"Narrative Analysis" Thirty Years Later

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For the most part, people tell stories to do something—to complain, to boast, to inform, to alert, to tease, to explain or excuse or justify, or to provide for an interactional environment in whose course or context or interstices such actions and interactional inflections can be accomplished (M. H. Goodwin, 1989, 1990). Recipients are oriented not only to the story as a discursive unit, but to what is being done by it, with it, through it; for the story and any aspect of its telling, they can attend the "why that now" question (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). It should not be surprising that the projects that are being implemented in the telling of a story inform the design and constructional features of the story, as well as the details of the telling (Sacks, 1978). They inform as well the moment-to-moment manner of the story's uptake by its recipients (C. Goodwin, 1984; C. Goodwin & M. H. Goodwin, 1987), and that uptake in turn is taken up by the teller (if indeed there is a single teller; cf. Duranti & Brenneis, 1986; C. Goodwin, 1986; Lerner, 1992; Mandelbaum, 1993) and feeds back to affect the next increment of telling.

Design and constructional features of stories are shaped as well by an orientation to who the recipient(s) is, to how many of them there are, and who they are to one another and to the teller and what they can (or should) be supposed to know (C. Goodwin, 1981, 1986). Such quotidian storytellings arise in, or are prompted by, the ongoing course of an interactional occasion or the trajectory of a conversation or are made to interrupt it (Jefferson, 1978; Sacks, 1974, 1992). On the story's completion the interaction and its participants have been brought to some further state of talk and interaction, transformed or not—talk and interaction whose further trajectory will in some fashion be related to that story's telling (Jefferson, 1978; Sacks, 1974, 1992; Schegloff, 1992). Ordinary storytelling, in sum, is (choose your term) a coconstruction, an interactional achievement, a joint production, a collaboration, and so forth.

Although the 1967 Labov and Waletzky paper, "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience" (this issue; henceforth L&W), was important in attracting attention to the interest of ordinary persons' stories of personal experience,[1] it obscured part of what is involved in their very constitution by setting their formative examination in the context of the sociolinguistic interview, an interactional and situational context masked by the term "oral versions [of personal experience]." This formulation of their subject elevated the issue of "oral vs. written" into central prominence and glossed the telling differences (if I may put it that way) between contrasting auspices of speaking and organizations of talking in the interview on the one hand and less academically occasioned settings of storytelling on the other. Although we are celebrating the positive consequences of their paper on its 30th anniversary, it is worth detailing its unintended, less beneficial consequences in the hope of redirecting subsequent work toward a differently targeted and more compelling grasp of vernacular storytelling.

This tack may strike readers as tangential to the occasion, and in a sense it is. It starts not from an interest in *narrative* as a field for whose development L&W is central, but from a more general interest in quotidian talk-in-interaction—a domain into which most occurrences of "oral versions of personal experience" are likely to fall. Taking narrative as the focus, one opts for a discursive unit, genre, and activity across contexts of realization, pushing to the background the consequences of those contexts—however conceived—for the actual constitution of stories. Taking "talk-in-interaction" as the relevant domain, an analyst is constrained to take into account

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[1] It may be worth recalling "the times" in which L&W was produced by reference to other work and workers active in related areas, in order to complement the line drawn from L&W to this issue of *Journal of Life History and Narrative*. Recall, then, that the special issue of the *American Anthropologist* on "The Ethnography of Communication," edited by John Gumperz and Dell Hymes, appeared in 1964. Goffman's influential "The Neglected Situation" appeared in that special issue, as did Labov's "Phonological Correlates of Social Stratification," in which the basic interview techniques used by L&W are described (L&W, 1967, fn. 5). Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology* appeared in 1967. The first of Sacks' *Lectures on Conversation* (1992) were delivered in 1964 and mimeographed transcripts began circulating informally shortly thereafter. The lectures for Spring 1966 began with several lectures on storytelling (later published as "On the Analyzability of Stories by Children," Sacks, 1972), including observations on the mapping of sentence order to event order (Sacks, 1992, Vol. I, pp. 236–266; cf. the notes for an earlier version of these lectures in Fall 1965, Vol 1., 223–231). Schegloff's "Sequencing in Conversational Openings" appeared in the *American Anthropologist* in 1968. There was an informal meeting during the 1966 Linguistic Institute at UCLA at which many of these people—Garfinkel, Gumperz, Labov, Sacks, Schegloff—and others—Aaron Cicourel and Michael Moerman come to mind—met, some for the first time. For example, though Bill Labov and I had then been colleagues at Columbia for a year, we met for the first time at that UCLA encounter; it was also the first meeting of Labov and Sacks, as I recall. A few days later, there was an informal meeting at Bill Bright's house involving a partially overlapping set of people—including Goffman, for example, but not Garfinkel or Sacks—to discuss the teaching of sociolinguistics. In short, the mid-60s was a time when a range of related ways of addressing a related range of subject matters at the intersection of language, interaction, discourse, practical action and inference, and the like was being explored.

the different settings of "orality" (henceforth "talking")—in which different speech-exchange systems with different turn-taking practices differentially shape stories and the practices of storytelling, not to mention the different practical activities in whose course, and on whose behalf, storytelling may be undertaken. An analyst is so constrained because the participants embody these differences in their conduct.[2]

Taking the practices of conversation as a baseline for talk-in-interaction, what can be said about the sociolinguistic interview as a setting in which to describe an object generically formulated as "oral versions of personal experience" or narrative?

For one thing, the context of the sociolinguistic elicitation plays havoc with the motive force of the telling—the action and interactional precipitant of the tell-ing—by making the elicitation question itself the invariant occasion for telling the

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[2]"Personal experience" in this way emerges as a "type" of the larger class "narrative," a taxonomy fitted to academic and investigatory preoccupations—such as the task of collecting examples of narrative by soliciting their telling and needing to specify "what kind of story" is wanted. This, however, is an unusual way for the matter to come up in ordinary interaction. Rather than starting with "narrative" and choosing some "type," participants are likely to have something to tell, with design considerations bearing on whether to tell it minimally in a single-unit utterance, as a story, and so forth, and, if as a story, what design features for story construction to adopt. For example, in the brief excerpt that follows, Hyla and Nancy are two college students with tickets to the theater that evening to see The Dark at the Top of the Stairs. In this telephone conversation several hours before they are to meet, Nancy asks Hyla how she came to get the tickets.

Hyla, 5:06-17
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 1                    (0.8)
 2  Hyla:    [·hhhhhh]
 3  Nancy:        [How did]ju hear about it from the pape[r?
 4  Hyla:                                              [·hhhhh I sa:w-
 5                    (0.4)
 6  Hyla:    A'right when was: it,
 7                    (0.3)
 8  Hyla:    The week before my birthda:[y,]
 9  Nancy:                             [Ye] a[:h,
10  Hyla:                                   [I wz looking in the Calendar
11           section en there was u:n, (·) un a:d yihknow a liddle:: u-
12           thi:ng, ·hh[hh
13  Nancy:             [Uh hu:h,=
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Here the question asked at Line 3 is ostensibly to be answered with a simple response: "I saw … " ("ostensibly" because this may be belied by the audibly deep in-breath which precedes it ("·hhhhh") and which may project a rather longer telling in the works). That initial response-in-progress is abandoned shortly after onset, and a storytelling format begins to be deployed, the story going on for a good two pages of single-spaced transcript. This is one type of instance of having something to tell and choosing among alternative formats of telling, in contrast with starting with a story-to-be-told and choosing among types of story.

story.[3] Though the authors would surely now disavow or reject it, this seems to have embodied something of an ideal of a "null context" in which one might get at the pure shape of storytelling itself, freed of the diverse situated motives and contingencies of actual tellings. It would not be the first time in the western intellectual and scientific tradition, or even in the context of contemporary linguistics, in which an ideal form is extracted from transient "distortions" of its idiosyncratic situated occasions, however ironic such an effort appears in the midst of otherwise sustained and innovative preoccupation with linguistic variation. However, the variationism of sociolinguistics has been couched more in terms of groups and sociodemographic categories than in terms of situations and interactional contexts (Goffman, 1964).[4]

Actually, the image at work here appears to take the story or narrative as already formed, as waiting to be delivered, to fit in or be trimmed to fit the context into which it is to be inserted. In this regard it resembles common conceptions of speech acts, whose constitutive conditions and properties are autonomous, which have their origins in the psychology of the individual (whether in intentions or experiences and memories) and which are then stitched into the occasions on which they are enacted. One does not find here the sense of an ongoing interaction in which consequential next moments of the participants' lives are being lived together (in contrast to the content of the stories being elicited, in which that property is valued) with the stories being touched off or mobilized by those moments, with the telling constituted to serve the exigencies of those moments and being shaped thereby.

This image of narrative was (and is) both reflected in, and fostered by, the data with which L&W worked, at least as displayed in the 1967 paper. Although it was an important step to present the data, to devote a whole separate section of the paper to the "texts," when we look at "the data" today, a number of striking observations present themselves:

1. They report nothing (no talk or other conduct) by the recipient(s) in the course of the telling.
2. They report nothing (no talk or other conduct) by the recipient(s) at the end, on the completion of the story.
3. They report no silences "in the course" of the story to indicate where else (earlier) the story might have been (designed to be) possibly complete, without fruition.

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[3] If the inquiry for a story was designed to implement some other action or interactional tack, or was so understood by its recipients, L&W do not tell us. The same goes for the telling that ensued, though we might suppose the common "motive" of "helping science" to have been mobilized (cf. Orne, 1959, 1962; Rosenthal, 1966).

[4] The problem is not the aim of arriving at some underlying practices or structures of narrative, only the effort to do so by stripping away naturally occurring circumstantial detail by intervening in the data collection (thereby distorting the data), rather than by arriving at it by analysis of naturally occurring "specimens."

4. They report no hesitations, hitches, or other deviations from smooth delivery in the course of the telling, nor any problems in its uptake during the course of the telling.

In short, there is nothing interactional in the data at all other than the eliciting question, which takes on a role much like that of an experimental stimulus to occasion the production of the already formed story waiting to be told.

Of course, L&W could not do everything, could not take everything into account, could not anticipate developments that were still embryonic at the time of the 1967 paper. Still, it is striking to what degree features of the 1967 paper have remained characteristic of treatments of narrative. This analytic tack has remained acceptable, and indeed celebrated, because it has fit so well with the academic tradition of ex cathedra decisions on analytic focus. I speak here of the academy, not of L&W.

Academics—whether literary, linguistic, psychological, and so forth—have wished to focus on narrative per se, so that is what they studied or how they formulated what they studied. A focus on the structure of narrative as an autonomous discursive form was consistent with the structuralism that dominated academic culture in the 1960s from the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss to the then-recent turn of literary studies, and which allowed an extension of themes familiar from literary studies to the study of the vernacular. They have collectively disattended the fact that, unlike the narratives examined in literary studies that are ordinarily singly authored (however sensitive to social and cultural context), in the natural social world narrative—in the form of the telling of stories in ordinary talk-in-interaction—is an organic part of its interactional environment. If it is disengaged from its environment, much is lost that is constitutive of its occurrence there. Even many of those otherwise committed to "coconstruction" as a theme of social, cultural, and linguistic practice might be drawn to disengage stories from the detailed interactional context of their telling by this effort to focus on narrative structure per se or by the uses to which it may be put. Thereby, the "product-narrative," or an idealized version of narrative structure, logic, rhetoric, and so forth, has been disengaged from its context of production and reception and has become reinforced as a rich discursive resource, deployable for a wide variety of other interpretive undertakings, unconstrained by the symbiotic relation otherwise obtaining between a story and the occasion of its telling. But back to L&W.

L&W took the key problems of securing oral narratives of personal experience for analysis to be those of authenticity and spontaneity—how to get their tellers to transcend Labov's version of the observer's paradox (Labov, 1970, p. 47), the formality and hypercorrection of speech that set in with overt observation by outsiders, a problem which Labov had already encountered and described in other work. Part of the solution was to elicit stories so exciting and engaging to tell that the tellers would lose themselves in the very drama of the

telling (hence stories about "a time you were almost killed," etc.). At the same time, avoiding "contamination" by the observer led to an enforced reserve in the uptake of stories by the elicitor that could not but problematize the trajectory of the telling and the shape of the resultant story—especially in the case of a dramatic or "exciting" story. *In this respect, in treating the recipient as basically extraneous* (and hence a source of "bias"), in treating the narrative as "belonging to" the basic unit of western culture—the individual doing the telling (the talking head)—the opportunity was missed to re-situate the narrative in social context, to see that the recipient(s) is an irremediable component of a story's telling. Even if recipients stay blank (and perhaps especially then), their presence and conduct enters into the story's telling. Nor are the consequences of having proceeded in this way trivial or incidental. They go to the heart of the mat-ter—the characterization of the anatomy of ordinary storytelling. For example, *the presence of a summary theme or evaluation in L&W's account may well* reflect the formative effect of the elicitation session and the eliciting inquiry as the occasion for telling. When stories come up "naturally," such summings-up by teller are often not present (they may rather be articulated by recipients as part of a receipt sequence), and if they are present, it can testify to "trouble" in *the uptake of the story (Jefferson, 1978, pp. 228–237).*

Or consider the possible effects of the decision to solicit "stories of almost being killed" for their capacity to secure involved and spontaneous telling. This seems to be predicated on the view that "type of story" or "topic of story" is nonconsequential *for its anatomy or structure and that only spontaneity is specially associated with* it. This may well be so, but there is some past experience with this issue and some evidence that what stories are about (given their recipients, etc.) may be nonarbi-trarily related to the trajectory of telling.

Jefferson (1980, 1988), for example, observed that she was initially reluctant to *get involved in a proposed study of "talk about troubles," suspecting that it was a* structurally nonconsequential matter, focussed on a topic designed to be of interest for analytically extraneous reasons. Once engaged with the data, however, she found that "troubles-telling" mobilized distinctive interactional stances from both teller and recipients, engendered distinctive trajectories of telling and uptake *(Jefferson & Lee, 1981), and so forth. Similarly, Schegloff (1976/1984) found that* "opposition-type stories in which teller was one of the protagonists" served to pose issues of alignment for recipients which could in turn have consequences for how the telling was brought to a close.

However "obvious" in retrospect, neither of these *distinctive features,* nor that these were relevant ways of "typologizing" stories, was accessible in advance. Whatever the virtues of stories about having almost been killed, when disengaged from the details of the context of their telling and in particular from their uptake-

in-their-course by their recipients, we cannot know what distinctive features of structure or interactional enactment they occasion.[5]

To sum up, there have been some developments over these 30 years in our understanding of talk-in-interaction and conversation in particular, and they suggest *some directions of inquiry that merit more serious attention by those interested in* narrative as a dressed-up version of storytelling. For example:

Consider the differences between storytellings by reference to their conditions of launching—between those which themselves launch a sequence and those which are "responsive," that is, between storytellings that have to "make their own way" and those that are responsive to inquiry, to invitation, to solicitation, or can be introduced under that guise. Here we are noting not only the special character of stories "in second position" in the sense of being produced in answer to a question *as compared to ones that launch a spate of talk*, but that there can be striking differences between stories that have been *sol*icited (and further between those already-known stories that are solicited and those not previously known) and those that are *el*icited, in which a question gets a story without having specifically asked *for one (as in the excerpt reproduced in Footnote 2).*

Consider the differences between stories analyzably used to do something and those apparently told "for their own sake."

Consider the relation between a story proper and the practices of storytelling, *and the storytelling sequence, by which it is constructed and conveyed.*

Consider the fact that one consequence of a storytelling can be the touching off of another storytelling (Sacks, 1992, Vol. 1, pp. 764–772; Vol. 2, pp. 3–17, 249–68). Subsequent stories are mobilized in recipients' memory by a story's telling just *because they can serve as displays of understanding of, and alignment (or misalign-*ment) with, prior stories. Such a consequence is both background and prospect for storytelling in conversation. A "subsequent story" is designed for the place in a course of tellings that it is to occupy. Consider, then, the differences in storytellings *by reference to their place in such a sequence of tellings. This is especially relevant* for stories of personal experience, and much is lost by not incorporating it, for

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[5] Here again there are analytic particulars, not hypothetical speculations, to be considered. For example, in the stretch of talk taken up in C. Goodwin, 1986, and Schegloff, 1987, 1992, the telling of a story is prompted for its dramatic, exciting character to escape the displayed boring character of the talk otherwise going on. However, the telling is no sooner launched than the auspices of its telling, the premise of its dramatic character, are challenged, and turn out to compromise the course of the telling. Where "excitement" is offered as relief from ennui, it may be taken as a complaint about the current active speakers and prompt responses which impact the teller quite differently from the "exciting" stories elicited in the L&W. These too might have been compromised (or differently told) had others, familiar with the tale and the events it reported, been present to the telling. However, the elicitation setting provides a more antiseptic and hothouse environment, and in this respect at least, an unnatural one.

example, in collecting stories of the Holocaust. However, this is a consequence of severing narratives from their origins as stories told in real-life interaction.

Whatever findings may emerge from such inquiries, given that story recipients may contest the initial premises of the telling (C. Goodwin, 1986, pp. 298–301; Sacks, 1974, pp. 340–344), that the telling can be substantially shaped by such contestation (C. Goodwin, 1986, 301–302), or by other "interpolations" by recipients (Lerner, 1992; Mandelbaum, 1993), and that whether, where, and how the story and storytelling end can be contingent on the occurrence and form of recipient uptake (Jefferson, 1978, pp. 228–237; Schegloff, 1992, pp. 203–214), one might entertain the possibility that the constitutive practices of storytelling incorporate recipients and that storytelling abstracted from its interactional setting, occasioning, and uptake is an academically hybridized form. A search for the vernacular or quotidian counterpart to literary narrative could benefit from a redirection from this path.

A body of conversation-analytic work over the last several decades has found that the organization and practices of talk-in-interaction in specialized (often work) settings is generally best described as a modification or transformation of the organization of talk in ordinary conversation (Drew & Heritage, 1992a, 1992b; Heritage, 1984; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). For example, the practices and organization of talk in classrooms, courts, news interviews, therapy sessions, and so forth all stand in systematic, describable relations to the organization and practices of ordinary conversation.[6] "Elicitation sessions" appear to be a specialized setting and speech exchange system (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) as well. They ought to be understood by reference to ordinary interaction, as should the activities (like storytelling) that occur in them—and not the other way around.

Just because L&W was an early entry, very likely the first, in the effort to describe "ordinary" narrative does not mean that other story types, otherwise contexted and occasioned, should be described by comparison to their account. Although stories like those described by L&W surely get told, in ordinary conversation they take work to achieve, work that may vary from occasion to occasion, yielding stories that vary from occasion to occasion, or ones whose invariance took doing. We do not get to see any of that in L&W or to suspect it.

I have focused attention on the half of the cup that is empty, not the half that is full. L&W sought to bring attention from the stories that preoccupied students of high literature to those of ordinary folks. They sought to bridge the chasm between

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[6]This goes specifically to the practices of storytelling in such settings as well. For example, with respect to talk in therapy sessions, Sacks (1992, vol. 1, pp. 767–768) called attention to Fromm-Reichmann's observation that a key problem in the training of therapists and in the practice of therapy is listening to the stories of others without having those stories mobilize in the therapist subsequent stories ("second stories") of their own experience. Her remarks exemplify the notion of specialized settings as transformations of ordinary conversational practice—therapists-in-training have to neutralize or suppress practices of story reception in ordinary conversation in favor of ones fitted to the technical tasks of therapeutic interaction. For another setting, see also Pomerantz (1987).

formalism and functionalism by taking on both jobs. This is the full half. They isolated the ordinary folks in the artificial environment of the academic elicitation and thereby suppressed the possibility of observing the very functions they hoped to link to their formal account. This is the empty half. There is, then, ample work remaining to be done.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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