

ON BEING SWEEPED OFF YOUR FEET BY THE STORY:  
THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF INVOLVEMENT  
IN CONVERSATIONAL STORYTELLING

Josep Maria Cots  
*Universitat de Lleida*  
jmcots@dal.udl.es

The aim of this paper is to explore the nature of conversational involvement as the result of specific discourse strategies deployed by the speaker(s) with the purpose of creating not only a coherent but above all a sufficiently unique representation of reality to promote the active participation of the interlocutor(s) in the task of sense-making. Through the analysis of one conversational story, recounted in a particular social setting, it is suggested, first of all, that rather than making a point or transmitting a specific message, the function of conversational stories may be that of resolving an interpersonal problem. The analysis also shows how the narrator “works” towards forcing the participation of the addressee(s), sometimes indirectly, through facilitating their reconstruction of the world of the story by introducing details, imagery and external evaluations, and sometimes directly, by means of discourse markers of interactivity.

## 1. Introduction

This paper constitutes an attempt to explore the discursive construction of conversational involvement. The focus of the study is the discourse strategies a speaker displays in informal conversation to promote the interest and engagement of the other participant(s) in verbal activity. By focusing the analysis on a conversational story, a text type which might, in principle, be defined as monologic, we have created the necessary laboratory conditions which ought to increase the speaker’s efforts to involve the addressee(s) in the interaction. The notion of informal conversation usually implies an enthusiastic co-operation of individuals in the task of constructing a specific type of text or communicative event. Because of this, it is usually very difficult to observe strategies that contribute precisely to creating that enthusiasm or involvement. The speakers simply have no need to create that special atmosphere because it is already an intrinsic part of the activity of conversing informally.

One of the most important tasks of any good conversationalist is to secure the involvement of the other(s) participant(s) in the conversation. The easiest way to do this is by requesting their contribution. In the case of the telling of a story, the turn-taking system is momentarily suppressed and the floor is left free for the storyteller. Since the speaker can no longer rely on the possibility of requesting the addressee’s contribution, he/she must deploy a series of discourse strategies which are intended to enhance the effectiveness of the message and, consequently, promote the involvement of the addressee by facilitating his/her task of sense-making.

The conversational story that is the object of my analysis was told by an American professor to a colleague in the office of the former and with the presence of a graduate student and the researcher. In the first section, I will introduce the context in which the conversational story took place and I will also summarise the main aspects of the story. Next, I will discuss the role of conversational stories in conversation. The main part of this paper will be devoted to discussing the concept of conversational involvement and its role in the achievement of communication, and to describing four types of involvement strategies used by the narrator. These strategies will be analysed according to their pragmatic function as well as to their formal structure. Finally, I will consider some issues concerning the analysis of conversational discourse.

From a methodological point of view, the analysis adopts the framework of interactional sociolinguistics, initiated by J. Gumperz (1982a; 1982b; 1992) and continued by Schiffrin (1987), Tannen (1989) and Heller (1999), among many other scholars. In this theoretical framework, discourse is a social and culturally symbolic means through which people attempt to create and recreate both macro-level social meaning and micro-level interpersonal meaning (Schiffrin 1994: 133). Discourse coherence—and consequently understanding—is based on a series of inferential processes which the interlocutors make by reinterpreting the background assumptions and expectations they have built from their personal experience. This process of reinterpretation, which is defined as “contextualisation,” takes place through a series of “cues” or “strategies” at different levels of speech production: paralinguistic signs, prosody, code choice, choice of lexical form or formulaic expressions, etc. (Gumperz 1992). The only way to gain access to both the knowledge required by language users to engage in social interaction and the ways in which this is implemented is, as Gumperz (1992: 231) suggests, “contextualisation-based, on-line, discourse level inferencing of cues.” This task must be carried out at three different levels. The first involves the perception and categorisation of signals in isolation. The second level is that of the sequential organisation of verbal actions. The third level is connected with the language user’s definition of the activity and his/her expectations about what is normal.

## 2. The story of Pedro Quiche

The story of Pedro Quiche (pseudonyms are being used for all the participants) is part of a brief conversation between Jim (J), a university professor in his late fifties, and Dan (D), a professor of the same department, in his early forties. Both Jim and Dan had lived in Peru during a period in their lives while doing anthropological research.

The communicative event in which the conversational story appears started with Jim in his office with a graduate student (S). The object of the encounter was to go over a proposal for a grant which the graduate student had prepared. This conversation was being observed and tape-recorded by the researcher (O), who was sitting in a somewhat unobtrusive part of the room. The conversation was interrupted by Dan (D), who came into the office after knocking on the half-closed door. The purpose of his visit was to hand in the question corresponding to his area of specialisation which was to be included in a comprehensive examination to be taken by another graduate student on that day. Jim had

forgotten about Dan's part of the exam until the very same day. Therefore he phoned Dan early in the morning to ask him to prepare a question for the examination. Although in a friendly atmosphere, in the brief exchange that precedes the story Dan recriminates Jim for his absent-mindedness. Jim tries to excuse himself and ultimately accepts his blame. The exchange continues with a series of turns dealing with a book that Dan sees in Jim's office. It is at this point that Jim decides to introduce the story of Pedro Quiche: "Oh Dan just a quick note and probably you'll be amused" (4318–19).

The conversational story we examine in this paper is about a Peruvian immigrant in the U. S. whom Jim had met when he was living in Peru. Pedro Quiche migrated to the U.S in the early seventies. Pedro comes from the Huaylas valley (department of Ancash), in the Andes, and before he migrated to the U. S. he lived in Lima, where he had a restaurant in El Callao. At the time the story is being told, Pedro is retired and he is living in a house in Palm Coast, Florida. The event that originates the story is a visit Jim and his wife paid to him a few days before the narrative was told.

### 3. Conversational stories as social repair

One of the first questions the analyst of conversational stories asks himself/herself concerns their function. That is to say, why did the speaker decide to tell a story at this point? In order to answer this question Polanyi makes a distinction between "narrative," to refer to the representation of past events, and "story," which refers to a narrative with a point: "Speakers tell stories in conversation to make a point—to transmit a message, often some sort of moral evaluation or implied critical judgement—about the world the teller shares with other people" (1985a: 187).

However, this definition cannot completely account for the function of the conversational story in a communicative event, through which the teller of the story and the listener come into contact. Johnstone (1996: 56) suggests that when people transform personal experience into stories, they create meaning on three different levels: creating and sharing knowledge about the world, evoking and creating interpersonal relationships, and expressing one's individuality. From the point of view of Conversation Analysis, Cheepen includes conversational stories within the category of repairs and proposes the concept of "scapegoat repair" in order to explain the function of a conversational story such as the one that is being analysed in this paper: "The function of a Scapegoat Repair is to allow the interactants, who have, as a result of the preceding trouble, been on opposite sides of a status boundary, to present themselves as on the same side, against an absent Scapegoat, so that equality can be restored to the current interaction" (1988: 116).

The kind of repair that the narrator is performing is not the result of inaudibility, incomprehensibility or incredulity on the part of the addressee (see Jefferson 1972; Stenström 1994); rather, it is an attempt to maintain or restore a social relationship which may have been put at risk by the narrator at a previous stage in the interaction. Cheepen's concept of scapegoat repair and Johnstone's second and third levels of meaning seem to offer a more promising line of explanation of the reason why Jim decided to tell Dan about Pedro Quiche. Nevertheless, this explanation can only be found if we bear in mind what has happened before in the encounter as well as the relationship between the world of the participants and the world in the story.

The story of Pedro Quiche appears almost immediately after a phase of tension in which Dan shows slight disappointment towards Jim because the latter had not reminded him until the same day that he had to prepare a question for a graduate student's comprehensive examination.

- D: [*knocks on the door, which is half-open*]  
 J: Oh Dan. Need that [*pointing to the piece of paper Dan is carrying*]  
 D: Yeah, I know you do. [*Laughter*] Eight (h) thirty (h) in the (h) morning.  
 J: (But that's) [*Laughter*]. She's gonna be coming in here this afternoon.  
 D: | I'll kill you.

However, Dan does not seem to be ready to close the encounter because he introduces another topic (a book he notices in Jim's office). The moment is therefore appropriate for Jim to introduce an amusing story which will not only restore a friendly atmosphere but will also reconcile the two participants by appealing to their common past experience in Peru.

- D: Hm. Is this yours? [to O, pointing at a book on the shelf]  
 J: | (Which one is that?)  
 O: No . . .  
 J: | No  
 J: What's that?  
 D: Social Anthropology and Development Policy [reading title of the book]  
 J: Yeah.  
 D: ASA Monograph  
 J: Yeah, one of those things - Oh Dan, just a quick note and probably you'll be amused.

According to Johnstone, apart from dealing with knowledge of the world, "people use stories to shape and reshape personal relations of solidarity, power, and status" (1996: 56). Furthermore, in telling a story speakers enact their identity "calling attention to who they are as they call attention to the ways they choose for creating meaning and coherence in their stories" (1996: 57). The story of Pedro Quiche, like many other stories, is not "occasioned by some point being made in the conversation," as Polanyi (1985a: 187) says. Rather, it is a response to some kind of interactional problem that has arisen between Jim and Dan because the former has failed to act in the appropriate way. For this reason, Jim feels the need to compensate for the damage he may have inflicted to his relationship with Dan. The telling of the story may be particularly effective in repairing the relationship because, firstly, it supposes a generous sharing of an amusing piece of private life. Secondly, the story is an appeal to solidarity and to reinforcing the connection between Jim and Dan because it activates some common background shared by both participants (both of them had lived and worked in Peru). Finally, the amusing nature of the story helps Jim to counter what may have been a display of negative self (his forgetfulness) with a more positive feature of self such as sense of humour.

The next question we need to ask is, if the function of scapegoat repair is precisely to introduce a topic disruption in the conversation, how does the topic of the story become integrated in the ongoing talk? The answer here is that this is done by choosing a topic to which the addressee can relate through his past experience (Peru), an aspect that is

mentioned at the very beginning of the narration: “over the over the uh week I went out and I visited a *Huaylas* friend of mine” (4319–20, my emphasis).

An analysis of coherence in conversational discourse cannot be based exclusively on those elements of the context that are being progressively activated by the participants and which constitute the “topic framework” of the discourse, as defined by Brown and Yule (1983). Rather, coherence seems to emerge progressively from the different interactional positions that the participants adopt as well as the personal experience they bring to the encounter in question.

#### 4. Conversational involvement as discourse strategies

The concept of *discourse strategies* that is used in this study has been influenced, first and foremost, by the work of Bialystok (1990), for whom “communication strategies” are characterised by three main features: *effective* (they are related to solutions and productive in solving a problem), *systematic* (they are not selected at random by the learner but according to the type of problem that needs to be solved) and *finite* (there are a limited number of strategies that can be identified). The second source of influence is represented by the work of Gumperz (1982a) and Brown and Levinson (1987), in which the concept of strategy is used to refer to the speaker’s and listener’s systematic use of linguistic and general socio-cultural knowledge to achieve their intended goals when producing or interpreting a message in a given context. For these authors, a strategy can only be successful if the participants in an interaction share some linguistic experience which they can rely on in order to make either the necessary projection of meaning (in the case of the speaker) or the necessary inferences to interpret the other’s intent (in the case of the listener).

The second main concept in the analysis is that of *conversational involvement*, which, according to Gumperz, is at the base of all linguistic understanding: “I believe that understanding presupposes conversational involvement. A general theory of discourse strategies must therefore begin by specifying the linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge that needs to be shared if conversational involvement is to be maintained, and then go on to deal with what it is about the nature of conversational inference that makes for cultural, subcultural and situational specificity of interpretation” (1982a: 2–3).

Involvement is achieved when the speaker, by means of certain “contextualisation cues,” appeals to the listener to cooperate in the task of sense-making by forcing him/her to make certain inferences based on the speaker’s linguistic choices, which “function relationally and cannot be assigned context-independent, stable, core lexical meanings” (Gumperz 1992: 232). Contextualisation cues may involve choices at different levels: code, dialect, style, formulaic expressions, conversational openings, closings and sequencing strategies, syntactic structures, lexical strings and prosodic elements. An example of contextualisation cue at the level of syntactic structure may be seen in the example below, in which one of the speakers adopts a question form to express a request (emphasized in italics):

A mother is talking to her eleven-year-old son, who is about to go out in the rain:  
Mother: *Where are your boots?*

Son: In the closet.

Mother: I want you to put them on right now.

Gumperz's definition of involvement is similar to Goodwin's (1981) notion of "conversational engagement": a state of being in active coordinated participation rather than mere co-presence.

Another definition of involvement is proposed by Tannen, who understands involvement as "an internal, even emotional connection individuals feel which binds them to other people as well as to places, things, activities, ideas, memories, and words" (1989: 12). For Tannen, involvement is essential to perceive coherence in discourse, and it is precisely this perception of coherence that is necessary to achieve a sense of being-in-the-world.

My understanding of involvement is an outgrowth of these two points of view. On the one hand, I see it as the result of a conscious effort by the speaker to force the listener to find coherence in discourse. This is achieved by deploying a series of clues involving contextualisation-based, on-line, discourse-level inferencing. On the other hand, I see it as an attempt to construct a representation of the world which can penetrate the world of the listener and bring him/her to a sort of communicative communion with the speaker. This second point of view is precisely the one Georgakopoulou and Goutsos emphasise in their definition of the function of the "strategies of involvement": "... bring the discourse alive by creating a sense of concreteness, particularity and familiarity. The speakers communicate their meanings and emotions through the power of evoking specific scenes. In this way, they send messages of rapport and intimacy to the audience inviting their involvement with them and with the events which are so vividly recreated" (1997: 136).

An analysis of the discourse strategies used by Jim in the telling of the story of Pedro Quiche makes it very clear that his intention is not only to refer to a past event in which he participated. It is also a generous act of allowing Dan to experience the event as if he had been present in it. If Jim succeeds in emotionally or aesthetically connecting Dan with the story of Pedro Quiche, he will also have succeeded in enlarging their common background, and this will automatically strengthen their relationship.

The concept of involvement is also used by Chafe (1982) and Biber (1988). Chafe proposes the distinction between *involvement* and *detachment* as a way of classifying discourse types and styles, and Biber, for his part, distinguishes between *involved* and *informational* production. Both authors suggest a series of formal features that can be associated with involved discourse, among which we can list the following:

- Tendency towards concreteness by introducing details and imagery
- First- and second- person pronouns accompanied by subjective verbs such as *asthink* or *feel*
- Emphasis on actions and participants rather than states
- Direct speech
- Hedges and emphasisers
- Fragmentation and syntactic reduction
- Present tense

Many of these features are also suggested in the work of researchers specifically interested in the study of oral stories such as Labov (1972) and Polanyi (1985b). These authors use the concept of *evaluative devices* to refer to those devices which are "not

concerned with reporting what happened but with conveying the narrator's attitudes and feelings towards the sequence of events narrated" (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 1997: 129). In the words of Labov (1972: 371), evaluative devices "say to us that this was terrifying, dangerous, weird, wild, crazy or amusing, hilarious, wonderful, more generally that it was strange, uncommon, or unusual, that is worth reporting." Labov (1972) distinguishes between external and internal evaluation depending on whether the evaluation breaks the flow of the story (by means of an explicit comment by the narrator) or not. Within internal evaluation he mentions four kinds of devices: intensifiers (gestures, expressive phonology, repetition, ritual interjections, and exaggerating quantifiers), comparators (marked verbal phrase constructions such as negatives, futures, questions, commands, modals and comparatives), correlatives (complex syntactic constructions bringing together events in a single independent clause) and explicatives (appended subordinate clause introduced by *while, although, since, because*). Some of the evaluative devices that Polanyi (1985b) studies are negative encoding, hyperbole or exaggeration, repetition, direct speech and collapse of story world and narrating world.

In attempting to summarise the involvement strategies that appear repeatedly in conversation studies, Tannen (1989: 17) proposes a division between those strategies that work primarily (but not exclusively) on sound and those that work primarily (but never exclusively) on meaning. In the former group, she includes (1) rhythm, (2) patterns based on repetition and variation of phonemes, morphemes, words, collocations of words and longer sequences of discourse, and (3) style figures of speech (many of which are also based on some kind of repetition; e.g. beginning of successive clauses with the same word or group of words, two segments containing the same two parts but with their order reversed). Among the strategies working primarily on meaning, engaging the audience in the task of sense-making, Tannen mentions indirectness, ellipsis, tropes, dialogue, imagery and detail, and narrative.

In the following sections, I will provide examples of what I consider to be four outstanding types of involvement strategies deployed by the teller of the story of Pedro Quiche: (i) details and imagery, (ii) hyperbole, (iii) external evaluation, and (iv) discourse markers.

#### 4.1. Details and imagery

One of the first things that attracts our attention in the story of Pedro Quiche is the great profusion of details and images that Jim supplies to his audience. According to Tannen, it is by means of images, partly created by details, that a hearer can imagine a scene: "Images . . . evoke scenes, and understanding is derived from scenes because they are composed of people in relation to each other, doing things that are culturally and personally recognizable and meaningful" (1989: 135).

Attention to details may also be interpreted as a sign of intimacy, as a demonstration of the speaker's willingness to share as much as possible of the experience he/she has had and the hearer has not. By describing the most minute details a speaker appeals to the cooperation of the hearer in constructing a scene, and it is as a result of this mutual cooperation that meaning will emerge. González (2001), in her contrastive analysis of a corpus of spoken stories in Catalan and English, found out that Catalan stories contained

a greater amount of description than English stories; it is possible, therefore, to hypothesise that there is a link between the provision of details and imagery in a story and the narrator's cultural style.

The details given in the story can be divided into those referring to the protagonist, Pedro Quiche, and those referring to the house where he was living at the time. The first group of details are all intended to depict a type character with which Dan should be familiar, thanks to his experience of Peru and its peoples:

(1) Pedrito is a a a a perfect Huaylas immi/migrant - one of these guys who's always sent money back and bought the roof for the school. (4339-4341)

(2) he's standing in the driveway, waiting for us, you know. There he is, typical Andean man, down there, little round guy, you know. (4465-4467)

Part of this first group of details is the characterisation Jim makes of Pedro's way of speaking. On more than one occasion, when Jim reports Pedro's speech he does it in Spanish, trying to imitate the typical Peruvian accent and intonation.

(3) J: all of a sudden last summer I get this phone call out of the blue - *wuh Jaime*

S: [laughter]

J: | and, you know, I said, ¿con quién hablo? *Este: wuh hablas con con Pedrito pues. [laughter] Con Pedrito, Pedrito. Sí sí, Pedro Quiche de Huaylas.* I said, Pedrito ¿dónde estas? *Aquí estoy, en Bunel.* Where? *Pam Cos.*

S: [laughter]

D: | Pam Cos

J: *Pam Cos. Estoy jubilado, tengo mi casita aquí en Palm Cos [laughter].* (4382-4393)

I have deliberately misspelt the names of Bunnell and Palm Coast to signal Pedro's incorrect pronunciation of these two English names. Notice how Jim reinforces the inaccuracy of this pronunciation by indicating first that he did not understand the name Bunnell. The mispronunciation of Palm Coast is remarked by both Jim and Dan by repeating it.

At another stage in the story Jim recounts Pedro's reaction to his invitation to visit the university where Jim works:

(4) I said, Pedro, you'll love it. Come on over, I said. You'll meet students, a lot of people interested in Peru. *¿Cómo no? Les voy a cocinar.* [laughter]. (4490-4492)

The second group of details is devoted to the description of the scene he contemplated in Pedro's house. In the first place we encounter the living room of the house.

(5) J: so there's this fabulous - huge furniture with - jungle designs (h) on (h) on (h) the (h) on (h) the (h) cushions (h), you (h) know, and

S: | [laughter]

J: then there's all kinds of geegaws and . . . little fluffy animals

D: | Right. (4452-4458)



Secondly, Jim describes the meal Pedro had prepared for them by mentioning every single item there was on the table,

(6) J: we come in and he's got a spread for us. He cooked all that stuff, **Huaylas . . . type bread uh ceviche,**

D: . . .

J: | **typical ceviche,** you know. Because he ran a restaurant, so he knows how to cook, you know, all that stuff. **We had choros and a/in the half shell by the ch />**

D: | **Alright! Oh god! Choros a la chalaca=**

J: = **a la chalaca. We had these by/choros a >**

D: | **Oh (h) my (h) god!**

J: **la chalaca. We had about/by the barrel. Then we had un seco, you know.** (4468–4480)

Pedro's office represents another occasion for Jim's to introduce more details in his story.

(7) and it's all set. **He's got a desk, he's got books** - all kinds of books, philosophy, technical technology books, **like how to repair television sets,** uh just a tremendous pot-pourri of of of stuff, you know, everything from, you know, **the writing writings of Kant or or something like that to to,** you know, **TV repair in three . . . lessons.** I mean incredible stuff, an encyclopedia. And the desk is all neat, no piles of papers and letters and stuff, you know. (4519–4526)

The presence in the story of figures of speech like metaphors and similes is a clear evidence of the constant negotiation of meaning between the interlocutors and the search for that precise representation of reality that will allow them to reconcile potentially divergent apprehensions of the world. A metaphor does not only suppose an effort on the part of the hearer but also on the part of the speaker to adjust and verbalise the way one categorises experience. This is the point of view expressed by Lakoff and Johnson in their study on metaphors: "Metaphorical imagination is a crucial skill in creating rapport and in communicating the nature of unshared experience. This skill consists in large measure, of the ability to bend your world view and adjust the way you categorize your experience" (1980: 231).

In order to give as accurate a description of Pedro Quiche as possible, Jim resorts to comparing him to a "beaver" (4354) to indicate Pedro's high capacity for work. In this same direction, Pedro is also compared to "one of these types who knows how to make money" (4350). Finally, when it comes to describing Pedro physically, Jim compares him to a popular Peruvian character, Dinos Bautista (4495). The house is compared to "a middle-class Huaylas migrant house in Lima" (4416) and to give an idea of the profusion of decorative items in the living-room of Pedro's house Jim uses the metaphor "everything is blooming away" (4461).

#### 4.2. Hyperbole

One of the main characteristics of informal conversation is the tendency towards exaggeration (Crystal and Davy 1981). The function of hyperbole in a conversational story seems to be that of reinforcing the sense of uniqueness of the event that is being narrated

as well as its characters, thereby arousing the hearer's interest in participating in the act of communication. According to Crystal and Davy (1981: 114), "rhetorical exaggeration is a useful means of engaging the listener's interest, giving the speaker greater scope for self-expression and also of maintaining the informality of a conversational situation."

Hyperbole in conversation is usually realised by means of a particular group of modifiers that Quirk, et al. (1985: 589–93) classify under the category of *intensifiers* (e.g. *absolutely*, *real(ly)*, *first*), but this is not an essential element of my definition of the concept in this case. My understanding of hyperbole in a conversational story is as an utterance about an event or a character which automatically places them into the special category of rare or unique. In some cases, the interpretation of a statement as a hyperbole requires taking into account the previous discourse context. This is the case of the following extract, where the hyperbole has been emphasised,

(8) so he set himself up a travel agency. So it's Pedro Quiche, Quiche South American Travels. And so he starts writing, **he doesn't speak hardly any English, right?** (4369–4373)

Pedro's inability to speak English cannot be said to place him automatically into a category of rare or unique. The sense of uniqueness is realised when we take into account the information of the previous discourse in which it is said that he set up a travel agency in New York. The protagonist in our story, Pedro Quiche, is presented by Jim as "the **first** Huaylas **millionaire**" (4330). This was the rumour that circulated in Huaylas when Jim lived there. Jim seems to doubt that he was a real millionaire but, nevertheless, he does not hesitate to state that "in soles [Pedro] made a **gob** of money in his restaurant" (4333). Pedro Quiche is also unique in that he "is a **perfect** Huaylas immigrant" (4339), a "real highlander" and "a **typical** Huaylas type" (4355). His incredible intelligence and capacity for work are also pointed out by Jim when he says that Pedro has got "a **whole trunk full** of certificates" and that he "can fix **anything**" (4359). Furthermore, when Jim describes his office he says that Pedro has got "**all kinds** of books, philosophy, techni/technology books" (4520). Finally, about Pedro's garden, Jim says that "he had **the whole place** planted" (4534) and that he has "**all kinds** of Peruvian-type stuff growing **all over the place**" (4535).

At the end of the story, we are left with an idea of Pedro Quiche as a rather unique man, someone whose story has been worth listening to because it has enlarged our ordinary view of the world. The storyteller is aware that unless his story is presented as a somewhat extraordinary event, it will be very difficult for him to keep the attention of the listener and, ultimately, justify the imposition both in terms of time and in terms of turn-taking the telling of the story has supposed.

Hyperbole can also be realised by repetition of a word or an expression. The accumulation of the same expression in a short stretch of conversation, usually as part of the same utterance, has the effect of leading the attention of the listener towards that specific expression. The resulting effect is that the listener is forced to focus his/her attention on that expression and consider the possibility of extending its ordinary range of meaning. Repetition used as hyperbole involves the presence of more than one instance of the same expression, although in some cases synonym expressions can appear instead.

The usefulness of repetition as hyperbole can be seen in the high number of repetitions that appear in the following extract belonging to the beginning of the story. Jim, in this

case, wants to emphasise the incredible capacity for work of Pedro Quiche. The propositions which are repeated are the following: (A) Pedro knows how/can make money (3 mentions); (B) Pedro is a hard-working man (3 mentions); (C) Pedro is a real highlander (2 mentions); (D) Pedro has many certificates (4 mentions).

(9) this guy is one of these types of people who **knows how to make money** (A1). He he just **knows how to make money** (A2) - He doesn't make . . . is he can **make money** (A3). And so he decided that maintainance of buildings was something that that he could move into. - He has absolutely **no hang-ups about work** (B1). The guy is a beaver. He's a **t real highlander** (C1). He's a **typical Huaylas type** (C2). He's a **hard worker** (B2) and - you know, **no hang-ups** (B3). So he tried to/He he . . . he he went to school and he got a refrigeration **certificate** (D1), and a heating **certificate** (D2). And he/and all kinds of maintainance **certificates** (D3) from all these companies. - He says, I got a whole trunk full of **certificates** (D4). (4350–4360)

#### 4.3. External evaluation

According to Polanyi (1985a: 194–95), in classifying the utterances in a conversational story we can distinguish two main types: those that refer to mainline story events and those whose interpretation is outside the story world. Among the examples of the latter type we can include explicit evaluative utterances which refer to the personal reaction of the teller and his/her audience towards the state of affairs in the story world. These evaluators can be spread all over the story and their function seems to be that of making explicit the point of the story, i.e. the reason why the speaker thought it worthwhile including it in the conversation.

For Labov (1972), a skilful storyteller must always take pains to prevent a potential *so what?* from the audience by deploying a series of evaluation devices that remind them of the point of the story. Johnstone (2002: 83) defines the function of evaluation devices as follows: “stating or underscoring what is interesting or unusual about the story, why the audience should keep listening and allow the teller to keep talking.”

This evaluation can be internal or external. Internal evaluation does not involve a break in the story flow, and it is realised through the speaker's manipulation of verbal elements such as stress, tempo, repetition, lexical choice, direct/reported speech, etc. In this type, we can include the introduction of details, imagery and hyperbole (described in sections 4.1 and 4.2). External evaluation takes place in the form of free parenthetical utterances, when the speaker abandons his/her narration momentarily to introduce a statement through which s/he explicitly evaluates the experience.

One of the things that attracts our attention in the story of Pedro Quiche is the fact that the opening and the closing of the story include external evaluation utterances in which the narrator expresses his assessment of the worthiness of listening to the story. It is clear, then, that Jim is interested throughout in justifying his telling of the story.

(10) Oh Dan, just a quick note. **And probably you'll be amused.** Uh over the over the uh week I went out and I visited a Huaylas friend of mine. (4318–4320)

(11) He's a **great guy**. - **Anyway, I/we thought it was wonderful.** That's kind of a highlight of of the being over there. (4542–4543)

Extract 11 exemplifies the two types of external evaluators that have been found in the story analysed, depending on whether the focus of the evaluation is on one element of the story (in this case, the main character) or on the story as a whole.

On the one hand, there are evaluators involving a comment about some aspect of the story. In our case, it is mainly the protagonist of the story, Pedro Quiche, who is at the base of most of the evaluative expressions classified in this second type:

- (12)
- “Pedrito is a perfect Guailas migrant” (4340)
  - “this guy is one of these types of people who knows how to make money he he just knows how to make money” (4350–51)
  - “the guy is a beaver he’s a real highlander he’s atypical Huaylas type he’s a hard worker” (4354–56)
  - “I mean this guy is just pjjj” (4373)
  - “I mean this guy is wonderful” (4494)
  - “I think he’s amazing” (4501)
  - “he’s just a marvellous guy” (4536)
  - “he’s a great guy” (4542)

On the other hand, we have those which preface or close a section of the story and which involve the teller’s comment on the story as a whole:

- (13) now he’s retired in Bunnell. So anyway, we went down to see him. **And this is just - priceless**, you know. You get down there and it’s like going into a middle class mig/Huaylas migrant house in Lima, right? (4414–4417)

The amount of evaluative work in a story seems to be highly sensitive to contextual factors such as the social/communicative situation, the topic, and the personal and social characteristics of the storyteller (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 1997). Furthermore, external evaluation, according to Labov (1972), is more frequent in the narration of middle- and upper-class speakers. Whereas internal evaluation seeks to convince the listener of the worthiness of the story by creating an involving scene, with external evaluation the storyteller, perhaps relying more in his/her intellectual capacity, interprets and evaluates the story for the listener. What is interesting about the telling of the story of Pedro Quiche, by a middle-class highly educated speaker, is that the presence of external evaluation is not to the detriment of internal evaluation, as can be seen in the profusion of details and images.

#### 4.4. Discourse markers

Following Schiffrin (1987), by discourse markers I refer to those lexical units with little or no referential value, whose function is that of maintaining discourse coherence by appealing to one of three types of structure: illocutionary, sequential, and cognitive-inferential. The introduction of the discourse markers *you know*, *right?*, *you see?* and *ok?* in the conversational story we are analysing is perhaps one of the most direct ways of promoting the listener’s involvement. With these tokens the speaker appeals to the sequential structure of the discourse, acknowledging the presence of the audience and giving them (even if perhaps only apparently) the chance to contribute to the construction

of what in principle is a dialogic speech event. However, since they are almost never followed by a turn from the listener, it is clear that the storyteller does not expect a real contribution from the listener but a simple nodding of the head or, at most, a backchannel token indicating that he/she is following the narrative development. It is precisely this action of appealing to the listener that creates the impression that the task of telling the story is a cooperative one and, therefore, the contribution of the listener, even if it is only by paying attention, is essential. Examples of this can be found in extracts (14a,b):

(14a) and the next thing I know, last summer I get this phone call, - and and uh and I'd known he was in New York, **right?** I'd never had time. I'm never up there so I've never looked him up. (4380–4382)

(14b) J: He owns a house in Brooklyn, which he bought, **ok?** - A friend of his from Peru - bought a lot and built a house in Palm Coast in this big ITT development thing, you see? - But this guy is >

D: | Yeah.

J: a lot younger. (4401–4405)

Extract (14b) shows that obtaining a verbal response from the listener is not a condition for the presence of a discourse marker like *ok?* and *you see?*. The introduction of *you see?* immediately after a backchannel token from the listener makes it clear that the aim of such expressions is simply to create the impression of interactivity and, consequently, promote the involvement of the listener.

Of the four pragmatic markers mentioned at the beginning of this section, *you know* is clearly the most frequently used in the story (38 occurrences in the 2200-word story, compared to 52 occurrences in the 6200 words of the rest of the encounter) The expression *you know*, uttered with falling intonation, seems to function rather differently from the three previous expressions. Schiffrin (1987: 281) explains it with the following words: “*Yknow* also occurs when a hearer is invited to share in the information transfer being accomplished through narrative discourse. The interactional effect of *yknow* in narratives differs, however, because *yknow* enlists the hearer not just as an information recipient, but as a particular kind of participant to the storytelling (an audience). This function is suggested by the fact that *yknow* has two primary locations in narratives; with events which are internally evaluative of the story's point, and with external evaluation of the narrative point.”

I consider that the function of *you know* as a conversational device to create audience involvement is accomplished partly through the direct mention of the addressee (**you know**) and partly through the “marking” of the immediately previous or upcoming information as known or familiar to the listener. It is by reinforcing the impression of commonality and consensus between speaker and listener that involvement is created. The listener feels closer to the speaker because they share not only specific information but also points of view about the world. The listener therefore feels more motivated to contribute to the story, even if it is by listening more attentively, since he/she is being asked not only to receive the message but also to evaluate it, according to his/her world view.

(15) he doesn't speak hardly any English, right? I mean this guy is just pjjj, **you know**. He

speaks Quechua and Spanish . . . and English. - *Modestamente*, as he would say.  
(4373–4376)

In the previous example, Jim, by means of **you know**, suggests to Dan that they already share a view about people like Pedro Quiche and, for this reason, there is no need to verbalize it. In the following extract, the storyteller presents a scene as a familiar one, to which the audience can easily relate.

(16) he's standing in the driveway, waiting for us, **you know**. There he is, typical Andean man down there, little round guy, **you know**, little round face, **you know** . . . (4465–4467)

## 5. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have tried to illustrate how a conversational story contributes to creating interactional involvement. The first point of the analysis was to consider the function of conversational stories within specific communicative events. On this issue, I concluded that rather than transmitting a message or making a point, a conversational story may be introduced by one of the interlocutors to repair an interpersonal trouble for which s/he is responsible. The narrator therefore has the moral obligation to attempt to resolve the problem by offering personal information, which is at the same time relevant for and appealing to the interlocutor.

The second point of the study was to show the workings of four specific types of discourse strategies that have been identified as characteristic of *involved* (vs. *detached* or *informational*) discourse types or styles (see Chafe 1982; Biber 1988; Tannen 1989): (i) details and imagery, (ii) hyperbole, (iii) external evaluation, and (iv) discourse markers. It has been shown how the profusion of details, images and hyperboles, centred on the description of the main character of the story and his environment, contribute to representing a character (Pedro Quiche) whose uniqueness makes him worth becoming acquainted with, even if it is only through somebody else's eyes. From this point of view, the function of discourse strategies involving the introduction of external evaluation and discourse markers may be seen as auxiliary resources intended to secure the involvement of the listeners.

Apart from providing us with detailed structural descriptions of an essential element of ordinary conversation, the analysis of narratives of personal experience offers us an excellent ground to study subjectivity and individualism in ordinary language use, in a way that resembles the analysis of literary texts. As Tannen (1989) has shown, conversational and literary narratives share many resources for promoting the involvement of the participants. From this point of view, a conversational story may be considered not only as an act of efficient communication through following a pre-established pattern, but also as an act of aesthetic creation, which is ultimately intended to produce pleasure by sharing with others a personal apprehension of the world. Johnstone (1996: 23) points out that "discourse analysts often work with texts they like and come to love them in the process", and she cites Becker (1979: 240) to define the goal of a "philologist" as that of guiding readers/listeners to "an aesthetic understanding of a text."

Linguistics is sometimes accused by undergraduate students in language departments

of being excessively dry and rational. The analysis of conversational stories proves that linguistics can be, in the words of Tannen (1989: 197), scientific and, at the same time, humanistic and aesthetic.

### Transcription Conventions

The transcription conventions adopted in the extracts quoted in this study are intended to facilitate intelligibility rather than to accurately reflect the speech produced by the participants. For this reason, regular orthographic punctuation marks are used at the boundaries of tone units. Other conventions are the following:

- Short but noticeable pause which breaks the flow of speech.
- > No interruption of the turn.
- | Point at which one speaker's turn starts overlapping with that of the previous speaker.
- = No noticeable pause between the end of one turn and the beginning of the next by another speaker.
- [*text*] Non-verbal vocal sound and other non-verbal contextual information.
- ... Unintelligible segment of speech.
- / Sudden interruption of tone group/information unit
- (h) Utterance delivered while laughing.
- Bold type** Segment of the example that is relevant to the discussion.

### Appendix

#### The story of Pedro Quiche

- 4318 J- yeah one of those things uhm - oh Dan just a quick note and  
 4319 probably you'll be amused uh over the over the uh week I went out  
 4320 and I visited a Huaylas friend of mine  
 4321 D- where =  
 4322 J- = who lives in Burnel Florida'  
 4323 D- ...  
 4324 J- |in Palm Coast he's retired in Palm Coast (this guy's name's)  
 4325 Pedro Quiche Pedrito as they call him in Huaylas  
 4326 D- he was there when you were there ?  
 4327 J- | he is a he's an intimate buddy of  
 4328 Fidis and uh he (loves) to come up and he he's a guy  
 4329 who had a had a restaurant in Callao called the Contiqui and the  
 4330 Guailinos said he was the first Guailas millionaire I don't  
 4331 know whether he was or not but an not in dollars certainly but >>  
 4332 D- | yeah  
 4333 >>J in soles made a gob of money in his restaurant - his wife  
 4334 died and his kids came to the States to study and  
 4335 D- | in Callao because  
 4336 there was a club Contiqui out in Miraflores  
 4337 J- I don't know this was in Callao

- 4338 D- | yeah right  
 4339 J- | anyway so Pedrito is a is a a a  
 4340 perfect Guailas immi migrant - one of these guys who's always  
 4341 sent money back and bought the roof for the school and the village  
 4342 you know and (chuyu vario chuyu)  
 4343 D- | and he's retired and  
 4344 J- | and so anyway he  
 4345 migrated to the States about seventy: two or so or seventy three  
 4346 and started working as a janitor in a Social Security building  
 4347 in Brooklyn he migrated legally I mean he had you know green card >>  
 4348 D- | uhu  
 4349 >>J and everything - and and then he discovered that you know that  
 4350 h this guy is one of these types of people who knows how to make  
 4351 money he he just knows how to make money - he doesn't make  
 4352 . . . is he can make money and so he decided that  
 4353 maintainance of buildings was something that that he could move  
 4354 into - he has absolutely no hang-ups about work the guy is a  
 4355 beaver he's a t real highlander he's a typical Huaylas type he's  
 4356 a hard worker and - you know no hang-ups so he tried to he he  
 4357 . . . he he went to school and he got a refrigeration certificate  
 4358 and a heating certificate and he and all kinds of maintainance  
 4359 certificates from all these companies - he says I got a whole  
 4360 trunk full of certificates he says I can fix anything  
 4361 you know  
 4362 S- | [laughter]  
 4363 J- and so he worked as a maintainance guy in these buildings and  
 4364 got contracts to maintain things in in public buildings  
 4365 D- started hiring people  
 4366 J- and ok then then he discovered that there were a lot of  
 4367 Ecuadorians Peruvians and Bolivians in New York who didn't know  
 4368 how to make who didn't know how to get - uh go home uh they  
 4369 (ended) up paying too much for their airline ticket so he set  
 4370 himself up a travel agency so it's Pedro Quiche Quiche South American  
 4371 Travels - and so he starts writing he doesn't speak hardly  
 4372 S- | [laughter]  
 4373 J- any English right? I mean this guy is just pjjj you know he  
 4374 speaks Quechua and Spanish . . . - and English - >>  
 4375 S- | [laughter]  
 4376 >>J modestamente as he would say [laughter] and then but anyway he  
 4377 runs the Quiche Travel Agency actually he should have Chiquito  
 4378 Travel Agency . . . Pedro Quiche Travel Agency >>  
 4379 D- | mhm  
 4380 >>J and the next thing I know last summer I get this phone call -  
 4381 and and uh and I'd known he was in New York right? I'd never had  
 4382 time I'm never up there so I've never looked him up - all of  
 4383 a sudden last summer I get this phone  
 4384 call out of the blue - woo Jaime  
 4385 S- [laughter]  
 4386 J- | and you know I said oh con quien hablo este woo hablas  
 4387 con con Pedrito pues [laughter] con Pedrito Pedrito si si Pedro Quiche



- 4388 de Huaylas [laughter] I said Pedrito donde estas? aqui estoy en  
 4389 Bunel where? Palm Cos  
 4390 S- [laughter]  
 4391 D- |Palm Cos  
 4392 J- Palm Cos estoy jubilado tengo mi casita aqui en Palm Cos  
 4393 [laughter]  
 4394 D- so he's up there with his has he got family (there)?  
 4395 J- | well he's remarried  
 4396 his wife in Peru had died and so he remarried a Puerterican -  
 4397 woman and they retired then they bought a house well they haven't  
 4398 bought a house actually bought he owns a house in Brooklyn -  
 4399 typical =  
 4400 S- = [laughter]  
 4401 J- he owns a house in Brooklyn which he bought ok? - a friend  
 4402 of his from Peru - bought a lot and built a house in Palm Coast  
 4403 in this big ITT development thing you see ? - but this guy is >>  
 4404 D- | yeah  
 4405 >>J a lot younger he's got little kids and his wife and his wife  
 4406 came down there and didn't like it and so and his job is in New  
 4407 York so they decided they wouldn't live in the house so he said  
 4408 Quiche why don't you rent my house you're retired - and: you know  
 4409 just live in it you know so here's this brand new house  
 4410 down in the middle of the Palm Coast development - and so Quiche  
 4411 rents his house in Brooklyn for more money than he has to pay  
 4412 to rent this one right? so he's making money so he [laughter] so >>  
 4413 D- | sure  
 4414 >>J now he's retired in Burnel so anyway we went down to see him  
 4415 and this is just - priceless you know you get down there and  
 4416 it's like going into a middle class mig Huaylas migrant house  
 4417 in Lima right ? it's it's done in guachaperia furniture and >>  
 4418 D- | right  
 4419 >>J guachapo is that special you know that? [to O]  
 4420 D- no that's not  
 4421 O- | no . . .  
 4422 J- | no you don't know  
 4423 D- I had to explain guachaperia to uh to all my Spanish (friends)  
 4424 J- | it it it's  
 4425 a wonderful concept uh guachaperia is - it's related to  
 4426 being criollo uh in in the Peruvian concept this is something  
 4427 like it's pretension beyond your means in in a way =  
 4428 S- | [laughter]  
 4429 D- = but it also a little bit cursi  
 4430 O- oh ::  
 4431 J- and it and it's and it's you know everything is you know if you  
 4432 got a chandellier is you know the most extraordinary chandellier  
 4433 if you're wearing clothes you've got you know - everything is  
 4434 sort of too much you know it's like  
 4435 O- | . . . nuevos ricos  
 4436 D- | like the like the  
 4437 D- nuevos ricos is like the wives of the mi uh of the milicos

- 4438 O- | ...  
 4439 J- yeah  
 4440 D- | during the military regime . . . so there's the >>  
 4441 J- | yeah yeah everything is sort of  
 4442 >>D . . . thing the women were all just sort of dripping with gold  
 4443 S- yeah  
 4444 O- ...  
 4445 J- everything is overdone you know just t(h)oo fan(h)cy you know and >>  
 4446 S- | yeah  
 4447 O- | ...  
 4448 >>J here's this - furniture and it's all this Overstock Badcock  
 4449 furniture company [*laughter*] this is a furniture company that  
 4450 specializes in selling - superornate - and fairly expensive  
 4451 furniture to the upper-lower class and the lower-middle class  
 4452 people who are trying to impress others right? so there's this  
 4453 fabulous - huge furniture with - jungle designs o(h)n on  
 4454 t(h)he on (h) the cushi(h)ons you kn(h)ow and then there's  
 4455 S- | [*laughter*]  
 4456 J- all kinds of geegaws and ..... uh little little fluffy animals >>  
 4457 D- | right  
 4458 >>J animals and [*laughter*] it ju(h)st there's ever(h)ything  
 4459 you kn(h)ow =  
 4460 D- = little guachaperias =  
 4461 J- = blooming away you know and there's so we drive down there  
 4462 and here's this - it's only half an hour from Crescent Beach  
 4463 so I really so I guess we'll be seeing Pedrito a lot so Quiche -  
 4464 his wife . . . his wife was gone to Puerto Rico uh for a  
 4465 funeral so he was there alone so he's standing in the driveway  
 4466 waiting for us you know there he is typical Andean man down there  
 4467 little round guy you know little round face you know oi  
 4468 Pablito you know enthu(h)siactic gu(h)y - we come in and >>  
 4469 S- | [*laughter*]  
 4470 >>J he's got a spread for us he cooked all that stuff Huaylas  
 4471 . . . type bread uh seviche  
 4472 D- ...  
 4473 J- | typical seviche you know because he ran a restaurant so  
 4474 he knows how to cook you know all that stuff we had choros and >>  
 4475 D- | alright oh god  
 4476 >>J a in the half shell by the ch  
 4477 D- | choros a la chalaca =  
 4478 J- = a la chalaca we had these by choros a la chalaca we had about by >>  
 4479 D- | oh m(h)y g(h)od  
 4480 >>J by the barrel then we had un seco you know it it you know  
 4481 D- | ey invite me next time  
 4482 J- all this whole thing  
 4483 J- [*laughter*]  
 4484 D- | it's been six years since I haven't had Peruvian food =  
 4485 J- = and you know this guy and you know . . . we had a little  
 4486 coctelito you know . . .  
 4487 S- | coctelito [*laughter*]

4488 J- so (I'm gonna say) I said Pedro I said you have to come over  
 4489 and visit the University and he says - ok never been to a  
 4490 big university like that before I said Pedro you'll love it come  
 4491 on over I said you'll meet students a lot of people interested  
 4492 in Peru como no les voy a cocinar [laughter]  
 4493 D- | alright [laughter]  
 4494 J- I mean this guy is wonderful I mean he says - he says w he  
 4495 looks like Dinos Bautista you remember him I mean he's got an >>  
 4496 D- | uhu:  
 4497 S- | oh::  
 4498 >>J round Andean type you know he's kind of bumpy little guy  
 4499 D- | he's a bumpy little  
 4500 guy yeah well =  
 4501 J- = I think he's amazing oh the other thing you know Pedrito >>  
 4502 D- | you (both were) >>  
 4503 >>J I said  
 4504 >>D in Guailas in in in the sixties  
 4505 J- | uh?  
 4506 J- oh I met him back in sixty:-one or sixty-two yeah I've known >>  
 4507 D- | one  
 4508 >>J him for years he used to come back and be the marinero in the  
 4509 boats  
 4510 D- uhu  
 4511 J- and I've got a picture of him in some place he's all black  
 4512 face in a in a in a in a buque you know yelling and hollering  
 4513 and . . . =  
 4514 D- | does he ever return to Guailas?  
 4515 J- he hasn't gone back for a while I think eighty - three  
 4516 or ^something or eighty-four he was there^ - but uh anyway  
 4517 somewhere anyway but he goes back - but Pedrito said oh  
 4518 the other thing the final . . . is in his house he's got an  
 4519 office - and it's all set he's got a desk he's got books  
 4520 - all kinds of books philosophy techni technology books  
 4521 like how to repair television sets uh just a tremendous -  
 4522 pot-pourri of of of of stuff you know everything from you know  
 4523 the writing writings of Kant or or or something like that to  
 4524 to you know TV repair in three . . . lessons I mean incredible  
 4525 stuff an encyclopedia and the desk is all neat no piles of  
 4526 papers and letters and stuff you know I said Quiche what are you  
 4527 into? he says oh I'm studying real estate [laughter] >>  
 4528 D- | oh oh  
 4529 S- | real  
 4530 >>J . . . (h) . . . (h) . . . a real estate bro(h)ker  
 4531 >>S state  
 4532 S- [laughter]  
 4533 J- | he's - and he says outside let me show you my garden he  
 4534 had the whole place planted with with stuff you know he's got  
 4535 chairote and all the kinds of Peruvian-type stuff growing  
 4536 all over the place yuca [laughter] is ju(h)st the g(h)uy he's >>

- 4537 S- | . . .  
 4538 >>J ju(h)st a marve(h)llous g(h)uy -)  
 4539 D- oh god . . . I look forward to meeting him - . . . when >>  
 4540 J- | hu Pedrito Pedrito  
 4541 >>D he comes over  
 4542 J- he is a great guy - anyway I we thought it was wonderful that's  
 4543 kind of a highlight of of the being over there [laughter]  
 4544 D- | [laughter]  
 4545 D- well I'll let you get on with your =  
 4546 J- = anyway I'll thank you sorry I haven't sorry to have you wake you  
 4547 up . . . I figured you would be . . . if you were >>  
 4548 D- | no (h) no  
 4549 >>J ready to go anyway [laughter]

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