A story-prefacing resource in conversational English
Russell Lee-Goldman

Stories are a key component of everyday conversation, but are difficult to execute successfully (Labov 1972, 1981, 1997; Jefferson 1978, Norrick 2005). Storytelling requires a combination of meta-discursive and semantic techniques: the speaker must hold the floor for an extended period, maintain the recipients' attention, and ensure that the recipients understand the "point" of the story and react in the desired way(s) (Labov and Waletzky 1967, Schegloff 1997, Labov 1997). It should therefore come as no surprise that language would provide resources tuned to telling stories. I present such a grammatical resource in English: a predicative copular clause with a cataphorically-interpreted *it* as subject. I argue that this pattern constitutes a grammatical construction which simultaneously *projects* (Auer 2005, Hopper and Thompson 2008) and *evaluates* (Labov 1997) an upcoming extended-turn narrative. It is, in other words, a grammaticalized story preface (Sacks 1974)

The construction, *it-be*-[evaluation] (IBE) is illustrated in (1). It is both discourse-functionally and formally notable.

(1) Marie: Oh it was so funny one day.
        Um .hh (.) hh uh Kent was (..) at the (.) store hh
        And me and Cassie were talking and I was just like (..) that's before he fired Barry.

IBE is dual-functional. It notifies the listener that a story is coming, orienting them to behave as story recipients and not interrupt the unfolding narrative. It also describes the story so as to capture the listeners' attention. Thus, mentions of time and place (i.e., Labov's orientations) are usually not interpretable as story prefaces: **It was last night/at the diner*. By evaluating the story before any of it is even told, IBE prepares listeners to react at the right time and in the right place. For instance, the most common reaction to Marie's story was laughter.

IBE is syntactically and semantically idiosyncratic. First, though *it* normally cannot accomplish cross-sentential cataphora, in this syntactic pattern it can (Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson 2008). Syntactic, semantic, and information-structural comparisons with predicates known to have so-called expletive subjects (weather predicates (2a), clefts (2b), extraposition (2c)) indicate that IBE is referential, not an expletive. Second, as a cataphor, *it* must appear in a copular clause; otherwise, the interpretation as a preface/evaluation disappears, even if the semantic content is in principle construable as an evaluation (3a,b).

(2) a. It was raining.
    b. It was Sue that had the idea.
    c. It was embarrassing that no one recognized me.
(3) [not interpretable as a story preface]
    a. It embarrassed me.
    b. I was horrified by it.

I present a construction-grammatical analysis (following Fillmore and Kay 1999, Sag 2011) of IBE that integrates the construction's formal and the functional properties. It makes explicit the connections to other syntactic resources of English as well as to the types of conversational actions intrinsic to storytelling. This provides further support for the tight integration of grammatical and discourse analysis: the two must be carried out in tandem, and generalizations about linguistic structures and social actions are not separate but interdependent.

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