

**Stories as talk-in-interaction:
Implications for narrative and identity analysis ***

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Abstract

The starting point of this paper is what will be identified as the “narrative canon” comprising a specific type of narrative (past events personal experience elicited in research interviews) that mutually feeds into a specific analytic vocabulary, an interpretive idiom, and a research agenda (normally identity analysis) within conventional narrative analysis. The aim here is to give voice to and advance understanding for stories that do not fit this canon and are thus in the fringes of narrative research. Examples of such stories are brought in from two communication contexts (adolescents’ conversations – private email messages) and their interactional features of ongoingness, intertextuality and recontextualization are documented. The issues that are then addressed on their basis involve the ways in which mainstream conceptualization of narrative analysis (e.g. tellership, tellability, embeddedness) can be revised and stretched to reach out to those cases; also, the implications for narrative cum identity research.

Key-words: narrative analysis/canon, narratives-in-interaction - ongoing narratives, recontextualization, tellership, tellability, embeddedness.

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Introduction

Although in principle a diverse (at best rich, at worst fragmented) endeavour, narrative research within linguistics (mainly pragmatics, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics) as well as in numerous social science disciplines tends to employ specific kinds of data and methodologies which in turn generate a specific analytic vocabulary. In particular, departing from Labov's (1972) influential model of narrative structure, a volume of studies have focused on research or interview narratives that are invariably about non-shared, personal experience past events. Such narratives occur in response to the researcher's "elicitation" questions or prompts. Two prototypes can be identified here: the life story that mostly takes the form of a reflexive and representative account of self that amounts to a more or less coherent autobiography (see Linde 1993). The other prototype is a short-range narrative that gives an account of a certain landmark or key-event or experience that is considered to be pivotal in the formation of the interviewee's sense of self (e.g. marriage, pregnancy, divorce, etc.). In Labov's case, this concerned a sensational event, that is, coming close to dying.

Whether analysed linguistically or within the framework of clinical interviews, the place of these kinds of narrative in research has to be assessed in connection with questions about self and subjectivity as well as with the healing process that the narrativization of experience is believed to afford. Two widely held views on narrative are instructive here: first, the significance of narrative as a privileged mode for making sense of self and others and as such a unique point of entry into questions of identity (see papers in Brockmeier & Carbaugh 2001); secondly, the relationship

between narrative and experience which according to many, translates into the compelling idea that we actually perceive the world in narrative form (e.g. Carr 1986, MacIntyre 1981). Even if life is not accepted to be narratively structured, the process of narrativizing it is invariably thought of as involving meaning-making, ordering and structuring of the experience. From a linguistically minded point of view, this meaning and structure become a worthwhile object of inquiry into the mechanisms and devices for organizing and perspectivizing discourse (Toolan 1988). From a psychologically oriented point of view, this narrative recollection of the past is seen as being at the heart of self-discovery and the process of storying oneself, i.e. integrating oneself in time (McAdams 1997). These two foci of interest, although not mutually exclusive, often present themselves as a dichotomy: the “how” of narrative on one hand and the “about” of narrative on the other; how people tell of their experiences in specific contexts as opposed to what story they have to tell about themselves (see Freeman 2003: 338ff).

What is notable for this discussion is that in both cases the narrative data that analysts use tend to be of the same kind: past events stories of personal experiences not known to the audience. As we will argue below, this type of narrative comes with specific communicative features that do not necessarily apply to all (interactional) narratives. However, its frequent use as the basis of numerous empirical studies in the social sciences in general and in linguistics in particular has had profound implications about the direction of narrative analysis, creating notions of a narrative canon and orthodoxy, i.e. what constitutes a story, a good story, a story worth analysing, etc. that in turn dictate a specific analytic vocabulary and an interpretive idiom. It could be claimed too that in a cyclical sort of process, the longstanding

assumptions about narrative as outlined above have both fed into a specific type of narrative and have been further strengthened by its analysis.

One of the key-features of the narrative canon emanates from the communicative event in which it tends to occur, that is, the research interview. This not only casts the interviewer in a role of elicitor of a story but it also generates asymmetrical and lacking in intimacy interpersonal dynamics. A spin-off of those specifics is certain participation roles: the prototypical interviewer tends to avoid interruptions or challenges in the course of a story's telling and refrain from communicating their own experiences, opinions, and feelings; the prototypical interviewee on the other hand tells the story to attentive ears, fills in the gaps, and creates the missing frames of mutual reference (see Lucius-Hoene & Depperman 2000). Within a dynamic and dialogical conceptualization of communication which is increasingly gaining purchase, the picture is certainly not as neat: for one, the role of the interviewer is by no means negligible in the shaping of a story; interviewees too may resist or recast roles (*idem*). Interview narratives, in their duly problematized form, are thus taken to be co-authorings or co-draftings (e.g. Mishler 1986). Even so, what reflexivity on research contexts has brought home is the idea that the interactional features of narratives are specifically and inextricably bound up with their context of occurrence. In this respect, however problematized, the context of an elicited story in an interview situation still tends to divide participants into a teller with strong floor-holding rights and a recipient.

Thereafter, this narration tends to develop as a well-structured activity with a beginning, a middle and an end, which unfolds in the fashion of a (more or less) classic narration, as Labov called it (1972). This means that it moves from the reported events and the complications within them to the most significant event(s) (*sic*

high point, peak, climax), evaluates (i.e. shows or tells its significance) them, and resolves them. This narrative pattern has been seen as the end-point of narrative development and the ideal form in which to cast the richness, depth and profundity of human experience (see papers in Bamberg 1997). Its assumptions have pervaded whole areas such as narrative psychology but also filtered down to work on naturally occurring (cf. non-elicited) narratives in ordinary conversational settings. As Ochs & Capps aptly put it (2001), “narrative scholarship is centered on narratives with the following qualities:

A coherent temporal progression of events that may be reordered for rhetorical purposes and that is typically located in some past time and place

A plotline that encompasses a beginning, a middle, and an end, conveys a particular perspective and is designed for a particular audience who apprehend and shape its meaning” (57)

Researchers have frequently noted that the narratives told outside research interviews depart significantly from the above qualities (e.g. papers in Bamberg 1997, Goodwin 1990). Nonetheless, empirical studies of exactly what these “other”, non-canonical stories are like, what the analytical tools appropriate for them are and what their consequentiality can be for narrative cum identity research are lagging behind. Ochs and Capps (2001) have identified this lack of research in terms of a set of narrative dimensions, namely tellership, tellability, embeddedness, moral stance and linearity/temporality. Although these dimensions establish a range of possibilities in

the form of a continuum, Ochs & Capps convincingly argue that conventional narrative analysis has consistently privileged one end of that continuum. In particular, one active teller as opposed to multiple co-tellers; high tellability instead of low tellability; detachment from the surrounding activity at the expense of embeddedness in the local context; a certain and constant moral stance over an uncertain, fluid and dynamic one; a closed temporal and causal order over open-endedness and/or spatial organization. Ochs & Capps go on to argue that “understanding narratives compels going beyond these exemplars to probe less polished, less coherent narratives that pervade ordinary social encounters and are a hallmark of human condition” (57). They illustrate some of those narratives with data from ordinary conversations thus offering a landmark study for the inquiry into less “conventional” or “canonical” stories. There is, however, much scope for research not least as the following questions beg answers:

- 1) The first concerns the types of non-canonical stories and their textual and interactional features, both of which we know little about. In similar vein, we need to know if there is anything systematic about the contexts of occurrence of such stories other than that they frequent ordinary conversations. What are the types of social organisation and local contexts that encourage, warrant or equally prohibit non-canonical stories?

- 2) What are the tools appropriate for the analysis of such stories? Is there a case for redefining or stretching the existing analytic vocabulary, for instance, by bringing in new concepts? A case in point concerns the influential concept of tellability, which is at the core of narrative analysis, and at times being equated with narrativity.

Tellability captures the aesthetic, affective, and subjective aspects of narrative; the dynamics of experientiality (Polanyi 1989). Narratives low in tellability are often seen as low in narrativity too (for a discussion see Fludernik 1996). Would that hold in the case of non-canonical narratives? If we accept Ochs & Capps' instruction to look at such narratives not in aesthetic terms but as a vernacular forum for piecing together an evaluative perspective on an incident, for ordering, explaining, and taking a position on experience (2001: 36), what would the place and significance of tellability be in such an inquiry?¹

3) Given that, as suggested above, canonical narratives have mainly been used as heuristics for the inquiry into the teller's construction of identities, what implications would researching other types of narratives have for the identity constructions project?

That a different approach may be required for narratives that depart from Labov's classic narrative is something that Labov himself has recently admitted in his revised version of the 1972 model:

The narratives that form the focus of this work were normally told in the course of a sociolinguistic interview, where the interviewer formed an ideal audience: attentive, interested and responsive. Though they are fitted to some extent to the situation and often to a question posed by the interviewer, they are essentially monologues and

¹ Note that in Ochs & Capps, the importance of tellability is recognized by being accorded the status of a narrative dimension. The acceptance of a distinction between high and low tellability and the association of the latter with the end of the continuum that involves less researched and less conventional stories arguably feed into narrative orthodoxy by implying some kind of an evaluative order. Complex questions can be raised in this respect regarding who defines tellability and how, what its relationship is with narrativity, and if the quality of high tellability in effect makes certain stories better or more worthy of analysis than others.

*show a degree of decontextualization. They exhibit a generality that is not to be expected from narratives that subserve an argumentative point in a highly interactive and competitive conversation. **Such narratives are often highly fragmented and may require a different approach.** Yet studies of spontaneous conversation also show a high frequency of monologic narratives that command the attention of the audience as fully as the narratives of the interview (1997: 397, my emphasis).*

All the above suggests that what is needed at this point, now that the frequency of non-canonical stories has been duly noted, is to flesh them out, bring to the fore their interactional features, and show what “a different approach” -to echo Labov above- may consist of. This paper is aimed at contributing to this project of giving voice to and advancing understanding for those other stories that are still in the fringes of narrative research. By putting such stories on the map, the hope is not only that linguistically oriented studies of narrative will review some of their ways of analysing narrative in particular by intensifying links with interactional work on talk but also that biography researchers in a number of disciplines (e.g. sociology, psychology) where the narrative-interviewing method is used extensively will re-think the benefits and dangers of their main methodological tool for identity analysis from the perspective of the role of narratives in interaction.

Part of legitimating “neglected” stories involves naming them, finding appropriate ways of referring to them as opposed to defining them in negative or othering terms, e.g. a-typical, non-canonical, etc. Bamberg in his recent work (2004a) has labelled them *small stories* (also adopted in our paper, 2005). The term both captures their fragmented qualities and serves as an allusion and an antidote to the modernist concept of grand narratives. My own formulations (i.e. *story-lines*, *ongoing*

narratives, see 2005a) draw attention to the qualities of fluidity, plasticity, open-endedness and dynamic character that I have found to be salient in the stories of my data. Still a more neutral possibility is that of *narratives-in-interaction* (echoed in the title of this paper): not only is the term an accurate description of the contexts of occurrence of such stories but, on a less literal level, it also emphasizes their dialogical qualities, their occasioning in ongoing social interaction.

The discussion below will first identify certain types of small stories found to be salient in the data from a face-to-face and a computer-mediated communication context. It will be argued that the stories coalesce in the ongoing-ness of their tellings (with links to previous, present and future interactions as well as to other tellings). The stories' main interactional features will be subsequently discussed with reference to the narrative dimensions of tellership, tellability and embeddedness, in an attempt to identify ways in which narrative analysis can stretch its analytic vocabulary and agenda in order to reach out to those kinds of stories. Finally, the discussion will look into the implications of a turn to *narratives-in-interaction* for identity research as the main project of narrative analysis.

Data

Two independent projects of mine have led me to identify recurrent cases of stories that by no means fitted the bill of the canonical narrative of personal experience past events, as described above. Yet, not labelling these cases as stories would mean missing out on important analytical insights into the activity at hand, particularly as on many occasions, the participants themselves oriented to what going on as a story. At the same time, the most widely accepted definitional criteria of narrative were also

fulfilled: as we will see in the examples below, there is temporal ordering and transition from one state of affairs to another, some form of a complicating action (e.g. problem arising, circumstances changing, newsworthy events) and evaluation of the events and/or characters talked about (Polanyi, 1989; Ricouer, 1988). That said, if set in the background of a classic narrative, these cases could be described as fragmented, small (some of them were not long) stories, but more importantly enmeshed in other discourse activities, unfinished and in the making.

The first context of occurrence for such stories involves the conversations of a group of three Greek women (a fourth female person joins in occasionally but is not seen as a "core" member) that describe their relation as "best friends". The group was studied ethnographically in various stages between 1998 and 2000 and the data collection involved: a) 20 hours of audio-taped data that two of the participants, Vivi and Tonia, recorded wearing audio-microphones; b) 60 pages of personal field-notes in the form of a diary; c) interviews before, during and after the period of audio-recordings. Some of these interviews elicited retrospective comments by the participants on what was being said and done in parts of the recorded data. When the recordings started, the participants were 17 years old and living in a small town (25.000 inhabitants) in the Peloponnese, South Greece. At that point, they were re-sitting their University entrance exams and, as such, were outside the school framework. Their daily routine thus involved self-study in the mornings, private tuition in the early afternoons, and socializing thereafter, that mostly took the form of hanging out with one another and chatting at cafés.² This regular socializing over a long period of time (the participants had been "best friends" for 10 years) had resulted

² This routine was quite typical of a large number of the participants' contemporaries in Greece. Entrance to a Greek university was highly competitive, with only 1 in 4 candidates securing a place, so re-sits of the "Panhellenic" exams the following year were quite common. (The educational system has undergone certain changes since then).

in a dense interactional history, rich in shared assumptions that were consistently and more or less strategically drawn upon to suit various purposes in local interactional contexts.

The other context of occurrence is private e-mail messages exchanged between friends. The corpus comprises two data-sets of 3,500 messages collected at different stages (1995-1997, end of 2000-now) from the email correspondence of six Greek informants, three women and three men, (currently) aged 28-35³, and supplemented with interviews with them before and after the period of data collection⁴. The informants have on average spent the last 5 years of their lives in England and I have discussed elsewhere how this shapes local language choices, particularly occasional code-switches to English (1997). Here, it is important to note that all the messages are in Greek, more specifically, in Greek transliterated with Latin characters (commonly referred to as Greenglish). Also, as I have stressed elsewhere, a significant factor in the data at hand is that "the participants know one another personally, their e-mail interactions thus mediating past and future face-to-face interactions" (1997: 145). For the purposes of this study, 600 messages were extracted from the second data-set (100 messages from each of the six participants-informants) involving communication with the four friends that each participant-informant emailed more frequently in the period of selection.⁵ In the selection of all the messages, I ensured that responses to messages were included (and, in that

³ Anonymity or pseudonymity has been unexceptionally applied to all messages of the two data-sets. I have also obtained that written consent of all the informant-participants' correspondents whose messages I have analysed (for a discussion of ethical issues involved in the collection of private email data, see Danet 2001).

⁴ The interviews, relatively unstructured, mostly focused on the informants' range and frequency of communication practices with friends and acquaintances.

⁵ It has to be noted that, in the whole of data, same-gender interactions outnumber mixed-gender interactions.

respect, trails of communication followed), as well as previous messages to which the sample messages were responding (when those were available).

To say that the two communication contexts are quite different is to state the obvious. Among the many differences, attention should be drawn to the asynchronicity of email messages coupled with the speed in response (messages are on average responded to within half an hour), as they bear on the stories' tellability, as we will see below.⁶ Furthermore, in this case, any differences between face-to-face and mediated communication are also closely associated with time constraints: the conversational data involve leisurely and long encounters between the participants while the email data at hand place a high premium on brevity (the messages are very often sent from work). Despite these differences, it is still the case that the stories occurring in the two environments present interesting similarities to the extent that they can be grouped together into distinct types, as we will see below. These similarities are intimately linked with the single most important common denominator of the two communication contexts, namely the participant relations. In both cases, there is a shared interactional history that makes for a dense nexus of discourse practices which the participants frequently orient to and reaffirm. In this respect, we can talk about two communities of practice (Wenger 1998)⁷ resulting from sustained (face-to-face and mediated) interaction over a number of years and yielding a repertoire of shared discourse and social activities, resources, and understandings of them.

⁶For a detailed discussion of the differences between computer-mediated and face-to-face communication with reference to the continuum of oral-literate-electronic practices, see Georgakopoulou 2003.

⁷ For applications to ordinary exchanges see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1999.

Analysis

Narratives are of utmost importance in both communication contexts as ways of jointly interweaving events and characters from daily experience and (re)fashioning interpretations of them, working out and through the emotional impact of them. They are also fundamental acts of sharing and through doing so, reaffirming closeness in positions and viewpoints, putting them to the test, or revisiting them. In the female adolescents' conversations, stories involve their focal concern at that point in their lives, namely romance and heterosexual relationships. As such, they revolve around men that they are romantically interested in or attached to. In the email data, the gamut is broader and events (particularly conflicts) from the professional life figure prominently. At the same time, there are also clear expectations about what kinds of stories are to be told or not in this particular environment: long stories are to be avoided and their infrequent occurrence is framed in ways that justify their occurrence and seek their acceptability (e.g. tellers apologize for having to share a long story, reflect on the fact that its telling may be tiring for the addressee, stress the newsworthiness of the events to justify their telling, etc.). In this way, there is a visible orientation to issues of appropriacy and tellability as shaped in the context at hand and in the light of a requirement for brevity.

The stories most commonly initiated or told in the data at hand can be brought together on the basis of their main characteristic, namely that they are presented as part of a trajectory of interactions rather than as a free-standing, finished and self-contained unit. More specifically, a) the events they report have some kind of immediacy, i.e. they are very recent past or near future events, or are still unfolding as the story is being constructed; b) they establish and refer to links between the

participants' previous and future interactions (mostly face-to-face but also online), including their shared stories. In this way, the stories are not only heavily embedded in their immediate discourse surroundings but also in a larger history of interactions in which they are *intertextually* linked and available for *recontextualization* (Bauman & Briggs 1990) in various local settings. We will present them below starting from the most obvious cases of narratives-in-the making and moving to cases of (re)making narratives.

a) **“Stories to be told”**: Bidding for a story and telling it later at a more opportune moment is very frequent in conversational events.⁸ The initiation in the conversational data at hand is normally of the kind: *Θύμησέ μου να σου πω μετά* (Remind me to tell you later), *A, να μην το ξεχάσω ...* (Oh, I shouldn't forget it ...). On email, this bidding presents a notable inter-textuality, more precisely, inter-mediality between on and off line interactions: stories are initiated and bid for on email, but their actual telling is deferred for an offline interaction:

(1)

> *Pos ise?*

Megalh istoria afth pou elpizo na soup o apo koda otan me to kalo vrethoume. Mou leipoun akoma kapoia chapters allvste, kalo einai na xv kati peran tou Prologikou shmeivmatos.

> How are you?

⁸ In a corpus of family interactions, I have reported (2002) that it is mainly the children who bid in those ways, as a result of the increased pressures they are faced with in gaining the floor from the adult-tellers.

Long story that, which I am hoping to tell you face-to-face when we hopefully meet up. In any case, there are still some missing chapters, it would be good if I had something other than the Prologue.

(34 year-old female to 40 year-old female).

In the example above, the telling of the story, as well as being explicitly constructed as narrativization-in-process, is deferred to a temporally non-specified future face-to-face interaction. In most cases, however, the stories' to be told anchoring in offline interactions becomes specific, as we can see below, where the telling of the story is deferred till later that day:

(2)

Date: Wed, 27 Sep 2000 16:15:55 +0100 (BST)

From: Jannis

To: Klio

Subject: Re: Evrisa ton Charlie (kai th gynaika tou)!!

> Tha sou pv to vrady, megalh plaka.

nai eh? tha erthei katholoy - or is he history?

Jannis

ps thlepathiko: vrizoyme thn idia wra.

Date: Wed, 27 Sep 2000 16:15:55 +0100 (BST)

From: Jannis

To: Klio

Subject: Re: I gave Charlie (and his wife!) an earful!!

>I'll tell you tonight, great fun.

Oh really? Will he come back at all – or is he history?

Jannis

ps. telepathic: we give people an earful at the same time.

As we can see above, when the full telling of the story is deferred for the near future, the initiation of stories to be told is normally done with a summarizing statement of the story's main event(s) (*I gave Charlie (and his wife) an earful!!*), and/or its point (*great fun*), reminiscent of Labov's (1972) abstract. This commonly appears in the message's subject heading.

The above examples suggest that tellability considerations are very important. Not only is the point of the story previewed and foreshadowed but, as the interviews with the participants revealed, its fulfillment is deferred to an environment that the participants deem more appropriate for performances. In the conversational data, it is notable that deferrals of storytelling are resisted more, as these typical uptakes from the interlocutors show: *Ένα ένα θα μου τα λες;* (Are you going to tell me one by one?), *νάτα τα καλά, πέστα τώρα* (here's the good one, tell me know).

b) **“Breaking news”**: In these cases, tellers seem to wish to share the reported events straight away, almost as they are still unfolding. As in example 2 above, some of the stories to be told are also based on the reporting of breaking news. What is provided is the abstract (again commonly to be found in the message’s subject), an elliptical skeleton of the main events (the gist) and their evaluation:

(3)

From: Nick

To: Kostas

Subject: Me pire o Thanasis telefono

ke ti mou lei? Padvondai me tin Eleni to Martio! Tis ekane lei protasi proxthes over dinner, meta pirane tous dikous tis, kata to ethimotipikon, ke tora to lene se filus.

Kala nea, e? To mono pu me fovizi ine min arxisun ki ales ke theloune tetoia ...

From: Nick

To: Kostas

Subject: Thanasis rang me

and what did he say? Eleni and he are getting married in March! He said he proposed two days ago over dinner, then they rang her folks, as is customary, and now they are telling friends.

Good news, eh? The only thing that worries me is if others ((in the original the inflection is feminine, i.e. other women)) start wanting similar things ...

In response, what the receivers seem to dwell on and provide feedback for is the evaluation of events rather than the events themselves. See for example the response to 3 above:

(4)

> *Kala nea, e? To mono pu me fovizi ine min arxisun ki ales ke theloune tetoia ...*

Ondvs. Mhn trelainesai esy omvs, katse na deis prvta pvs tha adidrasoun oi alles. To pio pithano einai na mh boun se sygriseis ...

>Good news, eh? The only thing that worries me is if others ((in the original the inflection is feminine, i.e. other women)) start wanting similar things ...

Indeed. But don't you run wild, see first how the others will react. In all probability, they won't enter into comparisons ...

In the adolescent group's data, breaking news are also about events that are part of the teller's focal concerns; in fact, they invariably report sightings of men that the participants are romantically interested in. Sightings are newsworthy as they allow the participants to locate men, that is, to situate them in (social) time and place, thus "conferring spatial and temporal specificity on them" (Butler 1997: 29). As I have shown in detail (2005a), in doing so, the participants mark the men for certain identities, roles, and activities by associatively linking them with plots, i.e.

meaningful activity types and event sequences that are routinely attached to the specific time and space coordinates. In the process, these plots can be reaffirmed and reinforced in their local use and/or they can render new plots intelligible. Excerpt 5 below, a “breaking news” story, introduces the character talked about with a nickname (line 2, *Εκλαιράκι*). This is a common way of referring to men (for a detailed discussion, see 2005b). “Eclairette” (line 2) is the diminutive form of a pastry and has loose connections with the fact that the talked about person frequently buys that pastry in quantities from the patisserie that Fotini's father owns. In the interactional history of the participants, there has been a suspicion that such visits are owed more to the love interest that the man in question has for Fotini and less to the actual pastry. Nonetheless, over a period of three years in use, the nickname has developed added layers of meaning. Its associations with sweetness (the character is frequently referred to as sweet) have lent themselves to the attribution of feminine qualities to Eclairette.

(5)

Participants: Tonia (T), Fotini (F), Vivi (V).

1 T: *A:: (.) δε σας είπα. Το πρωί περνάω απ 'το (()) (..) είχε κόσμο (0.5) πού ναι το
Εκλαιρά::κι? (.) πού ναι το Εκλαιρά::κι? (.) νά::το το Εκλαιράκι. Εκεί στη γωνία (.)
με τη σκούπα*

1 Oh ::(.) I didn't tell you. This morning I go past (()) it was packed (0.5) where's
2 Eclair::tte? (.) where's Eclair::tte? (.) the::re's Eclairette. There in a corner (.) with
3 his brush ((or vacuum cleaner))

4 F: *Ρε (.) η σκούπα και το Εκλαιράκι έχουν γίνει // ένα*

4 Man (.) the brush and Ekleraki have become // one

5 V: *// Η σκούπα Φίλιπς ρουφάει τη σκόνη*

- 5 //The Phillips vacuum cleaner sucks the dust ((sings a TV commercial jingle))
 ((They all laugh))
- 6 T: *Παιδί μου (.) και να πω ότι είναι γυναίκα με τη σκούπα (..) αυτό: το πράμα!*
- 6 Guys (.) as if he were a woman with a brush (.) wha:t a thing!
- 7 F: *Θα 'χω κι άντρα νοικοκύρη ρε: (..) τι άλλο θέλω:?*
- 7 I'll have a house-proud man guys (..) what else do I want?
- 8 V: *Είχε φάει κουραμπιέ: και σκού:πιζε?*
- 8 Had he had a *kourabies* ((traditional pastry with icing sugar)) and he was cleaning?
- 9 T: *χα χα (..) Περνάει (()) και λέει (..) καλά είχε πιάσει βροχή:?=*
- 9 hhhh hhh (()) passes and says (.) wow did it rain?=
 10 F: *=χα χα (..) Έβρεχε λιχουδιά?*
- 10 =hhhhhh (.) Had it been raining sweets?

In addition to reporting the latest whereabouts of Eclairette, excerpt 5 is about evoking and reaffirming familiar associations regarding the character talked about (e.g. domesticity, sweetness, feminine qualities). The re-affirmation of such associations seems to hold the key to this story's tellability in the sense of its current local relevance. At the same time, the re-affirmation of the familiar is a pleasurable activity in itself, as the participants' playful and allusive collusion in talking about Eclairette suggests.

Breaking news such as 5 above are also instrumental in the participants' joint drafting of dating scenarios and possibilities, as they provide a repertoire of routine events, activities, locations, and roles for the men talked about (for details, see 2005b). More generally, in both cases (interactional and email data), they fashion slices of life and experiential moments which are reworked in tune with the participants' focal concerns. In the email data, the constant cross-referencing to face-

to-face interactions allows us to speculate that breaking news subsequently give rise to further plots.

c) Projections: Contrary to the predominance of past events stories in conventional narrative analysis, stories of (near) future events (sic projections) are by far the most common type of storytelling in the group's conversations and frequent in the email data too. The taleworld of such projected events, in the same vein as in stories of past events, is temporally ordered and emplotted yet they are clearly one of the most neglected and marginalized narrative types in narrative analysis (and narratology, cf. Norrick's discussion, 2000: ch 5).⁹

In the adolescents' group, projections present a lot of intertextual connections amongst them. To begin, there is an obvious thematic preoccupation that runs through most of them and that has to do with flirting, romance, and relationships with men. As such, projections are typically about planning a meeting with and/or asking out the man that one of the participants happens to be romantically interested in. This planning involves a turn-by-turn co-authoring and negotiation of details in the taleworld, particularly of an orientation kind (e.g. time, place):

(6)

1 T(onia): *Mori tha pezi i AEK ecino to vradī, de tha pis? INE AEK o Pavlos!*

⁹ cf. Prince's (1988) "negative" term *disnarrated* 1988 which could be applied to the cases at hand. It is also telling that the typical illustration of projections in narratological books is that of prophecies, far removed from the world of narratives-in-interaction.

T: AEK ((basketball team)) are playing that evening, aren't you going to say anything? Pavlos SUPPORTS AEK!

2 F(otini): *I AEK pezi simera.*

3 T: AEK are playing today.

4 T: *Perimene (...) sto mikro teliko, - ton broimiteliko, ama kerδisi simera,*

T: Wait a minute (...) in the semi final, - the quarter final, if they win today,

5 T: *a peksi c'avrio*

T: they'll play tomorrow too

6 V(ivi): *Re to χune noris, äen do χune //arya*

V: The match is on early, not //late

7 T: *Δe θimase pu iχane ton Olibiako edeka i ora?*

T: Don't you remember, they had Olympiakos's match ((team)) at 11?

8 V: *Gamo tin atixia mas! Na to orγanosume j'ali mera, na ine iremos=*

V: Bloody hell Let's organize it for another day, when he'll be calm=

9 F: *=Bori na mi θeli omos na to //parakolutθsi*

F: But he may not want to //watch it

10 V: *Apkli:ete!*

V: No wa:y!

11 F: *Bori na min ine fanatikos!*

F: He may not be a big fan!

12 T: *Re, ine ce se OMAAA, kaθe Tetarti pezi*

T: Man he's in a team himself, they play every Wednesday

The plotline of projections consists of planned events and verbal interactions.

The latter mostly involve interactions between one of the participants and the man she

is planning to go out with. As such, they tend to take the form of "You will say - he will say" (example 7 below) or, less frequently, "We will say - he will say" (example 8 below):

(7)

1 F: *Orea (..) vrisko edo kapu to Maci (..) etsi?*

F: Tell me now (..) we are talking serious. Okay (..) I bump into Makis right?

2 F: *Milai o Pavlos me ti Vivi eci, c'o Macis ine eci, ce ti tu les, TI TU LES?*

F: Pavlos is talking to Vivi, and Makis is there, and what would you tell him, what?

3 T: *Ta kalandra? =*

T: The carols? = ((jokingly))

4 V: *=Ta kalandra*

V: The carols ((laughs))

5 F: *Oçi ta kalandra re pedi mu, ama su tiçi prota ap'ola (..) daksi?*

F: Not the carols man, assuming this is going to happen (..) right?

(8)

1 F: *>oçi me to pu tha mas ði< tha pi: e koritsia ti kanete? Vjikate, irθate ja kafe?*

F: >no the moment he sees us< he'll say: eh what's up girls? Came out for a coffee?

2 F: *θα tu pume ne c'emis, ja kafe imaste, tha pi o Pavlos kaθiste pareia tha pi*

F: we'll tell him yes, came for a coffee, Pavlos will then say come sit with us

3 F: *θα epimini o Pavlos, tha rotisi ksero γo, ðe mas χalane tim bareia re Maci?*

- F: Pavlos will insist, he'll ask, they are not imposing Makis, are they?
- 4 F: *mas ti xalane? Tha pume emis stin arxi, oxī re pedja ksero γο*
- F: To begin with, we'll say no guys
- 5 F: *mi sas xalame tim barea ksero γο*
- F: we don't want to impose right?
- 6 T: *θα πι ο Pavlaras eci pera, koritsia KAΘISTE KAΘISTE*
- T: Then Pavlos will say, girls DO SIT DOWN SIT DOWN

It is notable that projections are initiated as bids for co-construction. See, for instance, the plural “guys” and the pronoun “we” framing the telling of the events as a joint endeavour, in the initiation of the projection which excerpts 6-8 were taken from:

- 1 Fotini: *Pedja .. ti tha kanume avrio? Iremiste ce sjopite. TI tha kanume?*
- 1 Fotini: Guys ... what are we we going to do tomorrow? Contain yourselves and be silenced. WHAT are we going to do?
- 2 Vivi: *Katarçin tha pas na kanis ena krio banjo=*
- 2 Vivi: First of all you'll have a cold bath=
- 3 F: *=Na xalaro:so?*
- 3 F: To relax?
- 4 V: *Ena krio banjo ... ce tha pçis ena zesto kafe=*
- 4 V: A cold bath ... and you'll have a hot coffee=
- ((further down))
- 8 V: *Ore:a .. meta tha katsis na xalarosis .. na kanis mja peripiisi prosopu*

V: Fine .. then you'll sit down and relax .. you'll do a facial ..
((further down))

13 F: *Orea .. meta:?*

F: Okay .. and then?

Furthermore, as we can see, the participants themselves orient to talk about the future as a temporally ordered sequence of events.

In the e-mail data, although space afforded for co-construction in asynchronous communication is much more limited, projections are still framed as co-constructions, with questions to the addressee at the beginning and at the end (see 10 below). Here too, projections are about making plans for near future activities but in this case they mostly involve social arrangements.

(10)

> *Subject: Re: Tonight*

Pvs sou fainetai to parakatv os sxedio?

Synadiomaste ekso ap to Notting Hill Coronet stis 7. Paizei tainia me p. gelio stis 8.40 me R. de Niro (Meet the parents, o,ti prepei gia goneis korhs...), pairnoume ta eisithria kai tsibame kati/pinoume ena poto kapou ekei koda metaksy 7 & 8.40.

Ti les?

How about the following as a plan?

We meet outside Notting Hill Coronet at 7 o'clock. V. funny movie showing at 8.40 with R. de Niro (Meet the parents, just the ticket for parents of a daughter...), we buy the tickets and grab sth to eat/have a drink locally between 7 & 8.40.

What do you say?

d) References: References are one specific case of a very common type of stories in the data, namely stories of shared (known) events. As I have argued elsewhere (2004), stories of known events are variously reworked in interactional contexts and this remaking normally takes the form of mini-tellings rather than full performances. In fact, such mini-tellings outweigh the commonly discussed in the literature full retellings for group-bonding and other purposes (see Norrick 2000). It is in other words more common in the data to draw upon stories of shared or known events selectively and argumentatively.¹⁰

References are one end of the continuum of mini-tellings as they are typically brief, frequently one-liners, and take the form of a punchline, a characterisation of a third party based on action in the taleworld, or a formulaic personation (i.e. quoted set phrase that imitates, parodies or generally stylizes a character's speech style). In both the interactional and email data, references originate in less recent stories that have attained the status of building blocks in the participants' interactional history, rich in symbolic associations, and prone to recontextualisation. There seems then to be a

¹⁰ I have discussed elsewhere (2004) how this is the case with stories of shared or known events in the context of projections, where the former are introduced to support and legitimize a participant's own projected version of events.

process of de-narrativization or reduction that shared stories undergo, possibly after numerous retellings, until they reach a bare minimum of a reference that is as brief and elliptical as any other allusion to shared sources or texts can be. This type of reference becomes somewhat "frozen" in the sense that, as its instances in the data suggest, it does not get reformulated, the wording remains the same, although it is drawn upon on different occasions for different purposes in different ways.

One such oft used reference in the adolescents' group is "Mila tu re, mila tu" (Talk to him man, talk to him) frequently used to stylize the voice of inarticulate men (for a detailed discussion, see 2005b). It also indexes men's shyness and awkwardness around women. In the story from where the phrase was originally extracted, it served as the punchline and was addressed (by one of his friends) to Mikes, a male character that epitomizes lack of communication skills and sociability in the group. Tellingly, the reference is used five times in the course of the telling of the projection which excerpts 6-8 above are taken from as a vehicle for the gradual undermining of Mikes on the part of two of the participants and the questioning of his suitability for a date with Fotini. In this way, a reference to shared events is drawn upon as a running commentary on and a comparison base for events that have not taken place yet.

As suggested, the interactional affordances of references are numerous. In the email data, references normally "re-open" communication by looking back and alluding to co-experienced (between teller and addressee) events from a previous (as recent as last night, see excerpt 11 below) interaction as well as by providing an evaluation of them (e.g. *I am very flattered!!!!, Bless you ... mention!* in example 11 below); in some cases, a coda is also added which closes the gap between the here-and-now of the email message and the there-and-then of the participants' previous referred to interaction, by providing some kind of a follow-up to it.

(11)

Subject: Re: last night

*Kale me ehoun pei polla pragmata alla tourta genethlion proti fora! Les tora
na paroun ta myala mou aera? I am very flattered!!!!*

*Na 'sai kala - you have always been good for my morale (unlike some others I
will not deign to mention)!¹¹*

Polla filia

H tourta!!

Subject: Re: last night

Well I have been told many things but birthday cake never before! Do you think that I
will now get too big for my boots? I am very flattered!!!

Bless you - you have always been good for my morale (unlike some others I
will not deign to mention)!

Many kisses

¹¹ For a discussion of the role of switches to English in a story's evaluation, see 2005a.

The cake!!

Nonetheless, there are also one-line references to be found that are traceable to less recent, shared stories, as in the case of the adolescents' group. One such quotable fragment in the email correspondence of two close friends in the data involves: *Ti les esy kyria Koula mou?* (What d'you say, my dear Mrs Koula?). This is an agony aunt personation exploiting the connotations of an old-fashioned Hausfrau in the proper name Koula. The reference is frequent in the context of storytelling (particularly in the place of a coda) as an addressee-oriented invitation for feedback.

Finally, space considerations do not allow the discussion of another case of stories, particularly frequent in the email data, which I call *updates*: these add events and evaluative comments to an already established and ongoing story-line.

Interactional features

As shown, each of the above types of narrative present their own specific features which are in turn tied to the local norms and practices of the two communication contexts in question. In that respect, this discussion is not aimed at presenting a deceptively homogeneous picture. The contention here is nonetheless that there are broad unifying features that run through the above types of narrative and systematicities that depart significantly from what was labelled above as the canon of conventional narrative analysis. These systematicities pertain to the different stages of the stories' sequencing, that is, their initiation, subsequent telling, and response to.

Here I will single out the most important ones and discuss them with reference to the three narrative dimensions of tellership, tellability and embeddedness. By placing them in the framework of generally accepted ways of talking about narrative, I can point to the limitations in the orthodox conceptualization of these modes of operation and discuss the analytical tools needed to tap into the exigencies of narratives-in-interaction.

1) Tellership: The idea of co-construction has been frequently put forth as a new way of looking at narrative and away from the crude distinction between active teller and passive audience (e.g. see Norrick 2000). Ochs & Capps (2001) go one step further and talk about multiple co-tellers as the end of the continuum that has been little researched by conventional narrative analysis. Nonetheless, co-construction is too often used as a deceptively unified term obscuring differences in the participants' storytelling roles and types of actions raised by them. In the data at hand, for instance, it is important to note that co-tellership is afforded by the mere fact that the stories told are *not* about personal experience past events; there is a lack of privileged access to events because they have not happened yet or because they are assumed to be shared experience. This type of co-construction calls for a nuanced approach to telling roles, i.e. who tells which bit of the story and why. As I have argued elsewhere (2002), there are systematic relations to be found between telling roles and a sense of emerging story structure on one hand; and larger social roles and identities on the other hand. In other words, certain tellers contribute more than others to certain story parts (e.g. complicating action, evaluation); also, which part each of the participant contributes more or less and in what ways is shaped by as well as reveals power and other relations between the participants, roles that are accepted as holding above and beyond the immediate storytelling situation. At the same time, a contribution to a

story may take various forms and perform various actions vis-à-vis other participants' contributions ranging from affiliative (e.g. collusion, ratification) to disaffiliative (e.g. contention, disagreement, delegitimation).

To document this in detail is beyond the scope of this paper but what is important to note as an implication of the turn to narratives-in-interaction is the need to link the study of tellership with a view of narrative as a sequentially organized activity in which structure emerges on-line and is negotiated by the participants. This line of research is well-developed vis-à-vis other types of discourse activities within the conversation-analytic tradition (e.g. see Zimmerman 1998) but it is still lagging behind in narrative analysis (cf. Schegloff 1997).

2) Tellability: The context- and culture-specificity of tellability and the evaluative devices by which it is signalled have been amply documented (e.g. see Polanyi 1989, papers in Bamberg 1997). There is, however, a longstanding commitment to defining tellability on the basis of aesthetic criteria and ultimately link it with notions of performance and display of skill and efficiency. The stories in the data at hand show that this is a restrictive definition of tellability, not least as it does not sit well with a model of co-construction (see above) where more than one person is accountable for the piecing together of a story. In addition, the stories are mostly used argumentatively, so aesthetics is simply not as relevant as notions of effectiveness, appropriacy, and consequentiality for the local business on hand. These qualifications do not call for an abolition of the concept of tellability; after all, as we have seen, the participants themselves orient to what locally constitutes a tellable story. They do, however, dictate the need to open up its scope. Two cases in point in that direction are as follows:

In the context of bringing in shared stories and references argumentatively, as discussed above, participants often contest the tellability of stories by labelling them as irrelevant, unrelated to what is being talked about, the point is being made (2004). In this respect, tellability has not been linked productively with telling roles, co-tellership rights and issues of entitlement (Shuman, 1986).¹²

Another direction that the re-conceptualization of tellability needs to take is to be found in the revisiting of the relationship between actuality and possibilities. The narrative predominance of past tense accounts has meant that tellability is normally defined on the basis of bringing in possibilities to the actual event (see Labov 1997). In the data, however, this retrospective relationship is on numerous occasions reversed in favour of a prospective relationship: as we saw, it is the possible, what has not happened yet (sic projections) that is evaluated on the basis of the actual, of previous events (e.g. references) which act as interpretative viewpoints.

3) Embeddedness: As we saw in the stories at hand, they present a complex interrelationship with the participants' shared interactional history, with previously experienced events, previous stories as well as interactions in other media. In this way, the emphasis on the relationship with the local context and the conversational event needs to be expanded to capture relations of recontextualization and intertextuality, more specifically, inter-mediality and inter-narrativity; also of recontextualization. Put differently, the move away from narrative as a detachable and autonomous event (cf. Ochs & Capps 2001: 30ff) towards its embeddedness in discourse surroundings needs to be spatially and temporally expanded to capture the dis-embeddedness and the re-embeddedness of stories: the ways in which stories are

¹² Interestingly, still working with a dichotomous view of teller-listeners, Labov in his revised model (1997) defines a story's reportability as the justification for the (re)assignment of speaker role to the narrator (406).

transposed, (re)shaped and recycled across time and space in different contexts (cf. Silverstein & Urban 1996).

Conclusion: Narratives-in-interaction for identities-in-interaction

We started by arguing that canonical narratives have been seen as a privileged mode/system for the inquiry into how speakers make sense of themselves and construct their identities. It is therefore necessary at this point to consider the implications that a turn to narratives-in-interaction might have for this project. The questions that arise are: Does a focus on non-canonical stories de-privilege narrative for the study of subjectivity and identities? Is narrative still deemed crucial for the study of identity? To answer these questions, my contention is that the turn to narratives-in-interaction has to be methodologically grounded and analytically associated with the following three paradigm shifts with increasing purchase within discourse studies: a) new theories of genre, b) a view of identities-in-interaction and c) a late modern celebration of the micro-, that is, of small, unofficial, fragmented and/or non-hegemonic social practices.

To take each separately, a) new theories of genre have since the 1990s decisively moved away from formal classifications as the basis for text-distinctions to an emphasis on the members' conventionalized expectations about the activities they are engaged in, the roles and relationships typically involved and the organization systems of those activities. What this means for the study of narrative is that instead of treating it as a supra-genre with fixed structural characteristics, emphasis is placed on narrative events as dynamic and evolving responses to recurring rhetorical

situations. As the awareness that the fit between a particular text and the generic model can never be perfect (Bauman 2001: 180) grows, the question that becomes pertinent is: How do generic representations get situated and become relevant in the microcosm of specific instances of communication? Answers can only be given through a scrutiny of generic variability. Although this is not a radical claim to make for other types of discourse, in the case of narrative the situation is somewhat different: the systematic idealization, essentialization and homogenization of narrative within the framework of its primacy as a mode of communication has implicated a slower and more reluctant move to its micro-instances (for a discussion see Georgakopoulou & Goutsos 2000: 64-68). A firm interdisciplinarity between narrative and new genre approaches is necessary for exploring narratives as resources suited to carrying out certain actions in certain environments.

b) Research on identities within social sciences has recently witnessed a contextual and interactional turn on the basis of which identities are seen as discursively emergent and achieved. This irreducible situational contingency is emphasized at the expense of statically treating identities as properties that people have a priori of their interactions (see papers in Antaki & Widdicombe 1998). As locally accomplished categories, identities need to be made relevant to be consequential for any interaction and are also open to revision and refashioning.

The above turn radically redefines research on narrative for the construction of identities. Within the identities-in-interaction framework, the quest for whether narratives are better or worse, more real or more relevant resources than others for the construction of identities becomes methodologically questionable. Also, possibilities open up for looking into the interactional affordances of narrative without any prior assumptions about a necessary or automatic implication of narrative in identity work.

c) A turn to narratives-in-interaction as discussed here finds parallels in late modern theory that has become increasingly relevant in linguistics and cultural studies (for a discussion see Rampton 2005, chs 1 & 9). These stress the need for looking into fragmentation and multiplicity of social practices rather than presupposing certainty about grand theoretical frames of reference. Within this framework, narratives can be seen as ongoing projects in which improvisation, contingency, contradictions and fragmentation are equally –if not more- plausible and worthy of investigation as coherence, structure and totality. Late modern theory also urges us to reflect on research contexts and to shift our analytical lenses to hidden, small, unofficial and fragmented practices either in the fringes of official sites or in unofficial sites, away from carefully chosen cultural niches. In this respect, interview narratives are no more worthy of investigation than stories that occur within private micro-cultures such as the communication contexts of this study. Research within cultural studies (e.g. see Hey 1997) has shown that such sites present systematic features and are deemed crucial for the understanding of language and subjectivity.

The above paradigm shifts can provide an overarching theoretical coherence to a systematic turn to narratives-in-interaction at the same time as affording opportunities for much needed interdisciplinarity for the future of narrative analysis.

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