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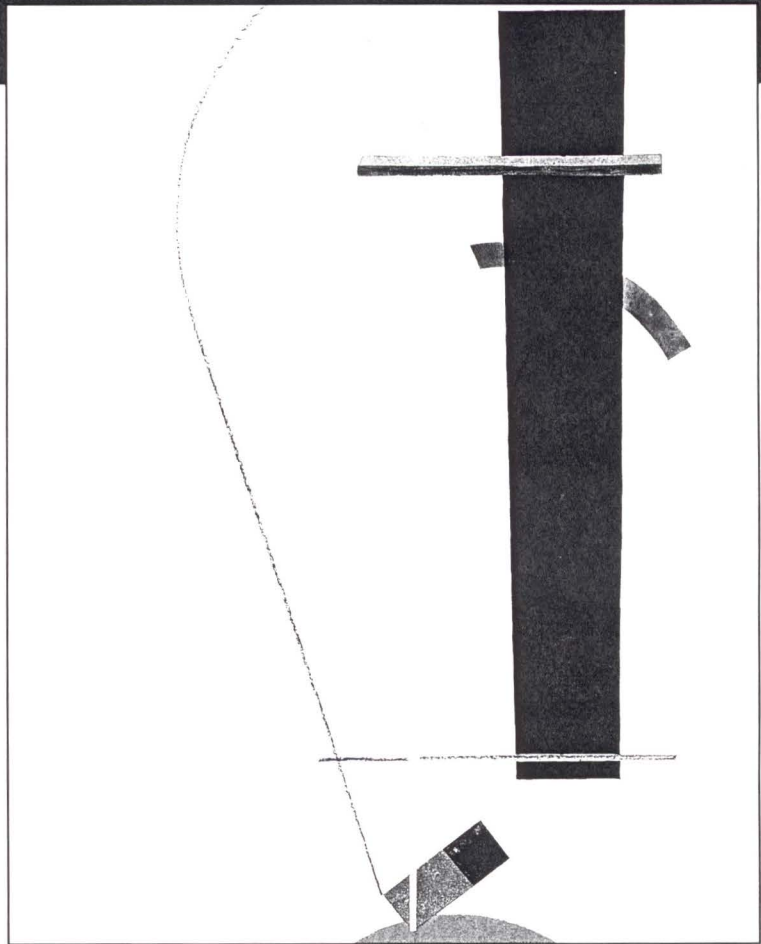
DISCOURSE AS STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

DISCOURSE STUDIES 1

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY INTRODUCTION

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7

Narrative

Elinor Ochs

Narrative Realms

Imagine a world without narrative. Going through life not telling others what happened to you or someone else, and not recounting what you read in a book or saw in a film. Not being able to hear or see or read dramas crafted by others. No access to conversations, printed texts, pictures, or films that are about events framed as actual or fictional. Imagine not even composing interior narratives, to and for yourself. No. Such a universe is unimaginable, for it would mean a world without history, myths or drama; and lives without reminiscence, revelation, and interpretive revision.

When we think about narrative, literary forms come to mind as narrative texts *par excellence*. At least since Aristotle's *Poetics* (1962), narrative genres such as tragedy and comedy have been the preoccupation of philosophers and critics. As a fundamental genre that organizes the ways in which we think and interact with one another, however, narrative encompasses an enormous range of discourse forms, including popular as well as artistic genres. The most basic and most universal form of narrative may be the product not of poetic muse, but of ordinary conversation.

Scholars of narrative have argued that narratives are authored not only by those who introduce them but also by the many readers and interlocutors who influence the direction of the narrative (Bakhtin, 1981; 1986; Bauman, 1986; Goodwin, 1981). This co-authorship is most evident in conversational narratives, where interlocutors ask questions, comment and otherwise overtly contribute to an evolving tale (Ehlich, 1980; C. Goodwin, 1984; M. Goodwin, 1990; Jefferson, 1978; Mandelbaum, 1987; Quasthoff, 1980; Ochs et al., 1992; Sacks, 1978). The interactional production of narrative maintains and transforms persons and relationships (Miller et al., 1992). How we think about ourselves and others is influenced by both the message content of jointly told narratives and the experience of working together to construct a coherent narrative.

Our species is fortunate to have access to several communicative modalities available to create a narrative. Narratives can be produced through spoken, written, kinesthetic, pictorial, and musical modes of representation. Spoken and written narratives are commonplace. Dramatic enactments of events through body movements and facial expressions may be even more

basic a narrative vehicle, given the historicity, ubiquity, and enticement of performance (Aristotle, 1962). Indeed Kenneth Burke (1973: 103) harkens back to ritual drama 'as the Ur-form, the "hub", with all other aspects of *human* action treated as spokes radiating from this hub'. And every picture tells a story in the form of a more or less compressed narrative. Indeed the history of art is in part a history of narrative representation (Adorno, 1984; Berger, 1972; Dissanayake, 1988; Marsack, 1991). In some cases, a narrative is communicated through a series of depictions, as in certain forms of cave art or certain medieval illustrated manuscripts. In other cases, the sequence of events is compressed into a single representation, requiring the viewer to untangle the storyline from different elements in the scene. From one point of view, minimalist art places heavy demands on viewers by inviting them to create a narrative from highly abstract and elusive forms and juxtapositions. From another point of view, minimalist liberates the viewer from having to discern a single, authoritative narrative scripted by artist or patron. Rather, the viewer is free to construe a range of possible narratives suggested or inspired by the visual forms (Capps et al., 1993).

The range of narrative interpretation that characterizes paradigms of visual art also characterizes other narrative modes, particularly music. Instruments, tonality, and melodic leitmotifs may more or less explicitly, more or less iconically, build characters and move them through emotional and actional realms. The ethnomusicologist Steven Feld (1982) describes how the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea relate the melodic contours of bird songs to particular forms of human sentiment, activity, and states of being. Certain pitches, for example, convey sadness and weeping, which in turn may evoke loss and abandonment. Kaluli reproduce these melodic contours in sung narrative performances to arouse strong feelings from those listening (Schieffelin, 1976).

While a narrative may be crafted through a single modality, more often narrators intertwine a multiplicity of modalities. Narrators may quote or make reference to a narrative excerpt from a book or newspaper, blending oral and written instrumentalities. Or demonstrations involving artifacts may be incorporated, as when children in American schools engage in a narrative activity called 'sharing time' in which they tell a story through both words and displays of objects brought from home (Michaels, 1981). Similarly, narrating may involve tellers talking about, looking at, and pointing to visual representations. This is seen in courtroom narration, where witnesses and lawyers piece together a plausible narrative, using objects and images they construct as evidence (Goodwin, 1994). Scientific narratives also rely on graphs, diagrams and other figures. While sometimes scientists merely refer to a figure, in the throes of working through a scientific problem they may construct a narrative account from the perspective of being a symbolic object *within* a figure (Ochs et al., 1994). At these moments, scientists use the figure as a frame of reference as they gesturally and vocally narrate changes in physical states along symbolic points within the figure. Picture books also interweave images with

linguistic text, inviting readers to pursue a narrative line across these two modalities. And theatrical drama can be enacted through a variety of modalities including pantomime, voice, written text, visual image, and musical instrumentation.

In some cases, the interpenetration of communicative modalities is evoked rather than actualized. Rather than using different modes of communication, the narrator implies these modes through stylistic variation. For example, when authors shift from descriptive prose to direct quotation, they imply a shift to speech. In so doing, they transform the reader into an (over)hearer as well. These interpenetrations produce intertexts or hybrid modes of discourse (Bakhtin, 1981; 1986). The intermingling of implied modalities is especially prevalent in the novel, where authors craft not only spoken dialogue but also inner silent forms of communication in a literary format. The play of communicative channels weaves a complex relationship between author, character, and reader/(over)hearer. If well wrought, such complexity yields meanings that render the author an artist and the product a work of art.

As this discussion implies, narrative plays host to a range of genres. In the course of telling a narrative, speakers may engage in a wide range of language activities. For example, they may embed an argument within a narrative, as in the following exchange[1] among family members narrating a story:

Mom: = We didn't <u>laugh</u> believe me.
Rhoda: [<u>Yes you did</u> – you st[arted to <u>laugh</u>.
Corky: [((shaking head no)) [hh
             ((Mom looks to Corky for confirmation of memory))
Mom: I don't think we did – I [had to go-
Rhoda: [YES YOU DI:D!
                         (from Family Dinner Corpus: Ochs, 1986–90[2])

In this example, Rhoda accuses her family of laughing at her during an embarrassing incident. When an interlocutor is the butt of a narrative, he or she often disputes the account of events. Gossip, a form of narrative in which a breach in cultural norm is recounted, is characteristically contentious (Brenneis, 1984; Haviland, 1977; Goodwin, 1990). The highly confrontative nature of gossip is captured in Goodwin's (1990) account of this activity among African American girls. These pre-adolescents engage in complex, conflict-laden narratives called 'He-said-she-said', wherein one girl tells another/others about what a third girl said about her/them (such as 'They say y'all say I wrote everything over there'). This reported accusation is refuted ('*UH* UH. = *THAT* WAS VINCENT SAID.'), in turn triggering lengthy public discussion.

Not only can narrative house other language activities, it can itself be incorporated into a larger genre or activity. For example, not only can a narrative house a dispute, it can also be housed within an ongoing dispute,

as when someone launches a story to illustrate a point he or she is advocating. Narratives can also appear as a part of a prayer. In the following example, a child begins to say grace at the dinner meal, but in the midst of a formulaic thanksgiving, she launches a narrative about events in her day:

Laurie: =kay – Jesus? – plea:?se – um – help us to love
           and .hh um – Thank you for letting it be a n:ice day
           and for taking a (fine/fun) nap?
           .hh – a:nd – for (letting) Mommy go bye
           and I'm glad that I cwied today?
           cuz I like cwying [.hh and
Annie?:   [((snicker))
Laurie: I'[m glad (that anything/everything) happened today=
Roger?:   [((snicker))
Laurie: =in Jesus name
           ((claps hands)) A:-MEN!
                                     (from Family Dinner Corpus: Ochs, 1986–90)

In this example, Laurie's story about crying at school when 'Mommy go bye' is framed within the saying of grace. However, grace does not function simply as a set of bookends for Laurie's narrative, as visualized below:

Grace | Narrative | Grace

Rather, features of the genre of grace seep into the telling of the story:

G r N a ARRA c TIVE e

In particular, a defining feature of grace is an expressed sentiment of thankfulness. This sentiment organizes Laurie's narrative when she recounts 'I'm glad that I cwied today' and 'I like cwying'. Events like crying, which are normally associated with sadness, are imbued with a sensibility appropriate to the occasion of giving thanks for a meal. In this fashion, narratives become organized by the contexts in which they are constructed.

When we think about written narratives, many of us envision them as different from Laurie's narrative. Delimited by titles and typographical spacing, perhaps even a book cover, written texts appear to have defined boundaries. However, even written texts can be part of an ongoing communicative interaction – for example, a dispute or a supplication or a political agenda – that in subtle and profound ways shapes the narrative text. Kenneth Burke (1973: 1) notes: 'Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are *strategic* answers, *stylized* answers.' Scholars ranging from Burke to Russian formalists (Bakhtin, 1981; Todorov, 1984) to proponents of cultural studies (Williams, 1982; 1983) implore interpreters of narrative to embed such texts in the social and historical dialogues in which they participate.

Given the variety of modes and genres that realize narrative activity, it is an enormous task to consider how narrative is rooted in cultural systems of knowledge, beliefs, values, ideologies, action, emotion, and other dimensions of social order. Typically cultural analyses of narrative focus on a particular context of narrative activity, for example spoken or sung narrative performances (Bauman, 1986; Becker, 1979; Briggs, 1992; Feld, 1982; Hymes, 1971; Jacobs, 1959; Scollon and Scollon, 1981a; E.L. Schieffelin, 1976; Tedlock, 1972; Watson-Gegeo and Boggs, 1977; Witherspoon, 1977), mythic tales (Lévi-Strauss, 1955; B. Schieffelin, 1984), conversational narratives of personal experience (Miller et al., 1990; 1992; Morgan, 1991; Ochs and Taylor, 1992b), reading stories (Heath, 1983), writing stories (Scollon and Scollon, 1981b), gossip (Besnier, 1993; Brenneis, 1984; M. Goodwin, 1990; Haviland, 1977), or classroom narrative events (Cazden and Hymes, 1978; Michaels, 1981; Ochs et al., 1994; B. Schieffelin, forthcoming). Narrative in each of these contexts is rendered meaningful *vis-à-vis* some property of local ethos – for example, an orientation towards autonomy or intervention, explicit moralizing, sacredness of text, facticity of text, imagined selves, social asymmetries, and so on. To date no study examines narrative activity as it is variously construed across modes, settings, and participants within a single speech community. As such, we need to be cautious in positing broad generalizations that identify a culture with one narrative style.

Narrative and Time

The term 'narrative' is used either in a narrow sense to specify the genre of story or in a broad sense to cover a vast range of genres, including not only stories but also reports, sports and news broadcasts, plans, and agendas among others. What holds these diverse modes of narrative together? Regardless of the contexts in which they emerge, the modalities through which they are expressed, and the genres laminated within them, all narratives *depict a temporal transition from one state of affairs to another*. This attribute does not uniquely define narrative. We may think of this temporal attribute as a necessary but not sufficient characterization of narrative. As will be discussed later, narratives depict far more than an ordering of events.

Literary philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1988) refers to the temporal property of narrative as the 'chronological dimension'. This transition is captured linguistically by a sequence of two or more clauses which are temporally ordered (Labov, 1972). This characterization encompasses narratives that are captivating as well as those that are dull. It includes accounts of enigmatic events as well as those that are predictable. A narrative can be a simple chronicle of events or an account that contextualizes events, by attempting to explain them and/or persuade others of their relevance.

Narratives may concern past, present, future, hypothetical, habitual, or other culturally relevant mode of reckoning time. Narratives that are

primarily concerned with *past events* include broad genres such as stories, histories, and reports concerning either professional or personal matters. Livia Polanyi (1989: 17), for example, notes that 'stories and past time reports are specific, affirmative, past time narratives which tell about a series of events which took place at specific unique moments in a unique past time world.' William Labov and Joshua Waletzky (1968: 287) refer to personal stories as 'narratives of personal experience' and characterize them linguistically as 'one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred'. Both of the narratives excerpted above, about Rhoda's embarrassment and Laurie's crying, are narratives of personal experience.

Narratives can also be primarily concerned with sequences of events taking place in *present* time, for example, sports broadcasts in which commentators narrate actions, strategies, and reactions of players and their audiences. Alternatively, narratives may focus on the *future*, as with event sequences such as agendas, prescriptions, advice, suggestions, instructions, forecasts, warnings, threats, and planning generally. In the following excerpt, a young girl narrates a series of suggestions, forming a plan for her birthday party:

Sally: Mommy! I know what I'munna do for my birthday? –
        Could we paint our face for our birthday?
Mom: If you want,

        .

Sally: ((counting on her fingers as she speaks))
        Mommy, paint our face, number one –
        Okay, now. go to the park, number two,
        Daddy has to play monster, number three,
        U:m: – number !FOU:?:r! go to miniature golf
        And number five go to UCL pool –
        And number SIX? – kiss Mommy,
        Ha-ha I'm just kidding,
                                (from Family Dinner Corpus: Ochs, 1986–90)

Narratives about *hypothetical* worlds can concern hypothetical past, present, future, or generic time and include such genres as plans, science fiction, and narratives of personal experience. For example, the following segment of hypothetical narrative is constructed by a principal investigator (PI) and a student who are planning how to resolve a scientific problem:

PI: If you take your li:ne there (0.2) and you-
        temperature [quench (0.5) down to:: where I have
                    [((Student looks at board))
        that word [long range order,
                  [((Student rises, goes to board))

Student: Yeah,
PI: will you see any dynamics at all down there?,
                                        (Ochs et al., forthcoming)

In this excerpt, the principal investigator uses a figure on the blackboard to take the student and himself on an imaginary narrative journey (Ochs et al., 1994; forthcoming). The principal investigator posits a sequence of hypothetical moves, and elicits from the student a consequential generic event.

While scientific narratives (such as experimental reports) reckon time primarily in terms of scientific units of measurement, autobiography and other genres of personal narrative reckon time in terms of a person's apprehension of time. As noted by Ricoeur (1988), narrative time is human time, not clock time. Ricoeur's approach to narrative draws on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1962), who distinguishes physical time from existential time. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger suggests that humans experience time as a fusion of past, present, and future. We experience ourselves in the present time world, but with a memory of the past, and an anxiety for the future. A property of our species is that we have human cares; and these cares lead us to contextualize the present in terms of the past and future, the past in terms of the present and future, and the future in terms of the past and present.

It is our cares about the present and especially about the future that organize our narrative recollections of past events. Narrative serves the important function of bringing the past into the present time consciousness. That is, narrative provides a sense of continuity of self and society. But perhaps even more importantly, narrative accounts of past events help us to manage our uncertain future. In Heidegger's framework, when we construct narratives about the past, we apprehend them in terms of what they imply for the present and future.

For these reasons, narratives that touch on past events are always about the present and future as well (Ochs, 1994). In some cases, narratives provide new models, open up novel possibilities, for the shape of our lives to come. In other cases, narratives about the past touch off a concern about the present or future. For example, in 'He-said-she-said' narratives told by African American girls, gossip about the past 'instigates' one of the interlocutors (the accused) to defend herself in the present and posit how she will redress the offense in the future (Goodwin, 1990: 271):

Barbara: Well you *t*ell her to come say it in
          front of my fa:ce. (0.6) and *I*'ll *p*ut
          her somewhere.

In conversational narrative, a concern for the present and future may crop up at any point in the telling. Co-narrators wander over the temporal map, focusing on the past then relating it to the present and future and then returning to another piece of the past. For example, after Laurie recounts

(during grace) how she cried when her mother left her at school, the family returns to Laurie's predicament to help her face tomorrow (Ochs, 1994: 129):

Mother: but honey? – I only work –
          this – it was only this week that I worked there all
          week? because it was the first week? of school
          [but –
Annie: [she cried at three o'clock too
          (0.2)
Mother: but after this? – it – I only work one day a week? there
          and that's Tuesday

The family narratively ricochets from relevant bits of the past:

Mother: Laurie? – you didn't take yer ((shaking head no)) –
          blanket to school either did you.
Laurie: No I (for)got it ((petulant)).

to strategies for conquering the future:

Mother: We'll hafta get it out of the closet –
          and put it over there with the lunch stuff.
          (2.0)
Jimmy: yes – so you could – bring it (with/to) school.

What is the import of experienced time (human time) for understanding narrative? One implication is that different narrative genres, such as stories and plans, organize the same text. The compression of different temporal domains within a single stretch of discourse in turn suggests that genre is best understood as a *perspective* on a text rather than as a *kind* of text (Ochs, 1994). Rather than mapping particular genres on to different narrative sequences, we examine the same stretch of talk or writing or music or visual representation for different genre properties. Rather than asking, 'What genre is this text?', we ask, 'How (if at all) is this text organized as a story? a plan? a broadcast? a forecast?' And so on. The task of the narrators and scholars is to pursue the generic threads that run through a text and fathom their interconnections.

   For the remainder of this chapter, the discussion will focus on characteristics of one narrative genre, namely stories. We will pursue the linguistic, psychological, and sociological structuring of such narratives.

Narrative Point of View and Plot Structure

While narratives can in principle recount utterly predictable events, usually stories concern noteworthy events. Something happened that the storyteller finds surprising, disturbing, interesting, or otherwise tellable (Labov and Waletzky, 1968; Chafe, 1980). Stories normally have a point to make,

which organizes the construction of the narrative itself. Often the point is a moral evaluation of an occurrence, an action, or a psychological stance related to a set of events.

   Stories are not so much depictions of facts as they are construals of happenings. Kenneth Burke (1962) looks at stories as *selections* rather than as *reflections* of reality. And Erving Goffman notes:

> A tale or anecdote, that is, a replaying, is not merely any reporting of a past event. In the fullest sense, it is such a statement couched from the personal perspective of an actual or potential participant who is located so that some temporal, dramatic development of the reported event proceeds from that starting point. A replaying will therefore incidentally be something that listeners can empathetically insert themselves into, vicariously reexperiencing what took place. A replaying, in brief, recounts a personal experience, not merely reports on an event. (1974: 504)

Ricoeur (1981: 278) calls point of view the *configurational* dimension of narrative. Aristotle introduced the term *mythos* or 'plot' to characterize how events and emotions are interwoven to form a coherent narrative. It is plot that distinguishes a list of events from a history of events or a story of events (Frye, 1957; Ricoeur, 1981; White, 1981). In creating a plot, historians and storytellers give structure to events within a sense-making scheme. The plot knits together circumstantial elements such as scenes, agents, agency (instruments), acts, and purposes into a coherent scheme that revolves around an exceptional, usually troubling, event (Burke, 1962).

   The plot can be seen as a theory of events in the sense that it provides an explanation of events from a particular point of view (Feldman, 1989; Ochs et al., 1992). In this sense, stories are akin to scientific narratives. While scientific narratives de-emphasize agents and motives (Latour, 1987), they share with story narratives the property of recounting something out of the usual – an enigma, a discrepancy, an oddity, a challenge, an upset that disturbs the equilibrium. Further, both scientific and personal narratives try to shed light on that problem by placing the problem within a sequence of cause–effect events and circumstances.

   The capacity to create and decipher plots is a quintessential faculty of the human species. Jerome Bruner (1990) has proposed that narrative is a basic instrument of folk psychology. Stories are cultural tools *par excellence* for understanding unusual and unexpected conduct. In storytelling, narrators intertwine two domains of behavior, what Bruner calls 'dual landscapes': (1) situational circumstances and protagonists' actions, and (2) protagonists' mental states. Often, for example, narrators explain an unusual and unexpected action in terms of a protagonist's thoughts and feelings. In so doing, narrative serves to 'render the exceptional comprehensible' (1990: 52). Because stories recount events that depart from the ordinary, they also serve to articulate and sustain common understandings of what the culture deems ordinary. For this reason among others, narrative is a powerful means of socializing children and other novices into local notions of situational appropriateness. Co-narrators often comment on how they

would behave in the reported events and how others should have conducted themselves. As participants to these narrative interactions, children come to understand what is expected, normal, and appropriate.

Building a Narrative

How are story narratives constructed? How are they initiated and developed, and how do they come to completion?

When we see a printed text, a title or other visible feature may initially identify the text as a possible story. While stories told in conversation do not have titles, they do often have *story prefaces* (Sacks, 1992). Instead of abruptly beginning a story, a teller transitions into it with the co-operation of other interlocutors. This activity is accomplished through story prefaces such as 'You want to hear a story?', wherein interlocutors indicate an intention to tell a relevant story and elicit a go-ahead to do so from others. Tellers of stories in conversational interaction often have an additional task: not only do they let others know that a story is coming up (which will occupy the floor for more than one utterance), they also need to link their story at least vaguely to current talk. This goal may be accomplished through repetition of some portion of the prior talk, as in the following example (Jefferson, 1978: 221):

Roger: Speakin about *forties*. I worked on a k-o:n Morganelli's
               Forty.

Sometimes story prefaces are introduced by someone other than the person who eventually initiates the story. For example, women sometimes preface and forward a story to their husbands to tell (C. Goodwin, 1986; Mandelbaum, 1987). In the excerpt below, Phyllis prefaces a story in a way that retains her husband Mike as its principal teller (C. Goodwin, 1986: 298):

Phyl: *M*like siz there wz a big *f*ight down there las' night,
Curt: Oh rilly?
               (0.5)
Phyl: Wih *K*eegan en, what.
               Paul [de Wa::*ld*?]
Mike: *P*aul de Wa:l d. Guy out of . . .

Once a story is launched, it assumes a particular structure. The elements that comprise a story have been analysed by philosophers, folklorists, literary critics, and discourse analysts at least since Aristotle. Aristotle (1962) described in some detail the architecture of tragedy and comedy. He characterized tragedy in terms of principles of plot, character (moral habits), language, thought, spectacle (manner), and melody. For Aristotle,

the soul of tragedy is the plot, and character is of secondary importance. A plot must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, but this progression is not as obvious as it might first appear:

> A beginning is that which does not come necessarily after something else, but after which it is natural for another thing to exist or come to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which naturally comes after something else, either as its necessary sequel or as its usual (and hence probable) sequel, but itself has nothing after it. A middle is that which both comes after something else and has another thing following it. A well-constructed plot, therefore, will neither begin at some chance point nor end at some chance point, but will observe the principles here stated. (1962: 52)

Literary studies such as Vladamir Propp's *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1986), Northop Frye's *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* (1988), and Roland Barthes's *The Semiotic Challenge* (1988) continue to draw on these Aristotelian principles in analysing the structure of story narratives.

William Labov's (1972) linguistic analysis of narratives of personal experience also harks back to Aristotle's notion of the narrative essentials of a beginning, middle and end. Rather than analysing written narratives, Labov gathered oral narratives of purported lived experiences in the course of interviewing a population of speakers in New York City. The narratives were produced in response to the interview question, 'Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?' Examining these narratives, Labov comments that some 'are complete in the sense that they have a beginning, a middle, and an end', but other more fully formed narratives display the following structural features of personal experience narratives (1972: 363): (1) abstract (for example, 'My brother put a knife in my head'), (2) orientation ('This was just a few days after my father died'), (3) complicating action ('I twisted his arm up behind him . . .'), (4) evaluation ('Ain't that a bitch?'), (5) result or resolution ('After all a that I gave the dude the cigareete, after all that'), and (6) coda ('And that was that').

These elements are echoed in 'story grammars', which, somewhat parallel to Propp's morphology of Russian folktales, articulate a syntax of story narratives (Mandler and Johnson, 1977; Mandler, 1979; Stein and Glenn, 1979; Stein and Policastro, 1984). In these analyses, stories have grammatical constituents, which in turn are composed of internal constituents. The constituents and the rules that order them are seen as reflecting our tacit knowledge of story structure. In Stein and Glenn (1979), major story constituents include: (1) a setting, either (2) an initiating event or (3) an internal response, (4) an overt attempt, (5) a consequence. Stein and Policastro (1984) add a sixth story component: a reaction to (3), (4), or (5). Jean Mandler and Nancy Johnson (1977) include as well an 'ending' component, and make a further distinction between stories that are goal-oriented and those that are not. Those that are goal-oriented parallel the

Stein and Glenn model. Stories that are not goal-oriented consist of (1) a setting, (2) a beginning, (3) a simple reaction – either an emotional response or an unplanned action – and (4) an ending. All constituents comprising a story episode, and with the exception of the setting, are seen as invariantly ordered.

The concept of *setting* is common to literary, linguistic, and psychological models of narrative. Story grammars and linguistic conceptualizations of setting define setting in terms of the physical, social, and temporal context of protagonists' conduct. Literary analyses of stories and cultural psychological approaches (Bruner, 1990; 1991; Feldman, 1989) emphasize that setting goes beyond time and space and social circumstance to encompass the psychological climate that anticipates a beginning narrative event. The historical rise of the novel and other narrative genres is linked to greater attention to what Bruner (1990) calls the 'mental landscape', including the emotional states, morality, perspectives, and motives of protagonists as they enter a crucial narrative event. It is the psychological climate that colors protagonists as tragic hero/heroines or comedic fools. Aristotle notes, for example, that a tragedy rests on establishing that the protagonist is of high moral fiber and that the protagonist is an unwitting victim of circumstances. This psychological context is established in settings.

While pieces of the setting appear at the start of stories, narrators may also delay revealing crucial aspects of the setting until much later in the story. There are many reasons for this. One is that the narrator may wish to slowly disclose vital elements of the context to build suspense. If the narrator were to reveal all the relevant background initially, the story loses its dramatic tension. Another reason is that narrators themselves are not always aware of important details of the story setting at the start of the storytelling. It is only when the story is under way that storytellers make a connection between a prior circumstance and the troublesome event of concern in the narrative. In conversational storytelling, a narrator may be reminded of such circumstances by co-narrators participating in the interaction (Ochs et al., 1989). In therapeutic conversations, the psychotherapist is often instrumental in evoking unmentioned states of mind, actions, or conditions that may render a narrative event more meaningful (Capps and Ochs, 1995a; 1995b).

Yet another reason for late revelations of settings is that narrators at first try to present themselves in the best light as protagonists (Ochs et al., 1989). They build settings in such a way that their emotions and actions seem reasonable and worthy of an interlocutor's empathy. However, sometimes the best laid plans of mice and men run amok, when other co-narrators bring out undisclosed pieces of the setting that unravel this positive self-portrayal. Such dissembling occurs in the narrative excerpt to follow. The story opens with nine-year-old Lucy complaining about how her school principal inadequately punished a girl who pulled up her friend's dress in front of the boys:

Lucy: I don't think Mrs. um Andrew's being fair because um

       .

       When we were back at school um –
       this girl? – she pulled um – Vicky's dress *((puts hand to knee))*
       up t'here *((gestures with hand high on chest))* in front of the boys
Mom: mhm?
Lucy: she only – all she did was get a day in detention

Her family sympathizes with Lucy's perspective. Then, unexpectedly, her six-year-old brother Chuck introduces a piece of the setting unbeknownst to her parents: Lucy herself had been punished by the principal and for the same length of time (one day) as the girl who embarrassed her friend:

Chuck: Lucy? – you only went to it once – right?=
Father: =*((clears throat))*
       (1.0) *((Lucy arches her back, eyes open wide, looks shocked, starts*
       shaking her head 'no' once, father looking at her))
Mother: (You' [ve been in it/You can tell us can't you?)
Father: [I'm lis?tening)
Lucy: *((low to Chuck)* (thanks)
       (0.4)
Lucy: *((louder))* [yeah – that – (was   )
Mother: [(She was in it) once?
       (0.6)
Lucy: Once.

                                  (Ochs et al., 1992: 47)

Lucy's plight is a common one in conversational storytelling. When we tell stories among intimates such as family members and friends, we are vulnerable to their knowledge of our lives. They can at any moment introduce background information that undermines the point we as narrators are trying to convey.

All characterization of stories specify *a key event that disrupts the equilibrium of ordinary, expected circumstances.* For example, the notions of 'complication' (Aristotle, 1962), 'trouble' (Burke, 1962), 'deviation from the ordinary' (Bruner, 1990), 'complicating action' (Labov, 1972), 'initiating event' (Stein and Glenn, 1979), and 'inciting event' (Sharff, 1982) all concern an unpredictable or unusual or problematic event on which a narrative episode focuses. In the story that Laurie tells while saying grace, for instance, she focuses on the problematic event of 'Mommy go bye.' In Lucy's story, the focus initially is on the problematic conduct of a schoolmate: 'this girl? – she pulled um – Vicky's dress up t'here in front of the boys.'

In many stories, the key troublesome event is seen as provoking *psychological responses* and *actions* that attempt to reinstate a sense of equilibrium. In Mandler and Johnson's (1977) framework, these are goal-

directed stories. For example, in Laurie's story, 'Mommy go bye' is seen as inciting Laurie to cry. In Lucy's story, the schoolmate's transgression is seen as inciting the principal to punish the transgressor with one day's detention.

These psychological and actional responses in turn have *outcomes*, which in turn may engender *further psychological responses and actions*. For example, in Lucy's story, Lucy becomes upset when she discovers that the principal gave the schoolmate only one day's detention. She tells her family that the principal is not fair; and when her mother asks her, 'You think she should have gotten suspended?', Lucy responds, 'At LEAST!'

In a study of the narrative construction of agoraphobia, Lisa Capps and Elinor Ochs (1995a; 1995b) found that the narratives of panic experience told by an agoraphobic woman consistently delineate a series of spiraling problematic events, wherein one problem leads to another. For example, a traffic jam is seen as inciting heightened awareness. This realization in turn incites panic, which then incites the protagonist to initiate a series of attempts to mitigate panic that fail, inciting further panic until eventually the protagonist communicates her distress and escapes the situation. In stacking problem upon problem, the narrator constructs a world in which she is helpless and driven by panic.

When storytellers recount that a problematic event incited psychological responses or actions, the story appears to be capped in past time. As discussed earlier, however, stories have a way of edging into the future, and storytellers often frame an inciting event, a psychological response or an attempt to handle that event as *still* unresolved, *still* problematic at the time of the telling. For example, in Laurie's story, while Laurie herself treats the problematic event of 'Mommy go bye' as finished business ('I'm glad (that anything/everything) happened today in Jesus name A:-MEN!'), her mother does not. Laurie's mother treats both 'Mommy go bye' and Laurie's response as *current* problems, which provoke her to propose a set of future actions to help. In the case of panic stories, the sufferer of agoraphobia consistently frames panic as not only a past problem but also an ongoing problem with debilitating consequences. Indeed a hallmark of agoraphobia is the tendency to ruminate about the consequences of past panic episodes for future life experiences. The storied past becomes a rationale for the here-and-now and beyond (Capps and Ochs, 1995a; 1995b).

Many narratives appear to be motivated by narrators' current dissatisfaction with how they or some other protagonist handled a situation, as in Lucy's complaint about the response of her school principal to a school problem. Indeed one motivation for narrators to initiate stories is to work through with other interlocutors how they currently feel or should feel about some element of a past situation. The writer Vaclav Havel notes in his *Letters to Olga* (1989) that this motivation is part of an all-encompassing quest to relate our personal lives to a broader horizon of relationships, places, objects, ideologies, values, and other human concerns. Our experiences are full of enigmas, and we tell stories to probe with others

these mysteries and frustrations. While the character of co-narration varies, the activity offers an opportunity and a potential for communal reflection not only on the meaning of particular experiences but also on the meaning of life on historical, cultural and cosmological planes.

In many communities, the activity of problem-solving through collaborative narration is emblematic of friendship, collegiality, or family membership. Unfortunately, members of these communities are not always able to enjoin familiars to narratively work through problems. Even in close physical proximity of family and friends, persons may feel awkward or incapable of presenting an unresolved narrative. In the absence of informal problem-solving encounters of this sort, would-be narrators may bring their stories to community practitioners. In a number of societies, these practitioners are said to engage in 'disentangling' (Watson-Gegeo and White, 1990), and in others, 'psychotherapy'.

Narrative Identities

Narrative is not only a genre of discourse, it is also a social activity involving different participant roles. Both Bakhtin (1981) and Goffman (1974) distinguish the narrative role of author (or, in Goffman's words, principal) from that of narrator (or, in Goffman's words, animator). As noted earlier, Bakhtin also inspired the perspective that narrative audience plays a key role in the construction of narrative (see Duranti, 1986; C. Goodwin, 1986). The audience is a co-author of narrative form and meaning.

Jennifer Mandelbaum (1987) suggests that audience involvement varies in storytelling. She distinguishes between teller-driven and recipient-driven stories. Teller-driven stories resemble Erving Goffman's description of a story: 'Sometimes [the participant] will sustain his story across several consecutive turns, the interposing talk of others largely taking the form of encouragement, demonstrations of attentiveness and other "back channel" effects' (1974: 509). In recipient-driven storytelling, recipients take a more active role: 'teller and recipient together work out what a storytelling is "about" and how it is to be understood' (Mandelbaum, 1987: 238). Recipient-driven storytelling characterizes situations in which the recipient is also a story protagonist, especially when the recipient is the butt of a story. This observation resonates with Marjorie Goodwin's (1990) study of 'He-said-she-said' interactions, where the primary story recipient is both the object of accusation and highly active in structuring the ensuing story.

Charles Goodwin (1986) points out that story recipients vary in their knowledge and expertise concerning story details. In storytelling interactions among adult Americans, recipients who are more knowledgeable tend to contribute more to the ongoing telling. Their knowledge can be viewed as an entitlement to narrate (see also Shuman, 1986). Knowledge is not always a basis of narrative rights, however. Carolyn Taylor's (1995a;

1995b) study of family storytelling suggests that American children often don't get to tell stories about themselves, but rather are expected to listen as one or both parents assume this right. In parallel fashion, the medical anthropologist Basil Sampson writes an article called 'The sick who do not speak' (1982) in which he portrays how persons who have been sick or injured in Australian aborigine communities do not have the right to tell the story of their illness. The sick are thought to be not themselves in this condition and therefore unable to portray events. Instead those who cared for the sick person retain this right.

The assignment of the roles of teller and audience, or teller and recipient, to whole narratives ultimately breaks down in conversational storytelling in which many participants construct the story. Particularly where storytelling includes close friends and family members, the telling can be widely distributed. Particularly in these cases it makes better sense to assign the roles of teller and audience/recipient turn-by-turn as the storytelling evolves. At one moment a participant may be teller and the next a recipient.

In examining family storytelling, Ochs et al. (1992) found it useful to consider all family members present as co-tellers in that telling routinely shifted from one family member to another in the course of a story. We distinguished an *initial teller*, someone who introduces a story, from *other tellers*, those who contribute to the telling of a story once introduced. Rather than assuming a minor role, family members as other tellers contributed substantially to story construction, including supplying pieces of the setting, positing psychological responses, and attempting to resolve the central story problem. For example, after Lucy as initial teller introduced the story about the schoolmate who gets only one day of detention, her mother continues the story by suggesting Lucy's psychological response to the schoolmate's offensive actions:

Lucy: she only – all she did was get a day in detention
Mother: mhm? – you think she should have gotten suspended?
           (0.6)
Lucy: at LEAST
           .

Mother: (cuz Lucy) was really embarrassed
           ((nodding yes, talking while eating))
           (1.6)
Mother: (I mean you/Lucy really) would have liked to kill the – the
           girl – huh?
Lucy: [((nods yes slowly, as she chews, fork in mouth))
Mother: [(cuz) you were upset with her –
           ((speaking very fast)) but you were held back
           because you (thought) your school was goin' to do it
           and the school didn't do it and you feel upset

Other family members also chime in as co-tellers. Lucy's younger brother Chuck, for example, suggests that he would give more detention as punishment:

Chuck: I think? she should – be: in there for a h- whole MONTH? or
           so=
?:   =(well maybe)
           (0.6)
Chuck: each day she('d) hafta go there – each day each day each day
           even if? . . .

And as noted earlier, it is Chuck who takes the story in a radically different direction when he discloses that Lucy herself was in detention.

Narrating Lives

When those involved in narrative interactions actively participate as both tellers and recipients, they exercise their entitlement to co-author a narrative. When that narrative concerns a lived experience, co-authors impact the understanding of that experience. It is not only a narrative but a life or a history that is collaboratively constructed. Narrative is a sense-making activity; it is also a primary vehicle for retaining experiences in memory. Entitlement to co-tell a narrative is then a powerful right, encompassing past, present, future, as well as imagined worlds.

As co-tellers draft a story, they script one or more narrative messages. The message may concern what happened, discerning *truth* status of events. Hence telling a story becomes, for better or for worse, a means of establishing a sense of reality in memory. On the other hand, the narrative message may concern what should have happened, discerning the *moral* status of events (Duranti, 1994; Ochs et al., 1992). Indeed, because narratives have at least one point of view, they inherently convey judgments. All of the narratives illustrated in this chapter communicate strong moral messages, but perhaps the most striking is the story of Lucy and the girl who got one day's detention in school. Everyone in the family throws in their moral judgment first about the girl and then about Lucy. Very often, story narratives are vehicles for socializing values of a family or a public institution such as a school or a community at large.

Messages about truth and morality contribute to *causal explanations* that narratives routinely construct. Because they present a point of view and because they frame an event as provoking responses, story narratives in particular allow co-tellers to build explanations about situations (Ochs et al., 1992). In some cases, co-tellers work together to build a compatible account of events. In these cases, collaborative storytelling helps to create solidarity – for example, a coherent family, institution, or community culture.

However, in other cases, co-tellers challenge one another's explanations of emotions, actions, and circumstances. This often happens when stories

are narrated among those who share a history with one another and with the protagonists in a story narrative. In societies such as mainstream America, those privy to background relevant to an unfolding story may introduce elements that radically alter the storyline. For example, in the story about school detention, Lucy's younger brother's revelation of her detention experience undermines Lucy's explanation of why the school principal is not fair. Whereas Lucy had based her sense of injustice on the gravity of the schoolmate's transgression, her brother provides an alternative basis for Lucy's judgment: the principal was not fair to give Lucy and the schoolmate equal amounts of detention. Co-narration that involves challenging and redrafting storylines is akin to academic and legal challenging and revision of explanations for events. In both cases, challenges recast a narrative account as a *version* of experience rather than as fact. As such, collaborative storytelling of personal experiences is a province for socializing intellectual skills demanded in professional worlds (Ochs and Taylor, 1992a; Ochs et al., 1992).

Challenging how another is telling a story, like all human actions, is socially organized. There are expectations concerning which stories are challengeable. For example, Heath (1983) notes that the white working families in her study discouraged challenging written narratives. Similarly, family, institutional and community cultures may structure who assumes the role of challenger. In many communities, for example, adults more than children are given this entitlement (Heath, 1983; Goody, 1978; Ochs and Taylor, 1992b; Ochs and Taylor, 1994). In the white middle-class American families studied by Ochs and Taylor, mothers challenged more than twice as often and fathers more than three times as often as did children in collaborative narrative interactions. Because narrative activity is ubiquitous in these households, the recurrent narrative roles of family members help to constitute their family identities. When a family member routinely assumes the role of challenger, this narrative role becomes part of their family identity. In middle-class American families, challenging narrative accounts is a routine social action that contributes to the identity of parent but especially the identity of father. The predilection for parents, especially fathers, to challenge is well understood by young children, who in turn display a predilection to sabotage or only minimally comply with parental efforts to elicit their stories. Familiar to these households are exchanges of the type: 'What did you do at school today?' 'Nothing.' Children in these families are loath to have their stories problematized and redrafted by authoritative co-narrators.

Conclusion

Narrative activity in these ways is at once a discursive medium for collective probing and problem-solving and a tool for instantiating social and personal identities (Mumby, 1993). Narrative activity allows members of

communities to represent and reflect upon events, thoughts and emotions, but this opportunity may be asymmetrically allocated, granting reflective rights to some more than to others. Crucial to the construction of a self, an other, and a society, co-narration crafts biographies and histories; yet the meaning of experience and existence – what is possible, actual, reasonable, desirable – tends to be defined by some more than others. To these ends, narrative has the capacity to limit, indeed imprison, or to expand and transform the human psyche.

Recommended Reading

Bakhtin (1981)
Bruner (1990)
Duranti (1986)
Goodwin (1984)
Goodwin (1990)
Heath (1983)
Labov and Waletzky (1968)
Miller et al. (1990)
Ochs et al. (1992)
Ricoeur (1988)
Sacks (1992)
Stein and Policastro (1984)
White (1981)

Notes

1   Transcription conventions

.hhh	inbreath
hhh	outbreath
underline	emphatic stress
:	sound stretch
(0.2)	pauses in seconds and fractions of seconds
(.)	micropause (less than 0.2 seconds)
((comment))	non-vocal action or transcriber's comment
.	falling (final) intonation
?	rising (final) intonation
,	continuing (final) intonation
?,	slightly rising (final) intonation
bolded text	phenomenon of focus
[	overlapping talk or actions
( )	doubtful hearings
bu-	cutoff sound or syllable
°you°	low in volume
>well<	speeded up speech
CAPS	loud volume
^	sudden pitch rise
*	vocal fry

2 Many of the examples used in this review are drawn from the Family Dinner Corpus gathered during 1986–90 as part of a larger project 'Discourse Processes in American Families', supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Development (grant no. 1 ROH HD 20992-01A1). Members of the research team included principal investigators Elinor Ochs and Tom Weisner, and research assistants Maurine Bernstein, Dina Rudolph, Ruth Smith, and Carolyn Taylor.

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