

Narrative Discourse and Identities

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1. Introduction

At the outset of my contribution to this volume, I need to stress that my research interests lie in identity; more precisely, in the identity constructions of children and adolescents. In other words, I am analyzing narratives in order to trace how children in their transformations to young adults bring off claims about themselves that result in something like a sense of self and therefore, something that can be claimed to be relevant to one's 'identity'. The approach with which I am working is part of the attempt to explore identity formation processes from the perspective of 'the natives'; that is, with as little preconceptions as possible, particularly preconceptions that come from a perspective informed by a notion of maturity in terms of what it means to be an adult at a particular socio-historical time-place coordinate.¹ I will outline the type of work I do in terms of 'narrative research' further below, but first I would like to fend off the potential misunderstanding that my work directly lends itself to a 'better understanding' of narrative. In other words, the approach I am embracing in my pursuit of adolescents' identities and the work I am doing with narratives does not directly contribute to the field of narratology.

Having presented this strong disclaimer, I will nevertheless try to take this opportunity to position my own approach in such a way that it can be read in contrast to a trend in current narratological theorizing. This trend, which I—admittedly somewhat polemically—have called the 'cognition-über-alles' position, is on the verge of becoming the dominant attempt to lend to narratology a seemingly more scientific habitus. Having

¹ This type of ethnographic/ethnomethodological analysis is explicitly anti-deductive. If we already knew the central concerns of the life-world of 'the natives', we would go in with clear hypotheses, test them, and not waste our (and the natives') time with expensive (in the sense of time-consuming) qualitative research. However, it should also be clear that there is no totally 'presupposition-free inquiry'. Ethnographic research, particularly if ethnomethodologically informed, has to be open and become increasingly reflexive of the ideological positions that are exposed in this type of inquiry.

entered the field of cognition myself at the heights of the ‘cognitive revolution’ in the mid-seventies, and having embraced the cognitive approach to language and narrative enthusiastically for more than a decade, I have become increasingly dissatisfied with its straight-jacketing controls when it comes to exploring the lives of ‘real’ people, and the telling of ‘real’ stories in ‘real’ contexts.²

Originally, the turn to cognition, which resulted in the field of cognitive science, had a clear liberating force: The image of the ‘cognizing person’ was not only no longer at the mercy of outside stimuli or forces, but also, the ‘cognizing person’ is viewed as constructing meaningful relationships by taking information in, working it over, and ‘putting it out’ (in verbal and non-verbal actions). More importantly, viewing the person and his/her central organizing apparatus, the mind, simultaneously as the producer and interpreter of meaningful entities, became an approach that opened up a radically new way of doing inquiry into the human faculties as ‘competencies’. However, as I will briefly outline below, this ‘revolution’ came also with considerable costs. The world of practices (formerly conceived of as ‘behavior’), in particular human discourses, becomes an add-on. Talk as the everyday business of interaction in this purview becomes one of the many aspects of what humans can do because they are endowed with competencies and parameters, and these competencies have become more and more central to what seemingly needs to be explained—particularly by developmental research. As a consequence, actual talk-in-interaction as well as narratives-in-interaction become applications and deviations, all the way up to ‘distortions’ of what the ‘actual’ mind is able to accomplish—particularly in experimental or institutionally augmented settings. In order to study what the mind is able to do in such situations that are relatively far removed from the everyday, ‘explanatory approaches’ are called for that show how mind and brain interact in the production of meanings. Therefore, the empirical domain to conduct this type of research can no longer be a description of the everyday, of talk, and of narratives-in-interaction, the way they are negotiated in daily routines. In contrast, explanations are gleaned (by glimpses of the ‘actual’ mind) in idealized, experimental conditions, or even better, in controlled simulations, ‘revolutionizing’ the empirical domain for narrative investigations.

² This appeal to ‘something real’ is not supposed to contrast with something that is ‘not real’, but rather to view people (in my case young adolescents) involved in everyday interactions, sharing accounts on topics that are relevant to them. It will become clear further below that this orientation is concerned more with ‘small stories’ (Bamberg 2004b), the way they surface in everyday interactions—in contrast to full-blown life stories (elicited in research interviews or therapeutic sessions) or written biographies.

Before I elaborate further on the potential costs of our turn to cognition and cognitive science, let me foreshadow briefly an alternative, one that a number of psychologists and scholars in communication theory and sociology who became increasingly disillusioned with the limitations of cognitive science have been working on for the last two decades. This is the orientation I will outline more fully in the second and third section of this chapter. This approach focuses more strongly on the action orientation of language in 'communities of practices'. With this orientation, we decidedly analyze what people *do* when they talk and what they *do* when they tell stories. Starting with practical talk-in-interaction and narratives as embedded in such talk, presents the attempt to break free from the constraints of the 'cognition-über-alles' position with its inherent costs. Thus, the turn to discourse counters the previous turn to cognition; however, it does not claim that cognition is dead or redundant. Nor does it replace the 'cognition-über-alles' position with a newly formed 'discourse-über-alles' position, but rather, it complements and sets straight the former with an opening to an empirical realm where cognitions emerge out of discourse as well as discourses from cognition. In other words, the approach to narratives as discourse and performance, the way I will elaborate below, does not explain cognition 'away', but knocks it off its hegemonic 'über-alles-position' and puts it from its head onto its feet, where cognition can become a product of discursive, story-telling practices.

I should, however, mention that there are attempts that seek to connect and complement the two views that I present here as contrasts and in discordance (narrative as cognition versus narrative as discourse), particularly in the work represented by Herman (2002, 2003a, 2003b). And clearly, as with my own academic biography from cognition to discourse in my work with narratives, one could highlight more strands that point to an underlying coherence. However, in the hope to contribute to more clarity, I have chosen to structure this chapter in terms of two contrasting positions. For this reason, I will first sketch a few thoughts as to why narratologists at this point in their long-standing history may be attracted by and turn to cognition. Thereafter, in section two, I will explicate my own work with narratives as an approach that attempts to analyze narratives-in-interaction in order to see what people actually *do* when they narrate. How it will be possible to integrate this approach into what is the main concern of narratologists, that is, moving closer to a definition of 'narrative' (or at least closer to a delineation of what 'narrative' can *be*), may not become clear instantly. However, I hope that this chapter will stimulate discussions toward that end.

2. Why Narratologists Might Want to Turn to Cognition

To start with, literary studies and narratology are in good neighborhood. The cognitive revolution has swept across the social sciences to the point that even social psychology, the former stronghold of social behavioral research, is in the firm grip of cognition. Nowadays, what is social in psychology is studied by ‘getting inside the head’ (Taylor/Fiske 1981), so that we can experimentally investigate how social phenomena are represented in the individual mind, or, as Greenwood (2004:239) calls it, to explore ‘cognition *directed toward other persons and social groups*’. The study of emotions, personhood, and even ‘the world’ has been successfully subjected to a cognitive orientation that views the human mind as the central and universal organizer of information—or, in less agentive terms, the place where information about self and the world is centrally organized (Hogan 2003, 2004; Taylor/MacLaury 1995; Wierzbicka 1999).

However, what’s in it for literary studies and narratology in particular to jump onto this very powerful band-wagon, unless it is simply attempting to reach for the mere proximity to what commonly counts as ‘science’ and ‘scientific’? In my opinion, there are at least two compelling reasons: the first stemming from narratologists’ preoccupations with and strong privileging of the literate over the oral, and the second, from the hope finally to link what traditionally has been divided into more or less two separate centers of concern, the author and the reader. Both are ‘good reasons’, in the sense that they reflect orientations to expand shortcomings of a traditionally more textually oriented narratology. However, as I will try to argue, both are simultaneously coming with great costs; costs that may blind alternative and potentially more productive ways to expand traditional narratology and connect it more closely with the ‘narrative turn’ in the social sciences.

3. Cognition and the Oral-Literate Distinction

The oral-literate distinction has been widely discussed, and it is generally assumed that the development of writing systems has had some major impact on our self-construal and the ways we make sense of (social) others in modern times. Writing handles best the developmental organization of bounded categories in the form of events; it creates a beginning, a middle, and an end. In writing, we have become capable of making lists, charting changes, categorizing everyday experiences, developing a new form of memory, and ensuring the transmission of memories between generations (Goody 1977; Goody/Watt 1968; Ong 1982). Olson has pointed out that

writing in ontogenesis facilitates the attribution of belief and emotion states to others, both of which are said to be central in children's construals of mind and intentionality, and these in turn are developmental keys en route to learning how to read and write (Olson 1997a, 1997b).

But why? And how? There seems to be no clear agreement on how to answer these questions, nor is it clear whether there is a clear boundary between non-literate and literate epochs within the European development of literate cultures. Similarly, what kinds of oral practices tie children optimally into learning to read and to write is another wide open issue demonstrating the oral-literate continuum (Heath 1983). However, agreement seems to exist on the categorical distinction that written texts contrast sharply from oral speech in terms of their openness and contextual limitations. While oral texts are limited to the immediate situation of the interlocutors, this 'narrowness of the dialogical situation' explodes in writing (see Josselson's and Freeman's discussions of Ricœur; Freeman 2004; Josselson 2004). While the oral is fleeting, the referential and ideational fixity of writing orients more clearly toward intentions 'behind' the text that are to some degree now inscribed or fixated by writing. While meanings are loosely situated in oral dialogue, they can be negotiated and ultimately surface in oral encounters, though in a fleeting sort of existence. In writing, however, they seem to be more overtly and directly accessible. Again, we may wonder: Why? Why is it that the written text seems to be superior and simply a better candidate for the investigation of what 'really' seems to be at stake in the construction of meaning and its interpretation?

Only rarely has the question been raised as to whether the oral origins of narrating (socio-genetically as well as onto-genetically) have had any consequences on transferences into other medial representations. Wolf (2002:36f) briefly touches on this question, only to dismiss oral storytelling as a special case within prototype theoretical considerations to narrative and to use (written) fairy tales for his demonstration of a 'narrative prototype'. Fludernik (1996, 2003) more explicitly claims to privilege 'spontaneous conversational storytelling' (1996:13); that is, oral versions of non-fictional storytelling, however, only to revert and give privileged status in her analysis to fictional stories.³ An additional question, raised

³ Fludernik (2003) argues that the model she has developed in (1996) 'takes its inspiration from natural narrative, arguing that natural narrative is the prototype of all narrative' (248), but it should be clear that her goal is very different from my own. While my interest in narratives is concerned with how people use them, hers is to work up a definition of narrative that can be applied to 'all types of narrative texts', including 'the two least researched areas of narrative texts—pre-eighteenth-century narrative (medieval and early modern) and postmodernist narrative' (ibid.).

recently by Freeman (2004), is whether written transcripts of oral narratives have implications in the sense that predilections stemming from traditional narrativity leak into the analysis.

Along these lines it should not come as a surprise that discourse (oral talk) itself is modeled as a text, and its referentiality is declared to be its central ingredient. Discourse is the exchange of referentially denoted information, the way it is represented in the individual mind, encoded by culturally available semiotic means (usually in terms of a linguistic code), and subsequently encoded by the reader/interlocutor. Discourse is 'cognitive discourse', exchange between 'talking heads'. In the worst scenario it is the mere exchange of information; in a somewhat better world, it is the negotiation (between interlocutors) of cognitive models. And in an even better world, it is a negotiation that includes a constant updating of such models (see Herman 2002). How we, as information processors, text producers, interactants, ended up with our mental models in the form of (more or less) ready-made competencies, ready for exchange and updating in performance, is the issue I will pick up on with my alternative proposal below.

4. Cognition as 'Distributed' between the Author and the Reader

Classical structuralist narrative theory takes the (written) text as given and investigates the structural features of the text (Nünning/Nünning 2002). From here it moves in two possible directions: one is toward the author and tries to answer the question of how the text came into being; the other works from the text toward the reader and attempts to answer the question of how the text is interpreted. Author-oriented approaches typically are interested in aspects of the author's life, his or her biography or spirit as it is breathing in the text. Psychological, in particular psychoanalytic, interpretations have their place in this orientation. Reader-oriented approaches are relatively young (Iser 1974, 1978). They developed during roughly the same period in which the cognitive turn took its grip in psychology; that is, during the sixties and seventies, paralleled by very similar assumptions. While reception theory was primarily guided by the question of how the reader interacts with the text (and in this sense what the reader brings to the text in terms of expectations), cognitive theorizing in psychology was turning to comprehension issues of a similar but broader range, that is, asking the question of how the human mind picks up patterns and enriches them with schematic information (from expectations and memories) into meaningful units. Developments in artificial intelligence, a sub-domain of cognitive science, promised exciting developments in the simulation

of such comprehension processes and resulted in advances such as story grammars and machine translation projects. It is worth noting that these two directions of author-oriented and reader-oriented text studies rarely were able to connect within the field of literary studies and its sub-discipline, narratology.

This, so it seemed, could productively change by more fully embracing the cognitive turn and transporting cognitive theorizing more explicitly into literary studies and narratology. The text in cognitive theorizing is less the starting point for pattern-seeking, but rather the connective tissue for and between author and reader—or in broader terms, between speaker and hearer. Concepts borrowed from frame- and prototype-semantics (Fillmore 1975, 1982; Lakoff 1977, 1987; Rosch 1975, 1978; to mention a few) provided the links between mental configurations of representations that are able to supplement the cues given in text and communication with additional, supplementary information. For instance, verbs such as *buying*, *selling*, *putting up for sale*, *purchasing*, or *auctioning*, all can be said to trigger aspects of a more holistic scenario (or ‘gestalt’) of the ‘financial transaction scenario’ (Fillmore 1982; Herman 2002:164). Language processors of the form of the human mind (or artificial, though intelligent, systems) automatically fill in the other, unsaid, aspects of the scenario to a fuller understanding of who is involved, including contextual aspects of how the transaction took place. The choice of specific lexical/textual items and devices highlights the particulars of cognitive scripts or scenarios (such as Schank/Abelson’s ‘restaurant script’ 1977) that are taken to be culturally shared and as such contributing substantially to human understanding and sense making.

Against this background of cognitive theorizing, it becomes intelligible that the study of narratives as spoken and written texts is always the study of texts as deviations from the prototypes that are assumed to be shared by speakers/writers and audiences/readerships. Actual narrative texts are the imperfect copies or performances of idealized, but ‘psychologically real’, representations of the idealized speaker, writer, hearer, or reader. In this sense, the narrative as a cognitive category, it is argued, is as ‘natural’ as the category ‘*birds*’ or ‘*furniture*’, from where we, as contextual, cultural beings, derive—through frequent exposure and ‘experience’—the categories that are central (prototypical) to us, such as ‘*robins*’ and ‘*chairs*’ for Northern Americans. What used to be construed as two different orientation points in traditional narrative theorizing has become the central unit of cognitive narrative research. Empirical research has developed a number of different means to approximate our ‘natural category’ (the culturally shared prototype) of storyhood. These means were sophisticated ways to test for story comprehension and story recall (prompted and unprompted),

appreciation and goodness-judgments of goals, motives, or emotional tone, as well as comprehension studies of non-literal statements and non-typical stories. And some of us would like to take this as the definition of what ‘story’ means, so we can ‘measure’ deviations from it, and/or see how much of this central category applies to narratives told in everyday conversations and narratives in other modalities, such as film, music, as well as across the different arenas of its application, such as court rooms, medicine, history, psychoanalysis and the like.

Let me stress that there is nothing wrong with this type of argument and the type of research that follows up on it. To be clear, research that demonstrates effects that can be interpreted in terms of some form of ‘psychological reality’ of prototype categories is a clear progress vis-à-vis traditional checklist inventories, since it is based on some kind of fuzziness of the assumed category boundaries and open to some form of cultural, contextual processes of formation. However, if the argument is maintained that these categories guide not only decision making processes in experimental conditions, but (all) our activities in everyday categorizations and interactions, this position is elevated into one that places ‘cognition-über-alles’, that is, it becomes a predilection with consequences. Ochs/Capps (2001) have listed five practical implications that the hegemony of cognition has had on the privileging of narrative dimensions in the social sciences: (i) with regard to the dimension of ‘tellership’, conventional (cognitive) narrative analysis has privileged ‘one active teller’ in contrast to ‘multiple active co-tellers’; (ii) high ‘tellability’ has been over-explored at the expense of low ‘tellability’; (iii) detached ‘embeddedness’ from surrounding talk and activity has been emphasized over a more contextual and situational ‘embeddedness’; (iv) a more certain and constant ‘moral stance’ has been assumed as the default case in contrast to a more uncertain and fluid one; and (v) with respect to linearity and temporality, the closed temporal and causal order has been privileged over a more open temporal or spatial ordering. These—in my opinion unfortunate—tendencies, though not in any way caused by the turn to cognition in narrative theorizing, nevertheless seem to come in the wake of an otherwise productive inquiry into the cognitive dimensions of narratives.

5. Narratives-in-Interaction as Vehicles to Fashion Identities

Again, at the outset of this section, let me reiterate that the purpose of my work and my intellectual involvement with narratives is not to find out or contribute to a better understanding of what narratives *are*. In addition, and this may come even more as a surprise, my primary interest

in narratives is not even in what the narratives that I am analyzing are *about*. Form and content are of secondary relevance. They only become relevant as far as they assist the analyst in figuring out for what it is they are used. In other words, the analyses of form and content of narratives in identity research are heuristics in the effort to analyze how self and identity come to existence.

Of course, this shift in emphasis requires some staking out of the terrain of investigation. Therefore, this section is devoted to clarify the general approach I am embracing. First, I will sketch the discursive approach (within the larger framework of ‘discursive psychology’) that is laying the foundation for my interest in what best is characterized as ‘identity negotiation’—or even better as ‘identity confrontations’, events in which conversationalists encounter interaction-trouble and need to manage and fine-tune their resources in order to come across in alignment with institutional and interpersonal demands.⁴ In this section, ‘*the discursive approach to narrating*’, I will argue that narratives are ‘built on-line’; they are fashioned in order to build and work one’s way through challenging circumstances. Then, in the next section entitled ‘*positioning analysis*’, I will lay out an analytic framework that is able to take care of this type of ongoing relationship work that narratives are said to accomplish. In a third section, I will summarize the analysis of a ‘small story’ (Bamberg 2004b) to orient the intended reader toward the application of this type of approach to narratives-in-interaction.

6. The Discursive Approach to Narrating

Grounding narratives in interaction, I follow tenets of a social constructionist approach that applies ideas from ethnography, discourse analysis, and ethnomethodology to psychological issues and concepts (Edwards/Potter 1992; Potter 1996; Potter/Wetherell 1987). This type of approach typically is concerned with identifying the rhetorical and argumentative organization of discourse the way it is used to fashion self- and identity-claims. This, for us as discourse analysts, implies paying close attention to the way speakers’ accounts are rhetorically and argumentatively organized, which we only can do (as analysts) by closely following the interactive subtleties and rhetorical finessing that are part of the daily expression of attitudes,

⁴ It is assumed that ‘interactional trouble’ is more the norm than the exception; in particular, this is so when it comes to claims about self and identity. The kind of relational maneuvering of claiming a positive social value for oneself that Goffman called ‘face-work’ (Goffman 1967), even if participants cooperate in sustaining its enactment, always requires us to place ourselves ‘on the line’. Face can either be lost or saved.

evaluations, and assessments. As such, analyzing narratives-in-interaction operates in close proximity to discursive approaches that examine evaluative expressions as parts of interactive, social, and cultural practices, which implies the close scrutiny of how such expressions are put to use, as opposed to speculating about the mental or attitudinal objects that they putatively reflect (Edwards/Potter 1992; Potter 1996; Potter/Wetherell 1987). Rather than seeing attitudes, values, or self-claims as cognitively given, either/or, and slow to move, attitudes are seen as talk's business, as partial and shifting devices (or 'topics') that spring up in a constantly shifting interaction that occasions and makes use of these devices, and then moves on (Antaki in press; Edwards/Potter 1992).

As a result, applying this type of discursive approach to narrative analysis in identity research is fully interested in the inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambiguities that arise in interactions. And narratives are taken to be primary territories where co-conversationalists seek and find ways to mitigate the interactive trouble and fashion a portrayal of themselves in ways that are interactively useful. Rather than seeing narratives as intrinsically oriented toward coherence and authenticity, and inconsistencies and equivocations as an analytic nuisance, the latter are exactly what are most interesting. They offer a way into examining how storytellers are bringing off and managing their social identities in contexts (Bamberg 2004a). Seen this way, such instances no longer appear as contradictions or inconsistencies, but rather as openings into which the analyst can delve and see how such multiple attending and rhetorical finessing is used to work up identity claims that do appear as complex, reportable, and authentic, and not too obvious, challengeable, or immature (see Korobov/Bamberg 2004).

It is in this sense that participants in interactions constantly adjust their actions to what is created 'in the moment'. As Sigman puts it: 'communication is not always or primarily the execution/enactment of prototypes or scripts; certain problematic situations both emerge and are resolved through ongoing communication' (Sigman 1995:9). It also should be clear at this point that this type of work with discourse neither advocates nor denies the pre-existence of previous knowledge, experience, or personality traits; it simply circumnavigates the necessity of having to explain interactive manoeuvres within a cognition-über-alles approach. Communicative competence of participants in interactions along these lines becomes the 'competence to monitor the progress of an interaction and fashion ... turns to effect remedial steps if it heads in the wrong direction' (Sanders 1995: 118). And narratives are no exception.

In contrast to the 'biographic method' of the German sociological tradition (e.g., Fischer-Rosenthal/Rosenthal 1997; Fuchs-Heinritz 2000;

Rosenthal/Fischer-Rosenthal 2000) that is interested in analyzing elaborate self-accounts in the form of life stories, I am (more) interested in ‘small stories’, the ones that are told in mundane encounters and everyday circumstances. While biographical life stories are typically elicited by use of particularized interrogation techniques in institutional settings (research or therapy), I am starting from the more general assumption that stories in principle are rhetorical tools for point or claim making, irrespective of whether they are ‘revealing’ personal and private issues about the speaker and irrespective of whether they thematize whole lives or a singular incidental event or happening.

In entering the narrative realm the point or claim that is under construction becomes contextualized in the form of exemplary actions by exemplary characters that are appropriated (from a speaker’s point of view) to ‘act out’ and to make currently relevant the claim the speaker intends to convey for the here-and-now of the conversation. This principle holds whether the speaker talks about him-/herself, his life, or about others. However, inserting the self of the teller into the story line opens the door to the possibility of an ‘I’ that has been or even still ‘is’ in flux, is open to interpretation, and can be viewed from different angles. The conversational point of presenting different ‘I’s’ at different times and places, subjected to different character constellations, can be highly effective in constructing a particular understanding of ‘me’ as speaker in particular conversational contexts. In other words, the sequence of I-positions in the story-world are the means to bring off a claim with regard to ‘this is the way I want you to understand me’, here and now: The *I* as a character who has emerged in the story-world is made relevant to the *me* as the speaker in the here-and-now. This differentiation between the self as character in the story and the self as speaker (animator and/or author) is extremely important, because we all too often tend to collapse them too quickly in our analyses. However, although there is no principled difference between drawing up characters in a story world, in which the self of the speaker figures as character, from drawing up story worlds in which he/she is not, I would like to concede that the former usually has more at stake in terms of anticipating and preventively fending off potential objections by the audience.

In sum, narratives, irrespective of whether they deal with one’s life or an episode or event in the life of someone else, always *reveal* the speaker’s identity. The narrative point-of-view from where the characters are ordered in the story world gives away—and most often is meant to give away—the point-of-view from where the speaker represents him-/herself. By offering and telling a narrative, the speaker lodges a claim for him/herself in terms of who he/she is. In narratives in which the speaker talks about or even

thematizes him-/herself, this is neither more nor less the case. However, constructing a self as a character in the story world and entering this construction as a claim for the self of the speaker, requires ‘additional’ rhetorical work in order to be heard ‘correctly’. It is this ‘additional rhetorical work’ that elevates ‘personal narratives’ into the realm of interesting data, and not the fact that speakers are revealing something that counts as more intimate or ‘personal’. It is along these lines that I would like to argue that narratives told in everyday interactions always lodge claims about the speaker’s sense of self, and in their attempts to convince and make these claims intelligible, speakers incorporate counter claims vis-à-vis what they think could constitute possible misunderstandings.

7. Positioning Analysis

For the purpose of analytic work with narratives, I had begun to apply in some of my previous work the concept of ‘positioning’ (Bamberg 1997, 2003; Talbot et al. 1996). This concept has gained current relevancy in theorizing identity and subjectivity, where ‘positions’ are typically seen as grounded in master narratives but opening up and conserving some territory for individual agency. Elaborating on Butler’s (1990, 1995) notion of performing identities in acts of ‘self-marking’, I have tried to advance a view of positioning that is more concerned with self-reflection, self-criticism, and agency (all ultimately orientated toward the possibility of *self-revisions*). In so doing, I suggest that we clearly distinguish between the ‘being positioned’ orientation, which is attributing a rather deterministic force to master narratives, and a more agentive notion of the subject as ‘positioning itself’, in which the discursive resources or repertoires are not a priori pre-established but rather are interactively accomplished. ‘Being positioned’ and ‘positioning oneself’ are two metaphoric constructs of two very different agent-world relationships: the former with a world-to-agent direction of fit, the latter with an agent-to-world direction of fit. One way to overcome this rift is to argue that both operate concurrently in a kind of dialectic as subjects engage in narratives-in-interaction and make sense of self and others in their stories.

In taking this orientation, the ‘who-am-I?’ (identity) question does not presuppose a unitary subject as the ground for its investigation. Rather, the agentive and interactive subject is the ‘point of departure’ for its own empirical instantiation (Butler 1995:446) as a subject that is constantly seeking to legitimate itself, situated in language practices, and juggling several story lines simultaneously. The analysis of how speakers actively and agentively position themselves in talk starts from the assumption that the

intelligibility of their claims is situationally and interactively accomplished. However, since this intelligibility is the result of what is being achieved, and therefore inherently oriented to, we begin our actual narrative analysis by paying close attention to the ways in which the represented world of characters and event sequences is drawn up. Here we attempt to spot descriptions and evaluations of the characters and analyze the time and space coordinates in the way that these relate to social categories and their action potential. From there we move into a closer analysis of the way these referential and representational aspects of story construction are assembled in their sequential arrangement among the participants of the conversation. The assumption that governs this step is that particular descriptions and evaluations are chosen for the interactive purpose of fending off and mitigating misinterpretations. The descriptions and evaluations rhetorically function to convey how speakers signal to their audience how they want to be understood.

In working from these two levels of positioning (one with respect to the content of what the story supposedly is about, the other with respect to the coordination of the interaction between speaker and audience), we are better situated to make assumptions about the ideological orientation within which the speakers are positioning a sense of self; that is, as signaling complicity in order to mark off segments that can be countered. The analysis of the first two positioning levels is intended to lead progressively to a differentiation of how speakers work up a position as complicit with and/or countering dominant discourses (master narratives). It is at this juncture that we come full circle by showing how subjects position themselves in relation to discourses by which they are positioned. In other words, analyzing talk in interaction along these lines enables us to circumvent the aporia of two opposing subject theories, one in which the subject is determined by existing narratives, the other in which the subject is the ground from which all narratives are invented.

Ironically, this way of analyzing talk-in-interaction for the purpose of gaining an understanding of how interactants establish a sense of self (*in stories-in-interaction*) resembles closely what in developmental theorizing is termed 'microgenesis' (see Bamberg 2004a). This approach focalizes the momentary history of human sense-making in the form of emergent processes. It assumes that developmental changes (such as *learning* or *better understanding*) emerge as individuals create and accomplish interactive tasks in everyday conversations. The interactive space between the participants, whether situated in interviews or other social locations, is the arena in which identities are micro-genetically performed and consolidated and where they can be micro-analytically accessed. Here I am borrowing from developmental (Bamberg 2000; Catan 1986; Riegel 1975; Werner

1957; Werner/Kaplan 1984; Wertsch/Stone 1978), conversation-analytic (Schegloff 1982; Sacks 1995; Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974), and ‘communities of practice’ approaches (Eckert 1989, 2002; Hanks 1996; Wenger 1998) to analyze the sequential and relational structure of narratives-in-interaction, for the purpose of inquiring not only into the developing sense of self and others, but also into what is shared as the cultural background of sense-making. This does not imply that such ‘senses’ of self, other and generalized other (culture) do not exist previously to or outside the discourse situation. However, for the analysis of narratives-in-interaction, I am suggesting the bracketing out of these categories so that we can be open to the analysis of what the participants make currently relevant in the interactive setting. In entering this orientation from a socio-linguistic and ethnomethodological vantage point, I am proposing considering and analyzing narratives as brought off and carefully managed in the social realm of interaction rather than as texts that come in the form of stories.

8. How to Use Narratives-in-Interaction to Analyze Identities

In this section I will elaborate my aforementioned approach to the ‘narrative analysis of identities’ and give an illustration in the form of a brief example. The story I want to analyze is a very short account about a male 11th grade student, who is said to talk a lot about his gayness (near his locker), and who is further characterized as associating more with girls than other boys. This account, which altogether does not entail much of a plot development, stems from a 15-year-old boy and is situated in the context of a group discussion with an adult male moderator and five other male age mates. It will become clear that a good assessment of what the story is about can only be made if we are able to take into account why the story was shared, which requires an investigation into how the story is interactionally grounded, and how it is jointly accomplished by the participants of the interaction.

The discussion topic at the start of this excerpt is whether there are any gay boys at their school. James, who in turn 4 had already established to be better informed than Ed about the current status of gay boys at their school, in turn 6 claims to actually know a few gay boys at their school. However, midstream he self-repairs his claim to this kind of knowledgeable authority by downgrading it to ‘just’ ‘having seen’ them. One possible explanation for downplaying the quality of his relationship with gay schoolmates may be to fend off being heard as ‘too close’ to them; that is, as someone who has ‘gay friends’ and possibly even is gay himself. However, he is challenged by Ed and Alex in their subsequent

turns (7 and 8), though not for ‘having gay friends’ (or being gay). But instead, Ed and Alex ‘notice’ that James does not have clear criteria for recognizing others as gay—as if James did not know what he was talking about. James, in turn 9, responds by seeking clarification (‘how do I know they’re gay?’). He displays ‘not understanding’ Ed’s and Alex’s challenges, and treats them as if they were groundless.

From here the conversation could go into a number of different directions. For instance, a potential dispute could evolve about typical gay characteristics. However, when Ed upholds his challenge (turn 10), James responds with a turn-initial ‘well’ (a general shifter of frames that also signals the intention of holding the floor for an extended turn) and shifts focus from ‘plural gays’ to an unspecified ‘singular he’, supposedly a member of the ‘gay category’. This ‘he’ is further specified as an 11th-grader, and his name is explicitly not mentioned. The rhetorical device of explicitly not mentioning his name is a clever way of displaying sensitivity and discreteness, and thereby indexing the interactive business at hand as not gossiping or any form of ‘bashing’ a particular person. However, at the same time, these very same devices foreshadow and gear up the audience’s expectations toward something that is highly tellable and gossipy. Ed’s and Josh’s demands (in turns 12 and 14, respectively) to hear names bespeak exactly this. However, instead of giving names, James (in turn 13) moves further into descriptive background details; namely that he has class with mostly 11th-graders, and thus—in contrast to the other five boys in the ongoing conversation, who all are 9th-graders—may be more knowledgeable of the boy he has introduced in turn 11 and left unspecified thus far.

So, the interactional setting in which the storied account is grounded is the following: James, who seemed to have successfully laid claim to knowing better and more about the gay population at their school toward the beginning of this excerpt, is challenged for not being able to distinguish gays from non-gays. This seems to force James to respond by setting the scene for what orients toward a more elaborate account in the form of a story. He introduces a specific character, presumably a gay 11th-grader, opening up audience expectations for what is to come next as a sequence of descriptions and evaluations (most likely of the character in question) that clarifies why and how he (James) actually is able to make accurate judgments on gay issues. In other words, with his subsequent story James is expected to reclaim the authority on gay issues that had been questioned.

- Excerpt: *How do I know they're gay?*
- 1 Ed there are some gay boys at Cassidy.
- 2 Moder do they do they suffer in eh at your schools do they are they talked about in a way//
- 3 Ed //I don't think there are any I don't think there are any openly gay kids at school
- 4 James ah yeah there are
- 5 Ed wait there's one there's one I know of
- 6 James *actually I know a few of them I don't know them but I've seen them*
- 7 Ed how can you tell they're gay
- 8 Alex yeah you can't really tell
- 9 James *no like how do I know they're gay*
- 10 Ed Yeah
- 11 James *well he's an 11th grade student the kid I know I'm not gonna mention names*
- 12 Ed alright who are they (raising both hands up)
- 13 James *okay um and I'm in a class with mostly 11th graders*
- 14 Josh and his name is (rising intonation)
- 15 James *ah and and ah and um a girl who is umm very honest and nice she has she has a locker right next to him and she said he talked about how he is gay a lot when she's there not with her like um so that's how I know and he um associates with um a lot of girls not many boys a lot of the a few of the gay kids at Cassidy*

The actual story unfolding in turn 15 is not a typical event or plot story, but rather consists of two pieces of further descriptive information. First, a description of the 11th-grader: He is said to talk a lot about his being gay and to hang out at school more with girls than with boys. These pieces of information arguably provide evidence for the alleged person's membership of the category 'gay', and in this sense can be said to relate the point the audience may be waiting for. The second piece of information is more subtle and also more interesting, although it does not seem to be directly relevant to why James actually relates this story, this is, to show that he actually can differentiate gays from non-gays. However, this piece of information makes the story more tellable: James presents the information about the gay boy as 'second-hand knowledge. He uses 'reported speech' (here in the form of 'indirect speech', i.e., as a summary quote) to recreate the action in question (= having seen gays in their school) through the talk of someone else who is held socially accountable. He skillfully introduces an overhearing (though nameless) witness, who is characterized as female, honest, and nice, and as having her locker right next to the boy whose

reputation is at stake in this account. It is this girl who is presented as overhearing the speech actions of the boy that give rise in the unfolding story to the characterization 'gay'. And supposedly this girl has reported this information back to James.

In sum, James's attempt to regain his credibility and authority (on 'gay issues') rests on his presentation of an overhearing eyewitness and relaying the crucial information as hearsay. And by placing his reputation as knowledgeable in the hands of this witness and her reputation, he is able to successfully 'hide' behind this eyewitness. Thus, the question arises, how does he manage to come across as believable in spite of the fact that he himself does not have any first-hand knowledge—at least not in this particular case?

James seems to be accomplishing several activities at the same time: First, when openly challenged not to be able to differentiate gays from non-gays, he successfully (re)establishes his authority. He lists a witness' account and rhetorically designs this witness as reliable. This witness is 'honest' (in contrast to 'a liar') and 'nice' (in contrast to 'malicious' or 'notoriously gossiping'). In addition, giving details such as 'her locker next to his' contribute further to the believability of James's account. Furthermore, the characterization of the boy as talking 'a lot' about his gayness, makes it difficult to (mis)-interpret the girl's (and James's) accounts as potential misreadings.

Second, introducing his witness as a girl (note that James could have left the gender of this person unspecified), and in addition as one who did not talk directly to the gay boy, further underscores how James wants to be understood: In line with his corrective statement in turn 6 ('just having seen gay boys, not really knowing them'), to have a close confederate who is also close to the gay boy (and speaking with him 'a lot') could make this confederate hearable (again) as in close relationship with a 'gay community'. Thus, designing this confederate as a girl, who is not even being addressed by the gay boy when he talks about his sexual orientation, makes it absolutely clear that there is no proximity nor any other possible parallel between this boy's orientation and James's. A girl is a perfect buffer that serves the role to demarcate the difference in the sexual orientations of James and the gay classmate.

Third, James' staging of the 'fact' that this boy 'associates with a lot of girls and not boys' (except with a few other gay kids at school) at the very end of his story, is very telling. Had James mentioned this at the beginning—that is, as his abstract and orientation for why he is sharing his account—he could have easily been heard as too quickly buying into the typical (stereo-typical) view of gays. And this could have resulted in further challenges from Ed and Alex as just talking 'from the top of his

head' and not really knowing. However, placing this generalized statement at the end of his very detailed account, and giving it the slot of the coda, he uses this typicalization to finish the storied account and orient the conversation toward why it is that gays hang more often out with girls, and this is what actually happens in the talk that follows. It may be fair to say that the more general group-level ascriptions of the boy as hanging out with girls and gays is more likely to be heard as stereotypical if followed by his carefully scripted account of how he actually knows about particular gay boys at their school. In other words, this way of strategically sequencing his 'evidence' allows James to epitomize the group of gays by having captured the individual in relation to the aggregate; and in turn helps James to move himself back into the group of 'his peers' by drawing a boundary between 'them' and 'us'.

In sum, James's story is doing multiple things: When openly challenged that he doesn't know how to differentiate gays from non-gays, his story enables him to re-establish his identity as knowledgeable and reliable; furthermore, it helps him to fend off coming across as gossiping and being heard as prejudiced, that is as antigay or homophobic. However, most important, his story allows him to carefully fashion himself as heterosexual and straight. It is in this sense that his story reflects masculine norms and a sense of heteronormativity. However, as I would like to argue, this sense of a heteronormative self—just like his sense of self as a cool authority in 'gay issues', a non-gossiper, and as someone who is not homophobic and prejudiced—are all active accomplishments of the participants who in concert put these norms to use. They are achieved by the way this story is situated and performed within this very local setting. Thus, it is the situation that determines the logic or meaning of the norms being circulated, and not the boys' cognitions or previously established concepts that they seem to have acquired elsewhere and now 'simply' bring to their interactive encounters. And it is in this sense that the boys (as members of the social category 'boys') are both producing and being produced (or 'acquired'—see Hall 2004) by the routines that surround and bring off these kinds of narratives-in-interaction. And although our particular 'small story' in a strict sense is the response to the challenges by Ed and Alex in turns 7 and 8, it answers a number of other identity challenges that are hearable in the way the story is made to fit into the ongoing negotiation. It should be stressed that this particular local 'small story' as an exercise in maneuvering through the challenges of gossiping, homophobia, and heteronormativity is simultaneously a practice of negotiating competing ideological positions. It is in situations like this that children and adolescents, but also adults in the form of a life-long process, draw on multiple subject positions; positions that can be used to

be complicit or to counter existing master narratives (Bamberg, 2004b). Practicing 'small stories' are indispensable stepping-stones in the identity formation process of the person.

9. Concluding Remarks

My contribution to this volume has been intended as a question-asking chapter rather than one that lays out clear-cut orientation guidelines for narratologists. It emerged from my puzzlement with why narratologists have become embraced and increasingly seem to be embracing cognition, while there are other (better) alternatives available.

As I have stated repeatedly, for social scientists whose interest lies in people's identities, the question of what narrative really is (that is, the definition of 'narrative' as a literary or oral category), is not relevant. I am working with what people tell us, but equally important, with how they tell their stories. The story that I briefly analyzed (as an example in the previous section of this chapter) may not even count as a 'narrative' to some of my readers. But that is beside the point. Narratives-in-interaction are not particularly privileged speech genres. They happen. And the analysis of these 'happenings' does not provide a deeper or better window into people's lives. It is one of many. However, narratives are 'interesting' and 'telling' devices, since they usually enable speakers to arrange their claims in a 'more organized' fashion: Speakers, with their narratives, react to previous pieces of the interaction, and orient, with their temporal and spatial layout of the narrative, to the future course of talk-in-interaction. How speakers are entering the floor and are managing to hold the floor by successfully blocking off interruptions or objections, and how they constantly monitor how they will be heard, gives us better insights into how several simultaneous positions by a singular speaker are brought off and managed in synchrony. This is what I attempted to demonstrate with James's 'How do I know they're gay?' narrative. And as I hope I was able to show, this narrative is only to some degree about 'how I know'—and to an equal, if not larger, degree about James' self-claims as a non-gossiper, as not prejudiced vis-à-vis homosexuals, and as a 'normal heterosexual'. The focus of telling the story is on the creation of 'normalcy' and to claim this normalcy for the moment of this narrative-in-interaction. The narrative is rhetorically designed to do this job for him. Neither does it reflect that James 'is' normal, nor was the narrative brought off 'because' James 'is normal'. I think of this mundane insight as a beginning for continued work with narratives; it is definitely toward the end of more and better analyses of identities-in-the-making. But also, I hope, it has some potential

to energize discussions around issues of what narratives are and how it is possible that we can do such interesting things with them.

Let me conclude with some final thoughts on ways in which the concept of positioning may help illuminate and re-conceptualize such notions as 'focalization' and 'evaluation'. As should have become clear from the aforementioned, working with oral 'narratives-in-interaction' as presented in this chapter sympathizes with Fludernik's suggestion to 'scrap the concept of focalization in its traditional configurations' (1996:346) and to develop alternatives that start from and can be applied to ordinary, every-day stories, the way they occur in the form of 'small stories'. In contrast to Fludernik, however, I would like to suggest that the project of 'recontextualizing narrative' should not rest on the notion of consciousness nor cognition, but on 'action'—or better, on what is being accomplished between co-conversationalists in terms of their strategic management of positioning selves vis-à-vis others and vis-à-vis dominant subject positions in the form of master narratives.

The concept of 'evaluation', as developed by Labov (1972) and expanded by Polanyi (1989), can equally be better accounted for in terms of 'positioning strategies'. Rather than assuming that there are some internal mechanisms (operating at the time of the actual experience or at the time of telling the experience) that cue the speaker into his/her evaluation (and cue the listener into the point for the telling), positioning emphasizes the interactional accomplishment of 'doing evaluating'. Furthermore, the linguistic (and supra-segmentational) devices that actually result in what can be read as 'evaluative stance' are not only all over the delivery of the text, but more relevant, they point to previous and subsequent speech as well as to larger aspects of the context; they function as 'contextualization cues' (Gumperz, 1982).

'Positioning' should incorporate what 'focalization' and 'evaluations' are supposed to accomplish. Sorting out the linguistic and supra-segmentational performative means that index what's going on in the represented world of the story (the way characters are positioned vis-à-vis one another), and adding them to the layer of discursive means that index the relational work that is being accomplished between the co-tellers/audience (where tellers and co-conversationalist gain their interactional identities), we are better equipped to understand how tellers become positioned vis-à-vis themselves with claims they hold to be true and relevant above and beyond the local conversational situation and in relation to dominant ideological subject positions. This should not be misunderstood as wanting to do away with 'evaluative perspective' and 'focalization strategies'. However, both can become incorporated in the more general strategic orientation of speakers to convey one's sense of self in the face of challenges to one's

identity positions—may they be concrete and actual in the form of challenges by interlocutors in the communicative situation, or may they be more abstract, imagined and anticipated in the form of demands by competing discourses that always seem to position us.

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