

# 'He says ... so I said': verb tense alternation and narrative depictions of authority in American English<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*In a study of the use of the historical present (HP) tense in American English narrative, Wolfson (1982) finds that the alternation between say and said in introductions of reported speech does not function the same way as do past/HP alternations in other places. Wolfson is unable to explain say/said alternation, though she tries a number of hypotheses. The present paper reevaluates one of Wolfson's rejected hypotheses, that tense alternation in narrative dialog introducers may be related to the relative status of the reported speakers. The paper is based on an analysis of a corpus of narratives in which storytellers re-create conversations with figures of authority. Throughout the corpus, tellers use the past tense (said, was going) far more often than the HP to introduce the speech of nonauthorities, and the HP (says, goes) far more often for the speech of authority figures. This finding fits well with Schiffrin's (1981) observation that the historical present is used for evaluation in narrative. I next turn to rhetorical microanalyses of narratives to see how storytellers use tense choices to track shifts in 'footing' and 'authorship' (Goffman 1981) as they re-create dialog. The methodological points of the paper are (1) that speakers make the choices they do for a variety of reasons, so that no single explanation of any discourse feature is sufficient, and (2) that quantitative analyses of discourse must be supplemented with qualitative microanalyses of what individual speakers do in particular situations.*

## Introduction

The following excerpt from a spontaneous narrative of personal experience will serve to introduce the theme of this paper. A young woman is describing a conversation she had with a police officer who stopped her on the road when she was a new driver.<sup>2</sup>

- (1) and then *I said* what's the problem here?  
*he says* well ma'am ... ah ... you didn't stop for that stop sign back there  
*I said* WHAT ...  
 I mean I was mad  
*I said* WHAT  
 and *he says* ... *he says*  
 it's the In-  
*he just starts off rattling*  
 it's the Indi- Indiana State Law you must come to a complete stop ...  
 before the stop sign da da da da  
*I said* I did  
*I said* there's a crosswalk there and the thing's before that  
*I said* where were you sitting anyway [laughs]  
*he says* I was right in that parking lot by the church  
 and that parking lot's right back here [indicating on table]  
 you can't even see the stop sign  
*I said* I'm sorry  
*I said* you didn't see me  
*he said* it's the Indiana State Law da da da da da

This storyteller, like any, is re-creating the situation as she narrates it, constructing the dialog<sup>3</sup> she puts in her own mouth and in the police officer's. It is very unlikely that she remembers the exact words anybody said ten years ago, and more unlikely that she actually spoke this brashly to a police officer. As she constructs this dialog, she tracks who is talking with what I will call *introducers*, clauses like *she said*, *I'm going*, *I said*, or *he went*. Sometimes the introducers are in the past tense and sometimes they are in the historical present (HP) tense (present tense in form but past time in reference). In the example above, the pattern of tense usage in the introducers is striking and regular: the teller's speech is invariably introduced in the past (*I said*), and, in all but one case, the policeman's speech is introduced with the HP (*he says*).

Why do storytellers choose the tenses they do as they construct dialog? What is the best way to find out the reasons for tense choice in narrative? These are the questions I will try to answer in this paper. Small though it seems, the problem of accounting for tense choices in narrative dialog introducers has proven to be a sticky one, as yet unsolved despite several attempts to solve it. And the search for a solution has important methodological ramifications for the debate about the value of quantitative versus qualitative analysis in the study of discourse. There is a reason for every sort of alternation there is in talk; the trick is to figure out how

to uncover the reason, and for this the smallest problem is as illuminating as the largest.

In what follows, I will first discuss two recent studies that bear on the problem of tense choice in dialog introducers, though neither solves it. I will then introduce the narrative data on which my analysis is based and will present and discuss the results of a quantitative pilot study of this data. Then I will show how rhetorical microanalyses of some of the data can explain aspects of tense choice which quantitative analysis leaves unexplained. Finally, I will present the theoretical framework in which I think all narrative tense choice can best be understood, a framework based on what has been called 'the linguistics of particularity'.<sup>4</sup>

### Previous studies of tense alternation in narrative

Two recent studies of past/HP alternation in narrative are those of Wolfson (1982) and Schiffrin (1981). While only Wolfson talks specifically about past/HP alternation in dialog introducers, both studies bear on the issue. Traditional analyses of the HP explain the use of the present tense for events in the past as a way of making events appear to be in the present so that they seem to be happening as the story is being told, giving the impression that the speaker imagines that the events are actually happening again. Wolfson points out, however, that the English present tense is in fact timeless in reference (1982: 32), and, furthermore, that the HP (or CHP, for conversational historical present) always alternates with the past tense (1982: 34). Thus the function of the HP cannot simply be to report events as if they were happening now. Wolfson's claim is that what is communicatively significant is the SWITCH between past and HP. When a speaker changes from past to HP or from HP to past, the switch operates 'to partition off important events or points in the story from one another' (1982: 36).

Schiffrin's analysis of the HP in 73 personal-experience narratives uncovers the same kind of patterning of past/HP usage as Wolfson's. Schiffrin points out that the use of the HP is almost completely restricted to the clauses in a story which form its backbone, the clauses, that is, in which the central events are related in chronological order (1981: 51). This is the case, for one thing, because it is only in these 'complicating action' clauses (Labov 1972) that the actual temporal reference is clear and does not need to be encoded in the verbs. Schiffrin agrees with Wolfson that switches in tense may signal breaks in events, though she points out the need for a clearer understanding of what constitutes an 'event' (1981: 53). However, Schiffrin claims that it is only switches FROM HP TO PAST that

have this function (1981: 56). When the switch goes from past to HP, the function of the HP is EVALUATIVE, serving to underscore the unusual or surprising events which give the story its point (1981: 59).

Schiffrin does not discuss past/HP alternation in dialog introducers. Her implicit claim is that tense choices in this context function the same way as do tense choices elsewhere. Wolfson, however, does focus specific attention on this problem. She claims that tense choice in narrative introducers does not function the way it does elsewhere (1982: 50). Since 35% of all the verbs in Wolfson's corpus are uses of *say* or *said* (Wolfson discusses only *say/said*, but her discussion presumably applies to other narrative introducers as well), this is quite a large problem, and one which Wolfson is unable to solve. She tries a number of hypotheses about *say/said* alternation (1982: 51–52):

— The choice of tense has to do with patterns of dialog. If both speakers are performing the same speech act, the tense of the introducers does not change.

— As long as one speaker keeps talking, the tense used to introduce his/her speech stays the same.

— In third-person stories, in which the teller is not one of the characters talking, only the past is used.

— Different introducer tenses are used to keep apart different participants.

— Tense choices in dialog introducers have to do with differences in the relative status of the reported speakers.

Wolfson rejects all of these hypotheses because of counterexamples in her data. She rejects the last one, that tense choice has to do with relative status, because the same speaker in the same dialog is sometimes introduced both ways, with past and with HP.

Before turning to the dialog introducer data I will use in this analysis, I would like to say a few more words about Wolfson's last hypothesis, which I will call the status hypothesis. Wolfson is clearly right that the same speaker in the same dialog can be introduced with the past for one utterance and with the HP for another. In fact, the same speaker IN THE SAME UTTERANCE can be introduced both ways, as in (2):

- (2) and *I says* yeah I know  
       *I said* ah I know

I do not agree with Wolfson, however, that this is sufficient reason to reject the status hypothesis. As speakers talk about interactions with people of differential status, they are doing several things. They are not simply capturing a static social fact about relative status in their stories. Rather, they are constructing the relations between speakers, relations

which may start out with socially defined status differentials, but which may evolve in the course of the reported talk. For example, if one is stopped by a police officer, the officer starts out with the higher status and greater power. But if it turns out that the driver didn't do anything wrong — that the police officer made a mistake — then the situation changes, and one's narrative depiction of relative status and power will change too. People very often talk about interactions with people of higher status precisely to show that the initial, socially defined status differential is in fact unfair or wrong: personal experience stories revolving around harassment by unfair authorities are extremely common. So it should not be at all surprising to find that discourse introducers change as dialog proceeds.

For another thing, once a storyteller's audience gets a certain point, the teller does not need to keep making the point. It is possible, and I think it is sometimes the case, that a teller may mark status relations once or twice and then not keep marking them, once they are clear, until they change.

This, in brief, is my point: in stories involving interactions with figures of authority, storytellers DO use tense alternations in dialog introducers to capture status relations. They do this, however, in a considerably more fluid and more individual way than Wolfson suggests, and while there is a general pattern that is repeated in many stories, it is necessary to look at individual stories to understand particular choices.

#### 'He says'/'I said': a general pattern

For the present analysis, I have used a corpus of 66 personal-experience narratives recorded in the course of spontaneous conversation. The speakers are with one exception middle-class whites (the exception is a middle-class black). All are from a midwestern American city and the surrounding rural area. From this corpus, I selected for this analysis the 13 first-person stories which include clear examples of verbal interaction with figures of authority and which re-create this interaction with reported dialog. The authority figures are varied, and some stories involve more than one: five are police officers, three are older neighbors or parents' friends, two are parents, two are emergency-room nurses, two are merchants, and one story involves several different military superiors. There are two cases in which the storyteller is the authority figure: one in which the teller, an auto mechanic, interacts with his wife, who is in another town with a car that won't start, and one in which the teller interacts with military subordinates.

I have chosen to focus on authority stories for several reasons.

Authority stories are very common, as mentioned above. People tell about encounters with authority figures to help redefine the situation, to assuage the embarrassment and powerlessness they felt during trying moments: getting pulled over on the road, having to be polite to a lieutenant who left you and your men stranded for three days, having your body examined in the hospital, being caught taking a pet onto the bus, or discussing how to steal an ashtray. Authority stories are particularly clear examples of stories as attempts to redefine one's self, and they provide good examples of what Tannen (1986) calls 'constructed dialog': reported dialog that could not possibly be a simple repetition of the actual words anybody said in the situation being told about. Constructed dialog is one of the ways speakers manipulate their 'footing' (Goffman 1981) vis à vis other characters in the story and vis à vis their audiences. The manipulation of footing is an aspect of storytelling I will discuss later in the paper.

Of the 13 under consideration, nine stories include at least one reported interchange between an authority figure and the nonauthority. An *interchange* is defined here as a conversational move and its response (Goffman 1976), or, more simply, as one turn by one speaker and one by the other. Note that one reported turn may include several discourse introducers, as in this interchange:

- (3) turn 1 { *she said* it won't turn over  
won't do anything  
*she said* they tried to jump it and it wouldn't even jump ...
- turn 2 { *I said* aw  
*I said* unless it's in the starter it should jump  
*said* got lights and everything?

There are 20 interchanges with authority figures, in all. The reported dialog in these interchanges is introduced in the following ways:

- I/he/she/they *said*
- I/he/she *says* (*I say* does not occur)<sup>5</sup>
- he/she *goes*: I/we *go*
- I'm/he's *going*
- I *was going*
- he *asked me*
- he *just starts off rattling*
- no lexical introducer<sup>6</sup> (I will symbolize this in the examples that follow with  $\emptyset$ )

The first step in the analysis was a quantitative one:<sup>7</sup> for each of the 20 interchanges, I noted which tense was used for each speaker. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 1. In other words, in about half the

Table 1. Results of quantitative analysis

Nonauthority:	Past	HP	$\emptyset$
Authority			
Past	5	0	0
HP	9	3	0
$\emptyset$	2	0	1

interchanges tellers choose to introduce the authority figure's dialog with a different tense from the one they choose for the nonauthority's dialog, and, in these interchanges, IT IS ALWAYS THE NONAUTHORITY WHOSE TALK IS INTRODUCED IN THE PAST; THE AUTHORITY FIGURE GETS INTRODUCED EITHER IN THE HP OR WITH  $\emptyset$ . When there is a pattern that has 20 opportunities to occur and does not occur once, it is worth thinking about why this might be the case.

Why, then, this prevailing pattern of having the nonauthority and not the authority introduced in the past tense, the authority in the HP or with  $\emptyset$ ? Let us look at some examples in which this pattern occurs. Several examples can be found in (1) above; one is the following:

- (4) and then *I said* what's the problem here?  
*he says* well ma'am ... ah ... you didn't stop for that stop sign back there

Example (5) is also from a story about driving, although in this case the teller has had a traffic accident and is being interviewed by a police officer immediately afterward.

- (5) and *he goes*  
you been drinking?  
and *I said*  
WELL ... yeahh ... I had a few beers this afternoon

In (6), the teller, a man in his early 20s, is being interviewed by the judge ('she') at a traffic-violation hearing.

- (6) *she says* ...  
okay ... I  
I see you plead guilty to this ...  
to this charge  
you know  
is there anything you'd like to say on the record um ...  
before I give you your uh ...

your fine or whatever?  
*I said* well I just ...  
 no I just want to get it over with  
 I think this is just ridiculous

The story from which interchange (7) comes is about a visit to a casino in Las Vegas. The teller wants a souvenir from the casino and is forced to make a somewhat embarrassing request of the waitress, who in this case is clearly in a position of authority.

- (7) so *I said* to the waitress that'd been waiting on our table all morning  
*I said*  
 could I buy a couple ashtrays?  
 and she'd been so nice  
 I didn't want to rip one off you know [laughs]  
*she goes* ...  
 honey you don't buy ashtrays in Vegas  
 and *she goes*  
 stay right there I'll be back

In (8), the teller is the authority figure. He is an auto mechanic and garage owner, middle-aged, telling about having troubles with a second-hand car. Here his wife has gone into town for a meeting and calls to find out what to do when the car fails to start.

- (8) she called back on Sunday night *she said* uh ...  
 car won't start [laughs]  
*I says* what do you mean the car won't start?

Even though it is the teller here and not someone else who is the authority, the pattern is the same: authority's speech introduced with *HP says*, nonauthority's with past *said*.

Example (9) illustrates the other version of this pattern, in which the nonauthority is introduced in the past and the authority with  $\emptyset$ . The authority here is an older neighbor, a member of the teller's parents' or grandparents' generation.

- (9) Misses Czinski's got her housecoat on  
 and down the lawn by then ... you know  
 $\emptyset$  what's going on here Carol? [raised pitch]  
 [Jim: laughs]  
*I said* it's okay  
*I said* this ... this guy says he saw something  
 and he can't even see it from where he's parked anyway [laughs]

Interchange (10) occurs later in the same story and involves the same characters.

- (10) and Misses Czinski's out there  
 $\emptyset$  Carol is there any problem? [raised pitch]  
*I said* no ... no

The following example is an especially striking one, because, apart from the authority *says*/nonauthority *said* alternation, the two reported utterances are identical and are even spoken in the same performed tone of voice. The authority figure here is a military superior of the teller's. The situation is this: the teller, Malone, has been lost with a few other American soldiers in a remote part of Germany for three days, after their armored vehicle broke down during a military exercise. In the teller's opinion, his superiors have been unconscionably slow about coming to the rescue. He describes what happens when the lieutenant finally does arrive:

- (11) and this jeep wheels up  
 and it's this real hard-ass Lieutenant Mead  
 and he hops out  
 and *he says* MALONE WHERE IN THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN? [performing a tough voice]  
*I said* Mead  
 a lieutenant you know  
*I said* MEAD WHERE IN THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN? [performing same tough voice]

Despite the fact that Malone is taking (that is, presents himself as having taken) enormous liberties with a superior by talking this way — as he points out by saying 'a lieutenant you know' — he still sticks to the pattern: *he says/I said*.

Before turning to a discussion of the reasons for the *he says/I said* pattern, I will present one final example of it. These two interchanges are from another story told by the young woman responsible for example (1) above. Note especially what happens in the lines marked with arrows.

- (12) and *I said* what's the problem  
 and *he says* well misses um ...  
 I saw back down there by the high school  
 I think you were going a little FAST there  
 it's a thirty-mile-an-hour zone you know  
 →and *I says* yeah I know  
 →*I said* ah I know  
 and *he says* ... oh ... *he goes* well ... I just want  
 to let you know you're doing a good job

In the second of the marked lines, the teller adjusts the tense of the introducer from HP to past, so that it reflects the pattern she used in the first interchange, and the general pattern we have observed in all the preceding examples.

### 'He says'/'I said': toward a general explanation

To begin with, I do not think it should be surprising to find that the reasons for tense choice for dialog introducers should be different in some ways than the reasons for tense choice elsewhere. In stories, verbs like *say* or *go* do not carry the sort of lexical meaning that other verbs do. They are semantically neutral place markers, indicating only that what follows is supposed to be taken as someone's exact words. Unlike verbs like *yell*, *shout*, *whisper*, and so on, *say* and *go* do not carry any information about the exact nature of the verbal event, beyond the fact that it was verbal. A very loud shout can be introduced with *say* or *go*, as we saw above,

(13) and *he says* MALONE WHERE IN THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN?

as can a whispered sigh,

(14) so *we go* ... uhohh

In fact, a discourse introducer need not include a lexical verb at all (compare 'and *I'm like*').<sup>8</sup>

There are two bits of data in the corpus under consideration that seem to support the observation that fully lexical verbs function differently from *say* or *go*. One is seen in (15), where the fully lexical verb *ask* does not seem to be enough to get the reported discourse going and has to be supplemented with the less specific *said* in the next line.

(15) *he asked me*  
*he said* ...  
 do you know why I stopped you?

The only other case in the corpus in which something other than *say*, *go*, or  $\emptyset$  is used to introduce dialog is from example (1) above. Here is the relevant part:

(16) *I said* WHAT  
 and *he says* ... *he says*  
 it's the In-  
*he just starts off rattling*  
 it's the Indi- Indiana State Law you must come to a complete stop  
 ... before the stop sign da da da da

*Starts off rattling* follows two repetitions of *he says*. It is *says* that gets the conversational turn started. It is my contention that the fully lexical *starts off rattling* is not functioning as a discourse introducer here at all. *Says* is the introducer, and *starts off rattling* simply serves to draw attention to the speaker's prosodic style as she mimics the officer mindlessly quoting the law. To reiterate, then, I think that *say* and *go* are a special class of verbs in narrative. I do not think that these verbs should be expected to function the way others do, and, in fact, they do not.

It seems to me that there are a number of possible explanations for the pattern of tense choice for reported dialog introducers we have observed. It seems clear that, as Wolfson points out, tense shifts of *say* and *go* do not serve to mark shifts from one temporal episode to another. (This seems to be what Wolfson means by 'event'.) A more likely hypothesis might be that the tense change served to separate speakers, or speech events, from one another. But in the stories under consideration here, which are all first-person narratives, the speaker changes are already clearly marked by means of pronouns, *I* and *he* or *she*. This does not, of course, rule out the possibility that tense shifts may be a redundant marker of speaker shifts. However, this hypothesis does not account for the direction of the shifts.

A better hypothesis, I think, is a version of Schiffrin's claim that the HP is an evaluative device. What makes this hypothesis unlike Schiffrin's is that it is restricted to the *say/go* system. That is, tense choice in dialog introducers is independent of tense choice in other, fully lexical verbs, so that an HP introducer can be evaluative even if it follows a string of other HP verbs. Let me be more specific about why I think the HP in discourse introducers is an evaluative device.

It has been widely noted by students of personal-experience narrative that stories need to have a point (see Labov 1972; Polanyi 1979). The point of a story is what makes it worth telling and worth listening to. A speaker points up the tellability of a story by means of evaluative devices — ways of drawing attention to key characters and events. One such device is the use of the HP. It is not surprising, then, that if the HP is used at all in reported interactions with authorities this tense should be used to introduce the authority's speech. That the nonauthority was present is obvious in first-person stories, but that the authority was there is precisely what makes the event a potential story. So it is the authority who gets the marked form, the nonpast form for a past event. When there is a tense differential at all in the discourse introducers, the nonauthority always gets the unmarked past tense.

We see, then, that there is a good reason for the *he says/I said* pattern, a reason rooted in the general requirements imposed on storytellers by

virtue of the fact that they are telling stories. While the HP as evaluative is a good reason, though, it is not the only one. There are other reasons for the *he says/I said* pattern, and I have not yet said anything about the reasons for the cases when this pattern is not used, which, it will be remembered, happens about half the time. I turn now to some of the other reasons.

### Stories and re-creations of footing

Like all speakers and writers, storytellers do the things they do for a variety of reasons on a variety of levels. One of the sources of constraint on a storyteller is the need to communicate what it is that is interesting or 'pointful' about the story. This is the source of constraint that I discussed above, and this communicative necessity gives rise to storytellers' frequent use of the HP to introduce the talk of authority figures.

Another thing that storytellers must do is to capture in their talk a variety of levels of 'footing'.<sup>9</sup> Footing, as Goffman defines it (1981: 128) is 'the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance'. It is the 'projected self' of a speaker as this self emerges in interaction. A person involved in an interaction and telling a story about a previous interaction must manipulate footing on at least two levels: the level of the storytelling interaction and the level of the interaction in the story. One's alignment with respect to others changes in the course of interaction, and these changes, on both levels, must be encoded too.

One of the many resources storytellers can draw on to manage their footing on both levels is the choice of tense in dialog introducers. Dialog introducers have a special status in stories (as evidenced by the fact discussed above that they do not participate in normal past/HP alternation). They are not only part of the string of clauses that forms the story's backbone ('this jeep wheels up/ ... /and he hops out/and he says ...'), but they are also part of the dialog that is embedded in the story, in the sense that introducers serve as special cues for the interpretation of the dialog that follows them. So, for example, even without knowing what follows, one is likely to expect a different level of formality from a speaker who is introduced with 'and he says ... he goes' than from a speaker introduced with 'and he said'. To use Gumperz's (1982) terminology, dialog introducers are 'contextualization cues' on two levels at once.

This new, more particular approach to the functions of discourse introducers allows us to look at what individual speakers are doing as they construct particular stories for particular audiences. It not only

suggests some additional reasons why authorities are often introduced in the HP and nonauthorities in the past, but it also suggests explanations for the cases in which there is no tense alternation.

Let us begin with the cases in which there ARE tense switches in reported authority interactions. If storytellers use a different tense to introduce authorities' speech and nonauthorities', they are indicating to their audiences that, in the story, the two characters were on unequal footings. Nonauthorities tend to have to be presented as having spoken more carefully, more in accordance with prescriptive norms, while authorities can afford to be more colloquial, or can be put down a notch by being made to sound colloquial and slightly incorrect. Thus it is to be expected that there will be many cases in which nonauthorities *said* whereas the authority figure *says* or *goes*. We have seen one example above in which a storyteller corrects her telling in this direction:

- (17) and *I says* yeah I know  
*I said* ah I know

Note now how the constructed dialog that follows the introducer varies along with the introducer tense: *ah* is substituted for the more vernacular *yeah*.

If, however, the authority figure is speaking in a relatively formal way, then his or her speech may be introduced in a formal way. In example (1) at the beginning of the paper, there is one case in which the teller does not follow her consistent pattern of *he says/I said* alternation. This is in the final interchange:

- (18) *I said* I'm sorry  
*I said* you didn't see me  
*he said* it's the Indiana State Law da da da da da

Here the policeman is presented as having quoted verbatim a legal text, as he was once before. (The *da da da*'s are a conventional cue for highly formulaic speech, as we will see below.)

In general, tellers who are the nonauthorities in their stories present themselves to their audiences as having been far cheekier than they probably actually were, to show that they are not the types who get intimidated easily. They often do this in the constructed dialog itself, as, for example, in (6), where a young man presents himself as having said 'I think this is just ridiculous' to a judge, or in (5), where a man who has just wrecked his car drawls 'WELL ... yeah ... I had a few beers this afternoon' to the investigating officer. But even as they are presenting a kind of idealized, 'you-can't-intimidate-me' footing in their dialog, they are tracking the actual status differentiation with the dialog introducers.

What of the cases in which there is no tense alternation in dialog

introducers? One very real possibility is that where there is no tense shifting, tense choice is not important. Some storytellers may simply not choose this cue out of the range of strategies they have available for marking footing (for a more detailed discussion of individual variation of this kind, see Johnstone 1985). There are some cases in the corpus, though, in which I think there is more to it than this. Example (19) is from the youngest storyteller in the corpus, a 14-year-old boy. He is telling his stepmother a story about having been caught, together with a friend, fishing on somebody's private property. 'That guy' is the owner of the land.

- (19) *that guy goes*  
 what are you guys doing on the private property?  
 and *we go*  
 there's other people back there fishing  
*I say—*  
 and *he goes* ... well get in here  
 I'm going to call your parents  
 so *we go* ... uhohh [laughs]

What happens after this in the story is that the man does call the boys' parents, and boys go home and get yelled at. The boys' one attempt to get the better of authority — the attempted excuse in 'there's other people back there fishing' — doesn't work. The teller's inability to recast his footing relative to the authority figure's is one thing that makes this story sound like that of a youngster: older people just do win out. The lack of tense shifts here reflects the boy's inability to manipulate footings effectively in his retelling.

Example (20) is from the story about a car accident quoted from in (5) above. The story, in outline, is this: the teller has been bowling and drinking with friends, and on his way home he suffers a collapsed lung, blacks out, and crashes into a tree. Because he is intoxicated, he is arrested for drunk driving, and it is only at the last minute that the collapsed lung is discovered. This interchange, with a nurse at the police station, occurs as he is just about to be jailed.

- (20) and the nurse ...  
 there was this lady ...  
*goes*  
 you sure you don't want to be checked out?  
 and *I go*  
 HELL YES I want to be checked out

This teller consistently uses the *he says/I said* pattern in describing his dialog with the police officer after the crash. In the interchange in (20), however, there is no tense shift. Although the nurse, like everyone at the

police station, has greater power and higher status, the urgency of the situation presented here means that the teller presents himself as overriding the differential. His speech in this interchange is the most crucial part of the story — the moment of truth. So this line is doubly marked for importance, by means of the evaluative HP, and also because the teller presents himself as speaking out of character by not introducing his speech with the normal past tense.

In example (21) a young woman tells about a time when she was in high school, when her teacher tried to talk her into running for class president. 'He' is the teacher.

- (21) *he said ... he said* you know  
 you ought to run [points at listeners] and stuff  
 and *I was going* [waves hand, shakes head] naah  
  
 and *he's going*  
 you OUGHT to [points at listeners]  
 and *some other people in the class said* you OUGHT to  
 and *I'm going* naaah

Note what happens here with the introducer tenses: they shift, but between interchanges, rather than between speakers. It is an honor to have the teacher tell you you should be class president, and this speaker seems to reflect that fact in her story by introducing the teacher's speech and her own in the same tense, and then by having the tenses modulate together. The teacher's speech starts each interchange, but in the second interchange the teacher's speech is introduced with an introducer that picks up on the girl's (*I was going/he's going*). The other students in the class are left out of this mutual shifting: they *said* while the teacher and the teller *are going*.

We have seen in this section that tense choices in narrative introducers need to be seen as the result of two overlapping requirements on a storyteller.<sup>10</sup> One is the requirement to justify a long, relatively uninterrupted conversational turn by providing a pointful story, and highlighting the point by means of evaluative devices like the HP. The other is the teller's need to create a persona for him- or herself, a persona mirrored in reported interactions with others. As Harold Rosen (1985) suggests, the drive to re-create one's life in autobiography is a very basic one.

### Authority and authorship

Before concluding, I would like to suggest one more way of looking at authority stories, using another set of terms suggested by Goffman (1981:



144). Goffman proposes the terms *author*, *animator*, and *principal* to refer, respectively, to the person who 'has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded', the person who is actually performing the utterance ('a body engaged in an acoustic activity'), and the person who is 'committed to what the words say'; 'whose beliefs have been told'.

Clearly, the teller of a story is the animator of the story. The storyteller is also the principal: it is the teller's story, and the teller is responsible for choosing what kind of message is intended to be conveyed and liable to questions about its truthfulness and appropriateness to the situation.<sup>11</sup> The question of authorship is somewhat more complicated. When a person constructs dialog for another, he or she must create the fiction that the people represented as speaking were the actual authors of the words put in their mouths. This gives rise to an interesting tension: storytellers need to give speakers in their stories authentic authorial voices, while at the same time maintaining their (the tellers') own authorial voices. A storyteller who takes exaggerated liberties with the authorial voice of a reported speaker is liable to criticisms like 'He didn't really say that!' — despite the fact that listeners are colluding in the fiction that speakers in stories 'really said' ANY of what they are reported as having said.

The situation is especially complex when a storyteller creates dialog for an authority figure. Etymology to the contrary, authority figures like police officers, judges, and teachers are often not entirely the authors of their own words, in Goffman's sense. Authority figures speak with public voices: the voice of the law, the voice of adult morality, the voice of received wisdom. This is particularly evident in two of the stories we have been examining. In the story excerpted in example (1) above, the police officer 'starts off rattling' the law:

- (22) it's the Indi- Indiana State Law you must come to a complete stop  
... before the stop sign da da da da

The reported voice here is one in which the police officer is neither author nor principal, but only animator. The words the storyteller animates for him are a conventionalized version of the public words of the law. These words are no more likely to be a verbatim citation of anyone's real words than is any other reported dialog; this teller is no more likely than any average citizen to know the exact wording of the law. But there are several cues here that show that these words are to be understood as legal language. One such cue, mentioned above, is 'da da da da' (sometimes 'blah blah blah'). Nonlexical fillers like these indicate that the talk continues in such a predictable, formulaic way that listeners can fill it in for themselves. Another cue that this storyteller is reciting a formula

rather than actively constructing the policeman's words is the fact that she speaks these words in a single, very long intonation unit, without pauses for processing (Chafe 1985). The officer is thus presented not as BEING an authority, but as SPEAKING THE WORDS of authority: speaking the public, formulaic 'language of the ancestors', to borrow a term from ethnographers of communication (Bloch 1971).

A similar example is from the story cited in example (6) above. Here a judge is speaking, once again in a public, formulaic way. This is not an individual judge talking, but rather a version of stereotypical 'judge talk':

- (23) okay ... I  
I see you plead guilty to this ...  
to this charge  
you know  
is there anything you'd like to say on the record  
um ...  
before I give you your uh ...  
your fine or whatever

This storyteller is more hesitant in his recitation, but there are still indications that he is re-creating a kind of public formulaic talk rather than reconstructing the words of an individual. 'You know', in the fourth line, has the same function as 'da da da da' in example (22), to indicate that the hearers ought to be familiar enough with this formula to fill in the rest themselves. 'Whatever', in the last line, does something similar. These two interjections of the teller's authorial voice into the judge's reported talk both suggest that the public tone of the dialog matters more than the exact accuracy of the wording.

Until now, we have tacitly assumed that the 'authorities' whose words are reported in authority stories were individuals. The people with whom storytellers interact are, to be sure, individuals. But their reconstructed words are not the words of individuals. Rather, they are the words of the public authority which is vested in them by virtue of their roles in these situations. The authority figures in most of the stories are not people with names. They are 'the judge', 'the nurse', 'this guy', 'my teacher'. There are thus two senses in which authority figures in stories are not the authors of their words. In the first place, it is the teller who is the author of the story, and in the second place, it is the public that is presented as the real author of the words authority figures speak. In other words, authority stories involve conventionalized public authorship embedded in the individual authorship of the teller.

This set of facts about authority stories gives rise to yet another way of understanding patterns of tense choice in dialog introducers. The public

language of authority figures is timeless and universal in the teller's and hearers' universe of discourse. To the extent to which authority figures are not authors, but rather voices of authority, their words can be presented as fixed, inflexible formulas. The formulaic nature of their language can be keyed by means of a tense which, in English, is timeless and universalizing: the simple present. To the extent to which authority figures are not presented as speaking with the voice of public authority, but are rather presented as individual authors, their talk is keyed in the same way as that of the nonauthority, and there is no tense shift. There is not room here to look at all of the above examples again in this new light. Readers who do so themselves will find that the *he says/I said* examples above (4-12) tend to present the authority figures as speaking with the voice of public authority, whereas the examples which do not follow this pattern tend to present authority figures as individual authors of their words.

### Conclusion

While the data for this study consist only of stories involving constructed interchanges with people in the role of authorities, the study has implications for other kinds of stories as well. In the telling of any story that involves a person or people other than the speaker, tense choice is available as a resource for marking whose talk is more crucial to the point of the story, what the relationships between the reported speakers are and how they evolve in the course of the reported events, and who the real authors of the constructed words are. I have attempted not to provide a way of predicting what will happen in a given story, but rather to propose a set of parameters within which all storytellers must work.

The three perspectives on tense choice in narrative dialog introducers which I have discussed are intended to be just that: perspectives. They are not determinant variables which can be applied to a story to predict tense choices because tense choice is in the end an individual matter. Tense choice does have a lot to do with narrative evaluation; it does have to do with re-creations of footing; and it does have to do with re-created authorial and authoritative voices. A storyteller is constrained by many sorts of general rules about what stories need to be like and how tellers need to encode social relations in them. But as each reported situation is different, so is each story. It is only in individual deviations from norms that creativity can emerge; aesthesis only arises out of particularity (Becker 1984). Storytellers have their own individual, creative reasons for making the choices they make, and the best we can do is to see how general patterns create contexts for individual choices.

These facts about storytelling are true of all kinds of talk. Discourse phenomena are always the result of a variety of factors, some rooted in general, widely shared constraints and some rooted in particular, individual rhetorical situations. This means that in order to understand any particular text it is necessary to supplement quantitative analyses with qualitative microanalysis of individual choices in particular situations.

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### Notes

1. I would like to thank all the Fort Wayne students and storytellers who provided the data used here, especially Jim Mong and Bernie Lohmuller, who also listened patiently to my first attempts to formulate the ideas in this paper. Deborah Schiffrin gave me some useful suggestions as I wrote up the paper, and several anonymous reviewers provided helpful commentary on an earlier draft. An abbreviated report on this study was presented at N-WAVE XIV in 1985. Correspondence address: Department of Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, DC 20057, USA.
2. Examples are transcribed in lines of one intonation unit (Chafe 1985) each. Especially loud words are in small capitals. Ellipses indicate pauses.
3. For a discussion of constructed dialog in personal-experience narrative, see Tannen (1986). More about this follows.
4. I have this expression from A. L. Becker, who attributes it to Kenneth Pike.
5. The tellers of the stories in this corpus are all speakers of Northern/North Midland American English (the isogloss bundle separating the two goes directly through the county in which Fort Wayne is located). *I say* is the usual form for the first person singular in these dialects, except, it seems, in stories. I have no explanation for this. My intuition as a native speaker of a North Midland dialect is that *I say* as a dialog introducer would have a habitual reading like that of *I'm always saying*; none of the dialog introducers used in the corpus introduce habitual talk.
6. Constructed dialog which is not introduced lexically is usually signaled paralinguistically by a change in voice quality. Speakers often imitate the voice of the person whose talk they are constructing, or a voice stereotypical of someone in the role which that person has in the story (a gruff voice for an army sergeant, a high shriek for a worried older woman, and so on). However, this can and does happen in cases where there is a lexical introducer as well; some of these will be discussed below. I am concerned here only with the absence or presence of lexical introducers.
7. The corpus is of course too small to allow for statistical manipulation of the results, and I do not claim anything more than pilot-study status for this part of the analysis.
8. This introducer is widely used by Americans in their teens and early twenties; I do not know whether it is found elsewhere in the English-speaking world.
9. The idea of using Goffman's notions of footing and of the author/principal/animator distinction was suggested in a review of Wolfson's book by Romaine (1984), though Romaine's suggestion applies to a slightly different aspect of storytelling.

10. There are of course other reasons as well for a particular story's being the way it is. For one thing, the language in which a story is told constrains a teller's choice of strategies for reported discourse. This matter is discussed in Coulmas (1986).
11. This is the case for all the stories under consideration here. It is occasionally not the case, though, as when one person urges another to 'tell the one about so-and-so'. If the story falls flat in such a case, the teller can say something like 'He made me tell it; I didn't THINK it would fit in.' We will not discuss cases like these here.

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