

*coherence*. The present account has focused on the standards of referential and causal/logical coherence, which are basic and shared by most fluent readers. However, other—stricter, more lenient, or simply different—standards may be employed. For example, different representations result when people are asked to read a narrative taking place in a house with the perspective of a potential homebuyer or that of a burglar (Bransford and Johnson 1972). Moreover, standards vary as readers have different goals for reading the narrative (e.g., for a test, for entertainment, to learn about the spatial layout). Similar variations on the above description of narrative processing and representation occur within individuals from one reading situation to the next.

Further, a representation that is internally coherent need not be identical with that intended by the author of the narrative. Indeed, the overlap between intended and obtained representations is likely to be partial at best. In some situations (e.g., educational contexts) comprehension may require that the overlap is substantial, whereas in others (e.g., entertainment) it may not.

### 3. Comprehension of Narratives in Other Contexts

Narratives exist in many contexts outside reading. Examples are television and movie viewing, oral communication, historical accounts, and so on. The comprehension of narratives in these contexts has received far less attention than that during reading. Moreover, most extant research has focused on the product of comprehension (the representation) rather than on the process. Nevertheless, the available evidence suggests that the processes involved in the comprehension and representation of narratives are remarkably similar across contexts. For example, causal relations have been found to play a central role in the processing of television and movie narratives, of orally presented narratives, and even in the interpretation of arguments in courts.

### 4. Future Directions

The psychological investigation of narrative comprehension is likely to proceed in several directions. One direction is the further development of the computational models of reading comprehension described above. Aided by increasingly powerful computers, these models are likely to address hitherto underexplored issues such as the mechanism by which semantic knowledge is recruited during comprehension, how semantic knowledge itself is altered by the comprehension of individual texts, and so on. A second direction is the investigation of the neurological bases for these and other comprehension

processes. Such investigations will be focused not only on *where* in the brain certain processes take place, but also on the theoretical implications of such determination.

Third, the affective component of narrative comprehension will be investigated and the results integrated with those of the cognitively oriented models developed so far. Clearly, narratives elicit strong emotions on the part of the comprehender; indeed, such emotions are part of what makes narratives interesting. A final direction will be the extension of the detailed models developed for narrative comprehension to comprehension in other domains, both reading and in other contexts. Thus, the study of narrative comprehension truly becomes a study of the human mind in general.

*See also:* Inferences in Discourse, Psychology of; Inferences, Psychology of; Models, Metaphors, Narrative, and Rhetoric: Philosophical Aspects; Narrative, Sociology of

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P. W. van den Broek

### Narrative, Sociology of

Narratives are ways of linking together two or more events that have taken place in the past, making sense of historical or fictional personae. There exist

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multitude of genres—such as films, comic strips, Homeric epics, creation myths, novels, fables, case studies, hagiographies, and biographies—that, in turn, draw on diverse academic traditions ranging from legal studies, mass communication, and history to literature and hermeneutics. This review explores recent work on narratives, focusing on discursive or conversational approaches to narratives as elements of social action. In contrast to an analysis of fixed narratives, an analysis of narrative action does not merely involve issues related to domination such as the nature of grand narratives in relation to that of taboo or subordinated narratives. It also involves the conversational work of narrators and their co-participants.

### 1. The Narrative Turn

During the last two decades of the past century, social theory has undergone something of what could be called a narrative turn. In the post-war period, Wittgenstein's work on language games has broken new ground in legitimizing the study of language use. Today, there is a focus, not only on language games and fuzzy concepts, but on personal texts, life-stories, and inter-textuality. Some of this new emphasis can be traced to Bakhtin, Kristeva and the importation from literary theory into the social sciences. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, narration and narrative modes are cast as key elements in several theories oriented toward the epistemology of social action (e.g., Bakhtin 1984, Foucault 1997, Rorty 1980).

All such narrative models position language and the role of narration in the foreground during the formation of minds. In fact, narratives are the basic building blocks for communities, in that the very notion of community is often based on historically grounded, or oppositional, narratives. Similarly, social sciences are based on local ways of building narratives and on the type of language varieties involved (Rorty 1980). Key concepts in narrative models of self-identities are analyzed in a recent review by Ochs and Capps (1996). Some contemporary models are deliberately 'mindless' in that they are oriented towards procedural aspects of narration: how narratives evolve sequentially and how they are co-constructed or deconstructed as part of social action (Drew 1992, Sacks 1992, Schegloff 1997).

Many mechanisms in the orchestration of narration were first described by Sacks (1992), who investigated the interactional features of a variety of narrative practices, such as telephone calls to a suicide center, problem formulations in therapy, and jokes among friends. Sacks' (1992) lectures on conversation—recorded between 1964 and 1972—primarily discussed the turn-taking machinery, the dialogical and sequential organization of conversational turn-taking. Yet his lectures also involve entitlement to stories, tell-

ability, and what he called 'a technology for building stories.' More recently, it has been discussed how 'talk at work'—that is, dialogic mechanisms for storytelling and speaking at large—can be seen in courtrooms and other institutional settings (Drew 1992, Lynch and Bogen 1996). Such processual interactional analyses of narratives all diverge from traditional narrative analyses that have normally been focused on static structural aspects of narratives (plots, abstracts, resolutions, etc), not on the story telling.

In folkloristic and ethnographically oriented sociology, life stories have been key methods in the formulation of reflexive analyses of everyday action. Traditionally, interviews have been the main tools for eliciting life stories or story fragments. However, what has been analyzed is normally the life story as such, not the story telling.

In the 1990s, anthropological work on life narratives has been directed both to issues about how narratives are linked to the formation of selves in different cultures and to procedural aspects; that is, to storytelling. In their analyses of agoraphobia in ordinary family conversations, Capps and Ochs (1995) illuminate how panic is displayed and construed in the everyday narratives of a family where one member suffers from agoraphobia. Through her mundane panic stories, the mother in the family reveals her fears, but she also passes on patterns for how to construe the world as a fearful place.

The dinner-time narrations in the agoraphobic family can be seen to generate fragments of life stories. Analyses of such story-telling practices are particularly illuminating in that they combine life-story material with natural data that is not primarily elicited for the benefit of the interviewer.

One of the main methodological controversies in recent work on narration concerns the relative role of text and context. The work of Foucault, for instance, as well as ethnographic and traditional sociological work, is primarily focused on contextual aspects of discourse. In contrast, conversation analysis is primarily oriented to the text as such—and to intersubjectivity (the dialogic production of narratives). Context is focused only in those cases in which it is invoked by the participants themselves (cf. Schegloff 1997). In conversation analysis and the growing field of ethno-methodology, phenomena such as dominant narratives are thus primarily seen as participants' phenomena. It is only if domination is invoked by the participants themselves that it is, in fact, taken up in the researcher's analyses.

### 2. Technologies for Building Stories

Much research on narratives has centered on the structure of plots in relation to various related elements (such as background, future events, introduction of main characters), and the temporal order of the

narrative has long been a key element of narrative organization as in Labov's (1972) classical analyses of oral narratives of Afro-American inner-city youth. Minimally, a narrative in Labov's scheme involves two temporally ordered events. In the more elaborate type of fight stories and other personal narratives that he elicited from inner-city boys, it is often possible to discern a more complex pattern involving abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation (what's the point?), resolution, and coda (is there a signal that the story is over?).

Yet, the sequential order of story telling need not coincide with the temporal organization of the tale. In a critical discussion of narratives and cognition, Edwards (1997) demonstrates ways in which script models and other structural models (for example, Labovian schemes) in fact do not hold up in the face of the complexities of mundane interaction; they collapse when they are applied to real life on-line narration in interactional contexts.

Interactional analyses of story-telling dialogues are therefore important tools for sharpening our reasoning on narration as social action. Such work focuses on participants' orientations to co-participants and to the narrated events, rather than primarily or only on the temporal framework of the story. The narrator's stance or point of view can often be detected in linguistic cues such as word order, tense aspect marking, case marking, verb voice, and pronoun choices (cf. Ochs and Capps 1996). In some cases, linguistic resources can be seen to index stances that are closely related to conversational genres or institutional voices (Bakhtin 1984, Lynch and Bogen 1996). In interactional work on narration, genre is therefore not merely seen as a background variable for talk, but rather as the outcome of the interaction as such. In many institutional encounters, for instance, it is the powerful party who engages in authoritative moves, such as reformulating what the story is about or doing so-called formulations (Sacks 1992). Conversely, this means that someone may position himself/herself as a person in power through exploiting discursive devices that are associated with institutional authority.

In several institutional practices—e.g., medical consultations, trials, and psychotherapy—an important part of conversational action is to identify what is the problem. Joint or competing problem formulations are therefore key elements in such institutional narrations (e.g., Aronsson and Cederborg 1994, 1997). Narrations that are related to self presentations entail substantial moral work in that they project different positions in given social orders. Yet, in conversational studies of narration, control is not merely related to fixed positions in hierarchical organizations. In Goffman's (1971) analyses of social interaction and territoriality in public places, narration is principally studied in terms of remedial work, as in apologies and accounts. More recently, others have explored defensive aspects of narration in more depth, specifying

how participants present accounts of their actions, denying, justifying, or excusing themselves in the light of implicit or explicit blame (Buttuy 1993).

### 3. Narrations as Story-telling Contests

In adversarial courtroom proceedings, attorneys can be seen to employ questions as tools for eliciting the winning story. Trials can thus be considered story-telling contests, in which each attorney must ask questions in such a way that his/her client tells the most convincing and victorious story. Credibility is thus largely a matter of narrative design, performed by the witness or defendant and masterminded by the attorney.

Such story-telling contests underlie various actions in adversarial courtroom contexts. Witnesses are regarded as members of either side's team (the prosecution or defense side), which means that, for instance, rape witnesses/victims are treated as prosecution team members, who are at times exposed to discrediting and damaging questions. In an analysis of an American rape trial, Drew (1992) showed how such trials may yet involve substantial resistance and strategic defense on the rape victim's part. In his detailed analyses of an extended episode from a rape trial, he showed that the rape victim employed alternative descriptions as well as other discursive devices in her story (of being merely an acquaintance to the rapist) as opposed to that of the prosecution (of her being a lover or willing partner). Yet, the two competing stories were told as fragments, sequentially revealed in the attorney's questions and in the witness' defensive and oppositional responses.

An early study of oppositional work in legal settings can be seen in Cicourel's (1968) monograph on juvenile delinquents and the conversational work of parents, probation officers, and various experts such as psychiatrists. Cicourel did not detail the conversational work as such, but he discussed the defensive interactional work of parents, showing, for instance, how middle-class parents recruited outside assistance from experts such as therapists and teachers, working on recategorizing their sons as depressive rather than as delinquent, or as temporarily influenced by peers rather than as active and wilful. The ultimate written police record categorizations of the same delinquent actions were therefore partly the result of extended parent-expert negotiations.

Competing narratives can, of course, also be found outside of legal settings. In an analysis of clients' voices in family therapy, Aronsson and Cederborg (1994) demonstrate how family therapy episodes often involve underlying story-telling contests in which one side ratifies the same side story, whereas the other side's story is deauthorized in that the story point is challenged or undermined. The therapist plays a key role as an intermediary—an orchestrator of who talks

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to whom about what—and as arbitrator about when a narrative is ultimately finished. Therapists' control in family therapy is more concerned with issuing story-telling rights than with, for instance, sheer dominance over turn taking. Such implicit norms concern what is reportable or tellable, as well as story boundaries, that is, when a story is to be told as well as implicit norms for when it is finished. In another analysis of family therapy narratives, a love story was jointly construed and deconstructed by a young girl, on the one hand, and by her mother and therapist, on the other (Aronsson and Cederborg 1997). Here, it was shown how past and future time was construed in radically different ways by the two sides. An important part of the therapeutic work was to realign the two parties' diverging time categorizations with respect to parameters such as 'suitable age,' 'proper timing,' and 'normal duration and frequency.' The girl's story was, however, told as a series of fragmented justifications and excuses; that is, defensive accounts, whereas her mother's story was told as an authoritative problem formulation.

In his micro-sociological analyses of parental story telling in the face of alternative legal versions, Cicourel (1968) shows that detailed ethnographic data need not exclude a concern for macrosociological issues such as class. Detailed analyses of institutional encounters simultaneously involve micro- and macro-concerns. This means that the radical split between micro and macro is partly an artificial controversy inextricably linked to monolithic models of institutions and the type of work that institutions do.

Moreover, the cited work on defense and resistance (Aronsson and Cederborg 1994, 1997, Cicourel 1968, Drew 1992) in the face of authoritative legal and clinical narratives demonstrates that simple models of domination or cultural reproduction (e.g., mechanistic Foucauldian analyses) do not fully explore what happens in adversarial contexts. There is also a need for a more complex analysis of adversarial talk that could account for participants' resistance.

#### 4. Technologies of Selves

On a historical societal level, Foucault has discussed how dominant stories have been employed in the missionization and colonialization of selves. In his discussion of technologies of selves, Foucault (1997) presupposes that our public selves are intimately linked to conversational practices. In his analysis of the historical roots of self-technologies, these proposed technologies were closely linked to self-reflexivity practices and to early forms of self-confessions. The self was narrated in more or less monological formats, e.g., in letters to friends, as in the case of early Greco-Roman philosophy, or in confessions in monasteries in early Christian spirituality. In the first case, the focus was on deeds and actions (what I have done in

relation to what I should have done) and in the case of early Christian spirituality on thoughts (what I have been thinking in relation to what I should have been thinking).

In modern society, confessions have become integrated into what Foucault calls truth regimes that organize institutional practices in normative patterns for what should be told to whom and in what ways. In modern life, there are several discursive genres that can be related to the formation—and reflection—of moral order and selves in a Foucauldian universe. Interviewing, teaching, counselling, and therapy can be seen as prototypical discursive technologies for eliciting what Foucault calls confessions and authoritative responses to such confessions, e.g., judgments, evaluations, celebration, and disciplining (Foucault 1997). Such genres are important in modern discursive practices, but Foucault himself does not detail how such identity work is done on a conversational level.

In the realm of interactional theories, however, the micro-politics of identity work in institutional settings has been documented in a series of analyses of contemporary institutional narratives. There are many genres of such narratives: couple therapy (Buttny 1993), family therapy (Aronsson and Cederborg 1994, 1997), and, of course, witnesses' and defendants' narratives in court (Drew 1992, Lynch and Bogen 1996). All these genres have implications for identity formation, both for displaying identities and for creating identities. This Janus-face nature of conversations and selves is also an essential feature of ethnographic and conversational work on narratives and self-identities.

The intersubjective architecture of confessions has been discussed in Sacks' (1992) lectures on conversation. In telling a first story, a speaker may invite a second story, and categorizations and first assessments often precede second assessments. In everyday conversations between friends, disclosures of secrets or taboo or delicate information may similarly invite disclosures by co-present parties. Disclosures similarly tend to assume a sequential structure, involving fragmented and gradual revelations. Similarly, Goodwin (1990) demonstrated the complex sequential structure of young girls' multi-party story telling about other girls by showing how they would animate characters and use extensive reported speech in casting an absent girl as blameworthy, while simultaneously securing the alignment of co-present parties. Ultimately, the blame narrative was therefore a jointly created team product, rather than a story told by one person alone.

The written record is obviously an important parameter in technologies of selves. Cicourel (1968) revealed ways in which written police records were ultimately the products of talk; that is, the products of extended oral negotiations. Recently, Lynch and Bogen (1996, p. 203) have specified many ways in

which courtroom dialogue may be 'on the verge of breaking into writing,' as in the Iran-Contra hearings in which prepared written statements, documentary exhibits, citations of prior testimonies, and written notes played a prominent role in the defendant's 'spontaneous' oral response to questions in the public hearing.

Written narratives tend to look more objective or factual than oral narratives. Yet, many written documents obviously emanate from talk-in-interaction. The delicate interplay between written and spoken language can also be seen in other institutional settings than courtrooms. In his work on answering patterns at a suicide prevention center, Sacks (1992), for instance, showed that the professional's answering sheet influenced the order in which s/he asked questions, illustrating how the design of written forms and records is important for the formation of oral narratives.

### 5. Collusion, Genres, and Narrative Roles

Narratives in interaction are often contested, as language use is never disinterested—narrators always direct their narratives to someone, and they wittingly or unwittingly speak on somebody's behalf (Bakhtin 1984). In Bakhtin's epistemology of a multi-voiced or polyphonic universe, multi-party encounters always involve potentials for secret alliances and collusions. Such collusion can be seen in several different institutional contexts, such as in asymmetrical encounters when there are dominant or authoritative voices, on the one hand, and subordinate voices, on the other.

In detailed analyses of small claim court interactions, it has been shown that narrative genres at times have collusive qualities in that relationship-oriented and informal narratives need not be more egalitarian and democratic than more formal rule-oriented narratives (Conley and O'Barr 1990). In fact, inexperienced persons are often more at a loss in informal contexts, in that they are required to construe legal narratives on their own, whereas formal settings offer more support from legal professionals.

In a Foucauldian universe, education is seen as one of the technologies of the self. Yet education is not merely an issue for formal schooling, but also for informal schooling in family contexts. In work on family dinner conversations, it has been shown that narratives are deeply embedded in family politics that are, in turn, shaped by cultural norms for participation. In their work on American family dinner conversations, Capps and Ochs (1995) demonstrated recurring narrative patterns, reflecting silent opposition and underlying family hierarchies.

Silent opposition can also be found in public events. In legal contexts, witnesses are expected to be compliant. Yet in police interrogations, for instance, compliant witnesses may, through their collaboration,

produce the very evidence that is needed for an eventual accusation (Lynch and Bogen 1996). Institutional confessions or disclosures, therefore, often involve substantial downgrading of agency by the accountable person through impersonal constructions, vague or evasive responses, and minimizations of the offensive act.

In their in-depth analyses of the Iran-Contra hearings, Lynch and Bogen (1996), for instance, demonstrate how the defendant Oliver North cleverly exploited his response turns, changing the genre of the trial during its six days on television. Through his military politeness, minimal responses, and strategic repetitions, he displayed an attitude of apparent compliance and respectfulness to the great media audience—the popularity of which was also reflected in an audience response of flowers, supportive letters, and successive transformation of an alleged villain of war into a public hero. Moreover, the two authors present fine-grained analyses of the conversational management of staged spontaneity and strategic 'forgetting' of crucial events. For instance, Oliver North acknowledged lying in the past, but claimed that he would now tell the truth 'the good, the bad, and the ugly' (Lynch and Bogen 1996, p. 38). On a deeper level, however, it is shown how a well-prepared witness like Oliver North skillfully avoided responding to the important questions, undermining the interrogator's narrative, thereby indirectly mocking his interrogators. The trial was thereby changed into public entertainment; what Foucault would have called a historical spectacle as opposed to a serious courtroom interrogation.

In order to understand a story fully, it is necessary to know something about by whom the story is told and to what audience. In work on narration, analyses of subversion are closely related to dramaturgical aspects of story telling: as in a focus on voices and multivoicedness (Bakhtin), or a focus on participation frameworks; that is, on speaker/listener roles (Goffman). Subversive action has been at the heart of Bakhtinian and Goffmanian work on negotiation, whereas it has been a less central concern in some applications of conversation analysis (that do not focus on participants' hidden agendas) or in some historical Foucauldian applications (that do not attempt to account for participants' agency).

Dominance and power are classical sociological themes, but in the work of narratives in interaction, collusion and subversion are equally important phenomena. In many ways, narratives can be seen as battlefields for self-ascriptions and self-projections, even if some of the battles are indirect or hidden. In his classical work on asylums, Goffman (1961) discussed both the type of categorization work done by total institutions in their diagnoses of patients and the patients' resistance to stigmatization. In some recent work on youth sub-cultures, it has also been demonstrated how adolescent participants are acutely aware

of categorization they discuss (Widdicombe and Goffman) and silent resistance to collusion in case, subversive found in much more detail, an

See also: Conversation: Lin (1926–84); Narrative: Behavioral Science Postmodernism

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of categorizational aspects of interview talk, and how they discursively resist such categorizations (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995). Following Bakhtin and Goffman, many students of narration have studied silent resistance or secret alliances and other types of collusion in social interaction. More recently, however, subversion—located in ordinary narrations found in mundane interactions—has been analyzed in more detail, and it has been brought out into the open.

See also: Conversation Analysis: Sociological; Conversation: Linguistic Aspects; Foucault, Michel (1926–84); Narratives and Accounts, in the Social and Behavioral Sciences; Postmodernism in Sociology; Postmodernism: Philosophical Aspects

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K. Aronsson

## Narratives and Accounts, in the Social and Behavioral Sciences

Diaries, narratives, and accounts represent methods used in the social and behavioral sciences for investigating people's perceptions and subjective experiences (Josselson and Lieblich 1993). Diaries are written or recorded (audio or video) records of events, as well as related thoughts and feelings, often recorded on a daily basis. Diaries reflect text material in the form of stories (e.g., what happened to me today, or my interactions with my friend today) that are defined in terms of the ideas of accounts and narratives. Diaries often ask quite specific questions such as what did you do at 11 a.m. today? They may only ask a series of such questions or may involve questions for more lengthy involved responses. The latter are accounts and narratives and are the main focus of this discussion.

### 1. Definition and Scope

Accounts and narratives are terms referring to storylike compositions (that also may be written, or presented in another media format), that usually pertain to descriptions of and explanations for events observed or participated in by the individual. They also may include raw emotional expressions (e.g., 'Oh no, I can't believe it happened' as a reaction to hearing about a major loss occurring in someone's life). Some scholars (e.g., Schonbach 1990) have contended that accounts only pertain to justifications that people offer for consequential events in their lives (e.g., 'I had the accident because I was distracted by a large building I had not seen before on that highway'). Other scholars, however, have defined accounts more generally as the storylike responses to life events that may emphasize explanation and description, without special emphasis on justification. In the latter vein, accounts and narratives refer virtually to the same ideas and methodological approaches.

The following example is an excerpt from an account of a 63-year-old woman regarding how she coped with the loss of her husband and became