aged about thirty-eight. The audience is a male American graduate student, about forty years old, though not a student of the narrator. The relationship between them could be characterized as friendly, but not intimate. This, coupled with the fact that the story was being recorded as part of an academic research project, limited the range of appropriate topics and prevented the discourse from assuming a particularly personalized tone.

#### 4.2 Setting

The *setting* refers to the location of the speech event in time and place, either of which can play a determining or limiting role (Coulthard, 1985). For example, a special Easter church service could certainly not be performed at any other time of the year, and marriages are usually officiated in prescribed settings such as a church or a registry office rather than in a cemetery or on a cricket field. For many speech events, time and place are not so specifically defined, as we can see from the data. In our speech sample, the most relevant factor was the social position and profession of the narrator rather than the specific time or location of the recording. Still, we can

<sup>2</sup> In conformity with the narrative quality of the data, henceforth we will use the term *narrator* for the addressor and *audience* for the presumed addressee.

ponder some possible influences of the setting on our speech event. While it would be difficult to claim any direct relationship to the fact that the anecdote was told by a teacher in her office, it is quite plausible that this influenced the choice of this particular story.

An important factor with regards to the setting for this speech event was that no audience was present. When telling an anecdote, the narrator normally has an audience and can monitor his or her speech based on its reactions, both verbal and nonverbal (eye contact, gestures, facial expressions). The beginning of our narrative gives the impression that the narrator is ruminating or reminiscing about the past for her own benefit and that we, as an absent audience, are overhearing someone "thinking out loud." However, due to the constraints of the genre of the anecdote, the narrator gives some evidence of being oblivious to the absence of an audience, and adjusts her intonation very much as would have occurred had one been present. This reflects Richards & Schmidt's (1983) observation that a good conversationalist

*"does not tell tales as simple reportings of past events... but recounts a dramatic version (original italics) of what happened, using dramatic devices such as irony, innuendo, sarcasm, humour and suspense... [regularly including] direct quotes from story characters, sometimes mimicking accent or intonation as well"* (p.144-46).

Finally the lack of an audience suspended the usual mechanisms or constraints of conversational turn-taking. In a normal conversation of face-to-face interaction, the teller of a story has the problem of holding the floor, since "other speakers are likely to self-select at the first possible completion point" (Coulthard, 1985, p.82). Our narrator, however, was under no pressure to keep her part of the conversation going, and could even have stopped the recorder to organize her thoughts, if necessary,

although in the event it was not. Also, in normal interactions the audience needs to know when the story is finished, and thus when it is appropriate to take a turn and respond. Narrators often indicate this by a *Coda* (see section 5.4), which shifts the time frame of the story back to the present. The completion of our narrative was effectively signaled by an ironic punch-line, after which the narrator immediately switched off the tape recorder.

#### 4.3 Purpose

The *purpose* of a speech event may range from conveying factual information to creating and maintaining social bonds, the phatic use of language (Brown & Yule, 1983; Jakobson, 1960/1973). The immediate purpose of this speech event was to comply with a request to tell a story suitable for analysis as part of a class project. Of course, in different contexts this story could have had several other purposes. Normally, an anecdote occurs as part of an exchange, the purpose frequently being to amuse or to serve as one of the "rounds" to "keep the conversation moving," again a phatic use of language.

#### 4.4 Key

*Key* refers to the tone of the speech event, that is, how the event was performed, and can vary from serious to mocking, with many other possibilities such as sarcastic, deliberate, solemn, etc. Our speech event could be described as neutral in tone, with the exception of the ending, which sets the final tone as light, humorous, and ironic.

#### 4.5 Channel

The *channel*, the medium used for the transmission of the speech event, has the basic options of spoken or written. As remarked above, we will be comparing one sample from each of these two modes, both of them narrating the same anecdote. Data of this kind allow us to explore some interesting similarities and differences between these two basic channels of human communication. Specific influences of the channel will be reviewed in section 7.

We should emphasize once again that the oral sample was performed for a tape recorder, which has certain implications. A speech encounter can always affect the participant's self-image or what Goffman (1967) has called *Face*, "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself," for instance, by either enhancing the participant's Face and giving rise to good feelings, or threatening the Face, and thereby instilling feelings of inferiority, hurt, and shame.

It is well known that many people become nervous when speaking into a microphone. This could be explained in terms of *Face Threatening Acts*. Since speech is transitory, in normal conversation whatever is said vanishes soon after it is spoken. Recorded speech, in contrast, is preserved, and as such, is an uncontested document of what was spoken. Preservation of speech makes it possible to inspect lapses or errors which would otherwise go unnoticed.

In our particular sample, however, the fact that the channel was oral-taped did not influence the speech produced. Again, this can be explained by referring to the principal participant of this speech event, the narrator. Although not a native speaker, she had spent considerable time in the United States and had a fluent command of the language. This, along with the fact that as a teacher she was regularly called upon to speak to an audience, was certainly a factor which mitigated a Face-threatening view of the activity.

#### 4.6 Topic

An important component of any ethnographic description of a speech event is the *topic* of discourse. At first glance it might appear to be a fairly easy task to specify the topic for any given speech sample by simply examining the concepts that make it coherent for the participants; however, actual data show that the concept of topic is certainly not so simple as might be imagined (Brown and Yule, 1983). For any given stretch of oral or written text, there can often be several focal points which at any given moment could be considered to be the topic. As noted by Brown & Yule (1983, p.74), "for any practical purposes, there is no such thing as the one correct expression of the topic for any fragment of discourse." However, for any given discourse, there will usually be a limited set of "expressions" which could be considered as candidates for the topic(s).

A more productive approach, again from Brown and Yule (1983, p.75), would be to consider topic in terms of a topic framework, that is, in terms of a conceptual framework which "would allow each of the possible expressions, including titles, to be considered (partially) correct, thus incorporating all reasonable judgments of 'what is being talked about.'" This approach would necessarily take into consideration both the external aspects of the speech event (participants, setting, purpose, etc.) and the internal aspects actually contained or implied in the text (characters, events, time, place, objects, assumptions about shared knowledge, etc.). For our oral narrative, each of the following, at different moments, might be considered the topic:

- a. The protagonist's aversion to being considered a "professora"
- b. Her desire to change her image
- c. Her mid-life crisis
- d. Her encounter with the beggar
- e. Her inability to change herself

#### 4.7 Topic versus content

Having discussed the external aspects of the speech event in the immediately preceding sections, we can now address the internal content of the story. The circumstances readily allow us to identify the setting as Brazil and the characters as Brazilian. In addition, a clear signal occurs when the narrator code-switches from English to Portuguese and uses the word "professora" [1.7]. This is also highlighted when the narrator frames the beggar's speech as it was originally uttered [1.62] "mas professora tou com fome," using the colloquial form "tou" for "estou."

The fact that the story takes place in Brazil with Brazilian characters is important because of certain assumptions which form part of the narrator's cultural background knowledge, and which, if brought out, would lead to a deeper appreciation of the anecdote. The narrator says that her friend "didn't want to spend the rest of her days being considered a teacher and being called 'professora'" [1.4-7]. Presented with this sudden intrusion of Portuguese in an English text, we must ask ourselves "why," for as Brown and Yule (1983, p.77) have pointed out, "Any consideration of topic involves asking why the speaker said what he said in a particular discourse situation." This switch into Portuguese suggests that the narrator felt that the English word "teacher" would not convey the same idea or mental representation as the Portuguese word "professora." Whereas teachers in some countries are reasonably well paid and enjoy their measure of social status, these conditions do not apply to Brazil where both the salaries and the status of school teachers are unfortunately undervalued. The narrative does not supply explicit reasons for the protagonist's being so averse to the role of a teacher: they are part of the assumed cultural background knowledge. A hearer or reader without this knowledge would probably wonder what was so terrible about being a teacher that

the protagonist was so obsessed with the idea of no longer wanting to see herself in that role.

The psychological aspect of this story is particularly significant for the topic framework. The protagonist's aversion to being stereotyped as a "professora" is apparently linked to an existential mid-life crisis, which at her age, "mid-to-late forties" [1.2], is not uncommon. The fact that she was having an identity crisis is brought out by her overriding concern with changing herself. She:

*looked in the mirror and decided she needed a change... changed style completely... had a prescription for contact lenses and changed herself completely... was pretty much happy... with the changes in herself* [1.14 -31]

This existential crisis is also manifest by her concern with her own mortality, as shown by the fact that, right at the beginning of the anecdote, the narrator repeats the expression "for the rest of her days" [1.5 and 1.11].

Most of the other characters in this story make only incidental appearances, such as an "eye doctor" [1.26], presumably a psychoanalyst [1.34], unspecified "people" [1.33], and "new people" [1.43]. The only important character, other than the protagonist, is a blind beggar [1.51-69] who gives an ironic twist to the story: in spite of all her efforts to change herself and rid herself of the "professora" stereotype, a blind man, just by hearing her speak, was immediately able to recognize that she was a teacher.

Our final conclusion would have to be that all of the possible expressions of the topic listed in section 4.6 could indeed be taken to be partially correct: her mid-life crisis, her aversion to her "professora" image, her attempts to change herself, and the final outcome, emphasized by the beggar incident in which it became apparent that she had failed to change her image.

### 5 Analyzing the oral narrative (I): Story structure

One well-known model for analyzing oral narratives has been developed by the American sociolinguist William Labov (1972) in his studies of black vernacular English in the New York inner city. In order to avoid the constraints of a taped interview, with the consequent unnatural speech sample, Labov used a technique to elicit "*narratives of personal experience in which the speaker becomes deeply involved in rehearsing or even reliving events of his past*" (p. 354)<sup>3</sup>. The technique consisted of asking a "danger of death" question: "Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed, where you said to yourself, 'This is it'?" If answered in the affirmative, the speaker would normally become very involved in the telling of his narrative. But, as Labov is quick to point out, the placing of the question at a strategic point within the interview is crucial. Introducing the question too soon without the proper preparation produces "ludicrous results" (p. 354).

Labov (p. 359-60) defines *narrative* as "*one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events (it is inferred) actually occurred.*" Thus, a narrative consists of a set of clauses that are temporally ordered, each clause matching the order of the occurrence of the events in the story. While some narratives are limited to clauses showing a beginning, a middle, and an end of the story, many others are more fully developed and have some or all of the following elements:

1. Abstract
2. Orientation
3. Complicating action and resolution
4. Evaluation
5. Coda

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, references in sections 5 and 6 are from Labov (1972).



In Labov's scheme, fully developed 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 with the coda (p. 369).

This scheme will shed light on our sample data.<sup>4</sup>

### 5.1 Abstract

The *abstract* gives a condensed preview of the story. The segments "*she didn't want to spend the rest of her days being considered a teacher and being called 'professora'*" [1.4-7] and "*looked at herself in the mirror and decided she needed a change*" [1.14-15] serve as an abstract for our narrative. These two clauses encapsulate the story. The stage is thus set for our story describing how the protagonist adopted various measures in order not to be considered a "professora."

### 5.2 Orientation

The *orientation* situates the story in terms of the time, place, persons, and behavioral situation. All of these elements are not necessarily present, however; and in fact, some narratives lack an orientation all together. Our narrative does not have a clear cut orientation, particularly if we consider that the orientation should come at the beginning. Time and place are left vague aside from indirect evidence as noted above that the setting is Brazil. But the behavioral situation is clear: the story is about a middle-aged female teacher who was about to retire and who "*decided she needed a change*" [1.15].

<sup>4</sup> For an application of Labov's model to written narratives, see Caldas (1983).

The orientation section of a narrative often gives an "*elaborate portrait of the main character*" (p. 364). This is certainly true in the case of our narrative: right from the outset the narrator presents a clear characterization of the protagonist, as has already been discussed under topic framework. This characterization, however, extends far beyond the scope of a simple orientation, and intertwined with the narrative action, occupies a considerable part of the anecdote.

### 5.3 Complicating action and resolution

In the early part of a narrative, it is common for the protagonist's situation to be changed by a complicating action posing some kind of problem which needs to be solved. (Beaugrande & Colby, 1979). In our narrative this action is her impending retirement [1.9] and her worry about how to "spend the rest of her days" [1.4-5] in "a completely different kind of um outlook" [1.10-11]. She looked at herself in the mirror and decided she needed a change [1.14-15]. This first episode of the narrative is concerned with the changes she made in herself: had her hair cut, changed her hair style, dyed her hair, bought new clothes, and exchanged her glasses for contact lenses [1.16-27]. This episode ends with the protagonist feeling "pretty much happy with what she looked like... with the changes in herself... at least to the apparent changes" [1.30-32].

But the basic problem, which in section 4.7 we have described as an existential crisis, has not really been resolved, and the problem brought on by the original complication is repeated when "people still continued to call her 'professora'" [1.33]. This instigated her to take further actions. She underwent psychotherapy, and began to accept herself: She took some trips [1.42] and increased her circle of acquaintances by "meeting new people" [1.43]. Nevertheless, these further actions were not really successful as indicated by the evaluative term "pretty" :

“she was pretty much happy... that she was not looking at herself as a teacher anymore” [1.34-1.41], and “things were going on pretty smoothly” [1.44].

The third and final episode, from [1.47] to the end, relates her encounter with the blind beggar. In this section the anecdote is brought to a conclusion, and it is consequently the most important part of the story. The narrator is expected to wind up his or her story in such a way as to justify having told it. Intrinsic to this justification is that there be a point to the story, for, as Labov (p.366) says :

*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?”*

Not only must an anecdote have a point, but furthermore, it is expected to be skillfully told: the telling of an anecdote is a performance whose quality will be judged:

*We are all perfectly aware of the “unspoken agenda” by which we assess an experience's tellability. We know that anecdotes, like novels, are expected to have endings... We form judgments all the time about how good an anecdote was and how well it was brought off by its teller; in fact, we are expected to express this judgment as soon as an anecdote ends (Pratt, 1977, p.50)*

A narrator may have any number of reasons for telling an anecdote, but certainly among the most prevalent is a desire for appreciation and recognition of his or her skill as a storyteller.

The “danger of death” question used by Labov is calculated to elicit a story with an exciting point and a memorable performance. However, since the narrator of our story was simply asked to tell a story without the benefit of interaction with an audience, she may not have felt involved

with the situation and consequently chose to relate a story whose protagonist was not herself but a friend--what Labov (p.367) has labeled “narratives of vicarious experience.” The opening stretch of our narrative does not appear to herald any remarkable or suspenseful experience. The narrator, however, was able to bring the story to a particularly interesting and unexpected conclusion that fulfills the audience's expectations for a point to the story, thus avoiding the undesired “so what?” reaction. Furthermore, the conclusion leaves the audience with the feeling that the story was indeed well told, and consequently ratifies the narrator as a good storyteller.

The conclusion was, in fact, quite skillfully set up. By passing from simple narrative, typical of vicarious reporting, to dialogue, typical of involvement, the narrator gives dramatic emphasis to the ending, and as a result, draws the audience into the story. The dramatic effect is also highlighted by the fact that the punch-line is (a) in final position in the narrative, and (b) the answer to a question. A question has the effect of temporarily breaking the narrative flow, stopping the action, and preparing the audience's expectations as to what is about to come:

*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 (p. 374).*

#### 5.4 Coda

The *Coda* consists of “free clauses” (see section 6) at the end of the narrative indicating that the main narrative line has finished. It brings the audience back to the present and signals that a new “turn” can begin. However, the Coda is more than just a “turn-taking” device: a good Coda “leaves the listener with a feeling of satisfaction and completeness that matters have been

rounded off and accounted for" (p. 366). The pithy framed dialogue line, "It's all in the way you talk" [1.69] leaves no doubt that despite all of her efforts, the protagonist will never really be able to change herself and will always retain her "professora" image.

### 5.5 Evaluation

*Evaluation* is the means used by the narrator to indicate or call attention to the point of the narrative, to show that this particular narrative is really worth hearing. Evaluation is the narrator's voice, often interwoven throughout the entire narrative. The narrator, however, normally does not stop the narrative and explicitly say, "This is why I think the story is tellable" or "Pay attention to this part." Instead this is achieved by varying the parameters of the linguistic features as the narrative proceeds:

*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 (p.378).*

This will be exemplified in the following section.

### 6 Analyzing the oral narrative (II): narrative syntax

There are two kinds of clauses in Labov's model of American English oral narratives, "narrative" and "free." *Narrative clauses* are temporally ordered independent clauses, whereas *free clauses* are not temporally confined and can be moved about without disrupting the temporal order of events (p. 360-61). Furthermore, according to Labov (p. 375-76) the narrative clause is characterized by its structural simplicity, and consists of the following elements.

1. Conjunctions, including temporals *so, and, but, then*.
2. Simple subjects: pronouns, proper names.
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*, and occasional quasimodals.
4. Preterit verb forms.
5. Complements of varying complexity.
6. Manner or instrumental adverbials.
7. Locative adverbials.
8. Temporal adverbials.

Labov classifies the major modifications of syntactic narrative into four basic groups: *intensifiers, comparators, correlatives, explications*. We shall now look at how these are handled in our data.

### 6.1 Intensifiers

As the name implies, this category intensifies, exaggerates, or calls special attention to some aspect of the narrative. Here we shall examine the use of *quantifiers* and *repetition*.

#### A. Quantifiers

The use of *quantifiers* can be illustrated by the following data.

- [1.10] completely different
- [1.28] changed herself completely
- [1.30] pretty much happy
- [1.44] pretty smoothly
- [1.21] very very proper

#### B. Repetition

Repetition, a very simple but effective evaluative device, can include not merely the same lexical items, but also closely related ones, such as synonyms.

[1.21] very, very proper

[1.6] being considered a teacher

[1.7] and being called "professora"

[1.5 ] the rest of her days

[1.11] the rest of her days

[1.15] and decided she needed a change

[1.17] changed style completely

[1.18] changed color

[1.26] changed herself completely

[1.30] with changes in herself

[1.32] the apparent changes

[1.30] pretty much happy

[1.37] pretty happy

[1.36] not looking at herself

[1.39] not seeing herself

[1.45] in terms of her outlook

[1.46] of her view of herself

[1.40] as a "professora"

[1.41] as a teacher

## 6.2 Comparators

*Comparators* permit the narrator to make an evaluative comment on events in the story by comparing "the events which did occur to those which did not occur" (p. 381). Comparators consist of syntactic forms which deviate from the basic syntax, whose principal form is the simple past tense (see section 6). The narrator, in fact, has no need to use other forms since he or she is recounting events which occurred in the past:

*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... 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 (p. 380).*

### A. Negatives

Negatives typically indicate events as being marked in the sense that something that was expected to happen did not (Beaugrande, in press). Through them the narrator evaluates events in the story by "placing them against the background of other events which might have happened, but which did not" (Labov, 1972: 381). In our data much of the negation has to do with the protagonist's self-image as a "professora."

[1.4 -7] She didn't want to spend  
the rest of her days  
being considered a teacher  
and being called "professora"

[1.39-40] She was pretty much happy  
that she was not looking at herself  
at least she was not seeing herself  
as a "professora"

The narrator doesn't say anything about what the protagonist would like to do with her life, but rather uses the negative to emphasize how she would *not* like to "spend the rest of her days." By emphasizing the negative, the narrator subtly tells the audience that this has a special importance for the story.

The other negatives belong to situations in which the protagonist is refusing food to the blind man and her extreme curiosity at his reply.

[1.52-59] I just don't  
don't have anything right now

[1.65] at that point she couldn't resist

### B. Modals

The narrative action consists almost entirely of a series of verbs in the simple past describing the steps that the protagonist takes in her attempt to change her image. There are only two occurrences of modals in our data. In the first, "psychoanalysis might help" [1.34], the narrator expresses the protagonist's thoughts. The second, the comment that the protagonist "couldn't resist" asking the blind man why he called her "professora" [1.65], does not further the narrative action. However, it serves to highlight the protagonist's anticipation and emotional state of curiosity and anxiety. Furthermore, it focuses the audience's attention on the question which follows.

### C. Questions

In our data, no questions appear until the very end of the narrative when the protagonist poses the question "but why did you call me 'professora'?" [1.67], which interrupts the narrative flow and very effectively focuses the audience's attention on the punch-line: "It's all in the way you talk" [1.69].

### D. Forms other than the simple past

As expected, verb forms other than the simple past are quite rare in our data. "was about to retire" [1.8] is what Beaugrande (in press) calls the "successive," a category which does not appear in traditional English grammars or linguistic descriptions because it does not have a form of its own. It does, however, have the distinct function of indicating an action that is about to follow--in this case, retiring, which appears to have precipitated the mid-life crisis.

There are four examples of the progressive in our data:

- [1.38] that she was not looking at herself
- [1.39] at least she was not seeing herself
- [1.44] and things were going on pretty smoothly
- [1.47] one day as she was talking to friends after dinner

Here the progressive has an orientation function: the narrator is giving the audience information which acts as a backdrop for the narrative action.

We also find a few verbs in the present tense, which with one exception, logically appear in the framed dialogue:

- [1.60] I'm busy, I'm sorry
- [1.62] mas professora tou com fome
- [1.69] It's all in the way you talk

The exception is [1.55] "as they usually do here," which is an appended explicative (see section 6.4). In Labov's model, comparators also include futures, quasimodals, imperatives, or-clauses, superlatives, and comparatives; however, these categories did not appear in our data.

## 6.3 Correlatives

Whereas comparators compare unrealized possibilities with events that occurred, "correlatives bring together two events that actually occurred so that they are conjoined in a single independent clause" (p. 387). Extremely typical in English is the progressive in the past which is interrupted by another action (Beaugrande, in press). There was only one example of this in our data. It marks the transition from a general perspective in which there is little narrative action to the final episode with the arrival of the blind man:

- one day as she was talking to some friends after dinner
- the doorbell rang
- and this friend of mine walked to the door [1.47-49].

## 6.4 Explicatives

*Explicatives* are appended clauses for purposes of explanation and evaluation. In the example below, the narrative

suggests why a series of actions logically follows from the planned retirement:

she was about to retire  
and retirement meant  
a completely different kind of  
outlook for the rest of her days [1.8-11].

In the following example the narrator tells us why she was "pretty much happy":

she was pretty much happy  
that she was not seeing herself  
as a teacher [1.37-41]

Finally we have, "as they usually do here" [1.55], which was appended intonationally and supplies cultural background.

## 7 Differences between spoken and written discourse

Much has been written about the differences between written and spoken language (Beaugrande, 1984). As our data show, however, the differences are not so clear cut as has been asserted. We shall now examine some of the well-known theses as formulated by Brown and Yule (1983) & Chafe (1985).

1. *The syntax of spoken language is simpler and less elaborately structured than that of written language.* An overall examination of our data would seem to confirm this. However, if we examine the beginning of the oral narrative, we find that the language is quite similar to that of the written version. If we eliminate the three pause fillers, lines [1.1-1.11] could be transcribed as two sentences that show a high degree of organization and structural complexity:

*A friend of mine who was in her mid-to-late forties decided that she didn't want to spend the rest of her days being considered a teacher and being called "professora." She was about to retire and retirement meant a completely different kind of outlook for the rest of her days.*

Two explanations might be offered for this. In the first place, the narrator is a highly educated university professor whose daily work entails extensive contact with, and production of, written language. The speech of a person who is constantly dealing with the written language, as for instance someone who is in academics, may in some circumstances have much in common with the written forms (Brown & Yule, 1983). The second explanation is related to the situation of the recording, which differed from spontaneous speech. While the narrator would not have planned out the whole story, she may well have preplanned the opening prior to turning on the tape recorder.

2. *Spoken language is not formatted into complete grammatical sentences, and more typically consists of a series of short phrases.* While our oral narrative does exhibit some utterances that could be taken as complete grammatical sentences, as in:

[1.33] somehow people still continued to call her "professora"  
[1.39-40] at least she was not seeing herself as a "professora"

it is almost entirely composed of short phrases:

Uh, had her hair cut  
changed style completely  
changed color  
um bought an entirely new set of clothing  
different style  
and um nothing very very proper  
but colorful and feminine [1.16-22]

In contrast the written version contains only complete grammatical sentences.

3. *Written language uses an extensive set of metalinguistic markers to signal relationships between phrases and clauses.* This is in fact born out by an examination of the written version of the narrative:

[2.1] A friend of mine who was about to retire decided she didn't want to spend the rest of her days as a teacher, that is, being called "professora" by everyone.

[2.2] After buying a completely new set of clothes... she changed her hair style..."

[2.6] When my friend said that there were no leftovers that day, the old man insisted.

While markers such as *when* and *as* are also used in spoken language,

[1.47-48] One day as she was talking to some friends after dinner, the doorbell rang.

it is much more common to find words, phrases, or clauses joined by *and*, *but*, *then*, and *so*:

[1.21-22] and uh nothing very very proper but colorful and feminine

To some extent this difference is related to the higher degree of subordination in the written version calling for subordinators such as *after*, or *when*. In the spoken version the unmarked connective is consistently *and*: [1.7, 1.9, 1.15, 1.21, 1.27, 1.29, 1.36, 1.42, 1.44, 1.49, 1.56, 1.61, 1.63, 1.66]. Also typical of spoken language is the causal or explanatory use of *so*:

[1.12-13] so um she decided

[1.34-35] psych psy psychoanalysis might help so she made appointments

4. *In written language it is common to find two or more premodifying adjectives:*

[2.2] her old, gold-rimmed eyeglasses

In spoken language, noun phrases with multiple premodifying adjectives are rare. With the possible exception of the compound "mid-to-late" [1.2], we have no examples in our data.

5. *In written language, sentences usually have a subject-predicate structure.* In written language, the subject is usually followed up by a predicate over a relatively short distance. Three examples will suffice.

[2.1] a friend of mine who was about to retire decided...

[2.2] she changed her hair style

[2.4] one day the doorbell rang

In spoken language, in contrast, it is common to find a topic-comment structure. In the example below, a predicate is subsequently used as a topic about which several comments are made:

um bought an entirely new set of clothing different style and uh nothing very very proper but colorful and feminine [1.19-22]

6. *Speakers often refine or repair their speech by making corrections, replacing words or even abandoning the existing syntactic pattern to form a new one* (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977). We also find this in our data.:

[1.13-14] she decided looked at herself in the mirror

[1.25-26] made an appointment  
for uh with an eye doctor

As Halliday has remarked, the folk wisdom that oral language is less well organized than written language is due to the fact that it presents the hearer with a spontaneous first draft, whereas in written language any refinements or repairs replace the older material and keep it out of sight (Beaugrande, personal communication).

7. *Speech is characterized by hesitations, pauses, and fillers.* Exclusive to the spoken data is the use of nonword sounds like “uh” and “um,” which serve to “buy time” as the speaker organizes his or her thoughts:

[1.21] and uh nothing very very proper  
This was quite frequent in our spoken data, occurring no less than 14 times: [1.1, 1.3, 1.12, 1.16, 1.19, 1.21, 1.26, 1.29, 1.33, 1.36, 1.50, 1.51, 1.56, 1.62].

8. *Speech tends to generalize and use colloquial vocabulary.* In our data we can see this clearly in the following contrasts:

[1.29-30] and was uh pretty much  
pretty much happy with what she looked like

[1.44] and things were going on pretty smoothly  
*versus*

[2.3] she was indeed feeling very happy with the new image  
she had build for herself

[1.21] nothing very very proper  
*versus*

[2.2] her usual tailored suits

[1.24] glasses would have to go  
*versus*

[2.2] her old gold-rimmed eyeglasses

[1.61] and the guy looked at her and said  
*versus*

[2.6] the old man insisted

[1.58-59] I just don't  
don't have anything right now

*versus*

[2.6] there were no leftovers that day

9. *Speech is much more likely to repeat the same lexical items.* We have already looked at repetition in section 6.1 B. Here we shall merely call attention to the fact that in the oral narrative “decided” appears four times and “changed” or “changes” six times, whereas each item appears only once in the written narrative.

## 8 Conclusions and implications

This paper has essayed to assemble some basic concepts of discourse analysis and apply them to oral and written data gathered from authentic speech samples. I hope to have shown that the study of discourse encourages closer attention to, and greater awareness of, the way that people use language, both written and oral. I shall now conclude with some implications for the foreign language classroom.

1. *Speech production and comprehension depend upon the context of situation.* Our analysis, for example, highlighted the dependence of this particular story on cultural knowledge of Brazil. In the classroom, language should not be taught in isolation, as for instance, by memorizing and drilling isolated vocabulary items and structures, but rather should be presented and practiced within realistic contexts. Furthermore, cultural information relevant to the situation should be provided.

2. *The contexts and situations should be as authentic as possible.* The importance of practicing language in contexts reflecting realistic communicative situations is an important tenet of most modern methodologies few would question. However, the fact that the classroom itself is an authentic situation is not always appreciated and even less frequently



exploited. All classroom activities, from passing out papers to giving instructions as to how a task should be carried out, can serve as the basis for the authentic and communicative use of language (Willis, 1981; Hughes, 1981).

3. *As far as possible the language taught should represent authentic usage and use*<sup>5</sup>. As we have seen, there is a marked difference between spoken and written language. Too often the classroom presents a written form for oral practice, such as asking the students to answer with "complete sentences," when spoken language is characterized by short phrases. But the quest for authenticity can be carried too far and can even be pedagogically counterproductive: "if you stick to authentic communication, you may not be teaching very much actual language" (Widdowson, 1992, p.5)<sup>6</sup>. An authentic breakfast conversation, for example, might consist mostly of fragmented utterances, offering our students very little language to learn from. Swan (1985b) has also suggested that language classes cannot be based solely on authentic language:

*Of course one can hardly quarrel with the suggestion that classroom language should be as lifelike as possible.... None the less, the classroom is not the outside world, and learning languages is not the same thing as using language. A certain amount of artificiality is inseparable from the process of isolating and focusing on language items for study, and it is a serious mistake to condemn types of discourse typically found in the classroom because they do not share all the communicative features of other kinds of language use (p.82).*

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of "usage" and "use" see Widdowson (1978). For a criticism of this terminology see Swan (1985a).

<sup>6</sup> Widdowson is by no means advocating the use of contrived or artificial language. Rather he proposes task-based learning, which would "combine communicative purpose... and attention to the formal resources of the language itself (1992: 14).

We must therefore reconcile authenticity with sound pedagogy, not always a particularly easy task. However, thanks to the appearance of large corpora of authentic data, teachers, learners and materials writers will soon have access to actual usage, both oral and written (Beaugrande, in press).

4. *Teachers should have more realistic expectations about their students' speech production.* Do we expect an unrealistic performance from our student? If normal speech is characterized by pauses, hesitations, slips of the tongue and syntactic changes in mid-course, why is it that as teachers we expect well-formed (and complete) sentences to roll off of our students' tongues? We need to appreciate the spontaneous and improvised quality of spoken language and make corresponding allowances for the performance of our learners in the classroom. We need to make a distinction between activities devoted to accuracy and activities devoted to fluency, and gear our classroom procedures accordingly.

5. *Cultural knowledge is an important aspect of cross-cultural communication.* It has long been recognized that cultures are different, and that each one has its own particular and characteristic customs. Most people think of this in relation to areas in which there is an overt manifestation, such as food, clothing or gestures. Of more importance are the subtle differences. Since our narrator was compelled to code-switch from "teacher" to "professora" we concluded that there is a subtle cultural difference between the way Brazilians and Americans view the role of teachers in society. Subtle cultural differences need to be studied and made explicit to learners.

While the cultural distinction between "teacher" and "professora" seems to have been relevant for an in-depth understanding of our story, it still would have been understood without this cultural background, only not as fully. There are, on the other hand, many instances in which a lack of cultural knowledge can lead to serious misunderstandings (Wolfson,

1983). This type of cultural knowledge is imperative for learners who will be communicating in the language of another culture.

6. *Comprehension of language depends upon mental models or schemata of how the actions and events in the world are organized.* Our comprehension of the oral narrative was certainly facilitated because we have a schema for people wanting to change their image. Based on this schema, we would expect the story to highlight changing the physical appearance, as was the case with our data. The lesson for the classroom teacher is clear: teachers should use prereading and prelistening activities which activate the students' schemata for the events and situations of the material they will be working with. (Meurer, 1985, 1988; Taglieber 1988).

7. *The organization of language extends beyond the sentence boundaries.* Applying Labov's model to our oral sample, we could see that oral narratives have an identifiable structural organization. Familiarity with the structural organization of different types of text facilitates their comprehension. Thus, if we know that oral narratives frequently have an abstract, we can look for it, identify it as such when it is present, and use it to guide our comprehension.

8. *When planning and conducting their classes, teachers should keep in mind the concept of Face.* For a great many students, being called upon to speak the foreign language in class is a Face Threatening Act: the fear of appearing foolish in front of their peers can make language learning a very stressful activity. Therefore, it is essential to create an atmosphere of acceptance in the classroom where learners can perform with minimal threats to Face.

9. *In closing, it should be emphasized that the applications of discourse analysis transcend the classroom, and come into play in all of our daily interactions.* The study of discourse leads to a greater awareness of the many subtle nuances of the communicative act, and accordingly we are more

likely to pay attention to our choice of words and less likely to inadvertently give offense. Discourse analysis can "help us to apply more conscientious and cooperative strategies which will recognize and respect individual differences, drawing participants into discourse on the basis of solidarity and equality" (Beaugrande, personal communication). As the blind man so aptly put it in our story, "It's all in the way you talk."

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