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## Chapter Four The Orality of Literature and the Literacy of Conversation<sup>1</sup>

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In a paper entitled "Reconceiving Literacy," Bleich (in press) observes that, in light of growing concern with what he calls intersubjectivity (in the terms of classroom ethnographers, meaning as an interactional achievement), two elements not usually found in purely cognitive approaches to language, *affect* and *dialogue*, become central.<sup>2</sup> These two elements are central to the present chapter as well.

I have been arguing in a number of recent papers and books that orality and literacy, and spoken and written language, are not dichotomous but rather complex and intertwined. Therefore, we, as researchers, in addition to analyzing the discourse types that in some way typify spoken and written language respectively—that is, casual conversation on the one hand and written expository prose on the other—should be thinking in terms of understanding the dimensions and patterns underlying, connecting, and distinguishing a variety of discourse types.

Research on orality and literacy (most often cited are Goody and Watt, 1963; Havelock, 1963; Olson, 1977; and Ong, 1967; see Tannen, 1982a for summary and discussion) has provided significant insight into some of these patterns. I have benefited from such insight in my own analysis of discourse. However, in some ways the orality-literacy paradigm has led us astray. As Becker (1984a) eloquently reminds us, theories blind our vision, obscuring aspects of the world that do not fit into their frame at the same time that they illuminate those aspects that do.

<sup>1</sup> Research on the material presented here was begun with the support of a Rockefeller Humanities Fellowship, for which I am grateful. Discussion of dialogue in conversation is drawn from Tannen (1986a). A different version of this material was presented at the 1985 LSA/TESOL Institute at Georgetown University and will appear as "Hearing Voices in Conversation, Fiction and Mixed Genres," in *Linguistics in Context: Connecting Observation and Understanding Lectures from the 1985 LSA/TESOL and NEH Institutes*, edited by Deborah Tannen, to be published by Ablex Publishing Corporation.

<sup>2</sup> Bleich (in press) amasses and integrates a staggeringly diverse range of sources to illustrate his notion of intersubjectivity. These include, among others, George Herbert Mead, Vygotsky, Derrida, Ong, Levi Strauss, and researchers in the fields of feminist epistemology and child language acquisition, as well as two authors represented in this volume: Heath and Tannen.

Many educators, picking up on what has been called "literacy theory" (that is, research in anthropology, psychology, and rhetoric on orality and literacy or oral and literate traditions), argue that minority children do poorly in school because they come from an oral culture. For example, D'Angelo (1983, p. 104) writes:

Many students come from what Walter Ong would call a "residually oral" culture, a stratum within the mainstream of society where oral modes of expression permeate thinking. They come from homes where speech is more widespread than reading or writing. . . .

The thinking of preliterate and nonliterate people is concrete, syncretic, diffuse, perceptual, affective, situation-bound, additive, and digressive, concerned with everyday events, actions, and happenings rather than with abstract ideas. The thinking of literate people tends to be more abstract, discrete, definite, and articulated, consisting of generalizations, deductions, and inferences. Without writing, according to some scholars, the mind cannot participate in the kinds of analytical, sequential thinking necessary to develop even a single magazine article. Writing may be artificial, but it is also an artifice and an art that seems to be essential for the development of consciousness.

What I am suggesting is that one possible reason for the decline in literacy might be related to the incipient or undeveloped forms of literate thinking in some of our students.

D'Angelo thus sees orality and literacy as not only dichotomous but mutually exclusive.

Ogbu (this volume) shows that this hypothesis cannot be valid. Elsewhere (Tannen, 1985) I have demonstrated a similar point on different grounds. Drawing on my conversational analysis of what I then called (but would now rather not call) oral and literate strategies in casual conversation (Tannen, 1984), I have shown that New York Jewish conversational style uses highly oral strategies. Nonetheless, children of this cultural group do very well, not very poorly, in school. Jewish culture is both highly oral *and* highly literate. Hence the argument that orality precludes literacy must fall.

In the present paper, I continue this line of argument by drawing on an ongoing research project comparing conversational and literary discourse. The thrust of this research is to demonstrate that ordinary conversation and literary discourse have more in common than has been commonly thought.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Ricks (1981, p. 42), in a review of Goffman's *Forms of Talk*, reports feeling "what everybody always feels about the main contentions which issue from somebody else's discipline: that it is odd that certain things need to be said." Just so, it will seem odd to some, in particular to creative writers, that I feel it needs to be said that literary language is made of the same stuff as ordinary conversation. W.H. Auden, for example, is said to have commented that "poetry is memorable speech"; similar observations are reported by Heath (this volume) based on her ethnographic interviews with contemporary writers. Such insight notwithstanding, the relationship between conversation and written literature does need to be articulated, as witness the excerpt from D'Angelo cited above and conventional wisdom cited below.

Whereas conversation is generally thought to be messy, pedestrian and error-ridden (many would even adduce here the list of adjectives D'Angelo (1983) used to describe "the thinking of preliterate and nonliterate people"), literary discourse is thought to be an exalted use of language. I seek to show that both operate on the same linguistic dimensions—means of contributing to interpersonal involvement.

In this research, I am examining closely a variety of spoken and written discourse types in order to compare the linguistic means by which they create involvement. I group these linguistic patterns in two categories: first, uses of language that sweep the audience along through their rhythm, sound, and shape; and second, those that require audience participation in sense-making, such as indirectness, tropes, imagery and detail, and constructed dialogue (with many of these intertwined in storytelling). (For more discussion of this theoretical framework see the last chapter of Tannen, 1984 and Tannen, in press).

Among these numerous linguistic patterns I believe contribute to involvement, I have begun investigation of repetition, detail, figures of speech, storytelling, and constructed dialogue. The present paper draws on my analysis of constructed dialogue (Tannen, 1986a) and builds on it to include analysis of dialogue in three different discourse types produced by junior high school students: a school writing assignment, a story told in conversation, and notes written to friends.

### WHY CONSTRUCTED DIALOGUE?

Many researchers (for example, Chafe, 1982; Labov, 1972; Ochs, 1979; Schifffrin, 1981; Tannen, 1982b) have observed that narration is more vivid when speech is presented as first-person dialogue ("direct quotation") rather than third-person exposition ("indirect quotation"), and that the former is more commonly found in conversational narrative (sometimes generally referred to as spoken discourse) than written expository discourse (but not of course in written literary discourse, precisely, I would suggest, because fiction and poetry are akin to conversation in workings and effect). But there is more to it than that. The creation of voices occasions the imagination of alternative and distant worlds that is the stuff of dreams and art.

Friedrich (1979, p. 473) suggests that "it is the more poetic levels and processes of language, however defined, that massively model, constrain, trigger, and otherwise affect the individual imagination." I see constructing dialogue as one such poetic process. Constructed dialogue in conversation and in fiction is a means by which experience surpasses story to become drama. Moreover, the creation of drama from personal experience and hearsay contributes to the emotional component that is crucial for cognition to be effected.

I have compared constructed dialogue in two genres of two languages: stories told in conversation in American English and Athenian Greek, and excerpts from an American and a Greek novel (Tannen, 1986a). Here I will cite examples from the American conversation and fiction samples, referring only briefly to the Greek samples. I will first present evidence to support my claim that dialogue in conversational storytelling is constructed rather than reported, by examining the dialogue in a single conversational narrative. After this I demonstrate that constructing dialogue is part of a pattern of vivid storytelling by reference to a study of dialogue in Brazilian and American narration. I then move to discussion of the spoken and written discourse of junior high school students, in and out of school. Finally, I present an excerpt of an unusual and unusually effective document: a conference proceedings which is written like a novel.

To begin, I want to place the phenomenon of dialogue in the context of storytelling.

### STORYTELLING AS AN ACT OF MIND

I cannot here recapitulate his entire argument (though I would like to), but I shall refer cryptically to an eloquent essay by Rosen (1984) showing that storytelling in literature is a refinement of storytelling in everyday life—and that storytelling is at the heart of everyday life. Citing Barbara Hardy, Bakhtin, Genette, Eagleton, and others, Rosen argues that storytelling is “an explicit resource in all intellectual activity,” “a disposition of the mind,” a “meaning-making strategy” which represents the mind’s “eternal rummaging in the past and its daring, scandalous rehearsal of scripts of the future.”

I would add that inseparable from this cognitive function of stories—the creation of meaning in personal lives—is an interactive function. The telling and hearing of experience as stories is made possible by, and simultaneously creates, interpersonal involvement which carries a metamessage (G. Bateson, 1972) of rapport.<sup>4</sup> That is, hearers can understand and appreciate a story because they recognize its details and can imagine a possible life to account for such events. That the hearer’s experience thus matches the storyteller’s, creates a sense of a shared universe—of experience and of discourse. When this occurs in interpersonal interaction, rapport is drawn on and established. When it occurs in literature, the sense of rapport is broadened to include a wide audience and a published author—a community of rapport.

Thus storytelling is a means by which humans organize and understand the world, and feel connected to it and to each other. Giving voice to the

<sup>4</sup> The overriding importance of language use to create rapport is a repeated theme of R. Lakoff (1979). Building on her work, I discuss this phenomenon at length in an academic (Tannen, 1984) and in a popular (Tannen, 1986b) mode.

speech of the people in a story—and we shall see presently that such voice giving can be quite literal—creates a play peopled by characters who take on life and breath.

The casting of thoughts and speech in dialogue creates particular scenes and characters, and it is the particular which moves readers by establishing and building on a sense of identification between speaker or writer and audience.<sup>5</sup> As teachers of creative writing exhort neophyte writers, the accurate representation of the particular communicates universality, whereas attempts to represent universality directly often communicate nothing—a seeming paradox which may underly Becker’s (1984b) call, following Pike, for the “substitution of particularity for the pursuit of generality or universality as the goal of our craft”.

### STORYTELLING AS DRAMA

The great American writer Eudora Welty (1984) locates her beginnings as a writer in the magic of everyday storytelling. She was first exposed to the magic when her family acquired a car, and a storytelling (that is, gossipy) neighbor was invited along on family outings. It was the sound of dialogue that cast a spell on the child Eudora:

My mother sat in the back with her friend, and I’m told that as a small child I would ask to sit in the middle, and say as we started off, “Now talk.”

There was dialogue throughout this lady’s accounts to my mother. “I said” . . . “He said” . . . “And I’m told she very plainly said” . . . “It was midnight before they finally heard, and what do you think it was?”

What I loved about her stories was that everything happened in scenes. I might not catch on to what the root of the trouble was in all that happened, but my ear told me it was dramatic. (pp. 12–13)

Note that in this telling, Welty herself creates a scene (the child nestled between two adults in the back of a car), an inextricable part of which is constructed dialogue:

“Now talk.”

“I said” . . .

“He said” . . .

“And I’m told she very plainly said” . . .

“It was midnight before they finally heard, and what do you think it was?”

Welty knows that narratives in ordinary conversation are artistic creations. This assumption is seen again in her recollection of (or, more precisely,

<sup>5</sup> Havelock (1963) discusses this sense of identification as the basis for cognition in literate modes—for him, oral literature—which he calls “subjective knowing.” I am eager, however, to avoid the dichotomy between subjective and objective knowing which Havelock constructs a dichotomy that parallels the oral/literate one. I am grateful to A.L. Becker for patiently prodding me to avoid this terminology and attendant imaging.

cisely, her artful reconstruction of) Fannie, a woman who came to the Welty house to sew. Like the gossipy friend who was invited on car trips, Fannie delighted Eudora with her stories about other people, which the child did not understand but nonetheless loved to hear:

The gist of her tale would be lost on me, but Fannie didn't bother about the car she was telling it to: she just like telling. She was like an author. In fact, for a good deal of what she said, I daresay she *was* the author. (p. 14)

Welty does not, by this observation, criticize Fannie; rather, she places her among the ranks of talented storytellers.

The parallel between gossip and literature, though not unprecedented (it is drawn, for example, by Britton, 1982), is not generally accepted. Popular opinion lionizes literary storytelling but scorns gossip. This view of gossip is voiced in Welty's account in the character of her mother. A native of West Virginia, the elder Welty considered the Mississippi practice of social visiting to be "idling". And she was exasperated by the chatter that so delighted her daughter:

"What did she say?" I asked.

"She wasn't *saying* a thing in this world," sighed my mother. "She was just ready to talk, that's all." (p. 13)

Accordingly, her mother tried to prevent Fannie from telling stories in her child's presence:

"I don't want her exposed to gossip"—as if gossip were measles and I could catch it. (p. 14)

The suggestion that oral stories are created rather than reported was made by another professional storyteller: a medicine show pitchman, Fred "Doc" Bloodgood. In answer to my query about the accuracy of parts of his sample pitches (Bloodgood, 1982), he responded: "Anyway, as my dad always told me, 'Never let a grain of truth interfere with the story.'" I doubt that Bloodgood's dad ever said this; in any case it doesn't matter whether or not he did. What matters is that "as my dad always told me" is an apt particular way to introduce a general maxim.

Given this perspective of the creative act of storytelling in any genre, and of the centrality of dialogue in making stories dramatic, I will move to the examination of dialogue in narrative.

### REPORTED SPEECH IS CONSTRUCTED DIALOGUE

The conversational discourse I have analyzed consists of stories told in conversation either in dyads or in small groups, recorded by someone who hap-

pened to be there.<sup>4</sup> The literary discourse examined consists of excerpts from novels. The American novel used is *Household Words* by Joan Silber (1976), an enormously moving and beautifully written novel which won the Hemingway Award for first novels.

I will begin by demonstrating that dialogue presented in oral storytelling is constructed, not reported, by looking closely at the dialogue in a conversational story. The point is to show that the lines of dialogue in the narrative were not actually spoken by the characters to which they are attributed. What, then, are they doing in the story? The speaker uses the animation of voices to make his story into drama.

The narrative was told by a young man who came home from his work as a resident in the emergency ward of a hospital, to find a group of his friends gathered in his home, hosted by his wife.<sup>5</sup> Asked whether anything interesting had happened at the emergency room, he responded by telling this story:

- 1 We had three guys come in,
- 2 one guy had a cut right here.
- 3 On his arm? [Listener: uhuh]
- 4 Bled all over the place, right? [Listener: Yeah]
- 5 These three guys were hysterical.
- 6 They come bustin' through the door.
- 7 Yknow you're not supposed to come in to the emergency room.

<sup>4</sup> The American stories were recorded, chosen, and initially transcribed by students in my Discourse Analysis class, Fall 1983. Terry Waldspurger helped identify constructed dialogue and count words. I recorded the Greek stories in Athens; Fileni Kalou transcribed them; Maria Spanos checked transcriptions and helped with identification of constructed dialogue as well as translation.

<sup>5</sup> Kimberly Murphy recorded and initially transcribed this story. I am grateful to her for finding it, and to her and the speaker for permission to use it. In this and a later example, the transcription of speech is presented in lines and verses in order to capture in print the rhythmic chunking of oral discourse and consequently to facilitate comprehension. See Tannen (in press) for discussion of this transcription practice, its precedents and theoretical implications. The following transcription conventions are used:

- Punctuation reflects intonation not grammar. Hence,
  - period indicates sentence final falling intonation.
  - comma indicates phrase final intonation ("more to come").
  - question mark indicates rising intonation.
  - colon indicates elongation of preceding vowel sound.
  - CAPITALIZATION indicates emphatic stress.
  - three dots indicate pause of at least half second.
  - two dots indicate perceptible pause of less than half second.
  - /?/ question mark in slashes indicates unintelligible utterance.
  - dash indicates abrupt cutting off of sound.
  - "" quotation marks are inserted to mark dialogue.
  - Lines drawn over dialogue show intonation contours.

8 You're supposed to go to the registration desk, yknow?  
 9 and fill out all the forms before you get called back.  
 10 They come bustin' through the door,  
 11 blood is everywhere.  
 12 It's on the walls, on the floor, everywhere.  
 13 [sobbing] "It's okay Billy, we're gonna make it /?/."  
 14 [normal voice] "What the hell's wrong with you."  
 15 W-we-we look at him.  
 16 He's covered with blood, yknow?  
 17 All they had to do was take a washcloth at home  
 18 and go like this...  
 19 and there'd be no blood. There'd be no blood.  
 20 [listener: You put pressure on it]  
 21 Three drunk guys came bustin' in,  
 22 all the other patients are like, "Ugh Ugh".  
 23 They're bleedin' everywhere yknow.  
 24 People are passin' out just lookin' at this guy's blood here.  
 25 [Listener: Like "We're okay"]  
 26 "Get the hell outta here!"  
 27 [Listener: Yknow he's got stories like this to tell every night, don't you.]  
 28 Yeah [Listener: Mhm]  
 29 "Get the hell outta here!" yknow?  
 30 These three guys-  
 31 "What the hell's wrong with you guys!  
 32 You don't know anything about first aid?  
 33 Hold onto his arm."  
 34 ["Innocent" voice] "We raised it above his head."  
 35 "Oh yeah" shh shh [Listener: So it bled up]  
 36 Yknow they're whimmin' his arm around  
 37 [voice change] "Come here Billy. No, come here Billy."  
 38 Two guys yankin' him from both sides.  
 39 [sobbing] "Am I gonna die? Am I gonna die?"  
 40 He's passed out on the cot.  
 41 Anyway so... [sobbing] "Am I gonna die."  
 42 "How old are you."  
 43 "Nineteen"  
 44 "Shit. Can't call his parents."  
 45 [voice change] "Don't tell my parents.  
 46 Please don't tell my parents.  
 47 You're not gonna tell my parents, are you?"  
 48 [Listener: /?/ "We're going to wrap you in bandages"]  
 49 What happened. Then the cops were there too, the cops.  
 50 [voice change] "Who stabbed dja."  
 51 "I didn't get stabbed. I fell on a bottle..."  
 52 "Come o:m, looks like a stab wound to me."  
 53 [Listener A: Well this is Alexandria, what do you think?]  
 54 [Listener C: Really no shit.]

There are at least five different voices animated in this narrative, and each of these voices is realized in a paralinguistically distinct representation: literally, a different voice.

Billy's two friends are represented by one voice, and the quality of that voice creates the persona that the speaker is developing for them. In line (13) they are presented as trying to reassure Billy, but the quality of the voice representing them shows that they are themselves emotionally distraught:

13 [sobbing] "It's okay Billy, we're gonna make it /?/."  
 ..

37 [voice change] "Come here Billy. No, come here Billy."

When the friends protest, in (34), that

34 ["Innocent" voice] "We raised it above his head."

the quality of the voice suggests belabored innocence that is really stupidity.

Another example of more than one person animated in the story as a single voice is the speaker himself, merged with the rest of the hospital staff. The quality of this voice suggests frustration and impatience but also reasonableness and clam. Dialogue uttered by this persona is the closest to normal conversational intonation and prosody.

14 [normal voice] "What the hell's wrong with you."  
 ..

29 "Get the hell outta here!"  
 ..

31 "What the hell's wrong with you guys!"

32 You don't know anything about first aid?

33 Hold onto his arm."  
 ..

35 "Oh yeah"  
 ..

42 "How old are you."  
 ..

44 "Shit. Can't call his parents."  
 ..

48 [Listener: /?/ "We're going to wrap you in bandages"]

In line (48) a line of dialogue is animated by a listener, one who self-evidently was not present to hear it uttered by those to whom it is attributed.

Billy himself is animated in the most paralinguistically marked role-play. The voice representing his speech is animated as sobbing, gasping, desperate, out of control:

- 39 [sobbing] "Am I gonna die? Am I gonna die?"  
 ..  
 41 [sobbing] "Am I gonna die?"  
 ..  
 43 "Nineteen"  
 ..  
 45 [voice change] "Don't tell my parents."  
 ..  
 46 Please don't tell my parents.  
 47 You're not gonna tell my parents, are you?"  
 ..  
 51 "I didn't get stabbed. I fell on a bottle."...

The paralinguistically exaggerated role-play of Billy's voice, and the slightly less marked animation of the single voice of his friends, contrast sharply with the relatively ordinary quality in which the speaker/hospital staff voice is represented. These contrasting voices reflect and create the dramatic tension between the unreasonable behavior of "these three drunk guys" and the reasonable behavior of the speaker/staff.

Marked in a different direction is the stereotypically flat voice of the policeman:

- 50 [voice change] "Who stabbed dja."  
 ..  
 52 "Come o::n, looks like a stab wound to me."  
 Finally, the other emergency room patients are animated in a single voice:  
 22 all the other patients are like, "Ugh Ugh".  
 ..  
 25 [Listener: Like "We're okay"]

It is clear in all these examples that the lines of dialogue in this story are not reported, but rather constructed by the speaker, like lines in fiction or drama, and to similar effect. Through the quality of the voices created as much as (or more than) what they say, a drama is constructed. The animation of voices breathes life into the characters and their story—and the conversational interaction for which the story was created.

### CONSTRUCTED DIALOGUE AS INVOLVEMENT

Of the 25 stories told by American women about being molested which I compared with 25 stories told by Greek women about the same subject, the American women's stories included one instance of constructed dialogue. The Greek women's stories included 119. Constructed dialogue is one of a

range of features which made the Greek women's stories vivid and involving.\* (See Tannen, 1983 for presentation and discussion of this range of features). It seems that the use of constructed dialogue is associated not only with Greek but with other ethnic styles as well—all those that come across as particularly "vivid." Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1974) and Tannen (1984) show this for East European Jews, Labov (1972) for American blacks.

There is evidence that Brazilian speech falls into this category as well, and that constructed dialogue is a dimension of that effectiveness. In a pilot study comparing how Brazilian and American speakers told the story of Little Red Riding Hood, Ott (1983) found that Brazilian speakers used far more constructed dialogue. The American man in the study used six such instances, all formulaic for this fairy tale:

- "Grandma, what a big nose you have."  
 "All the better to smell you my dear."  
 "Grandma, what big ears you have."  
 "All the better it is to hear you my dear."  
 "Grandma, what a big mouth and big teeth you have."  
 "All the better to eat you with my dear."

The American woman in the study used 15 instances of dialogue, including the formulas found in the American man's story, but also including some improvised variations on them ("What long whiskers you have"; "The better to wiggle them at you my dear") and the casting of other parts of the story in dialogue. For example, she has the mother tell Little Red Riding Hood, "Go to your grandmother's house..." The Brazilian woman who told the same story used 20 instances of dialogue, and the Brazilian man used 43!

The Brazilian man's version of Little Red Riding Hood represents almost all action in dialogue, thus making the story rich in particularity. For example, at the beginning: (Brazilian excerpts were translated from the Portuguese by Ott)

- One time on a beautiful afternoon, in her city, her mother called her and said:  
 "Little Red Riding Hood, come here."  
 "What is it, mother? I am playing with my dolls, can I continue?"

Long segments are composed only of dialogue. For example, when she is accosted by the wolf on her way to her grandmother's house:

- "Little Red Riding Hood, Little Red Riding Hood".  
 And Little Red Riding Hood stopped and looked: "Who is there?"

\* This is not to suggest that Americans never tell effective stories nor that they never construct dialogue extensively in their storytelling. The narratives analyzed here make clear that they do. It is simply to say that in the corpus of stories I collected by women about being molested, the stories told by Greeks were more vivid. I want to stress, too, that there is no way of knowing whether there was in fact more talk in the experiences of the Greek women; I know only that in telling these stories, they presented themselves as having engaged in more talk.

"Ah, who is talking here is the spirit of the forest."  
 "Spirit? But I don't know you."  
 "No, but I am invisible, you can't see me."  
 "But what do you want?" (imitating child's voice)  
 "Where are you going, Little Red Riding Hood?"  
 "Ah, I'm going to my granny's house."  
 "What are you going to do there, Little Red Riding Hood?"  
 "Ah, I'm going to take some sweets that my mother prepared for her."  
 "Ah, very good... the sweets are delicious, they are, they are, they are, they are..." (licking his lips)  
 "Do you want one?"  
 "No, no, no, no. (Accelerated) Spirits don't eat.  
 Okay, okay. Then, now, yes, yes, you are going to take it to your granny  
 ...remember me to her, okay?"  
 "Okay, bye."

Thus, through constructed dialogue and other linguistic means (such as repetition and colloquial interjections), this speaker created a vivid new story out of a standard fairy tale.

### GRAPHIC VOCABULARY IN LITERARY NARRATIVE

The vividness of the foregoing story samples comes in part from the ordinariness of the diction, the familiarity of colloquial linguistic patterns. The effectiveness of some literary writing seems to derive from an opposite phenomenon: the choice of relatively unfamiliar (from the point of view of daily parlance) graphic lexical items.

A major part of my study of dialogue in conversational and fictional narrative focused on how the dialogue was introduced. The most frequent introducers in all four types of discourse studied—American and Greek conversation and fiction—were forms of the verb "say" (most frequently, in English, "s/he said" or "s/he says"). When the spoken English dialogue was not introduced by a form of "said," it was usually introduced by no verb at all (accounting for 26% of dialogue; as in the example above, dialogue was identified as such by its voice quality) or by a form of "go" ("so he goes") or "be" + "like" ("and I'm like"). "Go" and "like" accounted for 19% of the English introducers. The characteristic that set the novel *Household Words* off most noticeably from the other three discourse types studied is the use of graphic lexical items to introduce dialogue, accounting for 27% of introducers in a single chapter studied.

In this single chapter, the author of the novel used the following verbs to introduce dialogue: explain, complain, croon, coo, demand, call, call down, call out, wheeze, cry out, mutter, bellow, murmur, go on, titter, grumble, gasp, whisper, hiss, sob, scream, suggest, groan, intone, grimace, yip, warn, sniff, want to know, shout, wail, repeat, supply, yelp, snap. Of

these, only five are repeated, once each (explain, whisper, scream, shout, and suggest).

It might seem, reading these verbs in a list, that the writing of this novel is overwrought. (The author herself, on reading the list, had that impression—a regrettable but significant piece of evidence for the distortion involved in microanalysis of any type: Wrenching phenomena out of context falsifies their nature.) However, this is not the case. When the words appear in the text, they are effective, as seen in the following excerpt. In this passage, the heroine, Rhoda, serves lunch to her fifth-grade daughter Suzanne and Suzanne's classmate Ina Mae. (Verbs introducing dialogue are underlined.)

Suzanne...reached out to give Ina Mae a "feeny bird," a rap on the skull with flicked fingers, as Ina ducked away, screaming, "Get away from me!"

"How about," Rhoda suggested, "clearing off the kitchen table so you can have some good old peanut butter and jelly sandwiches?"

"Oh boy," Suzanne groaned sarcastically. "Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy."

"The boy," Rhoda intoned, beating time with a spoon at the kitchen sink. "stood by the burning deck, / His feet were full of blisters. / He tore his pants on a red-hot nail / So now he wears his sister's." The girls, unfamiliar with the original poem (a staple of recitations in Rhoda's childhood) failed to find this wickedly amusing. "Oh, Mother," Suzanne grimaced. "Ina, for Christ's sake, would you please pass the jelly? I'm starving, you know."

"You poor old thing," Rhoda said. "You're so hungry you could dydee-dydee-dydee-die." Ina giggled. Rhoda poured a glass of milk for the guest. "Say when," she suggested.

"I HATE milk," Ina yipped.

"Oh, we never serve milk in this house. This is cow juice. Don't be fooled by the carton." Rhoda smiled mysteriously.

"She thinks she's funny," Suzanne said. (p. 104)

Graphic introducers are evaluative devices, to use a term coined by Labov (1972) to describe the elements in oral narrative that contribute to its point. The author uses them to hone her description of the characters, their personalities and states of mind, and their relationships to each other—and to make that description more particular.

### IN-SCHOOL WRITING

Given the centrality of dialogue in creating vivid narration, and the evidence that at least some styles of written literary narrative use more graphic introducers in addition to the introducer "said," it is not surprising that a junior high school teacher gave her class the assignment of writing a story in which dialogue is introduced with words other than "said". The following is the

\* The same would not be true of other writers, for example Hemingway and such contemporary "minimalist" writers as Raymond Carver.

story produced in fulfillment of this assignment by Michelle Lange:<sup>18</sup> (Verbs introducing dialogue are underlined.)

Bob, Susie, and Lisa were walking in the park when suddenly Bob shrieked, "Look!"

"What?" Susie and Lisa inquired.

"I can't believe it!" Bob again shrieked.

"What is it? Tell us," Susie insisted.

"Look, on the sidewalk, sixty-dollars!" Bob exclaimed.

"Oh my gosh," Lisa mumbled as she sighed.

"This couldn't possibly be true," Susie theorized.

"Maybe it's counterfeit," Lisa suggested.

"No," Bill confidently stated, "It's real, all right."

They reached their hands out and grabbed the money off the sidewalk.

"Touch it," Bob suggested, "We have real money in our hands."

"What should we do with it?" Susie asked.

"I know one thing for sure," Lisa warned us, "we can't let our parents know we have this money!"

"Why not?" Bob questioned.

"Because if our parents find we have this money, they'll either keep it, or make us turn it in to the police department," Lisa pointed out.

"There's twenty dollars for each of us!" Susie busted out.

The children each took their share of the money.

"What are we going to do with our money?" Bill inquired.

"I have an idea," Susie replied. "Why don't we make a club house!"

Lisa and Bob chorsed, "Great Idea!"

"Maybe we can make it in the woods behind my yard," Bob offered.

"O.K.," Susie and Lisa agreed.

"Let's go to Bill's house now to start planning the materials needed for the club house," Lisa ordered.

"O.K.!" Bob and Susie enthusiastically exclaimed.

Michelle fulfilled her assignment admirably. But the assignment frame aside, the accretion of verbs introducing dialogue other than "said" gives the very impression that the fiction writer feared when she read a list of verbs she had used in her chapter. But in the novel the graphic introducers were interspersed with "said," which still accounted for the majority of instances, and the connotations and associations of the graphic verbs contributed effectively to the evaluation, in other words, the story world. In Michelle's composition, total avoidance of "said" gives the narrative as a whole a forced quality, and the formal register represented by the verbs she

<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Deborah Lange for identifying and bringing to my attention this and the following discourse samples produced by her daughter Michelle and her friends. I am grateful to her and to Michelle for allowing me to use them. The samples are presented exactly as they were produced, except that names other than Michelle's have been changed.

chose is often at odds with the nature of the actions in the story; for example, "theorized" is too lofty for the thought it introduces.

## DIALOGUE IN FRIENDLY CONVERSATION

Lest the impression be left that junior high school students are not adept at constructing dialogue and introducing it fluently, I will present another story, one created when Michelle's friend told her about having accidentally run into their mutual friend Stacy.<sup>19</sup>

- 1 We saw her huge big truck, yknow?
- 2 That new scu- that new car?
- 3 It's such a scandal, that car!  
[Listener: I think its so tacky.]
- 4 I KNOW. And so I SAW it.
- 5 And then, I didn't see STACY.
- 6 I'm like c- trying to cruise after the car,
- 7 because I see the car, yknow run..like..driving?
- 8 And so I go "Oh my God,
- 9 I have to go run after it
- 10 and say hi to Stacy,
- 11 and go "What's up?"
- 12 'n I look, to the left.
- 13 Is that scandalous?!
- 14 Stacy's look- going [screaming] "Michelle, what's up?"
- 15 I swear she said that.
- 16 I swear she said that.
- 17 And then we we had the biggest cow in front of everyone.
- 18 They were all staring at us
- 19 cause we're like hugging,
- 20 and she said, "What are you doing here?"
- 21 And I'm like "Nothing much" yknow
- 22 I explained the whole..weird story
- 23 and she's like "um...well that's cool."
- 24 And so then we had to crank over to Safeway?
- 25 Because her mom was gonna be there?
- 26 Cause she was like doing groceries and stuff?

The very point of this story is the dialogue: the irony that just as Michelle was looking for Stacy and planning to greet her by saying, "What's up?", she heard Stacy's voice saying to her, "What's up?" Note that I could, in the preceding sentence, have replaced the second "What's up?" with the

<sup>19</sup> To accommodate her sociolinguist mother, Michelle taped her private conversation with her friend.



phrase, "the same words." I chose to repeat the phrase "What's up," in order to create the effect of the repetition for the reader rather than simply describing it. This is intended to illustrate the function of dialogue in creating involvement. This main point is highlighted by Michelle's repetition:

15 I swear she said that.

16 I swear she said that.

What happened to all those terrific, graphic words for saying "said," which were found in the written assignment? These words, which were marshalled when required by a school assignment, were not appropriate to the social situation in which the preceding sample story was created. The lack of such words may make the spoken story—when transcribed—seem impoverished. But the written story seems impoverished, in comparison to the spoken one, in just the way that doesn't show up in writing: voice quality. Perhaps one of the reasons that graphic vocabulary emerges in some forms of writing is to make up for the loss of expressive potential in the human voice.

The spoken story, in contrast with the written one, is vivid and fluent. One might be tempted therefore to conclude that junior high school students are more comfortable speaking than writing. This, however, would be hasty and very likely incorrect. The main difference between these two verbal productions is not that one is spoken and the other written, but rather that one was an outgrowth of a familiar communicative situation. The oddness of the written assignment was not that it was written but that it asked Michelle to do something she does not often do, and to use a register she does not often use, though she has clearly encountered it in the writing of others. Is there, then, a written genre that arises spontaneously out of the communicative needs of Michelle and her friends? The answer is yes—writing notes to each other.

#### WRITTEN CONVERSATION: PASSING NOTES

For an example of a written register in which Michelle and her friends are comfortable and which they use as a natural outgrowth of their social life, I will present some brief excerpts of seventh graders' verbal productions in yet another discourse type: one that, to my knowledge, has not yet been studied, a form of written conversation: notes that Michelle's friends wrote to her and each other—the same friends they talk to every day, in person and on the telephone. Yet there are contexts in which they choose to write rather than speak. And the diction, vocabulary, and fluency are far more reminiscent of the story told in conversation than of the one written in fulfillment of a class assignment:

High! What's up? I'm kool! I'm cranking in science with Norm N. & Nate Noster. Party train up the butt!

••

You would look so good /w the one and only Tom, Baxter! So go for it! He loves you yeah yeah yeah!

••

[about a friend who got into trouble with a teacher] Karen is dead. Shams! DIES! Dead meat all over the street!

Involving, or poetic, aspects of this discourse abound: formulaic phrases which echo songs, including repetition ("He loves you yeah yeah yeah"); sayings ("Go for it!", "one and only"); common parlance (the now-familiar "What's up?"); rhyming ("Dead meat all over the street!"); repetition (as above, plus "dead" repeated in the last excerpt); paraphrase with increasing intensity ("shams, dies"); visual punning ("High!", "kool"); and stylized vocabulary ("cranking," "Party train up the butt!"). The point I wish to emphasize here is that it is not the writtenness of the written assignment that accounts for its linguistic form but the context in which it was produced, and the special requirements of that context. The notes written by Michelle to her friends provide an example of a written genre that shares many of the features of Michelle's spoken language production.

#### EMOTION AND COGNITION: MINGLING LITERATE AND LITERARY STRATEGIES

In her memoir of her parents Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, anthropologist and linguist Mary Catherine Bateson (1980, p. 180) recalls her efforts to take into account the centrality of emotion in cognition in confronting the task of communicating information that evolved in interaction. Her discussion of this process sheds light on the (as she shows, faulty) assumption that information-laden academic discourse should be emotion-free, emotion being appropriate only to fictional writing. Appointed rapporteur for a conference her father organized on cybernetics at Burg Wartenstein, Bateson "reached the conclusion that my book would be true to the event only if it followed some of the conventions of fiction" because the "conventions of academic reporting . . . would mean editing out emotions that seemed to me essential to the process."

Bateson contrasts this with the approach taken by Arthur Koestler, who happened to organize a conference on a similar topic at the same time, at Alpach. Koestler, Bateson reports, tried to separate ideas and emotions and produced two books, a conventional conference proceedings and a novel: "The emotion was edited out of the formal proceedings of the Alpach

Symposium, which came out dry and academic, and resurfaced in the novel as rage." In contrast, Bateson continues,

There is a sense in which the emotion was edited into [my] book, for I used my own introspective responses of dismay or illumination to bring the reader into the room, and worked with the tape-recorded discussions so that the emotionally pivotal comments would be brought out rather than buried in verbiage.

The successful result of Bateson's effort is a book entitled *Our Own Metaphor* (1972), a document which recreates rather than reports the proceedings of the conference, using, as she noted, linguistic means commonly found in literary writing. The result, I suggest, makes the evolving insights that emerged in the conference available to readers in a way more closely paralleling the way conference participants were able to perceive them. I would like to show how she does this by presenting an excerpt from that book, one which begins in the middle of an exposition presented as the dialogue of a speaker named Tolly:

I want to show, on the blackboard, a technique for writing, and I want to associate that technique with sentences.

"I'll begin with an extremely simple picture, by way of introduction, and then elaborate it. This will be like those initial minutes in the movies when you see the introductory pictures which give you an idea of the kind of movie it's going to be while telling you who the main characters are, and so on.

"Let's imagine a pendulum swinging back and forth." Tolly hunted around for chalk and then he drew this picture. "This means that for some interval of time the pendulum swings to the right, shown by the arrow labeled R. Here's an occurrence, shown by a point, and then the pendulum swings to the left for some other interval, shown by the arrow labeled L. The occurrence is the end of the swing. You can think of the same picture as representing a billiard ball rolling back and forth on a frictionless table between two reflecting boundaries. Left, right, left, right, and the occurrences are the bounces."

Horst did a double-take. "You mean the *point* indicates the moment it changes from right to left?"

Tolly nodded gleefully. "Yeah. That's right. Unconventional." Once Horst had called my attention to it, I realized that this was indeed unconventional. The minute I stopped thinking that the arrow indicated the direction of the pendulum (which it did not, because the diagram of a light changing from red to green to red would have looked exactly the same), I realized that Tolly was doing the strange thing of using an *arrow* to represent something stable (an "interval of condition-holding" he called it) and a *point* to represent change, the occurrence that initiates new conditions. This was the exact opposite of the convention Barry had used in his diagram, where arrows had represented the transition from, say, organic to non-organic nitrogen compounds, or Fred,

who had used arrows to represent causation. It was not yet clear whether these conventions were simply freakish or arbitrary, or whether this choice of symbols was a first step toward new kinds of meanings (pp. 166-67).

It would be possible to double the length of this chapter in analyzing the many ways that this passage is written like fiction (and also the many ways it is not like a transcript of speech). I will refer briefly to a few. Bateson uses first names for participants, bringing us closer to them than we would feel if they were referred to by last name only or title and last name. She presents Tolly's ideas as dialogue rather than paraphrasing them—with attendant interjections and colloquial diction ("say," "Yeah,"), contractions ("I'll," "it's," "let's"), and fragmented syntax ("Unconventional."). The possible responses of readers are represented and prefigured by the dramatized responses of the audience-participants ("Horst did a double-take"). Note, too, that this response is described as a picture of nonverbal behavior, not merely as a verbal response. The paralinguistic features which frame speech by letting us know how speakers mean what they say—tone of voice, rhythm, intonation, and nonverbal components such as laughter—are described and aided by adverbs ("Tolly nodded gleefully"). Moreover, the importance of the ideas is highlighted by representing the narrator's own developing cognitive state ("I realized . . ."), as well as by prefiguring future cognition ("It was not yet clear . . ."). This last device simultaneously builds suspense.

Suspense is also created by the scenically graphic but otherwise puzzling description of apparently irrelevant behavior such as "Tolly hunted around for chalk and then drew this picture." What is added by telling us he hunted for chalk? To answer, contrast this with the conventional academic-writing locution, "See Figure 1." In the latter case we see only the figure. In Bateson's description, we see not only the figure (or, rather, the "picture"), but also the human interaction that gave rise to it. Furthermore, the interruption in exposition gives readers time to prepare to focus attention on the figure/picture, much as the conference participants gained time as Tolly hunted for chalk and then drew. Finally, Tolly is represented as using a simile in his opening lines, likening the figure he is about to draw to a movie lead-in.

## CONCLUSION

I am suggesting in this chapter that orality and literacy, speaking and writing, are not dichotomous but rather complex, overlapping, and intertwined. In order to illustrate this, I have shown how both spoken and written storytelling—conversational and literary—make use of constructed dialogue which, by its particularity, occasions the imagination of alternative, distant, and other worlds. By this act of imagination, the hearer or reader participates in sense-making and is thus moved to a sense of rapport that is the means to meaning

in both conversation and fiction. I further illustrated the overlapping of discourse patterns in spoken and written discourse types by presenting samples of speech and writing produced by a junior high school student in three different contexts. The final section demonstrates how one writer used literary linguistic means to enhance an academic writing task, means which make use of, rather than exclude, emotional involvement.

Such mixing of genres reflects the mixing of spoken and written modes, of orality and literacy, in our lives. I would like to dramatize this by ending with an excerpt from a long essay in *The New Yorker* about Lubavitcher Hasidim—an orthodox Jewish sect living in Brooklyn, New York (Harris, 1985). In this excerpt, the writer constructs (I shall not, for now-obvious reasons, use the verb "reports") her conversation with a Hasidic man:

"Thanks," I said. "By the way, are there any books about Hasidism that you think might be helpful?"

"There are no books."

"No books! Why, what do you mean? You must know that hundreds of books have been written about Hasidism."

"Books about Hasidic matters always misrepresent things. They twist and change the truth in casual ways. I trust Lubavitcher books, like the 'Tanya' [a work written by the movement's founder] and the collections of the rebbes' discourses, because our rebbe got the information in them from the rebbe before him, and so on, in an unbroken chain. I trust scholars I can talk to, face to face."

The effectiveness of presenting this interchange of ideas as a dialogue is by now evident. Harris presents herself as naive to the point of rudeness ("You must know . . ."), so that the Hasidic man can be shown to explain his view in detail. The excerpt dramatizes, at the same time, the intertwining of oral and literate modes in the passing down of a written text—the Tanya—inextricably intertwined with people, the great religious leaders (rebbe) who are also seen as great scholars—interpreters of that text. The text, in other words, is meaningless apart from its interpretation, which is found in people, not in print—and, moreover, the interaction among people ("scholars I can talk to, face to face"). It is for this very reason that contemporary academics are forever holding meetings, conferences, and lectures—wanting to see scholars face to face rather than encountering them only through their written productions. Nonetheless, producing written texts before and after is a prerequisite of appearing in person as a "scholar."

I am suggesting, then, that we enlarge our field of study beyond the prototypical spoken and written genres of spoken casual conversation and written expository prose, which has been typical of studies of spoken and written discourse in order to understand the overlapping and contrasting linguistic patterns which reflect and create feeling and thinking in discourse in human interaction.

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## Chapter Five The Literate Essay: Using Ethnography to Explode Myths

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### THE ESSAY AS EXAMPLE

The essay, a written genre shrouded in myths and mystery, lies at the heart of academic performance. Beyond asserting general rhetorical principles of persuasion and argumentation, relatively few critical analyses explain the internal structuring of essays and how their composition is revealed to authors and readers. The goal of this chapter is to bring members of the reading audience—most especially teachers—into the composition and reception of the essay form so that they may feel they have stepped *inside a literate essay*. Reading this essay and following its argument should lead readers to experience something of the role of participant that students and teachers in a learning community can create as they explore their own language forms and uses.

It is somewhat surprising that within the current mood of deconstructing literature, so few language scholars have tried to understand what makes each essay that English teachers might regard as "well constructed" or "literate" an instance of the genre *essay*. It may well be that of all the literary forms, the essay has suffered most from an unwillingness on the part of scholars to make strange such a familiar form; academics are, after all, forced to reveal the results of their examination of the essay in that very form. Structural studies of the essay carry the same drawbacks as research on language or the brain. We are forced to transmit our studies of language through the linguistic medium; we must use the brain to study the brain. We resist researching the essay when the reporting instrument is the object of the inquiry.

Thus, instead of turning intense and closely argued analyses on the essay as a genre, we create and perpetuate myths and common-sense theories, such as the "five-paragraph essay formula" and prescriptive rules about teaching outlines and observing rules for choice of voice, person, and organization. This essay attempts to break open some of these myths and to look at ways in which the essay seduces the reader by pulling the reader *inside* its structure to ensure that the reader becomes a co-participant in the recompo-