Small Stories, Interaction and Identities
Studies in Narrative (SiN)

The subject of SiN is the study of narrative. Volumes published in the series draw upon a variety of approaches and methodologies in the study of narrative. Particular emphasis is placed on theoretical approaches to narrative and the analysis of narratives in human interaction.

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Volume 8

Small Stories, Interaction and Identities
Alexandra Georgakopoulou
Small Stories, Interaction and Identities

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King's College London

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Preface

One of the most puzzling aspects of narrative research is the almost irreconcilable breadth of definitions and approaches on the one hand (how many times has the conversation ended with 'how do you study narrative, then?') and on the other hand the striking consensus on what constitutes a story but also and importantly what constitutes a story worthy of analysis for the aim of tapping into human experience.

My autobiographical journey to the stumbling blocks of this orthodoxy within narrative approaches involved the transition I made from exploring questions of culture-specificity in prototypical narrative data in Greek (in the early '90s) to having to claim a place in narrative research for snippets of talk that flouted expectations of the canon. The latter I have come to call small stories, following Michael Bamberg (2004a, b) who has worked with comparable data. By prototypical narrative, I mean personal, past experience stories of non-shared events. As I will show in this book, small stories on the other hand are employed as an umbrella-term that covers a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell. These tellings are typically small when compared to the pages and pages of transcript of interview narratives. On a metaphorical level though, the term small stories is selected as an antidote formulation to a longstanding tradition of big stories (cf. “grand narratives”, Lyotard 1984): it locates a level and even an aesthetic for the identification and analysis of narrative; the smallness of talk, where fleeting moments of narrative orientation to the world (Hymes 1996) can be easily missed out on by an analytical lens which only looks out for fully-fledged stories.

To return to my story of small stories, the prototypical narrative data that formed the basis of my first book (Georgakopoulou 1997) had actually occurred in ordinary conversational contexts (where I was a participant-observer) and not elicited in research interviews. They still however resonated both with the influential Labovian (1972) paradigm and with the key-events research interview narratives and in that respect they were well connected with the Zeitgeist. They were thus well met even if often seen by colleagues as exotic data: the point was that in many ways, be they in terms of how they were structured or of how they signalled their tellability, – both focal concerns at the time –, they could be viewed
as tokens of a type, a case-study of how people in Greece in ordinary conversations get to tell personal past events experience studies. In this respect, they could easily be placed within the framework of contextual research, partly post-Labovian in spirit, partly drawing on ethnography of communication, which dominated the 80s and much of the 90s in sociocultural linguistic approaches to narrative.

With the benefit of hindsight, this kind of research can be characterized as the second wave of narrative analysis: it had definitively moved from the study of narrative as text (first wave) to the study of narrative-in-context but there was still a lingering emphasis on abstract, formal criteria (minimal narrative definitions were undeniably influential) and textual features as well as a tendency to view context as a surrounding frame, something to be contained and tamed by the analysis. Culture, community and comparable notions that informed the analysis of context (then often called variables) were still defined in somewhat homogenizing terms and certainly, the ideas of multiplicity, fragmentation and irreducible contingency that have now been embraced by sociolinguistics (e.g. Rampton 2001) were far less mainstream.

The increasing realization from a number of conversational studies that things looked different on the ground, that the stories told there did not quite fit the bill, never resulted in a productive dialogue between two parallel traditions: somewhat crudely speaking, the sociolinguistic, post-Labovian tradition on one hand, and the interactional paradigms on the other hand that — crucially — did not see themselves as doing narrative analysis but as doing conversation analysis that looks at narrative (if and when it occurs) as another format of telling. This book sees itself as a bridge between these two traditions inasmuch as it will show how the language-focused analysis of narrative for the exploration of socio-cultural processes can be enriched by the tools of interactional analysis.

More ambitiously, my aim here is to stake a claim for small stories as crucial sites for self- and other- identity construction. It is fair to say that if small stories have not been firmly put on the map of linguistic approaches to narrative, within narrative research that is associated with interviews (often called ‘narrative inquiry’), the lack of an inclusive and coherent paradigm for the analysis of non-canonical storytelling is particularly acute. There, any narrative data that depart from the paradigm of the “life story” tend to be dismissed, seen as analytic nuisance (e.g. as the result of bad interviewing) or subsumed under the focal concerns of the big story (e.g. taken to be instances of incoherent tellings, not yet incorporated into the big story). In the light of the above, this book will sketch a grand vision for small stories: it will launch them as data worthy of the project of identity analysis. More specifically, the book’s analytical aim can be described as three-fold. The first is to chart the interactional features or ‘ways of telling’ of small stories, highlighting their connections with the social spaces in which they are produced but also with those that they re-work in their plots. The second is
to offer a toolkit appropriate for the analysis of small stories. This involves both re-defining and extending the mainstay vocabulary and introducing concepts that have not been productively applied to the study of narrative. Finally, the aim is to both argue for the validity of small stories as points of entry into identity work and to show ways for engaging in small stories and identity analysis. The book is committed to fine-grained analysis but it goes beyond an approach to stories as texts and as talk-in-interaction and towards a practiced-based paradigm that allows us to document stories as communicative practices enmeshed in people’s social lives. This paradigm attempts to encompass the tellers’ local understandings and theories of their narrative activities as well as the ways in which they interweave their experiential processes of living and telling.

In fact, it is the tellers of the small stories at hand that I would like to thank first. This book would not have been possible had Vivi, Fotini, Tonia and Irene not let me become part of their lives so generously. I hope that they will see aspects of their lived experience in the end result that I offer in memory of Irene who had an untimely death in 2005. I am also grateful to Kostas Demetrellis for letting me have some of his professional pictures of the town, where the data were recorded. The book also owes a lot to comments and feedback from a wide variety of academic settings and formats (lectures, seminars, conference presentations), particularly a number of panels on narrative that I have been involved in over the years. The discussions I have had with colleagues as part of those panels have been invariably stimulating and special thanks go to Mike Baynham, Aleksandra Galasinska, Stef Slembrouck, and Stanton Wortham; Anna De Fina for hectic panel co-organizing and a lot of fun and therapeutic small talk in the process; Michael Bamberg for his infectious enthusiasm for small stories, his inspirational work and the eye-opening experience of working with him on this and the other side of the Atlantic and learning from the ‘master’. My ideas on identity owe a lot to stimulating discussions with Caroline Dover, Roxy Harris, Constant Leung, Ben Rampton, and Lauren Small with whom I collaborate in an ESRC-funded project on Urban Classroom Culture and Interaction.

Finally, I would like to thank my daughter Eliana and my son Christopher for providing all the necessary and wonderfully inventive distractions in the course of the writing of this book and for reminding me of the fact that the priority should always be in living and telling the stories as opposed to writing about them. It is to them that I dedicate this book.
Transcription symbols

Overlapping utterances are marked by // and/or [ ]

= connects 'latched' utterances

Intervals in and between utterances are given in small un-timed pauses. More specifically:

(.) indicates a pause that is less than 0.1 seconds.

( .. ) indicates a pause that is less than 0.5 seconds and more than 0.1 seconds.

( . . . ) indicates a pause greater than 0.5 seconds.

A colon marks an extension of the sound it follows; a double colon marks a longer extension.

Punctuation marks are used to indicate intonation: a period a stopping fall in tone; a comma continuing intonation; a question mark a rising inflection.

A dash marks an abrupt cut off.

Underlining indicates emphasis.

CAPITALS indicate speech that is louder than the surrounding talk.

> < Indicates delivery at a quicker pace than the surrounding talk

hh hh, heh, he, huh: Indicates laughter

(( )) Indicates editorial comments

( ) Empty parentheses enclose unidentifiable speech.
CHAPTER 1

From narrative/text to small stories/practices

1.0 Introduction

Narrative remains as elusive, contested and indeterminate in meaning a concept as ever, variously used as an epistemology, a methodological perspective, an antidote to positivist research, a communication mode, a supra-genre, a text-type; more generally, as a way of making sense of the world, at times equated with experience, time, history and life itself; more modestly, as a specific kind of discourse with conventionalised textual features (see Georgakopoulou & Goutsos 2000:64–68). It is nonetheless all too easy to underestimate the kinds of consensus that this richness and diversity tend to mask on what constitutes a story but also and importantly what constitutes a story worthy of analysis for the aim of tapping into human experience. In this respect, the typical opening of a book on narrative will be consciously avoided here: rushing to provide the definitive definition of the subject along with a list of definitional criteria (sometimes referred to as minimal) is all too often a perfect way for reaffirming an area’s orthodoxy.

Instead, the approach here will be that of a gradual unravelling of dimensions of narrative hegemony and canonization so that the periphery of narrative analysis will be gradually legitimated. In this way, in the first instance, the definitions of narrative will unfold inductively: by stressing the point of narrative as talk-in-interaction which will bring in the perspective of narrative as telling; more specifically, as a different or alternative format of telling that is selected over others by social actors and that is locally produced and subject to the interactional contingencies of any other format of telling. The implicit hegemony that will be tackled in this respect is both that of narrative as a privileged mode of communication as well as a text in the sense of a finished product.

Thereafter, narrative will be intimately linked with social practices – in this perspective, narrative will be proposed as a discourse in the broad sense of a semiotic system that comprises habitual associations with its spatio-temporal contexts of occurrence. Questions of what this discourse can do that other discourses cannot are not going to go away nor will this study consciously ignore them. It will however address them on the understanding that their answer presupposes an opening up of narrative analysis beyond the reductive confines of a single type of narrative that has monopolized attention; that unless we document the richness
and diversity of narrative genres and cease to hide behind all-encompassing and at
times reassuring totalizations, narrative will become increasingly resistant to em-
pirical work and increasingly susceptible to impressionistic slants. In contrast to
grand theories, it is the dedicated commitment to the “small” of narrative analysis
that this book will seek to promote: the art of focusing on the seeming minutiae,
the fine-grained analysis, the prioritising of the communicative how as an analytic
focus. This attention to the “little words” will be based on the assumption that
they “operate in the service of the big words, and as such are the unobtrusive ser-
vants of dialogue” (Billig 1997:143). In this case, and in the spirit of putting the
little words at centre stage, the emphasis will be on ‘small stories’ as an antidote to
conventional narrative analysis. I will specifically employ the term small stories as
an umbrella-term to cover a gamut of under-represented narrative activities.

Within this small stories paradigm the aim is to show how narrative analysis
deserves and needs a more intense and explicitly focused dialogue with interac-
tional paradigms of talk and how the ivory tower of the archetypal mode of com-
munication has deprived it of much needed opportunities for cross-fertilization.
At the same time, the oft invoked rhetoric of disciplinary differences on the ba-
sis of using narrative as a means to an end (e.g. healing people, exploring human
psyche) vs. doing narrative (in the sense of exploring the linguistics and stylistics
of its tellings), pointing to two camps of the expressivists vs. the productivists, to
borrow Freeman’s terms (2003:338), tends to create a false dichotomy, an arbi-
trary and ill-founded territorialization. The point of departure and the emphasis
in narrative-focused work may well differ. In principle, however, there should be
recognition that looking at language forms and structures (tellings) without re-
lying them to socio-cultural processes and self-identities (tellers) is increasingly
out of place within linguistically minded research. At the same time, construct-
ing macro-accounts without a sense of an analytical apparatus makes the tying
down of the enterprise difficult to achieve (see discussion in §3.1); it also lulls
analysts into a false sense of security when in reality the issues of narrative defini-
tion, tools of analysis, soundness of methodologies, not least reflexivity on what is
represented by whom and why, are no less pertinent there too.

1.1 Narrative as talk-in-interaction

Current fascination with vernacular (cf. vernacular, non-literary) narrative spans
a wide range of social science disciplines: e.g. sociology, psychology, social an-
thropology, etc. and is frequently referred to as the narrative turn (see papers
in Brockmeier & Carbaugh 2001; Bamberg 2006a; Daiute & Lightfoot 2004; and
De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg 2006). In these disciplines, narrative is seen as an
archetypal, fundamental mode for constructing realities and as such as a privi-
Chapter 1. From narrative/text to small stories/practices

 Alleged structure/system/mode for tapping into identities, particularly constructions of self. The guiding assumption here is that by bringing the co-ordinates of time, space, and personhood into a unitary frame, narrative can afford a point of entry into the sources “behind” these representations (such as “author”, “teller”, and “narrator”); it can make them empirically visible for analytical scrutiny in the form of ‘identity analysis.’

 Within linguistics, the legitimation of vernacular narrative as a valid object of inquiry is undoubtedly owed to Labov’s influential study of narrative structure (Labov 1972; Labov & Waletzky 1967) that was based on personal, past experience oral narratives in interview settings. The study showed that there is structure and systematicity in the storytelling of ordinary folks of the kind that was expected to be found in artful forms of narrative. The analysis resulted in the description of a fully-formed (or classic) narrative which “begins with an orientation, proceeds to the complicating action, is suspended at the focus of evaluation before the resolution, concludes with the resolution and returns the listener to the present time with the coda” (369).¹

 Hailed for bridging the gap between vernacular and literary narrative, Labov spoke not just to linguists but also to scholars from a wide range of social science disciplines that “had become disenchanted with the traditional positivist-based science that was dominant at that point” (Bruner 1997:62). Narrative was thus embraced as an experiential, anti-positivist mode that opened up new avenues and possibilities for looking into social and cultural processes, and at alternative ways of looking at human beings as communicators and social actors. This antidote to positivism soon took off in an array of disciplines as an alternative perspective, an inquiry that lets the voice of its subjects be heard and that prioritizes the personal, the emotive and the experiential over the impersonal, the rational and the rule-bound.

 This privileging of narrative over other kinds of discourse gradually led to a tradition of idealization, essentialization and homogenization of narrative. It is surely this framework of narrative primacy that has implicated a slower and more reluctant move to the exploration of its micro-instances (for a discussion see Georgakopoulou & Goutsos 2000:64–68). Tellingly, Labov’s model that was set to become one of the most influential approaches in the analysis of narrative at least within linguistics ultimately did not lend itself to this kind of study: as sustained

¹. Very briefly described, the abstract is a brief summary statement that encapsulates the point of the story; orientation identifies the time, place, situations, and characters; the complicating action answers the questions “Then what happened?”; resolution marks the end of the events of the complicating action; evaluation comprises the devices by which the narrator indicates the point of a narrative, i.e. why it is worth telling; finally, the coda closes a narrative off, normally by bringing it back to the moment of telling.
critique has shown (e.g. see contributions in Bamberg 1997a), narrative was seen in it as a detached, autonomous and self-contained unit with clearly identifiable parts. The crux of the counter-argument is that narrative occurs in some kind of a discourse environment, before and after other discourse activities and is thus enmeshed in its local surroundings. This view of narrative as a sequence, in itself part of a sequentially ordered event, is in Schegloff’s terms, where subsequent work on narrative “should be redirected” in order for us to get “toward a differently targeted and more compelling grasp of vernacular storytelling” (1997:101). What Schegloff has in mind is a conversation-analytic approach to narrative that treats narrative as talk-in-interaction.

Conversation analysts have already been successful and influential in documenting conversations as sequentially ordered activities which both give a glimpse of and provide a platform for social actions and roles (e.g. see Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; also papers in Antaki & Widdicombe 1998b). In this respect, recognizing narrative as talk-in-interaction cannot be disassociated from exploring the ways in which it relates to its surrounding discourse activity or co-text covering both prior and upcoming talk. Conversation analysis has thus done well to pay attention to the endpoints (entry – exit) of a story (e.g. Sacks 1974) but, as we will show in Chapter 3, there is still much scope for research, particularly with regard to the part that comes between a story’s opening and a story’s ending.

On the face of it, it could be that an intense cross-fertilization of conventional narrative analysis with conversation analysis has been hampered by a tendency towards essentialism and idealization of narrative that has all too often accompanied work on narrative (for a discussion, see Georgakopoulou & Goutsos 2000:64–70). Elevating narrative to a super-ordinate and archetypal mode of communication certainly does not sit well with the project of exploring conversations as the basic unit of ordinary human interaction. At the same time, if we accept Schegloff’s injunction (1997:100) that there are alternative formats of telling and a story is simply one of them, no better or worse, there is a good case for presuming and uncovering systematicity in this format of telling.

The premises of work on narrative-in-interaction could be summed up as follows:

1) Narrative is an embedded unit, enmeshed in local business, as opposed to being free standing and detached/detachable.

2) Narrative is sequentially managed; its tellings unfold on-line, moment-by-moment in the here-and-now of interactions. As such, they can be expected to raise different types of action and tasks for different interlocutors (Goodwin 1984). As we will show in Chapters 3 & 4, this brings into sharp focus the need to distinguish between different participant roles while moving beyond the dyadic scheme of teller-listener.
3) A view of narrative as sequentially unfolding, as outlined above, goes hand in hand with a view of it as *emergent*.\(^2\) In this sense, its tellings cannot be postulated *a priori* but emerge as a joint venture and as the outcome of negotiation by interlocutors. Allowing for the interactional contingency of patterns is the hallmark of a sufficiently process-oriented and elastic model of narrative (for details, see Chapter 3) that “opens up rather than closes off the investigation of talk’s business” (Edwards 1997:142) and that accounts for the consequentiality and local relevance of stories. This shift in perspective can turn the analysis into a different enterprise altogether: from solely working with analytical and reified concepts to focusing on their interpretative reality in discourse environments as part of the speakers’ own repertoires of sense-making devices.

4) Narrative tellings are irreducibly situational and locally occasioned: “a good part of [their] meaning is to be found in the occasion of their production, in the local state of affairs that was operative at that exact moment of interactional time” (Antaki & Widdicombe 1998a: 4). As such, their interactional affordances cannot be speculated in advance of local contexts. Attention to the details of their management inherent in specific kinds of interaction is imperative for tapping into issues of identity construction.

We will see in the course of this book how the above premises can inform the mainstay vocabulary of narrative analysis, calling for a rethinking and reconceptualization of narrative as a multitude of genres as well as of the notions of narrative structure, tellability and tellership.

1.2 Narrative and social practice: Beyond the here-and-now of local interactions

A view of narrative as talk in interaction begins to open us a window into narrative as a socially meaningful and orderly activity, allowing us to relate its local sequential management to extra-situational roles and identities in ways that will become clear in this book. It still however provides us with a clumsy way of navigating between the here-and-now of interactions, the fine-grained analysis and the heavy-duty discourses surrounding it, recognizing that any strip of activity is configured on the momentary-quotidian-biographical-historical frames, across socio-spatial arenas. Moving from the micro-to-macro- is not a straightforward

\(^2\) The term originates in linguistic research by Hopper (1987) who views grammar not as residing in hardwired, generative rules but as emergent in everyday social interaction, where over time it becomes sedimented but only provisionally so: in other words, it remains bound to contingency.
matter not just within the study of narrative but more generally in discourse analysis (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos 2004:187–189). What is more, these terms are taken to be a metaphor for what in reality is a multi-level operation with a multiplicity of levels involved on both ends. However seen, there is consensus on the difficulties involved in the balancing act between the micro-and the macro-, in finding a middle ground between the sheer intersubjectivity that is constructed on the spot and the objective determinism of a reality which is viewed as pre-given and external (e.g. Wetherell 2001).

In this book, this middle ground will be intimately linked with the notion of social practice. Social practice captures habituality and regularity in discourse in the sense of recurrent evolving responses to given situations while allowing for emergence and situational contingency. In Fairclough’s terms (2001:232), social life itself comprises interconnected networks of social practices of diverse sorts that articulate diverse social elements within a relatively stabilized form of social activity (e.g. family meals). Importantly, these practices, as Fairclough stresses, always include discourse.

The notion of social practice allows for an oscillation between the perspective of social structure and the perspective of social action and agency as both necessary perspectives in social science research and analysis. Put otherwise, an oscillation between relatively stable, prefabricated, typified aspects of communication and emergent, in-process aspects. As Hanks aptly puts it, three things converge on communicative practice: (linguistic) form, activity, and ideology (defined as a system of the participants’ evaluation of their activities). Hanks takes a step further to suggest that in this “moment of synthesis” (230) that practice is, the analyst’s “task is to integrate the three elements without destroying them. This requires carefully considering their respective domains of relevance and validity” (1996:12). “It is wrong headed, Hanks continues, to try to explain the details of a linguistic form without using the tools of linguistics”. This point can be readily adapted to the study of narrative: although links between narrative and social practices have been established, there is still much scope for bringing those together with linguistic methods of text analysis, which as Fairclough has suggested, the social scientists are more often than not ill-equipped with (2001:234). We will return to this point in Chapter 3.

An important aspect of discourse within social practices is the way it can be used reflexively to represent its practice as well as other practices. As we will see, this recognition forces attention to processes of intertextuality (and more specifically inter-narrativity) and of complex interactions with past, present and future events and tellings. In other words, it calls for the inclusion in the analysis of a narrative’s life cycle or natural history (Silverstein & Urban 1996): the ways in which it is transposed in time and space, recycled and reshaped to suit local contexts.
The notion of *genre* here is a catalyst, a powerful analytical way of bringing together text and practices, linking ways of speaking with producing social life in the semiotic world. In Hanks’s terms, genres provide a uniquely rich area of research into communicative practice (1996:246). Like other analysts (e.g. Bauman 2001), Hanks is careful to differentiate between earlier approaches to genre as a system of formal features or a type of text, and later approaches to it as a mode of action, a key part of our habitus (adapted from Bourdieu 1977), i.e. the routine and repeated ways of acting into which speakers are inculcated through education and daily experience. In this way, more than a “constellation of systematically related, co-occurring formal features” (Bauman 2004:3), genre becomes a “primary means for dealing with recurrent social exigencies ... a routinized vehicle for encoding and expressing particular orders of knowledge and experience” (6). As orienting frameworks of conventionalised expectations, genres force the analytical attention to routine and socioculturally shaped ‘ways of telling’ (Hymes 1996) in specific settings and for specific purposes. However, it is also accepted from the outset that any genre analysis has to calibrate the tension between uncovering habitual and patterned linguistic (and other semiotic) choices and not overlooking the contingent and irredicibly situated language use.

As we will see in the chapters to follow, this dynamic approach to genres has insufficiently informed narrative analysis. We will argue that this is linked with the focus of research on a specific type of narrative, namely the personal experience narrative of past events. The frequent use of this type of narrative as the basis of numerous empirical studies in the social sciences in general and in linguistics in particular has had profound implications about the direction of narrative analysis, creating notions of a narrative canon and orthodoxy, i.e. what constitutes a story, a good story, a story worth analysing, etc. that in turn dictate a specific analytic vocabulary and an interpretive idiom (cf. Bamberg 2004a, b; Ochs & Capps 2001). One of the implications of this orthodoxy is that it has deterred analysts from the basic recognition that narrative, exactly like other types of discourse, is not a unified and homogeneous mode, but it presents generic variability and in turn structural variability. In Riessman’s terms, it has not led to methods that allow the examination of diverse ways of telling and “counter tendencies (all too frequent in social science research) to objectify the subject” (1997:157). Riessman is right in pointing out that the answer to this problem lies in the systematic development of a typology of narrative genres. This would allow us to explore how different types and topics of stories shape narrative tellings but also to tap into the interpretative understandings that different genres carry (157). A prerequisite for this investigation of generic variability is to include in the analysis stories that depart significantly from the Labovian prototype of the past events personal experience story, in our terms, small stories.
As suggested above, linking work on narrative as social practice with that of narrative genre can only be done on the basis of the recent re-theorizing of genres away from formal classifications as the basis for text-distinctions and with an emphasis on the members’ conventionalized expectations about the activities they are engaged in, the roles and relationships typically involved and the organization systems of those activities (e.g. see Bauman 2001). What this means for the study of narrative is that instead of treating it as a supra-genre with fixed structural characteristics (i.e., invariant and inflexible structural units), emphasis is placed on narrative structures as dynamic and evolving responses to recurring rhetorical situations, as resources more or less strategically and agentively drawn upon, negotiated and reconstructed anew in local contexts. As the awareness that the fit between a particular text and the generic model can never be perfect (Bauman 2001:180) grows, the question that becomes pertinent is: How do generic representations of narrative structure get situated and become relevant in the microcosm of specific instances of communication? What kinds of strategies do speakers use to deal with the gap between what may be expected and what is actually being done? At the same time, the incompleteness or smallness of narrative instances be it in the sense of possibilities for revision and reinterpretation (Hanks 1996:244) or simply in the sense of narrative accounts in which nothing much happens becomes firmly integrated into the scope of analysis as opposed to being an analytic nuisance. As we will see below, the move to such a practice-oriented view of narrative genres also requires that we firmly locate them in place and time and scrutinize the social and discourse activities they are habitually associated with. In particular, it focuses our attention on the “social values of space as inscribed upon the practices” (Hanks 1996:246) that take place within narrative tellings.

Another important dimension, between micro-instances of narratives in local interactions and their embeddedness in social practices, involves mid-level conceptualisation, ways that allow us to overcome the “debilitating dichotomy between local and large-scale contexts” (Hanks 1996:192). These concepts, analytical in essence, allow us to tap into contextualization processes and to explore the participants’ inferences. In this way, they safeguard us against the reading off of identities or social processes from micro-level choices. There are numerous concepts here that direct us to the mid-order of discourse with unclear and overlapping reference, to echo Coupland & Coupland (2004). Here, I will single out the notion of indexicality that has been developed and refined within the American tradition of linguistic anthropology (e.g. Silverstein 1976) and has unfailingly served as a unique point of entry into natural histories of discourse, which are seen as an integral component of communicative practices.

It is fair to say that indexicality has been systematically shied away from in the longstanding tradition of treating narrative as a detachable, finished text, as