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CHAPTER 12 Narrative Lessons

Elinor Ochs

1 Introduction

This chapter takes the form of a series of lessons concerning narratives of personal experience. The lessons have been gleaned from analyses of the dynamics of conversational story-telling moments, in which interlocutors turn to friends, family, co-workers, mentors, healers, or others to piece together their experiences. These narratives are central to weaving the fabric of social life in that they forge and sustain social relationships and build shared lifeworlds.

Across the lessons, narratives of personal experience are viewed as a discourse genre, mode of cognition, and social activity. As a culturally stipulated genre, personal narrative exhibits its own internal textual organization, often referred to as plot structure (Aristotle 1982 [4th century BCE]; Propp 1968). The construal of personal experience into narrative entails complex cognitive processes, such as remembering, situating, anticipating, representing, evaluating, and otherwise interrelating life events. As noted by Jerome Bruner (1991: 8–9), "The telling of a story and its comprehension as a story... is a way of processing that, in the main, has been grossly neglected by students of mind raised either in the rationalist or in the empiricist traditions... But neither of these procedures, right reason or verification, suffice for explicating how a narrative is either put together by a speaker or interpreted by a hearer". As social activity, narratives of personal experience the world over tend to be dialogic, co-told, and even co-authored by those who engaged in the social interaction at hand (Goodwin 1984).

The narrative lessons contained in this chapter propose that personal experience may be rendered either as a coherent narrative with a beginning, a middle and an end or as an enigmatic life episode. The lessons articulate what Ochs and Capps (2001) call a "dimensional approach" (see below) to analyzing these two narrative inclinations, wherein community- and situation-specific discursive, cognitive, and social characteristics of everyday narratives of personal experience are examined as variable realizations of universal narrative dimensions.

2 Ten Narrative Lessons

2.1 Narrative Lesson One: Narratives of personal experience imbue unexpected life events with a temporal and causal orderliness

Narratives may be more or less aesthetically rendered, but they always depict or evoke an *ordered sequence of events*. Consider, for example, a narrative excerpt about a childhood swimming incident (See Appendix for explanation of transcription conventions):

(1a)
Meg: I remember a friend of mine
who was a very (.) acCOMplished swimmer and a diver.
And she took me swimming one time and
(0.4 sec. pause)
She said "Come on let's jump in he:re."
And very trustingly I di:d
and it turned out to be the deep end of the po::ol.
It was unmarked
[it was a-
Lisa: [wow
Meg: The whole pool was deep.
It was a pool for doing laps or something.
It was ALL DEEP
Lisa: Uh huh
Meg: And uh
(0.6 sec. pause)
And I remember just gulping water
and thinking I was going to drown
and being very afRAID swimmer.

Meg recounts a sequence of events in which (1) a friend takes her swimming, (2) the friend invites her to jump together in a particular area of the pool ("Come on let's jump in he:re"), (3) Meg "trustingly" jumps, (4) Meg discovers it is deep, (5) Meg gulps water, thinking "I was going to drown" and feeling "very afraid."

Sequentiality of events is a criterial property of all varieties of narrative and figures centrally in definitions of the genre. Linguist William Labov, for example, establishes narrative as a sequence of (at least) two clauses which are temporally ordered (1972). Similarly, literary philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1981) considers the "chronological dimension" (along with plot configuration) to be a central narrative property. Even a simple sequence of two events across time constitutes a narrative logic, in that the two events are positioned in relation to one another. In strictly temporal sequences, one event is first and the other occurs later as a second event:

Event 1 (Precedes →) Event 2

In many narratives, however, the temporal ordering belies a more complex narrative logic. Why do narrators select these two events to temporally juxtapose and not

others? Why, in the above excerpt, does the narrator temporally conjoin the event of jumping into a deep pool with the events of gulping water and fearing for her life? The temporally ordered events are usually not random occurrences but rather are linked in situationally relevant ways. In juxtaposing the events, narrators typically convey that the antecedent event (e.g. jumping into a deep pool) somehow gives rise to or *affords* the possible occurrence of the subsequent event (e.g. gulping water and experiencing fear):

Event 1 (Precedes → / Affords →) Event 2

That is, even without linguistic markers of origin, possibility, probability, consequence, entailment, and utility, temporally ordered events may implicate some form of derivative or causal relation.

2.2 Narrative Lesson Two: The life events that receive narrative attention tend to be cast as unusual, in that they are unexpected or problematic

The experiences recounted by tellers are often those that disrupt the ordinary business of daily life (Labov 1966). For example, in the above excerpt, Meg focuses on the childhood event of diving into a pool over her head. While some of these reportable events may be anticipated, most are rendered as unexpected ("and it turned out to be the deep end of the po::ol"). In many narratives of personal experience, the events run counter to personal, familial, or community assumptions about how events should unfold and how life should be lived. As Bruner (2002: 31) notes, "Narrative is a recounting of human plans gone off the track, expectations gone awry." Moreover, across speech communities, the narrated events are often problematic from the perspective of the teller or protagonist (Ochs and Capps 2001). The activity of narrating unforeseen, problematic life events raises awareness of expectations and provides a social modality for coping with such experiences.

The unanticipated or problematic character of an event lends a certain *frisson* and a focal point of interest to narration. Such an event often constitutes the pivotal element around which the *plot* is constructed (Burke 1962). The unusual event creates dramatic tension by raising interest in the setting that provoked the unexpected or problematic event in the first place and the events that subsequently transpired. Settings are critical elements of the plot, in that they not only situate but also establish a rationale for the reportable event and/or its aftermath, e.g. depicting relevant times, locations, shared knowledge, prior events, and situational conditions. In the above excerpt, for example, the narrator provides the relevant setting that her friend was "a very (.) acCOMplished swimmer and diver" and that the pool was deep. Prior to this excerpt, the narrator had provided yet another element of the setting central to the import of her experience:

(1b)
Meg: My mother never bothered to give us swimming lessons
[until I was thirt↑e:en.
Lisa: [Aww
Meg: And so I had a fear of water =
Lisa: = Umhm?
Meg: I liked to <u>swim</u>
but I would never go in the deep end,
and I was okay as long as I stayed <u>out</u> of that deep end.

These elements of the setting provide a rationale for why Meg's diving into a pool that turned out to be deep led to her sensation of nearly drowning. Moreover, background statements such as "I would never go in the deep end" and "I was okay as long as I stayed out of that deep end" foreshadow the traumatic pool experience that subsequently transpires. Narrators sometimes withhold such background information until well into the narrative for dramatic effect (e.g. what film theorists call "slow disclosure" (Sharff 1982)), or because they only gradually understand how an experience is grounded in past or present conditions, or because they otherwise have reasons to conceal these points of relevance (Ochs, Smith, and Taylor 1989).

In addition to linking the unexpected or problematic events to settings, narrative plot lines also relate such events to their aftermaths. For example, narrators may build a narrative logic by recounting how an unexpected or problematic event brought about a protagonist's *psychological* or *physiological response*. Meg, for example, recounts how diving into a pool led to her awareness of being in deep water and her fearfulness. Subsequently, she elaborates more enduring psychological outcomes:

(1c)
Meg: and after that thinking of myself as um
(0.3 sec pause)
<u>not</u> measuring up when it came to swim↑ming
Lisa: Umhm
Meg: Feeling <u>inFERior</u> to my friend and embarrassed
that I'd nearly drowned.

It is also common for tellers to recount subsequent *attempts* of a protagonist to resolve or come to terms with the problematic or unexpected nature of an event. Later in her narrative, for example, Meg recounts how she partly overcame her sense of helplessness:

(1d)
Meg: When I did get instruction at the YMCA
I proved to be a competent enough swimmer.

Even so her self-confidence never fully returned:

(1e)
Meg: But I <u>still</u> wouldn't uh- (0.3 sec pause) say

I'm a <u>stro::ng</u> swimmer.
I-in fact you know I still <u>fee:l</u> in many ways um (0.4 sec pause) still some fear of the water.

Indeed, these feelings of fear and anxiety mushroomed into panic disorder in Meg's adult life (Capps and Ochs 1995a, b). This eventual outcome is related to another possible aftermath of an unexpected or problematic event, namely changes in the state of a person or object. Thus, narrators recount how, for example, a snowboarding accident led to a debilitating injury, eating a chili pepper resulted in a burnt mouth, an earthquake toppled buildings, and so on (Ochs and Capps 2001).

2.3 Narrative Lesson Three: Narratives of personal experience are organized in terms of human time, wherein the experienced present is tied to a remembered past, an anticipated future, and/or an imagined moment

When tellers recount narratives of human experience, they tend to become enveloped in a temporal frame of reference that resonates with their experience, memory, anticipation, and imagination. Complementary to objectively measured time, a phenomenological sense of time draws upon the philosophical notion that human beings bring memories of their lived pasts and their projected or imagined, yet to be realized, life courses into their consciousness of the present (Augustine 1961[4th century CE]; Husserl 1991; Heidegger 1962; Ricoeur 1984, 1985, 1988). In Heidegger's framework, rememberings of past experience are filtered through one's current cares, through which *Dasein* (Being) is constituted, about mortality and an uncertain future. Certain past experiences may vividly invade our current consciousness (e.g. diving into a deep pool), while others remain at a distance. Alternatively, the recollection of the past may provoke thoughts and actions that orient toward future event horizons.

The future-directedness of a narrative often takes the form of unfolding forward-moving events that are fueled by prior events and circumstances. As noted in Lesson Two, a setting may foreshadow a problematic event, and/or a problematic event may provoke physical changes of state or protagonists' intentions, desires, and actions. While Meg's narrative of her childhood diving experience is characterized by a succession of unintended, uncontrollable misfortunes, temporality in other narratives involves more controlled future-oriented responses, such as preparing or carrying out a plan of action. In excerpt (2a) below, for example, a mother recounts to her son how a burglary at a bank prompted the installation of a protective window for the bank tellers:

(2a)
Mother: And you know what happened today
when I went to the bank?
Son: What.
Mother: Not that anything <u>happened</u>
but they had to install a high high

((raises hand high above head, looking up))
bullet proof windo:w (.) in front of
where the tellers take your money
(0.2 sec. pause)
because a couple months ago
[there was a burg - there was a armed robber =
Son: [are they ( )
Mother: = that went in there.
And he hurt some of the tellers
and said "Give me your money"

This excerpt also illustrates the point that temporality in narrative does not necessarily flow in chronological order. The narrative episode begins with the reporting of a constructive modification of the local bank then moves on to the dangerous incident that motivated this change.

Narratives about a past incident may be linked to future-directed life events beyond the time frame of the past experience recounted. In some cases, the recounting of past events "instigates" a projection into the yet-to-be-realized future (Goodwin 1990). In other cases, speculation about what the future holds may lead interlocutors to return to a relevant past incident. For example, just prior to the bank robbery narrative, family members warn the five-year-old son of the family not to bring a pretend cigarette lighter that he has fashioned out of aluminum foil to school. His mother and older sister speculate that it could be mistaken for an actual lighter:

(2b)
Son: MOM LOOK
(0.3 sec. pause)
[MOM a cigarette lighter
[*((lifts handmade aluminum foil toy "lighter" toward Mother))*
Daughter: I hope not.
Mother: That really looks like one Brian
[I thought you ha↑d one
Father: [*((looks at Son))*
Son: A little one
Daughter: [Well don't take that to school
[*((looking at her brother))*
Son: [Why?
[*((looking at his sister))*
Mother: *((looks at Daughter))*
Daughter: You could get in bi:g trouble.
If I took something like that to school?
((looks at Father))
And the teacher thought it was a cigarette lighter?
[She'd- I'd get suspended
[*((looking at her brother, vertical head nods))*
Father: We ↑ we really know that it's not a cigarette lighter right?
Son: Yeah

Mother: But somebody else might not know it's
Daughter: Yeah

At this point, Mother links possible future trajectories of teachers mistaking a toy cigarette lighter for a real one to bank tellers mistaking a toy gun for the genuine item:

(2c)
Mother: [Kind of like that-
[*((looks at Son))*
Son: [What would the teacher do if I?
[*((looks at Mother))*
Mother: like that toy gun I was telling Billy the other day
that people have been arre:sted
[*((looks at Father and back at Son))*
Father: [*((looks at Mother))*
Mother: for pulling out toy guns in ba:nks
because sometimes the bank teller thinks
it's a real robber
((looks at Father))
(0.4 sec. pause)
Father: *((nods))*
Daughter: with a real gun

After this confirmation by Father and Daughter of the hazards of toy guns and by implication toy lighters, Mother launches the narrative (see (2a)) of the installation of a bullet-proof window in the bank after a robbery ("And you know what happened today when I went to the bank?").

Excerpts such as this illustrate the intermingling of imaginings and rememberings in narrative activity. Interlocutors may traverse multiple temporal domains in the course of ordering a sequence of events in narrative form. These temporalities are brought into dialogic consciousness through the medium of narrative. In excerpt (2b), Daughter constructs a narrative that depicts a sequence of hypothetical future happenings:

"If I took something like that to school?"
→ "And the teacher thought it was a cigarette lighter?"
→ "She'd- I'd get suspended"

In excerpt (2c) Mother then recounts a past common sequence of events in which people "pulling out toy guns in banks" "have been arrested" because they were thought to be "a real robber". This scenario in turn draws the Mother and her interlocutors (excerpt (2a)) to recount the frightening bank robbery sequence of events leading to the recent installation of a protective window. In this manner, anxiety thoughts about the future prompt the remembering of past perils.

2.4 Narrative Lesson Four: The transformation of personal experience into a variety of narrative logics is one of the distinguishing accomplishments of the human species

The semiotic renderings of life events by certain other species are highly circumscribed and highly conventionalized, focusing on a single recent or impending occurrence, such as the presence of food or a predator (Deacon 1997; Gould and Gould 1988; Sugiyama 1996; von Frisch 1967). Human narrators, alternatively, have the luxury of a rich repertoire of symbolic forms and historically informed genres (e.g. gossip, testimonials, confessions, eye-witness reports, diaries, memoirs, dream performances) as well as stylistic strategies to nuance their renderings of personal experience. And the events rendered in narrative form extend as far as the interface of culture and the human mind allows through the workings of memory, anticipation, and imagination.

The drive to impose a logic on life experience is ubiquitous, cutting across languages and social groups large and small, and across the life span, emergent at the earliest stages of language development. It is not hard to imagine why the impulse to narrate experience is pervasive. The human condition is such that we not only act in and on the world, we also reflect on our actions and reflect on our reflections. In the middle of experiences, we are myopic and cannot make sense of them in relation to our expectations concerning people, objects, environments, activities, internal states, and other facets of the human condition. In narrating we do not replay an intact experience so much as bring experience into social and psychological focus.

2.5 Narrative Lesson Five: Narrating personal experience consists of two practices

Narrative Practice 1	Narrative Practice 2
Narrators present one consistent logic of experience, including an unexpected/problematic event and resolution.	Narrators question or dispute the meaning or accuracy of a recounted logic of experience.

If we think of narratives of personal experience as raising a dilemma for protagonists, Narrative Practice 1 generates both the dilemma and its resolution. The bank robbery narrative exemplifies Narrative Practice 1, in that it displays both the problematic incident of the bank hold-up and the subsequent means of handling the problem, namely the bullet-proof teller window. While this narrative practice depicts a way out of life's predicaments, Narrative Practice 2 draws narrators into probing multiple logics of experience, calling into question what happened, why, and/or the relevance of an incident for life more generally (Morson 1994; Ochs and Capps 2001), as in excerpt (3) below (Ochs, Taylor, et al. 1992: 52–3). In this excerpt, the co-narrators of the past sequence of events are also the protagonists of the story, and they dispute

what each other thought, said, and did in an incident involving photo negatives. They also dispute the moral character of one another; each casts the other as irresponsible, which in turn is rejected:

(3)

Marie:	Jon – Do you have those negatives from the (pony?) pictures?
Jon:	Yeah –
	They're a:ll in your cabinet *((pointing))*
Marie:	*((clears throat))* I wish you woulda told (Janie)
	cuz that's why I sent her down
	(cuz/and) Susan wanted em – when she came ↑ –
	(so she could) go (if) she took my roll of film =
Jon:	= *((with slight shrug))* Sorry –
	I told Janie I didn't have time to come in –
	Janie didn't ask me that –
	What Janie asked me was –
	Can I get the negative fo:r Susan's picture –
	[That meant I had to go through all those negatives
	[*((breathy))*
	and I was- I said "Hey I .h – I don't –
	Tell her I don't have time to do that right now"
	...
	I did the best I could with the information that I was given
	...
	I did not know =
	...
	= that you needed to know the location of the – film
	...
	('f) Janie had come out and said to me –
	"Dad will you tell M:Mommy
	where the films- are from the pic↑tures"
	I would have said "Yes? Janie"
Marie:	[Well when she's about eight or nine =
Jon:	[Janie came out =
Marie:	= I bet she'll be able to do that
	...
Jon:	YOU: are over eight or nine are you not?
Marie:	Ye:s – and that's exactly what I told her to say↑ =
Jon:	That's right?
Marie:	= is to find out where the negatives were. =
	...
Marie:	= so I could give them to Susan
	(0.2 sec. pause)
Jon:	I↑ see –
	Well she didn't she di-
	she didn't give me your message =
	...
	= in the form you asked it
	((narrative continues))

Narrative Practice 2 explores alternative understandings of experience, including the possibility that some life problems such as serious illnesses may be ultimately unresolvable. Across communities everyday narrative practice gives human beings an opportunity to examine facets of life experience and try to piece them together into a temporal, causal, and moral logic.

In recounting narratives of personal experience, tellers are pulled between their desire to arrive at a coherent account of life events and their desire to construct an account that is authentic, that is, that resonates with their understandings and sensibilities of what it was like to participate in the events being narrated. The desire for coherence of life experience is so strong, however, that it often overwhelms the desire for authenticity. Narrators want an explanation of events and moral guidelines for participating in them. In their desire to make sense out of events, they construct for themselves and for their interlocutors narratives that have a beginning, a middle, and an end, wrapped in a cloak of moral certainty (Bernstein 1994; Morson 1994). The most important characteristic of these narratives is that they offer a framework for handling unanticipated situations. Narratives "domesticate" unexpected life events by providing cultural schemata for interpreting them (Bruner 2002). Focal events are organized in terms of cultural genres of experience; precedents are proffered; and breaches and ways of dealing with them are outlined. Coherent narratives may be rhetorically compelling, having the character of what Mary Louise Pratt (1977) calls "display texts." These effective narratives of personal experience create colloquial dramas, which share aesthetic qualities of literary genres.

Authenticity plays second fiddle to these culturally canonical grids for interpreting events. For example, so-called master narratives of war or debilitating illness very often overwhelm individual renderings of these experiences (Morrison 1994). Default narrative models for making sense out of experience are pervasive, from mass media to professional advisers to peers and family offerings of their own parallel experiences and other precedents with which to interpret a specific experience.

Coherent renderings of personal experience, however, may dissolve when narrators exercise a desire to probe further and make sense out of events in a way that captures how they and other protagonists felt, thought, and acted. Coherent canonical narratives may simply not ring true to participants in or analysts of events, as when Vietnamese veterans and peace activists countered official accounts of the war events (O'Brien 1990), or when sufferers of a chronic illness discard medical narratives of recovery (Mattingly 1998). Even or especially in intimate contexts of narrating experiences among friends, family, and healers, tellers may raise doubts about their own and others' versions of what transpired. Interlocutors engaged in reconstructing events through narrative may suggest alternative scenarios or pose queries that leave ambiguous the contours of an experience.

2.6 Narrative Lesson Six: Pursuit of a coherent logic of events and pursuit of authenticity of experience differentially influence the shaping of narrative practices

Narrative practice that veers in the direction of coherence (Narrative Practice 1) is more likely to be dominated by one active primary teller, while narrative practice that

involves open-ended probing (Narrative Practice 2) generally involves the active participation of more than one teller who collaboratively author the narrative of personal experience.

Narratives that lean in the direction of coherence lend themselves to *performance* and *didactic modeling*, while narratives that take the path of probing before settling upon coherence lend themselves to open-ended dialogic problem-solving. If we accept that a fundamental motivation to narrate life events is to make sense out of those events, and if we accept that narrative sense-making may reach beyond tidy progressions of events, then the boundaries of narrative can encompass raising and responding to doubts, questions, speculations, challenges, and other evaluative stances.

2.7 Narrative Lesson Seven: These two tendencies in narrating experience – one to display a coherent logic of events and the other to probe alternative logics – have ramifications for the analysis of narrative as a human endeavor

Most social scientists consider narratives of personal experience to be those that assert a logic of events within a consistent evaluative framework (Narrative Practice 1) and ignore narrative activity that draws interlocutors into dialogically piecing together frameworks for ordering and interpreting events (Narrative Practice 2). This asymmetry is startling, in that all over the world people find themselves in the position of beginning to narrate an experience without having a firm grip or consensus on the shape and meaning of that experience. Whether as gossip or as mealtime accounts of the day's events or in some other social context, narrative probings of life events pervade informal social interactions around the world. Moreover, it is precisely this sort of dialogic narrative interaction that lays the foundations for open-ended, problem-solving narrative activity in law and science (Amsterdam and Bruner 2000; Ochs, Taylor, et al. 1992). In laboratory settings, for example, scientific accounts of physical events are vulnerable to challenge. The purported temporal and causal logic of events is probed and revised as a matter of course (Ochs and Jacoby 1997).

2.8 Narrative Lesson Eight: Recognition of distinct narrative practices affects the scholarly conceptualization of competence in narrating life events

The acquisition of the ability to tell narratives, especially narratives of personal experience, entails two forms of competence:

Narrative Competence 1	Narrative Competence 2
Competence to present a certain, consistent logic of events	Competence to probe, challenge, revise a logic of events

Each of these forms of competence is organized by communities of speaker-hearers, and each entails cognitive and social challenges. Narrative Competence 1 involves the ability to articulate a temporal sequence of events; situate the events; compose a coherent plot line with a beginning, middle, and end; and maintain a moral perspective (Berman and Slobin 1994; Nelson 1989; Stein and Glenn 1979). These skills develop throughout childhood, but even young children relate rudimentary coherent narratives of personal experience, as in the following excerpt from a 23-month-old child, Emily, as she recounts life events in her crib at night (Bruner and Lucariello 1989: 87–8):

(4)
Emily: Then Emily got the blanket
and set the dinner
Emmy ate one time
and one time Emmy sick
Emmy wanted dinner
Emmy (?)
and Emmy ate the ice
and took dinner

In this passage, Emily recalls a problematic event ("one time Emmy sick"). Moreover, she provides a relevánt prior circumstance ("Emmy ate one time") and goes on to relate her psychological response ("Emmy wanted dinner"), her attempt to remediate her problem ("and Emmy ate the ice"), and its aftermath ("and took dinner").

Narrative Competence 2, the ability to probe event logics, entails minimally the capacity to conceptualize and evaluate multiple versions of experience. This competence also develops throughout childhood and is evident in early efforts to render experience in narrative form (Feldman 1989). That is, young children ponder facets of what happened, what will happen, or what could happen in their narrative activity, as in the following excerpt by Emily at 24 months of age (Feldman 1989: 109–10):

(5)
Emily: In the bed fall down.
Actually the bed broken.
Huh, huuh, Daddy funny.
The bed broken.
Anybody can put it away.
Emmy go to sleep.
Maybe the baby and the mommy buy a different crib.
Maybe do that cause the other one broken.
What be the tree fell down.
Could be.
I don't know which.
Maybe tree fell down and broke that crib.
I don't know what thing fell down.
...
The crib did it ...
The tree did it.

The crib.
But I don't know which kind of lady bought the crib ...
But that one fell down.
That crib must been,
that tree must have been,
broke that tree.
That must fell down.
I don't know what lady bought it.
But the lady went to get this new crib.
But then this is one was, bring it back (seat) ...
And the you not supposed broke the tree.
(Broke) up.

Emily recounts a narrative about a broken bed that raises uncertainties about exactly what transpired and poses different possibilities of what could have occurred. The narrative is laced with a vocabulary of doubt, e.g. "Maybe," "Could be," "I don't know." One casting of an event alternates with another, e.g. "The crib did it" → "The tree did it." Emily speculates on how the bed broke in the first place and how the family will respond to the problem of the broken bed, e.g. "Maybe the baby and the mommy buy a different crib."

Overwhelmingly, acquisition research has favored a model of narrative in which competence consists of the ability to render experience in terms of a coherent temporal and causal logic. Scant attention has been paid to the equally viable template of narrative competence as the ability to engage in open-ended probing of experience. The remainder of this chapter attempts to redress this lopsided view of narrative competence by suggesting a framework for analyzing the breadth of human narrative variability. The narrative lesson that follows highlights facets of what Lisa Capps and I call a "Dimensional Approach" to narrative (Ochs and Capps 2001).

2.9 Narrative Lesson Nine: Narratives of personal experience can be analyzed in terms of five basic dimensions, each representing a spectrum of possible realizations

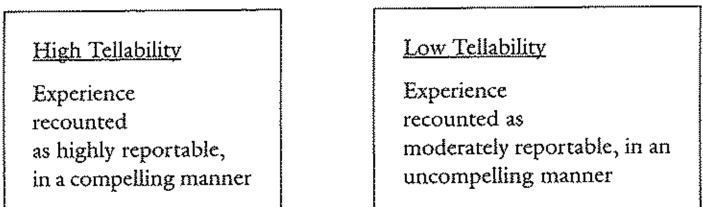
While temporal sequentiality is a criterial property of narratives of personal experience, other properties, such as a plot organization with a beginning, middle, and end, do not necessarily apply to all variants of personal narratives across situations and communities. The Dimensional Approach posits five dimensions that are relevant to *all* narratives of personal experience and are realized through a set of features that *variably* characterize different realizations of personal narrative. These variable features allow analysis of a range of narrative practices. The five basic narrative dimensions comprise Tellership, Tellability, Embeddedness, Linearity, and Moral Stance.

Tellership: Oral narratives of personal experience are rarely told apart from other interlocutors, as in the case of young Emily alone in her bed at night. More typically across the world's societies, personal narratives are collaboratively constructed with other interlocutors (Baquedano-López 1998; Blum-Kulka 1997; Goodwin 1986; Haviland 1977; Mattingly and Garro 2000; Miller et al. 1996; Minami 1996). The

dimension of Tellership includes the extent and kind of participation in the co-telling of a narrative. As indicated by the arrow, tellership may range from one active co-teller to multiple, active co-tellers.

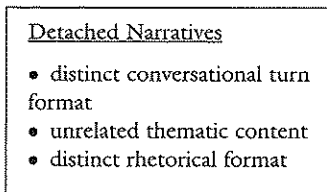
Narrative interaction may be dominated by a primary teller, who recounts events with a relatively passive co-teller. Interviews that elicit personal narratives often have this character, as illustrated in the narrative about diving into a deep pool (example 1). In this relatively informal interview, the interviewee (Meg) is the primary teller and the interviewer (Lisa) provides relatively restricted feedback ("wow," "uh huh," etc.). Alternatively, the narrative about the toy cigarette lighter, toy gun, and bank hold-up (example 2) involves several family members as active co-tellers. Some narrative interactions may start out with one variant of tellership, e.g. one primary co-teller, then shift to another form of teller participation, e.g. multiple active co-tellers.

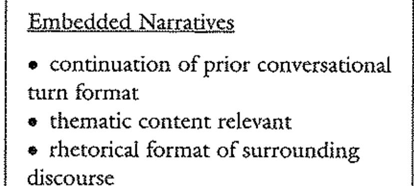
Tellability: The dimension of Tellability refers to the significance of the narrated experience and the rhetorical style in which it is related. As noted in Lesson Two, narratives of personal experience tend to focus on events that are out of the ordinary, unexpected, or otherwise reportable (Labov 1966; Labov and Waletzky 1968). Everyday narrative activity, however, examines a range of life events, some of which are narrated as highly tellable and others which are less so:



As linguistic anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath (1985) notes, narratives of personal experience elicited from children by their parents may be delivered reluctantly and with minimal elaboration. Such narratives fall on the low end of the tellability dimension. What counts as a highly tellable incident depends upon personal, local, and community evaluative frameworks. For example, from Meg's perspective, diving into a pool over her head when she couldn't swim is a vivid memory and highly tellable experience. Near-death and other extraordinary experiences (Labov 1966) may be recognized as inherently tellable. Yet, gifted narrators can rhetorically transform even relatively mundane occurrences into highly tellable events. In this sense, tellability resides in narrative style.

Embeddedness: The dimension of Embeddedness captures the relation of a narrative to surrounding discourse and social activity. Narratives of personal experience vary in terms of the extent to which and how they are part of ongoing concerns along a continuum from detached to embedded. Relatively detached and embedded narratives are distinguished in terms of the following features:

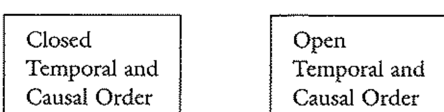




Detached narratives of personal experience are recounted in a turn-taking format that differs from prior and subsequent discourse. For example, a detached narrative initiated at some point in informal conversation may be recounted across one or more relatively extended conversational turns, which sets it apart from the surrounding conversational turns of variable length. In addition, detached narratives may introduce an experience unrelated to what interlocutors have been discussing or the ongoing activity in which they are engaged. Finally, tellers of relatively detached narratives may use distinctive rhetorical techniques, such as the use of particular verb tenses, lexicon, voice quality, intonation, sound symbolism, parallelism, slow disclosure, or other available stylistic strategies. As noted, Pratt (1977) refers to these narratives of personal experience as "display texts," in that they are geared more toward performance than communication of information.

Alternatively, embedded narratives tend to continue whatever turn-taking format is in interactional play. Initiated in the course of informal conversation, for example, embedded narratives of personal experience tend to be constructed across turns of variable length and appear part of the ongoing conversational dialogue. Relatively embedded narratives also tend to relate events that extend a current focus of attention. Thus, an instructor may embed a narrative of personal experience into a lesson to illustrate a point; similarly, litigants may use a personal narrative to shore up their argument. In addition, embedded narratives may be shaped by the rhetorical style of surrounding discourse. For example, personal narratives recounted to enhance a point in instruction may be inflected with features of a teaching register or by norms for communicating in classroom contexts (Haroutunian-Gordon 1991). Similarly, personal narratives delivered as part of legal testimony, medical visits, and political arguments may be constrained by institutional norms (Drew and Heritage 1992).

Linearity: The dimension of Linearity attends to the narrative logic organizing a sequence of events and lies at the heart of the distinction between narrative practices that favor coherence and those that favor inquiry. Narratives of personal experience related in the course of informal conversation vary in terms of how tightly events are woven into an integrated plot, as follows:



Human beings are capable of recounting narratives that present an orderly, linear temporal and causal progression of events, as in the following exchange between a

working-class Euro-American mother and child (Berko Gleason and Melzi 1997: 220):

(6)
Mother: Did someone bump you on the head?
Who bumped you on the head
Child: Derek
Mother: Derek?
What happened?
Child: I was going to ran into his leg
An um he hit me

Guided by Mother, the co-tellers of this narrative recount a linear sequence of events, moving back in time from a later event (Derek bumps child's head) to temporally and causally prior events (child going to run/runs into Derek's leg, Derek hits child).

Alternatively, humans are capable of questioning a purported progression of events and speculating alternative scenarios. In non-linear narratives, tellers may evidence confusion, disagreement, or memory lapses. They also may veer off the course of a story line or propose alternative scenarios for life events. Narrating can be an occasion for sorting through a tangle of experiential possibilities, as young Emily displayed in constructing versions of what happened to cause a baby's bed to fall down (example 5) and as the spouses Marie and Jon displayed in their conflicting accounts of what transpired in the events surrounding a search for photo negatives (example 3).

Moral Stance: Central to narratives of personal experience is the dimension of Moral Stance, namely, how tellers articulate a temporal and causal sequence of events in relation to principles of goodness. Narratives or portions of narratives may orient to one of the following propensities:

Certain, Constant Moral Stance	Uncertain, Fluid Moral Stance

Moral stance may be variably realized across narratives in terms of whether tellers posit or explore the moral implications of personal experience. Depending upon situation and community, some tellers may use narrative to affirm a moral perspective; they may elicit and receive supportive feedback from other interlocutors on their position. When the teller is the protagonist, the perspective is often that the teller-protagonist took the moral high ground compared to others involved in the recounted incident (Bamberg 1996; Ochs, Smith, and Taylor 1989). Alternatively, tellers may launch a narrative precisely because they are unsure of how to morally evaluate a life event, or tellers may disagree on the fairness or appropriateness of a protagonist's behavior. Narrating allows tellers to bring experiences into moral focus.

Moral stance and tellership are related, in that multiple active co-tellers often offer assessments or moral canons rooted in culture and history for understanding personal experience. Moral stance and tellability are intertwined, in that a highly tellable incident often involves a violation of moral standards or canons of behavior (Amsterdam and Bruner 2000). In addition, imbuing a narrative with a certain, constant moral stance is compatible with linear plot organization, while uncertain, fluid shifting of moral stance is characteristic of non-linear narrative structure (Bernstein 1994).

2.10 Narrative Lesson Ten: The variable realizations of narratives of personal experience play an important role in configuring selves

Formulating a personal experience in narrative form is a species-wide means of enhancing self-awareness. While inside an experience, participants are not able to adequately grasp how they and others are acting, feeling, and thinking in a situation at hand. As Milan Kundera (1995) notes, human beings move through life in a fog. Personal narrative becomes a way to reflect back on experience and give it autobiographical shape. Narrating personal experience allows us to reconcile how we (and others) behaved in the past and how we project ourselves (and others) in an as-yet-unrealized future with current self-understandings. That is, narrating experiences is a way of fashioning a sense of continuity of self. This is all the more true considering that most personal narratives dwell upon experiences that upset tellers' life expectations.

Narrative activity can reinstate a sense of stability of self when tellers engage in Narrative Practice 1. Tellers may be comforted by constructing a uniform account of what transpired and why, and by seeking and securing affiliative moral positions from their interlocutors. Certainly, Narrative Practice 1 is an effective means of socializing novices into who they are and who they can expect to become. As anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly notes, for example, narratives can "emplot" lives (1998). Yet, tellers do not always select this path to redress the uncertainties of life experience (Mattingly 1998; Mattingly and Garro 2000; Ochs and Capps 2001). Rather, they may pursue Narrative Practice 2, wherein they muse, inquire, contradict, revise, or otherwise reconfigure sedimented visions of self and the world. When tellers engage in Narrative Practice 2, they are unsure of themselves, yet this ambiguity affords a heightened self-awareness that serves as a universal springboard to self-transformation. In this manner, analysis of how personal experience is variably rendered yields insight into the narrative impulse.

3 Coda

Narrative provides a medium for construing events experienced in the imagination and in the everyday world. When recounting life events, memory and anticipation are filtered through narrative formats. In particular, narrative links events in temporal and causal sequences. Temporal sequences instantiate and influence how time is sensed by protagonists and narrators rather than time as calculated by scientific observation. This phenomenology of time sometimes leads narrators to leap from a past experience to its implications for present and future existence, or the inverse. In this manner, narrative constructs a framework for charting experiential paths through life. Causal

sequences in everyday narratives typically do not make predictions but rather construe how one event afforded or otherwise made probable another event.

Quotidian narrative activity involves narrators in two alternative narrative practices. When engaged in Narrative Practice 1, narrators articulate a plot that is coherent and consistent. Alternatively, narrators may participate in Narrative Practice 2, wherein they raise ambiguities and doubts concerning the experience recounted. Both narrative practices are essential to competent narration in day-to-day social interactions. A Dimensional Approach to analyzing narrative encompasses both of these practices. The dimensions of Tellership, Tellability, Embeddedness, Linearity, and Moral Stance are relevant to all narrative activity, but their properties differ depending upon whether interlocutors are engaged in Narrative Practice 1 or Narrative Practice 2. In particular, Narrative Practice 1 often manifests the following features:

Narrative Practice 1

Dimensional Characteristics
- one active co-teller
- highly tellable experience
- relatively detached
- linear plot line
- certain, constant moral stance

Alternatively, Narrative Practice 2 typically exhibits the following features:

Narrative Practice 2

Dimensional Characteristics
- multiple active co-tellers
- moderately tellable experience
- embedded in ongoing activity
- indeterminate plot line
- uncertain, shifting moral stance

Scholarship has privileged the distinctive features of Narrative Practice 1 as typical of narratives of personal experience. This chapter offers a framework for discerning and analyzing a broader spectrum of narrative practices, in an effort to better understand how narratives of personal experience are variably realized within and across speech communities.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

Notational conventions employed in the transcribed excerpts examined in this chapter include the following:

Symbol	Meaning
.	The period indicates a falling, or final, intonation contour, not necessarily the end of a sentence.
?	The question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a question.
,	The comma indicates "continuing" intonation, not necessarily a clause boundary.
:::	Colons indicate stretching of the preceding sound, proportional to the number of colons.
-	A hyphen after a word or a part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption.
word	Underlining indicates some form of stress or emphasis on the underlined item.
WOrd	Upper case indicates loudness.
°°	The degree signs indicate the segments of talk which are markedly quiet or soft.
><	The combination of "more than" and "less than" symbols indicates that the talk between them is compressed or rushed.
<>	In the reverse order, they indicate that a stretch of talk is markedly slowed.
=	Equal signs indicate no break or delay between the words thereby connected.
(( ))	Double parentheses enclose descriptions of conduct.
(word)	When all or part of an utterance is in parentheses, this indicates uncertainty on the transcriber's part.
( )	Empty parentheses indicate that something is being said, but no hearing can be achieved.
(1.2)	Numbers in parentheses indicate silence in tenths of a second.
(.)	A dot in parentheses indicates a "micropause," hearable but not readily measurable; ordinarily less than 2/10 of a second.
[	Separate left square brackets, one above the other on two successive lines with utterances by different speakers, indicates a point of overlap onset.
hhh	letter "h" indicates hearable aspiration.