Personal experience narratives in three West African sign languages: the influence of time-depth, community size and social interaction

Dias Da Silva Morgado Pereira, M.

PART II

STRUCTURE OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES

Chapter 3 – STUDY 1 Structure of personal experience narratives

3.1 Introduction

> *Ao contar estórias, situamos os outros e a nós mesmos numa rede de relações sociais, crenças, valores, ou seja, ao contar estórias, estamos construindo identidades.*
>
> [When we tell stories, we place others and ourselves in a network of social relations, beliefs, values, in other words, by telling stories, we are constructing identities.]
>
> (Liliana Cabral Bastos 2005, 81)

Storytelling is a human universal (Smith et al. 2017), in which events that unfold through time are communicated to an audience (Genette 1980; Bruner 1991). To use a widely-accepted definition for a **narrative** or story (the two are not distinguished here): "a narrative is an account of a sequence of events in the order in which they occurred to make a point" (Labov & Waletzky 1967). Stories also must include enough information for the audience to be able to imagine the world of the story in their minds: who, what, when, where, why and how. Thus, at a fundamental level, the **narrative structure** includes both (1) the **ordering of events** and (2) the **information** provided about those events. A further aspect of storytelling involves the ways that a storyteller makes the account compelling. Such narrative devices are crucial to telling a good story, and they are addressed in separate studies: Studies 2, 3, and 4 (Chapters 4–6).

In the current study here in Chapter 3, I focus specifically on narrative order and information, with the following main research question: how do signers of the three different sign languages (AdaSL, LaSiBo, LGG) structure their personal experience narratives? Even though storytelling is universal, it is mediated through both language and cultural knowledge (Dunbar 2014, 14013) and previous research has shown that it may not be until around 8–9 years of age that children exhibit full storytelling competence (Shapiro & Hudson 1991; Marjanovic-Umek et al. 2002). Further, true virtuosity in storytelling – whether in oral or literary traditions – is something that takes many more years to develop. For these reasons, it is not known to what extent storytelling conventions as linguistic constructions have developed for the signers in each of the three communities.

Developing storytelling skills not only requires basic linguistic structure (a lexicon, grammar, prosodic scaffolding, etc. [Sandler 2012; Stamp & Sandler 2021]), but also involves developing specific cultural and linguistic conventions for how to tell a story, as well as being able to consider what the audience or interlocutor knows (for the story to have a point), and knowing how to tell the story interestingly. As explained in

Chapter 1, the three languages in this research differ based on three **factors**: community size, time depth, and social interaction. To what extent is storytelling developed for the signers of these three languages when the language is relatively young (time depth), or there are not many communication partners (community size), or there are not many opportunities to tell stories (social interaction)? In this thesis, I pursue the hypothesis that social interaction is the primary factor leading to narrative development: the more a deaf group interacts, the faster the language develops, regardless of community size, or language age. Therefore, I predict that (1) AdaSL and LGG storytelling will be more developed than LaSiBo due to differences in social interaction, and (2) gender differences may appear in LGG (see §1.6.3). Since **AdaSL** is much older than the other languages, signers may have had time to develop a more conventional structure through accumulated interactions. The fact that **LGG** is the youngest, does not exclude a very high level of interactions in a short period due to the community size, which leads me to predict that LGG signers may also have evolved conventional narrative structures. At the same time, these interactions may be imbalanced by gender due to culturally marked differences in socialisation habits. Male LGG signers have many more socialisation opportunities, so their storytelling skills may be more advanced than female LGG signers. Finally, **LaSiBo** has had the lowest frequency of socialization opportunities, since they do not socialise as a group, but apparently only within the same pairs and not so actively, they are in their first generation of deaf signers and they constitute a very small community (§1.5; Tano 2016, 69 – 70). Therefore, storytelling in LaSiBo may be the least elaborated in terms of both structure (this chapter) and narrative devices (Chapters 5, 6, 7).

On the other hand, we also have to consider that, despite being unable to hear, the deaf are visual people that feed from gestures used by their surrounding hearing peers. If that is so, signers might have had countless opportunities to watch storytelling with all kinds of co-speech gestures from birth. Therefore, that gestural input may have given individuals in all these communities a kind of scaffolding for how to tell a story using their bodies and space: how much time it takes, the type of gestures involved, the expected reaction of the audience, etc. That argues for full narrative structure in all groups, not just AdaSL and LGG. Why? Also, if it is such a human universal to tell stories, won't all adults be able to do it to the same extent?

To test the predictions above, I elicited personal experience narratives with deaf signers from the villages of Adamorobe (Ghana; AdaSL) and Bouakako (Côte d'Ivoire; LaSiBo) and the city of Bissau (Guinea-Bissau; LGG). Specifically, I asked whether they had ever been in a life-threatening situation. Because the participants are mostly farmers who know the danger of snakes, I asked if they had ever encountered dangerous animals, in particular snakes. The question was posed in the same way to all deaf participants in the three different locations. This method of elicitation is well

known from the pioneering work of William Labov and Joshua Waletzky, to produce narratives of personal experiences that are relatively spontaneous and more likely to contain vernacular language than other types of narratives, such as retelling a myth or a fairytale. In the analysis, I use Labov & Waletzky's (L&W) model (1967). Since the topic of the story involves a particularly emotional moment, culminating in the encounter with a dangerous animal, I found in Freytag's pyramid (1894), the missing piece in L&W's model. Recognising the importance of the climax in this specific type of narrative, I propose to apply Freytag's structure shape to L&W's narrative parts, or components.

In this chapter, I first provide a background on previous research in §3.2, starting with the structural analysis of personal experience narratives in spoken languages, where I focus especially on Freytag's dramatic pyramid and Labov and Waletzky's model for the analysis of personal experience narratives. Due to the significance of such frameworks to this thesis, I propose joining the two by applying the pyramid to L&W's structure (§3.2.1). Then, I will show studies about the structure of personal experience narratives in sign languages (§3.2.2), with special attention to those involving the climax. In §3.3, I remind the research question for the study presented here. This is followed by an explanation of the methods in the analysis of the internal structure of personal experience narratives in the three sign languages (§3.4), which complement the information provided in Chapter 2. I then analyse the narratives of AdaSL, LaSiBo, and LGG in five sections for each narrative component: the orientation component (§3.5.1), the complication (§3.5.2.), the climax (3.5.3), the resolution (§3.5.4.) and the coda (3.5.5.). In each section, the linguistic content in each component, for each language, is described separately and then all languages are compared. In §3.6, I synthesize the comparison of all components by language. In §3.7, I discuss the findings concerning the literature. The chapter ends with the conclusion (§3.8).

3.2 Background on analysis of narrative structure in spoken and sign languages

Given that this thesis focuses on sign languages that are either used by very few deaf people, people with little educational skills, or for a short period, it was crucial to study an aspect of the signers' everyday lives that could emerge spontaneously. In this context, telling stories about one's own experiences seems suitable to test the influence of community size, language age and especially social interaction in language development.

Storytelling is a human universal that depends foremost on language (Sugiyama 2005, 181). Consequently, it derives from and develops with a community of speakers, presupposing the interaction between someone telling a story and another listening.

Under this assumption, will West African signers immersed in a traditional society of oral storytellers develop the ability to build a narrative? I am inclined to doubt it in cases where they do not socialise actively. One is only capable of telling a story after listening to others (Sugiyama 2005, 180). What is more, the skill to tell a story is shaped by social cooperation (Smith et al. 2017, 3 – 4), which, in turn, is strengthened by the ritual of storytelling (Dunbar 2014, 14013).

When sign language develops from the regular socialisation between deaf peers, storytelling naturally comes to life. Narrative components seem to be universal, especially concerning the temporal sequence of events (Sugiyama 2005, 183), the spatial setting (ibid., 186), "the essence of the story-character and motive" and the change between an action and a reaction. It is precisely the universality of such aspects that enables translating stories from and to distinct cultures (ibid., 180 – 181). Hence, the West African sign languages studied here will likely produce structured narratives. Will they also be able to develop skills to tell compelling stories?

Deaf people are expected to value storytelling as an important source of information. Narratives may have served in human evolution the fundamental function of exchanging personal experiences aiding the survival of the group (Sugiyama 2006, 331). Most important, successful narratives must trigger the interest of, i.e., emotions in, the audience (Habermas 2019, 51). Emotions are conveyed within social interactions from different perspectives to develop empathy (ibid., 5, 65). The more detailed the climax, the more vividly the interlocutor will (emotionally) experience it (ibid., 68). This is, of course, learned through the practice of both seeing and telling stories.

Since the narratives collected for this study are about animal attacks, how likely are the signers to tell emotional accounts? Storytelling requires capturing the interlocutor's attention for a longer period than in simple interactions. Thus, (skilled) narrators must constantly prove that their story is worthwhile while checking with their interlocutors about the story's interest (Habermas 2019, 24). The particular topic of the personal experience narratives of this thesis is considered universal for being related to human adaptation. Predator avoidance, i.e., animal attacks (Sugiyama 2006, 319, 325), including snake bites (ibid., 322) refers to a "folklore universal" that implies (1) the identification of dangerous animals and (2) strategies to avoid them (ibid., 321). Consequently, telling about threatening situations trigger basic emotions such as fear or anxiety (Habermas 2019, 7). For all the above reasons, it seems undeniable to expect that the narratives told by the signers in the three sign languages include a climax. This is, of course, in the case signers have socially developed the necessary empathy to share an emotional account with their interlocutor.

Since this thesis examines one particular type of narrative, the personal experience narrative, I will first look more broadly at how narrative form has been viewed and analysed over time. I will especially go through the work of Freytag on dramatic texts and the hallmark study by William Labov and Joshua Waletzky (1967), followed by Labov (1972; 2013) on the structure of personal experience narratives. Both Freytag and Labov & Waletzky's sources are essential because each posits different but largely corresponding structural parts of a narrative, providing a methodological framework for my analysis. While Freytag depicts the structure of emotional stories – like the ones involving life-threatening situations – with a triangle whose peak is the climax, Labov and Waletzky's model is particularly relevant to the current study by focusing on personal experience narratives. Finally, research into personal experience narratives in sign languages has also been resorting to Labov and Waletzky's model for structure analysis, while recognising the importance of a climax.

In this section, I first give a short overview of the structure of narratives in spoken languages (§3.2.1), where I go, in particular, through two highly influential models: Freytag's (1894) and Labov and Waletzky's (1967) and then propose to combine the two. Afterwards, I turn to the literature on narrative analyses of sign languages (§3.2.2), where I examine research on personal experience narratives that also include the climax.

3.2.1 Overview of structural analyses of narratives

In this thesis, I sustain my analysis on the general idea that there is a basic narrative structure, with a beginning, a middle and an end. I then consider the middle as the high point in attracting the audience's attention, especially in the type of emotional narratives that my study focuses on. Finally, I look at the exact type of narratives that were collected in the three African sign languages, concerning personal experiences of dangerous situations.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle is the first source in history to identify what seems universal in human storytelling, i.e., the most basic narrative parts. In his plays, he presented the idea that a whole is what has a beginning and middle and end (335 B.C.). Based on this idea, in the early 19th century, Freytag (1894) developed a dramatic sequence for literary and performative works, where the middle, i.e., the **climax**, is the most critical point of the story. This midpoint connects two main parts, the rise and the fall of the action. Labov and Waletzky's model was more expansive than Freytag's dramatic sequence and grounded in the storytelling of everyday people rather than playwrights and authors. Since I will base my analysis on the ideas proposed by both Freytag and Labov & Waletzky, I focus this overview on their work.

Freytag's dramatic pyramid

Freytag (1894) developed a pyramid to illustrate dramatic productions peaking at a **climax**. This structure model has been highly influential in the analysis of different types of stories (e.g., Cohn 2012; Yang et al. 2021).

His main idea derives from the observation that, in dramatic texts, the sequence of events is typically anchored on a contrast, like "the accomplishment of a deed and its reaction on the soul" (ibid., 104). In that centre lies the climax, which is the most important part of the dramatic story, where the action rises to and from where it falls afterwards (ibid., 105). Reflecting a pyramidal arrangement, known as the **dramatic pyramid**, illustrated below (see Figure 38). Here, the five-part drama starts with an introduction (1), that rises (2) towards the climax (3), i.e., the main scene, and then falls (4) to a catastrophe (5). He further distinguishes three dramatic moments: the exciting moment (a), between the introduction and the rise; the tragic moment (b), between the climax and the fall; and the last suspense (c), between the fall and the catastrophe. The last two are not mandatory (ibid., 114 – 115).

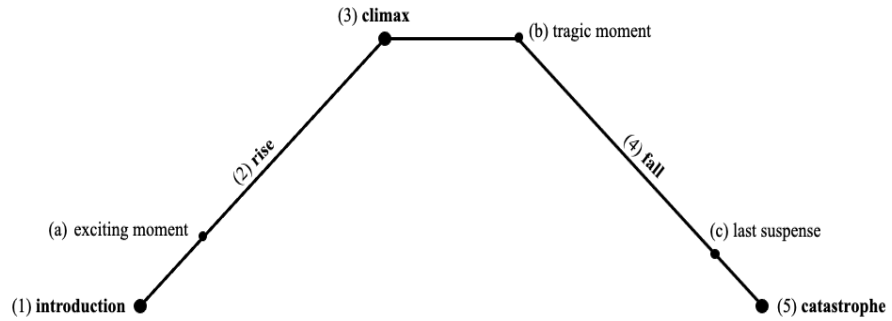


Figure 38. Freytag's dramatic pyramid comprising eight components: five drama parts (1–5) and three dramatic moments (a–b)

Hence, as illustrated above, Freytag proposes eight components (five drama parts, 1–5, and three dramatic moments, a–b) for the dramatic story:

1. **Introduction** (a prologue about what is presupposed for the action, containing the time and place of the action and additional brief characterisations, such as of the environment)
    a. **Exciting moment**, or complication (the beginning of the stirring action, the hero senses what follows and is set in motion)

2. **Rise** (progressing of the action, awakening of the audience's interest)
3. **Climax** (amplified scene resulting from the rising action and connecting point to what comes next as the effect)
    b. **Tragic moment** (the beginning of the counter-action which is closely united to the climax forming a double apex)
4. **Fall** (counter-action or reaction, followed by a sense of accomplishment or a new problem)
    c. **Last suspense** (aims at maintaining the interlocutor's interest)
5. **Catastrophe** (the closing action, the relief of the deed or purpose)

In a play, each part may consist of a short scene or a sequence of them, where the climax (the conflict, a decisive moment or an explosion) is the most enhanced scene (ibid., 115). The more the climax, is enriched, the higher the dramatic effect (ibid., 135).

When the sequence of events is delivered to an audience, what matters the most is not the event per se but the dramatic effect sparking emotions in the audience (ibid., 19). This is usually conveyed through the main character(s) in a way that the audience feels empathetic (ibid., 23). The dramatic effect results from a certain sociability, where communicated feelings are continuously expected to be mirrored by the audience (ibid., 52). Besides the "strong excitement of the characters" (ibid., 66), the audience's attention is maintained "through the progress of the action" (ibid., 40). Without that effect, the sequence of events is "lifeless" (ibid., 22).

Freytag argues that the ability to produce such an effect on the interlocutor presupposes "a certain degree of development when men have become accustomed to observing themselves and others critically under the impulse of a deed". He further suggests that the storyteller needs to freely master a language (ibid., 24) to set off feelings in others while telling a thrilling event (ibid., 25).

In the end, Freytag recognises that the dramatic author often gets inspired by life situations (ibid., 14), which are constrained to their essential aspects under a certain point of view (ibid.15). With this in mind, I now turn to Labov and Waletzky's study on personal experience narratives.

Labov & Waletzky's model

Specifically concerning narratives of personal experience, William Labov, who essentially established the field of sociolinguistics (Labov 1966, 1972, 1981, 1997,

2013 and Labov & Waletzky 1967), developed, in the modern era, one of the most influential structure models of narratives.

William Labov, together with Joshua Waletzky (1967), henceforth **L&W**, elicited hundreds of personal experience narratives from ordinary people rather than experienced storytellers. The original motivation of their research was not to devise a structure model for personal experience narratives. Instead, Labov wanted to argue that Black vernacular English should be recognised as a language in its own right and not as an incorrect or stunted version of standard English. He was able to show that these storytellers were as skilled, expressive and effective in their language use as those from any other speech community. In 2013, Labov made a brief comparison of personal experiences with the 'epic style' of old classics, concluding that, albeit spontaneous storytellers are not intentionally worried about academic requirements, they can be just as skilled as historians, who also have vernacular backgrounds (Johnstone 2016, 556).

In addition, the authors follow Todorov in suggesting that a personal story is ideally triggered off by something that comes along in a conversation and is thus more spontaneous. In such a context, the storyteller tends to turn it engaging and interesting to the audience (1979, 138) relying on narrative devices that mirror the actual linguistic potential of a given language at a given point in time. Therefore, when a surprising or dangerous incident that happened to the narrator is told without planning, it becomes a rich source for linguistic analysis. The naturalness of personal experience narratives contrasts with polished literary objects that may contain overly-formal language, such as tales, myths, folks, or legends.

The participants were not in the habit of gathering people around them to hear their stories, as in some traditional small-scale societies, so they were asked to tell about a remarkable episode that had happened to them as naturally as possible. To render narratives as spontaneous and appealing as possible, L&W (ibid., 30) decided to ask people about **dangerous situations**. They held face-to-face interviews that started with the question: "Were you ever in a situation where you were in danger of being killed?" When participants answered affirmatively that they had been in a dangerous situation, the interviewer asked, "What happened?", and the narrative would begin. This technique of eliciting a narrative with a question about life and death situations is aimed at distracting the participants from the formality or artifice of an interview context. In response to this prompt, they collected free narratives of thrilling experiences.

The people in L&W's study ranged from 10 to 72 years old identifying with working-class black Americans, from both rural and urban areas, and using the vernacular English of New York. None of the participants had finished high school. In their 1967

study, L&W chose just 14 adults out of six hundred narratives to exemplify the structure of personal experience narratives.

The analysis of narratives was done in a ground-up way to discover what the reoccurring parts of stories are. Such personal experiences told in a naturalistic way brought to light a more elaborate division of the structural parts than just the beginning, middle and end. The authors (ibid., 360) explain that this kind of narrative facilitates the intuitive recapitulation of past experiences by temporally sequencing the events. Thus, L&W argue that a personal experience narrative can only be identified as such if it has clauses that follow a timeline (ibid., 4).

In this way, it is always possible to distinguish the beginning, the middle and the end, but more specifically, each of these stages can be placed into the sequential narrative components that are listed in Figure 39. The temporal sequence in the stories expresses a structure containing the following five to six parts, as in Figure 40. In the course analysing spontaneously-created stories from people's personal lives, L&W developed a model that captured six components that reoccurred in all personal experience narratives, shown in Figure 39, along with their sequential position in the narrative: abstract, orientation, complication, resolution, and coda. In addition to these five sequential components, L&W describe an evaluation component that can appear throughout a narrative.

The **abstract** includes one or two clauses summarising the story before telling how something happened; for example, when one person started their narrative with "My brother put a knife to my head" (Labov & Waletzy 1967, 27 – 37). This brief phrase previews where the story is going. Then, after they were asked "How did it happen?", the rest of the narrative unfolds, starting with the orientation. L&W found that not all stories started with an abstract; therefore, it is an optional component.

The **orientation** component occurs in the beginning, and consists of a description that establishes time, place, characters and the activity or situation of the event as functions; it is the who-what-when-where component. Usually, the narrator describes it so that the addressee(s) can better imagine and understand the idea of the story. L&W (Ibid., 27) further state that not all narratives have an orientation (especially in children and less verbal adults who also fail to follow a temporal sequence) and that not all of their corresponding component has to have those four functions.

The **complication** is the main body of the narrative. De Fina & Georgakopoulou (2011) describe the complication as the narrative's skeleton, or backbone, as Linde describes it (1993, 68). It is when the action of the narrative begins, often in the past, with chronologically ordered narrative clauses, and it is conveyed to the audience what has happened. It should be told in a way that captivates the audience. In other words, Johnstone describes it as "recapitulate a sequence of events leading up to their

climax" (2016, 546), or the "high point of the narrative", as stated by Ozyildirim (2009, 1215).

The next component is the **resolution**, showing how the 'problem' is solved and that there is a conclusion to the narrative.

In the end, there is a **coda** when the narrator wraps up the story and turns to the audience. Not all of the narratives described in L&W's study had a coda after the resolution. Some examples of how people finish their stories include: That was it; And that was that; No more problems. The coda takes the narrator and the audience back to where they were at the beginning of the narrative.

How consistent are these structural components across narratives? L&W (1967) found that the abstract and the coda are optional, and don't appear in all narratives. In terms of length and content, a narrative can be quite short, with only two clauses, and still be complete if it has at least the complication, the resolution and the evaluation. They also found that even very long narratives have to comply with the condition of following the temporal line.

The **evaluation** expresses the reason why the story is being told. In stories without evaluation, the audience might think, "So what?". Narrators are constantly under pressure from the audience to make a story interesting, so they have to show how they felt at that moment, how they experienced it, and what they took from it. It is about what makes the story worth being told because it is about something dangerous, scary, wonderful or exciting. Storytellers in the L&W study wanted to show they had been in danger. The more convincing the story sounds, the more the audience feels involved. If the story is a vicarious experience (lived by others), uninteresting or weak, it presents a false claim. In their first approach to the evaluation, L&W distinguishes it as a separate component usually situated between the complication and the resolution, corresponding to the result of the sequence of events of the complication (ibid., 30), as if it were the climax. Under this assumption, they conceived a diagram (1967, 38), adapted in Figure 11, in which the narrative starts and ends at the moment when it is delivered to an audience. In their diamond-shaped graphic, there is an ascending line from the end of the orientation through the complication "up to the apex", which again seems to be a climax. At this apex, they circle the high point of the narrative, where "the evaluation suspends the action" (ibid., 37). They observe that this is where the narrators typically need to emphasise the emotional side of the story, i.e., their side. Then, the line descends through the resolution to the beginning of the coda.

Labov (1972) later modified and expanded the role of the evaluation component, on which the analyses described in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will focus. He reanalysed the **evaluation component** as being ubiquitous rather than restricted to one chronological

stage in a narrative. He recognised that evaluation clauses were scattered throughout the narrative and formed a second-layer structure embedded within the timeline. He distinguished between referential narrative clauses that tell the sequence of events and evaluative clauses that show how the narrator feels about what has happened and why the story is being told. In 1972, Labov updates the diagram created in 1967, adapted in Figure 39, keeping the evaluation in a circle at the apex. He explains the circle as being the "focus of waves of evaluation that penetrate the narrative" (ibid, 369).

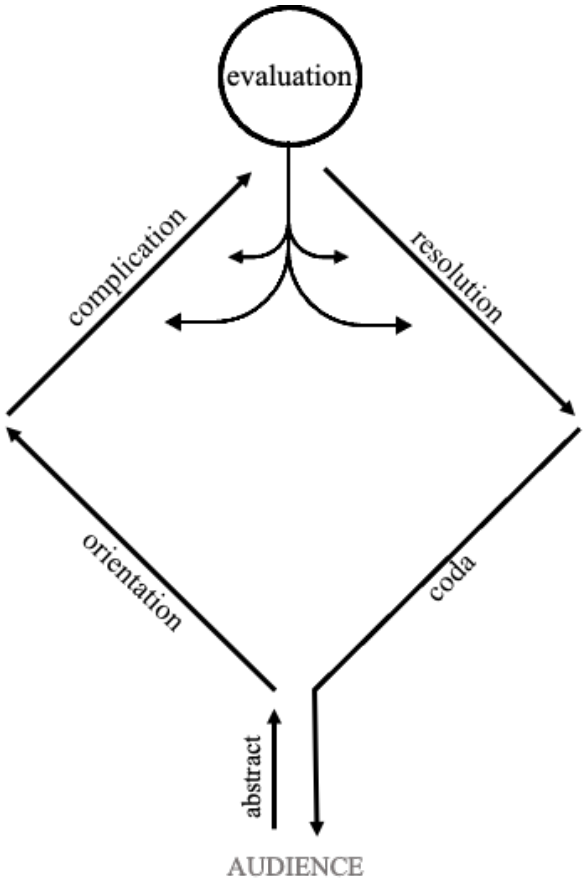


Figure 39. L&W's structure model comprising five sequential narrative components (1–5) and a ubiquitous component: the evaluation

In sum, the evaluation aims at turning the story compelling, which occurs through different narration modes (but see Chapter 4 for a detailed description of the different

types of evaluation). Typically, at the focus of the evaluation, in what could be interpreted as the climax, especially in emotional stories, the (skilled) storyteller may use quotations to convey dramatic force (Labov 1972, 372 – 373). Strategies involving reported speech or character enactment convey a higher level of emotional intensity (Koven 2012, 157). In contrast, the speaker addresses the interlocutor directly as a narrator, as a rule, at the beginning of the story, in the orientation, to contextualise what is being told (L&W 1967, 27), and then at the end, during the coda, to close the narrative (ibid., 35). In these moments, the narrator establishes the bridge between the surrounding interaction and the narrated event (Koven 2012, 154). The different types of evaluation will be further described in §4.2 since they are related especially to the devices enhancing the narrative analysed in Studies 2, 3 and 4. In Study 1, the evaluation will be referred only to what concerns the narration roles. Nonetheless, I should note that the evaluation has been one of the least understood and, hence, one of the most criticised aspects of L&W's model, as discussed below.

L&W 1967's research and subsequent Labov reanalysis of their work established a methodology and a structural model that has been highly influential up to the present moment (Alvanoudi 2021; Davydova 2022). However, it has not been free of criticism, especially in what concerns the fact that (1) narratives have been collected as monologues rather than construed within interaction; and that (2) they have been analysed around the temporal sequence rather than being centred on the experience itself; and, foremost, (3) it has not been easy to distinguish between narrative and evaluative clauses.

Concerning the first critique, some researchers point out that Labov based his entire analysis on monologues, contradicting the observation that narratives are embedded in interaction (Patterson 2011, 9; Johnstone 2016, 550; Schegloff 1997, 144). Sacks (1992) argues that stories need to be introduced, closed and adapted to the context of the conversation and its participants. Johnstone (2016) further states that stories are construed according to the influence of the participants who constantly add to them. Schegloff's critique is that the study does not report anything about the audience's interventions since there seems to be no interaction in Labov's data other than the elicitation question (1997, 144).

In response to these critiques, Labov justified his methodological options by first arguing that studies of spontaneous conversations also show a high frequency of monological narratives that hold the audience's attention in the same way as narratives elicited in interviews (Labov, 1997). More recently, Labov (2013) suggests that stories pre-exist to the moment they are told. That is, experiences are kept in the teller's memory until they are formulated into language for an audience. On that occasion, the language is usually adapted according to the type of interlocutor they

face. De Fina & Georgakopoulous (2011) explain that, although there seemingly was no interaction in Labov's work, participants appeared to have all the time they wanted to narrate their personal experiences without interruptions.

The second critique of Labov and L&W concerns the fact that the analysis takes the temporal order of the event as the basis of the narrative. Patterson (2011, 10) and Schegloff (1997, 555) argue that the main point of narratives is not to reveal the past but the personal experience itself. Instead, the experience should be analysed as the reason why the event exists, as controlling the recapitulation of events around itself. From their point of view, the experience is temporised and not the other way around, so the sequence is part of the creative process. In his elaboration on the evaluation component, Labov (2013) argues in his defence that evaluation, as the most essential component in a narrative, is all about the narrator's perspective on the experience and is not locked into a temporal order. Evaluation is what enriches the narrative.

Finally, the distinction between reference clauses in the primary structure, and evaluation clauses, in the so-called secondary structure has been problematic to identify for being so embedded in one another (i.e., Patterson, 2011). Again, Labov (1972) acknowledges that referential and evaluative functions may overlap.

Notwithstanding these critiques, L&W's work on the narrative structure has been – and continues to be – widely used, not only in linguistics but also in work related to identity building and socialisation (Goodwin 1990; Ochs & Capps 2001; Ozyildirim 2009; Bamberg 2010; de Fina & Georgakopoulous 2011; Johnstone 2016). Moreover, the fact that the model has continuously been applied in many languages (Koven 1998, Couto 2013, Kökpınar Kaya 2014, Guerrero González 2020) shows its robustness (De Fina & Georgakopoulous, 2011) and suggests that it does reflect universal tendencies in the structure of human narratives.

For these reasons, the L&W model would already be applicable in the current study, but it is even more appropriate because the personal experience narratives elicited in this research matches the methodology of L&W as well. The interviews on which their analysis and model were based were about dangerous, life-threatening situations. This perfectly coincides with the interviews done in the current study, in which signers of AdaSL, LaSiBo, and LGG narrate their personal experiences with dangerous animals. Also, Labov values the vernacular of ordinary people who are neither professional storytellers nor have finished school, which is also the case with the deaf people of the villages of Adamorobe and Bouakako (LGG signers have been to school). Besides the work on the structure, Labov also highlights evaluation in narratives. I believe that the study of narratives in these three sign languages will shed light on specific differences and similarities in the evaluation component, driven by sociolinguistic factors, such as the size of the deaf population and the age of the sign languages.

Although L&W's model seems to be suitable to test the narratives of animal attacks in the three sign languages, the lack of an explicit climax component makes it incomplete. It was evident to me, as their main interlocutor, that most signers told their stories progressing to a high point and from there descended to a conclusion. The fact that some signers highlighted the encounter with the animal more than others was puzzling, implying that this was also an ability to be developed over time and, most likely, over socialisation. Thus, I propose to combine Freytag's pyramid, centred at a climax, with L&W's components.

Applying Freytag's pyramid to L&W's narrative components

As just mentioned, it is necessary to see whether the two frameworks proposed by Freytag and by L&W overlap and whether a structural pyramid can be applied to L&W's components.

Here, I make a direct comparison between the frameworks proposed by Freytag (1894) and by L&W (1967) / Labov (1972). Even though Freytag describes dramatic productions – which are not at all the object of this study, I retain here the fact that he highlights the importance of the climax and of creating dramatic effects in the audience. On the other end, L&W's model focuses precisely on the type of narratives that I have collected, concerning personal experience narratives about threatening situations. In Table 17, I lay the two models side-by-side, showing that ultimately the proposed structure of both studies is not that dissimilar. The most important difference is that Freytag emphasises the climax, while L&W hardly mention it, if at all. Moreover, L&W's complication and resolution correspond to three components each in Freytag's framework. Otherwise, L&W's orientation and coda may easily overlap respectively with Freytag's introduction and catastrophe.

Table 17. Comparison between the organisation of narrative structures in Freytag and L&W

Freytag's pyramid (drama)		**L&W model** (personal experience narratives)	
component	content	content	component
		Summary of the story	abstract
introduction	Indication of time, place and environment	Indication of time, place, characters and situation	orientation
exciting moment	Beginning of action	Beginning of action Sequence of events Result of event sequence	complication
rise	Progress of action		
climax	Result of the rise		
tragic moment	Counter-action	Solving the problem Concluding the narrative	resolution
fall	Accomplishment		
last suspense	Additional interest		
catastrophe	Closing action or purpose	Returning to the audience	coda
		In any part of the narrative: Evaluation	

The fact that L&W include an abstract, while Freytag does not, may be because it is specific to personal experience narratives, or to how L&W (1967) conducted the interviews or both. Anyway, the abstract is only sometimes present in the narratives they analysed. Similarly, the coda, at the end of the narrative, when the narrator leaves the story and returns to the audience is not usually present in L&W's narratives. Freytag's catastrophe may include a purpose or the moral of the story before closing it, while, in L&W's coda, the narrator addresses the audience directly. Overall, even if there is no explicit climax in L&W's model, the complication, from the beginning of the action until the high point of the narrative, easily fits Freytag's components, starting at the exciting moment (or as he also designates it, the complication) and rising to the climax. Although described differently, the falling action in Freytag, right after the tragic moment, seems to correspond to L&W's resolution. The biggest difference lies in the last suspense which is understandable in a play to create emotion down to the end, unlike a personal experience narrative where the natural conclusion is the problem-solving.

Despite the different terminology, structural components do seem to overlap. Hence, to make the climax explicit and benefit from the visual layout of Freytag's structure,

Figure 40 presents L&W's components for personal experience narratives laid in a pyramid shape as first proposed by Freytag. Freytag's pyramid fundamentally subdivides the dramatic structure into a rise to and a fall from the climax. L&W model aligns with the main parts presented by Freytag, but the specific labels and structures reflect the types of components found in everyday narratives and stories from around the world. In the pyramid, I added to L&W's components Freytag's climax, of course, and two of the dramatic moments: the exciting moment (stirring the action) and the tragic moment (initiating the counter-action), anticipating their utility in content marking. Importantly, Labov's various types of evaluation can be anywhere in the structure, especially as part of the climax or merged with the complication and the resolution.

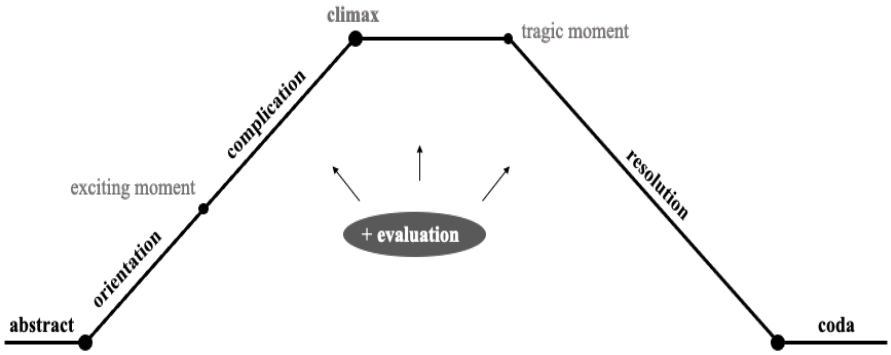


Figure 40. Freytag's pyramid applied to L&W's narrative components

Based on the combination of Freytag and L&W models, I found it useful to visually illustrate the type of personal experience narratives in the present study with a high moment at the animal encounter. This way, the climax was turned into a separate component situated at the peak of the pyramid and the structural components arising specifically from personal experience narratives were laid at the sides of the pyramid.

Finally, L&W and Labov's work is appropriate for the current study because the interviews they base their analysis on were about dangerous, life-threatening situations, coinciding perfectly with the interviews done for the study in this chapter, in which signers narrate their personal experiences with dangerous animals. Yet, L&W did not integrate any sign languages into their analysis. Does language in a different modality follow the same structural organisation as spoken languages? The next section will focus on previous analyses of narrative structure in sign languages.

3.2.2 Structure analysis of personal experience narratives sign language

The previous section presented two main models of narrative structure in spoken languages, including a benchmark model for how personal experience narratives are structured and encompassing some variability across speakers, languages, and cultures. In comparison, while there are several studies on personal experience narratives in sign languages (e.g., Bahan 2006; McIlroy & Storbeck 2011; de Vos 2012; Davidson 2017), there are very few on their internal structure. This section describes the existing published studies on the structure of personal experience narratives in sign language. All of them have also followed, in some way, L&W's model. In addition, some include the climax.

There is only one detailed study on personal experience narratives in sign language based on content analysis of narrative structure based on L&W's framework. In her book, Kirstin Mulrooney (2009) focuses on 12 personal experience narratives in ASL. From her analysis, she rearranges the narrative components and gives them new designations. Another detailed work of this sort is pursued by Sohre (2017). She analysed the structure of four personal experience narratives in Romanian Sign Language for her master's dissertation. Although she followed another model which in turn was partially based on Labov (1972), she used L&W's narrative components.

Other than these, smaller analyses of personal experience narratives test Labov's (1972) model. Wilson (1996) analysed one ASL narrative, Johnston & Schembri (2007) one narrative in Australian Sign Language (Auslan), and Sutton-Spence (2021) one narrative in Língua de Sinais Brasileira (Brazilian Sign Language – Libras). Interestingly, Sutton-Spence also felt the need to add the climax following Freytag's framework.

Besides content analyses of structural components, sign linguists have also looked at stylistic cues to mark narrative parts. There are two important studies of this kind, though not involving personal experience narratives. James Gee and Judy Kegl (1983) measured pauses as hierarchical boundaries (larger components including smaller components), while Ben Bahan and Sam Supalla (1995) observed different types of eye gaze, especially distinguishing the narrator from the character(s). Bahan & Supalla did not establish correspondences between prosodic boundaries indicated by eye gaze patterns and specific narrative parts, they rather pioneered a tentative effort in demonstrating such a possibility in smaller narrative units.

Besides analysing the structure based on content, Mulrooney (2009), Sohre (2017) and Wilson (1996) also used Gee & Kegl's (1983) method to identify prosodic boundaries. Moreover, Mulrooney analysed eye gaze patterns to distinguish the signer's roles. Although I mention Gee & Kegl approach since others have followed

it, I will not use pause marking in my analysis. Instead, I will rely on narration roles cued by the direction of eye gaze, as suggested by Bahan & Suppala and applied by Mulrooney. I am using eye gaze, especially in Studies 2 and 3 about narrative devices. In Study 1, I will look at the eye gaze as the main cue to indicate which role the signer is playing related only to its occurrence in specific narrative components.

Next, I go through the major findings of the structural analyses of personal experience narratives in sign language. I start with the more general conclusions coming out of the smaller studies to go then into more detailed results of in-depth studies involving content analysis of narrative components, namely by Mulrooney (2009) and Sohre (2017). Overall, these analyses lead us to conclude that personal experience narratives in sign language are structured similarly to equivalent narratives in spoken languages.

Three smaller studies followed Labov's (1972) framework. Johnston & Schembri (2007, 257 – 261) analysed an Auslan narrative where the signer tells about getting the teacher angry for being distracted in class. Sutton-Spence (2021, 119) focuses on a Libras narrative where the deaf signer tells about his attempts to kill a mouse. In addition to identifying all of Labov's components, she observes a climax before killing the rat when it is about to jump on the signer's face. Wilson (1996) analysed a personal experience – the Tobacco Story – told by a deaf signer in an informal context about a boy who spit tobacco out the window during class risking being caught. Curiously, going through the plots of these personal stories, the only one that mentions a climax involves the pursuit and killing of an animal, even if not dangerous. The climax is also mentioned by both Mulrooney (2009) and Sohre (2017) who will be discussed later on.

Both Johnston & Schembri (2007) and Sutton-Spence (2021) show that the personal experience narratives that they analysed have all of Labov's components. Wilson (1996) does not identify the abstract in her narrative, but the signer produces an entry in the story world, stating that he remembers something that happened to him in class (ibid., 169). She does not consider it an abstract since it does not represent a summary as L&W's put it. However, this seems to correspond to the story entrance in the other two narratives. Johnston & Schembri (2007, 258) considered the introductory sentence "Yes, I'll never forget this" as an abstract, though recognising that it does not stand for a summary. Similarly, Sutton-Spence (2021, 120) identified as an abstract the initial signer's statement about the narrative being a real situation that happened to him. Wilson does not mention the resolution either, but the long complication part is divided into two sections, which, in my interpretation of the story, would correspond to a complication followed by a resolution.

Although Wilson looked for pauses as proposed by Gee & Kegl (1986) to divide Labov's (1972) components, she ended up modifying the criterium to measure them,

finding them successful mainly in breaking the narrative into three main parts: beginning, middle and end (ibid., 167). She realised in her analysis that narrative devices were decisive in marking Labov's components (ibid., 106), and relied also on narration roles as suggested by Bahan & Supalla (ibid., 167). She concludes that roles played by the signer would be suitable for boundary marking (ibid., 173). For instance, in her narrative, the signer addresses the interlocutor in the orientation (ibid., 169) and the coda as a narrator (ibid., 173). Yet, the signer tells about the main events by embodying characters, which is manifested mainly by reproducing dialogues (ibid., 175) during the complication (including in what Wilson calls the second episode). Despite Wilson and L&W relating analogously narration roles and narrative components, neither of these works has systematised it.

The general assumption that the speaker's roles are crucial in involving the interlocutor, whether as the narrator or as a character – or both at the same time (e.g., Koven 2012), has also influenced Mulrooney's work (2009, 34 – 35). Mulrooney looked at 12 personal experience narratives in ASL from three different sources, ranging across a variety of topics that include the Tobacco Story analysed by Wilson (1996). As an example, one of the stories was about travelling episodes, where the signer lived the adventure of sleeping in an unoccupied firehouse (Ibid., 85) and endured communicating with a hearing person (Ibid., 87).

Like Wilson, Mulrooney also began by analysing pause breaks according to Gee & Kegl. In line with those discursive breaks, she observed slightly different narrative components from those of L&W, and, thus, gave them new designations to fit her analysis better (Ibid., 146). However, to identify content parts, she widened her analysis to include narration types, distinguishing narrator and character roles and their simultaneous use. To do so, she observed whether the eye gaze was addressed at the interlocutor during the narrator's role or was focused on the narrative event space as a character, as described by Bahan & Supalla (1995), but also in terms of narrative (or mental) space by Liddell (2003, but see §5.2.1 for a detailed description). She again suggests new terminology, distinguishing between the narrator as 'textual narration' – focusing attention on the story – and the character(s) as 'perceived narration' – focused on the past experience (ibid., 145). Following Liddell's framework, she also identifies the simultaneous narration, where the signer combines both the narrator and the character's roles. In these situations, the signer may embody the character in the past while adding information about the story. Similarly to L&W and Wilson, Mulrooney (2009, 95) can report a higher occurrence of the character's role (mostly in combination with the narrator's role) during the 'main event' (possibly corresponding to the complication and the resolution), precisely to express excitement. By such emotional displays, signers aim at involving their interlocutor in the story, creating empathy (ibid., 145) and arising interest (ibid., 120). In contrast, the narrator's role appears almost exclusively in the components preceding (which

she named ‘introduction’ and ‘background’) and following (designated by her as ‘explication’) the ‘main event’.

She finds no examples of abstracts like Wilson did not either (1996), or codas, and narratives typically conclude with the sign FINISH. She argues that components like abstract, complication with a climax and coda give the idea that the narrator has a narrative prepared, which can happen when it is told more than once (ibid., 146). Mulrooney clarifies that the fact that not all narratives have the totality of the components does not imply that they are incomplete, just as L&W (1967) have suggested before. She observes that all 12 narratives have an ‘introduction’, ‘main event’ and ‘closing’ as she designates them. Mulrooney also looks for the climax, as the result of the complication. She verifies that not all narratives have a climax and that the location of the climax can vary, whether at the beginning or the end of the ‘main event’ (ibid., 146).

She concludes that the structures of narratives in ASL are similar to those in spoken languages. However, she observes that such narratives have aspects unique to a signed modality, since in addition to signs, the information conveyed by the eye gaze, facial expressions, gestures, and the direction of signs complete the meaning of the narrative.

More recently, Sohre (2017) looked at the structure of personal experience narratives from social media (Facebook and YouTube) by deaf people fluent in Romanian Sign Language (LSR). Out of the four narratives, where the deaf are directed to the camera, two are about religious conversion. The third narrative is about the struggle of the signer to get his driver’s licence, and the fourth is about the experience of dealing with the hearing.

Her main aim was to compare her analysis with Mulrooney’s (2009) study on ASL narratives and with that of spoken language narratives included in the model she used. For the analysis of the narrative structure, Sohre followed a model by Dooley & Levinsohn (2000), which, in turn, used aspects of both Labov (1972) and Brewer (1984). At the prosodic level, she applied Gee & Kegl’s methodology of breaking the structure down according to the existing pauses.

Her analysis focused not only on the manual signs but also on non-manual features, such as the eye gaze (although results on this are not mentioned much in her study), body shifts and mouth morphemes. In addition, like Wilson and Mulrooney, Sohre looks for the hierarchical pauses proposed by Gee & Kegl. She states that pauses marking the abstract, orientation, and coda were easily identifiable. However, finding a break between the orientation and the complication was especially challenging. Thus, she relied on the moment where the signer started the story action to divide the two components (Sohre 2017, 47). In general, she noticed that pauses did not seem to align with the content type. When in the face of discrepancies, she looked at other

devices (ibid., 39), such as the signer's role. Besides Liddell's (2003) framework on narrative (or mental) spaces, she also relied on Metzger's (1995) description of enactment devices (see §4.2 for more details) – as Wilson has done – to observe the character's role. She concluded that character embodiment, including the enactment of dialogues, occurred mostly during the complication component. In contrast, and as expected, the signer plays the narrator's role in the orientation and the coda. Again, Sohre's work shows that pauses only sometimes express a transition between structural parts and that the signer's roles may help in marking narrative components.

In the end, Sohre's analysis of narratives in LSR aligned with Dooley & Levinsohn's model for spoken languages. Unlike Mulrooney's results for ASL, who had not observed the abstract or the coda in her analysis, Sohre's narratives include all of Labov's components: abstract, orientation, complication, resolution and coda. Moreover, although the narratives that she analysed were unemotional and did not refer to life-threatening situations, she finds the climax in the resolution just as Dooley & Levinsohn did.

The fact that narrators tend to embody characters during the climax, which can be perceived through the direction of eye gaze, is particularly relevant. Looking specifically at how the climax is produced in sign language, Hodge & Ferrara (2013) analyse retellings of 'Frog, where are you?' and 'The boy who cried wolf' stories in Auslan. They conclude that signers tend to retell the stories as the narrator during the introduction and the conclusion and as a character during the main events and the climax (ibid., 389).

Rachel Sutton-Spence (2021) in her book on literature in Libras shows preference in applying Freytag's pyramid to narratives in general (ibid., 116 – 117) and L&W's model to personal experience narratives in particular (ibid., 119 – 120). She notices, however, that, even if not reflecting the most common pattern, some stories do not have a climax, suggesting that it might depend on the plot itself. A climax implies a progression towards an emotional outburst and a subsequent change away from the problematic situation. Of course, this is not necessarily present in all stories, like the one about the deaf Indian trying different clothes and putting on make-up until getting completely ready (ibid., 118). This idea is observed by Cohn (2012; but see also Habermas 2019, 43, 46), who applies Freytag's pyramid to visual narratives. He further states that goal direction in a story depends on the information conveyed by the sequence of events rather than on the way it is told.

Supported by the fact that the climax was also included in the structural analyses by Sutton-Spence, Mulrooney and Sohre on personal experience narratives, I add the climax as a separate component between the complication and the resolution, as suggested for the role of the evaluation in Figure 40. Finally, considering the addition of the climax, I summarise in Table 18, the occurrences of the remaining narrative

components in the different studies presented here. Except for Mulrooney who proposed different content components, and Wilson that does not include the components that I have reinterpreted in the light of the other studies, all analyses present L&W's components in full.

Table 18. Occurrence of structural components in the studies of personal experience narratives in sign languages (in the order as they were discussed in this section)

Narrative components	Johnston & Schembri 2007	Sutton-Spence 2021	Wilson 1996	Mulrooney 2009	Sohre 2017
abstract	✓	✓	(✓)	-	✓
orientation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
complication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
climax		✓		✓	✓
resolution	✓	✓	(✓)	✓	✓
coda	✓	✓	✓	-	✓

In conclusion, while there are very few studies on the structure of personal experience narratives for sign languages, it is essential to acknowledge that such studies exist and have revealed significant similarities with spoken languages, such as an analogous structural organisation. Some of these studies have complemented the analysis of content parts with the observation of other narrative devices, such as the signer's roles, revealing, for instance, modality-specific devices of character embodiment. Therefore, I will consider the marking of narrative functions through eye gaze, as proposed by Bahan & Supalla, to try to establish a correspondence between the signer's roles and narrative components. In other words, I will look for enhancing strategies used by the signers to involve the audience in the narrative.

This overview of structure analysis of personal experience narratives in different sign languages shows that L&W's framework continues to influence the study of narrative structure partition based on content. Since I am looking at West African sign languages whose story building relies solely on interactive dynamics, a robust structure abstraction seemed more adequate, confirming L&W's model as the most appropriate for the study of AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG. The primary motivation behind such methodological choice in this thesis is justified by the fact that the type of narrative collected by L&W and myself coincides, i.e., it concerns exclusively personal experiences in life-threatening situations. Precisely because L&W asked

their interviewees the question of whether they had ever been in a life-or-death situation, they were naturally led towards a climax. Thus, for this study, I also take into account such a component (as designed by Freytag), as well as devices aiming at arising interest in the interlocutor.

In the background of narrative structure analyses (§3.2), I first looked at the two main models that I will follow in this study (§3.2.1): Freytag's dramatic pyramid centred at a climax and L&W's structural components arising specifically from personal experience narratives. I then proposed to combine the two frameworks, by applying Freytag's pyramid, including the peak at a climax, to L&W's components, consisting of abstract, orientation, complication, resolution and coda. After, I looked at studies about the structure of personal experience narratives in sign language (§3.2.2). I was specifically concerned about how L&W's model was tested, whether climax was involved and to what extent narration roles were distributed across components. The following subsection focuses on the research question underlying the structural analysis of personal experience narratives in the three African sign languages.

3.3 Research questions

In the previous sections, I explored storytelling as a human universal, dependent on language development and social bonding. Also as folklore universal, the topic of animal attacks presupposes an emotional account arising the audience's interest. In this line of thought, I highlighted two models of narrative structure: Freytag's dramatic pyramid centred at a climax and Labov & Waletzky's model for personal experience narratives. Then, I looked at studies on the structure of personal experience narratives in sign languages, following L&W's model, eventually including climaxes and relying on the signer's roles to turn it compelling.

Since this thesis study focuses on three African sign languages with different community sizes, language ages and interaction patterns, I can observe whether such factors influence how signers structure their narratives and make them interesting around a climax.

Thus, the research questions for Study 1 are:

1) How do signers of the three sign languages structure their personal experience narratives? And the hypothesis is: The more languages are developed the more narratives will be structured according to what appear to be universal components (as represented by Labov & Waletzky's model). Hence, LaSiBo narratives and those by female LGG signers may not be as structured as the ones in the other two sign languages.

2) To what extent do signers of the three sign languages convey emotion in their personal experience narratives? And the hypothesis is: The more socialisation habits signers have the more the narrative will be emotional, by including a climax (as represented by Freytag) and distinct narration roles. Hence, LaSiBo narratives and those by female LGG signers may not have a marked climax as the ones in the other two sign languages.

To verify this, I analyse the personal experience narratives in 17 AdaSL narratives, 12 LaSiBo narratives and 16 LGG narratives. In the next subsection, I explain which methods were followed to analyse the structural components and enhancing devices in the personal experience narratives collected about animal attacks.

3.4 Methods for analysis

To answer the research question, I analyse personal experience narratives in three West African sign languages, following L&W's model to which I added Freytag's climax. In this section, I recall the methodology followed specifically in the analysis of narrative components.

The deaf participants of the three sign languages were filmed in the same way. I called them one by one and asked them: "Have you ever encountered a dangerous animal like a snake?". The collection resulted in a total of 45 narratives: 17 in AdaSL, 12 in LaSiBo and 16 in LGG.

I follow L&W's model because they obtained personal experience narratives by asking their interviewees a similar question, namely "Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?". Thus, it was logical to test if the components that arose from their narratives would also occur in the same way in the narratives about animal attacks in the three sign languages with distinct backgrounds. Also, because the topic pitched during narrative elicitation potentially aimed at highly emotional accounts, Freytag's climax was included as an additional component between the two main middle parts: the complication and the resolution.

In line with L&W's content analysis, to which Freytag's climax was added, the criteria to distinguish components from one another were essentially based on the meaning of the utterances, which is summarised in Table 19 (see Chapter 2 for a detailed explanation with examples). In the **abstract**, I should find a summary of the topic. In the **orientation** component, I look for information about who, where, and when the story took place and eventually other details. The **complication** begins with an exciting moment, usually a verb of motion, and progresses until the moment immediately preceding the encounter with the animal. The **climax** goes from that encounter until the live contact with the animal is terminated. During the **resolution**

component, the attack is solved until the end of the narrative. Finally, in the **coda** component, the signer comes back to the audience to, eventually, add some comments related to his experience.

Table 19. Expected content summary in each narrative component

Narrative component	**Content**
abstract	Summary of the topic
orientation	Information on who, where, when and other details
complication	Beginning: stirring action to the animal's location End: just before encountering the animal
climax	Beginning: encounter with the animal End: termination of the live contact with the animal
resolution	Beginning: solving the attack (running away, killing it or other) End: end of the story
coda	Going back to the audience to add comments

Initially, to mark the boundaries between the components, I tested Gee & Kegl's method. However, the prosodic breaks with pauses did not match content units. Moreover, pauses were not consistent across signers, some used very few and others made many per line. For those reasons, I did not pursue this method for structure marking. Instead, I distinguished between the character's gaze and gaze on the audience as proposed by Bahan & Supalla (1995) to identify the signer's role, respectively as character or narrator. However, as described by Mulrooney (2009), simultaneous roles had to be considered. Thus, I also relied on character enactment types as described by Metzger (1995), influencing the analysis of Wilson (1996), Mulrooney (2009) and Sohre (2017). My analysis will be based on Metzger's work as well but mostly on Studies 2 and 3. Here, I will only use it to distinguish the signer's roles more accurately. Hence, apart from the narrator's role (looking at the audience), I distinguish between a fully **overt** character and a **partially overt** one, involving simultaneously the character and the narrator's explanations. I will keep in mind that, even in a double role, the character's role is focusing the interlocutor's attention on the event space (Mulrooney 2009, 37).

After dividing the narratives into components, I checked what was the signer's role – according to the direction of the eye gaze – in each component and the transitions between components. I recall here that the eye gaze is analysed in more detail in Studies 2 and 3.

The videos were annotated in ELAN, where specific tiers were used for this analysis: (1) **gloss** tier (divided into left and right hands whenever relevant); (2) **translation** tier (into English); (3) **component** tier (including all of L&W's components and Freytag's **climax**); (4) **eye gaze** tier (identifying either the character's eye gaze or the narrator's gaze on the audience); and (5) **role** (distinguishing between narrator, character and double role).

The annotations were then exported from Elan to Excel for content analysis. I watched and translated each narrative into English, then organised the translation by lines that are sequentially numbered (L&W 1967, 157 – 159, who order lines of narratives by letters), corresponding to minimal semantic units (usually comprised of one verb and its arguments, but also expressions). Finally, the lines were divided into the structural components. Components with one or two lines were considered **short** and with three or more lines were viewed as of **typical length**.

Line-by-line translations of all narratives in AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG are in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 respectively. In the end, I built the pyramids combining both Freytag and L&W's models according to the time spent by the signers in each component. They were all made manually (see §2.8.2 for more details).

The following section presents the content analysis of the narrative structure in the three sign languages.

3.5 Descriptive analysis of narrative structure in AdaSL, LaSiBo, and LGG

The previous section described the methods applied in this study, concerning how the analysis of the personal experience narratives in the three sign languages was undertaken. In this section, I go through a descriptive analysis of the narrative structure in AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG.

The internal structure of the narratives is analysed here, according to the research questions for this study, regarding how AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG narratives fit Labov & Waletzky's model and to what extent the signers of these three languages follow all the steps of the model. The components used here were previously described for spoken narratives, in §3.2.1.

The structural components are applied in the analysis of the three sign languages in separate sections, corresponding to abstract, orientation, complication, climax, resolution and coda. The abstract is the summary of the whole story and is presented before starting the narrative. The orientation refers to the background part of the story, including the who, when and where. The complication is where the action is developed until reaching the goal of the story, or the climax. Then the resolution deals

with when and how the problem is solved. In the end, where the coda is, the narrator leaves the story and returns to the audience.

In this section, I provide a descriptive analysis of the narrative components, in different subsections. For example, subsection 3.5.1. focuses on the orientation of narratives in three sign languages separately. After the analysis of each language, a new subsection compares the three sign languages with each other. Next, the complication (§3.5.2.) is presented for each language, then compared and so on. In each subsection, the analysis is illustrated through relevant details and examples, such as sentences and pictures. The analysis of the narratives into structural components is in the Appendix.

All components are analysed except for the abstract since none of the narratives present it. One LaSiBo narrative did not produce a narrative as a sequence of events that happened in the past, being more descriptive. Thus, instead of 12 narratives, only 11 will be taken into account in LaSiBo. Of all the narratives collected in the three sign languages, most start with orientation (16/17 in AdaSL; 9/11 in LaSiBo; 13/16 in LGG). In the LGG narratives, the orientation is not produced by three of the eight women. All narratives present the middle part of the story, i.e., the complication, the climax and the resolution. However, most LaSiBo narratives and half of the LGG narratives by deaf women are extremely short. In the end, most narratives conclude with the coda component (15/17 in AdaSL; 9/11 in LaSiBo; 13/16 in LGG). Whenever relevant I will also refer to the signer's role to create dramatic effects through character embodiment (Freytag 1894, 19, 23).

3.5.1 Orientation

The orientation is the first component, concerning the setting up of the narrative in the beginning. Before orientation, there could have been an abstract, i.e., a summary of the story, that was not found in the narratives for this study. The orientation component is when the story presents the background, i.e., the when, who, where and other important details. These aim at giving the audience a better understanding of the event that follows. AdaSL narratives are presented first, followed by LaSiBo's and LGG and then I undertake a comparison between the three sign languages.

Orientation in AdaSL narratives

The orientation is the first component in the structure of personal experience narratives analysed here, where the storyteller presents the background of the story. In this subsection, I show several examples regarding that component in AdaSL. In AdaSL, 16 of the 17 narratives have the orientation component. The narrative that has

no orientation is a very short one beginning immediately with the action event, in ‘I was looking for snails in the forest. The thin snake came to me and I cut it’ (Narrative ADA_02, 13 seconds).

The other 16 narratives that have the orientation include, in this introductory section, the answers to the main questions – who (all 16), where (14 of 16) and when (8 of 16), as the example in (1). The length of the orientation varies between one (6 of 11) and eight lines (1 of 11).

(1) Orientation component in AdaSL

A long time ago, [when]

when I was a small boy, [when]

there, on the farm, [where]

I went with my father. [who]

I walked there [where]

and stayed there. [where]

My father went farming [other details]

until he finished his work. [when]

(Narrative ADA_07, lines 1-9)

Now, looking in more detail at the orientation in all AdaSL narratives, I describe, next, what is mentioned for the main questions, namely for who, where and when, in this order. All 16 narratives with orientation explicit the participant(s). In 14 narratives, the signers identify the who as themselves, as in (2a). Of these, three narratives have an additional character: ‘I went with my father’ (Narrative ADA_07, line 4); ‘my mother had a baby and I went farming’ (AdaSL Narrative ADA_11b, line 2); ‘Kaya and I’ (Narrative ADA_15a, line 1). In the other two narratives, the narrators tell about the experience of others, in these cases of their fathers.

Of the 14 narratives that mention the location, 9 refer to the farm, as in (2b), since most of the participants are farmers (see Chapter 2 for details on the participants). Even those who are not farmers have experience with farming because they accompany or help their parents who are so. Three narratives occur in the forest and one mentions 'here' looking for snails.

As for when sequences, five signers started the narrative with ‘A long time ago’, as illustrated in (2c). Two others indicate the time by other signs like ‘In the past’

(Narrative ADA_15a, line 1) or ‘My father was old but not dead yet, he was here’ (Narrative ADA_13, lines 1-3). Apart from these, a signer refers ‘in the morning’ (Narrative ADA_10, line 1), without specifying the when.

(2) Signs referring to the who (a), where (b) and when (c) contents in the orientation component in AdaSL

a. 

ME

b. 

FARM

c. 

LONG-TIME

Eight narratives (including two very short ones) do not indicate the when but seem to be in the present or are stated as a frequent situation, as in examples (3a,b).

(3) Orientation components without the when content in AdaSL

a. I stayed to pick up snails with my father. (Narrative ADA_06, line 1)

b. I was in the forest,

near the water and there were lots of fish.
There were also many snails. (Narrative ADA_14, lines 1-3)

In the setting up of the story in the orientation component in AdaSL narratives, between the who, the where and the when contents, the order can be different in each narrative, as in (4a,b,c).

(4) Order of who, where and when contents in the orientation component in AdaSL.

a. A long time ago, when I was a small boy, there, on the farm, I went with my father.

(Narrative ADA_07, lines 1–4)

b. I went to the farm in the morning.

(Narrative ADA_10, line 1)

c. A long time ago, I was coming back from the farm.

(Narrative ADA_12, lines 1-2)

These examples show that the order of the settings may be different. In addition to who, where and when contents, nine narratives have added other details that help to better understand the setting of the story, as in examples (5a,b,c,d).

(5) Orientation components with additional details in AdaSL

a. I put the cutlass under my arm. (Narrative ADA_08, line 2)
b. my mother had a baby (...) (Narrative ADA_11b, line 2)
c. He tied the branches and put them on his head. (Narrative ADA_11a, line 2)
d. when school was finished (…) (Narrative ADA_15b, line 3)

Finally, I observed that in 14 out of 16 narratives with orientation, the signers acted as narrators, as in (6). During the description of the scenario, those 14 signers maintained eye contact with the audience.

(6) Eye gaze directed at the audience in the orientation component in AdaSL

LONG-TIME ME NASWANA (cocoa farm)

(Narrative ADA_04, lines 1-3)

The other two signers who showed instead the character's gaze immersed themselves immediately into the narrative, describing the setting when already inside the story without looking at the physical addressee(s). I will go into more detail about embodiment types in Chapter 6 (Study 3).

In conclusion, 16 out of the 17 narratives have an introductory part, the orientation. Here, most of the narratives address the who (mostly the self, except for two about the fathers), and the where (typically in the farm) contents and half refer to the when (mainly as a long time ago), as shown in the relevant examples above. The contents on participants, location and time of the narrative were ordered differently across signers and little more than half added other details. Most signers played the narrator's role by looking at the audience while explaining the settings. Next, the results of the introduction of the narratives in LaSiBo are presented.

Orientation in LaSiBo narratives

It was shown that all narratives in AdaSL have the orientation component setting up the story except for a very short one. In the same way, LaSiBo narratives present this introductory component, containing the who, where and when contents, except for two of them.

Nine of the 11 narratives in LaSiBo present the background in the orientation, including the answers to the three questions: who (all 11), where (8 of 11) and when

(4 of 11), as in (7). In LaSiBo narratives, the length of the orientation varies between two and nine lines.

(7) Orientation component in LaSiBo

I went… farming. [who and where]

When I finished farming [when]

I ate. [other details]

At midday, I was farming. [when and where]

In the afternoon I picked the 'bag' up [when and other details]

And put it on my back. [other details]

(Narrative LAS_04, lines 1-6)

In all the narratives in LaSiBo the who is embodied by the signers themselves. For the eight narratives with where content, six signers indicate the location: three on the farm, in (8a), one on the road, in (8b), one in the house and one at the father's place, in (8d). The other two mentioned it as there, by pointing to the ground, in (8c) or to an abstract location.

(8) Signs referring to the where content in the orientation component in LaSiBo

a.  b.  c. 

FARM ROAD POINT (to ground)

The when content, in four LaSiBo narratives, is described in different ways, as in (9a,b).

(9) Orientation components referring to the when content in LaSiBo

a. At that time, I was not pregnant.

Her father (pointing to her daughter)
let me go there alone.
I ate and waited until the afternoon,

(Narrative LAS_01c, lines 1-4)

b. I was this size (looked around and pointed to a person) like that person.

I was this size.

(Narrative LAS_06a, lines 1-2)

Two other signers describe the when content in more detail, as in 'One day, after my bath in the night' (Narrative LAS_02b, lines 1-2) and 'I went… farming. When I finished farming, I ate. At midday, I was farming. In the afternoon (…)' (Narrative LAS_04, lines 1-5). However, they do not say exactly when. The remaining two signers do not mention when it occurred, it might have been a recent situation or it may be a frequent one as in the AdaSL narratives, as in examples in (10a,b).

(10) Orientation components without the when content in LaSiBo

a. The snake with this colour (pointing to his brown pants) with its head up.

It was there (pointing to the floor beside him).

(Narrative LAS_02a, lines 1-2)

b. On the farm, with things in my head,

The snake was on the ground in front of me,

I didn't see it

(Narrative LAS_06a)

In this introductory component in LaSiBo narratives, the order of the settings in the orientation differed in each narrative, as in the examples in (11a,b,c).

(11) Ordering of who, where and when contents in the orientation component in LaSiBo

I went to the farm with things on my head.
who where

(Narrative LAS_01a)

I was walking on the road. An animal was walking there and passed by my side.
who when who where

(Narrative LAS_01b)

One day, after my bath in the night, the snake passed here.
When who when who where

(Narrative LAS_02b)

These examples show that the order of the settings is always valid, even if it differs within narratives. Curiously, where is always last in these examples, leaving the when and who as the apparent flexible elements.

In addition to the who, where and when contents, six narratives have added other details that help to better understand the setting of the story (12a,b,c,d,e). The last fragment in the examples below (12e) shows enough details for the audience to better imagine the scenario of the narrative.

(12) Orientation components with additional details in LaSiBo

a. (...) I carry it on my head (…) (Narratives LAS_01a and LAS_06a)

b. The snake with this colour (…) (Narrative LAS_02a)

c. (...) Her father let me go there alone (…) I ate (…) (Narrative LAS_01c)

d. (...) snake passed by (Narrative LAS_02b)

e. I was this size like that person.

I was this size.

An animal with horns, gave birth, to a baby this size.

It was strong.

It was there, not here, at my father's place.

The animal gave birth,

it was a hiding place

and I didn't see it.

(Narrative LAS_06a, lines 1-8)

In seven of the nine narratives, signers look at the audience in the narrator's role during the setting up in the orientation component, as in (13).

(13) Eye gaze directed at the audience in the orientation component in AdaSL

THERE FATHER (place) ME THIS-SIZE

(Narrative ADA_06a, lines 1-6)

The signer who did not look at the audience (in his two narratives) had the eye gaze directed at the hands when explaining that 'One day, after my bath in the night, the snake passed here'. During this moment, his eye gaze was always following the signs.

To conclude, nine of the 11 narratives have the orientation component, where they all indicate the who as the self, most say the where and only a few refer to the when. The order of that content varied across signers, as it did for AdaSL, but the where was always placed last. Moreover, more than half added details and most looked at the audience as the narrator. In the next subsection, the results for the introduction of the narratives in LGG are presented.

Orientation in LGG narratives

By now the orientation component has been described in both AdaSL and LaSiBo narratives. In AdaSL, 16 out of the 17 narratives have orientation, while, in LaSiBo, nine out of the 11 do so. I will now focus on the orientation in LGG narratives.

Before describing this component in LGG, I must highlight that narratives were told differently by men and women. Overall, most of the women told simpler narratives when compared to the men. Throughout this chapter, I will show several examples showing such distinction. I will start with the orientation, which occurred in 13 out of the 16 personal experience narratives (all 8 men and 5 of 8 women). The length of this component varies between two and 15 lines in those produced by men and between one and eight lines in those by women.

The signers who present the orientation answer to who (8 of 8 men and 4 of 5 women), where (6 of 8 men and 4 of 5 women) and when (6 of 8 men and 4 of 5 women). Besides participants, location and time of the event, signers may also add other details as in (14). In this example, the who refers to himself, together with five hearing friends. The signer also specifies the when as a long time ago when he was a child and that it happened on a Monday. They had gone to pick cashew in an area where each one chose a tree, his located ahead. Thus, the where is described amongst the cashew trees, that, for being far away, could only be reached by car. The signer adds other details such as 'we were talking and time passed (...) we were walking and we arrived, we stopped'. These are the specifics of what he was doing before he got into the complication. In this way, several details allow the interlocutors to understand the story better, leading them to build a mental image of the events. This orientation is the longest in all LGG narratives.

(14) Example of an orientation component in LGG

a long time ago, [when]

I was a child. [who and when]

by car, there in the trees (of cashew) [where]

I was here with my father [who]

we were talking [other details]

and time passed by [when]

I arrived on Monday [when]

and I went to work. [where]

I and my hearing friends, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 together walked inside [who and other details]

we were walking [other details]

and arrived [other details]

we stopped [other details]

and stayed here [where]

each one went to a different tree [where]

I went in this direction [where]

(Narrative LGG_06, lines 1-15)

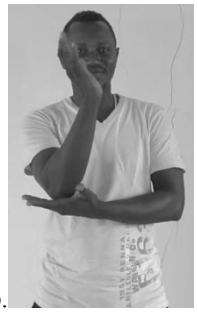
Of the 13 narratives with orientation, only one woman does not explicitly mention who the participant is. However, she indicates that it was in her house, implying that she was the character in her story. All other signers identified the main character as the self. Of these, two women are accompanied by hearing people and one deaf man by his father.

The reference to the location is given by six of the eight men. Five of them mention the trees, as in (15a) where they usually harvest cashew, as in (15b). The other tells the name of the island where he had been born and raised, Bubaque (15c). Four (of five) women also indicate the where: one in the trees, one at a hearing's house, one at home and one in the city of Bafatá (15d). In this example, the signers add details 'In Bafatá, a hearing had a deaf baby (me), I was born and then I grew up and then I don't know' (Narrative LLG_15).

(15) Signs referring to the where content in the orientation component in LGG

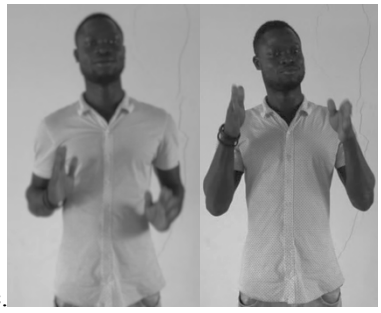
a. 

TREE

b. 

TREE

CASHEW

c. 

BUBAQUE (city name)

d. 

BAFATÁ (city name)

The time of the event is determined in most of the narratives. All six men (of 8) mentioning when say it happened a long time ago, or when they were children. Of the four women (of 5) indicating time, three do it in the same way as the men. The other says it happened the year before. Narrative LGG_08 shows specific details, namely about when it happened, by referring to his age when, in his own words, he had a certain size as a child, as in (16).

(16) Example of specific details in orientation in LGG

ME LONG-TIME

CHILD. GROW-UP HEIGHT-SIZE

‘Long time ago, I was a child. Then I grew up and became a boy, about this size. ‘

(Narrative LGG_08)

There is another example of a signer describing when the story occurred, in ‘A long time ago at school. It was sometime after I was born, I don't know, I was a child. I was four years old, I don't remember, it was a long time ago’. In this example, the signer also mentions that she had been born there – even if she does not say the name of the place (Narrative LGG_16).

Although the order of the who, where, and when in the LGG orientations varies greatly, most start with the when (9 of 13), followed by the who (7 of 9) and the where (6 of 7). Sometimes, after using a certain order, signers go back to describing the who by adding more people in the narrative, or to the where, or the when.

Thus, in addition to the contents on participants, location and time of the event, nine out of the 16 narratives (six men and three women) have added other details that help understand better the setting of the story. For instance, three of the narratives present details about what they were doing before encountering the snake. One is shown above in (14) and the other two are shown below in (17). In (17a), the signer describes what he was wearing before he left home and, in (17b), he mentions that his father was cutting down the trees, and he was carrying food on his head.

(17) Orientation components with additional details in LGG

a. I changed the T-shirt to a sleeveless one and shorts.

I got dressed and I was ready.

(Narrative LGG_05, lines 1-4)

b. (…) Father was there amongst the trees cutting trees.

I had my food in a bowl

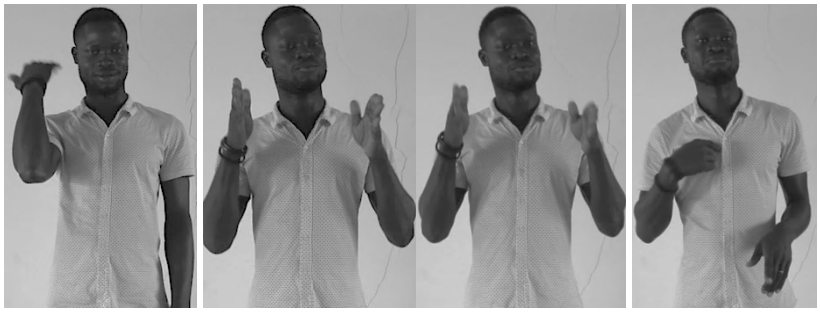
and I carried it on my head,

holding it with my hands.

(Narrative LGG_08, lines 4-7)

During this component, signers address the audience directly as the narrator in 12 out of the 13 narratives, as in (18).

(18) Eye gaze directed at the audience in the orientation component in LGG



LONG-TIME BUBAQUE ME

(Narrative LGG_02, lines 1-2)

In conclusion, of the 16 LGG narratives, three women did not include the orientation component. In this introduction, all but one of the women refer to the who as the self, and most mention the where (usually the cashew trees) and the when (typically as a child). Although the order of the contents varied, a consistent pattern arose in half of the settings, namely that of when – who – where. A little more than half also added details and almost all of them address the audience directly as narrator. After describing the orientation in LGG, I will now compare the results of the three languages.

Comparison of the orientation in the three sign languages

Most signers in all three sign languages do include orientation. In AdaSL, 16 of 17 narratives set up the story in the orientation component, while in LaSiBo nine out of 12 narratives present it and, in LGG, 13 of 16 have it (eight men and four women). These narratives have information related to at least one of the contents about the who (characters), the when (time) and the where (place).

The character's identification is the most frequent. AdaSL and LaSiBo narratives mention then the location and least often the time of the event. In LGG, the reference to both location and time is balanced. In the narratives with orientation, the character refers overwhelmingly to the self, except for two vicarious accounts in AdaSL experienced by the signers' fathers. The locations where encounters with animals are more likely to occur are the farm in Adamorobe and the (cashew) trees in Guinea-Bissau. I should also note that a few AdaSL and LGG signers say explicitly the names of certain locations, which was not found in LaSiBo. These personal experiences have for the most part occurred a long time ago.

The order of the settings varies, but, in LaSiBo, the location occurs always at the end and, in LGG, a consistent ordering of time, participant and location seems to be emerging. Also, many add other details to the setting. Most of the signers in the three sign languages acted as narrators directing their eye gaze at the audience. Although differences between male and female LGG signers start to arise in this component, the same was not observed in AdaSL in LaSiBo narratives.

After describing the introduction, I now move to the part when the action begins, i.e., the rising of the event. Again, first in AdaSL, then in LaSiBo, and finally in LGG, in separate subsections, followed by a comparison between the three sign languages of the study.

3.5.2 Complication

The complication component is where the action of the narrative begins, leading us to the goal of the narrative. This second component in AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG narratives occurs after the description of the setting, which includes the characters, the location and the time of the event. Next, the second component is shown in AdaSL narratives, followed by LaSiBo's and then by LGG's. In the end, I compare the three sign languages.

Complication in AdaSL narratives

In the previous section, I showed that all AdaSL signers and most of LaSiBo's and LGG's present the background of the story in the orientation component. Next, in the complication, the audience is led to the story's objective. In this subsection, I move on to the following component, where the action begins, i.e., the complication, to find out whether the two village sign languages and LGG also use it. Before turning to LaSiBo's and LGG's analysis, I first look at the complication in AdaSL narratives.

All signers in Adamorobe produce the complication component, introducing the main event with the exciting moment, usually expressed by a motion verb, and embodying the character's role. The stirring action, as Freytag put it, aims, in these narratives, at the location of the animal. Nine different verbs are stirring the action in the complication. The one with the most occurrences is WALK, as shown in example (19). Besides this one, there are other verbs like LOOK-FOR, SEE and FARMING, among others. Then, most narrators encounter the snakes on the farm including on their way to or from there.

(19) Instances of the sign WALK in the complication component in AdaSL

Below it is shown how the transition occurs between the setting up of the story and the beginning of the main event, or between the orientation and the complication components, which occurred in the 16 narratives (of 17) that had the orientation. The narrative skipping the setting up starts right away with the complication. The transition usually occurs with stirring actions expressed by motion verbs, such as WALK, in (20a), LOOK-FOR, in (20b), and CATCH, in (20c).

(20) Transitions between the orientation and the complication components in AdaSL

a.

orientation	1. I went farming
	2. and it was raining.
complication	3. I was walking around looking for snails
	4. but there was none.
	5. I sat down to rest
	6. and drank water.
	7. I looked for snails again.
	8. In my bag, there was a cutlass.
	9. was looking for it in my bag.

(Narrative ADA_05)

b.

orientation	1. I stayed to pick snails with father.
complication	2. I was looking for snails. 3. Amongst the leaves, 4. there was something big curled up 5. with its head moving.

(Narrative ADA_06)

c.

orientation	1. I was in the forest, near the water 2. and there were lots of fish. 3. There were also many snails.
complication	4. I was catching them 5. and putting them in the bag. 6. I was surprised. 7. There were really many snails 8. and I was surprised. 9. I, alone, caught a lot of snails up to this size 10. Snails were crawling. 11. I was catching snails by myself everywhere.

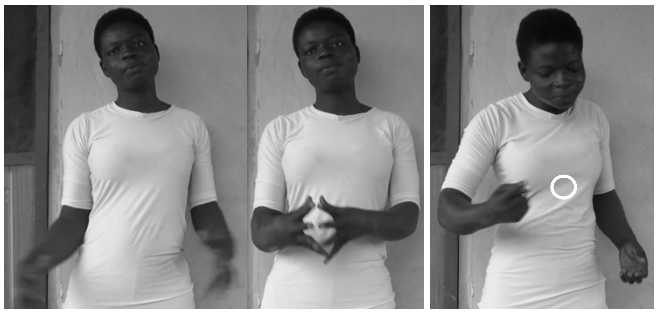
(Narrative ADA_16)

In (20a), above, the signer acts like herself, during most of the rising action, or the complication component, adding only two free clauses as side comments to say she had a cutlass in her bag and to describe the size of the swelling (both by looking at the audience). In (20b), the signer also acts as herself throughout most of the story, except when she describes the snake with free clauses. During the whole storyline, she never establishes eye contact with the addressee. In the same way, the signer, in (20c), never looks at the audience, except to show the size of the snails he caught on one occurrence, and, a second time, right at the end of the narrative, to conclude the narrative by signing the act of covering a hole in the ground. The signer embodies all narrative actions, clearly changing characters without mentioning them explicitly,

which shows that the signers are in the past exactly when it happened during the complication.

The 14 (of 17) narratives setting up the orientation in the narrator's role embody the character when entering the complication component, as in (21), showing that they are mentally travelling to the past event.

(21) Shift between signer's roles, from the narrator, in the orientation, to the character, in the complication in AdaSL narratives



gloss	FOREST	LOOK-FOR
gaze	audience	character
comp.	orientation	complication

(Narrative ADA_01, lines 1-2)

In this component, the Adamorobe signers embody the actions themselves as if they were in a past event. Their eye gaze is like the character reenacting what happened as close as possible. Most of the narratives are told in the first person, i.e., according to their own experience. Even though the embodiment of characters is addressed here, it is treated only later, with more detail, in Chapter 5.

All 17 signers present the complication component. Most complication components in AdaSL have a reasonable length since 11 of them have between three and 12 lines. Of the six remaining narratives, two have a one-line complication, two have a very short complication and climax and two others are overall very short.

In the 16 narratives with the orientation component, signers proceed from there to the beginning of the main event in the complication. This component is stirred by an exciting moment, expressed by a motion verb, like WALK. Here, all signers embody the character throughout most of the rising action, which will be further analysed in Chapter 5. Next, I look at the complication component in the LaSiBo narratives.

Complication in LaSiBo narratives

Having seen that all narratives in AdaSL have the part in which there is a preparation for the climax, i.e., the complication, I now turn to the same part in the LaSiBo narratives. Again, several examples are shown here, with special attention to the transition between background and the beginning of the main event, or the orientation and the complication, through stirring actions aiming at the location of the animal and the change of the signer's role, as in AdaSL narratives.

In LaSiBo, all 11 narratives begin the complication, where the story is set off, with an exciting moment expressed by a motion verb – eight begin with WALK, as in (22a,b).

(22) Signs referring to the motion verb WALK in the complication component in LaSiBo

a.  b. 

Another narrative, without a background, started the story immediately with the complication component. The signer starts with WALK, in pantomime, by using the whole body and no signed descriptions, in (22). The preparation for the climax in the complication of this narrative has three clauses in pantomime referring to the past event.

(22) Beginning of the complication component without orientation in LaSiBo

'I was walking and saw it. I took a step back. It was there. I cut it.'

(Narrative LAS_05a)

Of the seven narratives that were told during the orientation in the narrator's role, six shift to the character's gaze, as in (23). In the 11 narratives with complication, only one was told as the narrator. In the remaining ten narratives, signers embody the characters while in the complication when preparing for the climax. Worth noting here is that, in six narratives, signers embody fully the character, resembling pantomimes. In narratives beginning the complication with a stirring action, signers instantly embody the character, which will be looked at in depth in Chapter 5.

(23) Shift between signer's roles, from the narrator, in the orientation, to the character, in the complication in LaSiBo narratives

gloss	MIDDAY	WALK
gaze	audience	character
comp.	orientation	complication

(Narrative LAS_04, lines 4-7)

A striking characteristic of LaSiBo complication components is that they are overall very short (9 of 11). In fact, in LaSiBo, nine narratives (of 11) quickly move to the peak of the narrative right after the motion verb. Of these eight have only one line and the other has two lines. Importantly, eight complication components move on to an equally short climax. Below, I show examples of very short complication components occurring in LaSiBo narratives, as examples (24a,b,c). In (24c), the narrative skips the orientation component and starts with the complication.

(24) Short complication components in LaSiBo

a.

orientation	
complication	1. I was walking
climax	2. and it bit my leg

(Narrative LAS_04)

b.

orientation	
complication	1. 9. I was walking
climax	2. 10. And a big snake appeared.

(Narrative LAS_08)

c.

orientation	
complication	1. The gazelle passed by running to that way.
climax	2. Later, it came back, 3. I was surprised.

(Narrative LAS_05b)

All 11 LaSiBo narratives present a complication component, setting off the story with motion verbs, mainly WALK, similar to AdaSL. The majority of signers also enter the past event, by embodying the characters. This is especially evident in narratives that show a transition from the orientation to the complication by a change of the signer's

role, from narrator to character. In LaSiBo, a little more than half of the character's roles are fully enacted as pantomimes.

Overall, the complication components are very short, thus under-investing in the emotional preparation for the climax. Next, I analyse the complication in both male and female LGG signers.

Complication in LGG narratives

After observing the complication component in both AdaSL and LaSiBo, I will now analyse it in LGG narratives, separately in men and women.

All 16 LGG signers produce the rising of the action and introduce it with an exciting moment. Also, in this component, all signers embody the character except for two women. The stirring actions at the beginning of all complications are expressed by motion verbs, mainly WALK (7 of 16), as in (25), but also CLIMB or PICK, among a few others. This was also the case of the three narratives by deaf women that started straight into the complication without previously producing an orientation.

(25) Signs referring to the motion verb WALK in the complication component in LGG

Three out of the eight women do not produce the orientation component, starting the narrative immediately by signing the verb WALK in the complication (Narratives LGG_09, LGG_10 and LGG_12). Two of them start with the action 'I was walking' (Narratives LGG_09 and LGG_12). In the third one, the signer starts with 'The snake... the snake... and then she says I was walking' (Narrative LGG_10).

All signers, but two women, embody the character throughout most of this component. Signers that presented the orientation as a narrator (12 of 13) redirect their eye gaze from the audience to the character's event when moving to the complication, as shown in (26).

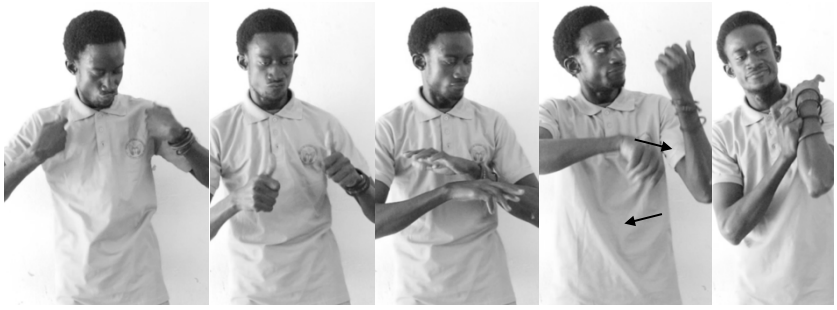
(26) Shift of signer's role from narrator to character between the orientation and the complication in LGG narratives

gloss	KID	CLIMB
gaze	audience	character
comp.	orientation	complication

(Narrative LGG_03)

The only male signer that does not change between roles, maintains a double role as both narrator and character, starting at the orientation and continuing from there. In the orientation, he explained that he changed what he was wearing, looking at the clothes on himself and the bag on his shoulder while embodying the character in 'I changed the T-shirt to a sleeveless one and shorts. I dressed and I was ready' (Narrative LGG_05). When he signs the motion verb, in 'I was adjusting the bag', he sets off the exciting moment moving to the next component while keeping the character's role, in (27).

(27) Character role in the transition from orientation to complication



gloss	DRESS	READY	FINISH	BAG-ADJUST	BAG-HOLD
gaze	character				
comp.	orientation			complication	

'I dressed and I was ready. I was adjusting a bag (…)'

(Narrative LGG_05)

The five women who started the orientation as narrators change their eye gaze direction to the event space when entering the complication, in a double role as both character and narrator, in (28a,b).

(28) Shift of eye gaze between the orientation and the complication components in LGG narratives

a. 

RHgloss	KNOW-NOT	SNAKE	ME	SEE
LHgloss		-	-	-
gaze	audience	character		
Comp.	orientation	complication		

'I don't know. I saw the snake'

b. 

RHgloss	FRIENDS	THREE	ME	WALK
LHgloss	-	-	WALK	
eye gaze	audience	character		
comp	orientation	complication		

'There were three hearing friends. I was walking'.

(Narrative LGG_11)

During the complication, most LGG signers change the direction of their eye gaze. In addition to the character's role, they may return to the audience to add information or comment on some aspect of the story, such as describing the snake. Before reaching the climax, they describe what they were doing, whether they were picking cashew, outside the city of Bissau, or simply at home or walking around.

There are only two short complication components in the narratives by deaf men. In contrast, five of the eight women produce a very short complication. Three of them move straight to an equally short climax, while the other two are part of overall short narratives.

In two of such narratives, the criterium to end the complication at the physical encounter with the animal had to be reanalysed. In these cases, they see the snake right after the orientation but do not react to it. Thus, I considered the encounter as the trigger to the climax only when the character becomes aware of the danger. One of them (Narrative LGG_14) has very short orientation, complication and climax components within only four lines, in (29a). The other (Narrative LGG_15) has a 10-line complication about the fact that she knew the snake was there but she did not find it threatening. She understands the danger only when her father sees it and reacts to the threat, in (29b).

(29) Neutral reaction to the snake in the complication in LGG

a.

orientation	Last year, in my house.
complication	I saw a snake
climax	and I was afraid. I saw the snake

(Narrative LGG_14)

b.

orientation	In Bafatá, a hearing had a deaf baby (me), I was born and then I grew up and then I don't know.
complication	I saw the snake

	and then I didn't mind it. I was taking cashew. The snake crawled. I was taking cashew. I didn't know it. The snake crawled here (near the feet). I didn't see it. I was here and I was taking cashew.
climax	My father saw it. My father ran

(Narrative LGG_15)

To conclude, all LGG signers introduce the complication component with a stirring action, especially set off by WALK and most embody the character's role. This becomes clearer when switching their eye gaze from the audience to the character's role in the transition between orientation and complication. Differences appear in narratives by female signers either by showing extremely short complications or by encountering the snake right away and not reacting to it. Next, I compare the complication in the three sign languages.

Comparison of the complication in the three sign languages

The three sign languages present the complication in all narratives. This component is always introduced by a stirring action and by the character's embodiment. Here, the narrator travels back in time and enters the event where the encounter with the animal happens. They build up the setting of the narrated event in their own signing space.

The exciting moment of the narrative introducing the complication component is usually expressed by a motion verb, mainly WALK (4 of 17 in AdaSL, 8 of 11 in LaSiBo, 7 in 16 in LGG). Most transitions between the orientation and the complication involve switching the direction of the eye gaze from the audience as narrator to the character's role (all 14 in AdaSL, 6 of 7 in LaSiBo, all 13 in LGG). Overall, the complication in LaSiBo narratives (9 of 11) is very short. This is also the case in five narratives by female LGG signers.

The complication is followed by the climax component which will be first described in AdaSL, then in LaSiBo and LGG. In the end, there is a comparison between the three sign languages.

3.5.3 Climax

The previous component, the complication, pushes the narrative towards the goal of the story, its highest peak, designated as the climax. Labov & Waletzky conducted a question that prompted respondents to tell a personal experience that would lead them to a point in the telling of the event. The question was whether they had ever experienced a life-or-death situation. This naturally has the telling of the event including moments of emotional suspense until it reaches the climax as described by Freytag. Given that a similar question was asked to AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG signers about encounters with potentially dangerous animals, I now look into the climax component in each of the three sign languages separately.

Climax in AdaSL narratives

After presenting the complication, AdaSL narratives are analysed concerning the subsequent component in the internal structure, designated as the climax.

All of the 17 narratives in AdaSL have a climax, where the goal of the story rises to a peak in the form of a dangerous or scary event. Because the narratives are about attacks by snakes (13 of 17), wasps/bees (2 of 17) or lions (2 of 17), which are potentially dangerous animals, the high point of the narrative is the encounter with the dangerous animal. Although five of the 17 narratives present it very briefly, in most of them (11 of 17), the moment of the encounter is previously prepared. In this way, there is an emotional preparation that leads the audience to the climax. It is also the case, in AdaSL narratives, that character embodiment involves more than one character, in enacted dialogues (see next chapters for more details), as in (30a,b,c,d).

(30) Climax component in AdaSL

a. I didn't hear anything, but my father heard it and came to me. I had my arm in the hole and my father said, 'Get out of there!'.

(Narrative ADA_07)

b. I walked quietly and told my mother the lion was there and we had to leave. 'When he sees you, he eats you and pulls out the meat and that's it.'

'Don't come closer, go away.'. She was coming and looking. 'No, go back!' I ran away. The lion ate the man's head.

(Narrative ADA_12)

c. I pointed at it. 'What is it? Is it a rat? Ah!'. The snake's head raised, I saw it and I was scared.

(Narrative ADA_06)

d. That's when I saw a snake and I was surprised. It was a big snake with spots on the body. The snake's head stood up and poked its tongue out moving sideways. The snake was big, had spots on its body and was curled up. The head rose, I was surprised and I screamed. The snake was strong. I was blessing myself and praying to God. I said, 'Thank you, Jesus Christ, thank you, God and Jesus Christ. 'I pray to God and Jesus Christ'. 'Please bless me with life'. 'Thank you, God, and I will pray, Jesus Christ'. I prepared myself by grabbing the cutlass (…)

(Narrative ADA_15)

Narrative ADA_15 has the longest climax, with 16 lines. Here, the signer was catching snails when he comes across a python. He describes it, while role shifting between himself and the python, and acts as praying before killing it with a cutlass, in (30d). More details about these aspects are given in Chapter 5. In addition to the 12 narratives with a climax component with at least three lines, four other narratives, in (31a,b,c), summarise such component in only one line and a last with two lines. Of these short climaxes, one is included in an overall short narrative and three follow an equally short complication.

(31) One-line climax components in AdaSL

b. (...) I saw a snake. (Narrative ADA_01)

c. (…) A wasp stung me on the face. (Narrative ADA_05)

d. (…) a snake bit his leg. (Narrative ADA_14)

AdaSL narratives show moments of emotion throughout the middle part of the story: the complication, the climax and the resolution. However, the highest emotional point occurs in the climax after an emotional preparation during the complication. In (32a), the signer puts his arm in the hole creating suspense. He repeats this action several times, increasing the suspense until the father arrives and tells him to get out of there. In (32b), the signer notices something among the leaves but does not know what it is, which triggers an emotional response to that suspicion, that later turns out to be a python.

(32) Emotional preparation for the climax in the complication in AdaSL Narratives

a.  b. 

In the exact moment when they encounter the dangerous animal, in the climax, the emotion is enhanced. The facial expression of the embodied character shows fear, fright, or surprise. Some include the description of the size and shape of the animal (see Study 4 in Chapter 6 for more details). For instance, in (33a) the signer looks at the snake and signs SNAKE while indicating with her facial expression that it was a big snake. In (33b), the signer signs SEE and presents a facial expression of distress. In (c) the signer embodies the character's reaction of surprise at what he sees.

(33) Emotional moment in the snake encounter in the climax in AdaSL Narratives

a.  b.  c. 

Some signers continue to show emotion after the climax, i.e., in the resolution. In (34), the two signers only had the opportunity to see the animal after they had killed it, showing facial expressions of a big surprise. The signer, in (34a), brings his fist to his mouth (this is a common gesture in Ghana to express a big surprise) when seeing the snake. In (34b), while signing how big the lion was, the signer expresses through her face a mix of surprise and fear.

(34) Emotional reaction after the climax in the resolution in AdaSL narratives

a.  b. 

To conclude, all 17 narratives have a climax component, most about encountering a snake. Many signers enhance the dramatic effect of the climax, which had been built up since the complication. Nonetheless, a few of the narratives have a very short middle part showing the goal of the story, i.e., the encounter with a dangerous animal.

Having presented the analyses on the climax component in AdaSL narratives, I now turn to that same part in LaSiBo narratives.

Climax in LaSiBo narratives

After the observations of the climax component, i.e., the peak of the story, in most of the AdaSL narratives, it becomes clear that LaSiBo narratives do not show that part, at least not in the same way. The examples below illustrate encounters with animals in LaSiBo, eight with snakes and three with animals with horns. In nine of the 11 LaSiBo narratives, there is a very short climax with only one or two lines and eight follow an equally short complication.

For a better understanding of how the encounter with the animal is only briefly mentioned by LaSiBo signers, I present some examples below. In nine narratives, the emotional preparation for the climax in the complication is introduced by an exciting moment expressed by a motion verb such as WALK. This is immediately followed by the peak of the story, which corresponds to the animal attack, as in the examples underlined in (35a,b,c).

(35) Brief presentation of the encounter with the snake in LaSiBo

a. 

WALK POINT STEP-BACK

'I was walking, it [snake] passed by me, and stepped back.'

complication climax resolution

(Narrative LAS_01a)

b. 

WALK POINT BIT SCARY

'I was walking and the snake crawled up my leg and bit me. I got scared, I held my leg.'

complication climax resolutio

(LaSiBo Narrative LAS_02a)

c. 

WALK POINT BIT. LOOK NOT

'I was walking and it [snake] bit my leg. I looked for it but didn't find it.'

complication climax resolution

(Narrative LAS_04)

I did not observe any significant emotional moments, during the preparation for the climax nor during the climax itself. The signer, in (32) above, was the only one expressing an emotion very briefly, where she looks at the ground and jumps

backwards. This is the only clear emotion I found in the 11 narratives. In (33), the signer had just been bitten and shakes his body quickly but barely shows any emotion. Similarly, in (34), the signer was also bitten but without expressing pain or fear.

In conclusion, although all 11 LaSiBo narratives present the climax component, most are very short and come after an equally short complication. This shows that emotional enhancement is not valued in these personal experience accounts. As AdaSL, most are about snake encounters, but unlike the signers in Adamorobe, the encounter is only briefly mentioned. I now turn to the climax in LGG narratives.

Climax in LGG narratives

As in AdaSL and LaSiBo, all LGG narratives also have a climax. However, as in LaSiBo where the climax is mostly very short, so are most of the ones produced by female LGG signers. Also in LGG, all narratives are about encounters with snakes, except for one about a dog attack.

In general, the climax in narratives told by deaf men is quite long (5 of 8 have between 9 and 12 lines) and the few remaining have a reasonable length (between 3 and 4 lines). In contrast, although two women present long climaxes (with 12 and 17 lines, in [36e]), five are very short (1 and 2 lines) and the other has three lines, in (36a). Importantly, three of those short climaxes follow a short complication, in (36c,d), and one other is part of an overall short narrative, in (36b).

(36) Climax components in LGG

a. (…) What is it? It was a dog barking. (Narrative LGG_09)

b. (...) I grabbed the snake. (Narrative LGG_10)

c. (…) and the snake lifted its head and I got scared. (Narrative LGG_12)

d. (…) we were afraid of the snake. Together we ran. (Narrative LGG_13)

e. (…) they saw it, they opened their eyes, ran and cut it down. The snake was big. I didn't know anything, I was holding things on my head and walking. The hearing people called me and told me: "There is a big snake". I didn't know, I opened my eyes and said,

> "Really?". I left the things from my head things on the floor, I went running and saw it.. It's big! (Narrative LGG_11)

The animal encounters by LGG signers are all with snakes, except for one with a dog. The one involving the dog is a very short narrative, where she sees the dog, gets scared and runs away. In most of the narratives about encounters with snakes, signers saw them on the ground, got scared, ran away and moved on to the resolution component, where they ask for help to kill it. Five signers tell their experience of seeing the snake on a tree. Four of them are men who were picking cashew nuts from the tree when they came across the snake. These moments are dramatized through the use of dialogues or monologues in seven narratives, where five are told by men and two by women.

In LGG narratives, signers produce emotional moments in the climax. For instance, in (37a), the signer had explained in the complication that the snake was on the tree, hidden in the branches and he did not realise it while he was up there picking cashews. This creates a moment of suspense. When he finally sees that the snake is over him, he quickly gets down from the tree and moves to the resolution component (Narrative LGG_06). In (37b), the signer, who was embodying a character walking with a bag on his shoulder, also creates suspense, by suddenly looking at the ground and remaining motionless, his gaze fixed on something. Then he asks himself if it was a snake and suddenly runs for help. The emotional account continues until help arrives and people hit the snake.

(37) Emotional moment in the snake encounter in the climax by male signers in LGG narratives

a.  b. 

In the female LGG signers, one enhances the expression of emotion in her narrative more than the other. She describes that, when she was walking, in the resolution, someone told her that there was a big snake. At this moment her eyes open wide. When she went to see the snake, in the climax, in (38a), she opens her eyes again while signing BIG (more details on the animal's size and shape in Chapter 6). The other female signers simplify the emotional moment by signing SCARED, in (38b,c,d) with fearful facial expressions without extending it.

(38) Emotional moment in the snake encounter in the climax by female signers in LGG narratives

a.  b. 

All LGG narratives have a climax. Those produced by men are mostly quite long and a little more than half had been previously prepared in the complication. Differently, most of the women's narratives are very short, like LaSiBo's, although a couple of women do produce long climaxes. As expected by the way it is structured across signers, the climax by deaf men conveys enhanced dramatic effects. I have reached the end of the analysis in LGG and now move on to the comparison of the three sign languages in the climax component.

Comparison of the climax in the three sign languages

The climax is the peak of the story. In the case of AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG narratives, the goal of the story is the moment when the signer meets the dangerous animal. All narratives in AdaSL and LGG by deaf men have the climax component enhanced. Although most signers are completely immersed in the past event, most narratives in LaSiBo and by female LGG signers have a very short climax, where the animal attack is referred to only in one or two lines, occurring right after an equally short preparation in the complication.

Labov & Waletzky say that not all narratives follow the same order of components in the narrative structure. However, they all have to present the order of events according to a timeline. Moreover, they state that the narrative structure is complete only if it has at least the complication, the evaluation (which would include the emotional enhancement in the climax, and other narrative devices described further in Chapters 4, 5 and 6) and the resolution, i.e., a whole development around the main event, preparing, experiencing and solving it. In addition to this, Freytag shows the centrality of the climax as the peak of the narrative.

Most narratives in LaSiBo enter the goal of the story right after the motion verb WALK. The character usually starts walking and then finds the snake. Almost along the same line are the preparation and the climax itself. However, neither is the audience prepared to arrive at the peak nor can this climax be compelling. Moreover, half of the women in the LGG narratives also had a very short climax mostly coming after an equally short complication. Although it is all very sudden, showing the least emotional enactments, LaSiBo narratives and those by female LGG signers follow an order of events within a timeline.

The moments of emotion last longer in AdaSL narratives and those by male LGG signers, beginning at the complication component, progressing to the climax and continuing in the resolution. These narratives show an emotionally enhanced climax, with character embodiments, including dialogues between characters, which will be developed in the next chapters.

The next subsection focuses on the component that follows the climax, i.e., the resolution. Again, first I will analyse the narratives in AdaSL, then in LaSiBo and finally in LGG.

3.5.4 Resolution

The resolution component is the fourth component in narratives. It is a component where the storytellers solve the problem after they have reached the goal of the story. They come down from that peak by solving the event. I will observe the resolution component in three sign languages and finally compare the sign languages with each other.

Resolution in AdaSL narratives

In the previous section, it was shown that most AdaSL narratives have the climax component, while most LaSiBo narratives and half of those produced by female LGG signers present it very briefly. I now look at the subsequent narrative component, the

resolution of the event, in AdaSL, illustrating with several examples the moments that come after the goal of the story.

All narratives in AdaSL have a resolution, after the climax. In these animal attack narratives, the resolution comes right after the dangerous animal appears and it's when the signers react to it explaining how they deal with it once they see it. The resolution continues until they are out of danger, in the case of the narratives in AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG. At the resolution, in AdaSL narratives, the story continues as in the preparation for the complication, with character embodiment to convey the past event.

In the resolution, the animal is killed (7 of 17), whether by being cut or shot, or it bites (6 of 17) – or stings (on one occasion) – the character who then focuses on the wound, runs away or shoots it. It can also happen that the character simply runs away. Overall, the signer keeps embodying the character, while explaining what happened and sometimes alternating briefly to the narrator's role.

To give a clear overview of the resolution of the event in AdaSL narratives, I detail, next, how signers react to the encounter with the dangerous animal. In Narratives ADA_02 and ADA_07, the protagonists are frightened when they see the snake and so they run away. One falls and calls for help, her father appears and takes her to safety. The other runs away until she reaches a safe place. In Narrative ADA_12, a snake bites his leg, so he runs away and calls for help. Someone manages to get the snake's tooth out and clean the wound. Someone else, seeing the snake, prays and kills it with a cutlass. He burns the snake and covers it.

In Narratives ADA_05 and ADA_15a, both signers were picking snails. Then, one of them is attacked by wasps. She tries to ward off the wasps on her body, but her face gets swollen. She tries to clean herself and take some medicine. The swelling reduces and she burns the hive. The other narrative is about two characters who find a hive, fetch a stone, throw it at the hive and escape without being attacked.

Narratives ADA11b and ADA_15b are about lions. In both of them, the lion is shot and dies. After it dies, one of the signers explains that the lion is cut into pieces, and the meat is shared between several people. The other signer describes the animal in detail, we said that 'the lion is very big… ahh... its body was strong, its claws were dirty, it was big, it could attack us. Ahh… Its teeth were the size of the index finger. Too many teeth. Its head was big, the eyes were big, the mouth was wide and the jaws were huge. It was bad'.

There are six narratives with a very long resolution of the event (between 15 and 26 lines) when compared to the previous components. Here, signers go into detail on how to deal with the dangerous animal and be safer, as in (39).

(39) Long resolution component in AdaSL

My father cut off the snake's head with the cutlass. The snake's head opened. The mouth was broken. I was scared and afraid. My father pulled the snake out of the hole. It was a big and very long snake.

He pulled it out and put it on the branch of a tree. I calmed down and my father said with gestures, 'Don't put your arm in the hole! Do you hear? No, you don't hear so you can't put your arm in the hole. You have to see, don't touch. If the snake bites you, you die.'. I was troubled, I should not have put my arm in the hole. I began to tremble with fear. My father kept asking me, 'Do you understand?'.

My father lit a fire, grabbed the snake from the branch and put it in the fire. He buried it and covered it. The fire is over.

Narrative ADA_07 (lines 27-51)

Except for the two short one-line action fallings within overall short narratives (one of these does not even have a coda component), there is only one other short resolution with two lines. Of the remaining 14 resolution components, one follows a one-line climax, but the complication had also been long, and another comes after a one-line complication and climax components. Importantly, five detailed resolutions are length-wise balanced with the preceding components concerning the middle part of the story, although one of them does not proceed to the closing part in the coda.

To conclude, all narratives in AdaSL have a resolution component, mainly involving killing the animal or being wounded by it, while embodying the character. To illustrate how signers solved the situation, several examples were presented here, some longer than others. Most resolution components in AdaSL are quite detailed and many follow an overall emotionally enhanced main event. Next, I focus on LaSiBo narratives in search of their resolution components.

Resolution in LaSiBo narratives

Knowing that all 17 narratives in AdaSL have the resolution component, after the climax, I now look at several examples in LaSiBo narratives that contain this same part, even if they showed a very short climax, moving directly from preparing to solving it.

In all 11 LaSiBo narratives, the resolution of the event continues from the climax, where the problem is solved. The resolution comes right after the dangerous animal appears and it refers to the way they face it and how they deal with it once they see it,

until they reach a safe place, as was the case in AdaSL narratives. In nine of the 11 narratives, signers keep embodying the character, two of them fully, while the other two are told in the narrator's role, as occurred in the climax.

As mentioned in the previous component, LaSiBo's accounts are mainly about snakes, except for three narratives, involving animals with horns, which appear to be a gazelle and a cow. In two of them, when the characters see the animal, they run away but the animal manages to attack them with their horns (Narratives LAS_01b and LAS_06a). In one of them, the character falls and hits his head on the ground. He then tries to throw stones and runs away (LaSiBo Narrative LAS_01b). On the other, she also falls when the animal attacks. After that, she complains to the owner of the animal, who gives her money to go to the hospital (Narrative LAS_06a).

In the eight narratives about snakes, three signers, i.e., the characters they are embodying, claim to have killed the snake. One of them has the shortest resolution of all narratives, of only one sentence: 'I cut it' (Narrative LAS_05a). Narrative LAS_05a is the same one in which the pantomime occurs at the beginning of the event in the complication but does not have background information in the orientation component. In one other narrative, some extra information is added after the main character kills the snake: 'After killing five of them, it was finished; I left the snake and I killed it. Then, I relaxed, stayed [or waited]' (Narrative LAS_05b). In the third narrative of the sort, the signer throws a stone at the snake without saying if it died. He simply says that, after hitting it, he prepares the medicine to put on the wound and then he goes to sleep (Narrative LAS_02b). In the other narratives (3 of 11), the characters run away when they see it. They feel the bite, but they do not see it. They then ask for help and take it away. In the remaining narratives (4 of 11), the character is bitten and focuses on the wound.

Unlike the AdaSL narratives, in which snakes are usually burned and buried, LaSiBo signers do not explain what they do with the dead snakes, they do not try to communicate to the interlocutor a lesson from the encounter. This seems important because their experience stays personal and is not reframed within a broader context, as is done by AdaSL signers. The account that was excluded from the structural analysis (the twelfth video collected for this study, Narrative LAS_05a) is more descriptive in the sense that the signer says what is usually done when facing a snake, and how it can be killed and then eaten or sold. However, he does not look at his audience, as if he was speaking alone, thus not really explaining it to us.

Contrasting with overall short complication and climax components, the resolution is longer than the previous two components (between 4 and 16 lines), in the majority of the narratives (10 of 11). However, two of them end precisely with the resolution without proceeding to the coda. Moreover, the only narrative whose middle components are length-wise balanced is told in the narrator's role.

In sum, all LaSiBo narratives solve the situation in the resolution component, whether by telling about being wounded and dealing with it, running away or killing the animal. The majority present the resolution by enacting the character and spend much more time in this component than in the two previous ones. The next subsection focuses on the resolution component in LGG narratives.

Resolution in LGG narratives

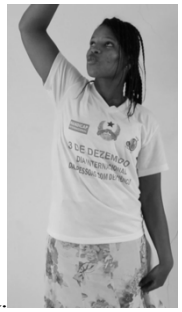
During the resolution, most signers describe what happens after they have found the animal during the climax. So far, the resolution has been described in AdaSL and LaSiBo narratives. Now I analyse this component in LGG narratives.

All narratives in LGG have the resolution as a component, mostly by embodying the character. Only two of the female signers tell it as narrators. When encountering the snake, the men typically run away (3 of 8), beat the snake (2 of 8) or both, i.e., run for help and then beat the snake (3 of 8). Importantly, they only beat the snake with stones or a stick until it dies when accompanied by other people, usually hearing. This is the case with the majority of the women who beat the snake with other people (4 of 8) and of one who also ran for help and came back to beat the snake (1 of 8).

The two remaining narratives told by deaf women did not solve the dangerous encounter with the snake believably. One of them saw the snake and got scared, then the snake bit her and she says she dies. After I asked her if she had really died, she retold it by saying that it hurt a lot (Narrative LGG_12). In the other one, which is overall very short, the signer grabs the snake in the climax and then says, in the resolution, that it became stretched out. She described it with her own body as she was the snake herself, in (39a). Finally, the female signer encountering a dog simply ran away, in a very short resolution.

As in Narrative LGG_10, where the female signer embodies the snake, in (40a), so does the male signer in Narrative LGG_03, in (40b). To enhance his experience, he enacts the animal, as if he was the snake being attacked, feeling the beating and dying. Again, these aspects will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

(40) Embodying the snake in the resolution in LGG

a. 

(Narrative LGG_10)

b. 

'The snake felt the beatings and slowly died. The snake's tail was shaking.'

(Narrative LGG_03)

In two of the narratives, signers add that they cooked and ate the snake. In one of them told by a female signer, she enacts a dialogue between her and a hearing friend about deciding on whether they would eat it or not (Narrative LGG_16). This resolution comes after a long climax. The narrative with the longest resolution, with 17 lines (Narrative LGG_11), also followed by a long climax is told by a female signer. In this narrative (Narrative LGG_11), the signer explains the whole process she went through after killing the snake. She describes that they hung it up, peeled off its skin from top to bottom, laid it down, cut it into slices and cooked it. In the end, other people were called up to eat it. During this description, she embodies the character to tell her own experience, in (41).

(41) Details in the resolution in LGG

They were beating it and it died. Six hearing people picked up the snake. They took it to the house. The hearing and I hanged the head of the snake. We cut the skin from

top to bottom. We remove the skin from top to bottom. We removed the head and the head was broken. We cut it into slices and put it on the fire. I lit the fire and cooked it. Time passed and it was ready. The hearing people came and sat down. I served the food to them.

Narrative LGG_11 (lines 31-47)

Most resolutions in LGG narratives have at least three lines (7 of 8 by deaf men and 6 of 8 by deaf women). Five male and five female signers produce quite long resolutions (between 6 and 10 lines in the men and between 8 and 17 lines in the women). Of these, half follow equally long climaxes (3 by men and 2 by women) but two end their reports in the resolution without proceeding to the coda component.

In conclusion, all LGG signers react to the encounter occurring almost always with snakes. In these resolutions, characters mostly enacted show how they dealt with it, which was mainly by running away or by beating it to death. Differently from AdaSL, deaf people in Guinea-Bissau kill the snake accompanied by hearing people. The majority of these components are long and almost half follow an also long climax, especially the ones produced by men. This demonstrates that dramatic effects initiated in previous components continue until the attack is solved in almost all narratives by male signers and only a couple by female signers. Next, I compare this analysis with the corresponding findings in AdaSL and LaSiBo.

Comparison of the resolution in the three sign languages

All narratives in the three sign languages have a resolution component, coming right after the encounter with the dangerous animal, where the character reacts to it. In these West African settings, the majority of the personal experiences refer to snakes. When encountering them, most characters kill them or run away from them.

Most narratives include character embodiment in the resolution component except for a few in LaSiBo and by female LGG signers that tell the account in the narrator's role. Overall, this component is quite detailed in the three sign languages. However, the main difference is that many AdaSL and male LGG signers and a couple of female LGG signers had built emotional growth throughout the previous components.

Finally, in the next section, the present analysis of AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG narratives looks at the last component, the coda, in the three sign languages separately.

3.5.5 Coda

The coda is the last component of the personal experience narrative structure when the narrator returns to the real present and the audience. Before this moment, the signer had already told about the personal experience, usually in the first person, embodying the character(s) according to a timeline in the past, from the setting up of the story in the orientation to the resolution of the event.

The coda component can end the narratives such as That was it, No more problems, among others. To see how AdaSL, LaSiBo and LGG signers enclose the personal narrations, I move forward to the analysis of the coda component in each of the sign languages, followed by a comparison between the three of them.

Coda in AdaSL narratives

The coda is the moment when the narrator turns to the audience. I now look at how AdaSL signers finish their personal stories.

In AdaSL, 15 out of 17 narratives have a coda, where the signers shift back to the audience as narrators. Furthermore, they seem to end similarly to Labov & Waletzky's narratives ending with ‘That was it’ and ‘No more problem’ (§2.5.1). In AdaSL codas signers finish their narratives with statements such as ‘that’s all’ or ‘it was over’ which usually, depending on the context, correspond to my own free translation of the sign FINISH. Half of them are very short (eight have one line and two have two lines). The signers of those short codas end their stories by looking directly at the audience and by, as in (42a,b).

(42) Direction of eye gaze during the coda in AdaSL

a. 

RHgloss	BACK	HERE	FINISH
LHgloss	-		
gaze	character	audience	
Comp.	resolution	coda	

'I got back here. That's all.'
(Narrative ADA_04)

b. 

RHgloss	FIRE	DECREASE	FINISH
LHgloss			
gaze	character	audience	
Comp.	resolution	coda	

'The fire decreased and it was over.'
(Narrative ADA_05)

Six narratives have a coda with more than three lines. For example, in one of them, the signer looks at the audience at the last moment of the resolution and moves to the coda, by signing 'I was tired' and then, in the coda, 'I laid down, I was tired. They saw that I was tired and brought me to the hospital but it was expensive' (Narrative ADA_10). Three of these codas are especially long (between 12 and 15 lines).

The one with the longest coda has an equally long resolution. This story about a lion attack (Narrative ADA_11b) seems to end with its disappearance, but then a witchcraft story goes on, in which the lion turns into a person to steal a baby and as soon as it has the baby, it runs away, it turns back into a lion and eats the baby. The signer ends by looking at the audience and saying this was a true story, 'It was over. Everyone was afraid, they went by car to look for the lion, but he never showed up again… yes it's true…' So, probably the coda of this story would be at the end of the witchcraft part, rather than the disappearance of the lion after the encounter. I later asked to confirm this story, and I was told that this is a story believed as being real by the people in the village.

Another narrative ending with a long coda had a long climax. This story from the AdaSL corpus, filmed in 2000, ends with the sign 'covered it'. At that moment, the signer looks at the audience and pauses, indicating that the story has finished. He then goes back to the audience and begins the description of the snake with free clauses, and embodiment, and ends with a question, 'The snake was too big, strong and long. I cut it. I cut the head's snake… yeah… it was in the forest and it had spots on the body. It can bite and eat you. I was looking for the 'animal', It was hunting for prey, to eat and swallow me completely… I screamed… its belly filled up a lot… ahh… rats, pigs, dogs, chickens, turkeys… do you know what a turkey is?' (Narrative ADA_14).

In the last narrative with a long coda component, the signer also repeats the story afterwards but adds new information, such as the fact that her friend and herself were in different spaces, one on each side, and that they caught 15 snails (Narrative ADA_15a).

To conclude, most AdaSL narratives end with the coda component told in the narrator's role. Half of the signers conclude by signing FINISH. Although a little more than half are very short, a few of them have prolonged it by going back to the story after finishing it, to repeat some parts or add information without being asked about it. Next, I turn to LaSiBo narratives to see if they have the coda component.

Coda in LaSiBo narratives

In the previous section, it was shown that 15 of 17 narratives in AdaSL have the coda component. To illustrate how the coda is in LaSiBo narratives, I show several examples.

Nine out of 11 LaSiBo narratives have a coda and seven of them are told in the narrator's role, making the coda identifiable when signers look at the audience, after the resolution component, as in (43).

(43) Direction of eye gaze during the coda in LaSiBo

a. 

RHgloss	SEE	NOTHING	DAYS	SWELL
LHgloss				
eye gaze	character		audience	
comp	resolution		coda	

'I was looking for it and I didn't find it. One day later. The leg had swollen.'
(Narrative LAS_04)

Of the nine codas, six say FINISH, usually as the last sign, except for (39).

RHgloss	FINISH	WALK	STRONG
LHgloss			
gaze	character		audience
Comp.	resolution		coda

'I was finished and walked. I was stronger.'
(Narrative LAS_02a)

Three of the coda components are very short, with no more than two lines long. For instance, signers simply say 'The leg was fine a few days later. Finished' (Narrative LAS_01a, lines 13-14) and 'I walked, I ran away' (Narrative LAS_02a, lines 11-12). In four other narratives, the coda is quite long (between 6 and 15 lines), for instance, to make a complaint, in (44).

(44) Long coda with additional information in LaSiBo

I went alone to the farm. Her father spent his time wandering around [pointing to her daughter]. I was looking for him and I didn't find him. I was alone, someone could kill me, then he didn't want to walk with me anymore and that was it.

(Narrative LAS_01c, lines 28-34)

Finally, two others are extremely long (with 38 and 46 lines) – when compared to their previous components and even to the two other sign languages in this study. Here, the signers add new information, as in (45).

(45) Extremely long coda with additional information in LaSiBo

It was heavy. I could take it and put it on my head with some effort, but my neck could get weak. No, I didn't want to. I cut it into slices and everyone took a piece. I was relaxed. I sliced it, I shared it around with nine people. Then I had no more. It isn't good to hide it, just give it. It is good to share. No need to pay for it right away. It was an ox with a long horn. It tried to hit me and I avoided it, it went away. It wanted to fight with me but I avoided it and it ran away. Later, a long time after that, I went farming in the field. There, I didn't see it, it was dark and I didn't see it. It was dark at night, the animal passed by and I didn't see it. I looked at it and I called someone [?]. I was surprised. We handled the animal and I pulled it up. I tied it. It went for sale and that was it.

(Narrative LAS_05b, lines 8-45)

At the end of the first six narratives collected in 2019, signers were asked to describe the snake, because, unlike the AdaSL signers, most had not done it during the narrative. They then said what the snake looked like and some went back to the story, adding, eventually, new information, as in (46). In this example, the complete signed production that was collected then is shown to make clear how, after the narrative, the signer repeats some information that is in the background, i.e., in the orientation, and the development, i.e., in the complication and the resolution. For the structure analysis, I only analysed the first part of the elicitation. Nonetheless, I found it useful to illustrate how a coda, resulting from interaction prompted a repetition of what they had said before in these particular signers.

(46) Repeated information in grey after the coda in LaSiBo

orientation	1. Well… I went… I went to the farm
	2. I put things on my head
	3. I went to the farm with things on my head
complication	4. And I was walking
climax	5. It (snake) passed by me
resolution	6. and stepped back
	7. I ran away…
	8. The snake bit me
	9. and I was hurt
	10. Someone took me on their back

	11. We walked
coda	12. The leg was fine a few days later. 13. Finished.
Prompted response to the clarification request	14. It's this size… more or less… it's the pinky size… 15. (She looked around for some to show the exact size but couldn't find it). 16. It's the arm size… with spots… more or less...
repeated narrative	17. I saw the snake, 18. And I stepped back 19. The snake passed by me
additional information	20. I called people, showed it to them
repeated narrative	21. and ran away with 'things' on my head 22. I walked 23. I got scared and stepped back 24. I looked for the snake 25. I ran away breathing fast. 26. Finished.

(Narrative LAS_01a)

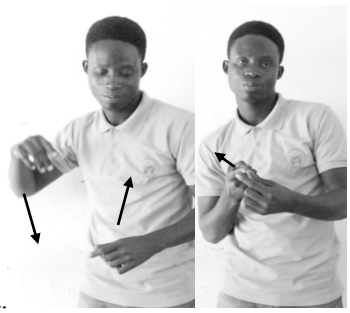
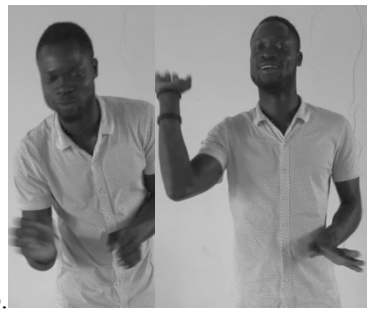
In the last six narratives, filmed more recently in 2021, signers were not asked about the description of the animal, but they did retell the same story anyway, even without describing the snake. In this case, I considered it as part of the coda component, as in (45a,b), above.

In sum, most LaSiBo narratives have a coda component which is usually introduced by the signer's eye gaze directed at the addressee. In more than half of the narratives, the signers end it with FINISH and extend it to repeat or add information, regardless of being asked for clarifications about how the animal looked like. Next, I turn to the coda in LGG narratives.

Coda in LGG narratives

As in AdaSL and LaSiBo, not all signers produce a coda in LGG, one man and one woman do not present it, finishing their stories in the resolution. Also, like AdaSL signers, all LGG signers that embodied a character in the previous component address now the audience as narrators, showing a clear change in their eye gaze between the last two components, as in (47). The signer that did not change her eye gaze during the transition between the resolution and the coda kept it on the audience until the end.

(47) Shift of the eye gaze between the resolution and the coda in LGG

a.  b. 

RHgloss / LHgloss	HIT	'LONG' (S&S*)	LOOK-NOT	AWAY
gaze	audience	character	audience	character
comp.	resolution	coda	resolution	coda

*Size and Shape depictions (Chapter 7 for more details).

c. 

RHgloss	KEEP	DIE
LHgloss		
gaze	audience	character
comp.	resolution	coda

Signers typically finish their narratives by putting down their hands, which is probably because they are very used to being filmed in a school context. Nonetheless, some sign FINISH at the end (4 of 7 men and 2 of 7 women). Most LGG narratives have a very short coda (eleven with one line and one with two lines).

In the end, because only three signers had described the animals during the narrative, I asked the others that had not previously mentioned it (13 of 16) what the animal looked like. They then described it without any further comments. (see Chapter 7 for details on the descriptions of the snakes as a type of evaluation). In one of these (with three lines), apart from adding the size of the snake, the male signer says that he hit it and it died (in Narrative LGG_06).

The longest coda, with four lines, was produced by the female signer that had already told an overall long narrative, with the longest climax and resolution components of all LGG signers. In this coda, she tells that she cooked the snake and gave it to people to eat. She comments that she does not eat snakes because she is afraid of doing so and finishes her account by saying THANK-YOU (Narrative LGG_11), in (48).

(48) Comments in the coda in LGG

LHgloss	HEARING	EAT	ME	EAT	NOTHING	ME
gaze	character		audience			
comp.	resolution		coda			

LHgloss	EAT	HEARING	ME	SEE	AFRAID	THANK-YOU
eye gaze	audience					
comp	coda					

‘I served the food to them I didn't eat it. I have not eaten it because I am afraid. Thank you!’
(Narrative LGG_11)

The majority of LGG signers produce a coda component as narrators, most of them shifting their eye gaze between the resolution and the coda. Less than half sign finish at the end. This component contrasts with the other two sign languages for being overall very short. I now move on to the comparison between the codas in the three languages.

Comparison of coda in the three languages

The coda component is the last component and ends with the narrator wrapping the narrative up and returning to the audience within the present moment. This final component may include comments by the narrator directed at the audience.

The majority of the narratives in the three sign languages have a coda component, where the conclusion is expressed clearly to the audience, about half with the sign FINISH. At this point, all AdaSL and LGG signers direct their eye gaze to the audience, while a couple of LaSiBo signers do not look at the audience for the entire time.

Overall, codas are very short in LGG, showing ease in front of the camera and awareness in making a clear end. In contrast, a few AdaSL and LaSiBo codas are quite long, but for different reasons. Signers in Adamorobe seem enthusiastic about adding comments or enhancing a particular aspect of the story, while in Bouakako emphasis and clarifications took the form of mainly just repeating information.

After going through the descriptive analysis of the five structural components in the three sign languages, I now present a synthesis of the results as a whole.

3.6 Synthesis of the results

In the previous section, the structure analysis was made for each component in each sign language. At the end of each component analysis, a comparison of the three sign languages was made per component. This section aims at giving a general overview of the 44 personal experience narratives analysed in the three West African sign languages.

As explained in §3.2.1 (see Figure 40), I propose to combine Freytag's pyramid, including the climax with L&W's components. The left side of the pyramid starts rising with the orientation and goes through the complication until the climax which can last until the tragic moment, as proposed by Freytag, resulting in a double peak pyramid ending at the falling line of the resolution. The coda is not included in the descendant curve since it is no longer describing the sequence of events. Therefore, it is represented by a flat line following the pyramid shape.

What is overwhelmingly similar between the three sign languages is the alternation between the signer's roles throughout the narrative, from narrator to character and back to the narrator, as shown in Figure 41. Most signers start and end their narratives in the narrator's role, looking at their interlocutor. Then, during the middle components – which are produced by everyone – where the story rises in the complication to the climax and falls from there, through the resolution, they typically

enact the character(s). There were only a few exceptions. The orientation was presented a few times under the character's role in the three languages (2 of 16 in AdaSL, 2 of 11 in LaSiBo, and 1 of 8 in male LGG signers). Similarly, in the coda, only two LaSiBo narratives did not return to the narrator's role. Curiously, in the three middle components, two narratives in LaSiBo and two by female LGG signers were not told as a character, but as a narrator unlike everyone else.

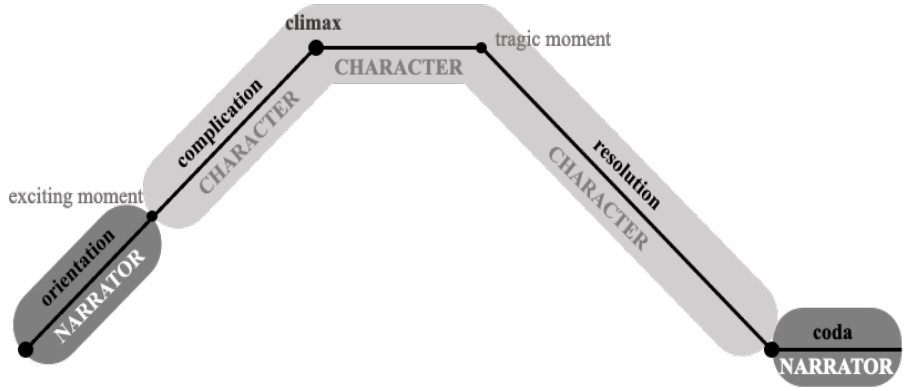


Figure 41. Signer's roles during the structural components

Looking at the results of the narratives as a whole, it becomes evident that they all follow a universal sequence with a beginning, middle and end. As shown in Table 20, the orientation and the coda components are present in the majority of the narratives (male LGG signers are the only ones producing the totality of the orientation components). The middle components, however, where the sequence of events is narrated, are always included. The biggest difference is that LaSiBo and female LGG signers tend to produce very short complication and climax components, with only one or two lines, as shown in Table 20, in the numbers shaded in grey. I note here that, even if AdaSL and female LGG signers show similar numbers in those components, they were interpreted in proportion to the total of narratives analysed. Another distinction that comes to light is longer codas in LaSiBo narratives. Notwithstanding, it is important to keep in mind that Labov & Waletzky state that rather than the length of the narrative, what matters is that the narrative follows a timeline (subsection 3.2.1.), which they all do.

Table 20. Summary of component production in the narratives studied, distinguishing the total of components from the very short ones (with one to two lines); these are shaded in grey when they occur in higher proportions

		orientation		**complication**		**climax**		**resolution**		**coda**	
		total	short	total	short	total	short	total	short	total	short
AdaSL	17	**16**	9	**17**	6	**17**	5	**17**	3	**15**	9
LaSiBo	11	**9**	1	**11**	9	**11**	9	**11**	1	**9**	3
LGG men	8	**8**	4	**8**	2	**8**	-	**8**	1	**7**	6
LGG wome	8	**5**	2	**8**	5	**8**	5	**8**	2	**7**	6

To better visualise how the structure of the narratives is produced by the signers, the pyramid combining both Freytag's and L&W's models was drawn to represent each component with a numbered line: (1) orientation; (2) complication; (3) climax; (4) resolution; (5) coda. Each line was then adjusted to include the time, measured in seconds and milliseconds, spent in the corresponding components. Critically, the length of each line in the pyramid reflecting the duration of its matching component does not always correspond to the number of lines in the translated text. In other words, one translated unit can be signed slowly or repeatedly. Otherwise, a sequence of lines in the text can be signed very quickly.

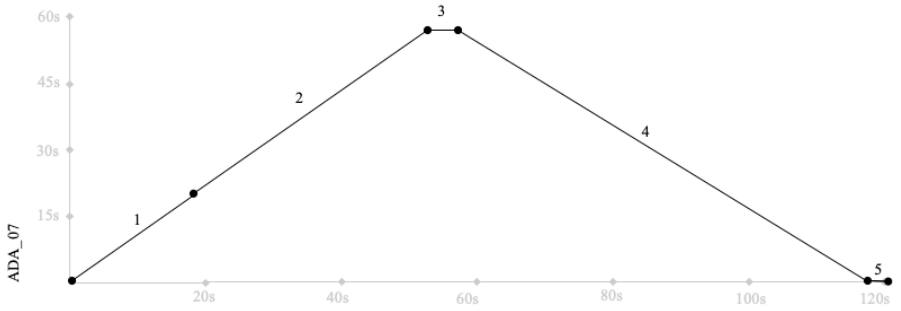
All narratives were able to be expressed in a pyramid, although of different sizes and shapes. Below, examples of pyramids are shown for the three sign languages. For considerations of space, not all pyramids are presented here. Instead, they were chosen

and grouped according to similar patterns and represented by prototype examples in each language.

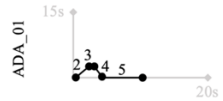
In AdaSL narratives, one particular narrative is highlighted, in (49a), for being the longest and highly balanced along its components (ADA_05 is similar to this one but with half its length and with a very short climax). This narrative (ADA_07) was produced by one of the younger signers, bilingual in AdaSL and Ghanaian Sign Language. In contrast, there are two very short narratives (AdaSL 1, AdaSL 2) with a similar shape, represented below in (48b). Other quite balanced narratives (ADA_06, ADA_09, ADA_11b, ADA_15a; and ADA_04 with double the length) are exemplified by the one in (49c). To illustrate unbalanced pyramids, the example in (49d), shows a very short complication (also ADA_08), followed by a reasonably long climax (also ADA_10, ADA_12) and a very long resolution (all of the previous and also ADA_13). Finally, a longer climax (ADA_03, ADA_14, ADA_15b) is an aspect that becomes clear in the pyramids for AdaSL narratives, as in (49e).

(49) Structure pyramids of AdaSL narratives

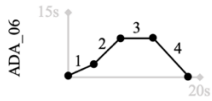
a.



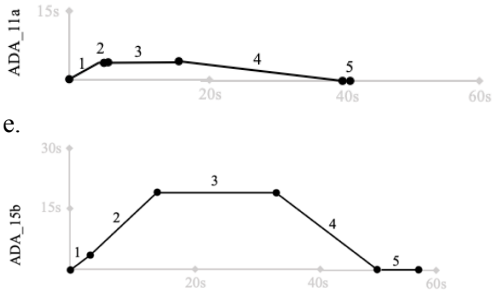
b.



c.

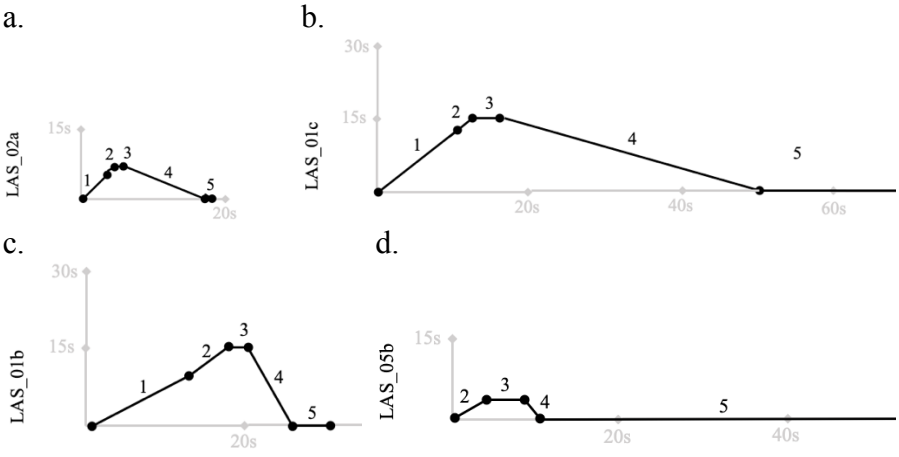


d.



Overall, AdaSL narratives correspond to balanced pyramid shapes with longer climaxes. In contrast, LaSiBo narratives present extremely short complication and climax components (LAS_01a, LAS_02a, LAS_02b), as in (50a), which may combine with a longer orientation (LAS_03, LAS_04) or resolution (LAS_06a). Others stand out especially because of their longer resolution (LAS_01c), as in (50b), or a longer orientation (LAS_01b, LAS_06a), as in (50c), or very long codas (LAS_05a, LAS_05b), as in (50d). These pyramids illustrate how less balanced they are in relation to the ones in AdaSL. In LaSiBo narratives, signers seem to quickly go through what is supposed to be the more important part of the story.

(50) Structure pyramids of LaSiBo narratives

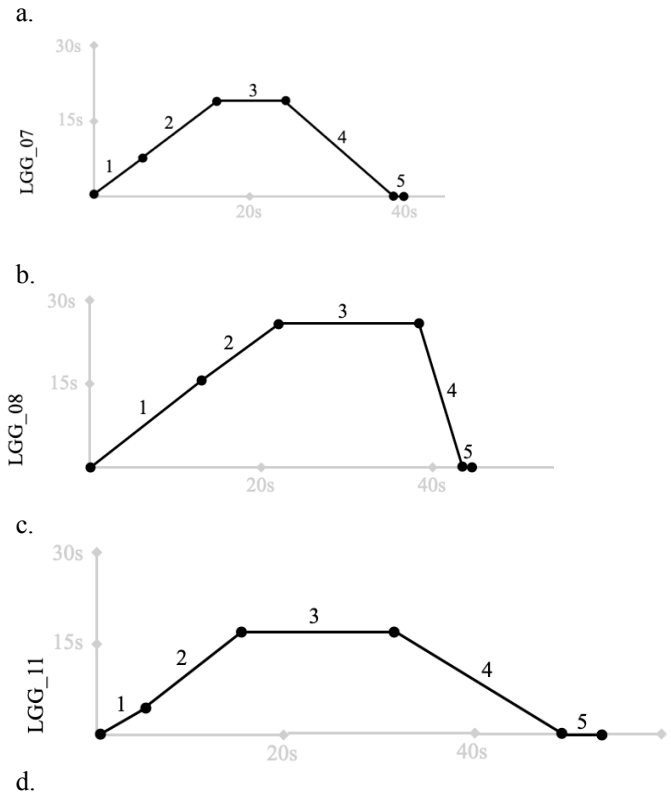


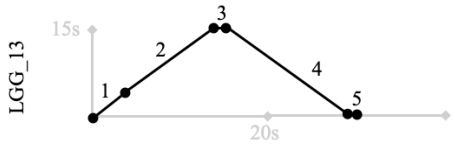
Similarly to AdaSL, narratives produced by male LGG signers are also quite balanced (LGG_01, LGG_07), as in (51a), even if they have a slightly shorter complication

(LGG_02, LGG_04), a longer resolution (LGG_03) or a shorter one (LGG_05). It can also be the case where the orientation is longer and the resolution is shorter (LGG_06, LGG_08), as in (51b). Overall, it is clear in these narratives that they spend time on the climax.

When looking at the pyramids of the narratives by female LGG signers it becomes clearer that they are overall balanced between components. The narrative with the longer climax (LGG_11), in (51c), results in a shape similar to two others (LGG_12, LGG_16), which contrasts with the remaining narratives by deaf women for generally having a very short climax (LGG 13, LGG 15), as in (51d). Of these, three are overall very short (LGG_9, LGG_10, LGG_14). Such a distinction may hint at two different socialisation patterns in women, those benefiting from more time within the deaf community and those more constrained to their hearing families.

(51) Structure pyramids of LGG narratives by male (a,b) and female signers (c,d)





In this way, the similarities and differences between the languages become more evident. On the whole, it is shown that AdaSL and LGG narratives have more balanced components. This means that the content that is expected to appear in each component is proportionally distributed within the overall structure aligning with the pyramid shape. In contrast, narratives that have extremely short middle components, such as the complication and the climax, or unexpectedly long orientation or resolution components, seem to the interlocutor as oddly unbalanced. This is the case of some of the narratives produced by LaSiBo and female LGG signers.

3.7 Discussion

Aligning the results of this analysis with the findings of previous studies in personal experience narratives in other sign languages (see Table 18), it is possible to establish correspondences, while adding a step further to the understanding of narrative structure in the signed modality.

Overall, as seen in Table 20, the large majority of the narratives in this study include the totality of L&W's components, except for the abstract, which was not found in Mulrooney's (2009) analysis, where she used different partitions and designations. Sohre (2017) argued that the abstract occurred as one with the orientation component. Wilson (1996) did not identify it either. However, the type of introductory statement in the narrative she analysed was equivalent to the ones in the narratives analysed by Johnston & Schembri (2007) and Sutton-Spence (2021) who interpreted it as an abstract. In the African narratives studied here, no abstracts were found probably because signers were answering the question, I had asked them. For that reason, they may not have felt the need to summarise what was their narrative about.

All the studies in personal experience narratives in different sign languages also included the orientation component, where the context of the story is given. Again, Mulrooney proposed this initial part be divided into the introduction (where the story starts with a topic) and background (with basic information about participants and the story's location) instead of designating it as orientation. I should note here that L&W suggest that this introductory component is not an essential part of the structure. In fact, despite being present in most of the West African narratives, it does not occur in three (out of 12) LaSiBo narratives and three (out of eight) narratives by female LGG signers.

All authors recognise the importance of the narrative's middle part as fundamental in the account of a personal experience, especially, if the topic involves an emotional event. Although the complication (Mulrooney labels it as main event) is identified throughout their analysis, not all mention the climax. Mulrooney does observe it but not always and in different locations of the main event, either at the beginning or at the end (remembering here that her 'main event' would correspond to the complication and the resolution). In Sohre's work on Romanian Sign Language (LSR), the climax is usually located in the resolution, where the event is solved, though in one of the narratives it occurs in the orientation, where the story is set up. It is important to remember that the personal experience narratives analysed in ASL and LSR are not about life-or-death situations. Such threatening situations, as in the case of an animal attack, naturally imply an emotional peak. Thus, their findings (obtained under different methods and for different topics) do not align at all with the results presented in this study where the climax, as I interpreted it, between the encounter with the animal and Freytag's tragic moment (killing the animal or running away from it), was always situated between the complication and the resolution, even if very briefly. Such a position of the climax was considered similarly by Sutton-Spence. She also found a double peak climax, as situated between a climatic point – when the mouse escapes a stick stroke – and the climax – when the mouse is finally killed (2021, 120), which I paralleled to Freytag's tragic moment.

A crucial reason for the presence of the climax in the African narratives is that the stories were precisely about encountering an animal. Therefore, all signers but one intuitively told about it. The only signer that did not produce a narrative about an animal attack describes instead different types of snakes and what usually people do with them. This LaSiBo signer seems to socialise very little with their deaf and hearing peers. Tano was not able to identify a habitual interaction partner for this signer in particular (2016, 77). Such a descriptive vicarious account was excluded from Study 1 due to the lack of structural components. However, it was included all the same in the remaining three studies on narrative devices since they could occur independently of a storyline.

Except for Johnston & Schembri (2007) and Sutton-Spence who clearly identify the outcome of the story, the resolution was the component that led to more ambiguous interpretations in the studies of other sign languages. Because Mulrooney proposes different categories it is not evident where the resolution would occur in her structural distribution. Similarly, even though Wilson follows L&W's partition, she does not mention the resolution component in her analysis, jumping from a long complication to the coda. Sohre acknowledges some difficulty in separating the complication from the resolution but she does observe it. In the analysis of the West African narratives, the resolution developed from the tragic moment on. It concerned the elaboration of

how signers dealt with the animal they encountered, which was mostly by killing it or running away.

Finally, although the coda was present in all the personal experience narratives analysed in the other sign languages, except for Mulrooney, two (of 17) AdaSL signers, three (of 12) LaSiBo signers and three (one of eight men and two of eight women) LGG signers did not produce it.

Having compared the structural components in different studies, again must be mentioned that the personal experience narratives analysed by the several authors are about distinct topics and none involve a life-threatening situation. They are mostly about past experiences, like travelling, school episodes, or other events not involving a danger to the self. Hence, the topic of an animal attack could be fundamental in triggering a (dramatic) structure building up towards a climax and descending from there to deal with the aftermath. In the end, the 45 narratives collected for this study are truly comparable only to those analysed by L&W, who also asked their interviewees about life-threatening situations.

The old AdaSL and the macro-community LGG (especially the deaf men) show narratives structured according to L&W's model and including Freytag's climax. In contrast, signers that socialise less, namely Bouakako's deaf villagers and the deaf women in Bissau, although presenting the same components, distributed them differently. As a distinctive pattern, most LaSiBo signers and half of the female LGG signers produced extremely short complication and climax components, usually condensed in a single utterance. This leads to the conclusion that a basic narrative structure, including an orientation, a complication, a climax, a resolution and a coda, seems to be universal, at least for this type of personal experience narrative. Moreover, addressing directly the audience in the initial contextualisation and the closing of the story, and embodying the character while telling about the sequence of events, is also highly intuitive. However, involving the interlocutors in the narrative by emotionally preparing the high point of the narrative, lingering in the excitement of the climax and maintaining their interest during the reactions, has to be learned through social interactions.

Whilst the sign language in the village of Adamorobe is used only by a small group of 33 deaf people today, used by several generations. It is assumed therefore to have developed linguistic structures over time, and consequently over numerous opportunities for social interaction. Deaf villagers have strong socialisation habits with each other, especially between age peers. Also, the fact that it became part of the village life across generations, turned it (even if strongly influenced by local gestures) into the usual form of communication with and between the deaf. In this sense, deaf people in Adamorobe spontaneously use their sign language to tell about their everyday experiences to interlocutors who value signing skills. Similarly, in Bissau,

deaf men meet every day for long hours in different spaces and with a variety of interlocutors. On these occasions, they exchange personal experiences and naturally place more value on those that are more compelling. Such a context enables both individuals and the language community as a whole to gradually grow as (skilled) storytellers. Thus, language age and frequency of social interactions both support the development of well-structured emotional narratives. As opposed to these two groups, the six deaf people in Bouakako have specific hearing peers as their preferred interlocutors and apparently interact with other deaf only in pairs. Consequently, they have not benefited during their lifetime from opportunities to enjoy others telling stories and develop their storytelling abilities which are manifested in their unemotional accounts collected for this study. Although the deaf women in Bissau are not able to socialise as much as their male peers due to cultural constraints, they have, nevertheless, had access to a wide variety of deaf interlocutors during the short lifespan of the local deaf community. The fact that they spend less time than the men interacting in LGG seems to account for the striking differences in the narrative structures between the two genders.

At the same time, the evidence for less compelling narratives told by Bouakako and female LGG signers strongly suggests that a gestural environment and potentially regular interactions with hearing people are insufficient to create the conditions for language development.

In sum, the hypothesis for this study was supported. Both language age, in the case of AdaSL, and frequency of interaction, evident in male LGG signers, seem to be crucial factors for the development of narrative structuring. Moreover, those factors also appear to determine the ability to make the narratives compelling to their audience through an enhanced climax.

The overall results concerning the structural components were discussed here, enabling the identification of salient patterns in their distribution, and aligning them with the signer's role, whether as the narrator or as a character. Results were also interpreted in the face of the literature in search of similarities and distinctions when possible. The following section presents the main conclusions of this first study on the structural analysis of personal experience narratives in the three sign languages.

3.8 Conclusion

Subsection 3.5 described the components of narrative structure in the three sign languages. In general, they all follow a temporal order with a beginning, a middle and an end. The model of Labov & Waletzky allows a more detailed analysis, adding more

components than those three main parts. All of such components were identified in the three sign languages.

During Labov and Waletzky's initial component, the orientation (if we disregard the abstract), and the final one, the coda, signers usually look at the audience. In the orientation, signers typically describe the character(s), the location, and the event's time. This contextual information, like sketching the scenario before introducing the events, is essential for the audience's understanding of the story. For that reason, signers focus directly on the audience to ensure it is being conveyed clearly. When signers look away from the audience and turn their eyes to the imaginary event being told about, they stop acting as the narrator and enter the story by embodying a character. This change in the eye gaze marks a break between components, in this case, between the orientation and the complication. At the end of the narrative, signers return their gaze to the audience for the coda component to eventually add a few final comments and indicate that the narrative is over.

Although storytelling is a human universal it depends on language and cultural knowledge to take form (Dunbar 2014). What seems to emerge in the first place is the temporal sequence of events which is expressed in all narratives told in the three sign languages. L&W had already acknowledged that personal experiences are only identified as such when they follow a timeline. Similarly, the story is also centred on a character with a motive that triggers a reaction (Sugiyama 2005).

What is strikingly different between the storytellers of the three West African sign languages is the degree of emotional investment in sharing a potentially exciting event with their audience. Those with the least opportunities to socialise do not seem to be aware of the importance of turning their stories compelling to the addressee. This may be due to a lack of skills or the necessary empathy with the interlocutors. Thus, narratives produced by LaSiBo and most female LGG signers demonstrate that they have not learned through social practice how to tell stories. It is not only because their sign language is still in the first generation since male LGG signers have developed that ability within the same time span, but because they do not engage in frequent interactions. They may not have been valued enough by their communicative partners to learn how to spark emotions with their accounts. However, most of them intuitively start and end the narrative as narrators, addressing the audience directly, while enacting characters in the middle part of the story. In this context, character embodiment could be the natural way for a deaf person to express their actions in the past, rather than an enhancement strategy (see Chapter 5 for more details).

What is evident is that narratives told in the old sign language of Adamorobe or by the vibrant male storytellers of the new deaf community of Bissau are highly compelling. Their skills in conveying dramatic intensity to their narratives appear in narration strategies such as character embodiment, including dialogues, alternating or

simultaneously with side explanations. This is done in such an enhanced way that the audience is transported to the narrated event.

I focus next on the types of evaluation aiming at enhancing the narratives (Chapter 4). In sign languages, those types of evaluation can be expressed by particular narrative devices. I look at signing perspectives to refer to story elements in different scales (Chapter 5), how lines in self-talks and dialogues are expressed (Chapter 6), as well as how signers describe the main point of their personal experience accounts: the animals encountered (Chapter 7). These narrative devices are the highlight of the narratives, it is what the signers do to captivate the audience's attention.