

## Personal Experience Narratives and Implications for Language Teaching

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### Abstract

In this paper, I analyze two personal experience narratives occurring in a casual conversation among graduate students from three different countries in order to characterize the story structure, functions, and variations. I found that the two stories had nearly the same features as reported in the literature, except for the story structure, the participants' identities, and the use of humor. These new findings together with the existing research on personal experience narratives can provide implications for language teaching and learning.

### Introduction

Narratives are important discourse phenomena. According to Barbara (2001),

Narrative has been one of the major themes in humanistic and social scientific thought since the mid-twentieth century. The essence of humanness, long characterized as the tendency to make sense of the world through rationality, has come increasingly to be described as the tendency to tell stories, to make sense of the world through narrative. In linguistics, narrative was one of the first discourse genres to be analyzed, and it has continued to be among the most intensively studied of the things people do with talk. (p. 635)

It is true that storytelling is one of the best ways to help people understand and learn from each other. For example, through stories, people will learn about each other's identity, social norms, cultural customs, and so forth. It is then not surprising that analysts have been studying and providing more details to help us understand the structure of narrative, its functions, and its variation in new contexts. Personal experience narrative (PEN) has been well researched (Propp, 1958; Propp, 1968; Labov, 1972; Labov, 1997; Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Goodwin, 1984; Jefferson, 1978; Hatch, 1992; Fleischman, 1990; Shegloff, 1997; Barbara, 2001, etc.). These researchers have studied a variety of dimensions, such as structure of narrative and its functions, ordinary events in a narrative, tense and narrativity, patterns of narrative discourse,

and the creation of coherence. This paper aims to review the literature on narratives and analyze some naturally occurring story structures, their functions, and their variation. Finally, I would like to discuss some implications for language teaching and learning.

### Features of the Personal Experience Narrative in English

In this section, I will discuss some important areas in PEN research: the functions of clauses in narrative structure, the functions of the narrative as a whole, variations in narratives in general, and some implications of narrative study for teaching and learning.

#### *The Functions of Clauses in Narrative Structure*

First, the most important concept in PEN analysis is the narrative clauses: "any narrative is not any talk about the past, or any talk about events, but it consists of at least two narrative clauses, and this sequence of clause is matched to a sequence of events which actually happened" (Labov, 1972, p. 360). Consider these two consecutive clauses: (1) *the man hit me* and (2) *I hit the man*. In this example, the man hit me first, and I hit him later. The sequence of the clauses and the sequence of events are closely matched, and so clause (2) can not come before clause one. If it is reversed, it will imply a different sequence of event, and as a result, the meaning of the narrative will be affected.

Besides short and simple narratives like in the above example, Labov & Waletzky, 1967 (as cited in Barbara (2001) discussed the structure of a fully developed narrative:

Most PENs are more complex and include more narrative clauses and free clauses that serve other functions, often in this order: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. Each of these elements of PEN serves two purposes: referential and evaluative: the referential is focused on the skeleton of the narrative while the evaluative is to explain and to make sure that the story is worth recounting and understandable to listeners. (p. 637)

It is obvious that most PENs go beyond the two clauses level discussed above. Besides the narrative clauses, they include other functions as Barbara mentioned. Most PENs have more narrative clauses and free clauses because while telling a story, the storyteller needs to explain important points to make sure that the listeners understand the story. Moreover, while telling a story, the listeners or the participants will collaborate: they may stop the storyteller to ask questions, or to relate the story to what they know. For example, Most PEN analysts (Labov [1972] and Barbara [2001]) recognize six components of a narrative.

*Abstract.* The abstract tells what the story is about. Before the actual telling of the story, the narrator often begins by giving the most important or noticeable points, usually with one or two clauses ( Labov, 1972, p. 363). Consider the following abstract: *I am going to tell you about the worst part of my trip to TESOL.* In this utterance, the most noticeable points are the trip and its worst part.

*Orientation.* Usually at the outset of narrative, it is essential to identify the time, place, participants, their activities, and the context in which the story happened (Labov, 1972, p. 364). For instance, *last week, the five of us went to New York to attend TESOL.* In this sentence, the orientation is easily recognizable: the time is *last week*; the participants are *the five of us*; and the place is *New York* and *TESOL*. In this part of the story, stative clauses, copula sentences, presenta-

tives, descriptive relative clauses, time orientation, place orientation, and role identification are often used, for instance, the use of *be, there is/there, one morning.* (Hatch, 1992, p. 165)

*Complicating action.* The complicating action is composed of a set of connected narrative events making up a story and is usually characterized by temporal sequence. In this section of the story, narrative clauses, especially restricted clauses, which can be displaced over a large part of the narrative without changing the semantic interpretation, are often used (Labov, 1970, p. 370). An illustration of this is: *On our way back to Hawaii, our flight was cancelled and we were stuck in Atlanta.* In this sentence, the restricted clauses are used in a fixed temporal sequence: the flight was cancelled first, then the group were stuck away from home.

*Climax.* The climax is where the drama of the story peaks. It is usually the most intense point and usually occurs near the end of the story. (Freischman, 1990, p. 141). An example of this is: *We had to wait for two days until there would be another flight, and we had no place to stay. We were missing classes, we were tired, and we didn't have that much money to spend.* In these utterances, the problem is that the next flight would be available for two days and the group needed a place to stay while they waited. There is a certain tension with this problem that needs to be resolved, and that makes it the climax of the story. Also, in this section, usually a set of action clauses is ranged in temporal order, often marked by words or phrases like first, then, and then, and finally. (Hatch, 1992, p. 166).

*Resolution.* The resolution or result is when the main character in the story attains the goal (Hatch, 1992, p. 166). In our example narrative, the resolution is: *So we complained to the airlines, and they finally gave us a hotel. In the hotel there was internet access, so we could communicate with our teachers and classmates in order to catch up a bit with the assignments.* This sentence informs the listener how the group solved the problems of accommodation and missing schoolwork.

*Evaluation.* The evaluation section is used to explain and to make sure that the story is worth recounting and making it un-

derstandable to listeners. Labov (1972) stated that the evaluation in the story answers the question: *So what?* (p. 370). In the example story, an evaluation can be: *So it wasn't that bad after all.*

*Coda.* The coda is used to bridge the gap between the story and the present time (Labov, 1972, p. 365). For example, at the end of the story, the storyteller might say, *I guess next time we will know how to handle problems like that better and won't be as panicked.* This utterance may help the story tie back to the current discussion.

### *The Functions of Personal Experience Narratives*

Obviously, personal experience narratives are told for a variety of reasons. For instance, "PEN also has its cognitive, cultural, social, and psychological functions: people tell stories to do something: to complain, to boast, to inform, to entertain, to explain, and so forth" (Schegloff, 1997, pp. 97-106). For example, the narrative about the group's bad luck mentioned above can be used to complain. In addition to Schegloff, Bliss (2003) addressed some more functions of a narrative: "the function of a narrative is to make sense of one's experience" (p. 5). In addition, the author also affirmed, "narratives are used as a memorable way of making the past present" (as cited in O'Brien, 1990). In this way, people will never forget the story, which can be a good lesson for the present or can represent a certain identity of a person or of a cultural custom. For instance, the story about the group's trip above will help people learn that in service encounters, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. Collins and Cooper (1997) also discussed some additional functions of a narrative: "the functions of narrative are to educate, to inspire, to record historical events, to entertain, and to transmit cultural mores" (p. 1). For example, the story about the group's trip above is not only to complain but also to remind people of the value of being patient and being able to negotiate with the authorities.

### *Variation in the Structures of Personal Experience Narratives*

In reality, ordinary PENs often vary from the outline described above. If a story is suddenly told in a casual conversation, the storyteller must remember and tell his story without preparation, so PEN often lack an abstract. Let consider this story: *Last time I climbed up to pick some longans. While I was eating, I suddenly saw a rattlesnake right in front of me. I slowly withdrew and climbed down.* Here, there is no abstract because the storyteller just simply retold his fearful experience during a conversation. According to Labov and Waletzky (1967), "not all narratives have their orientation section, and not all orientation sections perform the four functions: person, place, time, and behavioral situation" (p. 16). For example, when asked, "Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?" someone might tell this story: "Well, this person had a little too much to drink, and he attacked me, and the friend came in, and she stopped it." (p. 32). In this passage, the *what* and the *who* are found, but the *when* and the *where* are not. The setting details are also woven into the sequence of events themselves. Labov and Waletzky discussed another form of incomplete narratives: "the narratives are incomplete because they contain only one orientation, complicating action and result. These narratives have perfect referential functions, but are difficult to understand because they lack significance" (p. 33). Consider another narrative from Labov and Waletzky:

See he – they threw him out, you know. So he wanted to get back in, 'cause, you know, it wasn't—raining hard. So he got on this boat and tried to—to go somewhere else. And the boat went over. And he tried to swim. And this other man was fishing in the rain. So he seen the pig. And went over there. And picked the pig up. And put it in the boat and brought it back to shore, so he would land there. And that was that. (p. 33)

In this passage, there are clear referential functions, but there is no clearly seen point, due to the lack of evaluative component. Labov and Waletzky's studies have also shown that: "not every narrative has its coda" (p. 14-19). The narrative about the fight above has no coda, but the narrative about the pig does: *And that was that.*

Besides incomplete narratives, Labov and Waletzky also added that narratives may also have several complication sections, and each section may have several events. For example, in the following narrative about a dog that could do everything but talk, there are several events and sections. This is the first section:

I had a dog—he was a wonderful retriever, but as I say he could do everything but talk. I could waif<sup>1</sup> him that way, I could waif him on, I could waif him anywhere. If I shot a crippled duck he went out after it; he didn't see it in the water, he'd always turn around look at me, and I'd waif him over there, if the duck were there, or if it was on the other side of where we're on, etc. (pp. 14-15)

And here is the second section:

I was gunnin one night with that dog – We had to use live decoys in those days – a fellow named Jack Bumpus was with me; I was over at a place called Deep Bottom, darker than pitch. And – Uh – heard a quackin' off shore. And, I said to Jack, "Keep quiet. There is one comin' in." And – uh – finally Jack said to me, I think I see 'im.' I said, "Give 'im a gun. Give 'im a gun. Try it." (p. 15)

Then, the narrator continues talking until the sixth complication section. So, this narrative has six complication sections, and each section as mentioned consists of simple cycles of simple narratives.

An important reason for variations in PENs is pointed out by Barbara (2001): stories "perform social actions" (citing Schiffrin, 1984, 1986), and are "affected by the social contexts in which they are performed" (citing Burke, 1945, 1950) (p. 640).

In addition to Barbara, Tannen and Blum-Kulka (1996) discussed shared and unshared events, and monophonic and polyphonic modes:

In multi-party conversation, there are two types of events and two modes of story-telling: shared events or polyphonic mode known to at least some of the participants, such as a family trip to a certain place or a dog the family used to have, and unshared events or monophonic mode known to the teller only. (p. 99)

For instance, the story about the rattlesnake mentioned above is known to the teller only.

Also, Tannen (1980) reported, "Greeks tend to tell the film more critique and more story-like way than Americans who tend to aim for referential completeness and exactness in their retellings" (p. 56). This means Most American tellers get to the main point of a story more directly than Greeks do.

The structure of PENs may also vary depending on the cultural background of the teller. Blum Kulka (1933) also addressed the degree of cultural diversity between Jewish-Americans and Israelis in their attitudes towards narrative events: "Jewish-American narrative events foregrounded tellers and the act of telling, while Israeli narrative events prefer to focus on tales and tellers" (p. 82). In this sense, most Jewish-Americans prefer to observe ways that their tellers express a story and to participate in the telling while most Israelis just want to listen to the story and the teller.

### *Teaching and Learning through Storytelling*

Allyssa and Bliss (2003) discussed the connection between narratives and the acquisition of literacy. They found the first evidence that narrative is important for children beginning to acquire reading and writing skills which can help them become more successful in literacy skills (Allyssa and Bliss, 2003, p. 21, summarizing results from Crais & Lorch, 1994; Feagans, 1982; Snow, 1983; Graesser, Golding, & Long, 1991).

Also, Allyssa and Bliss, 2003, p. 21, recapitulated results from Paul & Smith, 1993 and cited some examples in support of this claim, for example, a study of 4 year-olds who were good at narrative skills and who became more successful in later school than those who lacked such skills and were at risk for academic and language problems. Another illustration comes from a study of a number of skills of 6 and 7 year-old learning disabled children. It was found that children with stronger narrative skills could perform better on various standardized academic achievement tests in both reading and math than those who were weaker at narrative skills (Feagans & Applebaum, 1986 as cited in Allyssa and Bliss, 2003. p. 21).

Besides these results, Allyssa and Bliss (2003) discussed the importance of narrative in improving students' language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. For example, they implemented some projects such as *New Standards Project, 2001: Speaking and listening for preschool through third grade* and *Reading and writing, grade by grade* in U.S. schools, they addressed some cultural differences which can affect children's skill at remembering and retelling stories. They suggested some good ways for teachers to achieve the goal. First, the teacher should set out narrative assessment profiles consisting of six aspects: topic maintenance, event sequencing, informativeness, referencing, conjunctive coherence, and fluency used to evaluate discourse coherence when asking students to talk or to listen to a story. Second, teachers are looking for and evaluating these elements: opener, abstract, orientation (who, what, when, where), complicating action, climax, resolution, evaluation, and closing. Teachers must look at the overall form and determine whether narrative is an area that is strong or weak relative to other areas of speech or language proficiency when students listen to or read a story. Third, in addition to this, in order to help students improve their narrative skills, the teacher might point out such elements of storytelling as stress, repetition, subjective judgments, objective judgments, and so forth.

In addition to Allyssa and Bliss's (2003) ideas on teaching through storytelling, Collins and Cooper (1997) discussed some vital roles of storytelling and their value in teaching and learning. Storytelling plays an important role in empowering teachers and students to synthesize and verbalize personal experiences, communicate feelings, and construct meaning-processes vital to effective learning. Storytelling helps in enhancing imagination and visualization, developing appreciation of the beauty and rhythm of language, increasing vocabulary, refining speaking skills, improving listening skills, allowing students to interact with adults on a personal level, enhancing writing skills, developing reading skills and sparking an interest in reading, enhancing critical and creative thinking skills, nourishing students' intuitive side, seeing literature as a mirror of human experience, and understanding their own and others' cultural heritage.

Obviously, teaching through story benefits students in many ways: in improving language skills, language proficiency, creative and critical thinking skills, and understanding their own and others' cultural mores. Additionally, they affirmed that learning becomes fun when stories are used (p. 5). When the information is organized, it will help students remember what they learned more easily.

## **This Study**

### *Research Questions*

In this small study, I aim to see the overall structure, the function, and the variation in naturally occurring narratives. I will compare them to the previous findings, and draw some implications for teaching and learning. Specifically, I ask the following research questions:

1. What is the overall structure of each story, and what is the purpose of each element in the story?
2. Why is the story told at this point in the discourse?
3. What is the function of each story?

4. How does each story vary in their structures?
5. What is the benefit of such storytelling in teaching and learning English?

### *Methodology*

The participants were a group of three graduate students engaged in casual conversation. They are all non-native speakers: Huy from Vietnam, Tony from the Philippines, and Landy from Indonesia. All of them are male. They are from 30 to 35 years old and are studying at Hawaii Pacific University and the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The conversation took place on October 1, 2007 at lunch, in the kitchen of Hale Manoa, an international student dormitory on the Manoa campus, and was recorded on tape on October 1, 2007.

### Excerpt 1

- 1 Tony: °The food in Hale Halawai is very good.°
- 2 Landy: Hmm.
- 3 Tony: They make them how. They make ↑↓ dinner.
- 4 Landy: °Very good cook.°
- 5 Tony: Yeah. But usually they have like people from Banglades, Myanmar, East Timor.
- 6 Landy: I (.) Ah. The first time I came. It looked like. Ah .. you know they . they sang like different kind of music.
- 7 Tony: Mhm.
- 8 Landy: From ah↑↓HotSeat.
- 9 Tony: Mhm.
- 10 Landy: Play good. ↑↓ Really ↑↓really good. I like it.
- 11 Tony: Mhm. . >Oh yeah. There is one band with <↑↓ really good on ah guy ah ↑↓really dark guy, medium size . . . he had a voice . . it was really (.)
- 12 Landy: ↑↓ Yeah. ↑↓ yeah.
- 13 Tony: I am glad to enjoy it. <It is really (.) >
- 14 Landy: If if there is a singer like that I will go even without food.

### Excerpt 2

- 1 Tony: That's matter if you use chopsticks with fried rice use chopsticks. ↑↓Ohman.  
[laughter]
- 2 Huy: [laughter]
- 3 Tony: How do I do this? [picking up some rice with chopsticks]
- 4 Landy: [laughter]
- 5 Tony: [laughter]
- 6 Huy: Hmm.
- 7 (..)
- 8 Landy: The first time I came here. We went to Kailua beach with ah (...)  
There was food and chopsticks and I never use chopsticks.
- 9 Tony: Mhm.
- 10 Landy: [laughter] I never use.

In the present paper, I begin with an analytical overall structure of the narratives. Next, I discuss some purposes of the elements in the narratives. I then point out some possible functions of each narrative. After that, I will consider variation in narratives. Finally, I will compare these findings with previous research to see new findings and bring out some implications for teaching and learning.

### *Data*

Two narratives occurred in the conversation, and they are presented here in Excerpt 1 and Excerpt 2 (transcript notations can be found on p. 21 of this volume. In addition, (.) indicates a short pause, and more dots in the parentheses indicate longer pauses).

11 Tony: Oh, yeah.

12 Landy: You know. My my hand was shaking > I was so hungry. < [laughter].

13 Tony: Mhm.

14 Landy: My hand was shaking and then (.) < I just looked I looked at everybody.  
Yeah. I can break up > My friends also said (...) [laughter]

15 Tony: [Where. Where is it?]

16 Landy: [I ↑↓ notice ]

17 Landy: Kailua kailua beach.

18 Tony: Oh. Ok. Party (.) picnic.

19 Landy: Picnic yeah. I noticed everybody ah didn't look at me. I just broke it [laughter]

20 Huy: Ah ha.

21 Landy: ↑I broke it. Threw it away. I used my hand. [laughter]

22 Huy: Oh. You use your hand.

23 Landy: Yeah. [laughter]

24 Huy: Wow.

25 Landy: [laughter]

26 Huy: [laughter]

27 Tony: So you broke it cause you got mad.

28 Landy: Yeah. I broke it. [laughter]

29 Tony: [laughter]

30 Huy: >So that you have a chance to use your hand.<

31 Landy: Yeah. Made me so mad. [laughter] I just broke it and threw it away.

32 Huy: ↑↓Oh.

33 Landy: And used my hand. But nobody looked at me. [laughter] (.) Ah.

34 Tony: ↑↓ Ok. °They didn't look at you because they became afraid of you° (.)

35 Landy: [laughter]

36 Tony: Look at that guy. He broke his ↑↓ chopsticks.

37 Huy: [laughter]

38 Tony: [He is very strong.] [laughter]

39 Huy: [He is very strong.]

40 Tony: What a strong guy! [laughter]

41 Huy: He's so strong that he can break his ↑↓ chopsticks. [laughter]

42 Tony: [laughter]

43 Landy: [laughter]

44 (...)

45 Tony: But it's good to practice.

46 Landy: Yeah. <It's good to practice>. But you know. At that time I was so hungry.  
[laughter] So I didn't want to practice. [laughter]

47 (...)

48 Huy: But I get used to chopsticks. Yeah. In my country I used it every day.

49 Landy: Yeah. Yeah.

50 Huy: I become expert in using chopsticks [laughter]

51 Tony: Yeah. You can catch a fly right?

52 Huy: Yeah. [laughter]

53 (...)

54 Tony: What if you go to a Japanese restaurant. You have to use chopsticks.

55 Landy: [laughter] I will bring my spoon [laughter] I just put my spoon in my pocket  
[laughter]

56 Huy: [laughter]

57 Tony: My chopsticks have five sticks.

58 Huy: [laughter]

59 Tony: [laughter]

60 Landy: [laughter]  
 61 (...)  
 62 Tony: In Philippines they Philippines they use (. spoon  
 63 Huy: Hmm.  
 64 Tony: And fork on the other hand.  
 65 Landy: Hmm.  
 66 Tony: The food gets in (.  
 67 Landy: Hmm.  
 68 Tony: So. But I am not used to it. Once I were there I used to eating with a fork  
 69 Landy: Hmm.  
 70 Tony: And they were looking '>why do you your fork? You use a spoon you can  
 put more inside<.  
 71 Huy: Oh.  
 72 Landy: [laughter]  
 73 Tony: Then I said yeah. But I am used to it. (.) I am O.K.  
 74 Landy: [laughter]  
 75 (...)  
 76 Landy: In Indonesia we have three: knife, fork, and spoon.  
 77 Tony: Hmm.  
 78 Landy: I you know. ( Like in a restaurant is ok but I (.) we have to use spoon. And there  
 is a rule so with you know with hand I mean (.your fork or spoon must to be.  
 79 Tony: Hmm.  
 80 Landy: Your right hand or left hand. So there is a rule. [laughter]  
 81 Huy: Hmm.  
 82 Tony: So complicated as rule.  
 83 Landy: [laughter]

### *Analysis*

#### The Overall Structure of the Narratives

*Abstract.* There is no abstract found in the two excerpts, but there is a hint for the story to arise in Excerpt 1. In Excerpt 2, before the story occurred, the participant talked about chopsticks: “That’s matter if you use chopsticks with fried rice use chopsticks. ↑↓Oh man. [laughter]” (line 1).

*Orientation.* In Excerpt 1, line 6, “The first time I came,” is the orientation. Here, the time reference “the first time” in the narrative may not be clear for outsiders. It is only clear for the participants in the conversation that the storyteller came to the University of Hawaii in January, 2007 for his first semester. Sometimes on Saturday evening, the East West Center organizes a potluck in front of Hale Manoa, the students’ dorm for students to enjoy food and music performed by invited singers. Here, the *who* and the *what* are clear. In Excerpt 2, the orientation can easily be seen in line 8: “The first time I came here. I went to Kailua beach with ah (...), There was food and

chopsticks and I never use chopsticks.”

Here, the statement of time is the same as in Excerpt 1, but the other details of orientation are also clearly stated: where, what, and who.

*Complicating action.* A clause of complicating action is a sequential clause that reports the next event in response to a potential question, “And what happened (then)?” In Excerpt 1 (line 6), the storyteller just presented one action, “they sang like different kind of music.” which is not the complicating action. One interesting complication can be found in Excerpt 2 (line 12 and line 14) when the *the hero* in the narrative tried to find the way to break his chopsticks secretly because he did not know how to use them.

*Peak or climax.* In Excerpt 1, there is no peak. The sentence, “...you know they (.) they sang like different kind of music... from ah↑↓HotSeat.” (lines 6, 8) is simply a description of one action. In the second excerpt, the peak can be seen clearly in line 14 when the main character thought that he



could break his chopsticks: “I can break up > My friends also said.”

*Resolution.* In Excerpt 1, the storyteller informed us that singer plays well: “Play good. ↑↓ Really ↑↓really good.” (line 10). This fits the slot of the resolution, but since there is no climax, there is no resolution either. It appears to be more like an evaluative comment. In the second excerpt, in line (21), the main character attained his goal. He broke his chopsticks and switched to using his hand: “↑I broke it. Threw it away. I used my hand. [laughter]”

*Evaluation.* As discussed above, each of elements of PEN serves a double purpose: referential and evaluative. In Excerpt 1 (lines 10, 11, and 12). In line (10), evaluative expressions used are intensifiers, stress, and repetitions: “Play good. ↑↓ Really ↑↓really good. (line 10). The narrative was then co-constructed to share their familiarity with the band HotSeat (reproduced below):

- 11 Tony: Mhm. (.) >Oh yeah. There is one band with <↑↓ really good on ah guy ah ↑↓ really dark guy, medium size . . . he had a voice . . it was really. (.)
- 12 Landy: ↑↓ Yeah. ↑↓ yeah.

Here, in line (11), the evaluation was provided by the recipient since he knew the story, so he tried to explain more to make it clearer. Some evaluative expressions used are intensifiers: rising and falling intonation, increasing speed, hesitations, hitches, and explicatives, for example, expansions of the narrative clauses to make the narrative more persuasive. In Excerpt 2, the evaluation can be found from lines (10) to (33). This co-construction shows the participants’ shared knowledge in certain areas. Additionally, evaluative expressions, such as intensifiers with stress, repetitions, hesitations, hitches, and explicatives can be seen in lines (10), (14), (19), and (21): “I never use.”, “My my hand was shaking”, “I looked at everybody.”, “↑I broke it” and “I used my hand. But nobody looked at me.” Also, the participants repeated some important points in the narrative and elicited more information from the storyteller. For instance, one par-

ticipant said, “Oh. Ok. Party\_(.) picnic.” (line 18), “Oh. You use your hand.” (line 22), and “So you broke it cause you got mad.” (line 27)

*Coda.* In Excerpt 1, the storyteller as well as the participants expressed their feelings as well as subjective judgments which can be found in lines (10), (13), and (14). In Excerpt 2: the coda is a joke with a lot of laughter which is present from lines (34) to (43). Both of these codas are built by the storyteller as well as by the participants, which shows that the narratives were well received.

### The Function of the Narratives

In Excerpt 1, the storyteller’s purpose was to inform his listeners that the singer sang really well, and that he liked the music. The telling also seems to aim to evaluate the band, HotSeat. This may reveal his social and cultural background (as someone who liked that type of music). In Excerpt 2, the storyteller’s purpose was to entertain and to represent his identity in particular, the culture, and the society where people do not often use chopsticks. Most Indonesians are not familiar with chopsticks. They typically use spoons, forks and knives which are mentioned in line 76. Not only the storyteller, but also the participants represented their identities. For example, Huy is from Vietnam, and he shows that he can use chopsticks skillfully (lines 48-52). Tony comes from the Philippines, and he knows that most Filipinos use forks and spoons (line 62, 64), but he has not used a spoon at all (lines 68, 70) because he moved to Hawaii a long time ago, and he has used a fork only. In addition to this, he also let the teller and the other participants know that most Japanese people are good at using chopsticks (line 54). Moreover, the storyteller showed how the story helped him make sense of his experience and also to make the past present or to remind him of the past story: he should consider practicing using chopsticks (lines 45, 46) or when he has to go to a restaurant, he should remember to bring along with him a spoon or a fork if possible (line 55).

### Variations in the Narratives

In Excerpt 1, there is no abstract. In Excerpt 2, there is no clear abstract, but through the co-participation in the conversation, the participant provided some hints for the storyteller to start his story. Again, in Excerpt 1, there is little collaboration during the telling of the story: the storyteller talked more directly to referential completeness and exactness in his retellings. The story is illustrated by one of the participants because he also knows the story. Here, according to Blum-Kulka's (1933) study mentioned above, this is called a *shared event*: the story is known to at least some of the participants. In Excerpt 2, there is more participation: more questions, more jokes, and even more information about the topic of the story mentioned to make the story understandable, informative, interesting and worth telling. Here, the storyteller also tried to get to the point, but due to the participant's participation, the story lasted longer compared to Excerpt 1.

### Summary

So far I have analyzed the functions of clauses in narrative structure, narratives' functions, their variations, and I have discussed some implications of PENs for teaching and learning. To answer my first question on what the overall structure of each story, and what the purpose of each element in the story is, it obvious that the two PENs analyzed here have the same basic story structure composed of various clauses: abstract, orientation, complicating action, climax, resolution, evaluation, and coda, except that Excerpt 1 has no complicating action, no climax, and no resolution. Each element of the two PENs in narrative structure served some purposes: referential and evaluative functions, bonding, and identity display. When compared with Labov and Waletzky's narratives (1967), the narratives in this paper are more interactional because there is more collaboration among the participants instead of just asking and answering questions as in an interview. The recipients performed several actions, such as providing more information, being silent,

hesitating, producing hitches, and subjective judgments, etc. in the course of the telling.

For the second question, why the stories were told at this time in the conversation, the answer is that the topic had been introduced by the participants and the storyteller. For example, in the first story, they had previously talked about the food in Hale Halawai where sometimes food is served and music is played (Excerpt 1). In the second excerpt, they had mentioned chopsticks (lines, 1-7).

The third question focuses on the function of each story. The general functions of the two recorded narratives are to inform, to evaluate, to entertain, and to represent not only some identities, social norms, and cultural customs of the 'heroes' in the narratives, but also the participants.

As for the fourth question, about the components of narratives, previous research indicates that most, but not all, stories have an abstract, an orientation, a complicating action, a peak or climax, an evaluation, a resolution, and a coda. Neither of the stories in this study have clear abstracts because they were told naturally without intention. The abstract was mentioned in Excerpt 2, but it is not clear. Nevertheless, both two stories are considered to be complete because they contain an orientation, complicating action, and some closure. Thanks to active participation, which is called *shared event* in the stories, the narratives became more complete, persuasive, and interesting. They also expressed the storytellers' identities. For example, in the first excerpt, although there is no complicating action, one of the participants in the conversation also knew the event, the band, HotSeat, and the reference to the dark guy, medium size. He repeated all of the events and even made the story become more detailed and thus perhaps easier to remember. In addition to this, he used a lot of intensifiers (stress, hesitations, and discourse makers) which can be seen in, for example, line 11 of Excerpt 1. In Excerpt 2, the participants did not assist with the narrative much because they did not know what had happened to the storyteller. They just participated by eliciting questions and making a

lot of jokes and laughter which can be found from the beginning to the end of the story.

The answer to the fifth question will be answered in the following section.

### **Implications for the Language Classroom**

It is important to make use of narratives in teaching because, as mentioned above, when the information is incorporated, it will be easier for students to remember. For example, suppose that in an English lesson, students are reading a story about a bicycle accident: "A boy fell off his bicycle on his way home from school, near the Youth Cultural House, in District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, on January 2<sup>nd</sup>. The accident happened while he was turning left at the corner between Pham Ngoc Thach Street and Dinh Tien Hoang Street. While he was turning after the red light, another man suddenly hit him from behind. The boy fell to the road and fainted because he banged his head. Passers-by called the Ambulance and so on." The teacher asks the students to tell their own stories about an accident. This second step helps students make sense of their experience. If the teacher only asks the students to recite the content of the story, they may not have the chance to make sense of their own world and experiences. They may not remember exactly what happened in the accident. To be successful in using English personal experience narratives, the teacher should know how to apply them to the level of the learners. As discussed in the literature review about teaching through storytelling, first, the teacher should set out narrative assessment rubrics consisting of six aspects: topic maintenance, event sequencing, informativeness, referencing, conjunctive coherence, and fluency. The rubrics are used to evaluate discourse coherence when asking students to talk or to listen to a story. Second, the teacher should provide students with assessment of constituents composed of opener, abstract, orientation (who, what, when, where), complicating action, climax, resolution, evaluation, and closing. Third, to help students improve their narrative skills, the teacher should fo-

cus students on elements of story grammar, such as stress, repetition, subjective judgments, objective judgments, and so forth.

In addition, after teaching a certain lesson, the teacher should consider if he should ask students to tell each other's personal story related to that lesson. By retelling familiar stories, students will make sense of their experiences, and remind themselves, as well as participants in the conversation, of the careless things they did, so that they will become more careful next time. Besides that, it is one of the best ways to improve the language skills and vocabulary that they have just learned. Moreover, they will learn how to evaluate different kinds of stories to make sure that the participants understand, and they will furthermore learn how to use story grammar: stress, repetitions, subjective judgments, etc. What is more, they will know how to share the story with each other by questioning to make the story become fully developed, by adding as much as what they know based on the theme of the story, for example, the story in Excerpt 2. Therefore, by giving them a variety of lessons on storytelling, asking them to tell stories to their friends, and asking their friends to participate and to add more jokes, laughter, and good and interesting information in the storytelling, the teacher can give them the love for storybooks which can help them improve their English more quickly. One more important thing is that the teacher should prepare as many PENs as possible so as to help students listen or watch and compare the differences between their own PENs and others', especially American ones, so that they can better understand American culture because they are learning English.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is very useful to analyze naturally occurring narratives because they can help us see the story structures in discourse, in different situations, and with different speakers. We can also see the stories' functions, and the storytellers' identities which often represent cultural mores and social customs. In teaching, depending on the lesson, and students' level, interest and

goal, the teacher should consider if he or she can ask students to relate the lesson they have just had to their own stories and share them with the class, or if possible, the teacher can include a storytelling section in his or her syllabi and spend some time before, during, or after a new lesson letting the students share their stories. Doing this can change the classroom atmosphere, enhance motivation, improve students' language and provide opportunities to use interactive storytelling skills. In order to make students even more successful, the teacher should show them different models of PENs. Also, the teacher may ask them to collect and

write stories as a class journal and encourage students to read more storybooks. Since this is a small study, more research on PEN should be conducted, and more specific implications for teaching and learning should be brought out in order to help researchers, teachers, and students see new structures, functions, variation, and application in new contexts.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is Labov's and Waletzky's way of capturing the speaker's pronunciation of *wave*.

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