1

Eliciting and Analyzing Personal Narratives

We begin our book on narrative and culture with an oral personal narrative from a 7- year-old Haitian girl (collected, transcribed, and given to the senior author by Yvanne Colinet). She narrated in English because she speaks primarily English. However, she also speaks Creole and a little French, as is typical for Haitian American children. We will call her Michele, though that is not her real name. This narrative is from our personal collection and was offered in the context of a conversation that had included several of our standard prompts but in this case was offered spontaneously.[1]

> (1) Once the crossing guard—you know the crossing guard? (2) (He) lets the stop sign for the bus. (3) The bus has it too. (4) Once he said, "Watch out for the worm!" (5) And there was no worm. (6) Once, you know when it was pouring yesterday, there was so many worms I kept on screaming for real. (6) So, it can get washed off. (7) But I like, "Ewww." (8) There was so many worms. (9) There was a worm in front of me. (10) There was a worm right there (gestures). (11) There was worm right here. (12) There was a hundred worm. (13) And when the kids came out, they said, "I never saw a hundred worm before." (14) It was a lot of worms. (15) When they dig up the ground—I don't know where those worms come from. (16) But the worm don't come from that ground. (17) And it maybe come from somewhere else. (18) It was on floor. (19) It was on the street. (20) It was on the street where, oh my goodness, I was like "Eww,eww,eww,eww,eww,eww!" (21) Once this boy, he said, "There was it was this worm that it was it was it could have—it's not a worm. (22) It evolve into, um yeah. (23) And oh this is pink. (24) This is pink. (25) Pink is my favorite color. (26) And my friend, and he said never saw that once there was so many worms. (27) And there was worms on the street. (28) And there was worm everywhere. (29) There was worms right there, right there, and right there.

[1]Here and throughout most of the manuscript we have chosen to display narratives in paragraph form to capture the flow of real discourse rather than to list sentences comprising them.

This is a truly hilarious narrative about an experience many of us have had but few have thought to tell about: finding all the worms out, drowned, on the pavement in the springtime. This narrative is a clear account of a specific past experience that is not a typical English-speaking child's narrative (Peterson & McCabe, 1983). No goals, no motivations here, and yet she tells a vibrant narrative in the following ways:

- Vivid description of the worms—how many they were, the fact that they were her favorite color, pink—is provided at the outset and throughout.
- She seeks confirmation that the listener understands about the crossing guard.
- She elaborates her points in such a way that most listeners have to laugh.
- She quotes herself, the crossing guard, other kids, a boy, and her friend, and the use of such reported speech makes a narrative especially vivid.
- She speculates about where all the worms came from and starts to repeat something she has heard about evolution; Michele stops perhaps because she has forgotten the full account of how some "worms" (really caterpillars) "evolve" into butterflies, which is an opportunity for a teacher, parent, or pathologist to provide her with that information again.
- Evaluation pervades the narrative (e.g., "so many worms I kept on screaming for real").
- The repetition and variation of the refrain, "There was worms," is an extremely effective narrative mnemonic device. Several years from now, most listeners/readers will remember the story about all the worms.

We begin with this narrative for a number of reasons. First of all, professionals who look at Michele and hear her speak might jump to the conclusion that the chapter on African American narration in this book would be relevant to understanding whether aspects of her narration are culturally determined. They would be mistaken. Although English is one of her two first languages, Michele's language background and cultural values are Haitian. Her mother was born and raised in Haiti and is Michele's first and most important linguistic influence. She would be an invaluable resource for professionals seeking to work with Michele. What we have to say about African American children whose families have been in the United States for centuries is not relevant to Michele. Thus, the first concern we have is that professionals do not make assumptions about culture. They need to seek information about a person's cultural background to determine whether culture is relevant, and how culture might be relevant for the particular speaker in question.

Definitions

Narrative

Narrative is a type of discourse that usually concerns real or imagined memories of something that happened and therefore is often largely told in the past tense (McCabe, 1991). However, there are also hypothetical, future-tense narratives and others given in the historical present. Sometimes events are broadcast as they occur (e.g., sportscasts). Narratives often contain a chronological sequence of events, but

one can also find narratives that contain only a single event or those that skip around in time. Although there are musical, pictorial, and silently dramatic narratives, the narratives that will concern us in this book are a kind of language (McCabe, 1991). Narrative is a level of language expertise that is distinct from syntactic, semantic, and phonological levels. That is, atypically developing children's expertise in narrative does not correlate with measures of syntactic and morphological complexity or size of receptive vocabulary (Hemphill, Uccelli, Winner, & Chang, 2002).

Coherence

Coherence is a judgment we make, formally or informally, about how well put together a piece of discourse is. A narrative is coherent if it is "composed of relevant turns that are thematically related" (Gleason & Ratner, 1998, p. G3). The general judgment of coherence involves several specific dimensions, which we will attempt to specify in the instrument we will present in this book, the narrative assessment profile.

Types of Discourse and Narrative

We will consider this topic in detail in Chapter 7. However, some mention of the variety of discourse needs to be made here. Movie and story retellings, spontaneous fiction in response to story stems, and personal narratives are the major types of narrative that have been explored in research and practice with children and adults. Narrative discourse has received most attention; oral expository or explanatory discourse has received relatively scant attention, though some have considered it (e.g., Beals & Snow, 1994). In fact, this latter type of discourse has received so much less attention than narrative that it is called various names. For example, Bruner (1986) called such logical and scientific description and explanation *paradigmatic* thinking.

In this book, we will focus on the realm of personal narratives because these narratives are relevant to individuals of all ages. They are a means of connecting to other people around us. The extent to which we know another person's important life stories is a pretty good gauge of our intimacy with that person.

Narratives serve many other functions, some of which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2. Most important among such functions is that narratives enable us to *make sense of our experience.* To understand this better, imagine that you have just had a car accident. The first time somebody asks you what happened, you will be likely to tell a disjointed, somewhat incoherent account of the event. After you have told the story to a number of supportive listeners who have asked questions about the parts you left out, your account will improve in coherence. And you will feel that you really know what happened.

When we tell narratives of personal experience—the genre that we primarily focus on in this book—we also *represent ourselves* in a particular light. That is, we show ourselves to be victims or responsible human beings, jokesters, scoundrels, heros, or a little of all of these. We often alter our representation of ourselves when, for example, telling about an experience to a parent versus a friend.

Narratives are very important in our education as children and adults. Narratives are a memorable way of *making the past present* (O'Brien, 1990) or the abstract

concrete. In Chapter 2, we will go into detail about the important role narrative plays in becoming literate. Preschool children are in the process of developing oral narrative skills, a critical prerequisite for literacy. In early elementary school years, personal narrative is a frequent writing assignment ("Write about one important event that happened to you over the summer"), as well as a bridge to stories read in school. Throughout the life span, personal narratives are necessary in communicating with people in the medical profession (e.g., "Tell me how you hurt your knee") and the legal profession ("Tell the court what you witnessed on November 4, 2001), among many other uses, including some on a daily basis. Furthermore, personal narratives, unlike other genres, are integral to all cultures and ages studied to date.

Cultural Composition of Professionals versus Students

According to the 1993 figures compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (Day, 1996), 86.5 percent of teachers are "white, non-Hispanic," hereafter known as European North American. According to the American Speech-Hearing-Language Association (ASHA) Membership Update 2000, 92.3 percent of speech-language pathologists are European North American; only 7.7 percent of 99,000 pathologists certified by ASHA are members of minority groups. Thus, most professionals bring informal values of narration that are based on European traditions. Furthermore, the extent to which we have been formally educated about well-formed stories, we have been educated almost exclusively in the European tradition. We know Aristotle's definition of a good story as having a clear beginning, middle, and end. Even this mild dictum proves problematic in the face of what we have learned about considerable cultural differences in narrative form.

The European North American background of teachers and speech-language pathologists contrasts to the backgrounds of a large and steadily increasing number of their charges. The Condition of Education 2000 reports that in 1998, 37 percent of public school students in grades 1–12 were considered to be part of a minority group, an increase of 15 percent from 1972. This increase was largely due to the growth in the proportion of students who were Hispanic, which was up 9 percentage points from 1972; Hispanic students account for 15 percent of the public school enrollment. African American students account for 17 percent of public school enrollment. The U.S. Bureau of the Census (1996) reports that by 2030, white non-Hispanics will comprise only 60.5 percent of the total population.

This mismatch means that professionals must gain knowledge about and expertise in dealing with children and adults from cultural backgrounds other than their own. Otherwise, abundant evidence to be reviewed suggests that cultural differences may result in misdiagnosis as deficits, a mistake costly to an already overburdened educational system and potentially disastrous to the individual who is misdiagnosed.

Elicitation of Personal Narrative

As we have suggested, we recommend the genre of personal narrative because it is functional and relevant in many contexts. Before we discuss this genre, we need to describe how we elicit personal narratives.

The first author and Carole Peterson (Peterson & McCabe, 1983) have developed a particular method for collecting personal narratives, which we detail below. Professionals must first understand the way that they themselves affect the form of narrative they hear from their clients.

The Conversational Map Elicitation Procedure (McCabe & Rollins, 1994; Peterson & McCabe, 1983) has been widely used to elicit personal narratives from children with typical and impaired language usage (McCabe & Rollins, 1994; Miranda, McCabe, & Bliss, 1998; Peterson & McCabe, 1983). It has also been used and is applicable for adults. The map operates on the principle that children and adults are much more likely to tell a narrative about their own experiences if examiners share one or more about their own experiences first. The professional tells a brief narrative about an experience and then asks open-ended questions of the person being interviewed. The following steps comprise the Conversational Map Elicitation Procedure.

Story Prompt

In informal interactions spontaneous stories typically generate other spontaneous stories (McCabe & Rollins, 1994). Unfortunately, frequently when professionals say to clients, especially young ones, "Tell me about . . .", they are often met with silence. However, if the professional begins to describe a personal experience, the client may be able to relay a similar personal experience. The similarity of experience gives structure to speakers and assists them in providing a personal experience. The content of the personal experience relayed by the professional (story prompt) is not as important as the fact that one is provided. The goal is to ask individuals to talk about meaningful experiences and have them describe specific events, not typical or routine activities. That is, narratives should be distinguished from scripts. The latter involve descriptions of routine events (e.g., going to a fast-food restaurant).

Children are likely to tell their best narratives in response to requests to talk about injuries (Peterson & McCabe, 1983). Some suggested child narrative elicitation prompts are shown in Box 1.1. Adults talk freely about stolen items, car accidents, hospital stays, and locking themselves out, as we have found in our years of interviewing (see Box 1.2).

Collection of Narrative Samples

Not all people will respond equivalently to any narrative prompt. Individuals have all had different experiences. In order to maximize performance, it is advisable to elicit at least three different narratives from an individual. In this manner, the clinician should be able to tap into the upper range of any individual's narrative performance.

Minimize the Speaker's Self-Consciousness. Attention must be removed from the speaker and the narrative exchange in order to collect useful narratives. A successful technique for children is to have them draw a picture while the narrative is elicited (Peterson & McCabe, 1983). In this way, the children do not feel as though

they are being interviewed or judged. Note, however, that some individuals who struggle with producing language may find such tasks too distracting.

A procedure that is more successful with adults is to elicit narrative in an informal manner, not during the formal testing itself. Perhaps the narratives can be elicited before testing in a waiting room or a coffee room. The goal is to make the speaker as comfortable as possible.

Do Not Rush the Speaker. Personal narratives take time. Speakers need to feel at ease to communicate a story. The professional needs to give them time and listen and show real interest in what they have to say. Specifically, some interviewers are uncomfortable when someone does not immediately respond to their questions. We encourage such people to understand that some individuals—particularly

BOX 1.1 • *Suggested Child Narrative Elicitation Prompts*

1. Once I broke my arm. I had to go to the doctor's office. She put it in a cast. Have you ever broken anything? Tell me about it.
2. On my way home last night, I saw a car broken down beside the road. It was all banged up and some windows were broken. Have you ever seen anything like that?
3. Last week, I took my grandmother's cat to the vet because it had a sore on its tail. Did you ever take a pet to the vet? What happened?
4. Two weeks ago, I had to go to the hospital to have some x rays taken. It took a long time. It was scary. Have you ever been to the hospital? Tell me about it.
5. Yesterday I spilled a glass of milk while I was eating dinner. The milk went all over the floor and I had to clean it up. Have you ever spilled anything?
6. Last summer I smelled a pretty flower in the garden. There was a bee on the flower. I didn't see it. It stung me right on the nose. Have you ever been stung?
7. My neighbor had his car stolen last night. He went outside and it was gone. He called the police. Have you ever had something stolen?
8. When I was young, my brother and I got into fights all the time. We would scream and yell at each other. Have you ever fought with someone? Tell me about it.
9. See this bandage? Last night I was peeling potatoes and I cut myself with the knife. Have you ever cut yourself?

Prompts to Avoid

1. Birthday parties: Children often respond by giving a generic script of such events.
2. Trips: Children (and adults) will often give a kind of travel itinerary instead of a narrative about some specific exciting event.
3. Experiences about a loved one who died: Children who are otherwise capable narrators may tell confusing and jumbled sequences and omit evaluative information in such narratives.

BOX 1.2 • *Suggested Adult Narrative Elicitation Prompts*

1. On my way home last night, I saw a car accident. Two cars hit each other. There was glass all over the place. Have you ever been in a car accident? (If no, then: Have you ever seen a car accident?).
2. Two weeks ago, I had to go to the hospital to have an operation. I was there for a week. Have you ever been in the hospital?
3. My neighbor had his car stolen last night. He went outside and it was gone. He called the police. Have you ever had something stolen?
4. I had a dog that ran away. One morning I let him outside and he took off and never came back. Have you ever had a pet that ran away? Tell me about it.
5. Yesterday, I was taking care of my friend's little two-month-old son. I brought him back to my house and parked in the shade and carefully locked the doors to my car. The problem was that he was still inside and so were my keys. I had to call my friend who has a spare set of keys to come home from work and open up the car. Have you ever locked yourself out?
6. I was helping my brother out by taking care of his two pet snakes. But the lid of the container he kept them in was loose. When I got up the first morning, the snakes were gone. I had to tell everyone who came to look out for snakes in my house.

young children and impaired people at all ages—require extra time to formulate their responses. Become comfortable waiting a while for a response. Put the other person at ease.

Use of Relatively Neutral Subprompts. Neutral subprompts are statements or questions that do not refer to the content of a story but serve to encourage the narrator to continue talking. If an examiner asks specific questions, it will not be possible to determine what the speaker can do on his or her own (Peterson & McCabe, 1983). It is often very difficult to resist asking specific questions when a speaker is having a difficult time in constructing a narrative or gives a very brief one. However, in the evaluation phase, it is critical to withhold specific questions and use more neutral subprompts in order to objectively assess an individual's narrative performance. Some examples of effective and ineffective subprompts are shown in Box 1.3.

Cultural Issues. This method for collecting narratives has been used successfully by numerous researchers and professionals dealing with children, adolescents, and adults in many English and Spanish-speaking countries, from various Asian backgrounds, from South Africa, and from American Indian, Asian American, and African American ethnicities. It has also been used with individuals from deaf cultures. In fact, so far there is no age nor cultural group with whom this method has failed.

BOX 1.3 • *Subprompts*

Effective, Relatively Neutral Subprompts

1. Repeat the speaker's exact words with rising intonation when they pause:
   Client: Then Dad went home.
   Clinician: Then Dad went home?
2. Say, "Uh-huh."
3. Say, "Tell me more" or "Is that all?"
4. Say, "Then what happened."

Examples of Subprompts to Avoid

1. Where did you go?
2. How did you get there?
3. How did you feel about that?
4. That must have been awful or great or scary, etc.
5. When did you come home?

Analyzing Personal Narratives

In this section we will briefly discuss four different approaches to the analysis of narrative: high point, story grammar, stanza analysis, and narrative assessment profile (NAP), the one we focus on in this book. To give readers a feel for how these analyses contrast with each other, we will use each one to analyze the following narrative:

Example of oral narrative—8-year-old Japanese girl (from the personal collection of Masahiko Minami)
Note that words in parentheses were implied, not actually spoken and that the narrative was originally given in Japanese.
(1) When (I was) in kindergarten, (2) (I) got (my) leg caught in a bicycle. (3) (I) got a cut here, here and (4) (I) wore a cast for about a month. (5) (I) took a rest for about a week, and (6) (I) went back again. (7) (I) had a cut here. (8) (I) fell off an iron bar. (9) Yeah, (I) had two mouths.

High-Point Microanalysis

Once professionals have collected narratives, they must look at the overall form and determine whether narrative is an area that is strong or weak relative to other areas of speech/language proficiency for a particular client. One analysis that has been recommended to professionals (Hughes, McGillivray, & Schmidek, 1997; McCabe & Rollins, 1994) is based on the work of Labov (1972) and the related high-point analysis employed by Peterson and McCabe (1983). This relatively fine-grained analysis of constituents will be built into a more holistic assessment (adapted from Peterson & McCabe, 1983; and McCabe & Rollins, 1994) of narrative

structure in Chapter 7. In this analysis, the constituents shown in Box 1.4 are tracked in narratives of personal experience. Following the blank form is a high-point microanalysis of the Japanese girl's story. High-point analysis highlights evaluation, and Box 1.5 lists many types of evaluation found previously in children's narratives (Peterson & McCabe, 1983).

BOX 1.4 • *Assessment of Constituents*

Name: _____

Age: _____ Date: _____

Does the client's narrative show presence of the following components? If time permits and for purpose of intervention, it is recommended that specific examples of each of these constituents be documented.

___ 1. Openers (e.g., "I remember one time . . ."): _____

___ Abstracts (e.g., "Did I tell you about when I broke my arm?"): _____

___ 2. Orientation/description

Who: _____
What: _____
When: _____
Where: _____

___ 3. Complicating action (how something happened): _____

___ 4. Climax: _____

___ 5. Resolution (e.g., "We went home after that."): _____

___ 6. Evaluation throughout (why things happened; how narrator felt about them; importance of not coming across as cold to significant others; see Box 1.5): _____

___ 7. Closings

—"That's it/all" and other bailouts (if done repeatedly and prematurely, these may reflect an inability or unwillingness to narrate)

—"So I never ever told another lie." Codas are an elegant means of returning discussion of a past event to the present (Labov, 1972).

(cont.)

BOX 1.4 • *Assessment of Constituents, continued*

Name: _____

Age: 8 years Date: _____

Does the client's narrative show presence of the following components? If time permits and for purpose of intervention, it is recommended that specific examples of each of these constituents be documented.

no 1. Openers (e.g., "I remember one time . . ."): _____

no Abstracts (e.g., "Did I tell you about when I broke my arm?"): _____

yes 2. Orientation/description

Who: _____
What: 2 (bicycle)
When: 1; 4 & 5 partially
Where: 3, 7

yes 3. Complicating action (how something happened): 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8

? 4. Climax: (This category is n ot directly relevant to Japanese children's narration—Chapter 6.)

? 5. Resolution (e.g., "We went home after that."): possibly 5

yes 6. Evaluation throughout (why things happened; how narrator felt about them) 9

no 7. Closings

—"That's it/all" and other bailouts (if done repeatedly and prematurely, these may reflect an inability or unwillingness to narrate)

—"So I never ever told another lie." Codas are an elegant means of returning discussion of a past event to the present (Labov, 1972).

Story Grammar Analysis

Another approach to analyzing narratives is known as story grammar or episodic analysis. Hughes, McGillivray, and Schmidek (1997) recommend it for analyzing fictional stories but not personal narratives or scripts. Story grammar examines the extent to which stories are structured around the explicit goals of a protagonist. A good narrative, from this point of view, begins with a setting, continues with an

BOX 1.5 • *Evaluations*

Onomatopoeia ("The car went *bang*!)
Stress ("I caught a BIG fish.")
Elongation ("The water was soooo high in the deep end.")
Exclamation ("I jumped!" said in excited tone of voice)
Repetition ("I screamed and I screamed and I cried and I cried.")
Compulsion words ("I always *have* to take a vitamin.")
Similes and metaphors ("His eyes got as big as tomatoes.")
Gratuitous terms ("I just *put* a bandage on it and went back outside.")
Attention-getters ("I got to tell you the important part.")
Words per se ("That stunk.")
Exaggerations and fantasy ("I was so hungry I could eat a house.")
Negatives ("The doctor didn't give me a shot.")
Intentions, purposes, desires, or hopes ("I wanted to go swimming.")
Hypotheses, guesses, inferences, and predictions ("I guess he wanted to do something else.")
Results of high-point action ("The car got totaled.")
Causal explanations ("I hit him because I hate him.")
Objective judgments ("That was a good thing to do.")
Subjective judgments ("I liked that game.")
Facts per se ("I caught the biggest fish.")
Internal emotional states ("I was sad.")
Tangential information ("Ten dollars is a lot of money when you're a little kid.")

—Adapted from Peterson & McCabe, 1983

initiating event or some explicit problem, a character's internal response and plan, the character's attempt to achieve the goal or solve the problem, and the consequence of that attempt. This approach was based on an analysis of Russian folktales by Vladimir Propp (1968) and is thus explicitly tied to the European tradition of storytelling. Though story grammar has been used in analyzing children's personal narratives (Champion, Seymour, & Camarata, 1995; Peterson & McCabe, 1983), it underrates the narratives of, for example, injuries that go untreated. That is, if a child tells a compelling story about a time she was hurt that meets the definition of being a good narrative from other analytical points of view but that involves no goals or solutions to problems, it will be deemed primitive in story grammar (Peterson & McCabe, 1983).

Another concern with the use of story grammar is that a number of studies have found that children with language impairment can produce all key story grammar constituents when retelling a story (e.g., Graybeal, 1981; Griffith, Ripich, & Dastoli, 1986; Hansen, 1978; McConaughy, 1985; Ripich & Griffith, 1988; Strong & Shaver, 1991; Weaver & Dickinson, 1982). In other words, this analysis does not necessarily register difficulties children have with discourse.

Story grammar is perhaps the best known narrative analysis. However, because it often does not discriminate impaired narration and also because of our interest in non-European background speakers, we will not address it further, except to say that it would characterize the Japanese girl's narrative as comprised of two *primitive* structures, the first at best an *abbreviated episode* with no explicit planning to resolve the problem posed by her injury. The second structure would be termed a *reactive sequence* (see Peterson & McCabe, 1983; Stein & Glenn, 1979). Neither structure reaches the level of the complete episode that would be expected from a girl her age were clinicians unmindful of her cultural background. That is to say, European North American 8-year-olds produced complete episodes or even more complex ones in 76 percent of their narrative structures (Peterson & McCabe, 1983, p. 94). In short, story-grammar analysis may be negatively biased toward narratives that are not produced in the European tradition.

Stanza Analysis

This approach to analyzing narratives involves breaking them into sentences or phrases and grouping these phrases into stanzas. That is, a stanza is a group of sentences related by their joint focus on a subtopic of the larger discourse. There are many variations in the procedure for doing this (see Gee, 1991a, 1991b; Hymes, 1981, 1982; Minami & McCabe, 1991). This method seems to illuminate the structure of narratives from some cultures (e.g., Zuni, Japanese, African American), but not others (e.g., European North American and Mexican American; see McCabe, 1996). Teachers may find it useful in teaching children how to break their writing into paragraphs, but speech language pathologists probably would not. Essentially, it involves displaying a story as if it were a prose poem. Contrast the ordinary transcription of the Japanese girl's narrative (page 10) with the following stanza analysis of it; the first stanza pertains to a first injury, the second to the aftermath of that injury, the third to a second injury:

1. When (I was) in kindergarten
2. (I) got (my) leg caught in a bicycle.
3. (I) got a cut here, here and...

4. (I) wore a cast for about a month.
5. (I) took a rest for about a week, and
6. (I) went back again.

7. (I) had a cut here.
8. (I) fell off an iron bar.
9. Yeah, (I) had two mouths.

Stanza analysis reveals what has been found to be the typical clustering of three phrases per subtopic in Japanese children's personal narratives (Minami & McCabe, 1991), as well as potential parallelism of sentence construction. For example, note the parallelism in all nine sentences above, all of which are statements in which the elliptical *I* serves as subject. Stanza analysis often facilitates cross-cultural understanding (e.g., Minami & McCabe, 1991), the major purpose for which it has been used, by allowing individuals outside a culture to see form and pattern in unfamiliar discourse structures. However, because it does not apply equally well to all cultures, we have chosen a different approach.

Our Approach: Narrative Assessment Profile (NAP)

If a clinician determines that an individual's narration is impaired, then which of the many aspects of narration is the most impaired should be identified for intervention. This triage phase will periodically be repeated throughout therapy/intervention. Note that NAP incorporates aspects of high-point analysis (Labov, 1972; Peterson & McCabe, 1983) via the constituents of informativeness.

The narrative assessment profile (NAP) was developed in order to evaluate discourse coherence. It is comprised of six aspects of discourse coherence that are relevant to the study of the narrative discourse of children and adults (Deese, 1984; Peterson & McCabe, 1983). They are topic maintenance, event sequencing, informativeness, referencing, conjunctive cohesion, and fluency.

The first three dimensions represent general aspects of discourse that involve the macrostructure of narratives. Referencing and conjunctive cohesion reflect more specific discourse functions as they pertain to the relationships between utterances. Fluency is included because it reflects manner of production and is frequently impaired in the discourse of children and adults (Deese, 1984; Peterson & McCabe, 1983).

Description and Scoring of Narrative Assessment Profile Dimensions

Topic Maintenance

This dimension refers to how well all utterances in a narrative relate to a central topic. Utterances may be related to a central theme by expansion, continuation, or contradiction. In contrast, utterances that do not maintain a topic may be irrelevant, tangential, vague, or ambiguous. Descriptions of extraneous routine events (e.g., scripts), associated information such as descriptions of plans, likes, dislikes,

capabilities, and possibilities represent deviations in topic maintenance that are often found in specific language impaired (SLI) children (Miranda, McCabe, & Bliss, 1994). Some school-aged children with SLI add extraneous material to the ends of their narratives (Merritt & Liles, 1987; Miranda, McCabe, & Bliss, 1995), launching into a description of a toothbrushing regime in the middle of a narrative about a trip, for example.

Event Sequencing

This dimension involves the presentation of events in chronological or logical order. There generally should be a correspondence between the order of events described by a speaker and the real-life ordering of events unless the narrator indicates to the listener that a violation of ordering will occur. Violation of event sequencing results in *leapfrogging*, characterized by an achronological presentation of events and/or omission of critical events (McCabe & Rollins, 1994; Peterson & McCabe, 1983). These qualities impair discourse coherence because a listener may have difficulty keeping track of events that have been described.

Informativeness

This dimension relates to the sense-making process of discourse coherence; it involves three aspects of the completeness and elaboration of a narrative. The first aspect is that kind of narrative information someone such as a police officer would request: the important facts of some specific experience. In other words, does a narrator present sufficient information for a listener to make sense of a narrative? Omissions of crucial information compromise discourse coherence.

Second, informativeness also comprises embellishment of the sort a teacher would request to make a narrative engaging to listeners. Optional details help make a text coherent. Unelaborated narratives will be barely coherent; the listener will understand the gist of an experience but will be unable to fill in all of the details. As we will see, some cultures value elaboration about participants (see Chapter 5 on Spanish-speaking people), whereas others value action (see Chapter 3 on European North American people).

Finally, a fully informative, coherent narrative contains all basic narrative ingredients: description, action, and evaluation (Labov, 1972). Descriptions consist of attributions of people and objects (e.g., "the red barn"). Actions refer to events (e.g., "He tripped on stage"). Evaluation refers to the subjective significance of an event for a speaker (e.g., "We laughed because we thought it was funny"). Narrative contains many kinds of evaluation (e.g., internal states, exclamations, repetitions and negatives; see Box 1.5; Peterson & McCabe, 1983; McCabe & Rollins, 1994). Evaluation is important because it informs the listener of the speaker's feelings about an event and therefore has interpersonal implications. Without evaluation, a speaker may give the impression of being aloof and unfeeling.

Referencing

This dimension involves the adequate identification of individuals, features, and events (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Individuals or locations need to be identified before pronouns can be used to refer to them. Inappropriate referencing occurs when pronouns are used without prior identification, when nouns are repeated where pronouns would be expected, or when erroneous pronouns are used (e.g., a feminine pronoun for a man). Referencing contributes to discourse coherence because it enables the listener to identify salient individuals, locations, or events.

Conjunctive Cohesion

This dimension involves words (*and, then, because, so, but*) or phrases that link utterances and events. Conjunctions contribute to coherence because they link concepts and discourse functions. Without conjunctions or with inappropriate ones, the listener may not be able to discern relationships between utterances.

The most commonly analyzed cohesion measures assess semantic links between events (Liles, 1985; Merritt & Liles, 1987; Peterson & McCabe, 1983). Specifically, the following cohesive ties have been studied: **coordination** (e.g., the description of a series of events), **temporal** links (e.g., segments in a time sequence), **causality** (e.g., ties that establish a relationship between cause and effect), **enabling** (e.g., meanings that occur in which one event establishes preconditions for another event), and **disjuncture** (e.g., meanings that involve semantic contrasts between two clauses) (Hood & Bloom, 1979; Peterson & McCabe, 1991).

Another aspect of cohesion involves pragmatic links between utterances (Peterson & McCabe, 1992). Pragmatic aspects of cohesion include a variety of discourse functions (Peterson & McCabe, 1992). The following utterances are examples of pragmatic uses of cohesive devises (Peterson & McCabe, 1992, pp. 452–454):

1. *Beginnings* serve to initiate a narrative. Examiner: "I bet you saw the sun come up in the morning." Child: "*But* I saw the zoo. . . ."
2. *Endings* signal the termination of a narrative. One example involves a child's narrative about a car accident and how many people died. He closed his narrative by saying, ". . . .*So* they dead right now too."
3. *Change of focus* forms signal a departure from an established temporal ordering of events in order to insert additional information, as in the utterance "And then I fell down *but* you know what?"
4. A *chronology violation* signals that a sequential ordering of events will be violated. "We went to Florida *but* first we went to Texas."

Fluency

This final dimension of discourse consists of lexical or phrasal interruptions in utterances. Dysfluencies reduce coherence because they interfere with the understanding of a message. False starts refer to abandoned utterances: "My mom took

me to the hospital *and said* . . . uh . . . *the doctor said, we, he, might be* . . . *we're going to* . . . he *has to do*. . . . can't ride his bike in the street." Internal corrections are retracings of words or phrases with corrections: "We went in the water, *went to the lake,* uh *beach,* by, *up* north . . . We went fishing and . . . we caught, we *found* a snail." Repetitions consist of word or phrasal reiterations that are not used for emphasis: "I swim and kick in the water up north and I *swim and kick.*"

NAP Scoring

All of the questions for each dimension should be asked regardless of whether the answer to each question is positive or negative. A "variable" response can also be given; many individuals are not consistent in their discourse abilities. Research using the NAP has shown such analysis to be reliable (interrater reliability correlation coefficients generally exceed .94) with children (Miranda, McCabe, & Bliss, 1998) as well as adults (Biddle, McCabe, & Bliss, 1996).

Note that the use of *appropriate, inappropriate,* and *variable* judgments (Box 1.6) may appear subjective for several reasons. First of all, such responses are not quantitative. To address this concern, Chapter 11 (p. 161) presents a quantitative form of NAP scoring procedure. However, even when we employ the quantitative approach, we refrain from providing specific numerical guidelines regarding how many orientative statements, for example, are enough to warrant a judgment of "appropriate" or "2." This is a deliberate decision on our part, driven by our knowledge that narrative length varies enormously as a function of context, age, gender, and individual temperament. Specification of numerical standards would be impossible given the extent of such variation. Instead, clinicians must consider a narrative as a whole. Does this little (or lengthy) story contain an adequate amount of evaluation, information, etc.—keeping in mind its overall length and scope?

BOX 1.6 • *Narrative Assessment Profile: Scoring Guidelines*

Appropriate. A behavior is considered to be appropriate when the narrative behavior occurs frequently. Inappropriate behaviors are infrequent enough so as not to reduce discourse coherence.

Inappropriate. A behavior is considered to be inappropriate when its frequency reduces discourse coherence.

Variable. A behavior is considered to be variable when its frequency occasionally reduces discourse coherence but when the client shows some strengths on a particular dimension.

Needs further study. Perhaps further questions are needed; possible cultural variation is involved. This response should be noted when a professional is unsure of whether what children are doing is acceptable in their culture. Professionals should seek information from parents or teachers who are full participants in the child's culture before determining a particular child's own standing.

A clinical format for the NAP is shown in Table 1.1. Once a narrative has been elicited and transcribed, the questions shown can be asked to identify a client's areas of strength and weakness.

TABLE 1.1 ***Narrative Assessment Profile with European North American Children and Adults (and adapted to individuals of other cultures)***

Topic Maintenance: Are the majority of utterances on topic?	**No** →	What patterns of digression are evident?
Event Sequencing: Are the majority of the events organized in chronological order?	**No** →	What patterns are evident?
Informativeness: Is enough information presented for the listener to understand the narrative?	**No** →	What specific information does the listener need to understand the narrative?
Is the narrative sufficiently elaborated?	**No** →	If the narrative seems short, how could the speaker elaborate it?
Is there adequate description, action, and evaluation in the narrative?	**No** →	Are any of these components consistently deleted?
Referencing: Is there appropriate referencing of time and place, individuals, and attributes?	**No** →	What kinds of inappropriate referencing are used? Are references vague, overspecified, omitted, or confused?
Conjunctive Cohesion: Are linking devices used for both semantic and pragmatic purposes?	**No** →	What linking devices are missing or inappropriate?
Fluency: Is the production fluent?	**No** →	Are there excessive false starts, internal corrections, and/or repetitions

What follows is an application of the NAP questions to score the Japanese girl's narrative:

Topic Maintenance: As we will explain in Chapter 6, this child maintains topic in the way preferred by Japanese speakers (Minami & McCabe, 1991), which is to combine narration of two or three similar experiences in one narrative.

Event Sequencing: This child sequences two events (2, 3), but again, this dimension is not emphasized in Japanese culture.

Informativeness: As will be discussed in Chapter 6, Japanese listeners are expected to empathize with speakers and to infer relatively more information than many Western listeners, while Japanese speakers are expected to avoid being verbose. We take these cultural values into account in determining that this child is giving enough specific information for us to understand the gist of not one, but two specific experiences.

Is the narrative sufficiently elaborated? The answer is that yes, it is elaborated sufficiently for participants in her culture. Western ears may balk at this, but we ask skeptics to reserve judgment until they read the rest of this book.

Regarding the three types of information, our prior high-point analysis makes clear that the child has given us some description, some action, and some evaluation.

Referencing: This child makes many omissions in referencing, as we have denoted with parentheses in the transcription, and readers may well initially form an impression that she is impaired in this area. However, far from being a sign of pathology, these omissions are a sign that the child is successfully acquiring the values of her culture, summarized in such proverbs as "A talkative person is embarrassing." That is, Japanese speakers often omit pronouns because these can easily be inferred by empathic listeners, and Japanese children are specifically trained to expect that listeners will be empathic, doing far more work in comprehension than Western listeners are accustomed to doing (see Minami & McCabe, 1991, for a review of past research on this issue).

Conjunctive Cohesion: One conjunction appears in the child's narrative; the issues of Japanese cohesion are quite complex, as are translation issues. Suffice it to say that in Japanese, the child's production included appropriate conjunctions (Minami, personal communication).

Fluency: Her production is quite fluent.

In summary, this chapter has defined key terminology and presented details of our preferred method of eliciting personal narratives and the reasons for choosing that genre of narrative. We also contrasted four ways of analyzing a Japanese child's personal narrative.

Patterns of Narrative Discourse

A Multicultural, Life Span Approach

Allyssa McCabe
University of Massachusetts Lowell

Lynn S. Bliss
University of Houston

Boston • New York • San Francisco
Mexico City • Montreal • Toronto • London • Madrid • Munich • Paris
Hong Kong • Singapore • Tokyo • Cape Town • Sydney