

- _____, and N. P. McKinney. 1963. Loudness, sound pressure, and subglottal pressure in speech. *J. Acoustical Society of America* 35.454.
- _____; M. H. Draper, and D. Whitteridge. 1958. Syllables and stress. *Miscellanea Phonetica* 3.1-14.
- Pike, Kenneth L. 1967. *Language in relation to a unified theory of the structure of human behavior*, 2nd edition. The Hague: Mouton.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1916. *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot.
- Sievers, Eduard. 1893. *Grundzüge der Phonetik*, 4th edition. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Hartel.
- Steriade, Donca. 1982. *Greek prosodies and the nature of syllabification*. Ph.D. Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Stetson, R. H. 1951. *Motor phonetics: A study of speech movements in action*, 2nd edition. Amsterdam: North-Holland.
- Twaddell, W. F. 1953. Stetson's model and the 'supra-segmental' phonemes. *Language* 29.415-53.

What Was Funny? Discourse Referents in Pronoun Use of Young Children

REBECCA BURNS

I. Introduction. The subject of this paper is the distribution of the pronouns *it* and *that* in the evaluative statement "X was funny." The discourse unit being studied here is the conversational narrative, or a story told in the course of conversation. The data used in this study was collected by Mark Clarke and a group of speech pathologists under the direction of Ann Morrison Clemens in the spring of 1982. The data consist of videotapes of school children in conversational dyads with peers or teachers. The age of the children ranged from 5 years to 9 years, and their general development ranged from normal to educationally handicapped. The data were collected expressly for samples of children's narratives within conversations. The children were told that they were being taped, and that they were to perform specific tasks such as making cookies or carrying on conversation during the taping.

For the purposes of this study, the sections of discourse that are treated as narratives were identified first of all by the evaluative expression "It was funny" or "That was funny." The boundaries of the narratives were arrived at by including all the conversational turns that were necessary to answer the question "What was funny?" In this sense, a narrative is a stretch of discourse that is retellable—that is interesting or has a point outside the context of the conversation in which it was told.

I have chosen to focus on the feature of evaluative language as a sufficient but not necessary feature of a narrative. I interpret "funny" as clear evidence of the speaker's intention to evaluate something in the speech event as humorous. The past tense of the verb increases the probability that what was funny was some narrated construct. The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether the pronouns *it* and *that* in the evaluative statements "It was funny" or "That was funny" are interchangeable or if each corresponds to a distinction in discourse structure.

The relationship of evaluative language to the narrative is given by Labov to be a feature of fully-formedness.

Some narratives contain only narrative clauses; they are complete in the sense that they have a beginning, a middle, and an end. But there are other elements of narrative structure found in more fully developed types. Briefly, a fully-formed narrative may show the following: 1. Abstract 2. Orientation 3. Complicating Action 4. Evaluation 5. Result or resolution 6. Coda. (Labov 1972:362-63)

He goes on to say that the evaluation of the narrative captures the point of the story—the reason why the story was tellable. Thus, by only focusing on stretches of discourse that are evaluated by the statement "It or That was funny," this analysis only covers potentially fully-formed narratives which are speaker-evaluated as funny.

II. Analysis of the data. In over 22 hours of taped conversations, the data contained only 10 occurrences of "It was funny" or "That was funny." Out of a total of 33 children in the data base, only 5 children produced either evaluative utterance, and only 3 children produced the 5 evaluative utterances associated with a fully developed narrative. Two of these three children were noted as normal in development and these two stood out from the rest as notably mature and articulate in conversation. From this preliminary scan, it would appear that evaluative language in discourse

associated with more mature stages of language development. Labov (1972:394) cites specific correlations between age and the use of specific types of evaluative syntax:

The figures for all four evaluative categories show a regular and marked increase from preadolescents to teenagers and another large increase from adolescents to adults.... We can assert that the preadolescents will have a great deal of language learning ahead of them. The ability to use negatives, futures, and modals in ordinary conversation is not equivalent to the ability to use them in narrative.

In items 1 and 2, each narrative is produced in an extended conversational turn, and the evaluation "It was funny" occurs at the end of each story or narrative as a separate utterance, not conjoined to a preceding or following clause.

ITEM 1

ADULT: Do you ever go--do you ever enter those NASTAR races?

AARON: Un un. Well, one day they forgot to take down or put em up for a reason--they forgot to take down the cones on the side and the nets and that, and the little posts--flags--and it was on the expert hill and I wasn't quite ready for the expert hill yet, and my brothers went up there and they came down. They came down on their heads! **It was so funny!**

ITEM 2

AARON: (Topic is still skiing.) One teacher that I had, he had a moustache, and he had snow on his moustache and he didn't fall or anything! **It was funny.**

ADULT: Oh, a ski instructor.

AARON: Yeah.

ADULT: Where do they get that snow on their moustache from when they don't fall? Where do you suppose?

AARON: /the air and that and/

ADULT: /that's right.

AARON: and when they breathe in it melts and it looks yuck/

ADULT: /It does look yucky. You're right.

In item 2, the narrative actually ends with the evaluation, "It was funny", but the conversation that follows is reported to show what clarification was required by the listener. In this case, the listener failed to interpret "teacher" in the context of skiing as a ski instructor until the end of the narrative where she clarifies the referent of "teacher." The narrative does not stand as truly funny for this listener because instead of just laughing, she goes on to question Aaron's knowledge of how the snow gets on the moustache of a person who never falls. She then offers agreement with Aaron's opinion that "snowy" moustaches look yucky, which serves to close the topic.

The intensifier in the evaluative portion of Item 1 seems highly appropriate--seeing one's older brothers get their just desserts is a rich example of something funny. The pronoun in the evaluation of both Items 1 and 2 refers to the narrated event that has just been recounted. In Item 1, *it* refers to Aaron's brothers skiing down an expert racing course and falling on their heads. In Item 2, *it* refers to Aaron's ski instructor who never falls having snow in his moustache.

ITEM 3

ADULT: Do you like to water ski?

CRAIG: Oh, yeah.

ADULT: Tell me how do--how good you are.

CRAIG: Well, the only problem is my left foot just doesn't have enough power. It's always going over like that. My dad's holding me and I'm setting here going like this, skiing, and my left foot's going like that and/

ADULT: /Do you ski two people at a time? Is that how your dad holds you?

CRAIG: Un huh and one time wa--while we were skiing I was doing really good and I was bringing my left foot over there, then finally the bar, the thingy that you hold on to/

ADULT: /rope/

CRAIG: /was so slick I just (noise) just lost it and my dad was still holding me. He didn't notice o-- and all of sudden go like this (gestures). Yeah, skiing with no hands/

ADULT: /With no hands and no rope. You were just with your dad?

CRAIG: Yeah, yeah. My dad's holding me hanging along and finally he noticed that I lost my grip on the handle and **it was funny.**

In Item 3, Craig's narrative occurs over five conversational turns; however, the five conversational turns of the adult contribute important information to the narrative. This story was not told in one extended turn, as were the stories in Items 1 and 2. The narrative can be retold and will be funny in the retelling but information prompted or supplied by the adult will necessarily be part of the retelling.

Also unlike Items 1 and 2, the narrative in Item 3 does not unfold spontaneously. The adult draws Craig into marking conversation by first questioning and then directly requesting a telling of his water skiing ability. What follows is a confusing narrative about Craig and his father skiing double when Craig lost his grip on the tow bar and skied with no hands as his father held him--unknowingly for the most part. The adult interrupts Craig's narrative for a clarification that skiing double is what is going on, then supplies the word "rope" as Craig struggles to name the tow bar, and finally she comments on his statement of "skiing with no hands" and asks for clarification of the situation.

As in Items 1 and 2, the evaluation in Item 3 comes at the end of the narrative, but unlike 1 and 2, the evaluation is conjoined to the speaker's clarification of his story which was forced by the adult's request for clarification. The pronoun *it* refers to the event which has just been narrated which is consistent with Items 1 and 2. In this case, *it* refers to Craig's water skiing with his father holding him, and his father not realizing that Craig had lost his grip on the tow bar, and his father finally realizing that Craig was skiing with no hands.

ITEM 4

ADULT: Tell me about some of your friends?

COLBY: One of em is Kent. He lives at the end of my block and another one is Johanathan and well, they're both nice. One of em likes, well, Kent sometimes gets pretty mean.

ADULT: Oh my goodness. He has a temper, huh?

- COLBY: Uh huh. One time, it was real funny, he, I, he was throwing a record cover around and he hit a plant and it fell down (laughs) and his mom gave him a spoon and told him to pick it up and I was laughing but I didn't want to laugh 'cause then he'd get mad at me. And then he said, "How would you like to do it, Colby?" (smiles, laughs) He got mad at me.
- ADULT: He did, huh?
- COLBY: Uh huh.

In Item 4, the evaluative utterance occurs immediately after the brief narrative introduction "One time." It is surrounded by pauses similar to a parenthetical expression and thus may be considered to occur free of any conjunction. The narrative unfolds in one turn and is voluntary--Colby's turn could have just as easily ended with "uh huh" without the "One time." The turn preceding and following the narrative are reported here because the preceding turn supplies the referent for the pronoun *he* which would be necessary in a retelling, and the following turn shows the reader that the Adult's response fits the analysis of the preceding turn as a narrative. As in Items 1-3, the referent of the pronoun *it* is the event that is (going to be) narrated, which is Kent's knocking over a plant when he was throwing a record around, and his mom making him pick up the dirt with a spoon, and Colby trying to hide his laughter for fear of Kent getting mad at him, and Kent getting mad anyway and asking Colby if he wouldn't like to do the job.

ITEM 5

- AMY: Tell me about the Incredible Shrinking Woman.
- DEAN: Um, oh one day she was going shopping and there like there was this new perfume and so she brang it home and her dad sprayed it on her, well, her husband sprayed it on her, and then her dress shrank up and then everyday she started to shrink and so she would fit in a trash sack. So that's where they carry her to get her in the grocery because everybody stared at her and she didn't like it. And she kept on getting littler and littler and there was this bad guy, he wanted her because her blood could shrink the world and so he went out to kill her, so he kept her in her gerbil cage, and um there was a monkey they were going to shrink too, and that monkey was nice and there was a guy that was helping her to get out. It was funny when they were going to escape, they put banana peels all over the floor and they were flipping all over the place and they were going all over stuff and they got out of there ...

(he continues to tell the movie story)

- AMY: Did you see Raiders of the Lost Ark?

Item 5 is a narrated retelling of a movie that the listener has not seen. The narrative is told over one very long extended turn. The evaluation occurs in the middle of the narrative and does not refer to the entire narrative. The evaluation precedes an introductory adverb clause and is not conjoined to or embedded in the sentence. The pronoun *it* refers to the event which is immediately narrated--the incredible shrinking woman and the guy helping her escape flipping all over the place when they were going to escape because there were banana peels all over the floor. The portion of the transcript preceding "It was funny" is reported here because it provides background information necessary to answer the question "What was funny."

ITEM 6

- COLBY: Well, um, have you ever gotten in a fight?

- DILLON: Yeah. I got with big fights with Chad Bussey, um--
- COLBY: I heard that Sam Ferris, um Sammy Sam Ferrison or something like that threw Lonnie's shoe on the bus. I heard that.
- DILLON: Oh, yeah. That was funny. (laughs)
- COLBY: It was funny?
- DILLON: Yeah ...

Item 6 has two occurrences of what I have been considering evaluative language, and both occur as independent clauses. "That was funny" is said by Dillon who was not the narrator of what was funny. The pronoun *that* refers to the event of Lonnie's shoe getting thrown on the bus by Sam/Sammy Ferris/Ferrison which has just been mentioned by Colby. Since Dillon was present at the event (further into the conversation he describes some of what happened), his evaluative statement is not necessarily an evaluation of Colby's narrative and is more likely to be an evaluation based on his own memory of the event. The appropriateness of the evaluation is questioned by Colby in his next turn; he does not agree that Lonnie's shoe getting thrown on the bus should be interpreted as funny. Just as in Dillon's evaluative statement, the *it* in Colby's question "It was funny?" refers to Lonnie's shoe getting thrown on the bus by Sammy Ferrison. Colby's use of *it* in contrast to his own use of the pronoun *that* in his narrative turn when he says "I heard that" refer to the shoe event as well as to Dillon's use of *that* in referring to the same event.

ITEM 7

- AMY: Do you have any movies you really liked? I mean/
- DEAN: /Oh, I saw Time Bandits.
- AMY: Oh, I like I saw that too.
- DEAN: I like the/
- AMY: /I like the giants spread the things down.
- DEAN: Uh huh. That was pretty funny and uh they had six little midgets. Yeah. That guy turned into a pig and/ [a]
- AMY: Yeah and then uh I think that was really funny uh when um the guy um at the end uh he looked at the fishnet and they were really there and then then they said like when they woke up there was a fire and so a campfire there and then um/ [b]
- DEAN: /to see if he was dreaming?
- AMY: Yeah. Then he said, "That's evil. Don't touch it," and they touched it and they disappeared
- DEAN: And it blew up. The whole thing. Then the fireman winked at them
- AMY: That was funny. That was the guy that was the king and he wanted to stay there and be his son. [c]
- DEAN: How do you know that?
- AMY: Cuz I saw them. Well, you know, like I saw like/
- DEAN: /Sure looked like 'im.
- AMY: Yeah, um I thought that was funny when um he says he asked um Evil, one of his servants, asked Evil a question. And then he says, "Good question." [d]

- DEAN: Oh yeah ... Oh I like another part um when they were going to have a war with the guy.
- AMY: Oh yeah.
- DEAN: **That was pretty funny**, he had that old spaceship that was going (makes speed noise). He shot that one big um one of those pile of rock things on that one guy and then goes (makes a frown) and makes them like line up. Sleeping on the job. [e]
- AMY: That was nnnnnnnn yeah
- DEAN: And then um and then he um gets back up and um he goes "Sorry I killed you."
- AMY: /I like/
- DEAN: /That was pretty funny everybody going after him ... [f]

In Item 7, there are six evaluative statements, all of them being "That was funny" with variations in modifiers of funny and in independent clause constructions. The referents for the pronoun *that* all are events from the movie which is the basis for the conversation. In statement [a] made by Dean, the referent of *that* is the giants' spreading the things down which Amy has just mentioned. Dean's ability to evaluate this event as funny must come from his memory of the movie because Amy has not supplied enough information for the event to have any meaning, let alone a humorous meaning. The referent of *that* in Amy's statement [b] is also unretrievable. The pronominal referent in her statement [c] is the fireman's winking at them which Dean has just mentioned. Unlike slipping on banana peels, winking is not a standard joke. Her judgment of its funniness must come from her knowledge of the movie rather than what Dean has told her. Likewise in her statement [d], the judgment of one of Evil's servants asking him a question and Evil saying "Good question" as being funny must come from movie knowledge. Dean's statements [e] and [f] seem to evaluate the same event, both *that's* referring to some guy in a spaceship defending himself and shooting things and a wizard being somehow involved and someone getting up from being dead and the killer of the person saying "Sorry I killed you." Statement [f] has the extra referent of everybody going after him. While anyone getting up from being dead and having his killer say "Sorry" may be funny, a retelling of this event is not possible given the confusion over who did what to whom and why. None of the conversational turns in Item 7 may be construed as narratives since none of them can be retold with any success outside the context of the conversation. The evaluative statements sometimes follow the event mentioned in conversation; sometimes they precede. Participants evaluate their own event-mentions as well as the event-mentions of the conversational partner.

III. Discussion. The use of *it* or *that* in the evaluative utterance "X was funny" is not random. The contrast between the pronouns in the evaluative statements in conversations marks the "location" of the referent. All of the referents of *it* in "It was funny" statements were events that were (more or less) fully narrated in the conversation. All of the referents for *that* in "That was funny" statements were events that were not fully narrated in the conversation. The evaluation of funniness of *that* events is based on knowledge of the event that is not given in the conversation--"you had to be there." The same judgment of funniness of *it* events can be supported on just the information given in the conversation. "That was funny" statements can refer to an event that the speaker has mentioned or will mention or that another participant has mentioned. "It was funny" statements are made by the speaker who has narrated or will narrate the event.

This contrast fits the traditional analysis of these two anaphors. *It* is classified as a pronoun--a form that has a nominal referent within an utterance. *That* is a deictic expression whose referent includes time, place, and person information outside the utterance and specific to

the speech event. In terms of discourse structure, the referent of *it* in "It was funny" statements will be a past experience event that is recreated in the conversation--the referent is contained within an utterance if the discourse may be viewed as an utterance. The referent of *that* will be an event whose existence remains outside the conversation--an event which is known by one or both participants. The referent is based on information outside the utterance and specific to the speech event.

Charlotte Linde was probably the first to systematically investigate *it* and *that* as an opposition. She analyzed discourse units of apartment layout descriptions which were non-interruptible, tightly structured narratives. She employed the notion "focus of attention" to account for the distribution of *it* and *that* in sentences where either could be produced. While both *it* and *that* were used to refer to rooms, *it* was used to refer to a room inside the focus of attention--that is, the room whose description was being given. *That* was preferred for references to rooms outside the focus of attention--that is a room whose description or reference had already been given ("There is a hall and the kitchen is off *that*"). Note that this rule is a statement of speaker preference and is not categorical. The *it* rule is categorical.

In the apartment layout discourses, Linde noted that evaluative information was often given by speakers when they described rooms. In all instances, the evaluative material was always in immediate proximity to the introduction of the room. In the discourse narratives, evaluation of the most fully formal narratives was either at the end of the story or in the introduction to the story and tended to be free of subordinate clauses. An evaluation with a subordinate clause introduces a very specific proportion of a narrative (episode) as funny as in the example from Item 5 "It was funny when they were trying to escape ..."

The position of evaluative language seems to be predictable in both conversational and apartment layout narratives. In Linde's analysis, the evaluation is part of the same information node as the object of evaluation. Keeping this premise, the node of a fully developed story will take evaluation at the beginning or end.

In terms of the conversational narratives reviewed here, we would expect to find fully developed narratives referred to only by *it* (never *that*). These structures are well in the focus of attention of the narrator and as well as the other participant(s). Events that are referred to but not narrated in the conversation are most likely to be referred to by *that*--the event remains outside the focus of attention. The distribution constraints of *it* and *that* appear to be consistent in both conversational narratives and apartment layout narratives.

Linde also noted that *it* was used to refer to the whole apartment and that attention could be in two places simultaneously--the discourse node under construction and the discourse as a whole.

Thus, if the focus of attention indicates where we are, we are actually at two places at once. In fact, it is likely that the number is considerably greater than two, particularly in more complicated discourse types. An excellent place to investigate this would be discourse units constructed by more than one person, under norms of competition rather than cooperation. (1979:351)

Conversations and conversational narratives are certainly more competitive and more complicated discourse types than uninterrupted narratives. In Item 7, the children are talking about the movie "Time Bandits" which they have both seen. There are many turn exchanges, expressions of agreement, and a turn where Dean finishes Amy's telling of an event in the movie. The two participants cover many events in the movie, none of which come into focus in such a way that a clear, retellable event is created, and all of which are referred to by *that* when evaluated as funny. Their attention is in their movie memories and on the face to face interaction simultaneously. Should the teacher have interrupted them and asked them if they wanted more time,

either one of them could have said "Yes, it's fun." *It* would refer to the conversation itself--a referent that has not been mentioned but could clearly be accessed by each participant and is more the focus of their attention than any individual movie episode. Neither participant could say "Yes, that's fun" to the teacher because the referent, conversing, is still in focus. The latter statement could be issued only after the conversation had ended and the teacher had asked something like "Would you like to do it again?".

In Items 1 and 2, the focus of attention is on the narrative being delivered in an extended conversational turn. The attention is not split in two places simultaneously. Conversational, interactive attention is suspended in favor of focusing on the story itself, and the participants become speaker and listener. Thus, in conversation, participants' attention can be two or more places at once. In conversational narratives, participants' attention may become focused in one place during the story.

A longer transcript of Item 6 illustrates focus of attention and "inside" versus "outside" knowledge particularly well.

ITEM 6a

- COLBY: Well, um have you ever gotten in a fight?
 DILLON: Yeah. I got with big fights with Chad Bussey, um/
 COLBY: /I heard that Sam Ferris, um Sammy Sam Ferris or something like that
 threw Lonnie's shoe on the bus. I heard that.
 DILLON: Oh yeah. **That was funny.** (laughs).
 COLBY: **It was funny?**
 DILLON: Yeah. He went "Phitt" (motions with hands). He was on the bus an he was
 cryin an we didn't know 'n that--he said Lonnie "You better get runnin' and
 he just stand there crying/ and star
 COLBY: Lonnie?
 DILLON: Yeah. It was Lonnie's shoe got on the bus. No. Sammy Ferris didn't frow it
 on. He tried to kick a cup. It went "tchiew" (gestures) on the bus.
 COLBY: Well I heard that he threw it up there.
 DILLON: Oh yeah. That was Jonathon. We're at this park an' he tried to kick a cup in
 the water an his shoe went "tchiew" (gestures) right into the water.
 COLBY: Who? Jon's?
 DILLON: Yeah. Jon's/
 COLBY: /Well Sam Ferris had to buy Lonnie new shoes. Did ya ever/
 DILLON: But/he got it back. Mmmmmmm. (5.5 second pause) A new pair?
 COLBY: Yeah, of shoes.
 DILLON: Of the same kind?
 COLBY: No. I think he got him cowboy boots because Lonnie doesn't wear tennis
 shoes. He usually wears boots. Like you mostly wear tennis shoes and I
 mostly wear 'em.

The two participants disagree on the evaluation of the event in the initial portion of the conversation, and after examining the larger script, it is clear that Dillon's evaluation is based on

what he remembers of Lonnie's shoe (not what he has told or has been told). Colby's questioning of Dillon's evaluation of the event is based on the two things he knows, one of which is told in the beginning, about Lonnie's shoe--that Sam threw it on the bus and that he had to buy Lonnie a new pair of shoes. Such trouble is generally not funny. Dillon didn't know about the trouble and may have seen the confrontation as funny without consequences.

Colby presents what he knows and uses the in-focus pronoun *it* when he questions "It was funny?" Dillon was present, as he later tells in an unclear, confused narrative, and made his original evaluation of the event using the dual focus pronoun *that*. Dillon's attention remains split between his memories and the interaction of conversation until he pauses for five and a half seconds, suspending his interactive attention, to focus on the information that Sam had to buy Lonnie new shoes. Colby's attention is focused on what he knows to be interesting (Lonnie's shoe --since he knows the outcome) throughout the conversation.

IV. Summary. The choice of *it* or *that* in discourse is systematically based on structural conditions of the discourse. In conversational narratives, *that* is used in evaluative language when the richness of the story remains outside the conversation and the story is only mentioned or referred to. *It* is used in evaluative language when the richness of the story has been presented in the conversation. This distinction corresponds to Linde's finding that *that* is used for referents outside the focus of attention, *it* is used for referents inside the focus of attention.

In conversation, participants attend to two or more levels of information simultaneously--the requirements of face to face interaction as well as the information being interpreted. When a fully-developed story is told in the course of conversation, the attention of the participants comes into focus as interactive requirements are suspended. A participant is willing to suspend his interactive role in conversation only for something better. That something better is the pleasure derived from the rich logical and contextual implications drawn from a well-told story.

The information structure of discourse can be marked not only by pronoun use (relevance outside versus inside the focus of attention) but also by the position of evaluative language. A discourse "tree" with many branching information nodes requires that evaluation precede the information. A tree with one in focus, developed information node may have evaluation before or after the information is given.

The study of conversational narratives provides a very complex unit of discourse as a testing ground for principles of discourse analysis. Separating conversation constraints from information structure is essential to such analysis, but it is clearly difficult. Isolating well-formed and not well-formed narratives from conversation using sources of evidence external to personal judgment is a first step in disentangling the systems underlying this interesting linguistic behavior.

References

- Labov, William. 1972. The transformation of experience in narrative syntax. *Language in the inner city*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
 Linde, Charlotte. 1979. Focus of attention and the choice of pronouns in discourse. *Syntax and semantics, volume 12: Discourse and syntax*. New York: Academic Press.