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► **To cite this version:**

Gaëlle Ferré. Gesture, Intonation and the Pragmatic Structure of Narratives in British English Conversation. York Papers in Linguistics, 2005, Series 2 (Issue 3), pp.55-90. hal-00294229

HAL Id: hal-00294229

<https://hal.science/hal-00294229>

Submitted on 11 Jul 2008

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York
Papers in
Linguistics
Series 2

Issue 3

April 2005
ISSN 0307-3238

Editors:
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Gesture, Intonation and the Pragmatic Structure of Narratives in British English Conversation*

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Abstract

This paper is an analysis of narratives in British English conversation. It shows that prosody and gestures made by the speaker align to the pragmatic structure of narratives and are especially used to distinguish the climax, e.g. the point of the narrative. Indeed I will show that the climax is most of the time uttered with a slower speech rate and higher voice intensity than the rest of the narrative. It is also accompanied by more gestures than the other parts of the narrative, and for the narrative to be successful these gestures must show speaker concern for the partner in the interaction.

1 Introduction

Last year, as I was working on a joint paper on intonation and gesture analysis in cases of mimetism in conversation, one of my co-authors proposed some interesting reading that might help us in the analysis of our respective corpora, some of us not being used to working on conversation. In a paper by Chafe (1997) a particular sentence struck me:

Typical is the narrative schema in which an initial setting establishes the background for a complicating action, which in turn leads on to a climax, after which a denouement may be followed by a coda that wraps up the topic as a whole.

(Chafe 1997: 42)

*I am particularly grateful to Traci Curl and Gareth Walker for their most useful discussion of this article. I would also like to thank Richard Ogden for his comments on a much shorter version of this paper that helped develop the few ideas I had then proposed. Correspondence: gf502@york.ac.uk or gaelleferre@yahoo.fr.

Being at the time ignorant in narrative analysis, the sentence nonetheless reminded me of literature classes I had attended some years before and the way we used to analyze literary texts then. I would never have thought of applying the same pattern to conversation sequences, that is narratives, and yet thinking of it the sentence sounded intuitively true to me. The aim of Chafe's article was not to go into this sort of detail but I felt I needed to look at my corpus and check whether I could find sequences that did correspond to the description he gave. What highly surprised me was that I could: first I noticed that some sequences in the corpus could actually be called narratives, and then that inside each of them, I could distinguish between different phases such as the ones described by Chafe, and one in particular was quite salient, e.g. the climax. That made me wonder how it happened that as totally ignorant as I was of narrative analysis, I could still intuitively, after being suggested terms, apply these terms to the different phases in the narratives in my own corpus – and I must add not doing it by chance. Since then, I have read more work on narrative analysis, of which I will speak in Section 3 of this paper, and I still agree with most of my first impressions.

Looking at it again from the point of view of a phonetician and gesture analyst, I thought that something must happen in these two fields that gives one clues as to how to distinguish between the different phases in a narrative. And since the climax was the most salient of them all, I thought of what it must be that highlights it from the rest of the narrative. The first hypothesis that came to my mind was that the climax must be much more modulated in intonation (fundamental frequency) than the rest of the narrative. What I found was however quite different: in the great majority of cases, I could not show that the different phases of a narrative were regularly associated with differences in intonational pitch of the speakers – which does not mean that there are none, only that I could see none. Unexpectedly however, I found that there were recurrent changes of tempo and voice loudness during the different phases of a narrative.

Looking at the gestures made by the two speakers, I also found that they were of different kinds in each phase. There are two main differences as far as they are concerned: the first difference lies in the frequency of gesturing in the various parts of the narrative and the second in the type of gesture that is used in each section of the narrative. In other words, as far as gestures are concerned, both a quantitative and a qualitative change are used by speakers to emphasize more or less consciously the different sections of their narratives. I will not go into the details of speakers being aware or not of the changes in their own narratives, which I cannot possibly do with my own corpus, but will focus instead on the detailed analysis of the narratives, some examples of which will be presented in Section 4, after I have presented the data in Section 2 and the background in Section 3. I will then gather the most relevant points in a discussion (Section 5).

2 The data

2.1 Corpus

The corpus I used for this paper was my doctoral thesis corpus, presented in Ferré (2004a).¹ It is a video recording of a conversation between two British girls, Zoe and Michelle, both aged 23 at the time and coming from London and Durham respectively. The recording lasts 30 minutes (which is not very long for a phonetic analysis but quite long when one considers gestures as well). I asked the two girls to come to a recording studio at the University of Nantes and just talk as they usually do since they are close friends. I am aware that this setting was quite unnatural to them and that this probably reduces some of the spontaneity of the conversation. I could even see that at the very beginning of the recording, the two girls were quite embarrassed. However, they soon seemed to forget the cameras and microphones and the conversation quickly became livelier. I felt at the time that I did not really have a choice, since I needed a good audio quality as well as a very good video recording of the two speakers and this is difficult to achieve with a hidden camera.

They were sitting opposite each other in a corner of the studio that had been arranged so as to look like a sort of sitting room or lounge. They were left alone during the whole recording session and knew nobody was listening to what they said. I used two cameras to film the two of them, each camera being placed on the right and slightly behind the two speakers filming the girl sitting on the opposite side. They also had a small microphone attached to their collar, so that they could move their heads freely without this having an effect on the recording itself. Each microphone was linked to the camera that filmed each girl.

The two recordings were then assembled on a single tape by the technician and copied to a series of CD-ROMs in an AVI format.

2.2 Narratives

From this corpus I examined 23 narratives. I must point out that some of them have been counted as different narratives although they came in a round or were even uttered in a cluster by the same speaker. In the same way that we can distinguish narratives from other parts of the conversation, I felt however that these were two or three narratives in a single cluster, each of them possessing a distinct climax and the general topic of the narrative shifting slightly from the topic developed before.

All the narratives vary in length ranging from 7.25 s for the shortest to 35.61 s for

¹Since my thesis was written in French and hasn't been published so far, I will briefly state some necessary points concerning my corpus in this paper.

the longest. The average length of the 23 narratives is 19.36 s. I preferred to count the narratives' length in seconds rather than in clauses for instance or in narrative units since these can vary considerably in length across narratives and even within the same narrative. Also, since I am going to speak of tempo, it made more sense to me to measure narrative length in seconds. I must add however that this measurement includes silent pauses and, for reasons that I will show later on, laughter from the speaker or the listener when it is produced at the end of the narrative, but also some comments made inside or at the end of the narrative by the listener and that I felt must be included as well, as I will explain in Sections 4 and 5.²

2.3 Prosodic and gestural analyses

I used the software Praat for my prosodic analyses and Quicktime to transcribe the gestures made by the two girls, viewing the sequences image by image. The prosodic parameters I explored were duration (and in this particular analysis, especially tempo), F_0 in Hertz (Hz) and voice intensity in decibels (dB). To calculate the rate of speech of the speakers, I measured syllable length in each tone unit, as has been defined by Cruttenden (1997) and Crystal (1969). For this particular study, I made a few adaptations when the tone-unit didn't correspond to a narrative unit – this happens very rarely, e.g. a demarcation pause (between tone units) is misplaced by the speaker for the sake of keeping the speaking turn (see Ferré 2002) or in some cases of reported speech. It is obvious though that a narrative unit may contain one or more tone units, as well as one or more syntactic clauses.

As far as gestures are concerned, I limited my observations to any gesture or mimic made above the waist, these including facial mimics (frowns, raised eyebrows, protruding lips, and so on), gaze and head direction, trunk position (rest position being trunk resting on the back of the seat) and orientation (to the left or the right). It also includes all arm and hand gestures. For this analysis however, I used a large classification of all the gestures grouping them in two main categories: gestures of discourse organization (McNeill 1992) and interactive gestures, that is gestures that are rather partner-oriented, like smiles, raised eyebrows, etc. This notion of orientation of discourse has been widely developed by Morel and Danon-Boileau (1998) for speech and intonation and then by Bouvet and Morel (2002) for speech, intonation and gesture, and it needs a short explanation.

Morel and Danon-Boileau, after Culioli and the Enunciation Theory,³ found that in a conversation between two persons in French, the speaker showed different personal attitudes concerning his/her own speech, and that these attitudes appear clearly lexically,

²I consider them as part of the narrative in the sense that they reveal the *collaborative floor* (Coates 1997) between speaker and listener, and that the listener's interventions in the narrative contribute to its building up.

³*Théorie de l'énonciation*. The speaker can be seen as a *locuteur* or as an *énonciateur*.

as well as in the syntax and the intonation used. One of these attitudes is that the speaker is first of all a speaker, meaning that s/he is involved in a process of speaking and particularly concerned with turns at talk in a conversation. This is shown when for example the speaker arrives at a possible syntactic completion point but still wants to keep the turn. S/he may then use a conjunction to show that something else is coming and will not lower his/her voice intensity, will avoid making a long silent pause, etc. . . . So then, the end of the sentence will not be perceived as a *transition relevance place*, where the listener would feel a right to take the turn (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974). For gestures, the speaker in this state of mind will avoid looking at the partner, which could be interpreted as a turn yielding as well.⁴

But the speaker in a dialogue is not just someone who speaks, s/he is also someone who thinks, feels, etc. and especially someone who is in interaction with somebody else, e.g. an enunciator. An enunciator always has the partner in mind, meaning s/he imagines how the partner is going to receive – accept or reject – what s/he says, but also whether the partner understands what is being said and what are his/her representations about the conversation and this also shows in the words and intonation used. One has to bear in mind though that the two attitudes of the speaker (whether the speaker or enunciator side prevails) are not differentiated in a conversation – the speaker does not act as only one or the other – but is rather of use for the analyst who can then determine what is at stake at this or that particular point in the conversation.

Applying this methodology to the gestures used in narratives, we can say that when the speaker shifts his/her gaze away at the beginning of a turn, this reveals more about the organization of the conversation than of the concern the speaker has for his/her partner's understanding (see footnote 4) etc. On the contrary, when the speaker smiles to his/her partner, it doesn't say much about the conversation's organization, but reveals much more of the concern of the speaker for his/her partner. This is exactly what I mean by interactive gestures: gestures that reveal more of the relationships between the two partners than of speech organization.

⁴This has been shown before by Kendon, as quoted by Goodwin who corroborated the findings:

Kendon (1967) has provided the most extensive analysis of the function of gaze within conversation. He reports a particular distribution of gaze over the course of an utterance. . . . A speaker looks away at the beginning of his utterance but gazes steadily toward his addressee as the utterance approaches termination, whereas the hearer at this point looks away from the speaker. Thus, when turn-transition occurs, the new speaker is gazing away from his recipient, as is expected of a speaker near the beginning of his utterance.

(Goodwin 1981: 31-32)

3 Background

As I said in the introduction, I became interested in narratives thanks to personal reading on another topic. My first impulse was to have an immediate look at the data and see if I could find narratives in the corpus. There were some but the question then was the following: how did I know that the sequences I found were narratives when other sequences were not? I had also read, a long time before that, an article by Sacks (1978) on a dirty joke which didn't make me think of narratives at the time but which surely had some impact in my apprehension of the data. It explained that a joke was different from what he calls *a story*. The three main criteria for a story are the following:

- (a) Stories are plainly ways of packaging experiences. And most characteristically, stories report an experience in which the teller figures and figures as the story's hero — which doesn't mean that teller has done something heroic, but that the story is organized around the teller's circumstances.

(Sacks 1978: 259)

This point has been very important in my considerations of what a narrative is. Two ideas are expressed here: the first thing is that the narrative has to tell some past events ('packaging experience') which happened to the speaker or could have happened to the speaker, as I will show later. In my corpus, there is quite a long description made by Zoe of what she would do at Christmas. The description is made with precise dates in chronological order ("the morning of the 25th", "and then", etc.), yet, while listening to the sequence, I didn't feel that it was a personal narrative and the only reason for this was that at the time of the recording, they were future events planned by Zoe. What is funny though is that had the recording taken place after the Christmas holiday, and Zoe told what she had done instead of what she was going to do, it would have made a perfect narrative. The second idea that is expressed is that a narrative has to be connected in some way with the speaker. Even when the speaker is telling what happened to someone else, in my corpus, she always shows the link between her and the person to whom the events actually happened using phrases such as "a friend of mine", "someone I bumped into", etc.

- (b) Now, not only does teller figure in the story and figure with the story organized around his circumstances, but it's pretty much teller's business to tell the story with respect to its import for him, and it is his involvement in it that provides for the story's telling. That is, teller can tell it to somebody who knows and cares about him, and maybe recipient can tell it to someone who also knows and cares about initial teller, but it goes very little further than that.

(Sacks 1978: 261)

I partly agree with this second point in Sacks' description. It is true that the speaker has to show his involvement in the narrative s/he's telling. It is also true that the narrative can be told a second time (and I should think also a third time although this doesn't happen as often) as reported speech, provided the teller shows the link between the actual characters in the narrative and him/herself as I have just told above. I don't quite agree with the fact that the recipient of the narrative must 'know and care about teller'. We've all had the experience of a perfect stranger telling us a personal narrative while waiting for the bus for quite a long time, for instance. Of course, one could argue that these people suppose wrongly that we care to hear their personal circumstances while we don't, but the fact remains that the recipient in this case doesn't have to know or care about the teller to be provided with a personal narrative. Narratives then can even be considered as a way to get to know people. For example, when someone is introducing a friend of his/her, then his/her telling of personal events often presented as something *out of the ordinary* can be a way of letting others know him/her.

- (c) Finally, one constraint on telling a story is that it needs to be fitted into the conversation. It doesn't make its own place... So that stories, for their occurrence, have to be put into a place appropriate for that story in the conversation, and stories are very carefully placed.

(Sacks 1978: 261)

This point was particularly true in the corpus I studied. Since none of the speakers started the conversation with a narrative – and in fact, narratives only started to be produced when they both felt more at ease with the recording set as if they had forgotten about the cameras – their narratives were particularly connected with preceding talk. This is important since this is not always true of other parts of the conversation. For example, at one point of the conversation, the two speakers had been talking of their plans for the afternoon. Zoe mentions a video that she has to pick up somewhere and one has the feeling that she was about to talk of the film (which she does later in the conversation), but she cuts herself short with the following sentence: “Oh, are you going this evening to this *soirée* thing?” This way of dropping a topic abruptly however never occurred with narratives and the speakers always made it a point that there would be a link between the narrative and the preceding context, even if that link were a very tiny one. Most of the time though, the link is quite obvious – like when the narrative is on the same topic as the preceding context. This I will develop while discussing precise examples from my corpus.

Sacks later added a particularly important point: a narrative is a sequence of more than one utterance ('Stories take more than one utterance', Sacks 1995: 222, Vol. 2) that has a beginning and an end:

One thing about some stories anyway is that they have special ways of beginning. That is to say, one can differentiate between ‘a start’, which could be anything, and the fact that the first thing that occurs is a ‘beginning.’ And perhaps the last thing that occurs is an ‘ending.’

(Sacks 1995: 255, Vol. 1)

This is a good description but it is not self-sufficient as I met some sequences in my corpus that corresponded to it and that I still didn’t consider as narratives. For example, in my corpus, there is quite a long part of the conversation in which the two girls are talking of a film. Michelle didn’t really understand the film and Zoe explains the plot to her. It certainly takes more than an utterance and has a beginning as well as an end but I don’t feel it is a narrative in the sense that what is told, which could be named a story, has nothing in common with the speaker’s personal experience. Although she has seen the film, Zoe doesn’t tell how she came to see the film, which could have made a personal narrative. She just tells facts and her objective is that Michelle understands the film. It does not, for example, ‘recapitulate experience [...] constructing narrative units which match the temporal sequence of that experience’ (Labov & Waletzky 1967: 13). In this particular instance, only the lack of personal involvement in the action told makes it a story and not a narrative. Finally, Sacks also pointed out that a narrative can account for ‘What we didn’t do’ (1995: 267, Vol. 2), which is an important point since I found in my corpus that the speakers sometimes evoked things that didn’t happen, either to comment on them or to dramatize their narrative (‘something worse could have happened at this particular point of the narrative but did not’).

Going further into the analysis of narratives, Labov & Waletzky then give the following general definition: ‘one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred.’ (1967: 20) Or, as Labov puts it later on:

A narrative of personal experience is a report of a sequence of events that have entered into the biography of the speaker by a sequence of clauses that correspond to the order of the original events.

(Labov 1997: 398)

What is new here as compared to Sacks’ descriptions of narratives, is that Labov & Waletzky – and later Labov – propose a detailed analysis of the internal structure of a narrative, in terms of clauses or units. Whereas Sacks was speaking in general terms such as *beginning*, *end* or *point* of a narrative, Labov & Waletzky gave precise definitions of all the components of narratives stating as well how they are organized in respect to one another. I will come back to the narrative’s structure all through this paper, but to state things as briefly as possible, here are the different narrative sections they present:

- ORIENTATION: ‘Orient the listener in respect to person, place, time, and behavioral situation.’ (Labov & Waletzky 1967: 32)
- COMPLICATION: Or *complicating action* ‘a series of events’ (Labov & Waletzky 1967) leading to an *apex* or *result*, that is ‘the most reportable event’ in the narrative (Labov 1997: 406).
- EVALUATION: ‘Information on the consequences of the event for human needs and desires. An *evaluative* clause provides evaluation of a narrative event’. (Labov 1997: 403)
- CODA: ‘Final clause that returns the narrative to the time of speaking.’ (Labov 1997: 402)

The description given above accounts for most of the narratives I found in my corpus, as in the following example:⁵

(1) Michelle: La Rochelle (13.83 s)

| | |
|--|--------------|
| <i>so you did the kind of thing that Vicki's doing this year {0,411}</i> | |
| 1 yeah LAUGH I got the train {0,648} (h) straight after my hem {0,134} last lesson on Friday | Orientation |
| 2 hopped on the train {0,898} | Complication |
| 3 and then Monday morning got up at five | Complication |
| 4 and I got the six o'clock train to be back at nine {0,241} for my ten o'clock class so that {0,563} | Complication |
| 5 (h) god {0,621} nearly killed me LAUGH | Evaluation |

Michelle's narrative is elicited by Zoe's question. Michelle was working in a town called La Rochelle at the time evoked here and had a boyfriend in Nantes. The journey between the two towns takes three hours which is long but Michelle still decided to come to Nantes some weekends. All this we learn from the preceding context. The narrative itself concerns what Michelle had to do when she was actually travelling to Nantes. The point of it is it was a difficult time since because she wanted to spend as much time as possible with her partner, and because of the length of the journey she did not even take time to stop after her teaching, and then had to get up early at the end of the weekend and go directly back to teaching.

⁵I voluntarily omit the *abstract* that I didn't use for this particular study. Transcription conventions are given at the end of this paper. I chose to transcribe the narrative more or less in clauses as Labov & Waletzky did for reasons of comparability. I usually don't use this sort of transcription, but it is perfect here.

Within the narrative, the different sections defined by Labov & Waletzky appear very clearly: unit 1 gives background information, e.g. the use of pronoun “I” tells who was doing the action.⁶ Michelle also refers to the train journey and gives temporal indications as well. The action then complicates into two actions: hopping on the train and getting up at five, which happen on different days. The latter action is the apex of the narrative and it is followed by another complication unit, which gives precision to the apex. Lastly, Michelle evaluates this series of actions in an evaluation unit. So this narrative perfectly illustrates the definition given above.

Yet, if we look at example (1), one may ask how I decided that the apex was on clause 3 instead of clause 4 for example. It could as well have been on clause 4, but if we listen to the recording, one has the feeling that it is on clause 3. What I mean here is that when working on oral conversations, one can’t decide on the apex unless one listens to the recording. This implies that the description given by Labov & Waletzky and Labov works at a semantic level but that this level doesn’t give all the information. And although their study was based on audio recordings of narratives, they don’t give any information concerning the acoustic clues which must necessarily influence our analysis, not to mention the gestures made by the speakers which play an essential role in story telling as well.

Another point is that since Labov & Waletzky’s narratives were elicited by an interviewer, there is little possibility of this person intervening in the narrative to build it up. There is therefore no possibility of one section being uttered by the partner. When looking at my own data, I however found that the evaluation was very often produced by the partner instead of the speaker, as in the following example:

(2) Michelle: Sacked (28.99 s)

| | | |
|---|--|--------------|
| 1 | I was a faithful employee | Orientation |
| 2 | and then {0,889} I’d been there just under a year I think and that’s NOISE when you’re allowed rights sort of sick pay and things like that and perhaps bonuses I’m not sure | Orientation |
| 3 | but (h) they said oh we’re gonna have to let you go we don’t need you anymore {0,851} | Complication |
| 4 | so I was really distraught cos I you know I needed a job at uni (h) <i>mm</i> SNIFF | Complication |
| 5 | they let me go {0,384} | Complication |

⁶A unit more or less corresponds to a clause. Some units may however contain more than one clause. A section contains one or more units (in this particular example, the complication *section* contains 3 units: unit 2, 3 and 4).

| | | |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| 6 | next thing you know there's all these new students working in Marks and <u>Spencer's</u> <i>that is appalling</i> {0,144} | Complication Evaluation |
|---|---|------------------------------------|

In this example, the apex is on unit 6, but the evaluation that follows is produced by Zoe and yet, I feel that it is part of the narrative itself. This happens quite often. In fact, out of 23 narratives, 10 contained an evaluation made by the partner, without counting laughter, which, to my mind is also some sort of evaluation, although of a different nature. This doesn't mean however that the speaker doesn't produce an evaluation of her own. And things are even a bit more complicated because if we look again at example (2), we can see that Michelle produces some sort of evaluation in clause 4 which can be understood in two different ways: at the same time as it plays a role in the sequence of events the fact that she was "really distraught" is also an evaluation of how she felt then. Another evaluation is expressed in a more subtle way. This narrative comes as an answer to a question Zoe asked: did Michelle get bonuses at Christmas when she was working at Marks & Spencer's. Zoe actually asks the question twice in the preceding discussion. The first time, Michelle just answers no and it is only the second time that she produces this narrative to explain why she didn't get bonuses. So starting the narrative with "I was a faithful employee" (clause 1) foreshadows the "but" of clause 3. "Faithful" being a highly positive word in this context, then we can deduce that the employers' attitude was a negative one. So one can say that clause 1 contains an evaluation of what happened to her, yet it is also an orientation since it indicates in what condition the action took place. In fact, clause 1 is something of a *preface*. Sacks defines a preface's role as 'giving information about what it will take for the story to be over' (1995: 228, Vol. 2), that is for instance if one announces something terrible is going to be told, then the story is over when that terrible thing has been told.⁷

I'm also wondering about the *orientation* section of the narrative. I find this word particularly interesting since it does orient the listener but at the same time it seems to me that two different acts are being done in the orientation section in most narratives if not all of them: as has been pointed out by many researchers working on conversation, a narrative rarely comes up out of the blue in the conversation. On the contrary, it is usually linked to the preceding context. So when we speak of orientation, we can consider that an orientation clause may be linked to what's preceding, or may introduce what's coming. Let's have a look at the following narrative, which is interesting in several points:

⁷ It must be noted however that Sacks' *preface* doesn't correspond to the term *preface* as used in CA which rather corresponds to what is here called the *orientation*. It is closer to the term *pre-announcement* used in CA (Levinson 1983: 349). However, to avoid any confusion, I will keep the two words *orientation* (a unit that gives background information for the narrative to come, such as place, time, etc.) and *preface* (a unit which is not only a 'bid for story space' (Levinson 1983) but which also gives a modality to the narrative (funny, extraordinary, awful, etc.).

- (3) Zoe: Year away (10.43 s)
- | | | |
|----|---|------------------------------|
| 1 | (h) but I never see those blokes at all {0,139} | Orientation |
| 2 | and we went to Felicity to dinner the other night (h) and hem | Orientation |
| 3 | <i>who's she again</i> {0,634} Felicity that woman that <i>oh she's that</i> {0,266} <i>woman</i> {0,665} <u>looks after</u> <u>the LAUGH</u> <u>looks after the Nottingham crowd</u> <u>LAUGH that woman</u> {0,397} | Parenthesis |
| 4 | (h) and {0,444} and hem COUGH {0,614} and she's {0,262} like {0,265} and she said oh you've been going to university | Complication |
| 5 | and they're like yeah yeah we're really enjoying the lessons we're really enjoying the lessons {0,0755} | Complication + Evaluation |
| 6 | <i>yeah like they're going</i> LAUGH | Evaluation |
| 7 | <u>and then I</u> {0,571} and then I saw them in hem the street | Complication |
| 8 | and I went are you really going to lessons because the girls say we never see you | Complication |
| 9 | and they're like {0,504} oh well yeah we haven't been for four weeks LAUGH | Complication |
| 10 | <i>no one ever does in their year-out</i> {0,917} | Evaluation |

I will not speak of clause 3 in this narrative, because it is just a clarification sequence (the speaker supposes that Michelle knows ‘Felicity’, but Michelle doesn’t remember her at first). If we look first at the orientation section in the narrative, we see that it contains two units but they don’t play the same role in the narrative. Unit 1 plays a role of connection between the preceding context and the narrative. When Zoe says “those blokes”, she is speaking of people who have already been mentioned in the preceding context.⁸ So “those blokes” is the link between what was said before and what is going to be said, since Zoe is now going to tell a narrative involving these people.

Now if we look at unit 2, we can see that its orientation is slightly different. There is no preface anymore, no evaluation of any kind. The use of the coordinator “and” and of the pronoun “we” could be considered as the residue of a link between the narrative and the preceding context (“we” could refer to me and “those blokes” but it could as well refer to “me”, “those blokes” and other people not mentioned in the preceding context). It happens very often in the corpus that there is a shift between pronouns “I” and “we”,

⁸The two girls were talking of a party that Zoe didn’t quite remember. Michelle had been describing some of the guests to help her remember the event.

“we” referring to a rather undefined group of people including the speaker. So here, the link is becoming thinner. The unit’s main role is however to define the place and time setting of the narrative: the initial setting was “at Felicity’s”, one evening that was not a long time before the narrative is told.

Again, as in example (2), unit 5 is a complication clause that contains an evaluation in it. The reported speech of the boys comes in sequential order and can’t be moved in the narrative since their speech came in answer to Felicity’s question, but at the same time, this reported speech is highly suspect. Some researchers have been trying to answer the question of whether reported speech is true to what was really said in the first instance (Rosier 2002 contains several articles which mention the truth of reported speech), some answer yes and some answer no but what is absolutely certain in this narrative is that this reported speech is not true to the initial saying of the boys. The content may be the same but they could not have expressed it this way: the allusion made by Zoe here is that the boys were lying to Felicity, and this is expressed in the double repetition of both “yeah” and “we’re really enjoying the lessons” which is uttered with no silent pause (so there is no emphasis in the repetition) and in a very rapid tempo. If the boys had said this to Felicity, their lie would have been immediately detected, or she would have thought they were making fun of her, or even being arrogant. Felicity being their tutor, they probably didn’t want her to discover that they were not attending class. So the double repetition is a way Zoe uses to produce an evaluation: “this is what they told her and this was a lie”. And Michelle then takes the turn to show that she understood the evaluation implied by Zoe, she paraphrases what was only implicit in Zoe’s speech and is in other words ‘confirming that something had been conveyed inexplicitly, — confirming both *the* allusion and *that it had been* an allusion’ (Schegloff 1996: 210).

I will now try to account for what’s happening at the acoustical and gestural levels as well since they also play an important role in the dramatic aspect of narratives, that is to say I will try to open up the perspective of analysis to shed more light on the divisions of the narrative.

4 Narrative analysis

4.1 Pragmatic, prosodic and gestural analysis of a simple narrative

Before Michelle produces the narrative in example (4), Zoe has just told her that she needs to get the video of an English film, ‘Secrets and Lies by Mike Leigh’, to show it to her students. The film happened to have been played on the French television a few weeks before the recording, as is mentioned by the two girls. Michelle’s narrative points out how glad she was that she could see an English film on television in France, although

it turns out in the discussion following the narrative that she disliked the film.

(4) Michelle: English film (7.25 s)

| | | |
|---|--|------------------------------|
| 1 | I only saw the end | Orientation |
| 2 | (h) I saw I (h) I came back from my kickboxing class | Complication |
| 3 | and I put the telly on and I thought | Complication |
| 4 | wahey <u>an English film</u> | Complication + Evaluation |
| 5 | <u>it's in English</u> LAUGH | Evaluation |

Considering tempo and voice intensity (see Figure 1), this narrative shows the typical pattern of stories in the conversation.

As far as intensity is concerned, one can distinguish three phases. The first phase goes from the beginning to “class”, and in it one can distinguish three groups of peaks separated by the two breath-takings of the speaker. Each of these groups is uttered with decreasing intensity. On the first syllable of each group, there is a resetting of intensity,⁹ e.g. intensity is reset at a higher value than the last syllable of the preceding group, but the general shape of the curve is falling. At the beginning of the turn, Michelle starts with a very high value on the second syllable of “only” (86.81 dB), and this particularly high intensity is due to the fact that the two girls have been sort of fighting for the turn. The preceding turn had been uttered by the two friends simultaneously in a joint construction, so that the two girls were potential speakers for this turn and Michelle wanted to tell her narrative so she starts with a very high intensity thus preventing Zoe from taking the turn (see Morel and Danon-Boileau 1998, Levinson 1983: 301). But at the end of this section, when Michelle is quite certain she won't lose the turn, intensity decreases to a very low value (only 59.57 dB on “class”). On the second phase of the narrative from “and I put” to “and I thought”, intensity is reset again to average values for this speaker¹⁰ comprised between 73.3 dB on the second syllable of “telly” and 66.96 dB on “thought”, so that one can say it is slightly decreasing again, although not as drastically as it was in the first phase. The third phase (apex, unit 4) is however more interesting since the curve here is not decreasing at all. The highest value is on “film” with 83.68 dB, but there was also an important peak at the beginning on the second syllable of “wahey” of 80.74 dB,

⁹Voice resetting is made when the speaker reaches low intensity at the end of an utterance and has to *reset* intensity at the beginning of the next utterance, e.g. return to higher intensity values.

¹⁰For each speaker, I calculated the mean maximum as well as the mean minimum intensity value over a sample of speech, and divided their respective intensity ranges into 4 levels (I-, I-, I+, I++) where I++ was the loudest voice. I applied the same procedure for the fundamental frequency and obtained the following pitch ranges: Low, Mid Low, Mid High, High. Details of calculation and precise values are given in Ferré (2004a).

and even if other syllables in the group are uttered at slightly lower intensity (which is due to the fact that they're not stressed), they are still not uttered in a quiet voice, their intensity values ranging from 75 to 79 dB. I must point out that this pattern is typical of narratives, and is indeed quite unusual compared to other parts of the conversation in which intensity typically decreases until it reaches its lowest value at the end of the turn. In the case of narratives however, I noticed that the apex of the narrative is regularly uttered with a high voice intensity although it is situated towards the end of the turn. There is no proper evaluation section in this narrative, but had there been one, it would have been uttered at a lower voice intensity again.

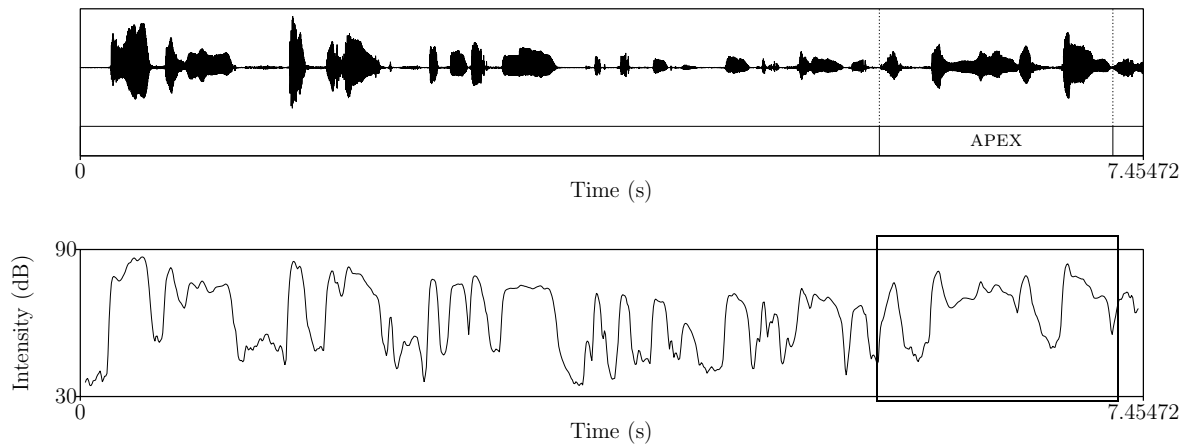


Figure 1: Intensity curve (in dB) of example (4)

I now turn to speech tempo in this personal narrative. This as well is quite typical of narratives. Michelle starts her narrative with a much higher speech rate (8 syllables/second, from now on syll/s) than her average rate and does so for the same reason as the high intensity, fast speech rate being a strategy constantly used by the speakers to prevent their partner from taking the turn. This is a result I found in my thesis (Ferré 2004a). It may seem contrary to some findings such as Levinson's: 'a speaker who upgrades most wins the floor, upgrading consisting of increased amplitude, **slowing tempo**, lengthened vowels and other features' (1983: 301). A slower tempo is used when the two speakers are actually trying to speak at the same time, but a faster tempo is used when only one of the partners is speaking and yet fearing to lose the turn. Michelle then slows down to 4.1 syll/s from "I saw" to "kickboxing class" and this time, it is more in her average speech rate, although there is some hesitation at the beginning of that bit, which appears in the false start. What is however clear at the end of this section is that vowels appear to be quite reduced compared to consonants. On "and I put the telly on" (unit 3), that is the complication clause immediately preceding the apex, speech rate suddenly increases drastically to 9.1 syll/s, whereas the rate of speech on the apex (unit 4) is even slower than the unit containing hesitation marks, with only 3.4 syll/s. It

is thus differentiated from the section preceding it. I will show in the rest of this paper that the apex containing the relevant information in the narrative is almost without exception uttered at a much slower rate of speech than the sections preceding and following it. As compared to the end of the first complication unit, one can also notice that vowels in this clause are much longer than consonants.

As I stated in the introduction, pitch changes may occur in the apex of narratives but this is quite rare, and most of the time, the intonation curve is regularly declining all through the narrative.¹¹ This example however shows an important pitch variation on the exclamative “wahey” that also serves the demarcation of the apex from the rest of the narrative. Indeed, one notices three different parts on the curve shown in Figure 2. The first part consists of the orientation section of the narrative: this is quite modulated, starts at a midrange intonation of 257 Hz, then rises and reaches 335 Hz on the second syllable of the focusing adverb “only”. After that, it decreases again until it reaches 209 Hz at the end of the utterance, but with a rise-fall intonation pattern on the tonic “end”. Such a modulation shows the involvement of the speaker on this narrative beginning, as I will show as well when speaking of gestures.

Then, one can see a second part that goes from “I saw” to “and I thought” in which one notices that intonation is progressively decreasing, starting once again at an average intonation value and reaching a much lower pitch at the end (194 Hz on syllable “I” in “and I thought”), “thought” being even uttered in a creaky voice. During this phase, no particular syllable is modulated. The third part one can distinguish on the curve is the extremely large modulation on exclamatory “wahey” followed by a rather flat curve. Indeed, “wahey” starts at a value of 279 Hz (a normal value for an unstressed first syllable in this type of word for this speaker) and reaches 415 Hz on the second syllable. The curve then decreases to 224 Hz on “an” and the lowest value on “film” is 200 Hz. So, the pitch span is considerably expanded on this particular part of the narrative being of about 11 semitones.

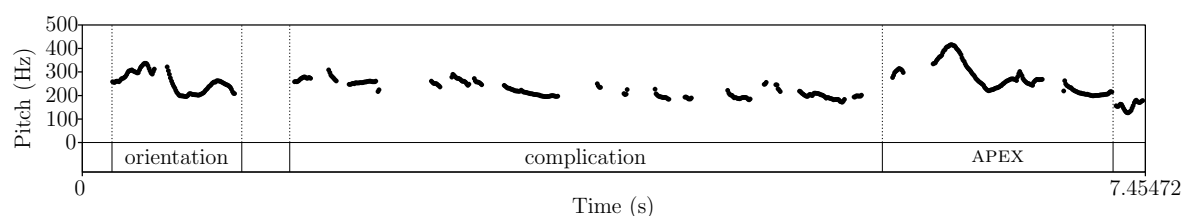


Figure 2: F_0 curve of example (4)

Let us now have a look at the two girls’ gestures. Just before the narrative, Michelle was resting her head on her hand in a sort of relaxed way (a), but as soon as she starts

¹¹This is the reason why I won’t show F_0 curves in a systematic way in this paper.

the narrative, she raises her head (b), while her index finger points at Zoe and her eyes open wide (c), as is shown in Figure 3.

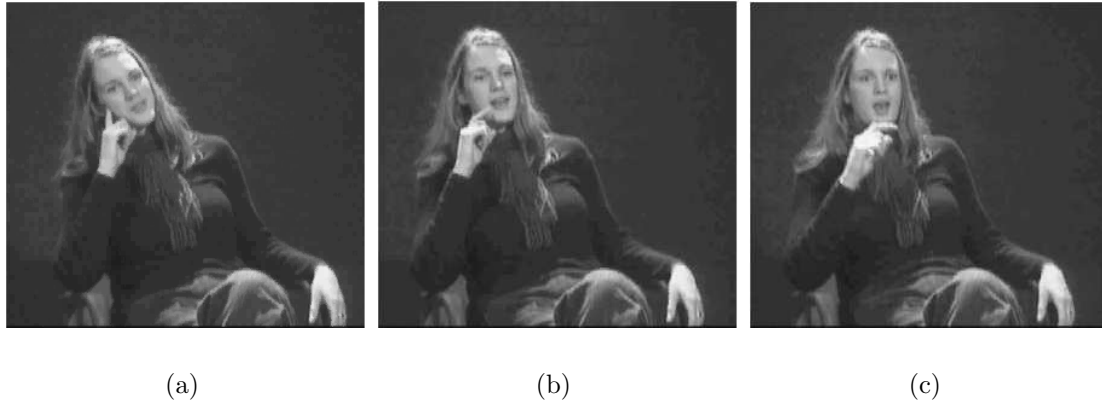


Figure 3: Speaker (Michelle) uttering orientation unit of the narrative ‘I only saw the end’

Two things can be deduced from these gestures. The fact that Michelle raises her head and opens her eyes wider shows how she suddenly becomes more involved in the conversation. In Section 3 of this article, I quoted Sacks who said that the teller of a narrative has to show his/her involvement in the story and this is what Michelle does here. The eyes opened wider also tell that what she has to say is going to be ‘interesting’ or ‘surprising’, because this is the kind of gesture one makes when faced to something interesting or surprising. In this sense then, Michelle anticipates gesturally what is coming next, also giving a modality to the narrative (e.g. some kind of *preface*, or some kind of pre-evaluation of the narrative). Her involvement is also shown in the fact that she continues gazing at Zoe all through this orientation unit, and even at the beginning of the complication section. In other parts of the conversation (except questions and narratives), when a speaker takes the turn, she shifts her gaze away from her partner (see note 4). In addition, I found that Michelle does not look at her partner much, even when she is listening to her. It then appears particularly informative that she does in this very case.

The index pointing has another role in this section. It is used as an anaphoric gesture that makes a link between this narrative and Zoe’s preceding turn. Zoe has mentioned the title of the film and its director whereas Michelle’s clause is elliptic. So this orientation clause is rather compact since the link between the narrative and the preceding context is expressed gesturally as well as the preface. What the speech does through the ellipsis is only telling that the film introduced by Zoe is going to be the topic of Michelle’s narrative.

Then, during the complication section until the climax, Michelle shifts her gaze and head away from Zoe. Otherwise, she makes no interactive or evaluative gesture at all as is shown in Figure 4 below:



Figure 4: Speaker (Michelle) uttering “I came back from my kickboxing class and I put the telly on and I thought”

The shifting of head direction is more a gesture of discourse organization than a partner-oriented gesture as it anticipates the speech to come. Indeed, McClave (2001) makes the following observation concerning reported speech: ‘When American speakers shift from indirect to direct discourse, they simultaneously change their head position. . . . These head movements are often subtle and abbreviated.’ (p. 62). I noted in my corpus however that the two British speakers may introduce reported speech with a shift of head direction, as is the case here, but reported speech is often only noted by a shift of gaze direction, the head of the speaker remaining in rest position.¹² So, in order to be able to shift her head and gaze direction in what will be her reported thought in the apex of the narrative, Michelle has to move her head and gaze first. This is a means of distinguishing the shift of enunciative levels but is also a means of distinguishing two syntactic clauses and in these terms, gestures are precisely timed with speech.

Now we come to the apex of the narrative (unit 4) consisting of the reported speech itself. As shown in Figure 5, and as I just explained above, the head and gaze direction shift to the left whereas they had been previously oriented to the right. Michelle is still not gazing at Zoe yet, she makes two partner-oriented gestures in this narrative unit: firstly she raises her brows on “wahey”, then she slightly inclines her head while smiling on the rest of the apex. Both gestures show some evaluation of the events reported in the narrative. The first reaction (raised eyebrows) is one of surprise as it doesn’t happen that often that a British film is shown on the French television, and the second reaction (smile) is one of pleasure (Bouvet 2001).

Just after the apex, Michelle looks back at Zoe again. What is interesting to note is how quickly Zoe gets the point of the narrative: just after Michelle has uttered “wahey”,

¹²It is interesting to note that in French Sign Language, reported speech is separated from the verb introducing it in a much more marked way since the trunk (and hence the head and gaze) shifts slightly to the right or the left, thus assigning some spatial reference to the different ‘enunciators’, to which the speaker then comes back in the reporting of a complex dialogue (see Cuxac 2000: 83-86, a series of drawings representing the speaker of his corpus reporting speech).



Figure 5: Speaker (Michelle) uttering the apex of the narrative “wahey an English film” (first two pictures) and reaction of listener (Zoe, last picture) to the narrative

Zoe proposes an end to the narrative that overlaps Michelle’s ending with “it’s in English” and that has the same semantic content. Such overlaps are explained by Coates (1997) as showing the partner’s involvement in the conversation, as a way of co-constructing a turn. After this, Zoe laughs thus proposing an evaluation of the narrative. Zoe also shows her interest in Michelle’s narrative in the fact that she gazes at Michelle all through the narrative. One must note however that she makes two *self-centered* gestures (scratches her nose and then replaces hair) during the narrative and that these gestures can sometimes be a sign of poor listener involvement (as I will show in Section 4.4) but this is not the case here although it is worth noting that the gestures were initiated by Zoe just as Michelle stopped gazing at her.¹³

To sum up what I have observed so far on this example before moving to other examples from my corpus, I can say that I first observed two characteristics of narratives at the prosodic level. The first characteristic concerns the intensity trace which has a particular shape in the case of narratives: it may have high or average values at the beginning of the narrative, but the trace is then decreasing until we reach the apex. In case the orientation and complication sections preceding the apex are quite long, intensity may be reset at some point between the beginning of the narrative and the apex, but even so, it doesn’t reach the higher intensity range of the speaker and the overall shape of the curve is still decreasing. The apex is then uttered with very high intensity values (in the higher intensity range of the speaker) and the intensity is kept in this high range throughout all the utterance of the apex, which is not pronounced with a decreasing intensity. I will show later that when the narrative contains an evaluation unit after the apex, this is again uttered with lower intensity values and the intensity trace is decreasing as it was at the beginning of the narrative.

¹³‘Self-centered gestures’ has been translated from Cosnier, Berrendonner, Coulon & Orecchioni (1982)’s *gestes autocentrés*, which is also found in Traverso (1999: 16).

The second prosodic characteristic I observed concerned speech rate. The beginning of the narrative starts at an average or fast speech rate, this depending on whether the speaker feels confident in keeping the turn or not. In the orientation and complication sections preceding the apex, the speech rate is usually variable between fast and average, depending again on the length of the sections, but the important point is that speech rate suddenly increases in the clause immediately preceding the apex, which, on the contrary, is uttered at a much slower speech rate than the beginning of the narrative. Again, I will show that when the narrative contains an evaluation clause, speech usually comes back to a normal or average rate after the apex.

These two prosodic characteristics are almost invariably present in narratives, or at least one of them is present. In the example I just described, I showed that the fundamental frequency was also used by the speaker to discriminate the apex from the rest of the narrative but this is far from being a regularity in the other examples in my corpus. In fact, example (4) contains an exclamation and the F_0 variation is precisely made on this exclamation so it may well be linked to the exclamation itself rather than to the apex of the narrative. It is worth noting though that semantically speaking, exclamations of this kind seem to be more appropriate in the apex than in any other part of the narrative.

At the gestural level, regularities can also be found. As was the case in example (4), the speaker is most of the time gazing at the listener at the beginning of her narrative whereas in other contexts in the corpus, the speaker is usually not gazing at her partner. Gaze may be turned away from the listener in certain parts of the narrative, as was the case here when it served to indicate the different voices in reported speech, but I noticed that mutual gaze is more present throughout the narrative and especially during the apex. I see mutual gaze as a partner-oriented attitude since it is also used in other contexts such as questions, which may be considered as one of the most partner-oriented speech act. Other partner-oriented gestures are used as well during narratives, and especially during the apex: smiles and raised brows. Generally, I found that in my corpus, raised brows are used to stress some element of speech — they typically accompany intensifiers as for instance when Zoe quickly raised her brows twice on the word “worst” in the following utterance: “that would have been the *worst* thing in the world”. It is besides interesting to note that raised brows are most of the time used by the speaker in questions, just as mutual gaze.

The gestures just described show the speaker’s involvement in her narrative but another characteristic of narratives is that the listener also plays a role in them, as she must show more involvement than in other parts of the conversation as well. The listener’s involvement appears in the fact that she is gazing at the speaker all through the narrative as well as in her responses to the narrative which may be gestural and/or verbal. This means she laughs if the narrative is funny, generally just smiles to show understanding and may add a verbal evaluation of the narrative.

4.2 Pragmatic, intonational and gestural analysis of a more complex narrative

I would now like to have a look in a rather more detailed fashion at two narratives in order to corroborate the fact that intonation and gestures align to the different sections of the narrative, making them clearer to the listener.

(5) Zoe: Josselin (16.32 s)

| | | |
|---|--|--------------|
| 1 | I didn't ever leave Josselin | Orientation |
| 2 | there was no like public transport noise | Orientation |
| 3 | and I left well <u>I went</u> | Complication |
| | <u>joking</u> {0,509} | Evaluation |
| 4 | it was awful | Evaluation |
| 5 | I went there was a bus to Rennes uh at about | Orientation |
| | {0,677} seven o'clock in the morning | |
| 6 | and one that arrived back around seven o'clock in | Orientation |
| | the evening | |
| 7 | so you couldn't like just rely on that | Complication |
| 8 | cos you'd have to spending like entirely the whole | Complication |
| | day there {0,721} | |
| 9 | (h) it was just awful | Evaluation |

In this narrative, Zoe is telling Michelle about some dreadful experience she had when she went to Brittany some years before the recording for her year of study abroad. The narrative is about the fact that she was staying in a very small town called Josselin at the time and buses to the nearest larger town, Rennes, were rare so she could hardly leave the school at all. I will show that it has quite a complex structure, but this structure is corroborated by prosody and gestures as well.

Zoe starts with a first orientation unit (unit 1). Josselin is old information since it has already been mentioned twice before in the conversation. When Michelle was telling about her own experiences as a language assistant in French schools, Zoe started to make comparisons with her experience in Josselin. So the first orientation unit refers to what has already been told as well as to what the present narrative is going to be about: Zoe's experience as a language assistant, a topic that is mainly the same as the one developed by Michelle before. The second orientation unit's role (unit 2) is to specify what this narrative is going to be about: "transport". There is no more explicit link to the preceding context.

She then starts a complication clause (unit 3) that is interrupted by Michelle who proposes an early evaluation of the orientation. This evaluation is immediately followed

words “ever leave” is the preface of the narrative. It gives the narrative its modality: Zoe is going to tell something negative, a bad experience. The other two headshakes (b and c) are the threads of the narrative, emphasizing this negative aspect. Emphasis also appears in the fact that Zoe uses the intrusive focalisation marker “like” (Underhill 1988) before the topic of the narrative “public transport”, which is also modulated with a rise-fall intonation pattern. Cruttenden (1997) describes the rise-fall as ‘a tone frequently used to reinforce irony...; adjectives like *brilliant*, *clever*, *splendid* are frequently used with a rise-fall to comment on a situation which is actually a disaster in the speaker’s view.’ (p. 105) In this utterance there is no particular irony on the part of Zoe and “public transport” doesn’t carry any appraisal in itself but the use of this particular intonation pattern on it may well carry a sense of ‘disaster’ in Zoe’s view, that is an intonational evaluation. The headshake then appears again on the evaluation clause produced by Zoe (d): on the last syllable of “it was awful”. I will show that examining the second part of the narrative, the same headshake is used by Zoe on the whole evaluation clause (unit 9). These two last occurrences show us that the headshake is strongly linked to the evaluation and this in turn shows us that there is evaluation in the orientation section.

The third line reports the body orientation of the speaker. It shows us three phases in this beginning: an initial phase during which Zoe leans towards her partner. This is the same as what Goodwin found in a narrative he reported and that he explains in the following way:

With this posture the speaker displays full orientation towards her addressed recipient, complete engagement in the telling of her story, and lack of involvement in any activities other than conversation.

(Goodwin 1984: 228)

The second move accompanies the change in orientation (unit 2): the speaker is not now oriented to the preceding context offered by her partner, but to her own narrative. While the first body posture was partner-oriented, this body shift is rather speaker-oriented as Zoe is building up her narrative. The posture ends after Michelle’s remark and remains in a rest position until the end of the narrative. In terms of timing, you will notice that there is a slight delay between the beginning of clause 1 and the shift of body orientation, and that this same delay appears at the beginning of clause 2. I don’t know the reason for this but I have often noticed in my corpus this sort of delay between the beginning of a clause and a shift of the speaker’s body, a delay that doesn’t appear for other gestures (see for instance how a head shake can be quite synchronized with a negation marker).

4.2.2 Second part of the narrative

If we now turn to the second part of the narrative, we will see that the prosodic pattern is very close to that of the first part and that some gestural elements are also recurrent. I will not give a full transcription of the gestures of the speaker since it would be too long but will describe them as clearly as possible. I give the intensity curves and some pictures of the speaker at the end of this section, to give a better idea of the different sections.

So after Michelle's interruption and her own evaluation, Zoe resumes the narrative. She is about to continue her aborted complication clause, repeating "I went", but apparently changes her mind and instead offers two new orientation clauses (units 5 and 6) or one new orientation section.¹⁴ She then starts the complication process (unit 7) and this time is not interrupted by her friend so there is an apex (unit 8), or a *climax*, as Goodwin states it (1984: 226) and at last another evaluation clause (unit 9). Let's see what happens in the prosody and the gestures.

At the beginning of the new orientation section (units 5 and 6), there is some hesitation, which explains the long "to" and the fact that Zoe frowns as well on "bus". Her rate of speech is slow but then coming back to faster tempo with a rate of 4.9 syll/s (end of unit 5). Her voice loudness is very high since Michelle had just interrupted her before and she wanted to finish her narrative.

The dramatic intensity of the narrative then increases with a rate of speech of 6.7 syll/s (unit 6). This rate of speech reaches 8.2 syll/s (unit 7) just before the climax "cos you'd have to spending like entirely the whole day there". This means Zoe increased her speech rate very quickly, so she could then differentiate the climax (unit 8) which is pronounced at a much slower rate of speech of 6.1 syll/s and only 5.4 syll/s on the evaluation (unit 9). In this particular example, she does not speak louder on the climax, but that is due to the fact that there was a fight for the turn at the beginning as well as an interruption. I did find this differentiation as well in other cases as in example (4).

At the beginning of the orientation section (unit 5) Zoe is looking at Michelle. However, she starts to look away from her from "bus", probably because of the hesitation I mentioned above and then avoids Michelle's gaze, shifting her own gaze direction from time to time (see Figure 7 (a)). She only directs her gaze towards Michelle again at the end of the orientation section on "seven" and it remains oriented towards Michelle during the first complication clause, in which dramatic intensity is increasing. That is when she initiates a hand rotation that will last to the end of the phase (see Figure 7 (b)).

¹⁴I was not totally certain here that these two clauses formed one or two units: nothing separates them at the gestural level, e.g. no shift of gaze direction for example, but at the intonational level, there are two tone units each uttered with a falling intonation. I should add that the orientation as regards context is the same in the two clauses. This however does not have too great an impact on the structural analysis, the important point being that Zoe resumes her narrative with an orientation section.

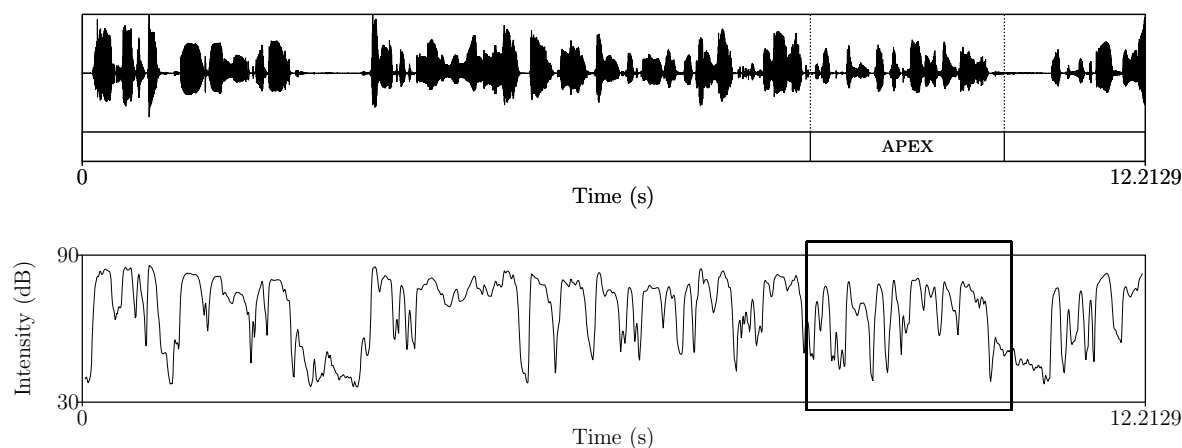


Figure 6: Intensity curve of the second part of the narrative (in dB). The part in the rectangle corresponds to the climax of the narrative and is not uttered with a higher voice intensity

But it is on the climax that Zoe becomes particularly lively: directly from the previous hand rotation gesture, she suddenly opens her hand and keeps it in this position till the end of the climax. Both intensifiers (“entirely” and “whole”) are accompanied by raised eyebrows and Zoe nods on “entirely” as well. She smiles during the whole climax (see Figure 7 (c)).

As soon as the climax is finished, Zoe looks away again from Michelle, stops smiling and puts her hand back to its rest position (see Figure 7 (d)). I have said that the negative appraisal is also accompanied by a headshake that was projected at the very beginning of the narrative. Richard Ogden (personal communication) notes that narratives’ climax ‘were lexically designed as some kind of extreme formulation which contributes to the complainable aspects of the story’. This means that although the formulation “entirely the whole day” may be redundant syntactically speaking, it has an effect on the dramatic intensity of the narrative. This and various other processes are used by both speakers to achieve a good dramatic intensity in the climax. They use lots of intensifiers, but also alliterations (Ferré 2004a) as in “that would have been the worst thing in the world” or in “it was as if it was gonna leap off the wall and like latch itself onto my leg”,¹⁵ but also lexical overstatements as in “she felt really awful and I felt extra awful” (Ferré 2004b) or repetitions. Figure 7 shows the speaker during the different sections of this part in the narrative.

4.3 How to determine the climax of a narrative

I would now like to come back to example (1). I then proposed that the prosody and gestural attitude of the speaker could help us determine what was the climax of this

¹⁵This alliteration was pointed out by R. Ogden.



Figure 7: Facial expression of the speaker during the four phases of the narrative (part 2)

narrative. So I will give a more detailed analysis of it. In Section 4.1 I showed that the climax is pronounced at a slower rate of speech in most narratives. Also the climax is generally uttered with higher voice intensity, although this was not quite the case in example (5), and that it is accompanied with more partner-oriented gestures than the rest of the narrative. The example is reproduced below:

(6) Michelle: La Rochelle (13.83 s)

*so you did the kind of thing that Vicki's doing this
year {0,411}*

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | yeah LAUGH I got the train {0,648} (h) straight | Orientation |
| | after my hem {0,134} last lesson on Friday | |
| 2 | hopped on the train {0,898} | Complication |

| | | |
|---|--|--------------|
| 3 | and then Monday morning got up at five | Complication |
| 4 | and I got the six o'clock train to be back at nine {0,241} for my ten o'clock class so that {0,563} | Complication |
| 5 | (h) god {0,621} nearly killed me <i>LAUGH</i> | Evaluation |

Michelle starts her narrative at a slow rate of speech on the orientation section (unit 1) with 3.98 syll/s, although her average speech rate is rather slower than that of Zoe so it can't be compared to the preceding example. It then rises slightly to reach 4.31 syll/s on unit 2, slows down very slightly for the climax (unit 3) with 4.03 syll/s and is then very fast on the following section (unit 4) with 6.65 syll/s. At last, it comes back to 3.78 syll/s on the evaluation (unit 5). We can say however that the slowing down by only 0.3 syll/s between units 2 and 3 is too small to be considered a perceptible marker of the climax, which is nonetheless distinguished from what follows. The climax is however mainly distinguished from the rest of the narrative by the voice intensity of the speaker as was the case in example (4).

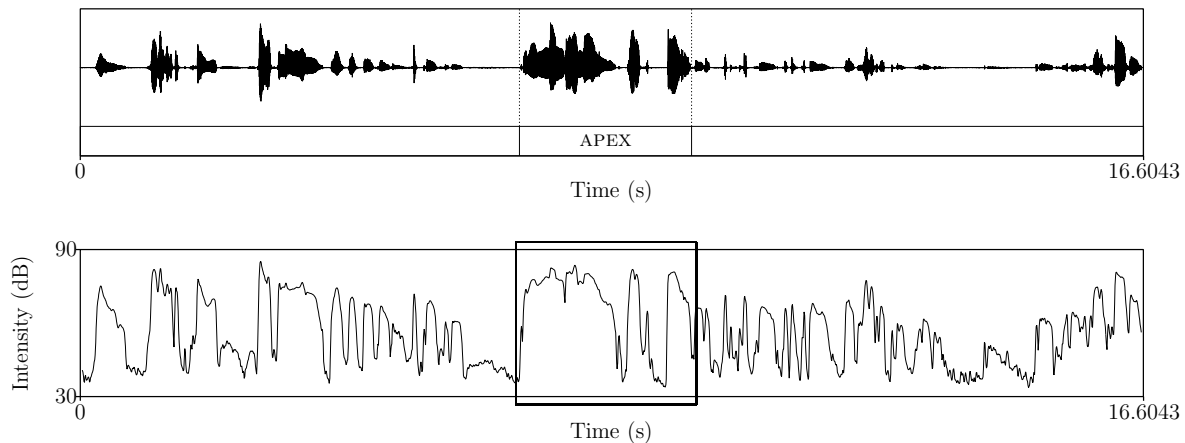


Figure 8: Voice intensity (in dB) of the speaker during the whole narrative. The section inside the rectangle corresponds to the climax of the narrative

Figure 8 shows Michelle's voice intensity during the production of the whole narrative. The section inside the rectangle is the climax. Now if we look at the whole intensity curve, one can see one peak of intensity in the part preceding the climax, which corresponds to the utterance of "straight", but one also notices that the curve then really decreases and reaches low values and indeed, when one listens to the recording, one hears that "hopped on the train" ends in what could almost be called a whisper in the lay understanding. The intensity then increases to reach high values again on the climax and is sustained until Michelle reaches the end of the climax. The rest of the narrative is uttered with much lower intensity as well as what preceded the climax and again, "so that" is pronounced voicelessly. What appears from the global shape of the intensity curve is that the climax is made to sound more prominent than any other part of the narrative by the use of a very

quiet voice around it. I should point out that this phenomenon can't be explained by an effect of voice resetting.¹⁶ I am also conscious that intensity measurements can be quite tricky, since a difference in intensity values can be due to a slight movement of the head but I still think that intensity is used by speakers to differentiate between different parts in a narrative and this can be heard by listeners. A similar remark has been made by Candea and Lefevre (2004) who showed that voice intensity could be used by speakers to highlight semantic intensity (for instance, intensifiers) in their speech in fairy tales told by teenagers in the French class. Although these were not personal narratives, some of the aims between telling a tale and telling a personal narrative are just the same, for instance 'tell something interesting' (Sacks 1995: 226, Vol.2).

Let's now turn to the gestures made by Michelle during this narrative. She doesn't look at Zoe at all until she reaches the end of the narrative, which is quite a particularity of this speaker. At the very beginning of the orientation unit, just after answering Zoe's question with "yeah", Michelle has a short burst of laughter. This I think doesn't preface the narrative as a funny story, but is probably due to Zoe's question itself. It appears in context that Michelle and Zoe have a poor opinion of Vicky. So the laughter in this narrative may have a connection with the fact that in her question, Zoe makes a comparison between Michelle and Vicky. This is also corroborated by the fact that while laughing, Michelle's body goes slightly backwards as if something she didn't like was in front of her. Apart from this short burst of laughter, nothing happens until the climax.

In the climax, Michelle smiles on "morning" but all the action really takes places on the nucleus syllable "five": the word lasts 0.546 s, that is a longer duration than other instances of words with the same phonemic weight (notwithstanding the fact that it is situated at the end of a syntactic clause where word duration is supposed to be longer). The closure phase of [f] is extremely long and accompanied by a very tense mouth closure, as well as a tight closure of the eyes. The speaker also frowns on this particular word showing some very negative evaluation of what she had to do then (wake up very early). This is shown in the series of pictures in Figure 9 representing the word "five".

It is also interesting to note that the strong emphasis appears at the beginning of the word "five" and not at the end: the closure of the voiceless fricative appears on 8 or 9 images, whereas the closure on its voiced counterpart at the end of the syllable is shown on only 2 images.¹⁷ This closure is also less tense.

As soon as the climax is over Michelle's head bends down and she looks downwards showing that she is not concerned with her partner anymore. She gazes back at Zoe

¹⁶This cannot be the case here since we can see plainly that there is no resetting after the climax, the intensity curve assuming quite a reverse shape of increasing values, and that the climax itself is not uttered with a decreasing intensity. Besides, voice intensity just before the climax is very low even for the end of an utterance.

¹⁷The film showed 24 images per second.



Figure 9: The different phases of the utterance of “five” in the climax of the narrative

towards the end of her speech turn on “killed” in the evaluation anticipating the actual end of the turn. It is however interesting to note that the gaze returning is produced precisely on “killed”. Although the phrase is quite common in English, it is another example of extreme formulation.

Considering all these parameters: rate of speech, intensity, interactive gesturing, then there can be no doubt as to what the climax of the narrative is. The reason why Michelle added another complication unit after the climax was that she probably intended to develop another narrative in a cluster but was cut short by Zoe and moved quickly to the evaluation clause.

4.4 When a narrative fails to reach its intended aim

To begin with, what is the aim of a personal narrative in a conversation? Sacks mentions the fact that a narrative is supposed to be ‘something interesting’ (1995: 226, Vol. 2) but the question remains: What makes a narrative interesting? Coates, who has worked much on conversations between women, says that when ‘women friends meet and talk, they tell each other stories about their own experience and the experience of others’ (1997: 55)

and that the main characteristic of their talk is that it is produced as an entertainment which has two roles:

The main goal of talk-at-play is the construction and maintenance of good social relations, not the exchange of information [...] The second goal of talk-at-play is that participants should enjoy themselves. The fun of talk arises as much from *how* things are said as from *what* is said.

(Coates 1997: 85)

Now, if the aim of a personal narrative is to be interesting and fun, as well as to help maintain good social relationships, it seems to me that the listener's attitude must show that it has reached its aim in some way, which was Sacks' point of view: 'Recipient of a story has as one business to display his understanding of it ... and/or affiliate to it by showing its particular relevance to him ... Another form involves recipient telling a second story, in which recipient figures as teller had figured.' (1978: 261). This was apparently also the opinion of Goodwin (1984) since in his article he focused mainly on the listeners' gestures during the production of a narrative. Clues to the listener's interest in the speaker's narrative are varied: laughter or verbal evaluation, gaze oriented towards the speaker, non involvement in any other activity than the listening to the narrative as suggested by Goodwin or even I should say starting a narrative in a round of narratives, e.g. a narrative with a topic which is more or less similar to the preceding one.

Although this is quite rare in my data, there are a few narratives that seem to fail to reach the goals mentioned above in that the listener doesn't react in the usual way. One of them is the following. Michelle is telling a narrative concerning British boys on their year of study abroad who don't make much effort to meet any French people, which according to the two girls is a total waste of time.

(7) Michelle: Flatmates (9.98 s)

| | | |
|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | (h) who was it I bumped into | Orientation |
| 2 | I bumped into someone | Orientation |
| 3 | who said how's it going on in your halls | Complication |
| 4 | and like (h) {0,462} well {0,614} I never see any of my French people {0,115} my French hem flatmates | Complication |
| 5 | they never talk to me you know | Coda |
| 6 | I said well | Evaluation |

It first needs to be mentioned that although the narrative may appear to be incomplete at the end, the impression is different when watching the video. Michelle pouts at the

end of unit 6, just after “well”, thus meaning that she didn’t know what to answer the boy. The narrative is also quite finished if one considers the preceding context with which it fits well and supplies an example of boys who “don’t make any effort to meet other people”, although that is only implicit here.

That the narrative missed its goal yet appears in the fact that although Zoe is looking at Michelle all through the narrative, she produces two *self-centered* gestures (replaces hair and scratches her cheek) during the orientation section (units 1 and 2). Besides, she produces no verbal or gestural appraisal of the narrative and as soon as Michelle reaches the end, Zoe comes up with “What halls? Were you in halls?” which seems to show that she has been listening up to a certain point (“halls” were mentioned by Michelle in clause 3 of the narrative) and focused on that point to come back to it as soon as Michelle has finished. It must be mentioned that she doesn’t interrupt her friend which could be interpreted either as ‘she is interested in listening to the narrative to the end’ or ‘she is not getting herself involved in the narrative’ or not trying to construct a ‘collaborative floor’ (Coates 1997) as she sometimes does in other narratives told by Michelle. So we may wonder what failed in this narrative for it to achieve its goal.

Michelle starts the narrative at a quite high speech rate of 6.76 and 7.2 syll/s on the two orientation clauses respectively (units 1 and 2). It then slows down a bit but remains high enough with 6.8 syll/s on the first complication unit (unit 3). The climax is uttered at a speech rate of 4.9 syll/s (unit 4). The speech rate then increases to 7.4 syll/s on the coda (unit 5) and 8.65 syll/s on the evaluation (unit 6). So in this respect, the pattern is respected. In terms of voice intensity however, there is no distinction between the different sections of the narrative, but I have shown in example (4) that this in itself does not make a bad narrative.

So there must be something in the gestures that makes the narrative work not as well as it could have been. At the beginning, Michelle is not gazing at Zoe and she turns her head to the left through all the orientation section and the beginning of the first complication unit. The gesture may be associated with the fact that she tries to remember the person she met (this also appears in her slight frown on “who”). Her head comes back to its rest position just after “who said” and it has been noted in Section 4.1 that such changes of head direction serve to differentiate reported speech from the verb introducing it. But, from the first “bumped” until just after “I never see” her body is leaning backwards on her seat back and she is engaged into two self-centered gestures in a row: first she replaces her hair at the back of her head and then keeps her hand behind the back of her head, as if resting her head on it. The first self-centered gesture may be seen as an echo of Zoe’s gesture.¹⁸ She is gazing at Zoe during the first part of the climax

¹⁸This has been the topic of a communication with C. Collin, A. Croll & A. Mettouchi, ‘Mimetism in Oral Interactions’, at the Conference *Language, Culture and Mind* held in Portsmouth in July 2004. The paper should come out soon.

but doesn't look at Zoe anymore on the last part of it. On "you know" she orients both gaze and head downwards and leans back on her seat again and stays in this position until the end of the narrative. There is only one gesture that may show some evaluation: Michelle pouts in unit 4 just after "well". This gesture means that she didn't know what to say then, but that was partly because she disapproved of the attitude of the boy.

So what this narrative shows in fact seems to be some lack of involvement on the part of the speaker who is not orienting enough towards her partner as well as some lack of evaluation. It is then not really surprising that the listener doesn't feel involved as well and does not react to the narrative itself, although this doesn't cause any disruption in the interaction.

5 Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that the segmentation of narratives made by discourse analysts was indeed corroborated by a prosodic and gestural analysis of the examples. The *orientation* of the narrative is generally doubly-oriented: one of the orientation units makes a link to the preceding context and the actual narrative whereas the second part of this section, when there is one, is rather oriented towards the new narrative itself, setting the place, characters, time, etc. It contains a preface, but in such a conversation as the one I recorded, this preface is not a clause that announces the narrative but rather the expression of a modality that will give the tone of the whole narrative. This modality is then usually uttered again at the end of the narrative in the evaluation section. It may be expressed verbally and/or with gestures in the orientation. Acoustically speaking, it stands in the background, that is it is not distinguished from other parts in the conversation. However, what distinguishes it from the rest of the narrative is that it is regulated by speech turn rules when the narrative occurs at the beginning of a turn: higher voice intensity as well as faster speech rate without any silent pause in the orientation section in case the teller fears she could lose the floor. Gaze and head direction may follow conversational rules (turning away from the listener at the beginning of the turn), but I have seen that it is often oriented towards the partner at the beginning of narratives, thus making the interaction (seen in terms of the enunciative side of speech) prevail over the organization of discourse.

Once the speaker is quite established in her narrative and her right to finish it, she may add a section that is called '*complicating action*'. This section may be shorter or longer, but the most frequent pattern here is that rate of speech is increasing or maintained at a high rate all through this section while voice intensity is on the contrary decreasing. It is also towards the end of this section that the speaker turns her gaze towards her partner if she was not looking at her before. Gazing at the partner while telling her narrative may however be quite speaker specific, since one of the speakers in my corpus does it

very rarely, although this is not in accordance with what I have observed in my everyday interactions, and not in accordance either with other studies. During this section, the speaker creates semantic suspense while adding information little by little. The section is not always present though: there are narratives that come directly to the point.

The point of the narrative, also called *apex* or *climax*, is made salient at all levels. Semantically, it is supposed to contain the most important information in the narrative. Acoustically, it is differentiated from the other sections of the narrative especially through the use of a different tempo: it is usually uttered at a much slower speech rate than the rest of the narrative. This is indeed quite consistent with other such findings; I found in my thesis that when a speaker wants to make a part of speech more prominent then she speaks more slowly as in cases of focalisation for instance (see Ferré 2003, 2004a). Most of the time, but this is not always the case, the speaker has louder voice intensity on this particular part of the narrative. As far as gestures are concerned, it is usually during the climax that the speaker is the most active. Whereas the rest of the narrative is rather quiet, several gestures suddenly appear at the same time on the climax. Most of these gestures are partner-oriented and often propose a gestural evaluation to the partner of the interaction, like smiles when the narrative is funny, head shakes when the speaker tells something terrible, frowns when she makes a negative judgment of the characters involved, raised eyebrows for something out of the ordinary, etc... These gestures are most of the time answered verbally in an echo fashion by the partner in the evaluation section. At the lexical level, the climax is very often expressed with highly dramatic words: either words that are semantically stronger than what is meant by the speaker or through the use of e.g. intensifiers, alliterations, etc.

The narrative may contain a *coda*, which was not often the case in the narratives in my corpus. I see the coda as some part of the narrative that comes as an anti-climax to the preceding section. Acoustically, tempo comes back to normal, and voice intensity is much lower if intensity is used as a clue to differentiating the climax. The speaker returns to a quieter state and most gestures just stop.

Part of this anti-climax is the *evaluation* section. It has the same acoustic and gestural features as the coda, although the evaluation may be expressed gesturally as well by a head shake for instance. What's interesting though is that the evaluation may be produced by the teller of the narrative or the partner, or even by both. In funny narratives, most of the time, the only evaluation offered is the laughter of the partner. It is important though since it shows that the narrative has reached its goal as it was supposed to be a funny narrative. The role of laughter at the end of a funny narrative is to show that the narrative is over. Funny personal narratives can then be compared to jokes at the end of which laughter is also expected, as 'after a story appreciation is immediately relevant' (Levinson 1983: 328). Being most of the time an echo of a preceding smile, laughter gives the narrative its unity. The fact that the evaluation may be produced by the partner also

shows that telling a narrative is a deeply interactive activity: although only one person tells the narrative, both partners play a role in it. It is therefore not surprising that narratives that don't show enough interactive gestures fail to achieve their goal.

As a last remark I will say that some speakers tend to be more expressive than others, as Zellner-Keller (2003) puts it, and that poor story tellers could be those who fail in making a clear distinction between the different sections of their narrative, not being able to play with tempo and intensity changes of their own speech or to show enough interaction with their listeners. This tentative hypothesis would be an interesting point to develop in further studies.

Appendix: Transcription conventions

| | |
|------------------|--|
| { } | silent pause in seconds |
| (h) | audible breathing |
| <i>italics</i> | speech produced by partner |
| SMALL CAPS | laughter, coughs, noise in the recording... |
| <u>underline</u> | the syllables underlined are produced by the 2 speakers at the same time |
| ⇔ | head negation gesture |

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