

# Culture & Communication

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Lecture 15: Family Narratives

# Topics

The concepts of “narrative,” story, report . (OBJECT, DATA)

Different methods of study <- methods of collecting stories (METHODS)

Analytic categories (used for the analysis), **parts of narratives**, types of narrative, types of participants (THEORY)

## 4 Traditions of Study of Oral Narratives

1. Folklore and performance studies (e.g., Richard Bauman) (Method: audio-recording of verbal “artists”, elicited)
2. Grammar in discourse, narrative syntax (e.g., William Labov) (Method: audio recording of interviews about life experience: Q: “Were you ever in a situation where you were in serious danger of getting killed?”)
3. Conversation Analysis (e.g., Emanuel Schegloff, Charles & Marjorie H. Goodwin) (Method: audio-recording or video recording of spontaneous conversations)
4. Language socialization (e.g., Ochs & Taylor, see *Reader*) (Method: video recording of family interactions at regular dinner time)

## Elicited Stories

Interviewer: Oh, the other one I wanted to ask you about was, um ... what's his name, the man that you bought Bill [a horse] from? Uh ... I never ...

C. Rogers: Johnny Fredericks?

Interviewer: Yeah! Right, Johnny Fredericks, yeah ... I wanted you to tell me about him because he was such a good character.

C. Rogers: Well, Johnny was quite a drinker, you know, and uh, he and Cal Markham, uh, went somewhere one day and ... and told his wife to pick him up at this certain gate to the ranch, and [story continues]

(from Richard Buaman (1986) *Story, Performance, Event*, Cambridge UP)

# Labov's categories

Abstract, ex. *Should I tell you about the first man who got killed by a car here?*

Orientation, ex. *This was just a few days after my father had died.*

Complicating action, ex. *he asked me what I was doing*

Evaluation, ex. *and I said to myself "this is it."*

Resolution, ex. *we managed to pull over to a service road and waited there till the storm ended*

(Coda) ex. *And that was that.*

but when my husband died

(ABSTRACT)

Well that Friday evenin' I was embroidering

(ORIENTATION)

I love to sew – embroidering, I was embroidering

and he asked me what I was embroidering

(COMPLICATING ACTION)

I said, I'm embroidering some pillow cases."

He said, "For who?"

I said, "For us, when you retire" 'cause he was gonna retire pretty soon.

He said, Not for me" he said, "You're not embroidering them for me."

I said, "Well, this is not for you," I said "well when you *die*"

I said, "Well I'll just get another man,"

I said "and I'll enjoy 'em with another man," teasing, you know.

So, about five o'clock that evening he come

An' he hugged me.

And he kissed me.

He said, "Well babe," he says uhm, he said, "you wanna get -

You can get married again.

You can do anything you want!"

I said, "look man, don't come around me

(EVALUATION)

Talking about death.

I'll go out in the yard somewhere,

I don't

want to hear nothing about death."

He said, "Well I'll let you find out tomorrow."

(RESOLUTION)

# Different kinds of narratives (Ochs)

- 1) Reports temporal sequence, past oriented, no causal sequence.
- 2) Stories of personal experience: a problem-centered past-time narrative, oriented toward solving some aspect of the narrated events.
- 3) Agendas temporal sequence without causal links, future-oriented.
- 4) Plans temporal and causal sequence, future-oriented.



**Reports** and **Agendas** articulate a temporal sequence of events but do not organize physical states, thoughts, emotions, and/or actions *as outcomes or responses to a pivotal unexpected Precipitating Events*.

NARRATIVE TYPE:	TEMPORAL SEQUENCE	CAUSAL SEQUENCE	TIME ORIENTATION
Reports	+	-	past
Stories	+	+	past
Agendas	+	-	future
Plans	+	+	future

## Report:

Mother: *((turning to Lucy))* I - really don't wanna ask you about your day mouse cuz we all know it was not the best

Father: [Well? - (we wanta )

Mother: [**You wanna tell Daddy about what -  
what happened this morning?**

Father: mhm? - I wanna hear about that

Mother: You woke up - and then what

Lucy: Okay we went um to our swimming lessons?  
and then we went to see - Snow White-

Wait! There was a note right there *((pointing to center of table))*

Father: Yes I saw

(0.2 pause)

Lucy: (Three film's playing)

Father: mhm (I do/knew) [continues next page]

Lucy: ( )

Father: mhm

(0.6 pause)

Lucy: Then we went to McDonald's<sup>↑</sup> for lunch.

Chuck:(and they had Leggos?)

(0.4 pause) *((Dad looks to Chuck, then turns immediately back to Lucy))*

Chuck:and

Lucy: I got a Big Mac - (and um)

Mother: Christopher got the [hamburger

Lucy: [Then we came ho::me - [then I

Chuck: [(I know)

Lucy: went to gym and you know what gym's !like?

*((report continues))*

# Stories of Personal Experience

1) the narrative contains at least two temporally ordered clauses referring to at least two past-time events (Labov and Waletzky, 1968; Labov 1972); and

2) the narrative centers around a past event--often referred to as the 'inciting event' (Sharff, 1982) or 'initiating event' (Stein and Glenn, 1979) - that is presented as inciting an internal/psychological or external/physical response or condition.

The initiating or inciting event roughly corresponds to the 'complicating action' of a narrative of personal experience described by Labov & Waletzky (1968).

Molly: (Oh) this chair broke - today

Patrick: I know

Molly: No:: I mean it rea[lly broke today

Patrick: [ I know

Patrick: I know?

Molly: Oh you knew that it was split?

Patrick:: yeah?,

Molly: The whole wood('s) split?

Patrick: yeah,

Molly: Oh did you do it?

(0.4 pause)

Patrick: I don't know if I did it [but I saw that it wa: s=

Molly; [(oh)

...

Molly: Yeah I sat down in it and the whole thing split  
so I -*((bending over as if to indicate where on chair))*  
I ti[e:d

Patrick *[(somewhat bratty intonation))* That's (a) rea:l si:gn  
that you need to go on a di:et.  
*((storytelling continues))*

# Ochs & Taylor's analytic categories

1. **Protagonist**, leading character, present or absent, in a narrated event.
2. **Introducer**, co-narrator who initiates the narrative (Elicitor or Initial Teller)
3. **Primary recipient**, the co-narrator(s) to whom the narrative is not just told but “oriented” (-> Recipient Design concept). (Family Judge role)
4. **Problematizer**, co-narrator who problematizes the action, thought, feeling of Protagonist.
5. **Problematizee**, co-narrator whose actions, thoughts, etc are rendered problematic.

# The “Father knows best” Dynamic

“Within this dynamic, the father is typically set up - through his own and others’ recurrent narrative practices - to be primary audience, judge, and critic of family members’ actions, conditions, thoughts, and feelings as narrative protagonists (actors in the past) or as co-narrators (actors in the present).” (p. 436)

“... the women as mothers and wives that contribute to this dynamic, instantiating and modeling in their conduct as narrators a pervasive orientation toward fathers as evaluators.” (Ochs & Taylor, ib.)

Conversation resumes at the dinner table after mother (M) talks on the phone with her mother.



1. F: So as you were saying?
2. M: I can't remember what was I telling you
3. F; I don't know.
4. M: oh about the dress?
5. F: the dress.
6. (1.2)
7. F: You had a dress right?
8. M: Your mother bought me it.
9. My mother didn't like it.
10. (0.4)
11. F: *((shaking head no once))* You're kidding
12. M: no

13. F: You gonna return it?  
14. M: No you can't return it.  
15. It wasn't too expensive.  
16. it was from Loehmann's.  
17. (0.8)  
18. M: so what I'll probably do? is wear it to the dinner the night  
before,  
19. when we go to the Marriott,  
20. (1.8)  
21. F : (Doesn't that sound) like a helluva waste?  
21. M: no:?  
[...]

## Context & Identities

Does it make a difference if you know that in the previous exchange

A = Husband

B = Wife

and that they are talking during dinner time?

# Final Questions

What have you learned about narratives?

What can we learn from analyzing narratives?