

# SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON REGISTER

*Edited by*

DOUGLAS BIBER  
EDWARD FINEGAN

New York    Oxford  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1994



**Oxford University Press**

Oxford New York Toronto  
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi  
Kuala Lumpur Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo  
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town  
Melbourne Auckland Madrid

and associated companies in  
Berlin Ibadan

Copyright © 1994 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.  
200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,  
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Sociolinguistic perspectives on register / edited by Douglas Biber  
and Edward Finegan.

p. cm. Includes bibliographical references.  
ISBN 0-19-508364-4

1. Register (Linguistics) 2. Sociolinguistics.  
I. Biber, Douglas. II. Finegan, Edward, 1940-  
P302.815.S65 1994  
306.4'4—dc20 92-44536

13579 8642

Printed in the United States of America  
on acid-free paper



# 5

## Stories That Step into the Future

ELINOR OCHS

### 1. Recollection and Anticipation

This chapter considers the role of future time within a particular genre of narrative generally referred to as 'narratives of personal experience'. While systematically linked to present-time conversational topics and concerns (Bauman 1986, Goodwin 1984, Jefferson 1978, Young 1987), narratives of personal experience have been generally characterized (with the exception of Goodwin 1990) as interpretive construals of *past* personal experience, in contrast to various other genres of narrative such as genres of science fiction or future planning narratives, which depict experiences which might take place at a *future* time. Labov, for example, notes that in producing narratives of personal experience, "the speaker becomes deeply involved in rehearsing or even reliving events of his past" (Labov 1972), and he defines such narratives as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred." Polanyi (1989) similarly uses past time in her analysis of stories: "In recounting a story, a teller describes events which took place in one specific past time world in order to make some sort of *point* about the world which teller and story recipients share." The centrality of past time experience is also evident in developmental studies of children's storytelling skills. In assessing children's storytelling competence, for example, developmentalists have used "consistent past tense" as an acquisition variable (cf. Applebee 1978, Pitcher and Prelinger 1963, Umiker-Sebeok 1979).

This essay argues that, while narratives of personal experience center around a

This essay has benefitted from the insightful comments of P. Gonzales, Sally Jacoby, Carolyn Taylor, and Sandro Duranti. The consideration of future time in this essay develops earlier collaborative research on family co-narration (Ochs, Smith, and Taylor 1989, Ochs, Taylor et al. 1992, Ochs and Taylor 1992a, 1992b). Data collection and analysis on which this study is based have been supported by the NICHD 1986-1990 (grant no. 1 ROH HD 2099201A1; Principal investigators E. Ochs, T. Weisner; Research Assistants: M. Bernstein, D. Rudolph, R. Smith, C. Taylor) and the Spencer Foundation 1990-1993 (Principal Investigator: E. Ochs, Research Assistants: P. Gonzales, S. Jacoby, and C. Taylor.)



specific past experience, such narratives share with other narrative genres a tendency to project *future* time experiences as well. Stories of personal experience regularly step out of the temporal domain of the past into the temporal domain of the future to make *story-coherent* predications of possible events to take place after the present moment. In many cases, these story-coherent predications consist of possible implications of past experiences for the future. In an incisive analysis of black adolescent storytelling, M. Goodwin (1990) details how storytellers may carefully lay the groundwork for future-oriented talk about implications in the telling of the past experience. In Goodwin's observations, the interlocutor who brings up the past experience structures the telling in a way that "instigates" other interlocutors to take future action or to talk about the future actions they intend to take or would like to take. The present essay argues that a concern for future time is not limited to the "instigating stories" of black adolescents: it is an existential dimension of *all* storytelling activity in the sense that storyteller's recollections of past events have the potential to evoke for participating interlocutors ideas and talk about future events/circumstances. Each verbal *recollection* of past events may lead interlocutors to *anticipate* ramifications of those events in the future. Talk about the future may be introduced at the very beginning of a story by the teller who initiates the story (henceforth 'Initial Teller') or may be introduced by some other teller (henceforth 'Other Teller') or the Initial Teller as the story events unfold (Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph, and Smith 1992).

Because talk about past personal experiences has the potential to evoke a sense of the future, it is not uncommon to find story-coherent predications about the future laced seamlessly in the storytelling activity. References to past- and future-oriented events as well as speech acts which are future-implicative (e.g., forecasts, warnings, prescriptions, advice) are often interwoven in the course of storytelling, at times within the same turn and at times even within the same clause (see section 4.2). An important claim of this essay is that such story-coherent future time references are integral to the story in the sense that they give meaning to its events. A defining feature of all stories is that they have a point (Labov and Waletzky 1967, Polanyi 1989, Ricoeur 1988). In many cases the point may be the relevance of the story's past events for future events. One or another teller may see the point of the story to include what certain past events mean with respect to their own or others' future experiences. A sense of the future may be fundamental to the design of the past events from the very beginning of the narrative, as Goodwin displays for black adolescent stories, or may be expressed at a later point in the course of storytelling. When interlocutors refer to story-coherent future-time events in the course of storytelling, they are not necessarily *exiting* from the story of personal experience and initiating a new discursive activity. Rather, they are furthering the construction of the story itself, using future ramifications to help shape what they see to be the *point* of the story's past events.

That narratives are Janus-like, with one face toward the past and one toward the present and future is recognized by Heidegger (1962) and Ricoeur (1988). Heidegger's chef-d'oeuvre *Being and Time* emphasizes that human "cares" (i.e., human concerns) structure our sense of time and hence our sense of ourselves, that is, what it means to be-in-the-world. Caring organizes narrative *recollection* of past events,



including history. Ricoeur (1988) refers to this relation between care (in Heidegger's sense) and narrative events as the "configurational structure" of narrative, or the narrative "plot." The narrative configuration/plot selectively arranges narrative events according to some point of view (i.e., some "care"). Narratives bridge present and past time in that present cares influence the production and understanding of narratives about the past and in that narratives are discursive means of bringing the past into the experienced present. From a Heideggerian perspective, narratives help us to achieve a sense of continuity as we move through our lifespan by virtue of their capacity to extend the past into the present. In this light, our sense of ourselves is an outcome of how we tell the stories of our personal experiences. In addition, narrative recollection helps us to anticipate the future, including ultimately our death. One reason that narratives, including history, hold interest for us is that they help us to understand what may lie in wait for us—our destinies, our potentialities, our fates. In some cases, narratives provide new models, open up novel possibilities, for the shape of our lives to come. In other cases, narratives expose problematic events which we feel call for some response in the future.

While present time has been analyzed for its importance to stories (Bauman 1986, Goodwin 1984, Sacks 1970, Young 1987, among others), there has been little text analysis beyond Goodwin's research of the expression of future time in stories of personal experience. This essay examines texts of conversational stories for evidence that future time can be a deictic and experiential reference point of stories. An orientation either to the present or to the future may be in the form of a moral or lesson to be implemented in the present or future or in the form of a present or future payback for a past misdeed, for instance. Future time may be explicitly referenced or implicitly at work as an organizing principle for the design of the story. For example, M. Goodwin (1990) details how black adolescent storytellers may subtly craft stories with the implicit goal of co-opting interlocutors to perform some future action. From this point of view, stories are not only reconstructions of past experiences but *preconstructions* of future experiences as well. Stories may imply or make explicit what will, might, could, or should (not) happen next. They draft lives-in-progress, allowing interlocutors continually to (re)create their past, present, and future selves at once.

One might counterargue that while stories have relevance for the future, this temporal domain is not properly part of the stories of personal experience, even when explicitly mentioned. This line of argument might hold that stories are properly about past events and that when interlocutors leap to the future, they have switched into another genre—a future plan, for example. This position maintains a past-future temporal definitional distinction for narratives of personal experience. It has several advantages. First, it accounts for story narratives in which there is no explicit predication of future events. Second, it allows the analyst to talk about structural relations between past- and future-oriented narratives. For example, we can refer to embedding relations between story narratives (which predicate past time events) and future planning narratives (which predicate future time events), wherein stories may be part of a larger future plan. Thus, for example, black adolescent "instigating stories" can be analyzed as components of a future plan to carry out some future action. Third, preserving a time-based genre distinction allows the



analyst to articulate possible functions of stories vis-à-vis (present and) future time narratives. For example, in the case of "instigating stories," they sometimes serve the function of introducing a problematic event which in turn "instigates" the addressee to initiate a future-oriented narrative about the actions she plans on taking to redress the narrated problematic event (Goodwin 1990).

These arguments are reasonable; however, when one examines everyday conversational storytelling, certain problems arise. First, switching among past, present, and future time can be recurrent and frequent in the course of storytelling. That is, storytelling is not always characterized by a lengthy continuous stretch of past time discourse followed by a lengthy continuous stretch of present or future time discourse. We can find predications about the present and future intermittent throughout some narratives that depict the past (see sections 3 and 4). Do we in these cases take out our analytic pencil and remove these present and future time threads from the story structure we are analyzing? Second, in cases where narratives of past events are analyzed as embedded in narratives of present or future events, the narrative of past events is nonetheless by implication a part of a future narrative. That is, such narratives can not be considered as just about past events. Third, from a Heideggerian perspective, present and future time are also part of the past time narrative in that one's sensation of the present and anticipation of the future organize one's sense of the story's past. Existentially (i.e., experientially) a story is past, present, and future at once.

This essay explores these arguments through an analysis of family dinner narratives. Many of these narratives journey back and forth between past and future time predications. The narratives often bring up past events that one or another interlocutor orient to as needing present or future attention. In all of these narratives, the narrative enactment of past and future events appears to be a single, coherent, discursive activity which interlocutors sustain with ease.

## 2. Data Base

The narratives analyzed in this essay are drawn from a larger study of family dinner discourse among twenty white, English-speaking, American families varying in socioeconomic status. All the families have at least two children, including a five-year-old and an older sibling. Our corpus consists of transcripts and videorecordings of dinnertime preparation, eating, and cleanup over two evenings for each of these families (a total of forty dinnertimes). During dinnertime recording, the researchers were present during dinner preparation. During the meal itself and the following cleanup, the researchers set up a videocamera on a tripod and then absented themselves from the dining area.

## 3. Narrative Past and Present Time

Before considering the expression of future time in storytelling, let us examine some dimensions of present time in stories of personal experience. The focus here is not



on the use of present time markers (e.g., the historical present) in depicting past events but on predications of events taking place in the present moment of the storytelling. Present and future time have in common that they both occur at a temporal point after past time. When interlocutors are talking about either present or future events, they may retreat in time to a narrative past (what Young 1987 calls "the taleworld"). And complementarily, when storytellers are depicting past personal events, they may move forward to a time beyond that in which these events occurred to predicate present and future time propositions relevant to those past events (what Young 1987 calls "the story realm"). We turn now to a consideration of these temporal relations in stories of personal experience.

### 3.1. Present Retreats into the Past

Researchers have noted that stories of past personal experience may also incorporate the present into their telling. For example, storytellers often couch their evaluations of the events in the present tense (Labov and Waletzky 1967). Further, they design their narratives for *copresent* interlocutors and other circumstances (Bauman 1986, Goodwin and Goodwin 1989). And recollections are stimulated or "locally occasioned" (Jefferson 1978) often by some *present* time focus of attention (e.g., by a discourse topic currently under discussion or by something currently experienced in the physical environment). Example (1) illustrates two occasions in which talk about the past is occasioned by a current focus of family interaction. It is a continuous stretch of talk represented in four segments (1a–1d) for purposes of analysis. The example displays a family dinner conversation that includes Father, Mother, Oren (seven years, five months), and Jodie (five years). The family is eating guacamole dip. In this segment, the present activity appears to motivate Father to ask Mother whether she put chili peppers in the dip. After some hesitation, Mother reveals that she has included not only chili peppers but hot salsa:

#### (1a) Excerpt 1 from "Chili Peppers" (Conversation before "Chili Peppers" Story)<sup>1</sup>

- Father: whadid you put in (here/it) – chili peppers?  
 ?: heh  
 Mother: no: ((*shaking head no*))  
 Father: what  
 Mother: uh yeah chili peppers – is it very spicy?  
 Father: no? – it's not that spicy=  
 Jodie: =Momma? ((*as she hands Mom back asparagus spear*))  
 [  
 Father: (It's spicy)  
 ((*Jodie chokes; Mom eats the asparagus*))  
 Mother: (not a) lot though  
 Father: (huh)  
 Mother: (not a lot of it/it had a lot of em)  
 (2.0) ((*Jodie choking*))  
 Mother: you wanta know what I put in it?



Father: ((slight raise of head—nod yes?))

Mother: guacamo— I mean avocado. tomatoes. lemon juice, garlic powder? some hot salsa? and chili peppers

In this segment we find a small instance of how a current activity (eating guacamole dip) leads to a return to a past event (what Mother put into the guacamole dip). Mother's recollection is more a listing of ingredients than a full-fledged narrative consisting of two or more sequentially related clauses (unless we wish to consider each ingredient as a separate event in the making of guacamole). In addition, in (1a) Father's remarks (e.g., "whadid you put in (here/it) — chili peppers?", "no? — it's not that spicy") may be interpreted as complaints about the guacamole being overly spicy) as well as a veiled challenge ("what") to Mother's initial claim that she had not put chili peppers in the dip. In (1b), Mother's reluctant revelation triggers a dramatization of a mock death by Oren:

(1b) Excerpt 2 from "Chili Peppers"

Oren: ((as if gasping for breath, facing Mom)) I ate hot salsa and chili?

((Oren pretends to die in his chair))

Mother: ((leaning over to Oren, smiling, as if taking his protest as a joke)) ye:s  
(1.0) ((Oren flops back on chair, gasping as if expiring))

Mother: uh — we lost Oren  
(0.4)

Mother: well: he was a great kid.

In (1b) Oren registers his surprise and dismay over the news, thereby reproducing and intensifying his father's negative stance toward Mother's making the guacamole peppery. At this point in the interaction, Oren initiates a narrative of personal experience of when, some years ago, his Mother inadvertently let him bite into a hot pepper.

(1c) Excerpt 3 from "Chili Peppers" (Chili Peppers Story Begins)

Mother: well: he was a great kid.

[ ]

Oren: (Mommy) — wasn't it funny? (when — wh—)

Oren: Wasn't it funny when you — thought that thing was a pickle? and I ate it?

Mother: no that wasn't funny. — I thought it was uh um:: ((looks at Dad)) — a green bean.

Father: ((nods yes))

[ ]

Oren: and — it was really a chili? — it was really a chili? — when I was about ((turns to Mom)) how old?

Mother: ((looking to Dad)) how old was he Don? when that happened?

[ ]

Father:

two



- Mother: was he even two?  
(1.0) ((no noticeable affirmation from Dad))
- Oren: yeah I was two:? – and then – and then you know what happened? – ((to Jodie)) I ate that chili pepper? .h ((imitating action of eating it)) and Mom thought it was a bean? – and I ate it? and I burned to death ((turns to Mom)) – what happened. – what=
- Mother: =you burnt your mouth  
(1.2) ((Oren and Mom looking at each other))  
((Mom is eating asparagus spears from bowl, licking fingers, eating another as she answers Oren's questions))
- Oren: (was/did) it all over?
- Mother: ((nodding yes)) (it was/I thought)
- {
- Oren: Did I hafta go to the hospital?
- Mother: ((low)) ((Mom shakes head no once)) (nah)
- Oren: what – (did they) hafta do?
- Mother: we gave you ice
- Oren: where
- Mother: in your mouth
- Oren: oh: my god – how long did I – keep it in
- Mother: (a few minutes) ((very quiet, looking down at lap))

In this passage the parallels that bind the present to the past are fairly evident. When Father asks Mother (in (1a)) whether she put chili peppers in the guacamole, she at first denies and then admits that she did. She goes on to list all the ingredients in the guacamole, putting off "hot salsa" and "chili peppers" till the end. In (1b) Oren reacts as if in shock, just now realizing that he ate hot salsa and chili. He collapses back into his chair, acting somewhat like a stereotypic Shakespearean actor who discovers he's been betrayed and poisoned. His mother enters into this dramatic footing, announcing to the world Oren's demise ("uh – we lost Oren"), even eulogizing him ("well: he was a great kid"). This dramatic enactment of a fictitious death calls to mind and presages the subsequent telling of narrative events of a similar nature that took place in another time and place.

When Oren turns to his mother and asks, "Wasn't it funny when you – thought that thing was a pickle? and I ate it?" this *present* time drama moves to a parallel *past, recollected* drama in which Oren unknowingly ate a hot pepper, trusting his mother's assumption that it was a benign food item. Although Oren initially frames this event as "funny," he subsequently alludes to more tragic elements in the narrative. Turning to his sister, Oren frames this event as one in which he was at death's door ("I ate that chili pepper? .h ((imitating action of eating it)) and Mom thought it was a bean? – and I ate it? and I burned to death"). With this statement, Mother is implicated as the perpetrator of his suffering, much in the way she is currently implicated for letting Oren eat hot salsa and chili peppers without forewarning him ("((as if gasping for breath)) I ate hot salsa and chili?").



### 3.2. Past Extends Forward into the Present

In addition to present time experiences occasioning stories of past experiences, stories of *past experiences can be extended forward to include present time* (Heidegger 1962:424–49). In these cases, it is not so much that present time falls back into a narrative past as much as that a narrative past progresses forward beyond a narrative 'then' to infiltrate a narrative 'now'. Indeed all stories of past experiences extend into present time in the important sense that their telling (i.e., storytelling) takes place in the present (see Young 1987 for discussion of this point). In this capacity, narratives allow persons and groups of persons to bring their pasts forward with them as they move through lifespans (Heidegger 1962, Ricoeur 1988). Narrative recollections discursively create for persons and communities a sense of continuity from past to present time.

In some cases, the narrative storyline does not stop with a recollection of past experience but rather *creatively evolves* (Bergson 1911) toward the present as a continuous discursive and/or physical activity (e.g., gestures, physical actions; that is, past and present predications are not separated by disjunctive markers, *oh*, *incidentally*, and the like—see Jefferson 1978 for a discussion of these constructions). The present time events dramatized in talk and action are incorporated *into* the story of personal experience rather than constituting a disjunctive genre or type of discourse. In such instances, predications about events that happened in the past progress into predications about events happening in the present or progress into some form of embodied actions (e.g., emotional events, action events). In (1b) we can see a brief illustration of this progression or creative evolution from the past into the present. In this passage, Oren moves from a narrated past experience (“((as if gasping for breath)) I ate hot salsa and chili?”) seamlessly into a present-time dramatic enactment of the consequences of that past experience (Oren flops back on chair gasping as if expiring). In so doing, Oren produces a narrative that not only incorporates both talk and embodied action but also blends two temporal domains. The evolving character of narrative activity is even more vividly illustrated if we turn to the remaining moments of the “Chili Peppers” narrative presented in (1d):

#### (1d) Excerpt 4 of “Chili Peppers”

Oren: did I love it [the ice] in?

Mother: you were crying  
(0.8)

Oren: I didn't like it (in there?)

Mother: ((shakes head no)) – you were hurting – your mouth hurt – it was burned=



Father: *leaving to Jodie*) =Oren - I mean Jodie - (did) you=  
[

Oren:

(I know)

Father: =kids like the mango)?

Mother: it was like - [-)

Mother: we were in a restaurant?)

Jodie: *shakes her head no to Dad*)

Father: *to Jodie, pointing to piece of roll on Jodie's plate*) Can I have this?

Oren: YOUR FAULT - YOUR FAULT = ((pointing at Mom and *reaching over until he's touching her cheek with index finger*))

Jodie: *shakes head no to Dad, then picks up piece of roll in question, looks at =, and hands it to Dad*)

Mother: =it was my fault

Jodie: um *scr. laugh at Oren's reaction to Mom?*)

Mother: I thought it was ((Oren now pinching both of Mom's cheeks)) a um - green pepper - HHHHH - ((pulling Oren's hands away)) ow that really hurts honey?

Oren: your fault - (I get to do whatever I want to do once)

Jodie: *to Dad?*) No Don't eat it - put some of - put some of the=  
(Dad responds by buttering her piece of roll))

Oren: =that was my fee?)=

Jodie: =for me:=

Oren: =he he .hh

*Mom shakes her head no slightly*)

Oren: *um. laugh*)

*Dad teases Jodie by acting as if he's going to take a piece of roll he's buttered*)

Oren: *sitting back in chair, to Mom, laughingly*)  
just like (it) happened to me=

Jodie: um *shrill*)

*Dad starts to put roll back on her plate, then starts to put it back in his mouth; Jodie doesn't see him, so he repeats motion*)

Oren: =it happens to you

In this passage, the narrative almost literally leaps from the *past* into the *present* as Oren follows up his accusation "YOUR FAULT - YOUR FAULT" with a bolt toward his mother and a rigorous pinching of her cheeks, the latter being carried out in the midst of his mother's affirmation and renarrating of her past error.<sup>2</sup> In this movement, Oren switches from an orientation to the *past*—the accusation is rooted in the



past—to an orientation to the *here and now*—the action of pinching. It is as if the events in the distant past have come alive to the point where Oren is emotionally aroused and reexperiences the past experiences in the time of their discursive portrayal, perhaps manifesting a form of transference (i.e., mapping feelings associated with a different set of circumstances on to the present circumstances). Mother's and Oren's subsequent turns sustain the orientation to the *present* ("HHHHH – ((pulling Oren's hands away)) ow that really hurts honey?", "your fault – (I get to do whatever I want to do once)"). Then, in a final elegant narrative move, Oren returns to the narrative past to make explicit the narrative progression from *past* experience ("just like (it) happened to me") to *present* ("it happens to you").

The "Chili Peppers" sequence is a provocative segment of interaction in that the interlocutors have interactionally produced *one* story with at least *two* episodes. (For a structural analysis of this sequence, see Ochs, Taylor et al. 1992.) The first episode took place in a restaurant when Oren was around two years old; the second episode takes place in the present time in their own home sitting around the dinner table. In this second time and place, Oren is old enough to participate in the telling of the first episode and to take revenge for what Mother and Oren ultimately construct as Mother's wrongdoing in the first episode. The interlocutors do not close down the story at the end of the first episode, as evidenced by Oren's shouting of "YOUR FAULT – YOUR FAULT". Nor do the interlocutors isolate the second episode from the first as evidenced by Oren and Mother's discursive mingling of past and present time references.<sup>3</sup> The fluidity of the passage from past to present and present to past support the notion that temporal shifts do not necessarily signal exits from an otherwise temporally coherent past time story. Rather, interlocutors sometimes construct multiepisodic, multitime dimensional stories that have a single, complex story plot-structure. In this case, episode two presents a "just desserts" ending to this story of personal experience.

#### 4. Narrative Past and Future Time

##### 4.1. Future Retreats into the Past

It is not only present time that both structures and is structured by narratives of past experience but *future time* as well. Just as a present concern for present circumstances and events both occasions and infiltrates the telling of past experience, so does a present concern for *future circumstances and events*. An interlocutor may drop back into a narrative past in the midst of considering the course of future events, for example. The return to a recollected past may provide evidence for or otherwise explain why a particular plan should be carried out in the future. Example (2) displays how a present concern for a future event may motivate and organize a narrative of past experience. In this example, Mother, Father, and three children—Dick (eight years seven months), Janie (five years eleven months), and Evan (three years seven months)—have just finished the main course of their dinner, and Father has just denied one of the children's (Dick's) request to eat some chocolate candy. In



the midst of this present discussion about a future event, namely the eating of chocolates for dessert, Evan initiates a narrative recollection (i.e., drops back in time) that before dinner Father had promised him ice cream for dessert:

(2) Excerpt from "Ice Cream"

Dick: =Daddy? could we have those little chocolates -- um af-

Father: ((to Evan?)) (wa-- -- Dick's doin it)

Dick: (uh) You said after dinner you'd save em for us?

Mother: What little chocolates

Father: What little chocolates

Dick: That Daniel um -- Daniel brought us?

Mother: Oh: oh -- yeah later

Father: Oh yeah. That's fer -- later or tomorrow

Mother: (not) (That's for later)  
((Evan is standing by Father, looking up at him))

"Ice Cream"

story begins→

Evan: No -- AN AND YOU 'MEMBER I COULD HAVE A --

Father: (yeah/it's) -- I think it's  
gonna be too late at night to have chocolates tonight

Evan: DADDY?

Evan: YOU (KNOW::/'MEMBER) IF I EAT A GOOD DINNER I--=

Father: (have those tomorrow)

Dick: o:kay

Father: =(You/Hey) (but see) in the morning? you get the energy?

Mother: Janie don't touch that  
((Janie is over by audio equipment?))

Father: You go outside -- you burn up that energy? s-

Mother: (that's)

Evan: MOMMY

Father: Yeah don't le-- -- play with that ((to Janie))  
((Evan is tapping Father's arm for attention))

Evan: Mommy -- you -- you 'member -- (um) if I eat a good=



Mother: (That's )  
 {  
 Janie?: (Could I get my  
 purse?)  
 {  
 Mother: No! ( )  
 {  
 Evan: =dinner I could have a ice cream  
 Father: An ice cream? - Who? said that  
 {  
 Mother?: Who said that?  
 Evan: You=  
 Dick?: =You .  
 (0.4)  
 Mother: Ooooooooo ((barklike laugh)) hehe  
 {  
 Father: I didn't? say that  
 ((Janie returns - Dick closes in toward Father too))  
 Dick: Remember? - he - h-you said "Daddy - could I have a ice  
 crea:m?"  
 {  
 Mother: Okay this is where you guys chant=  
 {  
 Dick: and  
 Father: =Where? was I  
 {  
 Mother: "Haagen Dazs Haagen Dazs"  
 Dick: and then  
 {  
 Mother: Haagen Dazs Haagens Haagen Dazs  
 {  
 Janie: Haagen Dazs HAAGEN DAZS HAAGEN DAZS  
 {  
 Evan: Haagen Dazs HAAGEN DAZS HAAGEN  
 DAZS HAAGEN DAZS  
 .  
 .  
 .  
 Father: I don't even remember telling you that-What was I doing when  
 { }  
 Dick: ((moves to Father, drops ball)) Daddy I'll tell you the  
 exact words you said  
 Father: Tell m- What was I doing - where was I first of all  
 {  
 Dick: You were sitting right



in that chair where you are now

[  
((sound of Dick bouncing ball?))

(0.4)

Mother: ((*laughing*)) hehehaha – It's o:n film – they have you.

[ ]

Father: (in/at dinnertime?)

Mother: .hh hahaha

[

Janie?: (he has a . . .)

[

Dick: (You) watch ((*moves to Father*)) I'll ask em to play back the film= ((*everyone is looking at Father*))

Father: =No – ton't – don't do that – just tell me when – when I first sat down for dinner?

Dick: No – um you– we– it was before dinner .h when we were all hungry Evan came up to you and said .h “Daddy? could I have a ice cream” and you said “Yeah if you eat a good dinner you can have a ice cream”.

[  
((ball bouncing))

(0.4)

Father: I – I did?

[

Mother: Ooooooooooooooooooooo

[

Janie?: Yes

Father: I remember the conversation that I said that I'd–

[

Mother: ooooooooooooo((*like ghost*))oooooooooooooooooooo

Evan: Did I EAT a good dinner?=

Mother: =You did so: we:ll: – chant “Haagen Dazs” ((*uses hand to root them on*)) no huh huh huh ((*laughing*))

Dick: Haagen Dazs Haagen DAZS HAAGEN DAZS HAAGENDAJS=

[

Janie: HAAGEN DAZS HAAGEN DAZS HAAGENDAJS=

[

Evan: HAAGEN DAZS HAAGEN DAZS

HAAGENDAJS HAAGENDAJS

[

Dick: =HAAGENDAJS

[

Janie: =HAAGENDAJS

[

Father: Okay – I'm not gonna go to Haagen Dazs

((*raises hand again to signal stop*))

(0.4) ((*sudden silence*))



Father:

In this passage the children display a *present* concern for *future* events, first to eat chocolates and then to eat ice cream for dessert. Dick reminds Father of his promise to let them have chocolates, but Father finds a rationale to postpone that commitment. At this point Evan starts the ball rolling for eating ice cream by initiating a collective remembering of a *past* event that entails *future* events, namely that before dinner Father had promised Evan that if he ate a good dinner (future event 1), he could have ice cream for dessert (future event 2). Seemingly in an effort to minimize his commitment and avoid carrying out its implications, the narrative events are disputed by Father, who turns the narrative into a courtroomlike cross-examination of the purported facts concerning this set of events (e.g., "An ice cream? – Who? said that?", "I didn't say that", "I don't even remember telling you that – What was I doing when", "Tell m– What was I doing – where was I first of all"), whereupon Evan and Dick, egged on by Mother, rally together to support one narrative defense (e.g., "Remember? – he – h–you said 'Daddy – could I have a ice crea:m?'", "Daddy I'll tell you the exact words you said", "No – um you– we– it was before dinner .h when we were all hungry Evan came up to you and said .h 'Daddy? could I have a ice cream' and you said 'Yeah if you eat a good dinner you can have a ice cream'"). Mother and Dick even draw on the research team to shore up Evan's and Dick's narrative credibility (e.g., "I'll ask em to play back the film").

Example (2) supports the notion that future time can play a major role not only in warranting but in *structuring* stories of past experience. A present concern for some future event is not simply a spark that ignites a narrative that is otherwise about the past. Rather, similar to what Goodwin found in black adolescent stories, *anticipation of future events is a design element in the story itself*: First of all, *predications about future events* are made within the storyline itself (e.g., "Mommy. – you – you 'member – (um) if I eat a good dinner I could have a ice cream", "you said 'Yeah if you eat a good dinner you can have a ice cream'"). Second, the future events of eating a good dinner and eating ice cream are the *point* of the narrative from Evan's and his siblings' perspective: it organizes which events are *selected* for mention (e.g., father's past commitment to allow Evan to have ice cream), how the events are *implicationally related* to one another (e.g., how eating a good dinner is related to eating ice cream and therefore why it is important to establish that Evan did eat a good dinner), and how different interlocutors *affectively frame* the past events (e.g., the children's insistent support for one version of the narrative events in contrast to Father's doubting stance, Mother's delight at Father's predicament).

#### 4.2. Past Extends Forward into the Future

In section 3.2., we considered how narratives of personal experience can evolve into present time narratives, wherein a sequence of recollected past events is continued into the storytelling moment. Storytelling evolves out of present concern/topic, turns to



past events, and then back to the present time in which implications/consequences of past events are incorporated into the storyline. The perspective here is that a turn to the present in these instances is not outside the story but *part* of it. It is as if interlocutors continue a narrative of personal experiences to the point that they narrate present events or physically act out present events that are logically, causally, temporally, emotionally, or otherwise relevant to the past events just narrated.

In similar fashion, *narratives of personal experience can extend forward to include talk and actions that evidence a present, story-coherent concern with the future*. For example, in (2), the narrative of Father's *past* commitment to ice cream for dessert evolves into both Mother's present proposal to lobby again for ice cream in the relatively immediate *future* ("Okay this is where you guys chant 'Haagen Dazs Haagen Dazs'") and execution of that proposal as the kids and Mother repeat the chant to obtain the desired future experience—a future-oriented strategy that eventually moves Father to make good on his commitment to ice cream that evening. (Despite his stated refusal to take the kids to Haagen Dazs, Father in the end took the whole family along with the researchers and their recording equipment not to Pronto Market but to the Haagen Dazs store a number of miles away!)

Examples (3a)–(3c) illustrate storytelling activity that moves forward in time to include both present and future time predications and references. These future time constructions are enmeshed in the narrative of personal experience topically and structurally in the sense that they are referential expressions embedded in clauses that refer to the past, or they are predicates that relate causally or otherwise to a prior past time predicate. The narrative in (3a)–(3c) involves Mother (Patricia) and Father (Dan) as interlocutors as they are sitting around the dinner table at the end of the meal; their two children—Oren (seven years five months) and Jodie (five years)—are playing nearby. The passage in (3) occurs in the course of a narrative elicited by Dan about Patricia's day and concerns buying a dress for an upcoming wedding.

(3a) Excerpt 1 from "Patricia's Dress"

Mother: =and then we went to this other um – this dress store? – a:nd (my Mom) bought me a dress for the wedding – (for . . . 's wedding).

(3.8) ((kids outside talking; Dan looks at Patricia, then starts to eat, then looks back at Patricia)

Father: (you're kidding)

Mother: hun uh ((shaking head no))

Father: (I thought you had a dress).

Mother: (my) mother didn't like it.

[  
((phone rings; Patricia gets up))

Father: ( )

Mother: (it's your mother).

((phone rings second time; Patricia's voice on answering machine begins; Patricia picks up; it is his mother))









TELLER	UTTERANCE	TIME DOMAINS: PAST PRES FUT
Mother	"... <u>went</u> to ... store"	
Mother	"... <u>bought</u> ... dress for ... <u>wedding</u> ..."	 
Father	"I <u>thought</u> you <u>had</u> a dress"	
Mother	"(my) mother <u>didn't like</u> <u>it</u> "	 

FIGURE 5.1.

In this narrative excerpt, Patricia begins by predicating two *recent past* events ("and then we went to this other um - this dress store", "and (my Mom) bought me a dress for the wedding - (for . . . 's wedding)"). In the second predicate, Patricia alludes to the *future* by referring within a prepositional phrase to a wedding that presumably is yet to take place ("for the wedding", "(for . . . 's wedding)"). At this point in the narrative, Patricia's primary linguistic focus of attention is on the *past* as evidenced by the use of the main-clause verbs *went* and *bought*. In the following turn, however, Dan brings the focus of attention in the narrative into the *present*. Although Dan uses verbs in the simple past (*thought*, *had*), Dan's predication ("I thought you had a dress") occupies a temporal domain that extends from a *more distant past up through the present* (I thought, i.e., think, you had, i.e., have, a dress for the wedding.). The predication implies that Dan not only thought that Patricia already had a dress for the wedding, but also that he still thinks that she has now in her possession a dress for the wedding. As this interpretation suggests, a sense of the *future* is implied in Dan's remarks. "I thought you had a dress" assumes the recipient's background knowledge that "a dress" refers not to any dress but to a dress for the wedding, which in turn both interlocutors know to be in the future. The *present* circumstance of having two dresses for the same event which was pointed out by Dan is addressed by Patricia in the subsequent turn. Her own predication, however, focuses on only that portion of the previous predicate that includes the *more distant past*. In this turn, Patricia predicates a stative event ("(my) mother didn't like it") that had motivated her mother to buy a second dress for her that day. It should be mentioned that Patricia alludes to the *future* event of the wedding in this proposition through the referential expression *it*. This term refers to the dress bought by her mother-in-law for the future wedding. Figure 5.1 displays the temporal domains alluded to in particular utterances by Patricia (Initial Teller) and Dan (Other Teller) in example (3a).

After being interrupted by a telephone call and intervening conversation, the narrative resumes:

**(3b) Excerpt 2 from "Patricia's Dress"**

Round 2 ((begins shortly after Patricia hangs up and sits at table again, sniffing from allergies and wiping nose; kids are outside playing ball))

(2.2) ((Dan eats, looks around to camera))



This passage follows a similar temporal sequential pattern to that characterizing the excerpt in (3a): attention to the *recent past* (i.e., *the recent purchase of the dress*) and *future* (i.e., *the wedding*) events as implied by the phrases "oh about the dress" and "(the) dress," followed by explicit attention to a period extending from a more *distant past up to the present* ("you (had) a dress right"). As in (3a), *future* events are implied through reference to the dress. Similarly, reference to recent past and future is followed by attention to the *distant past* ("your mother (bought me it/wanted me to) – (my mother didn't like it)"), with the continuation of an implied future carried by the pronoun *it*. This pattern in temporal shifting is represented in Figure 5.2.

Although both Initial (Patricia) and Other Teller (Dan) have alluded to the future

TELLER	UTTERANCE	TIME DOMAINS:		
		PAST	PRES	FUT
Father	"about the <u>dress</u> "			
Mother	"(the) <u>dress</u> "			
Father	"you <u>had</u> a <u>dress</u> "			
Mother	"your mother <u>bought</u> me <u>it</u> ... my mother <u>didn't</u> <u>like</u> <u>it</u> "			

**FIGURE 5.2.**



in (3a) and (3b), their subsequent turns in (3c) show them explicitly predicating future events:

(3c) Excerpt 3 from "Patricia's Dress"

Father: you gonna return it?

Mother: no you can't return it – it wasn't too expensive – it was from Loehmann's.

Oren: ((outside)) ( )  
(0.8)

Mother: so what I'll probably do? – is wear it to the dinner the night before – when we go to the (Marriott)?

(1.8) ((Dan turns head away from Patricia with grimace as if he is debating whether he is being conned, then turns back and looks off))

(narrative continues)

In this passage, it is Dan—the Other Teller—who moves the narrative squarely into the *future* with his predication "you gonna return it?" This utterance relates to the past events narrated in that it describes a possible future effect/resolution of Patricia's past misdeeds. The *distant past* is not absent, however, in that once again the *it* in this predication refers to the dress his mother had bought for Patricia prior to that day. Nor is the *future* event of the wedding absent, in that once again the *it* concerns a dress for the wedding. In the following turn, Patricia continues to focus on this *future* time predication (along with the *distant past* and *future* events implied within this predication) when she responds "no" (i.e., No I am not gonna return it) to the previous question. The narrative has now evolved from a narrative about past events that are relevant to future events (e.g., the buying of a dress for the wedding by her mother, the buying of a dress for the wedding by his mother, her mother's not liking the dress bought by his mother) to a narrative that predicates future events. After this negative response, Patricia predicates a *timeless present* (Quirk and Greenbaum 1973) event ("you can't return it") with the *distant past* and *future* once again implied through the pronoun *it*. She then focuses on the more *distant past* ("it wasn't too expensive")<sup>4</sup> with the same *future event* implications carried through the continued use of *it*. Pausing for a moment, Patricia returns to an explicit focus on *future* events with the future predication "so what I'll probably do? – is wear it to the dinner the night before – when we go to the (Marriott)," reinforced by the *implied* future in the continued reference to the dress ("it"). In this turn, Patricia presents her own future resolution to the problem of having two dresses for the same future event. The temporal domains relevant to example (3c) are displayed in Figure 5.3.

Examples (1)–(3) support the notion that the activity of storytelling lends itself to temporal flows forward in time not only into the here and now but also into the future. While a story of personal experience may focus on past events, the past is



TELLER	UTTERANCE	TIME DOMAINS:		
		PAST	PRES	FUT
Father	"you gonna return <u>it</u> ?"			
Mother	"no"			
Mother	"you can't return <u>it</u> "			
Mother	" <u>it</u> wasn't too expensive"			
	"... what I'll ... do ... is wear <u>it</u> "			
	"... <u>the night before</u> ... <u>when</u> "			
	"we <u>go</u> to the (Marriot)"			

FIGURE 5.3.

not necessarily the exclusive center of attention throughout the storytelling. In example (1), we saw a narrative progress from predications about the immediate past (what Mother put in the guacamole dip) to the present (Oren acts out a fictional death) to the more distant past (Oren at two years old) back to the present (verbal and nonverbal acts of respite). In examples (3a)–(3c), we saw that a narrative may progress from predications about the past to predications about the future and present. And in example (2), predications about the past, present, and future share the spotlight from the very first turn of the narrative. The past may be a more or less ephemeral focus and may share the limelight with predications about the present and the future. Further, even when, within a narrative, a predicate specifies a past event, complements of that predicate often imply present and future temporal domains.

### 5. Stories as Unfinished Business

When Ricoeur (1988) considers Heidegger's (1962) notion of future time in the context of narrative, he emphasizes Heidegger's point that *anticipation of the future* drives human thoughts and action. Ricoeur argues this point from two perspectives. The first perspective is that of the protagonist. Within the past time storyline, the protagonist thinks and acts in ways that anticipate the future. The protagonist, that is, acts in goal-directed, purposeful ways, albeit sometimes unwittingly, or sometimes under the control of forces other than himself/herself. This premise is a critical component of the narrative plot. The second perspective is that of the narrators of and audiences to narratives. At the risk of seeming somewhat circular, Ricoeur notes that narrators and audiences organize their understandings and memory of narrative events in terms of their knowledge that there is a future which human beings need to anticipate. Narrators and audiences understand why a protagonist thinks and acts in a certain manner (including cause-effect relations between thoughts and actions), because they themselves think and act to anticipate the future (see Stein and Glenn 1979 for an analysis of children's narrative understandings and recollections).



The future that Ricoeur considers is anchored in the past (the protagonist) and in the present (the narrators/audience), with the task of those present being largely one of interpreting a future that has yet to come for the protagonist but that has already passed for those interlocutors presently involved in the storytelling. We can refer to this kind of future as a *future before the present*. Heidegger notes, in addition, that narratives help human beings to sort out their own futures, that is, their *future after the present*. Heidegger's views on the future import of narrative may be used to account in part for the *interest* an interlocutor takes in a narrative. Part of the interest value of a narrative may be its potential relevance to an interlocutor's own future. If a narrative appears to an interlocutor to be completely irrelevant to his or her future or is not providing new information regarding his or her future, then the narrative may be of diminished interest to the interlocutor. If the narrative does have relevance to one interlocutor's future, for example, that of the Initial Teller, but not to other interlocutors, the interest of the narrative for other interlocutors may depend on the existing relationship of other interlocutors to that interlocutor and/or on that interlocutor's ability to pique the interest of other interlocutors, at least for the narrating moment, to entertain the import of the narrative events for the future life of that interlocutor. The same situation may hold if the narrative has import only for the future of some third party. The interest of any interlocutor may depend on his or her relationship with that third party or on an interlocutor's ability to involve others copresent in that third party's future life.

An interlocutor's interest in the future relevance of a recollection of past events has relevance for the direction of the narrative in that those participating in the storytelling activity may make their interest in the future ramifications of past events explicit in the course of the storytelling. The present chapter demonstrates that a human preoccupation with the future after the present is not only a mental state integral to interpreting narrative, as Heidegger suggests: it is also manifest as discursive structures integral to the production of the narratives of personal experiences themselves. These discursive structures make mental inclinations toward the future visible to interlocutors and analysts alike. Let us now consider more closely how interest in the future may be provoked by the recollection of past time events in narratives of personal experience. In particular, let us consider how narrated past events may be framed as problematic and implicative for the future.

Stories have been widely analyzed as narrative structures that contain some past problematic event that in turn incited some response in the past (Bruner 1986, 1990, Labov and Waletzky 1967, Mandler 1979, Polkinghorne 1988, Schank and Abelson 1977, Stein and Glenn 1979). It is the play between the inciting event and the responses it has engendered that creates the dramatic tension and plot structure of a story. In these analyses, events are viewed as experienced by protagonists and problematic, and responded to by protagonists at a time before the present moment of storytelling. In this sense, stories present completed events. That the events are temporally completed, however, does not necessarily mean that the interlocutors presently engaged in telling a story necessarily treat the past problematic event and past responses as dead issues, as business that has already been taken care of. To the contrary, quite often in conversational storytelling among friends or family either an Initial or an Other Teller will take issue with some aspect of the past experience narrated (cf. Ochs et al. 1989, Ochs et al. 1992). In so doing, interlocutors define a



*past* event as a *present* problem. And like protagonists in a narrative who provided *past* responses to a *past* event felt to be a problem in the *past*, the interlocutors presently involved in cotelling the narrative state *present* and *future* possible responses to a *past* event felt to be a problem in the *present*.

In cognitive science and cognitive psychology, stories have been analyzed as *plans* formulated and executed in the past (Schank and Abelson 1977), where a plan is a representation of a problematic situation along with consideration, evaluation, and execution of strategies for resolving the problem (Schank and Abelson 1977, Stein and Glenn 1979, Friedman, Scholnick, and Cocking 1987). The narratives of personal experience in the current study include not only *past plans* but *future plans* as well. The telling of the future plan may be a momentary discursive flash in the middle of the telling of the past plan, may be recurrent throughout the past plan, or may emerge after the past plan for a sustained conversational period.

Discursive turns to the future-after-the-present in the story narratives in our corpus characteristically frame some past event as unfinished business. In some cases, as in (2), the interlocutors (the children and Mother) problematize a protagonist's (Father's) past action as an unfulfilled past commitment (e.g., to have ice cream for dessert). In other cases, as in (3), the interlocutor (Dan) problematizes a protagonist's (Patricia's) past actions as leading to a present scandal (e.g., having two dresses to wear for the same event) which has yet to be resolved (Ochs and Taylor 1992a,b). In (3), the moral problems inherent in the protagonist's past actions are alluded to earlier in Dan's responses (e.g., "You're kidding") and they are further spelled out in the narrative activity that follows the discursive turn to the future, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

(3d) Excerpt 4 from "Patricia's Dress"

Father: (doesn't that) (seem/sound) (like a belluva - waste)?

Mother: no?:

Father: no.

Mother: ((with hands out, shaking head no)) It wasn't even that expensive.  
(1.2)

Mother: ((shaking head no, facing Dan)) even if it were (a complete waste)  
(0.4) ((Dan looks down at plate, bobs head to right and to left as if weighing logic, not convinced))

Mother: but it's not ((looking away from Dan))

(0.6) ((Patricia looks outside, then back to Dan))

Mother: (but the one) my Mom got me is great=

Father: ((Dan picks food off Oren's plate next to him and eats it))

Janie?: ((outside)) =( you're not letting me:))

Mother: =it's (attractive-looking/a practical dress)

Father: ((gesturing with palm up, quizzical)) (Well why did) you have -  
Why did you let my Mom get you something (that you-)

Mother: Your mo:ther bought it - I hh -



- Father: oh she just got it for you?  
 Mother: ((*nodding yes*)) (yeah)  
 Father: you weren't there?  
 Mother: I was there (and your mother said, "No no it's great. Let me buy it for you") – I didn't ask her to buy it for me?  
 (5.0) ((*kids outside talking; Dad is eating*))  
 Father: so they're fighting over who gets you things?  
 Mother: ((*nods yes slightly*)) – ((*smiling to Dan*)) tch – (cuz I'm/sounds) so wonderful.  
 (9.0) ((*Patricia turns to look outside; blows her nose—allergies; kids talk outside, bouncing ball*))

In addition to framing past events as unfinished business, these discursive journeys to the future generally specify a means of *resolving the purported problem* (cf. Ochs et al. 1992 for a discussion of *stories as problem-solving discourse*). In (3c), Dan suggests one future way of handling the problem, namely returning the dress that his mother had purchased for the wedding, but Patricia points to the impossibility of this solution and goes on with her own solution, namely that she will wear the dress his mother had purchased to a dinner at the Marriott the night before the wedding. In (2), two different strategies are presented for resolving the problem of Father's unwillingness to let them eat ice cream for dessert that evening. The children's strategy is simply to get Father to admit his past commitment to the future event, but Mother's strategy is to get the children to lobby for ice cream by chanting "Haagen Dazs." The speech act of lobbying pragmatically implies an event that the speaker wants to take place in the future.

Examples (1), (2), and (3a)–(3d) suggest that the construal of a story event as unfinished business, that is, as something to be resolved, can be carried out by either the Initial Teller or Other Teller. In (1) and (2), it is the Initial Teller (Oren in (1), Evan in (2)) who frames the narrative past as unfinished business, but in (3) it is the Other Teller (Dan) who does so. (For discussion of example (1) as unfinished business see Ochs et al. 1992.) Examples (4a)–(4c) below present two contrastive framings of a set of story events by different interlocutors in different rounds of the story—*round* is defined here as one of a sequence of story segments interrupted by two or more turns dealing with other matters (e.g., passing food, table manners). In the first round (4a), the Initial Teller, Laurie (five years seven months), presents a somewhat mixed but generally positive framing of the narrative events, by integrating the narrative events into dinner grace. Copresent with Laurie are her mother and Laurie's siblings—Jimmy (four years four months), Annie (seven years ten months), and Roger (ten years eight months).

(4a) Excerpt 1 from "Grace Story"

Round 1

- Laurie: I wanna pray ((*clasps her hands*)) – Jesus?  
 Mother: ((*to Roger*)) ( ) ((*adjusting Laurie's chair*))  
 Roger: ((*mumbled, to Mom*)) ( ) =



- Laurie: =Jesus?
- Mother: Wait a minute Laurie ((*irritated, throwing arms up in semidespair*)) I'm not sitting down= ((*Mother sits*))
- Laurie: =kay - Jesus? - please - um - help us to love and .hh um - thank you for letting it be a nice day and for taking a (fine/fun) nap? - and - for (letting) Mommy go bye and I'm glad that I cwied today? cuz I like cwying .hh and I'm glad=
- [
- Annie?: ((*snicker*))
- [
- Roger?: ((*snicker*))
- Laurie: =(that anything/everything) happened today in Jesus name ((*claps hands*)) A:-MEN!
- Mother?: amen ((*clapping lightly*))
- [
- Jimmy: A:-MEN  
(1.0) ((*Laurie starts licking fork*))
- Jimmy: amen baybe ((*baby*))
- Mother: hohoho  
((*general laughter—Mom, then Roger and Annie; Mom gets up*))
- Jimmy: amen
- [
- Annie: amen (honey bunch?) ((*with southern accent*))  
(1.0)
- Annie: amen dahling? ((*with glamour accent*))
- [
- Jimmy: amen
- Jimmy: AMEN baybe.

In this round Laurie introduces a past event ("Mommy go bye") simultaneously as one that was problematic in the past in that it provoked the event of crying ("I cried today") and unproblematic at present (perhaps indicating that she has overcome her earlier unhappiness) in that crying is something she claims to like doing ("I'm glad that I cwied today? cuz I like cwying and I'm glad (that anything/everything) happened today in Jesus name A:-MEN"). This double framing of unhappiness and happiness is somewhat a consequence of the story's also being a grace and the requirements that a grace express gratefulness for events.

The narrative events are dropped for a while until Mother reintroduces them in round 2 of the story.<sup>5</sup> In this second round, Mother, Laurie, and Laurie's siblings restate the narrative events, and Mother and Laurie's siblings redefine them explicitly as problematic.

#### (4b) Excerpt 2 from "Grace Story"

##### Round 2

Mother: ((*addressing Laurie*)) Miss (Graw) said you cried and cried=



- [  
((Laurie looks up  
from her spaghetti, momentarily pausing in her eating))
- Mother: =at nap time?
- Laurie: ((Laurie nods her head yes several times))
- [
- Annie: she did – she wanted (her) Mama
- Mother: She said that was because – this was your first day to be at  
school? without me:?  
(0.6). ((Laurie is visibly engaged in eating and spilling food))
- Mother: but honey? – I only work – this – it was only this week that I  
worked there all week? because it was the first week? of school  
but –
- [
- Annie: she cried at three o'clock too  
(0.2)
- Mother: but after this? – it – I only work one day a week? there and  
that's Tuesday  
(0.6)

In this excerpt, two different events are treated as problematic. First, the event of Mother's absence from school is treated as allegedly problematic from Laurie's point of view, as evidenced in reports by the teacher, by Laurie, and by Annie. Second, Laurie's past response to that event is treated as problematic and as unfinished business by Mother. Here Mother begins to find ways of altering Laurie's response to Mother's absence in the future. She tells Laurie what to expect in the future, perhaps as a way of bracing Laurie for the coming school days. After a brief interruption, the family returns once more to the story of Laurie's experience at school, pointing out other problems and offering solutions to them. In this passage (4c), Mother (and later Roger) indirectly makes Laurie responsible for her reaction to Mother's absence by pointing out that Laurie had not taken her blanket to school that day, indicating (especially through the use of the term *either* in turn 1) that she had not taken the proper precautions to buffer herself for the day alone at school:

(4c) Excerpt 3 from "Grace Story"

Round 3

- (2.2)
- Mother: Laurie? – you didn't take yer ((shaking head no)) – blanket to  
school either did you.
- Laurie: No I (for)got it ((perulant))  
(0.4)
- Jimmy: (you forgot it at a school)
- Laurie: ((nods yes once))
- Jimmy: (you left it at school?)
- Laurie: ((nods yes once again))
- Mother: No ((shaking head no)) – she left it at home



(1.0) ((*scraping plates sounds; Jimmy looking at Mom as if in a daze*))

Roger: She left it – here today

Mother: we'll hafta get it out of the closet – and put it over there with the lunch stuff

(2.0) ((*eating; Mom arranging hair*))

Jimmy: yes – so you could – bring it (with/to) school

Mother: { (as a warning/in the morning) –  
mhm?

Jimmy: yeah and you'd BETTER – ((*looks to Mom*)) take care of your –  
your – your – blankie because I am ((*looks to Mom again*))

Mother: mh:m:? ((*chuckles*))

{  
Roger: mhm ((*snickers*))

(1.0) ((*Roger finishes drink, wipes mouth*))

In this round, Mother turns to future ways of resolving Laurie's problem, namely making the family responsible to put the blanket with Laurie's lunch to take to school ("we'll hafta get it out of the closet – and put it over there with the lunch stuff"). Jimmy seconds this resolution, even intensifying it with his warning to Laurie about the future: "you'd BETTER – ((*looks to Mom*)) take care of your – your – your – blankie because I am ((*looks to Mom again*))."

The examples presented here suggest that at varying points throughout a story narrative an interlocutor may treat some past event as implicative for the future-after-the-present, that is, as unfinished business, and may alter the direction of the story to attend to those future implications. Sometimes the discursive expression of future implications appears right at the start of the story narrative, as in Evan's recall of Father's promise of ice cream in (2). But often the discursive turn to a future event implied by a past event is brought up in the course of a story's telling. Typically there is a two-step process in which a past event is first mentioned then framed as troublesome with respect to some future event. This process is illustrated in (3a)–(3d), where Mother's mentioning of the dress purchase is followed by Father's negative remarks and suggestions as to what Mother should do in the future, and in (4), where Mother first remarks on Laurie's crying at school and second makes a problem of her behavior in terms of future events.

## 6. Time and Narrative Genre

This chapter has been centrally concerned with narratives of past experience that creatively evolve (Bergson 1911) into narratives of future experiences in a discursively fluid manner. I have argued, following Heidegger (1962), that both past and future experiences comprise narratives of personal experience. Future time in narratives may be alluded to not only literally through noun phrases and predicates but also pragmatically through a variety of *speech acts* such as



*Reminders* ("Mommy. – you – you 'member – (um) if I eat a good dinner I could have a ice cream")

*Petitions* ("Haagen Dazs HAAGEN DAZS HAAGEN DAZS")

*Forecasts* ("so what I'll probably do? – is wear it to the dinner the night before – when we go to the (Marriott)")

*Prescriptions* ("we'll hafta get it out of the closet – and put it over there with the lunch stuff")

*Suggestions, admonitions, warnings* ("you gonna return it?", "you'd BETTER – ((looks to Mom)) take care of your – your – your – blankie because I am ((looks to Mom again))")

Talk relevant to future and past time does not necessarily map on to discrete segments of text. Rather, future and past time are often interwoven into the fabric of a single narrative. As such, the same narrative text can be examined for its relevance to both future and past events. In some cases, this might mean that the very same text might be examined for its properties as a future plan (wherein future attempts to respond to problematic events are expressed) and as a past plan (wherein past attempts to respond to problematic events are expressed), or for its properties as an agenda (a sequence of future events) and as a report (a sequence of past events). A more overarching implication of this discussion is that *genre* (e.g., past plans, future plans, reports, agendas, disputes) might best be considered as a *perspective* on a text rather than as a discrete text itself. Genre might be seen as a linguistically realized goal-structure (e.g., goals associated with planning for the future or reporting), and any single text might realize a multiplicity of such goal-structures (recollecting past events, projecting future events, engaging in a dispute, and more).

If interlocutors rarely made discursive journeys to the future in the course of telling personal experiences, we might analyze such phenomena as exceptions to the storytelling norm. However, interlocutors engaged in telling past personal experiences *discursively turn to future events regularly*, both in the sense that many stories of personal experience contain references to and predications about the future and in the sense that in a single story there may be several references to and predications about the future. For example, the "Ice Cream" story paraphrases a similar future event over and over throughout the narrative. The "Grace Story" contains a number of different predications about the future, and "Patricia's Dress" abounds in references to upcoming events (e.g., repeated references to the upcoming wedding, reference to the dinner before the wedding) and future time predications (e.g., about returning one dress, about not returning one dress, about wearing one dress to the wedding dinner).

If the discursive turns to the future were off-topic to the past story experiences or were prefaced by topic-shifting disjunct markers (e.g., "oh," "incidentally"; see Jefferson 1978) then we might analyze them as attempts to exit the story and begin another discourse activity. However, the future-time predications that appear in the course of a story's telling are *story-coherent* in the sense that they detail implications of or are otherwise relevant to past experiences predicated thus far within the story, and they appear without disjunct discourse markers. The future predications more generally are prefaced by a logical connector such as "so" (e.g., "so what I'll



probably do? . . .") or, even more commonly, appear baldly, with no prefacing discourse marker at all. For the interlocutors engaged in storytelling, these discursive moves are treated as topically continuous and structurally expectable within the activity of storytelling.

If stories progressed in one evolutionary direction from past to future, then we might distinguish the future-oriented portion as a discursive product of the story, to be cut off and analyzed in its own right, perhaps as a discrete epilogue. However, there are at least two problems surrounding such a proposal:

1. Stories may move not only forward to a future after the present but also *back to the past from a future time after the present.*

Consider, for example, "Patricia's Dress," in which Father's and Mother's references to and predications about the future in (3c) were immediately followed by more details about the past in (3d). And in "Grace Story," Mother's informing Laurie about the times she will be working in her school in the future is followed, after some interruption, by a return to another detail of the past experience, namely that Laurie forgot to take her blanket to school. Indeed, time-switchings between future-after-the-present and past predications can recur numerous times. In "Grace Story," for example, the interlocutors follow up Laurie's past forgetting of her blanket with another shift to future warnings and prescriptions. The "Ice Cream" story has interlocutors fluctuating between recollecting (e.g. "MEMBER", "What was I doing") and anticipating ("if I eat a good dinner I could have a ice cream", "Haagen Dazs HAAGEN DAZS. . .") as parallel, shifting lietsmotifs throughout the entire storytelling activity.

2. Propositions about story events very often involve *past and future time at once.*

It is not easy to separate expressed propositions in a story into those that are "about the future" and those that are "about the past." First of all, as mentioned in the beginning of this essay, the future may underpin the telling of a past event even when no grammatical or lexical structures used index future after the present. Second, in Figures 5.1-5.3 we saw that references and predicates of past and future commingle within a single clause. In "Patricia's Dress," lexical items referring to different dresses implied a future event (an upcoming wedding), whereas the verbs in the same clauses specified past time events or circumstances. Third, even when the temporal constructions are consistently past or consistently future within a clause, the clause itself may be embedded within a larger multiclausal construction which traverses past and future. Thus, in "Ice Cream," Evan's construction "you 'member - (um) if I eat a good dinner I could have a ice cream" contains multiple temporal domains as a whole, even though each clause may be temporally consistent.

These considerations suggest that narratives of personal experience have one face toward the future. We may not see evidence of that face if we examine stories in experimental settings where the interlocutors typically have scant interest in the



storyline or in the futures of the protagonists and copresent interlocutors (experimenters). And we may not see that face even in conversational narratives if we think of stories as mainly being told by entitled storytellers to story recipients, entitlement being by virtue of privileged access to some past events. In the larger corpus of family dinner stories used for this study, however, family interlocutors jumped into the telling of stories regardless of whether or not they had privileged prior knowledge or even any prior knowledge of the story's past events (Ochs et al. 1992). They contributed critical story parts such as psychological responses, outcomes, attempts, and consequences to the extent that they conarrated the story. In this framework, any copresent interlocutor helps to shape the point of the story. For any conarrator, the point of the story may be the import of the past events for future events. In some cases, coauthors rally around the same future import of past events, as do Mother and kids in the "Ice Cream" story and in later rounds of the "Grace Story". In other cases, coauthors are divided in their view of the relevance of the past to the future, as are Mother and Father in "Patricia's Dress" and Father and the rest of the family in "Ice Cream."

Finally, the future face of a story may be eclipsed if a story is not tracked and analyzed over sometimes lengthy interruptions and several rounds of narrative interaction. The "Grace Story" looks finished and is treated as finished by the Initial Teller at round 1 but reappears after lengthy intervening conversation. It is only in rounds 2 and 3 that the story is opened up to other family coauthors, who, as they narrate bits and pieces of the past events, begin to visualize possible future events. This process is at the very heart of the present argument. It is the perspective of this essay that story events are points along a temporal continuum of life, and that the activity of storytelling allows interlocutors continuously and creatively to move their lives forward in time (i.e., evolve) through a process of mentally and verbally stretching past life events into the future.

## Notes

### 1. The transcription conventions used in the present chapter are:

- [ open brackets indicate the start of an overlap between the utterances of two speakers
- ] close brackets indicate the end of an overlap between two speakers
- = equal signs appear at the end of a line to indicate continuous speaking and at the beginning of a subsequent line to indicate that no pause or silence has intervened; this device allows the insertion of other turns or comments where the width of the page does not permit a line to be continued
- a single dash attached to a word- indicates a cut-off utterance
- a single dash with a space on both sides indicates an extremely brief pause: word - word
- ( ) single parentheses are used for two purposes. When they enclose a number they represent a silent pause in tenths of a second; (0.6) represents a silence lasting six tenths of a second. Otherwise parentheses enclose uncertain transcriptions.
- (( )) double parentheses are used to enclose ((stage directions and other comments by the transcriber)); the comments are *italicized* to indicate that they are not spoken by the participants
- : a single colon indicates a lengthening of one conversational beat



- :: a double colon indicates a lengthening of two conversational beats  
 .h a period preceding a breath marker indicates an in-breath  
 / a slash is used within parentheses to separate alternative uncertain transcriptions  
 CAPS CAPITAL LETTERS are used to mark loudness  
       underlining is used to mark emphasis

2. This move could be seen as paralleling Father's earlier dissatisfaction with and criticism of Mother for putting chili pepper in the guacamole dip.

3. It could also be argued that the drama (described in (1b)) surrounding Oren's realization that he has eaten hot salsa and chili peppers links the distant past narrative episode (described in (1c)) to the present time episode "just desserts" consequences (described in (1d)).

4. Patricia's comment here appears to be a response to her husband's utterance "You gonna return it?" which she takes to be a complaint. Her comment is an attempt to mitigate the gravity of the problem of having purchased two dresses for the same event.

5. This is a somewhat odd second round in that Mother initiates the round as if the events had not been narrated earlier, that is, as if she is the Initial Teller, not Laurie. This narrative is considered to be a second round in the sense that it is a second narrating of the same events, albeit from a different perspective.

## References

- Applebee, Arthur N. 1978. *The Child's Concept of a Story: Ages Two to Seventeen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bauman, Richard. 1986. *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bergson, H. 1911. *Creative Evolution*. Boston: University Press of America.
- Bruner, Jerome. 1986. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 1990. *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Friedman, S., E. Scholnick, and R. Cocking. 1987. *Blueprints for Thinking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goodwin, Charles. 1984. "Notes on Story Structure and the Organization of Participation." In J. M. Atkinson and J. Heritage, eds., *Structures of Social Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 225–46.
- Goodwin, Marjorie H. 1990. *He-Said-She-Said: Talk as Social Organization Among Black Children*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Goodwin, Marjorie H., and Charles Goodwin. 1989. "Story Structure and Social Organization." In J. Bergman, ed., *Kommunikative Formen und Kulturelles Milieu* (Proceedings of the session on 'sprachsoziologie'). Zurich: German/Austrian/Swiss Sociological Association.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Jefferson, Gail. 1978. "Sequential Aspects of Storytelling in Conversation." In Jim Schenkein, ed., *Studies in the Organization of Conversational Interaction*. New York: Academic Press. Pp. 219–48.
- Labov, William. 1972. *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Labov, William, and Joshua Waletzky. 1967. "Narrative Analysis." In June Helm, ed., *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Pp. 12–44.



- Mandler, Jean H. 1979. "Categorical and Schematic Organization in Memory." In C. R. Puff, ed., *Memory Organization and Structure*. New York: Academic Press.
- Ochs, Elinor, Ruth Smith, and Carolyn Taylor. 1989. "Dinner Narratives as Detective Stories." *Cultural Dynamics* 2:238-57.
- Ochs, Elinor, and Carolyn Taylor. 1992a. "Family Narrative as Political Activity." *Discourse and Society* 3:301-40.
- . 1992b. "Science at Dinner." In C. Kramsch, ed., *Text and Context: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Language Study*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath. Pp. 29-45.
- Ochs, Elinor, Carolyn Taylor, Dina Rudolph, and Ruth Smith. 1992. "Storytelling as a Theory-Building Activity." *Discourse Processes* 15:37-72.
- Pitcher, E. G., and E. Prelinger. 1963. *Children Tell Stories: An Analysis of Fantasy*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Polanyi, Livia. 1989. *Telling the American Story: A Structural and Cultural Analysis of Conversational Storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. 1988. *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Quirk, Randolph, and Sidney Greenbaum. 1973. *A University Grammar of English*. London: Longman.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1988. *Time and Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sacks, Harvey. 1970. Class lectures. University of California, Irvine, CA.
- Schank, Roger C., and Robert P. Abelson. 1977. *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Stein, Nancy, and C. G. Glenn. 1979. "An Analysis of Story Comprehension in Elementary School Children." In Roy O. Freedle, ed., *New Directions in Discourse Processing*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex. Pp. 53-120.
- Umiker-Sebeok, D. J. 1979. "Preschool Children's Intraconversational Narratives." *Journal of Child Language* 6:91-109.
- Young, K. G. 1987. *Taleworlds and Storyrealms: The Phenomenology of Narrative*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.