

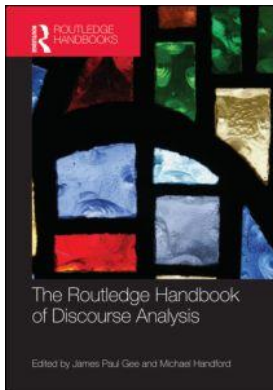
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# Narrative analysis

*Joanna Thornborrow*

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## Introduction: why analyse narratives?

Narrative discourse is pervasive in most contexts for social interaction. Storytelling is integral to the way we structure, account for and display our understanding of our human condition and experience; therefore analysing narrative as a genre, or particular form of talk activity, has become one of the central areas of inquiry within the broad field of discourse analysis. Narrative analysis has been approached from many different angles across the social sciences, and from a variety of analytical perspectives and methodologies, depending on disciplinary priorities and research foci (see particularly Juzwik this volume). In this chapter I will limit my discussion of narrative analysis to an overview of the principle methods and findings taken from the related fields of interactional sociolinguistics, discourse pragmatics and conversation analysis. The scope of this work means that some forms of narrative discourse cannot be addressed here, for instance fictional, text-based, or ‘news’ narratives, nor will I be dealing with the more abstract sense of ‘big’ stories, sometimes called social, macro- or ‘meta-narratives’, which tend to emerge as conceptual frameworks within the fields of social and cultural studies. However, there is now a considerable body of research that deals primarily with largely unscripted, naturally occurring, spoken narrative discourse. This includes both informal storytelling, the ‘small’ stories (Georgakopoulou, 2007) that are woven into the fabric of everyday talk and conversational interaction, and more formal, institutional contexts for narrative discourse, from the media to the courtroom, from research interviews to therapeutic encounters. I will look at examples of both conversational and institutional narratives in this chapter. But the first step in narrative analysis is to establish a framework for identifying narrative discourse, which is to say that we need to be able to describe a story formally, before addressing the issue of what storytelling means and how it functions across different contexts for talk.

## Theorizing narrative as a discursive activity

Discourse analytic research on narrative has produced some important insights into how stories are structured – that is, into their formal features – into what makes stories tellable – that is, into their cultural resonance and meaningfulness – and into what kind of work is involved in how stories are told – that is, into their interactional design and situated tellings. I outline below some of the key theoretical and conceptual approaches to narrative.

### *Modelling narrative discourse*

That it’s a story, anybody knows.

*(Sacks, 1995, Vol. II: 21)*

What is it that marks out stories as distinctive from other forms of talk? Stories have a recognizable shape, in the Aristotelian sense of having a beginning, a middle, and an end. How they begin, what happens in the middle, and how they end are questions that sociolinguists and discourse and conversation analysts have been concerned with for some time. In their pioneering work on the structure of oral narratives, Labov and Waletzky (1967) and subsequently Labov (1972) found that, in stories elicited in the context of sociolinguistic research interviews, there emerged an identifiable ‘syntax’ for narrative discourse, a structural model that, one way or another, has provided the basis for much narrative analysis over the past four decades (see Juzwik, this volume).

According to this model, a story consists minimally of two narrative past tense clauses, sequentially ordered. If the order of those clauses changes, then the story changes too. Michael Toolan (2001) provides a neat example of the importance of sequence when he points out that ‘John fell in the river and had two whiskies’ is not at all the same story as ‘John had two whiskies and fell in the river’. In addition to the ‘core’ narrative clauses, there are further components that routinely occur in oral storytelling. I illustrate these components (italicized below) by using an example taken from Norrick (2005: 112). This story is told among a group of friends, three of whom are German university students, on a visit to two friends in the UK.

An *abstract* (which is an ‘optional’ element, as not all narratives have abstracts) can provide a summary of the upcoming story. The example below does contain an abstract of ‘the story of the proposal’ (line 50), which Emma develops in lines 8–10:

#### Example 1

- 5 Emma: and you should, you should hear the story of the ehm proposal  
 6 Cordelia: {laughing} yeah that,  
 7 Emma: I mean this is so funny,  
 8 'cause the two of them were proposed to  
 9 within I don't know, [three]  
 10 Lois: [twenty-four hours]  
 11 Emma: two days, yeah

Here Emma provides the gist of what the story will be about, i.e. two marriage proposals within two days, before the full story is told. In the lead into this story we also find an *evaluation* (line 7), which signals the value or *point* of the story, what it is that makes it ‘tellable’ (Thornborrow and Coates, 2005, Juzwik this volume). ‘I mean this is so funny’ (line 7) orients the story recipients to expect an amusing, out of the ordinary tale about what might otherwise be considered an unexceptional event (that is, to anyone other than those immediately involved in the proposal). Finding a marriage proposal ‘funny’ is not perhaps the most conventional assessment of such an event (romantic, unexpected, or even awkward may be more likely assessments), so this story promises to break some canonic cultural script (Bruner, 1991). Furthermore, this is a known-about story for some of the participants – two of whom contribute to building up the narrative as one worth telling (see contributions from Cordelia ‘yeah that’ in line 6, and Lois ‘twenty four hours’ in line 10). In terms of *orientation* – the ‘who, where and when’ aspects of the narrative – all we are given here is ‘the two of them’ (line 8). The identity of the ‘two’ is contextually recoverable to the participants, who are friends of the protagonists. Much more relevant orientation detail is produced as this story progresses:

#### Example 2

- 40 Cordelia: yeah, and then,  
 41 he proposed in a park in Stuttgart,  
 42 it was really cute,

- 43           in a little hut,  
 44           on a ehm children's  
 45           what is it?  
 46 Emma:   [playground]  
 47 Lois:     [playground]  
 48 Cordelia: yeah, on a playground,

The setting, the little hut on a children's playground, turns out to be a significant part of the story, and contributes to Cordelia's own assessment of the narrative as 'dramatic': they had met to talk things through, it was raining, they had taken candles, their dog had to stand outside getting wet in the rain – all, details that make the narrative of this proposal 'tellable'. The proposal itself (line 41) is the *resolution* to a *complicating action* that precedes it in the story, as we can see now in line 35:

#### Example 3

- 35           anyway, he moved out,  
 36           and then (3 sec.)  
 37           well, he realized it was the wrong idea  
 38           {laughing} to move out  
 39 James:   yeah, yeah  
 40 Cordelia: yeah, and then,  
 41           he proposed in a park in Stuttgart,

The last of Labov's components is the *coda*, which, like the abstract, is 'optional'. This is the part of the story that signals the end of the narrative and forms a bridge out of the story time and back into the conversational present. After Cordelia's story of the proposal, we can see an explicit evaluation of the narrative by recipient James (Example 4, line 83): 'that's a great story', followed by Lois's evaluation: 'in the end, it turned out to be really romantic, didn't it?' This is similar to the 'happy ever after' endings that typically characterize fairytale romances. But it is not yet 'funny'. So, while ending the first proposal story, this coda leads into the telling of the second one (line 89) which needs to be told to fulfil the initial pitch for the proposal story as 'so funny':

#### Example 4

- 83 James:   Oh God, that's a great [story.]  
 84 Cordelia: [mmh,] well, it was (2 sec.)  
 85 Lois:     yeah, in the end,  
 86           it turned out to be  
 87           really romantic, didn't it?  
 88 James:   {laughs}  
 89 Emma:    and then it really spoiled [Hank's plan to propose to Lois]

The second proposal story is then told by Lois, which did turn out to be funny as she thought Hank was only proposing to her because of Ernie and Cordelia and didn't take him seriously.

While Labov's model has proved to be a robust one in terms of providing a starting point for the analysis of narrative discourse in a range of different contexts (and I return to some of these contexts in more detail in the section 'Chapter Summary'), it is firmly rooted in a traditional sociolinguistic, and primarily variationist, approach to language. Labov was studying the linguistic forms used by speakers of a variety of English known as Black English Vernacular (BEV), as well as the linguistic techniques of narrative evaluation and how these developed according to age. The narratives he analysed were elicited from pre-adolescents (9–13) and adolescents (14–19) in

Harlem, and were produced in response to the now famous ‘danger of death’ interview question (Labov, 1972: 354), which was designed to produce unselfconscious, casual vernacular speech from informants. So, while his method is useful as a descriptive model of narratives elicited during a research interview, what it doesn’t deal with so well is the locally ‘situated’ nature of narrative discourse – that is to say, how stories emerge within the context of ongoing talk in interaction (see Schegloff, 1997 for a critique of Labov’s narrative model). To explore the situated production of narratives in more detail, we need to turn to the conversation analytic tradition of research, which provides an alternative account of how and why narratives are shaped the way they are.

### *Narrative as an interactional phenomenon*

Sacks observed that (1) people tell stories in particular ways to particular recipients; and (2) stories are so designed that recipients are aware of what it will take for a story to be told, and what kind of story it is going to be:

Stories are ‘about’ – have to do with – the people who are telling them and hearing them.  
(Sacks, 1995, Vol. I: 768)

There are ways to begin, which inform a hearer – and intendedly inform a hearer – how to listen so as to find when it will have ended, in such a way that when it will have ended they can signal that they see it has ended in a way that is related to the way it began.  
(Sacks, 1995, Vol. I: 766)

Let’s examine these two fundamental points about narrative as an interactional accomplishment in relation to the proposal story above. We can see how it is set up for the listener, in this case the primary recipient James, in precisely the way Sacks describes, from the lead in or ‘preface’ to the story as ‘so funny’ in line 7, to the lead on to the second proposal narrative needed to complete the story in line 89: ‘it really spoiled Hank’s plan’. Furthermore, the narrative emerges within a specific context, where some of those present already know the story, elicit it from a storyteller for a specific recipient, and also participate in its telling.

Stories also need to contain ‘news’; telling someone something they already know is a risk speakers don’t normally take. One routine way of opening up narrative space in a conversation is through a ‘story preface’ (Sacks, 1995, Vol II: 18), where a potential storyteller will ask: ‘Hey did I tell you about X?’ or ‘Have you heard Y?’.

A story preface does a lot of work. It indicates what it will take for the thing to be finished, and it suggests what sort of thing should be done at the end. And that’s one order of the things involved in ‘telling a story’.

(Sacks, 1995, Vol II: 18)

Sacks gives an oft-quoted example of a story preface where the storyteller specifically orients to the other as recipient. ‘Say did you see anything in the paper last night?’ he points out, is ‘a request for help, where the other is then put in the position of one who might give help’ (1995: 765). So, before it gets told, this story of ‘the most gosh-awful wreck’ begins with a request for information about the event and what the recipient knows.

Stories are shaped by the local, situated context in which they occur. They require one speaker occupying more, and extended, turns at talk, while the other speaker(s) hold off taking a turn until the story is over, but signal their involvement in the storytelling through displays of reciprocity, usually in the form of minimal responses (e.g. ‘oh no!’, ‘what?’, ‘did they?’). When the story is over, recipients display that they know this through an alignment with the storyteller’s assessment

of the story: ‘that’s so funny/wonderful/awful’ – or perhaps, if a story is judged to lack ‘tellability’ (Polanyi, 1985), a disalignment, or, in Labov’s (1972) terms, a ‘so what’ assessment.

I now turn to a different example to illustrate the situated nature of conversational storytelling. In the next extract I show how a story emerges in an ongoing conversation among a group of 11-year-olds. The children are outside, walking down a street, ostensibly measuring out its length in paces for a school maths project, but chatting as they go about a well-known children’s author (Roald Dahl). Below is the full transcript of this rather complex multi-party conversation, which, although it is not fully decipherable from the recording, nevertheless contains two distinct and bounded narratives (in that each has a clear beginning, middle and end).

#### Example 5

- 1 Tasha: when did he die
- 2 JT: [(about) [x [x]]
- 3 Sophie: [(in nineteen eighty nine]
- 4 JT: (x x x [x about) ten years ago
- 5 Boy: [it’s not-
- 6 (0.8)
- 7 Tasha: ye[ah yeah roughly]
- 8 JT: [(x x x x x x] x)
- 9 Tasha: it’s so annoying like cos he’s my favourite author now:
- 10 [>one of my favourite< authors
- 11 Pupil: [yea::h
- 12 Tasha: [and then he goes and die:s (x) and you never meet him or
- 13 Boy: [(x x x)
- 14 Tasha: [yeah [WHEN you’re like one year old
- 15 Boy: [(my favourite author’s (x x x x)
- 16 Tasha: [(x x x x x x x x x x x x)]
- 17 Sophie: [but there was this girl right]
- 18 Sophie: there was this man (.) and um (0.9) this girl (0.5)
- 19 Sophie: (ok)
- 20 Sophie: [elvis presley]
- 21 Boy: [(x x x x] x x I [(told him)
- 22 Pupil: [SH:::]
- 23 Sophie: right this (.) um (0.4) lay- this little girl
- 24 when she was little (0.3) she wrote to elvis presley
- 25 and somebody forgot to post it
- 26 and then they found it like forty years later
- 27 and po- um (0.3) and posted it
- 28 and it got to her house=
- 29 Boy: [one hundred and forty five [that’s what I had ]
- 30 Sophie: =[ (x x x) elvis’s actual home [(x x) >and everything<]
- 31 Pupil: [(x x)
- 32 Sophie: it was [like he only wrote three letters personal on]es
- 33 Pupil: [(x x x x x-) one hundred and fifty]
- 34 Sophie: one (>for each of them<)
- 35 Sophie: and that was one of them
- 36 JT: [okay
- 37 Sophie: [and it [got there after all that time

- 38 Pupil: [(x x x x x x x)=  
 39 Pupil: =(x x x)] [(x x x)  
 40 Sophie: cos she was] still living [in the same place  
 41 she lived as a little girl  
 42 (0.7)  
 43 Sophie: (isn't that really cool) hh  
 44 Pupil: °oh:°  
 45 Sophie: I read that in the paper  
 46 and there was this man right (.) and he-  
 47 he saw it in an old oxfam ↑shop↓  
 48 he found this (.) uh fil- a camera film (.) undeveloped  
 49 he developed it  
 50 and it was the person who he used to go fishing with  
 51 a little boy (.) and him as a [little boy.hh  
 52 was sitting in the middle of it (0.4)  
 53 can you imagine finding that  
 54 Boy: that [must be so wei[rd  
 55 Sophie: [it's like [I know (.) (oh x x x x)  
 56 (0.5)  
 57 Girl: we're ↑he:re  
 58 (2.2)  
 59 Boy: (we are near the gate)  
 60 Girl: here we are

The narratives are embedded within another activity: counting out paces to measure the length of the street. (This ongoing task can be overheard in the exchange between two pupils in lines 29 and 33 in overlap with Sophie's narration.) The story seems to be triggered by Tasha's prior topic: her annoyance at not being able to meet her favourite author, who is now dead (lines 9–14). This talk sparks off Sophie's first story about the little girl and Elvis Presley (also dead) in line 17:

- 17 Sophie: [but there was this girl right]  
 18 Sophie: there was this man (.) and um (0.9) this girl (0.5)  
 19 Sophie: (ok)  
 20 Sophie: [elvis presley]  
 21 Boy: [(x x x x] x x I [(told him)  
 22 Pupil: [SH:::  
 23 Sophie: right this (.) um (0.4) lay- this little girl

It takes Sophie three attempts to get to a point where her story can be told, in other words for an upcoming story to be announced, and for the co-participants to cede the conversational space for her to tell it. Storytelling in conversational contexts takes time, in that a story is incrementally built by one speaker taking an extended turn, or turns, at talk, while the other(s) stop speaking and listen. This puts other participants in the position of being story recipients, and in a multi-party conversation such as this one this position needs to be worked up interactionally between the teller and the potential recipients. We can note Sophie's use of what Sacks (1995, Vol. I: 680) termed a 'floor seeker': 'there was this girl right' in line 17 (and similarly in line 23), and 'there was this man and um this girl ok' (lines 18–19) as an attempt to gain access to an extended turn at talk by signalling that she has a story to be told. In line 22 someone goes 'SH' which opens up that access

and positions the others as recipients (although ongoing overlapping talk occurs between some in the group who are engaged in counting).

Sophie's story is not a personal narrative; it is one she has 'read in the paper' but deems relevant and tellable at this particular moment. Her evaluation of it in line 43, framed as an agreement-oriented question addressed to the recipients, 'Isn't that really cool?', provides her own warrant both for telling it and for continuing straightaway, in a similar vein, with the next story, which concerns 'the man' she has already mentioned in the floor-seeking turn in line 18. This second story ends with a coda that brings the talk back into the present time, and is again directly addressed as a question addressed to the story recipients: 'can you imagine finding that'. In the next turn, one of them provides an evaluation of the story event (line 54): 'that must be so weird':

- 53                    can you imagine finding that  
 54 Boy:            that [must be so wei]rd  
 55 Sophie:        [it's like [I know (.) (oh x x x x)

Here we can see that the two stories emerge out of the talk as topically relevant (triggered by death, fame, childhood and highly unlikely events in later life). As Sacks observed, they are designed from the beginning to let recipients know what it will take for the storytelling to be over, and indeed that there will in fact be two stories, as Sophie indicates two potential narrative subjects at the beginning of this narrative sequence:

- 18 Sophie:    there was this man (.) and um (0.9) this girl (0.5)

The final assessment of the second story as 'so weird' brings the narrative to a close, just as the group arrives back at the school gate.

In my analysis of these two examples, I have used the first to exemplify Labov's model of narrative syntax, and the second to show some of the interactional work done by storytellers and recipients in the situated accomplishment of what Blum-Kulka (1997) calls a 'narrative event'. It is also important to note that the first example was an elicited story, i.e. one initiated by someone other than the teller, while the second was initiated by the teller herself, and the two narrative events involved different types of actions in each case (notably work around accessing the interactional narrative space). In the next section I review some more key research on the situated production of narratives which has informed our understanding of the design and function of narrative discourse in both conversational and institutional settings.

### *Social contexts and participant roles*

In an investigation of Jewish and American/Israeli family interaction, Blum-Kulka (1997) includes an account of storytelling that takes place during family mealtimes. In her analysis of these narrative events she makes the useful distinction between three facets of narration: the 'tale', the 'teller(s)' and the 'telling'. The 'tale' refers to the story materials, the events, the chronology and the participants in the story (which we can relate to Labov's narrative components of orientation, complicating action and resolution). 'Teller' refers to a participant who takes part in the act of storytelling. Stories sometimes have multiple, collaborating tellers and it is analytically useful to be able to examine the roles and relationships of co-tellers within the narrative event. The 'telling' is the situated act of narration, the performance of the story as an interactional event. So the same story (the tale) can be told by different tellers on different occasions (tellings).

When analysing narrative discourse, researchers have drawn on these distinctions to examine the formal differences between 'tellings' – for example what happens when two tellers have competing versions of the same 'tale' (Thornborrow, 2000), or when the same 'tale' is told



consecutively to two different recipients (see Norrick, 1997, 1998, 2005). Blum-Kulka has identified three main forms of collaborative narratives: monologic (with one main teller), dialogic (with question/answer participation and elicited narrative) and polyphonic, where the narrative is co-constructed by several participants. The findings from her own research into narrative activity in Israeli and Jewish American family settings showed cultural differences between the two groups in terms of ownership of the tale and performance rights. Israeli families tended to tell unshared events polyphonically, while Jewish American families tended to tell shared events monologically (see Blum-Kulka, 1997: 122–136).

In relation to what he calls ‘interlaced stories’ in conversational contexts, Norrick shows how the co-tellers of a marriage proposal story (a fragment of which has been discussed above) design its subsequent retelling through an interactional recontextualization of the ‘tale’ to produce a more unitary, humorous and more performed ‘telling’ for a new recipient. His analysis demonstrates a kind of ‘team performance’ of the narrative discourse involved in producing ‘a co-ordinated telling which lies between response stories [– – –] and collaborative narration’ (Norrick, 2005: 125).

Finally, in their analysis of narrative discourse in a family context, Ochs and Taylor (1992) observed that participants in the narrative event took up different positions, or narrative roles, in the storytelling. These were identified as *introducer*, *narrator*, *protagonist*, *primary recipient*, *problematizer* (of protagonists or other co-narrators) and *problematizee*. They suggested that the asymmetry in the distribution of these roles amongst participants had a particular function for producing political order within the family. Mothers did most of the narrative introducing, or eliciting, while children were most often the protagonists. Fathers tended to be the primary recipients of the story, and also the main problematizers of the protagonists and co-narrators. Furthermore, they observed that children ‘sometimes resisted family narrative activity, which suggested a certain awareness of the politics of narrative and its potential to expose them as objects of scrutiny’ (Ochs and Taylor, 1992: 301). Similar narrative roles have also been identified in other social contexts, for instance in TV talk show discourse where guests’ stories of personal experience are elicited by the host as introducer and sometimes co-narrator, problematized by the recipients (i.e. host and the studio audience) and where the narrator/protagonist becomes the problematizee. In addition, hosts have an additional role in such contexts as *dramatizers*, shaping the telling appropriately for the TV studio and viewing audience (Thornborrow, 2001). In the following section I examine mediated narratives further, as an example of storytelling in institutional discourse.

## Narrative analysis in institutional discourse

The relevance of narrative analysis in institutional contexts, where narrative discourse takes on a more public, front stage format than the stories in the data extracts presented thus far, can be demonstrated in a range of work addressing the role and function of narratives in specific institutional settings. First I discuss some of my own research into storytelling in media discourse contexts, then I look at research on narratives produced in legal settings, drawing on work by Harris (2005) and Johnson (2008). In both contexts, I illustrate how narrative design is shaped by and through its contextual production as institutional talk, in public settings, for a particular array of participants and to accomplish particular goals.

### *Narrative in TV talk shows*

The stories produced on television talk or chat shows are different from naturally occurring narratives in conversation in a variety of ways. Firstly, they are often elicited stories, where a TV host asks a participant to tell a personal experience narrative which contributes to the topical

discussion, so the entry into narrative space is organized differently from many conversational narratives that contain a story preface or other interactional work (see section ‘Narrative as an interactional phenomenon’ above). Secondly, the ‘tale’ is likely to be already known to the elicitor and primary recipient, the host, but it is not known to other participants in the broadcast event, the studio and viewing audience. The participation framework in terms of roles – the tellers, co-tellers, protagonists and recipients – is thus configured differently and shapes the telling of the story on that occasion (Thornborrow, 2001).

In a study of competing narratives produced in public participation television broadcasts (talk shows and a small claims television courtroom), where members of the public are often called upon to produce accounts of events which are then contested or challenged by another participant, I identified a tendency for the second teller to routinely shift into the conversational historic present tense (CHP) in the second version, or ‘telling’ of the story (Thornborrow, 2000). These narratives can be either personal stories, relevant to the topic under discussion, which are offered as examples of particular forms of behaviour (in talk shows), or justifying accounts, elicited as evidence of actions that are being disputed (in the TV courtroom). In both contexts, the design of the second ‘telling’, which occurs straight after the first but is given from a different, conflicting perspective, is marked by the teller’s shift into the CHP at key points in the narrative.

Here are two versions of the same story, taken from the talk show ‘Esther’, where the topic is how to deal with jealousy in relationships. The couple are Maria and Tony, who each give an account of the same incident at a party where Tony’s behaviour had caused problems for the family:

#### Example 6

1 Maria: well we can’t go (down)the pub (1.0) like we could  
 2 never go to a night club (.) could never go in a pub  
 3 r (.hh) like we went to a party (.) and there was a bit  
 4 of an incident (.hh) like Kelly (.)that’s my daughter  
 5 in the blonde hair (1.0)(.hh) a young chap(1.0) had  
 6 fancied her n’asked for her telephone number (1.0)  
 7 (.hh) n’it caused a bit of an argument over it Tony  
 8 thought (.) that I was taking the young chap’s  
 9 telephone number (1.0) so it was quite embarrassing (.)  
 10 an’we had to leave the party

#### Example 7

1 Host: do you think this is making (2.0) everyone’s lives  
 2 a bit miserable (.) Tony  
 3 (2.0)  
 4 Tony: yeah they say th’it does (1.0) makes my life miserable  
 5 as well really (.hh) but like (.) other things th–  
 6 at the party it was a different (.) situation there we  
 7 was all just (.) sitting having a drink n’I was I was  
 8 told why don’t you go (.) to the bar (.) an’the  
 9 r minute I was at the bar n’I looked round she’s talking  
 10 to someone else an’straight away (.hh) the old  
 11 jealousy comes in an’ gets you n’I think what’s going  
 12 on then she come up and said get a pen get a pen (.hh)

- 13 I gotta give that fella the number  
 14 [n'I'm like what? it's not for me] it's for Kelly (.)  
 15 Aud: [(laughter-----)]  
 16 Tony: so I went hold on n'I'm s- [march across the dance  
 17 Maria: [(laughs-----]  
 18 Tony: floor don'I]  
 19 Maria: -----].))  
 20 Tony: an'Kelly's behind goin' no no no not me not me so  
 21 straight away I'm thinking (.) [well what's] going on

We can see in these consecutive tellings that, while Maria's story is narrated entirely in the past tense, Tony's is narrated using predominantly the CHP, from the second clause of the complicating action sequence in line 9: 'I looked round/*she's talking* to someone else' to his evaluation of the events at line 21: 'so straight away *I'm thinking* (.) well *what's going on*'. Furthermore, Tony uses direct rather than reported speech in his account, for instance in line 20, he reports his daughter Kelly's words 'an' Kelly's behind goin' no no no not me not me', another significant use of present tense forms.

Why does the second version contain such a high-level use of CHP, when the first does not? I suggest that the reasons for this difference are the stories' sequential relationship and what the second teller is doing in telling it this way. Wolfson (1978, 1981) described the use of the CHP as signalling a shift from narrative discourse into 'performance', and indeed Tony's version is more highly 'performed' in its telling than Maria's. In this media context, where the second teller has already figured (and in an unfavourable light) in the first teller's story, I argued that the CHP is a resource not only for producing a more performed account of the same story, but for telling it in a way that makes their version more believable than the previous one the audience have just heard.

In his discussion of Goffman's theory of 'footing', the 'production format' of utterances, Levinson (1988) noted that there are clear grammaticalized forms in many languages for displaying a speaker's level of personal commitment to what is being said, as well as for distinguishing the role of relayer or transmitter of a story from its informational source. The CHP functions here as such an 'evidential' form (Jakobson, 1971), displaying the second teller's commitment to the events by foregrounding their 'principalship' (Goffman, 1981), and presenting their actions as justifiable and accountable. Commitment and accountability are both crucial in sympathetically aligning the recipients to the second teller's position and in producing a version of the story that functions to some extent as a convincing rebuttal or counter to the previous teller's version. The use of CHP is thus significant in the design of these second tellings in the public construction of believable alternative versions.

### *Narrative in legal discourse*

I now turn from media discourse to the analysis of narratives that occur in legal contexts. The centrality of narrative as a discourse activity in legal settings has been well documented (see for example Conley and O'Barr, 1998; Harris, 2001; Heffer, 2002). I draw on two recent examples to illustrate how narrative discourse analysis can provide insights into the way stories are shaped through their institutional context, and understanding the consequences of that shaping for the participants. I'll look first at Johnson's (2008) account of narrative negotiation in police interviews, then at Harris's (2005) study of narrative discourse as evidence in witness cross-examination.

## Narrative and evidentiality

In her analysis of how suspects' 'free' narratives (a free narrative being the story first produced in lay terms on arrest for some criminal act) are transformed into institutional accounts of events where clear attributions of guilt or innocence can be articulated or resisted, Johnson (2008) describes the interactional process through which a narrative that is 'unevaluated in terms of culpability and responsibility' (2008: 328) becomes recontextualized in an institutional frame of police interview practices. The two short extracts below illustrate the differences between the start point and the renegotiated end point of a suspect's story:

### Example 8

8a(start)

- 1 POL: so you've hit him, he's fallen back, lost his  
 2 balance and he's banged his head on one of the  
 3 wooden beams, is that right?

8b(end)

- 45 POL: But you admit that erm you stood up and  
 46 punched him in the side of the face?  
 47 SUS: yeah.  
 48 POL: Which caused him to lose his balance, fall  
 49 backwards, bang his head, which resulted in him  
 50 receiving a fractured skull in two places.  
 51 SUS: Yeah.

*(Johnson, 2008: 339)*

The renegotiated story becomes evidentially more valuable in terms of establishing the responsibility of the suspect and of moving the suspect from a position in the narrative 'where culpability is resisted to one where it is recognized and acknowledged' (2008: 331) – in other words, it occasions a more detailed story, with clear attribution of responsibility for suspects' actions. The shift of responsibility from the first 'free' version of the story to the second, negotiated version, produced through police questioning, is clearly demonstrated in this example. Johnson notes that the shift in frame from a suspect's initial story to an institutionally valuable version of events involves three main transformations: a shift of audience (the story must stand up in a court room), a shift of participation and role (establishing clear actors and victims) and a shift of evaluation into evidentiality.

My second example is Harris's (2005) study of witness cross examinations, which also uses narrative analysis to examine a particular form of narrative activity involved in giving evidence in a courtroom trial. Harris notes that witness testimony, including that of expert witnesses, consists of a significant amount of non-narrative discourse even in interrogation sequences that recapitulate past events (2005: 226). However, she also notes that in such contexts it is important to distinguish between narrative and non-narrative discourse, and she proposes a modified version of Labov's model consisting of 'orientation', 'core narrative' 'elaboration' and 'point', which she uses to analyse data from a US rape trial. 'Point', most crucially, 'establishes the significance of the narrative account for the larger trial narrative, i.e. the guilt or innocence of the defendant in criminal trials, and addressed directly to the jury' (2005: 219). In witness examination, narratives are produced in order to establish putative versions of events, to explore what did (and did not happen), and to present a version as believable to the jury.

The extract below shows a sequence where the defence lawyer tries to subvert the plaintiff's account of events, summarized as a 'telling' (lines 31–33), with his alternative account, which he presents as a 'fact' (lines 35–36). The first 17 lines consist of orientation details, and the core narrative starts from line 19:

Example 9

(DL: Defence lawyer; W: Plaintiff Vanessa Perhach; PL: Prosecution lawyer)

- 1 DL: Well, let me ask you then about the beginning. The beginning is
- 2 in September of 1986. Correct?
- 3 W: Yes.
- 4 DL: When he checks into the Miami Airport Hilton. Is that right?
- 5 W: Yes.
- 6 DL: And you were working at the Airport Hilton at that time. Is that
- 7 correct?
- 8 W: Yes.
- 9 DL: You said that at that time you were having problems in your
- 10 home life. Is that correct?
- 11 W: Yes.
- 12 DL: As well as you were just finishing up a four-year relationship
- 13 with a man named Jack Reynolds. Isn't that correct?
- 14 PL: Objection.
- 15 Judge: Sustained.
- 16 DL: And you say that you were working as a telephone operator.
- 17 Is that correct?
- 18 W: Yes.
- 19 DL: Now, of course, you found out from this registration form that
- 20 Mr Albert worked for NBC. Isn't that correct?
- 21 W: Yes.
- 22 DL: And you knew that NBC was a television network. Isn't that
- 23 correct?
- 24 W: Yes.
- 25 DL: Isn't it a fact – did you stop by his room?
- 26 W: Yes, I did.
- 27 DL: Is that after you found out that he worked for NBC?
- 28 W: Yes.
- 29 DL: And did you knock on his door?
- 30 W: He asked me to come up.
- 31 DL: You're telling us that he calls up on the phone and talks to
- 32 you and likes your voice, so he asked you to come up to his room.
- 33 Is that correct?
- 34 W: Yes
- 35 DL: Isn't it a fact that you just went and knocked on his door after you
- 36 found out that he was employed by NBC?
- 38 W: Absolutely not.

*(Harris, 2005: 230)*

The 'narrative hybridity' that Harris identifies in this sequence emerges through a tension between two competing narratives: one is presented as a 'telling' and one is presented as 'fact'. In terms of

its 'telling', this story is a long way from the conversational narrative discourse described in section 'Theorizing narrative as a discursive activity' above. Witness (cross-)examination is, however, a form of institutional interaction that turns crucially on the presentation of sequences of events, and its function is to establish a coherent narrative point for the jury – in this instance, to establish whether or not the plaintiff went to the defendant's room because she found out he was a well known TV presenter or because he had asked her to go up there. The relevance of this 'point' becomes clear as the trial progresses, as Harris shows in her analysis of the final examination of a witness for the prosecution. Here another hotel employee gives an account of a similar experience, which corroborates the plaintiff's narrative and results in a change of the defendant's plea to guilty:

## Example 10

- 15 PL: Did you hear from him after that?  
 16 W: About 15 minutes later I got a page on my pager and there was  
 17 a call waiting and I responded to the call and it was him.  
 18 PL: Why was he calling?  
 19 W: He called to say that he needed a fax sent and could I send a fax  
 20 and help him with a fax. And I said sure.  
 21 PL: Is that something that you do as part of your job?  
 22 W: All the time I send faxes, and I deliver Fed Ex packages. That's part of  
 23 my job  
 24 PL: What did you do?  
 25 W: I went up to the suite and the door was – the bolt was open on the door  
 26 so it wasn't shut; it was ajar.  
 27 PL: What kind of suite was it?  
 28 W: It was a two-room suite with a bedroom off to one side and a  
 29 living room and a bar area.  
 30 PL: And when you found the door ajar, what did you do?  
 31 W: I knocked on the door and I said, It's PJ – and – that's the name I go under.  
 32 And he said, come on in. And he wasn't in the room, so I just walked over  
 33 He called from the bedroom and said he would be right out.  
 34 PL: Where did you go when you got into the room?  
 35 W: I walked over to the window and I was looking out the window, because  
 36 the hotel was right at the airport and I was watching the planes land.  
 37 PL: What happened after that?  
 38 W: I heard the door close behind me and I turned around I saw him  
 39 standing there.  
 40 PL: What did you see?  
 41 W: I saw him standing in white panties and a garter belt.  
 42 PL: And what else did you see, if anything?  
 43 W: He was exposed and he was aroused.  
 44 PL: What did you do at that point?  
 45 W: I was in shock. I didn't know what to do. I was in shock. I just stood there.  
 (Harris 205: 234–235)

Harris argues that this account is more strongly narrative than the one in example 9, because it is produced predominantly in the witness's own words, as a response to a different type of questioning. Rather than the narrative emerging through a series of either yes/no or declarative tag questions by the defence lawyer (e.g. 'You found out from this registration form that Mr Albert

worked for NBC. Isn't that correct?), the story in example 10 emerges in response to information eliciting questions (what did you do? where did you go? what did you see? what happened after that?). However, in each of these examples, the narrative 'point' is not made explicitly, but is there to be inferred by the jury.

From this discussion we can see the centrality of narrative in relation to issues of evidentiality. These analyses, among other things, show how powerful narrative is in the context of producing believable and coherent versions of events through witness testimony. As both Harris and Johnson make clear, in interview and courtroom interaction there is a considerable level of activity which produces narrative in various forms and transforms raw, personal experience stories into institutionally functional discourses with coherent and persuasive cultural 'points'. Questions of blame, guilt and innocence are crucially tied to the evidential nature of courtroom narratives.

## Summary

In this chapter I have aimed to make the case for the relevance of analysing narrative discourse by using a selection of examples taken from both conversational and institutional contexts. I began with a discussion of narrative form, based on the work of Labov and Sacks. These are two of the most influential accounts of narrative as a genre of spoken discourse and as organized social interaction – accounts that underpin much of the research on narrative analysis over the last four decades. Then, working through the examples, I illustrated some of the key concepts of narrative analysis and some of the ways in which narrative discourse is implicated in social action. Whether this is manifested in the ongoing accomplishment of building and maintaining social relationships through the 'small stories' of conversational talk, or in the institutional work of convincing an audience or structuring experience as evidence in a courtroom, there can be little doubt that narrative is a primary discursive resource across many contexts for human social interaction.

## Further reading

A 'how-to' chapter:

Gimenez, J. (2010) 'Narrative analysis in linguistic research', in L. Litosseliti (ed.) *Research Methods in Linguistics*. London: Continuum, pp. 198–215.

Collections of recent work that illustrate the scope of narrative analysis:

De Fina, A. and Georgopoulou, A. (eds.) (2008) 'Narrative analysis in the shift from texts to practices', *Text and Talk*, 28 (3): 275–282 (special issue).

Thornborrow, J. and Jennifer, C. (eds.) (2005) *The Sociolinguistics of Narrative*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

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