# 10 Narrative Analysis in Linguistic Research

Julio C. Gimenez

*People are always tellers of tales*

Paul Sartre

## Chapter outline

This chapter introduces the key elements of traditional and new emerging socio-linguistic approaches to the analysis of narratives, focusing specifically on *narrative networks*. It illustrates how a narrative networks approach examines narratives not only as texts, but also as representative of an array of social processes in their own contexts of production and consumption. The chapter first reviews the main definitions of narratives and illustrates traditional analytical perspectives, namely the componential and functional analyses. It then presents narrative networks: its origins and theoretical principles. It outlines a step-by-step procedure for designing and analysing networks, showing how they can facilitate the critical analysis of narratives as sociolinguistic manifestations.

## 10.1 Introduction

Narrative, broadly defined as a 'recounting of things spatiotemporarily distant' (Toolan, 2001: 1), has been the focus of linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse analysis for the past 40 years. In fact, a decade ago this ever growing interest in narrative was termed 'the narrative turn' in several human sciences (Brockmeier and Harré, 1997). Since then, narratives have been examined in a plethora of studies, covering fields as diverse as accounting (e.g. Sydserff and

Weetman, 1999), language and gender (e.g. Coates, 2003), health and illness (e.g. Balfe, 2007) and technology (Pentland and Feldman, 2007).

The beginnings of narrative analysis can be traced back to Aristotle who, in his work *Poetics*, outlined the structure of plots in narratives. More contemporary analyses have been influenced by Labov and Waletzky's (1967) seminal analytical framework. Labov and Waletzky (1967) identified the 'narrative clause' (e.g. '[She left the house] and [he called the police]') as the basic unit in personal narratives and indicated that the order of clauses represents the sequence of events as they actually happened. If, for example, the clauses in 'She left the house and he called the police' were changed to 'He called the police and she left the house', they would be implying a different sequence of events and thus a different narrative. They concluded that clauses in a narrative can perform five different functions. Labov (1972) further expanded the functions to six (abstract, orientation, complication, resolution, evaluation and coda), creating one of the most influential models for analysing personal narratives.

The emphasis on the structural analysis of formal elements in narratives suggested by these early models has created, however, a notable tendency to examine narratives as isolated, self-contained accounts of past experience. While this type of analysis has made invaluable contributions to various fields (e.g. linguistics, discourse studies and genre studies) and has been adequate for the analysis of individual narratives, it may not be sufficient to establish connections between personal narratives and the social issues they evoke. In this respect, analysing narratives in isolation has largely overlooked the discursive connections that can be made between groups of narratives or discourses produced in the same sociolinguistic context and the social patterns which frame and sustain them.

This chapter adopts the view that narratives are sociolinguistic manifestations as well as discursive constructions of an array of social processes. It argues that a sociolinguistic analysis of narratives should examine not only their formal elements but also the sociolinguistic elements that surround narratives, thus furthering our understanding of the social phenomena reflected in individual narratives. The chapter starts with a discussion of the main definitions used in narrative studies and a review of how narratives have traditionally been analysed with examples from the field of linguistics (section 10.2). It then focuses on narrative networks as an alternative method of analysis and presents a step-by-step procedure for designing and analysing the networks (section 10.3).

# 10.2  The study of narrative: An overview

In the Western tradition we have been fascinated with narratives since Greek times. Aristotle was the first to describe the structure of narrative plots as having a beginning, a middle and an end; a description that most guidelines for the composition and analysis of narrative still follow to date (Hogan, 2006). But before considering how narratives have been traditionally analysed, let us look at the definitions that have influenced narrative studies in linguistics.

## 10.2.1  Defining narrative

Our fascination with narrative is mirrored not only in the number of studies and books published in the past four decades but also in the multiplicity of terms that have been used to refer to narrative. *Narrative* is often used inter-changeably with 'story', 'life story', 'account', 'discourse', 'narration' and 'tale' with little or no difference in meaning. The term 'narrative' itself also refers to various things: 'the telling of something', 'a story' or 'stories' and a method of analysis as in 'narrative inquiry'.

Coupled with this variety of terms, there are many definitions of narrative, of which the most oft-quoted is Labov and Waletzky's: 'any sequence of clauses which contains at least one temporal juncture' (1967: 28). The notion of temporal juncture is central to their definition as it is a distinguishing feature of narratives that creates a link between the sequence of events and the clauses that describe them. To illustrate this, consider Extract 1 below which includes 'and' (line 3) as a temporal juncture:

> **Extract 1**
> (1) I know a boy named Harry
> (2) Another boy threw a bottle at him right in the head,
> (3) and he had to get seven stitches.
>
> (Labov, 1972: 361)

Labov and Waletzky's definition is rather technical, primarily focusing on the formal elements that make up a narrative. It is, however, consistent with their analytical approach which examines the structural elements in narratives. This is described in more detail in section 10.2.2.

Working with life stories, Linde (1993: 21) offers a more sociolinguistic definition of narrative. She defines a life story as consisting of 'all the stories and associated discourse units, such as explanations and chronicles, and the connections between them, told by an individual during the course of his/her lifetime'. Linde further explains that life stories make a point about the speaker, not about the world, are tellable (i.e. they have a reason to be told) and are told and retold over a long period of time. Similarly, Ochs and Capps (1996: 21) define life histories as narrations in which people represent their 'selves' in relation to their physical and emotional environment and through which they 'come to know [themselves], apprehend experiences and navigate relationships with others'. Thus a 'multiplicity of selves', suggest Ochs and Capps (1996: 22), can be represented in the same story.

In their study of narrative research, Lieblich et al. (1998: 8) define narratives as stories which 'are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these remembered facts'. Like Linde, Lieblich et al. focus specifically on the story and the narrator, which is also part of their new framework for narrative analysis (for more details, see section 10.2.2.3). Along similar lines, in their recent work on narrative as a research method Webster and Mertova (2007: 1) state that 'narrative records human experience through the construction and reconstruction of personal stories'. They add that because narrative presents complex issues, its analysis should move beyond the structural elements that make up a story into 'the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates' (p. 4). To this purpose, Webster and Mertova's is another new analytical framework for narrative research, based on *critical events* within narratives, that is, incidents that reveal 'a change of understanding in worldview by the story teller' (2007: 73). Both Lieblich et al. (1998) and Webster and Mertova (2007) are important studies because they represent an attempt to reach a compromise between the two dominant approaches to the study of narrative described in sections 10.2.2.1 and 10.2.2.2.

The terms and definitions presented above reflect both the immense surge in the interest in narrative and how the study of narrative has evolved over time. Since Aristotle's definition of the structure of narratives, through Labov and Waletzky's analysis of their formal elements, to more sociolinguistics readings like those proposed by Ochs and Capps, narratives have been analysed mainly following either a componential or a functional analytical approach.

## 10.2.2 Analysing narrative

C*omponential analysis*[1] aims to identify the different elements that constitute a narrative and how these elements interact and change as a result of their interaction (Hogan, 2006), while the *functional analysis* examines the purpose(s) of narrative. Although these are two inextricably linked approaches, what narratives describe and what they accomplish are two completely different things (Brockmeier and Harré, 1997). The sections that follow examine how these two broad divisions in narrative analysis have been used in linguistics.

### 10.2.2.1 Componential analysis of narrative

The *componential approach* has been highly influential in narrative analysis. It was the preferred approach in early studies (e.g. Labov and Waletzky, 1967). Here I will illustrate the main features of the componential approach with examples from Labov and Waletzky's (1967) and Linde's (1993) studies.

As stated above, the componential approach aims to identify the basic structure of a narrative and to examine the sequence of its clauses. This sequential arrangement can then be used to determine the functions of the clauses. One prominent example of the componential approach is Labov and Waletzky's (1967). Apart from narrative clauses, they identified three types of clauses which maintain the strict temporal sequence:

- *free clauses*: they can be displaced without disrupting the match between the clause and the event sequence, and are normally used to provide background information about a central action or situation in the narrative
- *co-ordinate clauses*: they can have a number of complex relations to the narrative sequence
- *restricted clauses*: they are less fixed to the sequence than a narrative clause, but less free to be displaced than a free clause.

In Extract 2 below the first three clauses are free clauses (lines 1–3). They set the scene for the narrative: the situation, the action and the characters. The fourth (line 4) and fifth clauses (line 5) are narrative clauses. Clauses six and seven (lines 6 and 7) are examples of co-ordinate clauses, related to the narrative clause which immediately precedes them. Lines 13–14 offer an example of a restricted clause which could have been placed before the narrative clause (line 5) without affecting the logical sequence of the narrative, but the word 'either' at the end of it restricts its position in the sequence.

**Extract 2**

 (1)  and so we was doing the 50-yard dash
 (2)  there was about eight or ten of us, you know,
 (3)  going down, coming back
 (4)  and, going down the third time, I caught cramps
 (5)  and I started yelling 'Help!'
 (6)  but the fellows didn't believe me, you know,
 (7)  they thought I was just trying to catch up
 (8)  because I was going on or slowing down
 (9)  so all of them kept going
(10)  they leave me
(11)  and so I started going down
(12)  Scoutmaster was up there
(13)  he was watching me
(14)  but he didn't pay me no attention either

<div align="right">(Labov and Waletzky, 1967: 31)</div>

As can be seen from the analysis above, by isolating the formal structure of narratives Labov and Waletzky identified the sequences in which clauses can be arranged in a narrative. This, in turn, enabled them to demonstrate the different functions the clauses performed. These functions were: orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution and coda, to which Labov (1972) added the abstract. The abstract, found at the beginning of the narrative, announces that the narrator has a story to tell. Orientation is used to orient the listener as to person, place, time and situation, and is usually found in the first clauses of a narrative which tend to be of the free type. In Extract 2 above, the first three free clauses (lines 1–3) serve the orientation function. Complication, the second function, is performed by the clauses in the main body of the narrative (lines 4–11) and denotes a series of events leading to a result. Evaluation reveals the attitude that the narrator holds towards the narrative. Most narratives, Labov and Waletzky explained, end with a resolution; the results of the complication of the narrative. Some, however, have an extra function called 'coda' which returns the verbal perspective of the narrative to the moment of narrating, that is, the present.

Linde's (1993) analysis of narratives about people's choice of profession also illustrates the componential approach. Linde focused on how different elements in a story and in the listener–speaker interaction combined to create coherence through *causality* and *continuity*. She defined causality as what 'is acceptable by addressees as a good reason for some particular event or sequence of events' (p. 127), whereas continuity has to do with the normal progression

of events in a story. Both are necessary in order to explain how narrators manage to keep their narratives coherent in the face of discrepant events which may threaten the causality or continuity of their narratives. Thus narrators may use a series of strategies which include presenting accidents, for example, as unimportant, implying that in the end their choice was appropriate; distancing themselves from previous, sometimes younger and inexperienced selves; or suggesting that the discontinuity was only temporary. In Extract 3 below, taken from Linde (1993), the narrator uses the orientation function to explain how he went into Renaissance studies (lines 2–3). However, he later justifies this 'accident' by evaluating the complication as the right thing to do (line 9), thus making the accident look less important.

> **Extract 3**
> (1) That was more or less an accident.
> (2) Uh, I started out in Renaissance studies,
> (3) but I didn't like any of the people I was working with,
> (4) and at first I thought I would just leave Y and go to another university
> (5) uh but a medievalist at Y university asked me to stay or at least reconsider
> (6) whether I should leave or not,
> (7) and um pointed out to me that I had done very well in the medieval course
> (8) that I took with him and that I seemed to like it,
> (9) and he was right. I did
> (10) And he suggested that I switch fields and stay at Y.
> (11) And that's how I got into medieval literature.
>
> (Linde, 1993: 84)

Although Labov and Waletzky's approach has been criticized for its insufficient attention to context and audience (Langellier, 1989) and Linde's for its lack of attention to linguistic details (Herman, 1996), their work has set an analytical standard for the componential approach.

### 10.2.2.2  Functional analysis of narrative

The other traditional way of analysing narratives is the *functional approach*, which mainly examines the purpose(s) of narratives. Among the multiple functions that narrative can serve, the most widely studied is the representational function: how narrators represent or interpret the world (Schiffrin, 1996); how they represent self and others (e.g. Dyer and Keller-Cohen, 2000); and how they construct their – gendered, ethnic or class identities (e.g. Goodwin, 2003).

Cheshire's (2000) study of narratives and gender in adolescent friendships follows an analytical framework which consists of three basic components: the tale (the narrative), the teller (the narrator) and the telling (the act of narration). Cheshire demonstrates not only that the way the tale structures experience differs between boys and girls and that the ways in which a teller represents self and other also differs according to gender but also, and probably most interestingly, that the telling is used by boys and girls for different purposes. Cheshire shows that in most of the boys' narratives there are elements of inclusion of other speakers and co-construction of familiar narrative which are used 'to create a sense of group identity through the telling of a story' (2000: 242). This sometimes results in narratives being told in a 'disorganized' way, but it reinforces the idea that boys are more interested in the telling of the story than in the story itself. Girls, however, narrate stories of a more individual nature, are not so inclined to co-construction, but produce narratives which are more coherent. This, suggests Cheshire, seems to emphasize the idea that girls are more interested in the story than in the act of narration.

Extract 4 below, shows how the act of telling serves Nobby, the main narrator, to create a sense of group identity. This is contrasted with Extract 5, Julie's personal narrative about how her brother burnt his leg (both transcripts and their transcription conventions can be found in Cheshire, 2000).

**Extract 4**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (1) | Nobby: | and then my dada had to keep it there for about two days I think it |
| (2) | | was wasn't it Ben? |
| (3) | Ben: | yeah |
| (4) | Nobby: | cos it crashed outside your house didn't it? A lorry hit his wall . . . his |
| (5) | | house wall |
| (6) | Ben: | we was sitting in there aren't we . . . me and her . . . watching the telly . . . and |
| (7) | | it goes scrapping along our fucking wall . . . went in the back and went |
| (8) | | 'aah' the old man goes 'and what you been doing' . . . 'It's a |
| (9) | | fucking . . . er well . . . it's a lorry' |
| (10) | Nobby: | and his dad thought it was him! |

(Cheshire, 2000: 242)

**Extract 5**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (1) | Julie: | my brother he must have been daft cos he came back from Spain |
| (2) | | and he was ever so tired . . . we was downstairs and anyway I went out and he |

(3)     was fast asleep lying in the fire and . . . your know the fire was on
        full . . . and he
(4)     burnt his leg he had a big blister on it . . . he didn't even know
        he'd
(5)     done it didn't even feel it I thought ooh

                                                        (Cheshire, 2000: 242)

In Extract 4 Nobby includes Ben by using an addressee-oriented tag (wasn't it Ben?, line 2) and by encouraging Ben to co-tell the tale that is familiar to both of them. These are two ways in which boys usually constructed group identity in these narratives of adolescent friendship. In Extract 5, however, Julie narrates a personal story which shows no elements of co-construction or familiarity with the story on the part of the addressees.

The extracts above illustrate the analytical divide between the forms and the functions of narratives. In an attempt to avoid this analytical division, Lieblich et al. (1998) have combined both types of analyses, offering a framework based on two dimensions by which narratives can be read: the holistic – categorical, and the content – form dimensions (see Lieblich et al., 1998, for a discussion). Webster and Mertova's framework (2007), see section 10.2.1, also attempts to reach a compromise between the componential and functional analyses.

The approaches briefly reviewed in this section have examined narratives as individual and self-contained stories, sometimes making very little or loose connections with their larger sociolinguistic contexts. Placing narratives in their macrosociolinguistic context of production and consumption, however, can shed new light on the representational functions they serve in their local and social contexts. This is the focus of the next section.

## 10.3  Narrative networks

The term 'narrative networks' was first used by Bearman and his colleagues (Bearman et al., 1999; Bearman and Stovel, 2000) to describe how the structural elements in a narrative create an internal network of meanings which supports the holistic interpretation of a story. Despite carrying the label 'narrative networks', their work has also focused on isolated, discrete elements of narratives.

In this section, a different taking on the word 'network' is offered. A narrative network is defined as a group of stories, texts and artefacts collected

around the emerging issues in a core narrative. The network shows not only what the stories, the texts, the artefacts and the core narrative have in common, but also how they differ, thus broadening the analytical perspective and helping tensions and contradictions emerge during analysis (Gimenez, 2005; Solis, 2004). Narrative networks can then help highlight the links between the local and social functions that narratives represent. The meanings and functions of personal narratives enacted in their local contexts normally reflect a more macro set of social meanings and patterns, which are best captured when local narratives are networked with other narratives, texts and artefacts produced in both local and global contexts.

## 10.3.1 Theoretical principles in narrative networks

From an epistemological perspective, narrative networks can be placed within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA; see Chapter 6). Although a thorough review of CDA is beyond the scope of this chapter,[2] I will here define it and review some of the criticism it has attracted.

In Chouliaraki and Fairclough's words (1999: 6), CDA establishes a dialogic connection between 'critical social science and linguistics' in a single theoretical and analytical framework. Wodak further (2001: 2) points out that CDA is concerned with 'analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language'. Thus, CDA takes a particular interest in the relationship between language and power and moves beyond the linguistic boundaries of the written or spoken texts it analyses to examine the multiplicity of historical, political and institutional forces (including values, interests and beliefs) operating in a single given text.

CDA has created immense interest in fields such as media communication (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999), business and economy (Fairclough, 2001), education (Baxter, 2002), and language and gender (Lazar, 2005). It has also attracted a good deal of criticism, mainly in connection with its terminology, methodology and data analysis procedures. Widdowson (2004) has been especially critical of the fuzziness with which concepts such as 'text', 'discourse' and 'context' are used in CDA. He suggests that making a theoretical and analytical distinction between them will help analysts avoid confounding analysis, interpretation and explanation, an arguable shortcoming of some CDA analyses. Coupled with the ambiguity of its concepts, CDA has also been criticized for failing to establish a clear methodology, and lacking theoretical rigour in its

formal analysis (Schegloff, 1997). The third area of concern relates to the way CDA analyses and interprets data. Some CDA analysts seem to confound two related but still different processes in data analysis: interpretation and explanation (Widdowson, 2004). Interpretation results from assigning meaning to specific features of a text in relation to particular contextual factors. Explanation, however, refers to assigning significance to the text being analysed in broader socio-cultural terms.

Narrative networks provide a framework for the critical analysis of narratives that attempts to accommodate some of the criticism presented above. The framework is based on the following four theoretical principles:

1. *Representation*: The narrative chosen for analysis should represent the problem rather than how the analyst theorizes and interprets it. It should also represent the values, norms and behaviour of all those involved in the social problem. Misrepresentation can be avoided by creating a network of representative texts, documents and artefacts around the core narrative.

2. *Falsifiability*: To prevent argumentative circularity, the analysis of the narrative should consider counter-evidence, avoiding at the same time selective partiality of evidence. Contradictions, tensions and resistance should be observed.

3. *Derivation*: Interpretation of the narrative should highlight the relationship between the narrative and its immediate context of production and consumption, as well as the network of actors and artefacts that surrounds it. This principle should be observed before the explanation of the significance of the social problem being analysed is attempted.

4. *Validation*: Explanations of the significance of the core narrative in relation to the problem it represents should be endorsed by those involved in producing and consuming all the texts analysed. The use of participant validation and 'thick' ethnographic observations can facilitate this process.

One fundamental consideration that underpins these principles is the importance of the network. Concentrating on a single, isolated text or narrative may produce a 'narrow' analytical perspective that could easily lead to argumentative circularity and explanations based on analyst assumptions. A network of texts that brings together the core narrative and other associated texts offers the possibility of broadening the analytical perspective by considering tensions and contradictions. In considering a work narrative (see Figure 10.1) in which a conflict of power is being narrated, for example, we may also want to consider other stories by the narrator's co-workers and
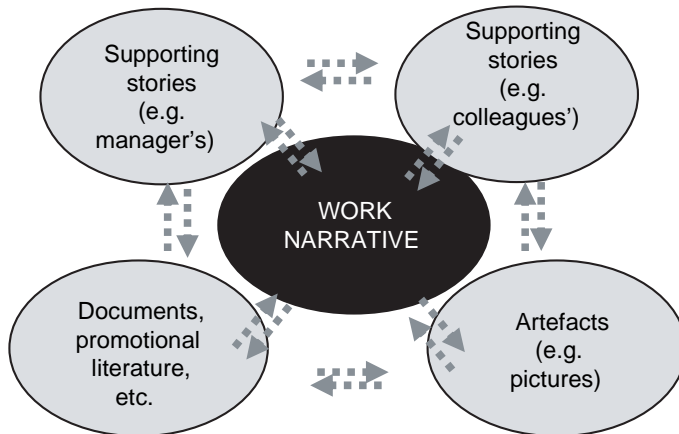
**Figure 10.1** A network for work narratives (Gimenez, 2007: 86)

managers as well as other related documents and artefacts produced by his/her community of practice (e.g. documents about the allocation of work, flyers advertising or promoting their activity, or pictures that reveal the history of their profession).

Figure 10.1 shows how the different elements that constitute a network inter-relate with one another despite their different nature. Whereas work narratives are central to the network, stories are supporting elements in the network which prove or disprove the issues that emerge from the analysis of the work narrative. Work narratives are collected using loosely structured prompts, sup-porting stories are more narrowly elicited. Researcher intervention therefore also varies: work narratives involve very little researcher intervention, but researchers need to purposefully conduct the interviews to elicit supporting data. Documents and artefacts involve no intervention at all as they have not been produced for the purpose of research but rather to document the activity of a community. These theoretical considerations underlie the procedures for constructing and analysing narrative networks, as discussed below.

## 10.3.2 Designing narrative networks: Putting theory to practice

The process for constructing a network is graphically presented in Figure 10.2 below. There are four major stages in the construction and analysis of narrative
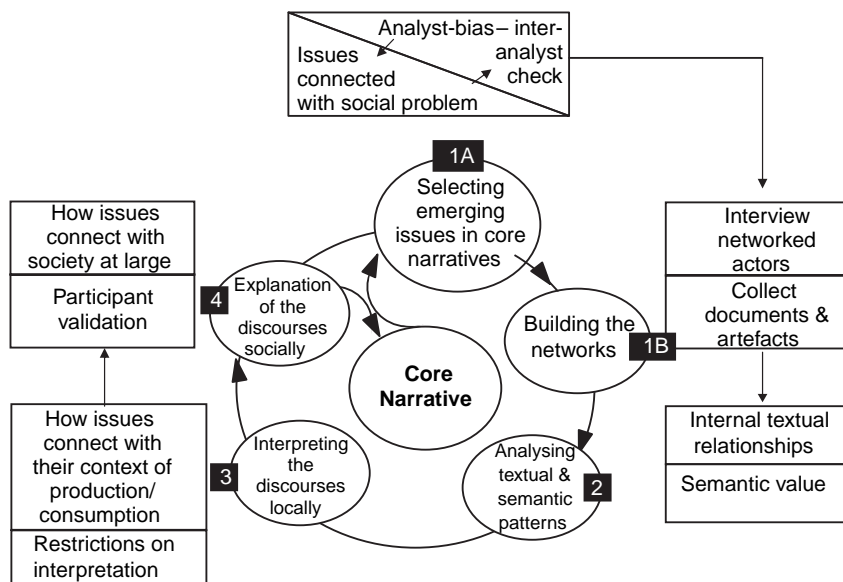
**Figure 10.2** The process of constructing a narrative network (Gimenez, 2007)

networks: data collection (stages 1A and 1B), analysis (stage 2), interpretation (stage 3) and explanation (stage 4). This division is obviously artificial. It is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to draw a clear-cut dividing line between collection and analysis as the act of deciding what data to collect is already an act of analysis.

In the procedures below, each stage starts with a brief theoretical comment before introducing the actual analytical step(s). After each stage, and before the analyst moves on to the next, the procedures include a check that reminds him/her of important considerations at the specific step.

**Stage 1: Data collection**

This stage focuses on the social problem to be analysed and comprises two substages: 1A – the collection of narratives and the selection of emerging social issues from such narratives (steps 1–3); and 1B – the design of a network (steps 4–8).

| Step | Action | Example |
|------|--------|---------|
| Step 1 | Select a social issue/problem you want to examine. | Oppression, social exclusion, immigration, gender and inequality, etc. |
| Step 2 | Collect narratives that may illustrate the issue/problem you want to examine. | Narratives of immigrants, narratives in the workplace, narratives of marginalized groups, etc. |

| Step 3 | Analyse the narratives in search of emerging issues. You can use AQUAD or NVIVO[3] to help you identify the issues. | How immigrants deal with legal issues, how women bank managers may have to struggle against double standards, etc. |

**Check 1**: Check for analyst bias by asking a second analyst to do step 3 independently. Also check that the emerging issues are representative of the social problem being examined.

| Step 4 | Based on the emerging issues, prepare questions to investigate through interviews. | How do immigrants find the legal system? How are opportunities for promotion distributed in banking? |
| Step 5 | Interview other people who are 'networked' with the core narrators. | The narrator's colleagues at work and their line manager, an immigration officer, the female manager's subordinates, etc. |
| Step 6 | Analyse their interview answers in search of supporting as well as contradictory evidence. You can use AQUAD or NVIVO. | Immigrants find it hard to understand legal issues and the language of legal documents. What support is there in place to provide them with the linguistic resources necessary to understand documents, for example? |
| Step 7 | Collect documents and artefacts that may throw new/different light on the issues investigated. | Pictures, historical/organizational documents, organizational charts, etc. |
| Step 8 | Use the issues you identified to build up the narrative networks around them. | Issue: position of women in banking. Network: interviews – what do women think about it? What do men think?, documents that explain promotion policies, pictures of the history of banking, etc. |

**Check 2**: Check for different ways of organizing the support stories, the documents and artefacts. Different organization of the texts may shed new light on the issues being analysed.

**Stage 2: Data analysis**

This second stage analyses the textual and co-textual features present in the chosen texts. This analysis will consider co-textual relations and internal patterns in the text (collocations, prosody, etc.), the semantic value of these relations and patterns, and any interpretative possibilities and restrictions imposed on readers by the text itself and its analysis.[4]

| Step | Action | Example |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Step 9 | Identify internal textual relations. You can use corpora for this (see Chapter 5). | Collocations (how certain words normally co-occur) and colligations (how certain grammatical choices co-occur) in phrases which trigger the main meanings in the narratives. |
| Step 10 | Identify the semantic value of textual relations. You can use corpora to support your analysis. | The semantic prosody (the connotative value) of main phrases in previous step. |
| Step 11 | Decide how textual and semantic relationships restrict interpretation. | Do the collocations 'female-dominated' and 'male-dominated' have the same semantic prosody? |

**Check 3**: Check for possible alternative interpretations. You can compare the textual and semantic patterns of the main phrases in the narratives with those in a corpus and see how similar or different they are.

**Stage 3: Data interpretation**

Based on the results from stage 2, this stage focuses on the interpretation of texts as social practices, where other elements such as the participating actors, their beliefs and their social artefacts are located and brought to the analysis.

| Step | Action | Example |
|------|--------|---------|
| Step 12 | Based on the restrictions identified in the previous step, how do the issues relate to their immediate context? | What do the emerging issues from the analysis tell you about their context of production? For instance, are the difficulties some immigrants face when dealing with legal issues their own individual problem or do they reflect a wider problem in the immigration system? |

**Check 4**: Go back to your fieldnotes to help you interpret the data you are analysing. Make sure your interpretation reflects the context you have observed.

**Stage 4: Data explanation**

This last stage explains the significance of the narrative networks in broader socio-cultural and political terms. This explanation should incorporate the relationships (problematic, contradictory, other) between the issues in the narrative and the social practices they represent, and a reflective validation of the explanation by incorporating participants' interpretations of the significance of the text, alternative interpretations of its significance and ethnographic observations.

| Step | Action | Example |
|------|--------|---------|
| Step 13 | Seek participant validation for your interpretations. | How do they see your findings? Do their interpretations support or challenge your findings? |
| Step 14 | Establish a link between the issues you have interpreted and related issues in society at large. | What are the social patterns that these local issues illustrate? What do they represent? What do they challenge? What voices are represented/silenced? For example, does the label 'female-dominated profession' (e.g. nursing) refer to women dominating 'in power' or 'in number'? Does it indicate that women (the majority) dominate in number and men (the minority) dominate in terms of power? |

**Check 5**: Go back to the social issue you wanted to examine in step 1 and check for the connections between explanation, interpretation and analysis.

# 10.4 Conclusions

As Toolan (2001: viii) advocates 'narratives are everywhere'. They have been and still are a popular data source in a wide variety of disciplines. In this chapter I argue, however, that the analysis of narratives, even when appropriately located in their context of production, has tended to examine narratives as

isolated discursive realizations, failing to make a link between the local, some-times personal, issues and their broader sociolinguistic context. But the local or the personal does not happen in a vacuum. As narrators, we have been socialized to perform in a given way, and it is thus essential to examine the link between the narrator's local performances and the social patterns such per-formances represent.

To do this, we need a wider network of texts. We need to expand the analy-tical possibilities offered by local narratives by networking them with the local as well as global social contexts where they are produced and consumed. As an analytical framework, narrative networks can help us achieve this. But we also need to adopt a critical approach to the analysis of narratives more broadly. We need an approach that focuses not only on the text itself but also on the mechanisms, actors and resources involved in its production and consump-tion. As researchers, we also need a deeper awareness of our influence on the research processes, which starts at the selection rather than the data analysis stage. The act of deciding what issues or problems to research is in itself an act of exercising our power to choose and decide. Distancing ourselves as research-ers from the data does not in itself entail a critical analysis of the data, and procedures like participant validation (Ashworth, 1993) can take us a step closer to more balanced interpretations.

## Notes

1. The term 'componental analysis' conventionally refers to the decomposition of the whole into its parts, as in structural semantics where the meanings of words are examined by their semantic features. Following Hogan (2006), however, it is used here in its broader sense to refer to the *relation-ship* between the whole and its parts.

2. For detailed discussions of CDA, see Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) and Fairclough (2001).

3. AQUAD (Analysis of QUAlitative Data) is a very useful software package for coding qualitative data. A demo version is available at http://www.aquad.de/. NVIVO is a similar, probably more com-plex but more powerful, package. You can find information about it at http://www.qsrinternational.com.

4. For a more detailed discussion on this, see Widdowson (2004).

## Further reading

**Bearman and Stovel (2000)** – Although offering a different take on the 'networks', this article provides a good description of how networks can enhance linguistic analysis.

**Daiute and Lightfoot (2004)** – This edited collection provides a solid introduction to the theory and analysis of narratives from a variety of perspectives. It showcases topics such as school-based violence, generational trends among women and undocumented immigrants in the United States.

**Webster and Mertova (2007)** – Webster and Mertova describe the theoretical background to the development of narrative inquiry as a research method, illustrating its application through case studies from a wide variety of fields of study.

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