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Interaction and Linguistic Structures

**Constructing scenic moments: grammatical
and rhetoric-stylistic devices for staging past
events in everyday narratives**

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In recognition of the enthusiasm he has brought to all aspects of the study of spoken verbal interaction, we dedicate this series to Professor Dr. Aldo di Luzio, University of Konstanz.

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1. Introduction

In this paper I shall analyze grammatical and rhetoric-stylistic devices speakers use in order to construct scenic moments and to build up narrative tension in everyday narratives, especially in complaint stories.

Complaint stories belong to the "family" of "reconstructive communicative genres" (Bergmann/Luckmann 1995) which recontextualize¹ past experience in the social-communicative present time.² They are "big packages", according to Sacks (1968-72/92), i.e. relatively long sequences of talk. The "participation framework" of complaint stories includes:

- a) The *narrator* and *complainant*, who appears as protagonist in the narrative. This protagonist is the victim of some wrongdoing in the storyworld.
- b) The *recipients* of the complaint story, who are not part of the storyworld and thus were not witnesses of the events being reconstructed.
- c) The *antagonist* and *wrongdoer* who harmed, unjustly attacked, or wronged the protagonist and who is not present in the narrating situation.

The antagonist's morally inappropriate behavior towards the protagonist forms the focus of the narrative (Günthner 1997; 2000a).

I will argue that narrators of complaint stories not only reconstruct the wrongdoings of others, but also stage these past events as "little shows" (Goffman 1986 [1974]: 506); i.e. they present them as something for the recipients "to re-experience, to dwell on, to savor" (Goffman 1986 [1974]: 506). In the following analysis I will present the grammatical and rhetoric-stylistic devices narrators use to stage past events in complaint stories.

This analysis is based on 36 complaint stories, which were narrated in informal German conversation (conversations over dinner, during coffee-breaks and over the telephone) among friends and family members.

¹ For "recontextualizations in discourse" cf. Bauman and Briggs (1990), Linell (1998) and Sarangi (1998).

² For complaint stories cf. Günthner (1997; 2000a).

2. Grammatical and rhetoric-stylistic means of staging past events in complaint stories

We shall look at one complaint story in detail in order to reconstruct typical features narrators use to stage their stories and to invite their recipients to show emotional alignment and involvement.

The following story is told in an informal dinner conversation among family members. Sara reconstructs her experience at a squash center:

SQUASH
1Sara: i war letschd woch im ↑squash,
2 <<stakkato> stell dir vor.> (0.5)
3 mit dem thomas, (-) berger,
4 <<p> mir war=n squash spiele, a stund>; (-)
5 un- <<p, all> danach gehn mir in d=sauna>,
6 und nō: war (-) s=war am nachmittag,
7 <<p, all>i geh normalerweile NIE am nachmittag.>(-)
8 un nō: war dieser (.) umkleideraum von de fraue,
9 VO::LL mit so WEIBER zwischen (-) vierzig und fu:fzig,
10 des war so a ganze GRUPPE die tennis gspielt
hat=oder=was,
11 hh' UND DANN↑HAB=I KOINE BADSCHLÄPPLE GHABT,
12 und nō: hat mi eine scho glei anPFIFFE; (-)
13 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> WAS ISCH EN DES FÜR A UN- eh
SAUEREI.>
14 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> OHNE ↑BA:DSCHLÄPPLE (-)S- SO RUMLAUFE.>
15 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> DES ↑GEHT DOCH NET.>
16Ulla: barfuß?
17Sara: ja. <<↑gepreßte Stimme> BA:RFUß HIER IN DE
UMKLEIDEKABINE.>
18 <<all> na hab i gsa;>
19 <<↓> ha:hh des macht doch nix und=so.>
20 und dann hab i dacht i war- i war so
verSCHWITZT=vom=sauna.
21 eh vom SQUASH.
22 nō: dacht i; (.)
23 jetzt dusch i kurz in- in de DUSCHE;
24 nō: sen aber VIER. FÜNF. drinstande.
25 <<p> nō: dacht i,>
26 <<p> heeh.>
27 <<pp> nō: geh i so in d' sauna.>
28 nō: wollt ich grad in d'sauna,
29 <<all> zimmer dō: wo die tür aufGEHT zum saunaraum,>
30 und die gleich(-)b- BLÖD <<hi>KUH hi ↑PFEIFT mi wieder an.>

31 <<↑gepreßt> JETZT WILL SE AU NO SO IN D'SAUNA. O:HNE
DUSCHT.>
32Ulla: HAHAHAHA[HAHAHHAHA]
33Rolf: [hahahahaha] haha
34Sara: <<↑,hi> SO: A ↑SAUEREI.> [hihihahahahahahahahah]
35Ulla: [hahahahaha(hat se.)]
36Sara: nō: sag i GA:r nix,
37 <<p> und bin nei (-) in diesen raum,>
38 und bin <<hi> nei in d'sauna,>
39 und war- nō: lag schon ((hi)) de thomas;
40Ulla: ((hustet))
41Sara: nō: bin i au nei::
42 und nō: kam nō: ne andere frau, (-)
43 und nō: waren mer zu dritt.
44 und nō:<<stakkato> KA:M. die:se. be::scheuerte. kuh.>(-)
45 MACHT d'tür uff.
46 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> DÖ: STINKTS.>
47Ulla: HAHAHAHHAHAHA
48Sara: ha <<↑gepreßte Stimme> STINKTS DÖ:((ha)) HEN. >
49 nō: hab i gsagt,
50 in de sauna stinkts IMMER.
51Ulla: haha[hahaha]
52Sara: [nach] schweiß. weil die leut ↑SCHWITZEN.
53 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> NOI ABER SO WIE'S DÖ: NOCH SCHWEIß
STINKT.>
54 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> SO STINKTS NORMALERWEISE NET.>
55 nō: hab i gsagt,
56 ja in de sauna ↑SCHWITZT mer.
57 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> ja: ABER DES ISCH (-) ALTER
SCHWEIß.>
58 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> DES ISCH SPORT[Schweiß.]>hihi
59Ulla: [HAHAHA]
60Sara: <<↑gepreßte Stimme> UND KEIN SAUNA [Schweiß.]>
61Ulla: [HAHAHA] HAHAHAHHA
62 (0.5)
63Sara: <<↑>des war <<stakkato> FU:RCHTBAR.>
64Ulla: hihihihihihih
65Sara: 'hh h'hi des war mir dann SO: peinlich.
66 dann bin i raus und hab ne wut ghät,
67Ulla: hahahaha[hahaha]
68Rolf: [hahaha]
69Ulla: i bin SO froh wenn mer dō: alloi isch da.
70Rolf: haja. kla[r]
71Ulla: [des] isch so: SCHEE:.
72 (-) hh' wie so a öffentliche sauna dō:.
73 i moin des isch au schee.
74 no isch a bißle unterhaltung [und so]
75Sara: [hihi]

SQUASH

1Sara: last week i went to play squash,

2 <<staccato> just imagine.> (0.5)
3 with Thomas (-) Berger,
4 <<p> we went to play squash, for an hour>; (-)
5 an- <<p, all> afterwards we go to the sauna,
6 and then there was (-) it was in the afternoon,
7 <<p> normally=i=NEVER=go=in=the=afternoon.> (-)
8 an then this (.) women's changing room,
9 was FULL of OLD BIDDIES between (-)forty and fifty years of
age,
10 this was a whole group who played tennis=or something,
11 hh' AND THEN I DIDN'T HAVE ANY THONGS,
12 and then one of them right away FUSSED AT ME; (-)
13 <<-tense voice> HOW DISGUSTING.>
14 <<-tense voice> TO WALK AROUND WITHOUT THONGS.>
15 <<-tense voice> YOU CAN'T DO THAT.>
16Ulla: barefoot?
17Sara: yeah. <<-tense voice> GOING BAREFOOT HERE IN THE CHANGING
ROOM.>
18 <<all> then i said;>
19 <<~> ha:hh that doesn't matter and=so on.>
20 and then i thought i was- i was so SWEATY
from=the=sauna.
21 eh from playing SQUASH.
22 then i thought; (.)
23 now i'll take a quick shower in- in the SHOWER;
24 but then there were FOUR FIVE people in there.
25 <<p> then i thought,>
26 <<p> no>
27 <<pp> well i'll just go into the sauna like this.>
28 then I was just getting ready to go into the sauna,
29 <<all> room there when the door OPENS to the sauna room,>
30 and then the same (-) s- STUPID <<hee> HAG hee FUSSED AT ME
again.>
31 <<-tense voice> NOW SHE EVEN WANTS TO TAKE A SAUNA WITHOUT
SHOWERING.>
32Ulla: HAHAHAA[HAHAHAAH]
33Rolf: [hahahahaha] haha
34Sara: <<- hee> HOW -DISGUSTING> [hihihahahahahahahah]
35Ulla: [hahahahaha(did she .)]
36Sara: so i say NOTHING at all anymore,
37 <<p> and I went (-) into this room,>
38 and went <<hee> into the sauna,>
39 and was- then <<hee> thomas was already there;>
40Ulla: ((coughs))
41Sara: so i went in too;
42 and then another woman also came in, (-)
43 and then there were three of us,
44 and then <<staccato> IN CAME this stupid hag.>(-)

45 [she]³ OPENS the door.
46 <<- tense voice> IT STINKS IN HERE.>
47Ulla: HAHAHAHAAAA
48Sara: ha <<- tense voice> IT STINKS <<ha> IN HERE>. >
49 then i said,
50 it ALWAYS stinks in the sauna.
51Ulla: haha[hahaha]
52Sara: [of] sweat. because people -SWEAT.
53 <<-tense voice> BUT NOT THE WAY IT STINKS OF SWEAT IN
HERE.>
54 <<-tense voice> IT'S NOT NORMAL.>
55 then i said,
56 well in the sauna one -sweats.
57 <<-tense voice> yes BUT THIS IS (-) OLD SWEAT.>
58 <<-tense voice> THIS IS ATHLETE'S[SWEAT.]> heehee
59Ulla: [HAHAHA]
60Sara: <<-tense voice> AND NOT SAUNA [SWEAT.]>
61Ulla: [HAHAHA] HAHAHAAAA
62 (0.5)
63Sara: <<->it was <<staccato> TERRIBLE.>
64Ulla: heeheeheeheeheehee
65Sara: 'hh h'hee it was SO embarrassing for me.
66 then i left and was furious,
67Ulla: hahahaha[hahaha]
68Rolf: [hahaha]
69Ulla: i am SO glad to be alone here.
70Rolf: of course. of[course]
71Ulla: [this] is so NICE
72 (-) hh' not like a public sauna.
73 i mean this is also nice.
74 at least you have a little bit of entertainment [and so on]

Already in the preface to the story, Sara hints to the recipients that something unusual, (i.e. something barely imaginable) is going to be reconstructed.⁴ The formula "<<staccato> stell dir vor.>" ("*just imagine*", line 2) in combination with the staccato rhythm function as "affects keys" (Ochs/Schieffelin 1989) framing the story to come.

In the following, I shall concentrate on three devices narrators frequently employ in complaint stories in order to stage their past experience: (i) reported speech, (ii) the narrative present, and (iii) verb initial positioning.

³ In the original (German) version the pronoun ("sie", *she*) is omitted.

⁴ Cf. Sacks (1971: 311) on the function of "prefaces" in stories.

2.1. The use of reported speech in complaint stories

In line 12, Sara reconstructs a reproach which was directed at her because she was not wearing thongs in the women's changing room. This reproach is introduced by the affectively loaded *verbum dicendi* "anPFIFFE" (*fussed at me*). The reconstructed activity of "Anpfeifen" (*to fuss at someone*) is contextualized by means of a high pitched, tense voice and a marked increase in volume:

13Sara: <<↑gepreßte Stimme> WAS ISCH EN DES FÜR A UN- eh
SAUEREI.>
14 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> OHNE ↑BA:DSCHLÄPPE (-)S- SO
RUMLAUFE.>
15 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> DES ↑GEHT DOCH NET.>

13Sara: <<-tense voice> HOW DISGUSTING.>
14 <<-tense voice> TO WALK AROUND WITHOUT THONGS.>
15 <<-tense voice> YOU CAN'T DO THAT.>

The quoted speech, which is prosodically marked off from the preceding context, is turned into a performance. Prosodically, it is distorted in such a way that we can detect a "layering of voices" (Bakhtin 1981; Günthner 1997; 1999; Schwitalla 1997). We do not only "hear" the angry voice of the quoted figure, but also the narrator's evaluation of this utterance as exaggerated, inappropriate, and rude. Thus, more than one voice is superimposed upon one utterance: The reported speech of the character blends with the narrator's evaluation. As Bakhtin (1986: 92) points out, "the speaker's expressivity penetrates through the boundaries" of the speaking subjects and spreads to the other's speech, by transmitting it in a caricatured way. In line 17, the tense, high pitched voice and the increase in volume contextualize a continuation of the quoted reproach: "<<↑ gepreßte Stimme> BA:RFUß HIER IN DE UMKLEIDEKABINE.>" (<<- tense voice> *GOING BAREFOOT HERE IN THE CHANGING ROOM.>*). Again, the reported speech of the character blends with the reporter's evaluation: We hear an exaggerated, angry, and rude voice. In line 19, we are confronted with the protagonist's voice "<<↓> ha:hh des macht doch nix und=so.>" (<<-> *ha:hh that doesn't matter and=so on,>*) ". Typically, when staging the different characters of complaint stories, narrators sharply

contrast the antagonists' voices with those of the I-protagonists. In this story, the antagonist's voice (which is prosodically marked off from the narrating context by its high pitch, a marked increase in volume, and a tense voice) contextualizes aggression and rudeness. The protagonist's voice – in contrast – is low-pitched, shows no increase in volume, and sounds rather calm: "<<↓> ha:hh des macht doch nix und=so.> (<<~>> *ha:hh that doesn't matter and=so on,>*) " (line 19). Thus, we can observe the "metapragmatic character" (Silverstein 1985) of reported speech: In quoting past utterances, reporters comment on the "use of language" at the same time. In line 31, Sara stages a further reproach uttered by the antagonist, and, again, we are confronted with the prosodic features already associated with this character: a tense, high pitched voice with increased volume: "<<↑ gepreßt> JETZT WILL SE AU NO SO IN D'SAUNA. O:HNE DUSCHT.>" (<<- tense voice> NOW SHE EVEN WANTS TO TAKE A SAUNA WITHOUT SHOWERING.>).

In re-constructing past utterances and interactions, reporters not only signal whose voice is being quoted and what kind of activity the quoted character is performing, but speakers also comment on the reported utterances and provide "speech about speech, utterance about utterance" (Bakhtin 1981: 337-338). Thus, the staging of the past events, such as the antagonist's communicative misbehavior, is an important device in making the narration more vivid (Tannen 1989) and inviting the recipients to show their alignment with the narrator (Günthner 1997). Ulla's indignant laughter in line 32 reveals her alignment with the narrator's evaluation of the portrayed misbehavior and simultaneously indicates her amusement at the story. In lines 46-48, the recipients are confronted with the antagonist's voice without any explicit introduction from Sara, the narrator:

45Sara: MACHT d'tür uff.
 46 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> DÖ: STINKTS.>
 47Ulla: HAHAAHAHAHAHA
 48Sara: ha <<↑gepreßte Stimme> STINKTS DÖ:((ha))_HEN. >

45Sara: [*she*] OPENS the door.
 46 <<- tense voice> IT STINKS IN HERE.>
 47Ulla: HAHAAHAHAHAHA
 48Sara: ha <<- tense voice> IT STINKS <<ha> IN HERE.> >

This segment illustrates how a narrator, in re-staging a past dialogue as a "little drama" (Goffman 1986 [1974]), can directly confront her/his audience with different voices without explicitly introducing the particular characters. This dramatic staging is possible once a particular voice is established as being characteristic of a particular figure (Günthner 1997; 1999).

The re-constructed utterance in line 48, however, is interspersed with laugh particles. These laugh particles are not part of the story world and the reproduced speech, but instead they represent the narrator's evaluation of the reconstructed behavior. Again, we can observe a "layering of voices": the narrator's "voice" penetrates the character's reproach and evaluates the reconstructed speech as ridiculous.

Traditionally, it is assumed that in using direct speech – as opposed to indirect speech – "the reporter-speaker does not have the option of communicating a comment on the content of the reported speech as s/he utters the direct quote, because (...) not only the form and the content of the reported speech, but also the non-verbal messages accompanying it, originate from the reported speaker." (Li 1986: 39). However, our example clearly demonstrates that even in direct speech the reporter is able to incorporate and contextualize her own interpretation, evaluation, and affective stance towards the reported dialogue.⁵ In the continuation of the re-staged dialogue between the antagonist and the protagonist (lines 49-60), the narrator again uses direct speech to produce a multi-voiced text:

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48Sara:  ha <<↑gepreßte Stimme> STINKTS DÖ:((ha)) HEN. >
49      nō: hab i gsagt,
50      in de sauna stinkts IMMER.
51Ulla:  haha[hahaha]
52Sara:  [nach] schweiß. weil die leut ↑SCHWITZEN.
53      <<↑gepreßte Stimme> NOI ABER SO WIE'S DÖ: NOCH SCHWEIß
        STINKT.>
54      <<↑gepreßte Stimme> SO STINKTS NORMALERWEISE NET.>
55      nō: hab i gsagt,
56      ja in de sauna ↑SCHWITZT mer.
57      <<↑gepreßte Stimme> ja: ABER DES ISCH (-) ALTER
        SCHWEIß.>
58      <<↑gepreßte Stimme> DES ISCH SPORT[Schweiß.]>hihi
59Ulla:  [HAHAHA]

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⁵ Cf. Günthner (2000b).

60Sara: <<↑gepreßte Stimme> UND KEIN SAUNA [SCHWEIß.]>

48Sara: ha <<- tense voice> IT STINKS <<ha> IN HERE>. >
49 then i said,
50 it ALWAYS stinks in the sauna.
51Ulla: haha[hahaha]
52Sara: [of] sweat. because people -SWEAT.
53 <<-tense voice> BUT NOT THE WAY IT STINKS OF SWEAT IN
HERE.>
54 <<-tense voice> IT'S NOT NORMAL.>
55 then i said,
56 well in the sauna one -sweats.
57 <<-tense voice> yes BUT THIS IS (-) OLD SWEAT.>
58 <<-tense voice> THIS IS ATHLETE'S [SWEAT.]> heehee
59Ulla: [HAHAHA]
60Sara: <<-tense voice> AND NOT SAUNA [SWEAT.]>

In this re-staging of the dialogical exchange between the two characters, we can again detect features of prosodic stylization and a layering of voices in reconstructing the antagonist's speech. Once more, the narrator uses prosodic means in order to contrast the reconstructed characters: Whereas the antagonist's voice is prosodically marked off by its high pitched, loud voice (lines 48, 53, 54 and 57, 58 and 60), the protagonist's voice is prosodically unmarked and sounds calm (lines 50, 52 and 56). Thus, different prosodic and voice quality features form the central means with which reporters may signal not only where reported speech begins and ends, but also whose voice is being quoted (Couper-Kuhlen 1999; Günthner 1999; 2000a,b).

The presented passages of reported speech show how narrators may use prosody not only to establish quotes as belonging to a particular character, but also to modify the reported utterances in ways that support the narrator's own aims. The recontextualized utterances are stylized, exaggerated, and caricatured and are made to accommodate the narrator's evaluations and to invite the recipients to show their alignment.

Polyphony and hybridization cannot, therefore, be reduced to literary texts, but speakers in everyday conversation can also make use of polyphonic strategies and produce "many-voiced" texts. The technique of "layering of voices" is employed to present different perspectives within one utterance: the perspective of the quoted figure

and the perspective of the narrator. Thus, what Volosinov (1929/86) calls "speech interference", also happens in everyday reported speech: One utterance can simultaneously belong to two persons (the quoted figure as well as the narrator), it can be anchored in two "worlds" (the storyworld and the narrating world) and it can carry two points of view (the quoted figure's perspective and the parodistic, evaluative perspective of the narrator). In order to infiltrate reported speech with their own commentaries and produce multi-voiced texts, speakers in everyday interaction draw heavily on the use of oral resources such as prosodic features and voice quality (Günthner 1999).

2.2. The use of the narrative present

A further device for scenic presentation found in complaint stories is the use of the historical or narrative present. In the literature we find two major positions concerning the use of historical present in everyday narration. Wolfson (1979; 1982) argues that the historical present does not have a pragmatic function by itself:

"the significant fact about the use of CHP lies not in the tense itself, but in the switching from past to CHP and from CHP to past in the story. Actions occur one after another in a series; but in order to separate the actions into events, to introduce a focus and permit the narrator to give his own interpretation of what happened, the alternation between the two verb forms is used. By switching from one form to another, the narrator creates a division between two events." (Wolfson 1979:178)

Thus, the switch from past to narrative present and vice versa is treated as a device with which to structure stories. The direction of the change – according to Wolfson - is irrelevant.

On the other hand, Schiffrin (1981: 59) argues that the narrative present does have a pragmatic meaning potential, as it allows the narrator "to present events as if they were occurring at that moment, so that the audience can hear for itself what happened, and can interpret for itself the significance of those events for the experience." Furthermore, she observes that the narrative present, which contributes to make a story more lively and scenic, is only used in the "complication"-part of a narrative:

"It is only here that tense is freed from its main job of providing a reference time: events can be understood as having occurred prior to the moment of speaking, with or without the past-tense form." (Schiffrin 1981: 51)

Thus, there are two different positions concerning the use of narrative present in everyday narration: On the one hand, there is the assumption (represented by Weinrich 1971[1964], Quasthoff 1980 and Schiffrin 1981) that the use of the narrative present functions as a stylistic means with which to create liveliness and construct a scenic presentation. On the other hand, Wolfson argues against the attribution of a pragmatic function to the use of the narrative present and maintains that only the switching itself has a pragmatic function; i.e. to structure the narrative by creating a division between different events of the story. The direction of the switch (from past to present, or from present to past), however, is considered irrelevant.

Let us look at two instances in which the narrator uses the narrative present in our complaint story:

28Sara: nō: wollt ich grad in d'sauna,
 29 <<all> zimmer dō: wo die tür aufGEHT zum saunaraum,>
 ->30 und die gleich (-) b- BLÖD <<hi> KUH hi ↑PFEIFT mi wieder
 an.>
 31 <<↑gepreßt> JETZT WILL SE AU NO SO IN D'SAUNA.

...

...

42Sara: und nō: kam nō: ne andere frau, (-)
 43 und nō: waren mer zu dritt.
 44 und nō: <<stakkato> KA:M. die:se. be::scheuerte. kuh.>(-)
 ->45 MACHT d'tür uff.
 46 <<↑gepreßte Stimme> DÕ: STINKTS.>

28Sara: *then I was just getting ready to go into the sauna,*
 29 <<all> room there when the door OPENS to the sauna room,>
 ->30 *and then the same (-) s- STUPID <<hee> HAG hee FUSSED AT ME*
again.>
 31 <<- tense voice> NOW SHE EVEN WANTS TO TAKE A SAUNA WITHOUT
SHOWERING.>

...

...

42Sara: *and then another woman also came in, (-)*
 43 *and then there were three of us,*

44 *and then <<staccato> IN CAME this stupid hag.>(-)*
 -> 45 *[she] OPENS the door.*
 46 *<<- tense voice> IT STINKS IN HERE.>*

The narrative present is used here to proceed from a background presentation, in which the narrator builds up the scene, to the nuclear phase of the story. Actually, this sort of switch from past (i.e. from present perfect, which is the colloquial past tense in German narratives) to the narrative present in connection with a change from background reporting to a foregrounded part of the story is rather typical for the use of narrative present in complaint stories. This observation is in agreement with Wolfson's position that the switch of tenses functions to structure a narrative and helps the narrator create a division between different types of episodes. However, one has to question Wolfson's claim that the direction of the change is irrelevant and that the change to narrative present has no interactive or pragmatic function as such. In the cases at hand - as well as in my data in general - , narrators do not use the narrative present to introduce just any sort of event or episode, but rather, to proceed from a reporting to a scenic presentation (and not vice versa). The use of the narrative present is closely related to what Hopper/Thompson (1980: 280f.) refer to as narrative "foregrounding", and thus, to material which supplies main points of the narrative and "comprises the backbone or skeleton of the text, forming its basic structure".

By using the narrative present in lines 30 and 45, the narrator makes a cut and jumps from "a long shot to a close-up" ("Fern- zur Nahaufnahme") (in Bühler's 1982 [1934]): 392 terminology). Thus, the use of narrative present can be treated as a device which contributes to the "zooming in"⁶ on a particular scene, and minimizes the distance between the reconstructed event and the recipient. Perelman (1979) in his *Nouvelle Rhétorique* also refers to rhetorical staging techniques and the creation of "presence" in narratives: by reducing the distance between storyworld and recipient, the narrator creates a common context within which to evaluate the presented events (Perelman 1979: 35). One could even claim that temporal distance (past tense; i.e. present perfect in German) and temporal presence (present tense) are used metaphorically in order to create narrative distance and narrative closeness.

⁶ For "zooming" -techniques cf. Tannen (1989) and Günthner (1992).

Although the narrative present in my data is frequently used to proceed from a more reporting to a scenic stance – and thus to mark a change in perspective –, the direction of the shift (past to present vs. present to past) is not arbitrary. The narrative present cannot be reduced to "indicating otherness" or "change of context"; instead it seems to have an inherent meaning potential, which is related to the semantics of the present tense. Instead of using past tense to reconstruct a past event, the narrator – by using the present tense – exploits a tense form which is normally interpreted as indicating "simultaneous with now". Past events are presented as happening in the "here and now" of the narrating world. According to Schütz/Luckmann (1984: 147ff.), past events are being taken from the "world outside of actual reach" ("der Welt außerhalb der aktuellen Reichweite") into a "world within actual reach" ("die Welt der aktuellen Reichweite"). Thus, a form of temporal hybridity is constructed: The "then-and-there" of the story world melts with the "here-and-now" of the narrating world.

2.3. The use of initial positioning of the finite verb

A further grammatical feature which German narrators frequently use within the complication part of complaint stories is initial positioning of the finite verb.⁷

In syntactically unmarked German sentence structure, the topic position (i.e. the position in front of the finite verb) is filled by one and only one constituent. In certain genres and sequential positions, however, this grammatical rule can be broken, and speakers may use verb first clauses. We have already encountered an example of an empty topic position in line 45:

```
42Sara: und nō: kam nō: ne andere frau, (-)
43      und nō: waren mer zu dritt.
44      und nō: <<stakkato> KA:M. die:se. be::scheuerte. kuh.>(-)
->45   MACHT d'tür uff.
46      <<↑gepreßte Stimme> DÖ: STINKTS.>
```

morpheme-by-morpheme-translation:

```
42Sara: and then came also another woman, (-)
43      and then were we three,
```

⁷ For a detailed analysis of initial positioning of the verb in spoken German cf. Auer (1993).

44 and then <<staccato> CAME this stupid cow.>(-)
-> 45 MAKES the door open.
46 <<- tense voice> HERE STINKS IT.>

colloquial translation:
42Sara: and then another woman also came in, (-)
43 and then there were three of us,
44 and then <<staccato> IN CAME this stupid hag.>(-)
-> 45 [*she*] OPENS the door.
46 <<- tense voice> IT STINKS IN HERE.>

The utterance in line 45 starts with the finite verb "MACHT" (*makes*). The topic position is empty; i.e. the constituent (here: the pronoun) which would normally precede the verb is absent. This is an example of "narrative verb-initial positioning" (Auer 1993). But why do narrators use this marked construction in the complication part of complaint stories? Generally, "narrative verb-initial positioning" is treated as an "expressive device" (Oppenrieder 1987: 179) used to construct a more "lively" narrative form (Sandig 1991). But how can we account for the fact that an initial positioning of the finite verb can contextualize expressivity in a narrative?

First of all, by leaving the topic-position empty, and thus, by putting the verb in the initial position, the action is emphasized, because the verb presents the "narrative-advancing information" (Hopper 1979: 249). Furthermore, by leaving out semantically redundant material, the utterance becomes more condensed and compressed. Instead of starting with an unaccented syllable in the topic position (e.g. "sie MA:::CHT d'Tür uff"; "*she opens the door*"), the recipients are confronted with the accented finite verb: "MACHT d'tür uff." ("*MAKES the door open*").

In my data, as our example in line 45 shows, narrators also frequently use verb initial positioning in combination with the narrative present. How can we account for this combination?

In line 45, had Sara used present perfect (which is the most frequently used past form in everyday narration) with verb initial positioning, the auxiliary would fill the initial position:

"hat die Tür aufgemacht"
(*has opened the door*).

In this case, the carrier of grammatical information, the auxiliary, would be in the focused part of the utterance, and not the semantically more important non-finite part of the verb

(i.e. "aufgemacht"). By combining initial positioning of the verb with the narrative present, it is possible for speakers not only to mark a connection to the action of the plot in general, but to focus on the concrete action, which advances the plot.

Let us look briefly at another complaint story where several instances of this combination of verb initial positioning and the narrative present occur in succession.

Lisa is telling her friend (Petra) about a car accident she caused. In the following segment Lisa reconstructs how she was parking her car while on the other side of the road a guy sitting in his car witnessed her doing it:

AUTOUNFALL

10Lisa: =ich versuch einzuparken bei de Klara,
 11 **KOMM** an des Auto daNEBen ran,[hh]
 12Petra: [hm]
 13Lisa: hh' **STEIG** aus,
 14 **SEH** nix,
 15 gegenüber von mir PARKT en ↑TYP

CAR ACCIDENT

10Lisa: =i try to park at Klara's place,
 11 **SCRAPE UP** against the car beSIDE me,[hh]
 12Petra: [hm]
 13Lisa: hh' **GET** out,
 14 **SEE** nothing,
 15 just opposite of me a -GUY is parking.

By leaving out the topic (the first pronoun "I") in lines 11, 13, and 14, the sequencing of the narrative events is handled in a denser and faster way – instead of:

"ich KOMM an des Auto daNEBen ran, ("I SCRAPE UP against the car beSIDE me")

ich steig aus, ("I GET out")

ich seh nix" ("I SEE nothing").

The utterances start by foregrounding the activities (scraping up against, getting out, seeing nothing), which supply the main points of the plot. Had the speaker used neither verb initial positioning nor the narrative present, the presentation of the narrated actions would not have near the density of the original form:

(a) KONSTRUIERTES BEISPIEL

11Lisa: **ich bin** an das Auto daneben **rangekommen**,
 ...

13Lisa: dann **bin ich ausgestiegen**,
14 doch **hab ich nix gesehen**,

(b) KONSTRUIERTES BEISPIEL

11Lisa: **bin** an das Auto daneben **rangekommen**,

...

13Lisa: **bin ausgestiegen**,

14 **hab** nix **gesehen**,

(a) CONSTRUCTED EXAMPLE:

MORPHEME-BY-MORPHEME-TRANSLATION

11Lisa: **I have** against the car beside me **scraped up**,

...

13Lisa: then **have I gotten out**,

14 but have **I nothing seen**,

COLLOQUIAL TRANSLATION

11Lisa: **I scraped up** against the car beside me,

...

13Lisa: then **I got out**,

14 but **I saw** nothing,

(b) CONSTRUCTED EXAMPLE

MORPHEME-BY-MORPHEME-TRANSLATION

11Lisa: **have** against the car beside me **scraped up**,

...

13Lisa: **have gotten out**,

14 **have** nothing **seen**,

COLLOQUIAL TRANSLATION

11Lisa: **scraped up** against the car beside me,

...

13Lisa: **got out**,

14 **saw** nothing,

By using the narrative present instead of the present perfect, which starts with the auxiliary, speakers can place the semantically relevant and narrative-advancing information at the beginning of an utterance and foreground the concrete action:

11Lisa: **KOMM** an des Auto daNEBen ran, [hh]

13 hh' **STEIG** aus,

14 SEH nix,

11Lisa: **SCRAPE UP** against the car be**SIDE** me,[hh]
13 hh' **GET** out,
14 **SEE** nothing,

Thus, the co-occurrences of these grammatical devices cannot be reduced to arbitrary combinations; instead they represent interactive resources speakers use in order to construct scenic moments in complaint stories.

In my data, all combinations of these two features appear within the complication part of the narrative and are closely related to the construction of the narrative nucleus. Verbs used in such initial positioning are generally dynamic verbs; i.e. they represent transitory actions. Furthermore, these utterances are characterized by short, condensed constructions and short intonation phrases. They often start with an accentuated verb. These features of syntactic and semantic density and rhythmic acceleration in combination with a focus on the action contribute to the contextualization of expressivity and vividness.

By foregrounding the action and thus the central components of the plot, the combination of verb initial positioning and narrative present turns out to be a grammaticalized form of creating narrative density, and thus, of dramatizing the storytelling.

3. Conclusion

As the analysis reveals, narrators of complaint stories do not merely report information, but "present a sort of drama to the audience" (Goffman 1986 [1974]: 508). By using scenic devices such as the reconstruction of past dialogues, the narrative present, and initial positioning of the verb, the speaker turns the narrative into a performance, making it more immediate for her/his audience. The reduced distance between the storyworld and the recipients creates a common context within which to evaluate the presented events and to create alignment among the participants.

The function of scenic presentation techniques in narratives has already been described in classical rhetoric. Quintilian (1972: 445) emphasized that stories are not just told for the listeners "to get familiar with the particular event but to get them to agree with one's perspective" (my translation, S.G.). Quintilian recommends using a maximum

amount of vividness when narrating a past event: The speaker should portray the past events in such a vivid way that the listener gets the impression of "perceiving them with his own eyes":

"It is a great achievement to portray the events we talk about in such a clear and distinct way, as if one would see them clearly in front of oneself. A speech whose force only reaches as far as the ears is not successful enough and does not attain the necessary effects. As long as the speaker only has the impression that what he speaks about is something he is saying and not something he is modelling and presenting in his mind's eye, his speech cannot be a success." (Quintilian VIII, 3, 62; my translation, S.G.)

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