

Narrative, Stories and Method”

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Mobility-Borders Heritage And resilience through Story-telling

Day 4th: Digital methods and research

Outline of the lecture

- ⦿ *What is a narrative*
- ⦿ *Narratives as research method*
- ⦿ *Narrative and meaning*
- ⦿ *Constructing a narrative*
- ⦿ *Case Study*



Narrative and Self

- ◎ Michael Jackson underlined that storytelling is a "vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances." (2002: 15)
- ◎ In a sense we are shaped in and through our stories

© *YESTERDAY, I MISSED THE BUS.
A MAN HELPED ME CATCH THE
NEXT ONE. IT MADE ME THINK
STRANGERS ARE KINDER THAN
WE ASSUME*

What is a narrative?

Part I.

- ⦿ What makes the last statement a story and not a mere piece of information?

Definition

- ◎ *Narratives are accounts of daily life, stories that spring from the imagination, vignettes of daily life, news reports of events of public interest, histories, gossip, and other oral and written accounts in past, present, and future time. (Daiute 2014: 2)*

According to Daiute's analysis

- ◎ Narratives are social processes produced in specific cultural contexts
- ◎ Being in the field and doing ethnographic research is to become immersed in these contexts (linguistically and culturally) to understand their meaning and practices from the inside.

Social Anthropology and Narrative

1900-1960

- ◎ Myths and Tale
- ◎ Mind Mapping

1960-1980

- ◎ From History to Narrative

1990-2010

- ◎ Self-narration, Voice

2010

- ◎ Positionality
- ◎ Co-creation

Relational Nature

- ◎ Narratives depend on audience, context, and norms
- ◎ They are co-produced between we as researchers and them (inter-subjectivity)

Characteristics

Part II

What are we looking in a story

- ◎ Who tells the story?
- ◎ Who listens to the story?
- ◎ Where is the story narrated?
- ◎ What is the content?
- ◎ What are the storytelling techniques?

○ Class

Gender

Age

Public space

○ Linguistic style

Private space

○ Different media /channels e.g. language, sound, image, body

Props

Form vs Content

- ◎ Meaning comes from HOW something is told, not just WHAT is told
- ◎ The discussion represents the core argument of the crisis of representation in social anthropology and the duality of ethnography (as method and as text)

Jerome Bruner, Actual Minds

1987

- ◎ He states that in the narrative there are combined spaces: the “**landscape of action**” and the “**landscape of consciousness**”
- ◎ The first one concerned with what happens, the second with what those involved in events know, think, or feel.
- ◎ Stories thus reveal the reasons behind things and grab our attention with the changing nature of these reasons and the uneven distribution of knowledge about some state of affairs. (Götsch & Palmberger 2022: 4)

Ethnographic Narrative

- ◎ Clifford Geertz underlined that "the authorial uneasiness" that produces unconvincing ethnographies "arises from having to produce scientific texts from biographical experiences" (Geertz, 1988:14).

Voice

- ◉ who tells the story (not always the physical person)
- ◉ the narrator can be inside the story (agent) or outside (witness) or be involved in the events/emotions (first person) or keep a distance (third person)

A migrant woman waits at a border checkpoint.



Compare the three narrations of the same story: what type of voice do they represent?

The queue moved slowly under the afternoon heat. Most travelers avoided eye contact with the guards.

I could feel my passport sweating in my hand.

From the back of the line, I watched her arguing quietly with the officer.

Analysis

- A. Omniscient / Detached
- B. First-Person / Involved
- C. Witness Narrator

Compare:

What kind of authority do different voices create?

What emotions emerge?

What knowledge becomes available?

Who controls interpretation?

Who becomes the object of observation?

Why is voice important?

- ◉ It influences trust (is the narrator reliable?)
- ◉ It controls information flow
- ◉ It creates tone and perspective
- ◉ It determines how close we feel to characters

There is always interpretation in facts

Compare:

- ◉ migration —---forced migration
- ◎ “There was a war here” vs “We fought them”

Narrative between facts and construction

- ◎ Narratives justify, persuade, assign blame, construct identity
- ◎ Facts claim objectivity
- ◎ Narratives interpret and frame reality
 - ◎ Narrative are always shaped by context, audience, power

Jerome Bruner, Actual Minds, 1987

- ◎ Narratives are versions of reality
 - ◎ Circumstances, audiences and storytellers shape and cocreate the form and content of these versions
- ◎ Narrative thus, is a powerful tool for framing social life producing personal and group identities
- ◎ Narratives have the power to shape reality as they can be transformed into social action

Ethnography and storytelling

- ◎ *the situation might include the site of fieldwork, various personal circumstances, the historical and social moment, and even prevailing theories about the subject of research. The **story, though, follows the transformations**—physical, emotional, intellectual—that an **ethnographer experiences personally or witnesses in others.** (Narayan 13)*

Ethnographic Voice

***Ethnographers build texts from conversations:** overheard words, directed interviews, theorists' debates. These varied voices might be reproduced through specific **quoted words**—recorded words, remembered words, words mediated by translation—or they might be **paraphrased**. An **ethnographer's own voice** can serve as **guide and interpreter**, sorting out these other voices. Or, in cases of collaboration, the ethnographer's voice might join in among others' voices. As **collaborative ventures** become more common, ethnographers seek the voices of the people they're writing about at every stage, from deciding themes to **reviewing transcripts and arranging a final form**.(Narrayan 2012: 69)*

Authority-power-narrative

Who has the authority to represent whom—
and how?

A matter of who speaks

Who gets heard

And whose perspective is legitimized

Answering these questions postulate ethical research
issues for researchers

Reflexivity: the anthropologist's voice

Narratology

Who tells the story?

Narrative position

Fictional narrator

Voice as structure

Social Anthropology

Who has the right to tell the story?

Power and representation

Real-world researcher

Voice as ethics + politics

An important anthropological insight is that voice is never neutral.

Different voices produce:

- . different truths,
- . different hierarchies,
- . different relations between observer and observed.

Think:

- . *Why did colonial ethnography prefer the distant third person?*
- . *Why do feminist ethnographies often use situated first person?*
- . *Why do experimental forms emerge in trauma/postmemory narratives?*

B. dos Santos

**“No global social justice without
global cognitive justice.”**

Epistemicide

- ⦿ Destruction of knowledge systems, e.g., systems killing forms of knowledge, stigmatizing them as invalid or inferior e.g. witchcraft, scientific vs rural
- ⦿ Some narratives are erased where
 - ⦿ others (western-centric, neoliberal orientation) become hegemonic in scientific narratives

Abyssal Line

- Valid knowledge vs invisible knowledge
- Some stories never count
- Multiple knowledge systems must coexist
 - (ecology of knowledge) e.g. living on and with nature and not as ruling over nature
- E.g.
- *A climate scientist studies the forest through satellite data.*
- *A local shepherd reads the same landscape through animals, smell, memory, and seasonal rhythms.*
- Anthropology asks how these knowledges might coexist rather than cancel one another.

Narrative form itself can become an ecology of knowledges.

**Polyphonic and multimodal narratives
can be a starting point for inclusion of
different epistemologies**

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