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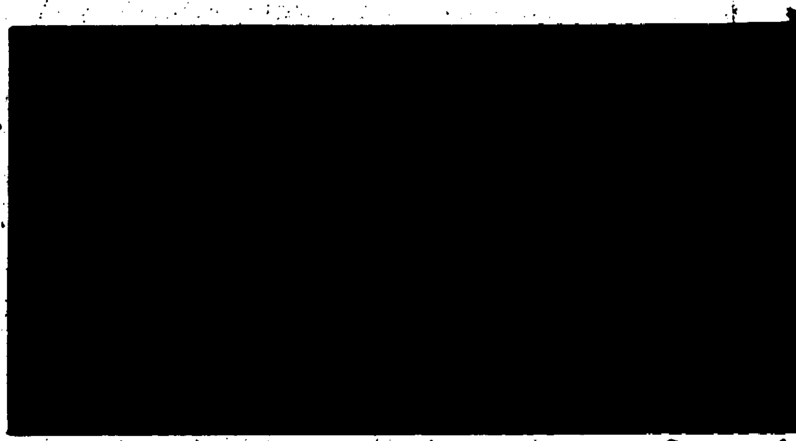
ABSTRACT

The narrative performances of Navajo children were examined to determine the ways in which the skills of competently structuring a narrative are informally learned within the peer group. Ten- and eleven-year-old Navajo children, living near Window Rock, Arizona, were evaluated in telling stories about the most traditional figures of Navajo belief, skinwalkers (the Navajo equivalents of werewolves). The stories were collected from the children as they gathered in self-selected groups within the classroom. The narratives were told in English, the first language of most of the children. For the Navajo child, a peer group is not merely a collection of friends, but of family members. Six elements in the structure of a well-formed narrative, suggested by William Labov (1972), provide an organizational framework for the analysis. These elements are: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result or resolution, and coda. Examples of the story-telling of specific children are cited. It is concluded that competence in ordering and structuring a narrative remains intimately connected with the interactions of a narrator's peers, for it is through peer group interaction that a child learns what is acceptable, what is exciting and involving, and what is culturally meaningful. The narrative competence in structuring the story cannot be measured simply on a scale of cognitive abilities and age-graded achievements. (SW)



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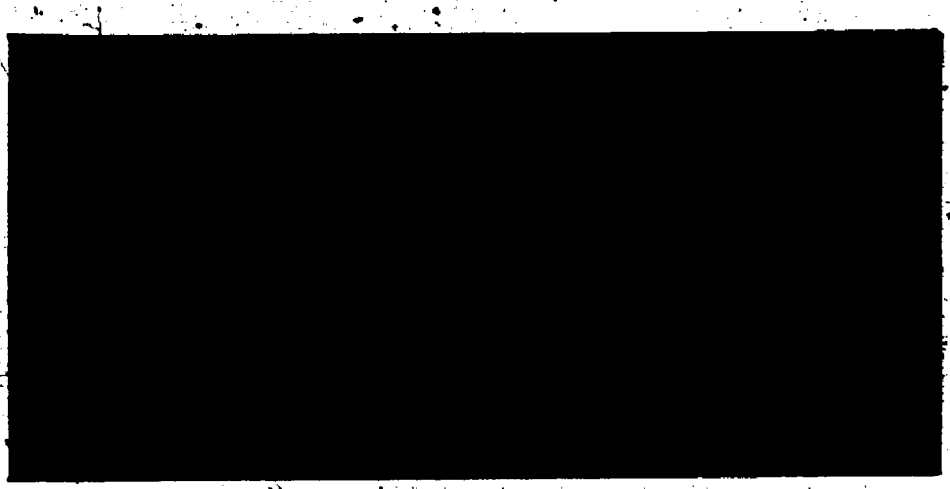

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RELEVANCE TO EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Recently linguists and students of child development alike have become increasingly interested in the acquisition and development of narrative competence. Most of these studies have focused primarily on cognitive operations and their relationship to the social or linguistic skills necessary to the telling of a story. Margaret Brady's paper explores another dimension of narrative competence, the acquisition and evaluation of competence within peer group interactions. Specifically, her paper deals with the narrative performances of Navajo children and how the skills of competently structuring a narrative are informally learned within the peer group. This approach calls for an understanding of communicative, especially narrative, competence in the child's own terms. Educators will find it useful to know that often we can learn as much about child development through close observation of peer group interactions involving peer evaluations as we can from sophisticated adult-constructed models of cognitive and linguistic competence. In addition, the ability of these children to competently adapt and modify traditional Navajo narrative forms as they tell stories in English, the language of acculturation, will also be of interest to both teachers and educational researchers.

PEER GROUP EVALUATION OF NARRATIVE COMPETENCE: A NAVAJO EXAMPLE

Margaret Brady

While there has been an increasing interest in children's development of narrative competence on the part of linguists and students of child development alike, most of these studies have focused on cognitive operations and their relationship to the social or linguistic skills necessary to the telling of a story. In other words, the focus of the study of children's development of competence in narrative has been restricted for the most part to an analysis of the kinds of cognitive abilities which a child must have before he can tell a story successfully.[1] While the understanding of the relationship between narrative competence and cognitive development is a most significant one, there is also the need for an understanding of narrative competence in the child's own terms. For within their own peer groups children do indeed recognize both competent and incompetent narrative performances and it is through the interactions of children within those peer groups that real narrative competence is attained. The purpose of this paper, then, will be to look more closely at the ways in which narrative competence is recognized within the peer group. Throughout this analysis it will be implicitly recognized that the child's narrative strategies are necessarily constrained by his capacities "to handle the formal devices available in his grammar, phonology, and sociolinguistic norms around him" (Ervin-Tripp and Cook-Gumperz 1974). The focus of this paper, however, will be on the evaluation and recognition of competence within particular peer group interactions, rather than on adult-constructed models of cognitive and linguistic competence.

THE NAVAJO DATA:

Although groups of children everywhere assess and evaluate the competence of their peers in telling stories, the particular children we will discuss in this analysis are ten and eleven-year-old Navajo children, living near Window Rock, Arizona. The narratives were collected in the classroom of a Catholic school on the eastern part of the Navajo reservation. Because of a number of factors--their proximity to Gallup, New Mexico, the involvement of many of their parents in the Navajo tribal bureaucracy, their education by Catholic nuns intent on their anglicization, to name a few--these children are some of the most acculturated individuals on the reservation. And yet, the stories which this analysis is based on deal with one of the most traditional figures of Navajo belief--skinwalker.

Skinwalkers are one of the most popular subjects for narratives among Navajo children. Skinwalker's nearest Anglo equivalents are werewolves. Yenaldlooshi (he who runs around on all fours with it) or skinwalkers as they are called in English are human witches who wear coyote skins and travel about at night. Traditionally, they are blamed for theft, illness and even death. Aside from a few scattered references and one somewhat atypical psychoanalytic study, there has been only one significant analysis of skinwalkers in the literature. Clyde Kluckhohn gives a brief account of these were-animals in a section of his seminal Navajo Witchcraft, where he describes the adventures of skinwalkers as they meet in caves at night to plan concerted action against victims, to initiate new members, to have intercourse with dead women, and to practice cannibalism:

> The witches sit in a circle, surrounded by piles or baskets of corpse flesh. Some informants said that rows of identifiable human heads were likewise stored in the cave. The witches are naked save for masks and many beads and other articles of jewelry. Their bodies are

> painted in a fashion reminiscent of that carried out in ceremonials ....English-speaking informants described the proceedings as "kind of like a sing" or "just like a bad sing." Most informants agreed that songs were sung and dry paintings made...assembled witches spit, urinate and defecate upon the sand pictures (1944:27).

According to traditional Navajo belief, skinwalkers climb on top of a hogan when a family is asleep and drop pollen, specially made from the ground bones of human infants, down the smokehole. Contact with this substance brings the sleeping person ill health, social problems and sometimes death. Kluckhohn (1944:26) indicates that these yenaldlooshi are tracked, normally the morning after an incident, when dirt falling in from the smokehole, usually loud barkings of the dogs, or "strange" noises have made the hogan dwellers sense that a skinwalker has been there. It is primarily such experiences of personal contact with a skinwalker, the prototypical anti-Navajo,[2] which form the corpus of 100 narratives on which this paper is based.

The stories were collected from the children as they gathered in self-selected groups within the classroom. The groups ranged from three to six children and all the sessions were tape-recorded on a small cassette machine hung over the arm of a chair. While the tape-recorder was a novelty at first, the children soon became quite used to it and in most cases disregarded its presence entirely. While I, as teacher, was in the classroom at all times, I rarely took part in the narrative sessions, except to observe proxemic and kinesic behavior from a distance. Except for the first few days of taping, the children believed themselves to be alone within their peer groups, since they received no outside interference from me.

All of the narratives collected were told in English, which is the first language of most of the children. While their parents and

grandparents often tell skinwalker stories in Navajo, these children, both inside and outside the classroom, consistently relate skinwalker narratives in English. When asked which language is "right" for telling skinwalker stories 98% of the children responded that both languages were right; some children went on to elaborate that Navajo was right for some people (grandparents were given as an example) and English was right for others (like themselves). As this study indicates narrative traditions can and often do persist in the language of acculturation.

Skinwalker stories first emerged in a narrative session where the children were telling "scary stories." At first these stories consisted of traditional ghost stories, such as "The Ghost of White Eyes" and "The Hook." When the repertoires of such stories began to be exhausted one child suggested that he knew a scary story, but that it was "family secrets." He went on to say that the story he knew was about witches and that he could only tell such stories to relatives. Another child, however, quickly picked up the conversation, took the floor and proceeded to tell a story about his own experiences with skinwalkers.

NAVAJO CHILDREN'S PEER GROUPS:

The importance of telling stories only to relatives points up a major difference in the peer groups of Navajo children. As in Anglo society, Navajo peer groups are significant as socializing agents for the child, since it is in peer groups that children learn interactive skills and strategies for dealing with people outside of their immediate family circle. However, there is a major difference between Anglo and Navajo children's peer groups. The young Navajo child operates within a peer group which <u>is</u> family. Traditionally, Navajo children spent much of

their time only with siblings and cousins who lived close enough to play with. The distance between families structured the peer groups in this manner. This is still the case in many of the more remote areas of the Navajo reservation. However, it is also true in the more acculturated areas as well. Just as the social networks of adult Navajos operate in terms of social distance which is genealogically and geographically determined, so also the networks of Navajo children are similarly characterized. Within this particular school, peer groups were formed by the association of brothers, sisters, cousins, and clan relatives. While most of these peer groups were sex-specific, upon rare occasions girls' peer groups and boys' peer groups were mixed.

In this particular case, then, peer groups were extended to any genealogical or clan relatives. In essence, almost every child could belong to every peer group by extension of this ego-centered kin principle; however, it also functioned as a convenient way of excluding children who weren't considered desirable members of the group. If asked to describe a member of his peer group, a Navajo boy will not say "He's my friend," but rather, "he's my cousin." Here "cousin" means anything from first-cousin to clan-relation, but the name itself includes the individual "in" as family and therefore as trustworthy, cooperative and non-threatening.

It is significant in this respect that although these Navajo children were willing to tell jokes, riddles and ghost stories in groups of children they did not consider kin (sometimes including Anglo children in the class), they were unwilling to tell skinwalker stories in the same groups. When I realized this I allowed the children to select their own groups for these narrative sessions? Never was an Anglo child selected; always those

children who were involved in sessions where skinwalker stories were told referred to each other as "cousins." This notion of adherence to the peer-group-as-kin prescription was elaborated by Buddy Yazzie, when I questioned him about the sharing of skinwalker stories:

B: One time, the only time me and Melvin and Billy Yazzie um we tell our stories like like what Billy his mom told him never to tell anybody.

I: Did he tell you?

B: Yeah, he told us and I told Melvin and Billy what my mom said never to tell anybody else.

I: Why did you do that?

B: Cause it's sacred ways.

I: I know, but why did he tell if it's sacred ways?

Melvin: the clan, the clan!

I: Oh, they're in the same clan.

Buddy, Billy, Melvin: Yeah!

Here the notion of never telling anybody refers to outsiders, non-relatives, strangers.

While Anglo and Navajo peer groups have many functions in common, while they provide a convenient place for children to experiment with social conventions and norms and to learn different social roles, their very conceptions in the minds of the children differ considerably. These differences are culture-specific as we have previously suggested and they highlight the necessity for examining peer groups within a specific cultural framework. For the Navajo child, a peer group is not merely a collection of friends, but of family members. In actuality, many of the same factors determine the selection of peers for Navajo children as for Anglos, but the over-riding concern is with family relationship. For the

Navajo, the kin group is both ego-centered and flexible, and thus it allows for a great deal of negotiation in the formation of groups of peers. As the child and his family become more acculturated, live in more densely populated areas and interact with a greater number of individuals, this notion of the formation of peer groups may become more and more flexible. In the case of these particular children, the prescription of family relationship has not been abandoned, but rather broadened to include a wider range of social possibilities. It is within these culturally distinctive peer groups that the acquisition of narrative competence, at least competence in the telling of skinwalker stories, occurs.

THE ACQUISITION AND EVALUATION OF NARRATIVE COMPETENCE:

As Navajo children huddle together, either in the mysterious darkness of a camp-out in the woods or in a well-lighted classroom, to tell stories of terrifying experiences with skinwalkers, each child is assuming a responsibility to the audience, the other members of his culturally distinct peer group, for a display of a particular kind of communicative competence--narrative competence. As situated communication, the competent performance of these stories entails both the knowledge and the ability to speak appropriately in a culturally defined and socially constituted world.[3] Thus, competence involves not only knowledge of the social and cultural realms, but also a willingness to assume an accountability to an audience for the particular way in which a story is told, for the skillfulness involved in the expressive realm as well.

When a Navajo child tells a skinwalker story to his peers, then, he is taking responsibility for a wide range of social and cultural knowledge, knowledge about the nature of social relationships, about the symbolic

function of skinwalker within the social world, about the appropriate selection of "listeners," and about the culturally defined functions of such stories.[4] At the same time, he is assuming a responsibility for the use of that knowledge within performance, within the expressive world, and for the necessary skills involved in such a performance. Such a display of competence within the peer group is a way not only of presenting knowledge of Navajo cultural symbols and meanings and of Navajo social structure and the structure of the peer group, but it is also a way of presenting oneself. Through the performance of a skinwalker narrative the child can present himself as hero, as slayer of evil, and thus as "Navajo" in the truest sense of the term; he can also choose to challenge traditional structures and beliefs by playing with the whole nature of skinwalker as symbol. The important point here is that through narrative performance the child can create and maintain a "social face" as he displays knowledge of cultural forms at the same time. All the while, however, he is putting himself in the position of being subject to evaluation for the skill and effectiveness he has demonstrated in this performance. That audience evaluation is based on both the performer's cultural knowledge and on the artful expression of that knowledge.

If either the cultural knowledge or the ability to express that knowledge in socially and culturally appropriate ways is lacking, the performance will not be a competent one. In most cases, competence in the realm of cultural knowledge comes first and then gradually expressive competence is acquired. For example, a child of six might know a great deal about the figure of skinwalker and yet still be unable to assume responsibility for expressing that knowledge within the narrative mode.[5] There is, however, also a great deal of experimenting with cultural knowledge

within the performance frame. A child who knows a little about skinwalker may try out this knowledge as he spins out a narrative within the peer group. Often the lure of being in the spotlight, assuming the role of narrator and taking the floor for an extended period of time is so great that a child with a minimal knowledge of the ways skinwalkers operate will voluntarily attempt to tell a skinwalker story for the first time. Such is the case with Charlene Lopez.

Charlene is half-Navajo; her father is a Chicano, who has held various positions with Arizona law enforcement agencies. Charlene's Navajo mother died when she was quite small; she is the youngest of four children and has spent most of her life off the reservation. However, for the last two years she has lived in Window Rock and has been "taken into" the family of one of her classmates, Margaret Begay. Charlene does not live with the Begays, but she spends a great deal of time at their house and is considered a "cousin"; both Charlene and Margaret say that they are related "through the clan." In this way, then, Charlene has been included in Margaret's group of peers. In fact, Charlene is Margaret's constant companion and is included in all the narrative sessions in which Margaret takes part.

When the narrative sessions began to involve skinwalker stories, Charlene, who is usually quite gregarious, sat back and listened intently for several days without attempting to tell this particular kind of story. Then one day when the children were involved in telling "scary" stories which did not involve skinwalkers (some personal experience stories of frightening happenings and some fictional narratives both traditional and idiosyncratic), Charlene told this story:

CL: One day there was this little boy--he was playing outside. And um he um his mother was trying to call him in cause it was time, nighttime and there was there was...so um (clears throat) shiiii![6] (pause) oh, wait! ...so he um he didn't want to come in and his mother was getting mad. His mother wanted to go out there looking for him. And he just started running off with his friend. And um they heard something in this tree and it was a thing...something. I think it was a skinwalker jumped down and they started running towards...no, they went around the other way so the mother couldn't see them. So when they got back in the house the skinwalker killed the mother. And then wait...and um they were running back and then um...the skinwalker started walking towards their house and it knocked on the door. They didn't answer so they um...so it walked in the house and it killed both of them and it started walking and walking and walking. So someday it might get you!

Here it is clear that Charlene has a limited knowledge of skinwalkers and their traditional activities; it is also clear that she is trying out her knowledge in a social situation where she will not be evaluated harshly if her efforts at representing skinwalker are not really successful. By inserting this narrative in a session where all kinds of "scary" stories are being told, Charlene can take a minimal kind of responsibility for the representation of accurate cultural information. Notice that she says, "I think it was a skinwalker" after hesitating to name the "thing." In this way Charlene is hedging on accountability. Her unfamiliarity with the form is apparent in the hesitation, false starts and rephrasings. In the end frustration with her own inexperience in dealing with this particular type of story leads her to revert back to a really familiar form and end the story with a traditional ghost story closing which plays on the form of the catch routine: "So someday it might get you!" In an earlier narrative session Charlene had told such a traditional ghost story catch and received the frightened and amused response she desired from her approving audience. In this case, the ending does not get the expected response of shrieks of surprise and fear mainly because Charlene has not

sufficiently cued the expectations of her audience.

For Charlene, though, the performance is a somewhat successful first attempt at skinwalker narratives. She is not evaluated harshly by her peers, but rather allowed to fade back into the audience as Margaret tells another "scary" story about two boys in a haunted house. Whether or not her peers would call Charlene's narrative a "skinwalker story" is questionable; however, they have allowed her to use her limited knowledge of skinwalker in creating a narrative for performance within the peer group. As she experiments with this particular narrative form and as she listens and responds to other narrators of skinwalker stories, Charlene acquires greater and greater competence not only with the knowledge of skinwalkers and their activities, but in the appropriate ways to talk about skinwalkers within a narrative performance frame. For Charlene and for all these children competence involves the relationship of knowledge and expressive ability. As this example has shown, the two domains are not mutually exclusive but constantly interface within the performance of these narratives. In actuality, then, it is impossible to talk about cultural knowledge evinced in these stories apart from the expressive competence of the child-performer--and vice versa.

While this particular study is not strictly developmental in the sense of tracing age-graded changes in the acquisition of particular communicative and narrative skills, and the cognitive abilities related to such skills, it does seek to demonstrate the areas in which children develop such competencies. As we discuss these areas of narrative competence it will be important to remember that as the child-narrator performs each story within the peer group he recognizes that that narrative is subject to evaluation for its skill and effectiveness within that particular narrative

session. It is through this exposure to evaluation by his peers that the child is able to become truly competent. In discussing Piaget's concept of the peer group, Ginsberg and Opper (1969:94) suggest that:

> as the child grows older...he is more and more thrown into the company of older children who are not as solicitous as adults. Other children do not try so hard to penetrate the obscurities of his language. Moreover, they argue with him; they challenge what he says and force him to defend himself. It is under social pressures of these kinds that the child is eventually forced to adopt better modes of communication.

For the Navajo child-narrator these social pressures to communicate in more appropriate ways reveal themselves in the kinds of evaluative comments given by his peers. Critical assessments of these stories are typically phrased in terms such as: "Ohhh! That was really scary!" or "That isn't so scary" which focus on the point of the narrative and indicate one way or the other whether the narrator has effectively involved his audience in a competent performance. Evaluative comments regarding specific competence in any given feature of narrative performance will be discussed in detail below. While the critical vocabularies of these children are limited to comments such as the ones described above, they very effectively indicate to peers whether or not they have given a competent performance, as we shall see.

STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF NARRATIVE COMPETENCE:

Competence in structuring a well-formed narrative is certainly a central area of concern for the child narrator, for it is on this basic structure that stylistic and interactional elaboration must play. The present analysis will focus, then, on such structural concerns.[7] Navajo children themselves recognize the importance of structure and plot development; this recognition is expressed, albeit fuzzily, in terms of "parts" of stories. In the following example, the ten-year-old narrator, Lou Billison, recognizes

that his narrative is lacking, because he doesn't know the information to fill out specific "parts":

> LB: One time my friend at Window Rock one time she told me this story about when she went to her grandma's at Tohatchi. Um she said they were playing, her, her cousins and her brother. And then they saw something black go across there. Then they told their uncle and then their uncle went out to find it. Then they keep running and then they caught up with that thing. It was a skinwalker. ...in a wolf a black wolfskin. And she didn't tell me the part that part. Anyway they kept following him. And then they asked him some questions. They go, "How come you're running out in the daytime?" He goes, "Because I want to." Then they asked him some more questions. Then finally they go, "Get out!" First they told him to get out of the skin. Then he wouldn't. And so they said, "We're gonna shoot you dead." Then he didn't get out. Then when they were about to shoot him, they couldn't pull the handle back. Pull it and shoot it but (interruption) pull the trigger back. And then it took off when they were still trying to. Then she didn't tell me the part about that other part.

It is precisely these necessary "parts" which create and sustain a competent narrative performance. William Labov (1972), in expanding on his previous work with Joshua Waletzky (1967), proposes six elements in the structure of a well-formed narrative. We may use these elements as a systematic means of discussing the variables of narrative competence in structure, though of course our emphasis will be on the evaluation of such competence within the peer group. The following six elements suggested by Labov will provide an organizational framework for our discussion:

1. Abstract
2. Orientation
3. Complicating Action
4. Evaluation
5. Result or Resolution
6. Coda

These sections are listed in their usual order of occurrence, but Labov himself indicates that most narratives do not in fact contain all of these elements. Since Labov's minimal definition of narrative involves simply a

pair of temporally ordered events, only the section "complicating action" is necessary for a minimal narrative. Those narratives which contain all six elements may be referred to as "extended narratives" (Labov 1972; Kernan 1977). It is important to recognize that in evaluative terms, narratives which contain all six elements are not necessarily "better" than narratives which include only two or three elements; as we have indicated above that judgment rests with an audience of peers. However, each of these elements may contribute to the understanding and appreciation of that audience in a variety of meaningful ways, and therefore ultimately enhance the success of the narrative. Labov's notion of narrative structure, then, provides a systematic means of discussing the variables of narrative competence in formal terms.

"Abstracts" present a brief resume of the entire story or the result of the story. They are used both to introduce the story and to frame the following action as narrative for the audience. Narrative frames are often generic markers; they also mark the boundaries of the narrative itself, separating it from other types of discourse. Abstracts, then, are only one kind of frame which structurally mark the following bits of discourse as narrative; they differ from other types of frame, such as the formulaic "once upon a time" or "one day" in that they also provide a summary of the narrative action which follows. A good example of this type of frame, the abstract, is the first sentence of this eleven-year-old girl's personal narrative: "My story is about when I was at my grandma's house." Interestingly, this quite limited abstract focuses the attention of the audience on a particularly significant generic marker--the notion that the action occurred at "grandma's house." This phrase might initially seem to be an orientation rather than abstract, however, this

particular phrase is quite consistently characteristic of personal experience narratives concerning skinwalker contact. It is used repeatedly in skinwalker narratives and may be considered a generic marker. This abstract, although definitely limited in scope of summarization, does cue the audience that a culturally significant form is about to be performed; it also indirectly summarizes the action of the narrative to follow in a general way. In other words, the audience is led to expect a narrative where the individual and skinwalker are involved in some type of interaction and where the individual triumphs.[8] The specific content of the tale is then spun out in the following narrative.

This "abstract" kind of frame is rarely used by these Navajo children in introducing their skinwalker narratives. This may be a result of the kind of narrative session in which these stories were told, however. Since many of these narratives build on familiar plot structures involving familiar characters, intricate abstracts of the actions to come are not necessary (as in the example above). If one of these skinwalker personal experience narratives was to occur within an extended bit of conversation or dialogue, apart from such a narrative session, perhaps the likelihood of the incorporation of abstracts would increase.

The second element of narrative structure is termed "orientation" by Labov; this fulfills the function of providing necessary information regarding the time, place, occasion and persons involved in the action of the narrative. Competence in this area of narrative structure involves an understanding of the needs of one's audience; the child narrator must have the sensitivity to recognize how much detailed orientation is necessary to adequately inform his audience and draw them into the narrative experience. Labov and Waletzky (1967) suggest that the narratives of children

often don't provide sufficient background information. Piaget has indicated that this problem often stems from egocentric language, which is a product of the child's "inability to take the other person's point of view" (Ginsberg and Opper 1969:93). Often when this lack of adequate orientation occurs it is dealt with by requests for clarification on the part of the audience. For example, in the following narrative John Begay, age 11, uses the personal experience form to weave an exciting story which involves many of the members of his peer group and their experience with a skinwalker. He is testing the limits of believability in the wildest ways. However, another child recognizes that the only way this story could possibly be true is if it happened when the boys were really young; so, he questions John: "when did it happen?"

JB: Once when me me, Darryl, Byron, Mitchell were camping out. We were camping out and we were just sitting by the fire talking. And then we heard some things and we didn't know what it was so Darryl grabbed his little pellet gun and his teddy bear. And then he started shooting at it. And then Byron Byron got his little squirt gun...that's when we were in about third grade or second grade. Then Mitchell grabbed his beebee gun and then he grabbed my truck and threw it at it but nothing happened and so and so we just started running back into my house. We told my mother and she told us to sleep in the house. So we just stayed up watching tv. We heard something knocking on the window. Then Byron started crying. We heard something scary knocking on there, so I ran into my mother's room. She came over; she looked through the window. She saw something looking at her. She opened the window and she said it started running off, so she let us sleep in her bedroom. And then when we were sleeping Darryl had a nightmare. I guess something was knocking on the window. Then Mitchell heard it. He didn't know what to do. He just ran up and grabbed Byron and Darryl. Me, Darryl, all of us four were crying. My mother couldn't go to sleep so she put us in the living room. Then we were asleep and then there we saw something hairy in there. Then Byron screamed. He got out his squirt gun and started shooting at it.

CD: When did it happen?

JB: When we were small like in second or third grade. We heard it knocking at the door and Mitchell started really crying and it

ringed the doorbell and Darryl wouldn't and we told Darryl to answer it and he wouldn't go answer it. We told Byron but he didn't want to. We heard someone trying to get it. We got scared. Then Mitchell Mitchell went over there and looked out the window. He saw something big. It was real white out there and he didn't know what to do so he just ran back. And we told our mother. She went out there and it was just the milkman—goodbye!

Realizing that an appropriate orientation could save his narrative, John quickly picks up on this cue and reassures his audience that the events occured "when we were small like in second or third grade"! He then proceeds with the narrative. This example clearly shows that the ability to adapt language use to the requirements of audience or addressees is a most important element of narrative competence. We also see that if a narrator fails to adequately orient the audience, questions as to details of setting, time or persons involved may arise throughout the narrative, not only in the beginning moments. In this case, John provides the orientation early in the narrative, but it is not picked up on by his audience and he is forced to re-orient them near the end of the story. A poorly oriented narrative can prove not only confusing to the audience, but also meaningless, if the point is obscured through the fuzziness of setting. Here, John's surprise ending will lack the force it demands if the audience is not effectively following the details of orientation.

The other extreme of problems with inadequate or faulty orientation lies in the inclusion of too much detail. While this problem may seem initially not so serious in developmental terms, it can effectively ruin the flow and the point of a narrative just as easily. In other words, too much setting tends to interfere with the flow of the narrative, to distract the audience and frequently bore them before the real action ever begins. A beautiful case in point is this skinwalker story told by

ten-year-old Theresa Etsitty:

TE: One time we were at our house and um-and um um um I guess... no it wasn't that...we were were at our house-and then I guess my mom and dad was sleeping in the bedroom. Right here is our trailer (uses piece of paper as trailer); this is how our trailer looks on the inside and then it looks like that...

CA: Uhhuh.

TE: And then this bedroom right here (pointing)...there's a bedroom right here and then there's a closet; right here's the bed. And then right here is the stereo. This is the room and then this right here is another wall and then right here is another wall; right here right here's a door and then this one goes right here and this one right here. And then the washing machine's right there. And then the toilet bowl's right there. And my mom and dad were sleeping right here and the window's right here. And then they heard some...a horse; they heard it knock on the window. And then then so then my mom didn't think nothing of it. So she just went back to sleep. And then that um the horse it knocked on the window again. And then I guess after it knocked on the window my dad heard it and then he looked outside. He didn't see anything and then we heard some horse...I think it was a horse on top of the trailer. And then um and then um after that um um um and then and then I guess it went up to the front door. And then after it went up to the front door it was knocking on the door. And it was scratching on the door. And then I guess in the morning when we looked at the door it was all scratched up. And we saw a horse hoof by the um thing. That's all.

In this case, Theresa is so intent on giving every possible detail of the setting, even to the description of the location of the "toilet bowl" (which incidentally never figures in the action of the narrative), that she exhausts the attention span of her audience before she ever really gets to the plot of the narrative. Theresa is still unsure about the relationship between animals and skinwalkers and this also comes out in the narrative; however, the most interesting point about this narrative lies in the over-attention to detail discussed above. As Theresa told the story she sketched out the details of the architectural and decorative dimensions of the house by drawing an imaginary plan on a piece of

paper with her finger. At first her friends were interested in this novel approach, but they soon appeared to lose interest. By the time Theresa finished her story not one child was paying enough attention to even comment on her bizarre suggestion that it was a horse who had been knocking at the door!

This same balance between adequate detail and economy of expression is important in the formulation of narrative events comprising plot structure, or the third structural element--complicating action. The incorporation of details here refers both to descriptive detail (as discussed in the orientation section) and to structural detail, the number of clauses used to move from orientation to coda. Within the complicating action section of narratives, descriptive detail performs many of the same functions as in orientation. Through these details the storyteller makes the unfamiliar actions of his narrative somehow familiar to his audience; in this way he draws the audience into the narrative frame and helps them to identify with the action of the narrative. When necessary details are omitted a disjuncture may occur between what the audience knows and understands and what is occurring within the narrative frame.

Sometimes the omission of detail gives the audience a chance to enter into the narrative event in a new way, as the missing piece is added by a member of the audience. In the case of one narrative, a member of the audience responds to the narrator's description of his brother's bike, "a tenspeed that cheap new good bike" by adding that "It was a Br-7." In this case the narrative is then picked up immediately as if the detail had been added by the narrator himself. Such collaboration on narrative details involves not only structural competence but interactional competence as well.

Competence in balancing detail and economy of expression in narrative also involves the actual selection and ordering of narrative events which make up the structure of the plot itself. While some of the narratives simply outline the action of the story in the most economical way possible, others weave intricate details of the action together and construct subplots which may or may not eventually be resolved. Competence in handling details of structure depends to a great extent on the verbal skills of the narrator, but it also depends on the narrator's understanding of the interest and involvement of the audience. Even the most interested audience can become bored by too much action related in a confusing or irresponsible manner. The attention span of the audience must also be assessed even by narrators who are quite proficient in storytelling skills. For ultimately an audience will not tolerate overly long, extended narratives as is revealed in the following example by Donald Lope, age 11:

DL: Once at my grandma's as we were coming back, going over there from here me, my father, my mother, and my brother. These guys were going on the dirt road there, then we heard something outside. They were going "Haoooooo!" (ghostly sounds) like that. Then I got scared. Me and my little brother and my big brother were sitting in the back. We were scared and then we got to the house. Then that thing, that "Haooooo" was almost right by the house, so my father told my uncle. Then we went out that night to look around, to see what it was, but we didn't find anything. So we went back inside. Then I guess it came over that night. Then it was going "Ahaoooooo" and "Klrlooopaaah" going something like that... whistling and then like getting hungry type. And then after a while we heard it down...me, my father, my uncle, and my brother and my other uncle went outside to see what it was. And then I guess we looked around. Then over there I guess by the barn there's this pile of hay, us guys went over there. Then we saw some footprints like...almost like bear tracks. It was about as big as...see, about five inches wide and two, three inches um three inches long. And us guys we didn't know what it was so we went back inside. Then got the guns, then went outside again. We went over there by the haystack.

Then I guess I saw it and I turned around like that around like turn around. Then I guess he was standing on the barn. Then I go, "Look! There he is!" Then my uncle took five shots into the sky and I guess I guess he took five shots into the sky. Then that thing took off. Then my uncle and those guys went to get a medicine man, to sing for us, to see what it was. And that night he told us to go outside and take the guns and see what he buried by the house. Then we went right there. Then we went right by the steps, the porch. Then that medicine man digged it up. Then my uncle took two shots at it. Then it started like wiggling around and then it stopped. I guess it died. And that thing that we saw that night, we heard it again. Then that medicine man said some kind of prayer and we went out to look for it with that medicine man there. I saw it again. It was over there by the outhouse (giggles) by the outhouse. It went over there. Then it was going "Ahaoooooo!" (whistles) like that! Then me my uncle, my father, my brother and my other uncle and the medicine man went over there. Then we saw those tracks, same tracks. Then it was over there by the sheep corral. Then my uncle took two shots at it. Then I guess he shot it. Then there was like bloodstains on the ground. There was this one bloodstain on the wood. It was kinda like poison blood. Then that day we went over there again to look at it, the bloodstain. Then we went over there. We were looking at it. And the the last time...I guess all that time the wolfman was dead, that wolfman and skinwalker was dead behind the sheep corral. Then I was riding my bike around. Then with my little cousin us guys were riding around. Then we hit that sage brush, then we crashed. Then my little brother started crying because we almost crashed right by that skinwalker. Then my uncle said, "Hey, look it's turning over. What's this? It's that thing.

ER: It's like a man dead." That's the end.

Here, although the narrative was well-told, exciting and involving, the audience could only take so much.— In the end, Ed had to take matters into his own hands and step in to end the narrative. There simply were too many narrative events happening within a single narrative and, as Ed perceived, it could have gone on for ever. In this case the expectations of the audience were violated in a most interesting way. Donald quite effectively built the structure of his narrative to create audience expectations; he built his narrative to a peak--except he did this several times. Everytime the audience presumed the resolution of the complicating

action was about to occur, another complicating action evolved and prolonged the satisfaction of audience expectations. The audience was thwarted again and again.

This example indicates quite clearly the importance of the relationship between the complicating action section and the result or resolution section of narratives. A result or resolution will only be meaningful and involving for the audience if the preceding complicating actions have been selected and structured carefully. Only if the expectations of the audience have been successfully created within the narrative performance, can those expectations be satisfied as the complications are resolved. If the sequencing of events of the complicating action is confused or jumbled, the result or resolution will be weakened. In the following example the eleven-year-old female narrator has a great deal of trouble selecting and organizing the narrative events. Although the point of the story does become clear in the end, the narrative is lacking in a number of areas of competent performance:

LD: One time I had a party, just last year in April, for my birthday it was really in April. And I guess I had a slumber party. We ate and I had cakes and my two [garbled] friends they came. And I guess we were having our party and so and so then they came...we stayed up all night and my mom was working that night. Everybody was home. And then um I guess those guys were cutting out and me and just us girls were there. Those guys wanted some beer (giggle) and I told them my dad has some. And we were gonna go over there but we heard something and we didn't know what it was. My dad was sleeping in there. We were in this one room by ourselves. We were eating cokes and pop and potato chips and then that night we had enchiladas. Then um Deanna came and--and Irvina. And I guess we heard it and it was kinda knocking on the window like. And we looked outside. It was just looking in. I got scared, everybody just got terrified. Finally finally um um um I don't know I guess it was just knocking at the window and so so we told...I got up and those other girls were scared and we all went in there. We told my dad...we told my dad and he he he he got his gun out. We have about five guns in the house...some my mom hid.

> And then I guess I guess my mom was working that night and that next day everybody went home. We went outside and (pause) and then then my dad shot it that night and that morning we saw it ...we saw it laying by the almost by the butane thing, the butane bottle. And so and so um I guess um I guess he shot it. That night we had to go to a medicine man; he said they were trying to witch us. They were jealous of us. We have five cars. And we have...I don't know except they were just jealous of us.

In this case the young narrator confuses and disorients the audience with problems of sequencing and ordering narrative events and details; as a result, she constantly rephrases and corrects her own narrative, in some cases confusing the audience even more. These "remedial gestures" (McDowell 1975) often interfere with the delivery of the plot and interrupt the flow of the narrative, as do all the "I guesses" she feels obliged to insert because of her uncertainty.

Perhaps an even more significant connection between complicating action and result or resolution lies in the area of topic selection. In order to create and satisfy audience expectations, a narrator must not only order events carefully, but must select those events, those elements of plot, with an eye towards the motivating and energizing forces of his culture. As Roger Abrahams (1968) has noted, performers of all kinds constantly draw on the energizing topics of their societies in order to actively involve their audiences. Here we find a basic requirement of competent narratives: the necessity of "tellability." And here, too, we find a dimension of narrative which Labov has not included in his minimal definition: the subject of a narrative must be appropriate, interesting, audience-involving, motivating; narratives must focus on culturally dynamic topics of concern. Certainly these skinwalker stories do just that—by focusing on the actions of and reactions to the skinwalker figure, who is so symbolically significant for the Navajo, these child-narrators

select topics which are extremely meaningful for both themselves and their audiences. Not only does this topic selection make for an exciting story, one that involves the audience fully, but it also provides, through such involvement, a powerful means of commenting on and indeed altering social relationships.

Topic selection is closely connected with another of Labov's elements of narrative structure, "evaluation." Used in this way, the term evaluation is quite different from the way we have used it previously in referring to the judgment of a performance by an audience. Here Labov uses the term evaluation to refer to the point of the story, "its raison d'etre: why it was told and what the narrator is getting at" (1972:366). Labov suggests that every narrator is constantly warding off the question "So what?" in regard to his narrative performance. Originally Labov and Waletzky (1967) suggested that narratives contain a cluster of evaluative clauses near the end of each story. Later, however, Labov modified this statement somewhat in positing that such evaluative clauses may occur throughout the narratives and that they are not normally clustered in any one place (1972). Evaluative statements occur throughout many of the skinwalker narratives presented here.

Labov suggests that evaluation occurs infrequently in the narratives of the preadolescent Black children he worked with (1972:30); however, these skinwalker narratives involve a great deal of evaluation, which functions in a number of the ways Labov discusses. As Watson (1973) has indicated, the evaluation element as defined by Labov actually includes a number of narrative techniques and narrative functions. Many of the narratives presented here illustrate that overarching function of

reminding the audience of the point of the story. An almost classic example of the elaboration of the point of the story can be seen in this narrative:

VN: Um one time we were at my grandma's. And then me, my cousin Darlene, she's in eighth grade...we went to the bathroom. And something, we saw something outside. We told my uncle and he came out there. It got closer and then we got really scared. We just still went to the bathroom. We heard something making noise and then um um we ran back up. We got, scared and we told my uncle and we came back down with her. Then he said he said, "Maybe that's something that's trying to trying to do something to you two." Then he said, then he said, "It's scary when you're alone outside at night." And he said, "How come you guys were out here?" We said, "Because we were going to the bathroom." Then he said, "OH." Um that we were gonna go back to the house and we did and he got his gun. And then he shot. And then and then that thing just took off. And then the other night we went to the bathroom again and we went back to bed. And then the same thing happened again and we told my uncle. And then he said that maybe it's the same thing. So he snuck and then it was a wolfman, it was a skinwalker and then and then we told that...they took us to the medicine man and that um that wolfman was trying to do something to us...that he was trying to get us killed. Then um then my grandma [redacted] "Never go out by yourselves again." So we never did. We always go with somebody big. The end.

In this story told by eleven-year-old Vickie Natani, the moral or explicit point of the story is very clearly elaborated. It is given special force as well, since Vickie puts the statement of the real point of the story in the mouth of her grandmother, perhaps the most respected member of her family. Many times reminders of the point of a story are cloaked in much more subtle ways and depend to a great extent on the relationship between teller and audience, the shared cultural understandings, and the kinds of values which may be taken for granted.

narrative sessions such as the ones we are dealing with here the point of the narratives shared may be quite different from the same narratives told within a conversational frame as illustrative examples for some meaningful effect. In other words, Vickie's story told within the peer

group at school may emphasize a number of potential points, only one of which is indicated in the closing clauses. Her grandmother may have used the same story for the single purpose of convincing Vickie of the importance of never going outside alone in the dark.

Besides emphasizing the significance of the narrative, Labov suggests that evaluation also functions for "self-aggrandizement," the desire of the narrator to create the best possible image for himself (1972:34). We have suggested earlier that skinwalker stories, especially personal experience skinwalker stories, function quite effectively to create and help maintain "face" for the Navajo child, since the narrator is generally revealed to be brave, intelligent and daring in his encounters with the dangerous, evil skinwalker. A final use of evaluation as described by Labov is to help the audience in following the narration by "emphasizing the point where the complication has reached a maximum: the break between the complication and the result" (Labov and Waletzky 1967:35). Suspension of the action both emphasizes the point of the narrative and helps to distinguish the complicating action from the result. In these narratives of encounters with skinwalkers such a function is usually performed by such statements as "I was really scared" and "I didn't know what to do." These statements occur so frequently in skinwalker stories that they might almost seem to be generic markers.

In his particular sample of narratives, Labov found that all narratives of personal experience included elements of evaluation, while narratives of vicarious experience did not contain any evaluation (1972). This might lead one to suspect that evaluation itself is a generic marker. However, in the case of skinwalker stories, elements and devices of

evaluation can be found not only in personal experience stories, but in legends and fictional narratives as well. In the light of this new evidence it might seem more correct to assume that particular stories involved with culturally-specific dangers, conflicts and resolutions may be more likely to incorporate evaluative elements. Personal experience stories would be likely to include evaluation, then, because the narrator accurately assesses the cultural dynamics at work, while recapitulations of the plot of a television show might be concerned with cultural concerns not specifically relevant to either narrator or audience. Once again evaluation is intimately tied to the point and purpose of the narrative, to topical concerns, and to the relationship between narrator and audience.[9] One other significant point in this regard is that such evaluative devices may be included because the culture-specific definition of that particular kind of story involves their inclusion. In other words, the child's repertoire of storytelling devices and formulae may include the use of evaluative clauses and he may employ such evaluative devices not for any of the particular functions described by Labov, but because their inclusion is part of the way you tell a story (see Watson 1973:255). In the case of skinwalker stories this seems a definite possibility, since the different types of evaluation are spread across a range of subgenres, as we have described. This is not to say that Navajo children do not employ evaluation in their skinwalker narratives for any of Labov's purposes. On the contrary, as we have shown, all of Labov's varied functions of evaluation can be illustrated with examples of Navajo children's skinwalker stories; however, there may also be a sociocultural dynamic at work which dictates that "good" skinwalker stories include these elements of evaluation regardless of the particular semantic, syntactic or social

function they may perform within the narrative. Competence, in any case, involves the appropriate use of such evaluative devices.

Labov's final element, the "coda," consists of those clauses which follow the resolution and signal that the narrative is finished. Sometimes this coda may bring the audience "back to the point at which they entered the narrative" (1972:296). In this way, then, coda is another term for closing frame; it functions to separate the narrative world from the real world and to transport both narrator and audience back to the latter.

While the coda is not a necessary element of narrative structure it can be a most useful one, especially in cases where the complicating action has not been effectively resolved. Many of the Navajo children involved in this study automatically concluded their narratives with "The end" or "That's it!" and thereby sounded a note of finality. These formulaic closing frames are the most frequently used codas for these Navajo children. They effectively assure that the audience understands that the story is over, the action completed. In general, it seems fair to say that children rely more consistently on such formulaic codas, while more sophisticated narrators employ extended codas, which act to make generalizations concerning the action of the story or to bring the audience up to date on later doings of a main character and so on.

Use of formulaic codas depends to a great extent on the needs of both audience and narrator to satisfy a sense of closure. If a narrative has been adequately structured with the complication building up expectations and the resolution successfully fulfilling those expectations, there will be less need for closure to be accomplished in this almost arbitrary fashion. However, for these children such formulaic closings

are simply a part of a story, a necessary part, without which the story would not be a "real" story. In the following example the storyteller, an eleven-year-old Navajo girl, demonstrates a particularly strong dependence on formulaic closings, as she uses every closing formula she knows to bring her narrative to an end effectively:

SD: This is a true story, the one I'm gonna tell now. Once I went camping with my...this is a true story. I went camping with just just one of my friends named Kathy. And we went camping out. We were camping out with our with our brothers. With two boys, just two boys. Then I guess we were camping by...what's that place? Monument Valley. And we were camping over there and we got really scared cause we heard coyotes howling and everything. And our tent there was a there was two boys keep watching us from up on a hill...every step we'd go. And uh we, I guess they turned into coyotes and they started coming to our tent and everything, started howling while we were sleeping. They came in there and they started...they almost they almost tore the thing ...they tried to open the tent but they couldn't with their teeth or anything. We got really scared. We didn't know what to do. And our tent had two windows and a door. And we took out and we were really running as fast as we could. We came to this house. This house nobody lived there and it had a padlock on there. We didn't know what to do. We tried to open the windows and everything but we couldn't open it. So we ran and we ran and we ran and we ran for a long time. We got to the highway and we...and these cars...there was no cars on the highway. I guess. And then there was a car up ahead. This car up ahead about a mile...we could see it. And soon it was about to get morning a little about one in the morning. We kept running we ran to that car and here there was dead people in that car, all blood was all over the windows and everything. You could tell those um two coyotes did that. We got really scared. We didn't know what to do. So we all we both screamed. And we ran, we kept running and finally we came to this little town.

YL: Was it Kayenta?

SD: Yeah...Kayenta. We came to Kayenta. We went to the police station. We told them about that we were camping out there and he took us back up there. And we went to get our tent and all our equipment and everything. We couldn't find those...we were looking for...we couldn't find those two coyotes. Then we went to that that place that house where nobody lived at um we showed them there. And they busted that door down and inside there was heads all decorated, blood of bodies all over. And there was people's clothes all over. And then those wolves, those coyotes came over there. And then we went back and uh

they called our parents. Then they called our parents and we went back home. Then we told, then my mom had to take me to her medicine man 'cause they put something on us. The medicine man said we had to go back over there and we didn't know what they were gonna do. And here they took a arrowhead out of my head and then a bone, a dead body's bone, out of my neck. Then um they took something out of my leg. They want my leg to cut off. And then they took they took the the same things out of Kathy too. And we didn't know what to do. Then my mom and those guys were just crying and everything. Then we took Kathy home. We told her mom about it. And then she paid us for letting the medicine man see her. And then we went home and we lived happily ever after. Amen, the end.

Here Linda has juxtaposed the formulaic ending of traditional fairytales, "we lived happily ever after" with the final word of the Catholic prayers she has been taught in school, "Amen" which lends a "so-be-it" quality to the closing frame. As if these two were not enough, she at last concludes with a simple "the end." There certainly can be no question in the minds of her audience that the story is definitely over. However, there are other cases where the narrator neglects to conclude the story either by resolving the complicating action or by signalling the conclusion with an appropriate formulaic coda, as in the following examples:

MB: My mom, she went over to Toni's grandmother's and I went over there too. They were telling us about this one night that they were sleeping in the trailer and they heard something like a horse on top of their trailer. And then they said that it sounded like it jumped off. So then they sent a man out there. He went all around the trailer, and came back in and said there was nothing. So then the next day they were still talking about it. Then after that that night they had a sing. The medicine man came over to their trailer.

RD: That's it?

MB: Umhm.

* * * * * * * * *

JD: I know one.

I: Ok.

JD: Last time at my grandma's house, we were sitting in my camper, me and my cousins and my little sister, Julia. We were sitting there and the dogs were barking at something over the hill, so we walked over there and that hairy thing was standing up there, and us guys walked by and our grandpa, our grandpa went outside and then he was gonna look for it and he didn't see it. And then we told him where it was and then we took him down the hill and it wasn't there.

CY: That's all?

JD: (Shakes head yes)

In both of these examples, the ten-year-old male narrators failed to arouse the expectations of their audiences in any meaningful ways. While they talked about skinwalkers, a potentially involving topic, each failed to build his story to a climax. Because the skinwalker could not be found, an exciting encounter could not be sustained and the narrative dissolves. Neither of these boys effectively concluded his story, for even though the stories were not interesting or exciting, they might have been salvaged by the use of adequate framing devices. Instead, members of the audience ask "That's it?" "That's all?", quite effectively indicating to the narrators that their stories have somehow failed. While the use of a coda might not have transformed each narrative into a really "good" or "really scary" story, it would at least have forestalled additional questions and perhaps have indicated a higher level of narrative competence.

In reviewing Labov's elements of narrative structure, we have explored the parameters of competence with narrative structure and form and more importantly have indicated the ways Navajo children evaluate and assess the competence of their peers. Competence in ordering and structuring a narrative remains intimately connected with the interactions of a narrator's

peers, for it is through peer group interaction that a child learns what is acceptable, what is exciting and involving, and what is culturally meaningful. The assessment of a narrator's competence in structuring his story is not one that can be simply measured on a scale of cognitive abilities and age-graded achievements, but one which must be viewed in the light of what his peers find both acceptable and meaningful. No child is interested in how his narratives rate on a scientist's scale of cognitive development, but each and every child is acutely attuned to the ways in which his peers evaluate and respond to his stories.

This particular analysis has been restricted to one particular type of narrative, the skinwalker story, which, though deeply rooted in Navajo traditional verbal art, is performed enthusiastically and elaborated upon in English, the language of acculturation. Peer group techniques and strategies of evaluation can be found in other narrative forms as well: In the other narrative genres I collected--myths, coyote tales, narrative jokes, for example--this kind of evaluation was also present. Although this data has been drawn strictly from Navajo peer groups, which we have suggested are somewhat different from Anglo-American peer groups, I believe that further investigation will demonstrate that this kind of peer group evaluation of competence has broad cross-cultural implications. Further study is needed to determine across a wide range of cultures the exact nature and influence of the peer group in the acquisition and evaluation of communicative competence of all kinds.

FOOTNOTES

1. Among the numerous studies done in the field of verbal cognition Piaget and Inhelder (1969) and Vygotsky (1962) are perhaps most notable; Kernan (1977) and Ervin-Tripp and Cook-Gumperz (1974) discuss cognition in terms of communicative and narrative competence.

2. For an elaboration of the symbolic role of skinwalker in Navajo society, see chapter two of my dissertation (1978).

3. This notion of communicative competence has been proposed by Hymes (1971, 1975) and elaborated upon by Bauman (1975, 1977).

4. These are, of course, only a selected few of the wide ranges of social and cultural knowledge which are drawn on in the performance of skinwalker narratives.

5. A distinction could be made here between active and passive competence: passive competence would imply the knowledge of skinwalker activities without the desire or ability to perform a story about skinwalker within the narrative frame. Active competence would refer then, to the coming together of both cultural knowledge and the ability to express that knowledge in socially and culturally appropriate ways. When we discuss competence here we are generally referring to this active type of competence.

6. "Shiii" is a common colloquial expression among these children, generally meaning, "oh, shoot!"

7. An analysis of stylistic and interactional features of narrative competence may be found in chapter four of my dissertation (1978).

8. The triumph of the individual over skinwalker almost always occurs in personal experience narratives; however, fictional tales often end in less predictable ways.

9. There is a real need for scholars to attend to the specific situational variables which may or may not affect the use of evaluation.

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