
Throwing a light on oral narrative data in order to inform language and literacy research

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ABSTRACT

Narrative methodologies are valuable to language and literacy research. Oral narratives told in situations of face-to-face interaction are used in research methodologies and in scaffolding pedagogic activities. Nevertheless oral narratives often present limiting cases in which narrative accounts are less easily distinguishable from other genres such as interrogative, expository, descriptive or argumentative accounts. The resulting confusion around genre has an impact on data selection and weighing and thereby on how narrative is mobilised in research and in pedagogic situations. This paper presents the results of a corpus-based statistical investigation into the interactional features of oral narrative accounts collected during academic literacy interviews. Common claims made about narratives, such as that they are structurally differentiated, that they rely on more turns at talk or that they are a

unique manner of presenting discrete experiences are not supported in a straightforward way in the corpus data. Narratives do promote more involvement, self-reference, complex embeddings and constructed dialogue. Conversely they are less frequent, less on task and are more consistently aligned with their context. In language and literacy research these findings suggest a need to reflect on the relationship between types of participant response, types of solicitation and allocated response times. The study contributes to differentiating discourse types more accurately and emphasises the particularities of oral narrative interaction.

Keywords: academic literacy, language usage, interviews, oral narrative data, face-to-face interaction, embedding, discourse genres, participant involvement, participant alignment

1. Introduction

The pairing of narrative and educational endeavour is a tight and productive one. Narrative is both a key support for pedagogic method and a foundational means of researching, and evaluating, its effectivity. Narrative, as term to designate discourse types, is pluriform, being used to refer to written literary texts, different kinds of written or multimodal student productions, oral accounts of personal experience and multimodal instances of storytelling. Oral narrative accounts can be used to scaffold and evaluate the design and uptake of pedagogic initiatives and to support findings in academic literacy research. Student accounts can be included in transformative pedagogies such as literacy or life narratives. They are, equally, a consistent part of preparation for language class activities in that they allow students to express their opinions and transmit experience. In many of these kinds of situations, easily-recognisable, canonical, narrative forms exist alongside ‘non’-narrative (Baynham, 1996) discourse types such as interrogative, expository, descriptive or argumentative forms. It is also frequent to find narrative accounts that are intermediate to these discourse types and that combine aspects of the narrative and the non-narrative. In such limiting cases, it is a more complex, and to a certain extent, confusing task to identify what is narrative and what is not.

This paper presents oral narrative data from a series of interviews conducted in the context of an academic literacy project in a South African tertiary education establishment that was concerned with access to, and availability of, digital resources. Whilst the application of findings has elsewhere (Kelleher, 2020a) concerned the subject of digital literacy itself, this paper wishes to turn the focus towards the dynamics of face-to-face interaction. The study seeks to address the pragmatic realisation of oral narrative forms in those situations where different discourse types are co-present and in which their features overlap. Through a comparative examination of both narrative and non-narrative accounts, and a statistic appreciation of the features of each, it seeks to apply its findings to better appreciating, selecting and weighing narrative data and, in consequence, better framing and designing narrative-based research into language and literacy.

The plan of the article is as follows. The field of narrative research is introduced with attention to uses in educational contexts. Minimal selection criteria are discussed for differentiating narrative accounts. Following this introductory discussion, the study methodology and corpora are presented. Three transcriptions are given in order to exemplify the challenges inherent in classifying and analysing narrative accounts. Analyses, as adopted, adduce statistical differences between the corpus of narrative accounts and non-narrative accounts as concern: relative interactional work, relative degrees of narrativity, participant role inhabitancy and alignment. The article then draws conclusions and recommendations for language and literacy research.

2. Background and research aim

Narrative methodologies are highly pertinent to reflexions on academic institutions and research into language and literacy. Narrative is posited as central to qualitative research methodologies (Holley and Colyar, 2012), and indeed to the human sciences (Kreiwirth, 2000; Scutt and Hobson, 2013). Since at least Soliday (1994) language and literacy narratives have been emphasised as a central tool for accompanying student learning (see also Coffey and Street, 2008). Narrative has been used to explore digital literacy (Clark et al., 2015), and contributes to paradigm shifting academic literacy investigations such as Moll et al.'s (2005) work into funds of knowledge. In South Africa, such narrative research has been used, for instance, to understand immigrant children's educational experiences (Isseri et al., 2018). In terms of learning (rather than research into learning) narrative is linked to expression of the creativity necessary to experimentation with, and acquisition of, language forms (Albert and Kormos, 2011). It is associated with the assimilation of cognitive skills (Laing Gillam and Gillam, 2016), cultural content (Kearney, 2010) and implicated in the formation of causal and semantic relations (Nahatame, 2020).

Many studies, however, take canonical, written narratives, as the (often unstated) basis for their research and pay less attention to the instantiation of narratives in situations of face-to-face interaction. In such face-to-face, rather than mediated, interactions, narrative accounts of experience are often co-present with other discourse types, such as interrogative, expository, descriptive or argumentative accounts. This mix, and to a certain extent confusion, of genres leads to a potential omission in research and practice, with narrative often serving as a sort of cover term whose features are less-precisely known. This, in turn, leads to problems of selection and weighing of data. Given that a participant's accounts can have very different orientations and opinions when narrativized or when couched using other discursive types (such as expository or argumentative types) the question of data selection is a crucial one. With this in mind, the justification, and aim, of the present paper is to provide a detailed examination of oral narrative data in order to better clarify the range of features, and pragmatic implications, pertinent to language and literacy.

In relation, however, to studies that have further problematised narrative, by showing its reciprocity with, and dependence on, acculturation (Chafe, 1980), or the acquisition of spatiality and gesture (Stein, 2008; Kunene Nicolas et al., 2017) it should be made clear that this paper hopes, rather, to simplify one's use of and reliance on the genre. Its aim is to disambiguate narratives from other discourse types to obtain a fairly clear, cross-cultural image of its pragmatic features. It is for this reason that the study departs from very minimal narrative criteria that are broadly applicable to the diversity of South African students' cultures, genders, languages, and educational experiences. The aim, therefore, is an understanding of what narrative tends to do within the spectrum of other oral and interactional genres rather than to offer arguments for what narrative should or should not be considered to represent.

Oral narratives, minimally (see discussions in Norrick, 2000; Koven, 2002; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Rühlemann, 2013) can be held to consist of a series of events that are restricted chronologically and sequentially (Labov and Waletzky, 1997 [1967]). These events are, further, held to be discrete, which is to say that they pertain to specific, isolable circumstances. If not, they are held to be descriptive rather than narrative (see Norrick, 2000). They usually involve some sort of climax and denouement (see Genette, 1966; Ricoeur, 1983) and the division of the interactional and informational project into abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result or resolution and coda (Labov, 1972: 354-396).

Within a speech event, participants regularly produce various interactional ‘projects’ (Selting, 2000: 481) that involve holding the floor over several turns. Narrative accounts are one these kinds of projects. From the perspective of interaction, narratives occasion the ‘inhabitation’, or the taking on of the speaker roles of author (the person who tells the story), interlocutor (the person who interacts with other participants in the situation of telling), and character (a figure in the story world who is responsible for events and spatial movement) (Koven, 2002). Narratives, further, generally involve several turns at talk (Sacks, 1986, 1992) since the imparting of sequential and chronological information implies that the teller hold the floor for a relatively sustained period of time. Narratives, finally, are participant designed and respond to emic criteria. The small stories approach (Georgakopoulou, 2007; Bamberg, 2008) has convincingly shown that narrative activity extends to shared references, allusive recallings of events and refusals to tell stories that are, nevertheless, evocable.

The aim of this study is to distinguish the characteristic features of oral narrative accounts from other kinds of interactional projects. In so doing the study imbricates questions of discourse and questions of interaction. Its findings will be useful to narrative research since they will contribute to better appreciating methodological questions, data selection, story structure, speaker roles, and in helping to conceptualise the cognitive, and to a certain extent, metacognitive relationship between narrative and language.

3. Research methods and data

In the context of applied narrative research, ‘accounts’ (Scott and Lyman, 1968; Antaki, 1988; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1990; Morris et al., 1994; De Fina, 2009) are those projects that speakers use to justify and naturalise information. With respect to previous studies of accounts that concerned their mobilisation in talk, De Fina (2009) drove a change in perspective and inquired into how accounts offered the possibility of studying contextualised narrative activity. She argued that the genre of narrative account involved: a) a recapitulation of past experience, b) explanations, c) recipient design, d) a general orientation towards factuality, and e) a variable structure that responds to interview dynamics (De Fina, 2009: 253).

What De Fina identified was the point of intersection between accounts, as a speech act, and narratives as a discourse type. This intersection offers the possibility of comparability between narrative and non-narrative accounts, since the function of the account remains stable. This

allows research into interactional realisation and the work that narratives perform in the unfolding alignment between interviewer and participant. It also allows investigation into pragmatic features of accounts. A corpus approach allows a certain degree of quantification of these aspects of differentiation.

The oral narrative data presented here come from a National Research Foundation financed academic literacy project into the digital humanities and the use of digital media. The setting of the study was a tertiary education institution in South Africa. Data was collected in 2018 and 2019 using an interview format with questions that prompted free participant responses. These interviews generated a series of audio recordings. All participants for the project have been thanked and grouped in Acknowledgments. An initial corpus of 78 narrative accounts and 74 non-narrative accounts as told by 11 of the participants to the study, was narrowed by selecting only those accounts dealing with the same subject matter and told in similar circumstances. The resulting 22 narrative accounts and 36 non-narrative accounts were transcribed in detail. This corpus of 58 accounts is consistent with the literature. Jefferson (1988), for instance, relies on a corpus of 20 extracts. Rühlemann (2013: 180) relies on between 20 and 50 stories.

The corpus of 58 accounts was successively parsed for items such as turn taking, occurrences of constructed dialogue, discourse markers, interactional cues, alignment and so on. The median values for each item were analysed statistically in order to understand the significance of observable differences between samples and to correct for extreme values, outliers or skewed data. It should be emphasised that parsing is itself a qualitative activity. If one takes just the category of shifters (Fludernik, 1991) one could minimally identify, in the second person, *you* to designate interlocutor, generalising *you*, *you* as part of the discourse marker *you know*, *you* as part of embedded third person direct speech (i.e. to designate the character of the narrator), or embedded first person direct speech (i.e. to designate another embedded character). O'Connor (1994) hints at similar findings. The 'indexical unsurety' that she mentions makes parsing of narrative a question of appreciation. This appreciation is accepted in this study and findings presented in this light. The aim in quantifying items is to be able to present the data rather more readily than to pretend to generalisability, and, in this respect, the study distances itself from the approach of Rühlemann (2013).

To provide an illustration of the data with which this article is concerned, Extracts 1 through 3 give examples of a well-formed narrative account, a less well-formed account that would still meet minimal criteria for selection as a narrative, and an account that would not qualify as a narrative. Extracts 1 to 3 also provide examples of differing orientations to the subject of the academic literacy interview which was concerned with the use of digital media. Notations indicate [comments], pauses (...), emphasis (bolding and capitalisation), changes in intonation (↑↓), changes in speed (><), [overlap, and breathiness (·hhh)]. They follow the schedule given in De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2015: 7).

- 1) Participant [our lecturer posted] a task for us (...) and then he didn't tell us about it he was just like um **no** he posted it and we must do it and then (...) on s- on like some day he comes to us and he's like (..) okay guys (...) so no-one handed in:: the assignment:: that I posted blablablalbla (...) and everyone was just like what are you talking about and he's like >no no no no you're doing this thing< (...) and we're like what are you talking about he's like no >no no no< I don't know what <consensus> you guys reached as a class to **pretend** that (...) uhm you guys didn't know about this thing but I'm telling you everyone's getting zero (...)↑and we're like **why:::** (..) no we didn't get anything and he was like no(h) and then (..) to ↑him <it reflected as a posted (..) uhm notification> but to us all of us we didn't receive it ↑and he thought (..) we were had some consensus between the class to delete it (..) or **something::**
- 2) Researcher ↑yah [uhm
- 3) Participant [just so:: (..) we don't have to do it and I'm like ha (..) this guy (..) ↑we were like ↑if you told us and said hey (.) there's something posted (..) we were going to be like ↑oh:: we didn't get it or something so now because you were sneaky and you just kept quiet (...) [snorts] (...) and then he had to [researcher laughs] and then:: he had to like speak to the HOD:: ·hhh and tell the HOD what's happening::
- 4) Researcher and what happened↑
- 5) Participant they let it go (..) we had another one (...) they let it go like we got another one (...) cause the HOD was like there's no way (...) that everyone in the class is just going to decide that they're not going to do it ↑you know there's always that **one [person]**

Extract 1 – A well-formed narrative account

- 1) Participant so yeah let me describe you [the (..) thingy
- 2) Researcher [yeah the scr- yeah if you can yeah
- 3) Participant so:: (.) the uhh (..) our lecturer right (..) we had the choice between uhm (...) doing the hybrid tasks every week (...) or:: (..) her giving us the hybrid task (..) like (...) a few weeks before we close::: so we can just do all of them at once
- 4) Researcher right

- 5) Participant and for some reason (.) everyone chose to do (...) them once off as the like towards the end of the year (...) which is terrible 'cause now we just have a whole lot of work to do (..) but anyway (...) we::: for the first week like the first one was to take uhm:: (..) what's this (...) this reading (..) on types of present- presenting and types of presenters (..) and all that the module is called (...) digital media (...) [presenting for the media
- 6) Researcher [cool
- 7) Participant so we have like articles on (.) different types of presenters like there's informative ones:: 'hhh there's uhm (...) coach ones there's ones to teach like there's (..) there's presenters that **teach** you stuff there's presenters that (..) inform there's presenters that (..) entertain and all those type of things↑
- 8) Researcher right
- 9) Participant and then we've got to (..) choose:: uhm (...) any presenter that we wanted and write an instructive three hundred page essay on it (..) [so it was quite simple
- 10) Researcher [on (..) how were like what kinds of presenter can you give me some names or
- 11) Participant I wrote about (.) uhm (.) Tamera (...) Tamera:: (..) Mowry the one who from the twin sister of of Tia and Tamera
- 12) (1.4)
- 13) Researcher who choose to is she like an a South African↑
- 14) Participant no no no she's American (...) I chose (.) Tamera because like (...) it was to do with this thing like (...) it was the quickest thing I really like her (.) so it was like okay now I'm going to work with Tamera (.) ↑because <if I work with a South African> it would be like Minnie or Tusie whatever and it's just like **agh** nah (...) so I was looking at Tamera and I wrote that she's more of an entertainer and she's more on the lifestyle segment like

Extract 2 – A less well-formed narrative account

- 1) Researcher okay what s- kind of socio-economic (.) categories do you th- feel most uh uh a a like associated with [e-learning]
- 2) (1.1)
- 3) Participant hh ·hh socio-economics↑

- 4) Researcher yah like you're rich or poor (..) you know↑
- 5) (1.3)
- 6) Participant I feel like it's (..) more for (..) the ri:ch because (...) hh ·hh it's something (...) not everyone has access to a computer (...)
- 7) (0.6)
- 8) Researcher mhm
- 9) (0.5)
- 10) Participant not everyone has (..) wifi (.) you know (.) they don't have data they don't have hh ·hh those USB modems (..) to (...) uhm (.) to have data (...) to go on to [the e-learning platform] (...) you know what I mean
- 11) Researcher yeah
- 12) Participant and then a person (.) who's in a (.) the college through NSFAS¹ (.) hh ·hh uhm who lives in a shack (...) doesn't have (...) uhm access to [e-learning] when they're at home
- 13) Researcher mhm mhm
- 14) (0.6)
- 15) Participant because they don't have interne::t
- 16) Researcher mhm
- 17) Participant they don't have (.) a computer or anything like that (...) hh ·hh and like me myself at home (..) when I'm at home I really don't go on [e-learning] because I don't have data (..) I mean I may have a laptop at home but I don't have data for it (.) you know

Extract 3 – An account that could not properly be considered a narrative

Although told by the same participant, Extracts 1 to 3 differ, as noted, in their instantiation of narrative criteria. The existence in the account of a series of events that are sequential, chronological and discrete is clear in Extract 1. These events can, furthermore, be understood in relation to complicating action and denouement. In Extract 2, there is a sequence of discrete events that contain complicating action, but few conclusions are drawn that are pertinent for interactional work. The participant chooses rather (at line 7) to detail the different kinds of presenters that are chosen to complete the task. In Extract 3 there is no discrete series of events. The account is general, descriptive, and, to a certain extent argumentative and expository. All three extracts contain references to characters, but whereas in Extract 1 there is constructed dialogue and work done on characterisation, in Extract 3 the character of line 12 is a type, an

¹ The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)

exemplification of a rule, rather than someone that could be associated with a specific sequence of events or a specific identity.

Extracts 1 to 3 differ, furthermore, in the orientation they display to the subject of the academic literacy interview. This is a very important factor in questions of research accuracy. In Extract 1, digital media are conceptualised principally as the online learning platform and the means by which supplementary academic work is distributed. They give rise to conflicting interests that require arbitration. Overall therefore, in this extract, digital media are portrayed in a negative light. Extract 2 is different. It shows two facets of digital media: the online learning platform and user-content sharing platforms like YouTube. Whilst participant orientation to learning platforms continues to be negative, the same participant's orientation to YouTube is generally positive, with evaluative tokens such as: *I really like her*. Extract 3 refers to questions of access to both hardware (PC's, modems) and software (the learning platform, internet as a service). The orientation is generally negative, and access is problematised.

Extracts 1 to 3 provide a good illustration of the kinds of variation that can be found in educational research data. Not only is the genre of the account a question of close analysis, each account represents differing orientations to the subject of talk. Language and literacy research based on either one of these extracts would return very different conclusions and offer different possibilities for re-use. This paper will present a statistical overview of typical inter-genre variation.

4. Analysis and findings

The questions that shall be asked in this section depend on the minimal criteria adopted for distinguishing narrative from non-narrative:

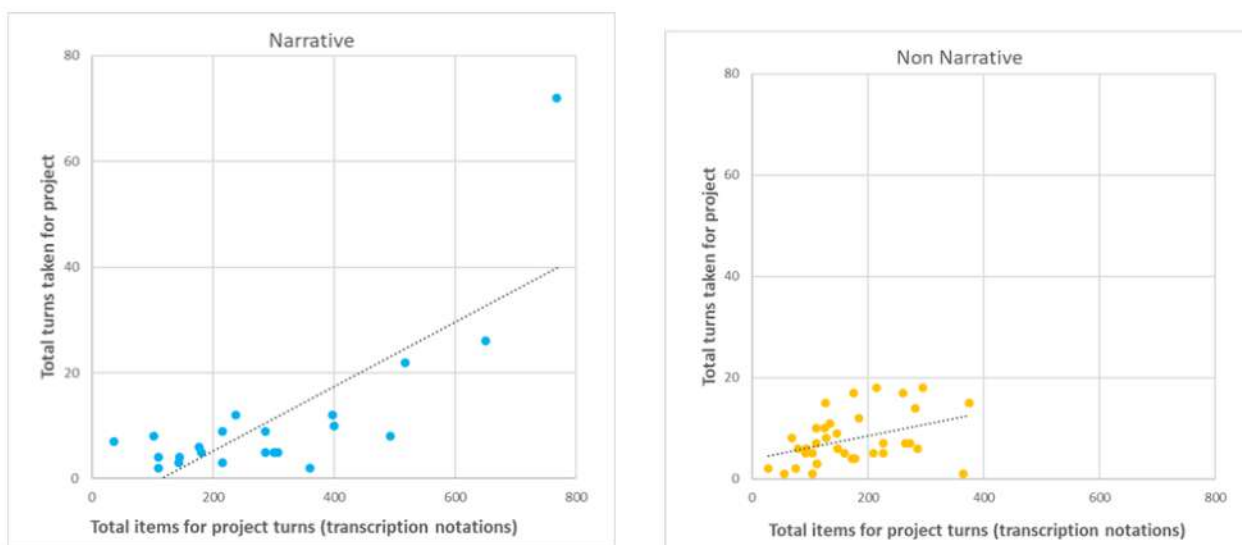
- 4.1) How long are narrative accounts compared with non-narrative accounts?
- 4.2) How clearly distinct, in terms of narrativity, temporal/aspectual use, discreteness and reference to a story world, are narrative accounts?
- 4.3) To what extent does role inhabitancy of author, teller and character differ between narrative and non-narrative accounts?
- 4.4) And, finally, what are the trends for participant orientation to the subject of talk when they are involved in narrative activity and when they are not?

These questions are important in language and literacy research. Participant orientation to the subject of talk, for instance, is primordial in research, whilst length of account and its complexity is important in studying language acquisition and use.

Length of narrative accounts

The claim made for narrative is that this discourse type allows longer projects, both in terms of turn construction units and number of turns at talk. Indeed, the claim is often made in both structural and conversational studies (Sacks et al., 1974; Sacks, 1986, 1992; Labov and Waletzky, 1997 [1967]) that narratives require a floor obtaining gambit such as an abstract, or a question, that allows a speaker enough turns at talk to be able to tell her or his story. It is for this reason that one minimal definition of a story is of a project that takes three turns to tell: bid to tell the story, telling of the story, and story exit (Jefferson, 1978).

The first task of this article is therefore to discover what differences in length actually obtain between narrative and non-narrative accounts. Data presentation 1 gives scatter graphs of the two corpora of accounts in terms of number of turns and counts of lexical and interactional markers (uhms, laughter, etc). Throughout the article, data pertaining to narrative accounts will be on the left and in blue. Data pertaining to non-narrative accounts will be on the right and in orange.



Data presentation 1 – Number of turns taken for account vs turn length

Narratives do indeed offer the possibility for longer turns with median values of length of turn for narratives and non-narratives as 261.5 items and 147 items respectively. However, it is interesting to note that median values for *number* of turns are 6.5 for both types of account. The totals for number of narrative account turns have skewed values with standard deviation of 14.9. The authors adopted a non-parametric independent median test, with Yates's continuity correction for the small sample size, to verify the null hypothesis that the median value for number of narrative turns is the same as the median value for non-narrative accounts. The null hypothesis can be rejected if the probability value (p-value) is <0.05 . In this case chi-square (X^2) is 0.073. P-value is 0.787 (>0.05) and the null hypothesis fails to be rejected. Narrative and non-narrative medians have the same value in respect of number of turns.

Whilst it is generally true, therefore, that narrative discourse involves greater monopolisation of the interlocutory floor, it is length of turn that emerges as the differentiating factor. This means that narrative turns are generally better formed, with more complete turn construction units. The finding is consistent with Rühlemann (2013: 92-108). It reinforces Kormos and Trebits' (2012) point that narrative discourse involves syntactic complexity, and translates in research as a recommendation to respect utterance-level analyses and utterance context when using participant data.

Narrativity

Narrativity is, put broadly, the instantiation of the 'storyness' of a story; the propensity of a particular account to correspond to what we expect from the genre. This section will examine the structural bases of this sense of completeness and will consider formedness, grammatical aspect, discreteness and embedding of characters and events.

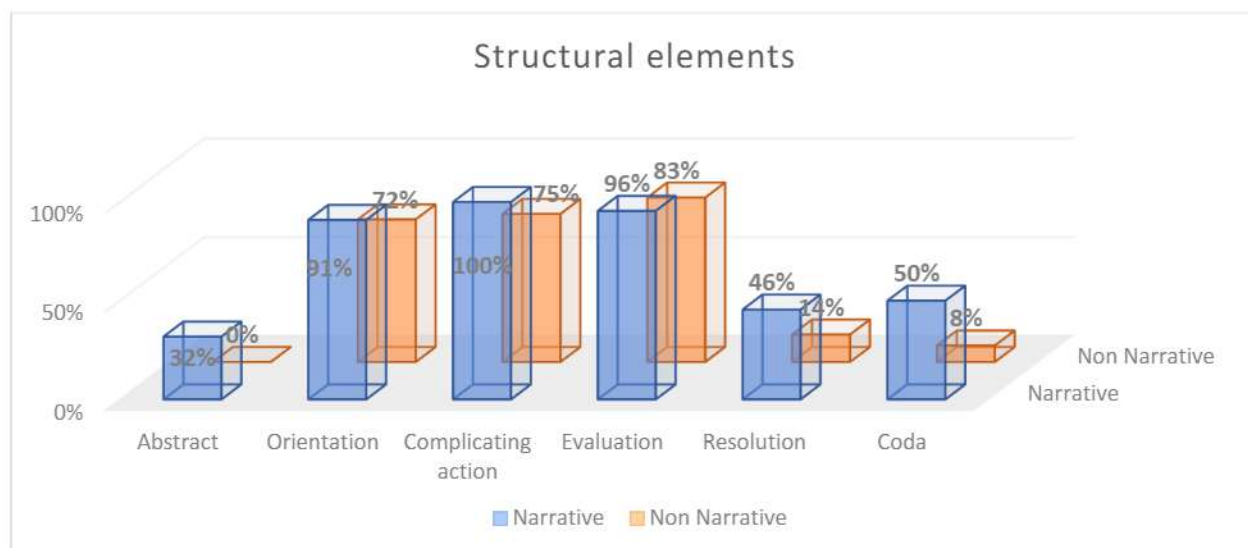
Well-formed stories comprise, minimally, an introduction, characterisation and complicating action (Bamberg, 2008). Often, a classificatory schema is applied to story elements derived from Labov and Waletzky (1997 [1967]). This comprises a six-part division into: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda. The abstract sums up and prepares listeners for the project to come. The orientation gives information as to time, place and character. The complicating action is what the story as a whole will address and resolve. Evaluation represents what narrator, listeners and characters think of the events. The resolution and coda resituate the point of telling and bridge from the story world to the present of interaction. A story that has all six elements is regarded as well formed (Labov, 1972: 369). However, in practice, these elements can double up, be omitted, or apply severally (see Kelleher, 2020b).

The grammatical aspect generally considered to apply to stories is the perfect, or what Barthes (1966) refers to as the 'aorist'. The very fact that events are in the past relative to the present of telling is what constitutes, in many respects, the identity work involved in telling (Freeman, 2006). Labov (1972: 359-362) uses this observation to construct a syntactic difference between those clauses that provide the series of events and those clauses that furnish, with durative aspects, the background information. Yet events, and the tenses and aspects of their telling, do not always overlap neatly. A story that is cast in the past can have recourse to a gradated series of tenses and aspects. Similarly, a story, may, as a limiting case, recount events that are occurring at the time of narration (Georgakopoulou, 2007). Indeed, one of the aims of the small stories is to explore narratives cast in tenses other than the past. A comparison of tense/aspectual distribution is therefore a means both of examining to what extent the past is fundamental to narrative, but also of investigating whether other projects, that are more descriptive, or argumentative, than narrative, have more or less recourse to present tense and non-perfective aspects.

The third basis for comparison is linked to the second. As noted, stories concern, on the one hand, a discrete series of chronologically and sequentially ordered events, and, on the other, durative, background information. The background information may be repetitive, but the series of events must be discrete. The ordering effected by narrative precludes multiple parallel series that are established by repetitive, rather than discrete events. The balance between discrete and repetitive events determines, to a certain extent, narrativity. If a project presents only repetitive events it is description, not a story. However, even though stories are structured around discrete series of events, they also contain repetitive elements. A comparison of longer projects in terms of discrete and repetitive elements brings to light important differences in narrativity.

Finally, a story necessarily implies an embedded world; the world in which the characters move and in which the events take place (Ryan, 2009). Goffman (1986: 504) makes it clear that any interactional production implies, to a certain extent, the creation of an embedded world because it is the function of language to encode and replay experience. Stories, however, elaborate on this world and make it central to the telling project. Non-narrative accounts could therefore be expected to contain fewer allusions to an embedded world than narrative accounts. Additionally, narrative structure allows a recursive feature in which a world embedded in a story can in turn contain a further embedded world that is conjured by the characters in the story (Goffman, 1981: 124-159). The comparison of embedded worlds provides a fourth basis on which to compare narrative and non-narrative accounts.

Formedness of narrative projects, temporal/aspectual use, discreteness and story world are given in Data presentations 2, 3 and 4.

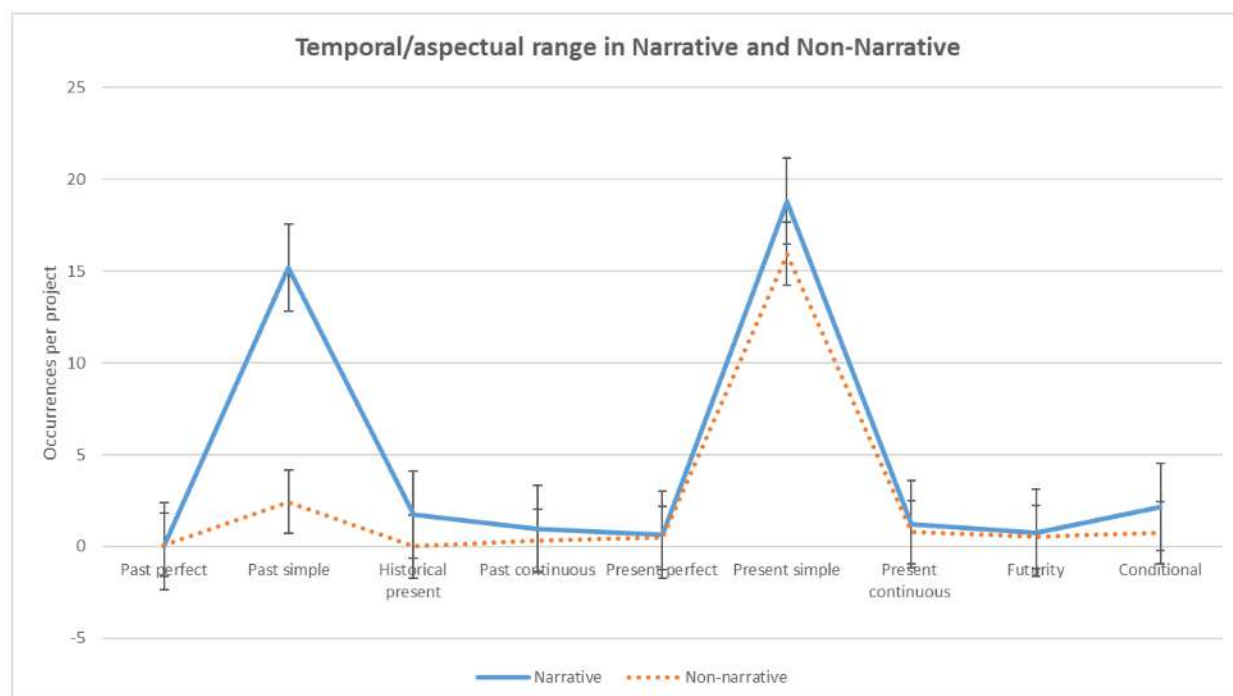


Data presentation 2 - Labovian structural elements

In Data presentation 2, one can note that the corpus of narrative accounts contains less than 50% fully formed narratives. Over half of the corpus contains accounts that are lacking an

abstract, a resolution or a coda. This is not unusual for interview data, since occasioning in interview is often cursory given the roles of participant and researcher.

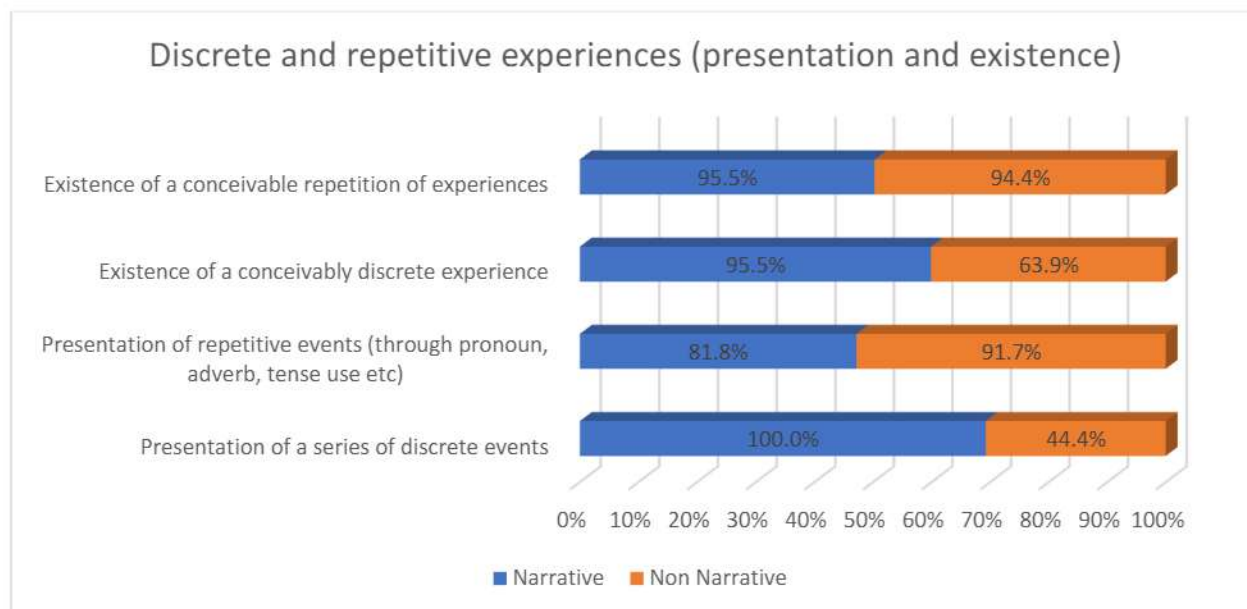
Data presentation 2 also indicates a relatively high proportion of non-narrative accounts that comprise orientation, complicating action and evaluation. A non-parametric independent median test, with Yates’s continuity correction for the small sample size, was again used to verify the null hypothesis that the median value for narrative is the same as the median value for non-narrative accounts. The null hypothesis is rejected if the probability value (p-value) is <0.05. In this case the chi-square (X^2) = 15.495. P-value is 0.000 (<0.05) and the null hypothesis can be rejected. Narrative and non-narrative medians do not have the same value. The median value for narrative is 4 and for non-narrative is 3 which implies that narratives do use more structural elements.



Data presentation 3 – Temporal/aspectual use

Data presentation 3 gives the distribution of tenses and aspects in narrative and non-narrative accounts. As predicted by narrative theory, narrative accounts do indeed represent a heavy polarisation between past simple (the events of the story) and present simple (durative background information), but it is noteworthy that they also employ other tenses/aspects such as the historical present, the past continuous, the present perfect and the present continuous. Non-narrative accounts also conform to expectations in that they have a clearly pronounced tendency to provide durative information, but they also provide a significant amount of information couched in present perfect and past simple. The two temporal/aspectual trends in the data mark out a continuum against which the different accounts can be situated, with narrative accounts providing a greater range and depth of variation. A non-parametric median

test was performed to verify differences in use of past tense. In this case chi-square with Yate’s continuity correction is = 16.517 and p-value = 0.000 (<0.05). The null hypothesis that medians have the same value can be rejected. The median value for narratives is 11 and for non-narratives is 1 which implies that it is significant that narratives use more past simple forms.



Data presentation 4 – Discrete vs repetitive experiences

Data presentation 4 gives relative proportions of discrete and repetitive events. Narratives do indeed consistently provide series of discrete events. However, the researchers also appreciated the conceivable existence of repetitive experiences in the elaboration of a narrative, which is to say that they inquired into whether events that are presented as discrete and ordered could in fact be a narrativisation of repetitive events. This, in some ways, is an operation that is opposed to that effected by non-narrative accounts where participants extrapolate general truths and evaluations from what can in fact be discrete events. Thus, one participant could mention in a non-narrative account that she dislikes the e-learning platform for its display, let’s say, where in fact display problems have only occurred once. In respect of repetition of experience narrative and non-narrative accounts are more closely matched, which leads one to suppose that narrative relies on a conventionalised arrangement and presentation of experience.

The closer matching of experience in Data presentation 4 can be related to the existence, in both narrative and non-narrative accounts, of an evoked story world. Embedding offers a participant the possibility of contextualising the appreciations and stance taking necessary to an account (De Fina, 2009). Respective proportions of evoked story worlds are 1 (narrative) and 0.75 (non-narrative). The z-test of proportions was performed to test if the proportion of narrative accounts which indicate story world is statistically significant compared with non-narrative accounts. Z-value is 2.552. P-value is 0.01858 which is <0.05. Results are therefore

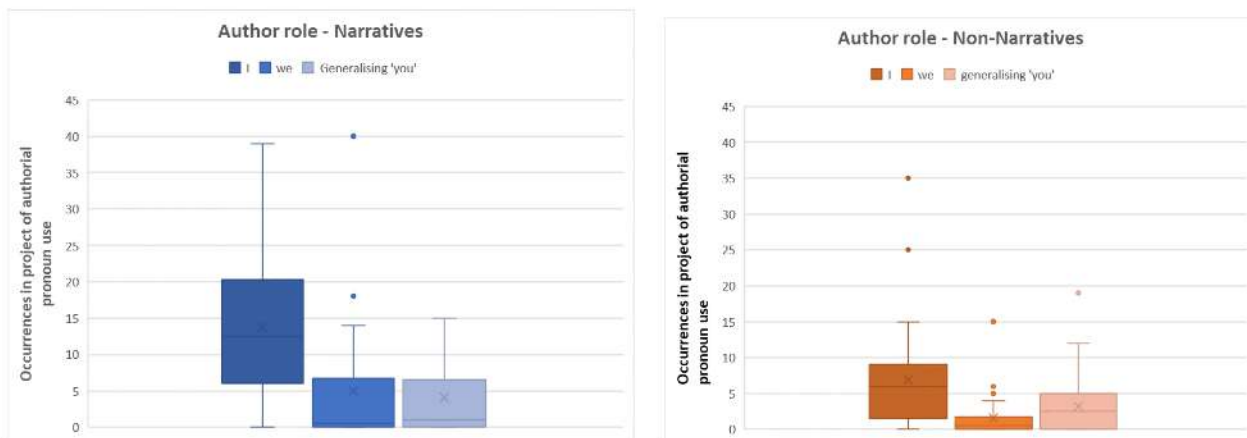
significant. Narrative accounts can be differentiated from non-narrative accounts in terms of their evocation of story worlds.

Data presentations 2 to 4 are significant for language and literacy research. Firstly, it should be clear that the difference between narrative and non-narrative operates much more as a continuum than as a sharp divide. Narrative is immensely variable in the operations it performs with respect to one's lived experience, both in terms of syntax and representation. It remains, nevertheless, a form, a discourse type, that is separable from the underlying experience it translates. Narrative is taught, and learned (Prain, 1996). However, its increased complexity with respect to other discourse types is also undeniable. The cognitive complexity of narrative is what makes it valuable for language learning and research. It also requires research orientations that are faithful to its complex structural-temporal-causal-sequential-experiential nature. Narrative, arguably, cannot be used in the same extractive way that is reserved for other types of data. One can even question whether quoting or reporting only a part of a story – the evaluation say – does justice to the story as a whole. Stories have a specific crafting and importance.

Role inhabitancy

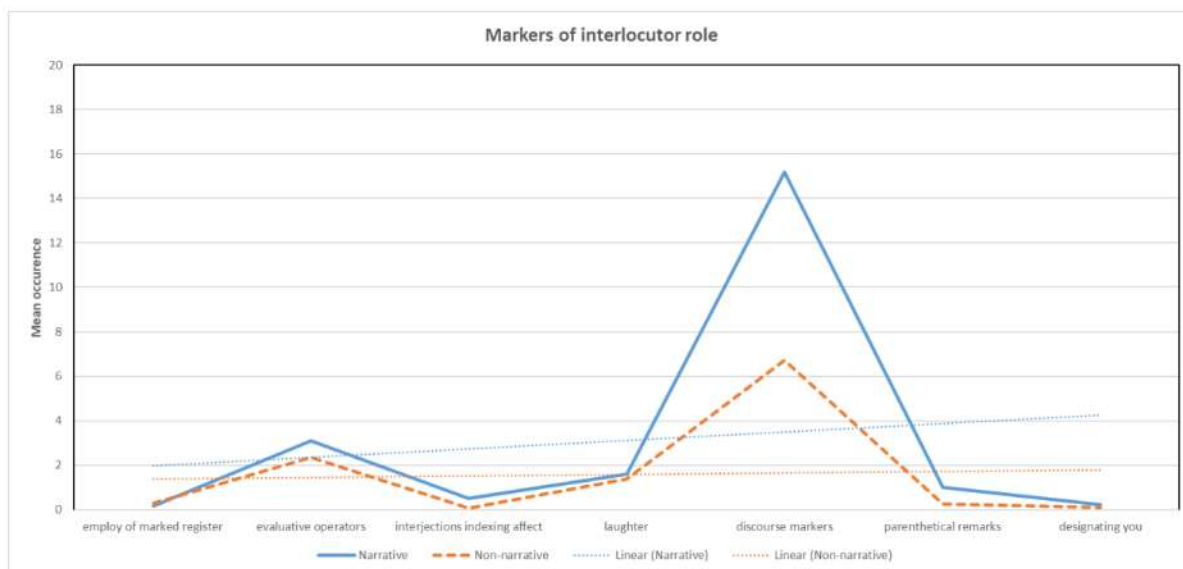
Within the context of face-to-face interaction, one of the principal differences between interactional projects is the speaking roles that they necessitate. The realisation of these roles inflects the strength of participant alignments and orientations. The roles of author, interlocutor and character discussed by Koven (2002) implicate differing discursive, pragmatic and interactional markings. The authorial role can be indicated by speaker self-reference and use of marked first-person pronouns that indicate, “autobiographical continuity between herself as an author and herself as a narrated protagonist ('I')” (Koven, 2002: 179). Here, we can slightly expand Koven's study to inclusive plural first-person forms and the generalising ‘*you*’ that is a form of impersonal self-reference. These are given in Data presentation 5.

An interlocutionary role is concerned with interactional and attitudinal information (Koven, 2002: 181). As such, this role prompts: marked register, evaluative operators, interjections indexing affect, laughter, discourse markers and parenthetical remarks. These are given in Data presentation 6. Finally, the embedding of characters or figures who act and talk in the story world, can be conveyed through use of direct, indirect and free indirect speech constructions. Such constructed dialogue (Tannen, 2007: 17) is fundamental to accounts and to other justificatory or explanatory discourse types, since it allows the inclusion of information, views and events from other times and other interpersonal interactions. These are given in Data presentation 7.



Data presentation 5 – Authorial role

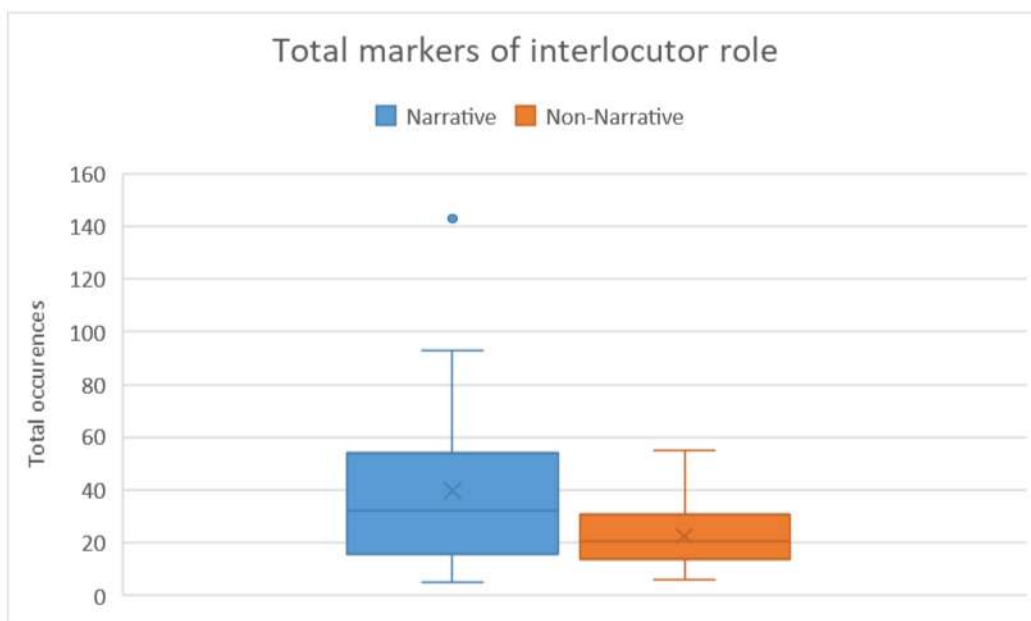
Data presentation 5 gives the distribution of occurrences of first-person pronouns and generalising *you*. It shows that narrative accounts emerge as both more self-referential and more inclusive. Non-narrative accounts are more impersonal since the low occurrence of first-person forms implies a higher occurrence of third-person forms. This confirms the explanatory and justificatory function of non-narrative accounts. Chi-square values for medians in Data presentation 5 are 4.819 for *I* across accounts and 0.073 for *we*. P-values for *I* are 0.028 (<0.05) and for *we* are 0.787 (>0.05). This means that whilst the null hypothesis that the median values are the same can be rejected in the case of *I*, as concerns *we* it is maintained. Statistically therefore, it is self-reference through *I* that is significant.



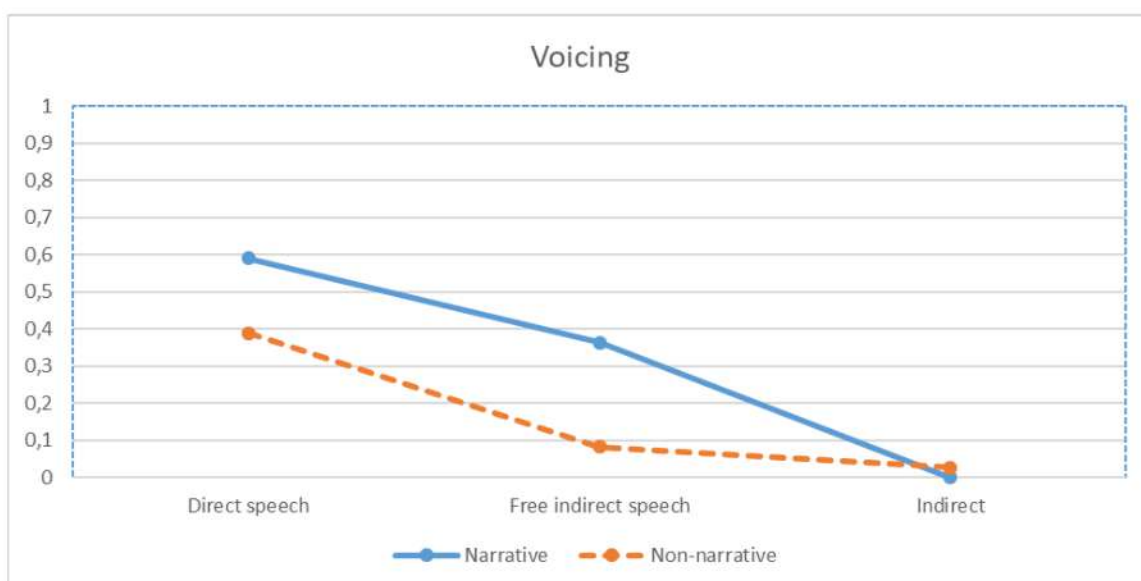
Data presentation 6 – Interlocutor role

Data presentation 6 plots several markers of interlocutor role: marked register, evaluative operators, interjections, laughter, discourse markers, parenthetical remarks and *you* as used for designation. Narrative and non-narrative accounts largely parallel each other with respect to markers of interlocutor role. However, proportionally, across all markers, non-narrative

accounts involve less interlocutory work than narrative accounts. This is particularly evident in respect of discourse markers. Discourse markers chart the course of a project for addressees. Interactionally, they indicate possible transition relevance places, which is to say points in the conversation where speakers can alternate turns at talk. The fact that the mean for occurrences of such discourse markers should be more than double across narrative and non-narrative accounts would seem to refer to a speaker’s need to negotiate more complex situations of embedding and voicing. Data presentation 7 gives total means of occurrence of markers of interlocutor role. Narrative accounts, generally, involve twice as many markers of interlocutor role as non-narratives. Median tests were performed on data in presentation 6. The null hypothesis that the median values are the same fails to be rejected ($X^2 = 3.125, p = 0.077$).



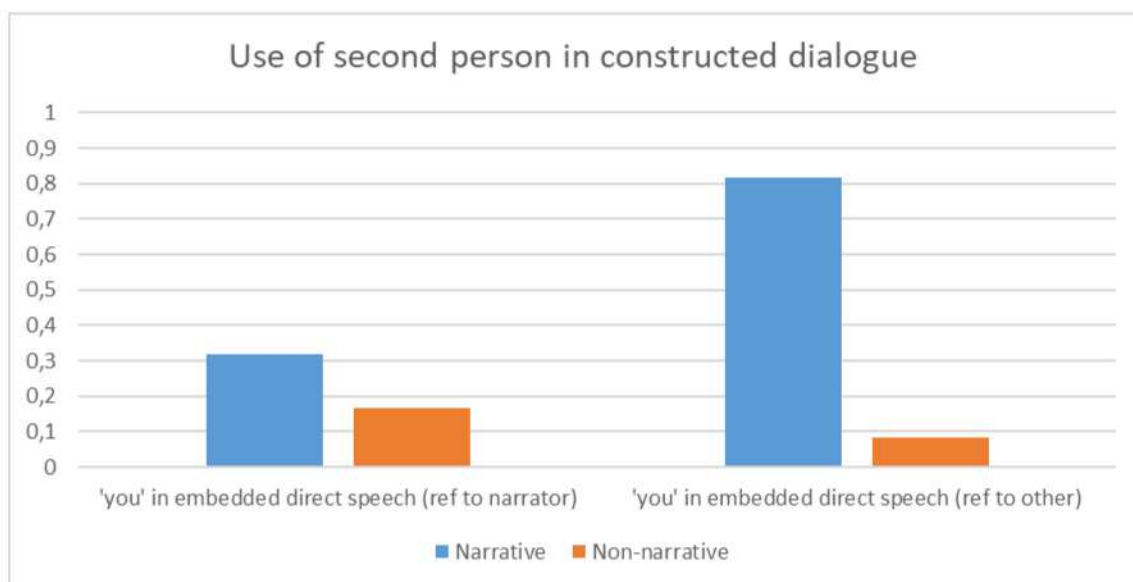
Data presentation 7 – Total markers of interlocutor role



Data presentation 8 – Character role

Data presentation 8 renders the three kinds of speech associated with voicing: direct, indirect and free indirect speech. Free indirect speech is the employ of constructed dialogue but without any explicit use of quotatives, often signalled only by an increase in speed or by an intonative shift. Data presentation 8 shows a 2 point preponderance for constructed dialogue in narrative accounts. Generally, more constructed dialogue equates as a more immersive or engaging account. Fisher's exact test was used to calculate p-value and thereby test the null hypothesis that there is no association between constructed dialogue and account type. Respective p-values for direct speech and indirect speech were 0.178 and 1.000. Both p-values are >0.05 which is to say that direct speech and indirect speech occur independently from accounts. The case of free indirect speech is slightly different. P-value is $0.14 < 0.05$ which means that there is an association between type of account and free indirect speech. Free indirect speech occurs much more frequently in narrative accounts (36.4% vs 8.3%).

Whilst constructed dialogue generally is an indicator of embedding of characters in the frame of the story world, the researchers also inquired into the referentiality of this dialogue. The speech of a character in a story can either be directed towards the figure of the teller or towards a third character. Data presentation 9 gives relative proportions of self-referential and other-referential constructed dialogue. One can note that narrative accounts again favour both self-reference and other reference. Narrative worlds are more completely constructed and more populated than non-narrative accounts. Median tests were not performed on these totals.



Data presentation 9 – Self and other reference in constructed dialogue

Data presentations 5 to 9 indicate that narrative accounts are much more engaging than other account genres. Put simply, they portray personal and shared experiences, they are immersive and interactional, and they include more shifts in voice from speaker, to embedded characters and back again. In terms of language and literacy research all of these aspects are pertinent. Since narrative favours personal and shared experiences, it provides an opportunity to pool

experiences among participants or students, reinforcing group cohesion and interpretation. Narrative is well adapted to qualitative data collection methods such as focus groups or class discussions. In addition, the increased marking of discourse is an opportunity to reflect on temporal and causal organisation (see also Nahatame, 2020) at a linguistic level, certainly, but also as a means of accessing the significance of events and processes for participants. Finally, voicing, and constructed discourse, represent a means of exploring different subject positions. Indeed, the ability of narrative to imbricate differing views, roles, and orientations to extra-narrational societal discourses and processes is a very productive resource in both research and pedagogy. As Marunda-Piki (2018) notes, narrative is very responsive to oral-based teaching and learning approaches.

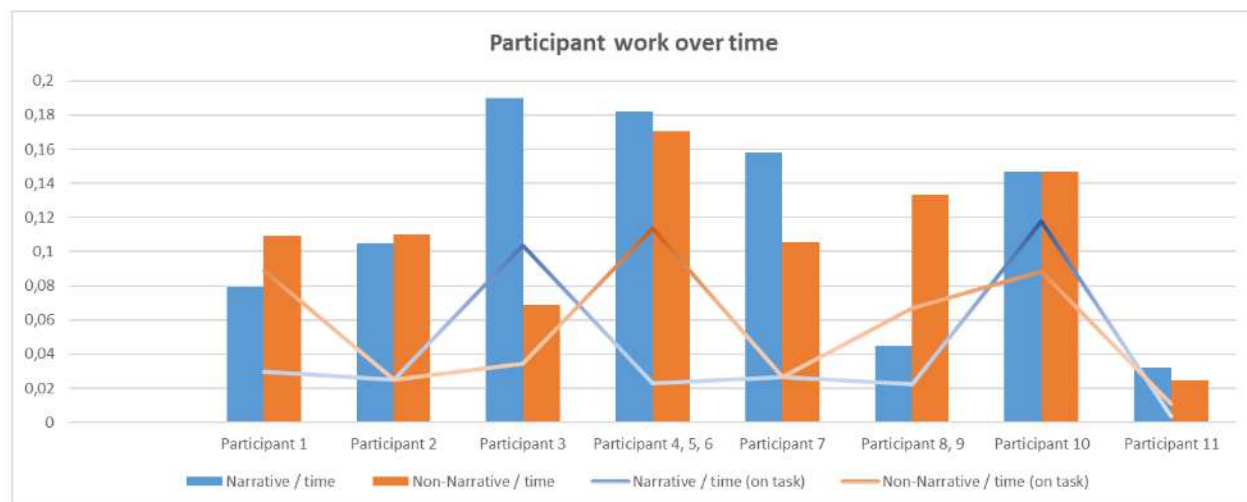
5. Orientation to the subject of talk

This last section of analysis is perhaps most relevant to qualitative research. The claim is often made that narratives are a mode and an epistemology (Slembrouck, 2015), representing a subjectively true transmission of opinion and experience. This does not preclude studies that examine change in participant alignment with respect to retellings of experience (Ferrara, 1998; Shiffrin, 2003; Kelleher, 2020b). Given the differences in structures, features and interactional work accomplished by narrative and non-narrative accounts, one could inquire into differences between these two types as concerns participant orientation to the subject of the interview. In the data presented here, the interview question concerned experience with, and orientation to, digital media.

In Data presentations 10, 11 and 12, participant accounts have been classified on the basis of whether or not they transduce a positive, negative or indifferent experience of digital media. This provides a means of observing trends in participant orientation with respect to the different types of account. The examination of participant orientation has, additionally, factored in frequency over time and markers of deferring, softening or repair. This is because whilst a participant may express a particular orientation to a subject of talk, s/he may also soften this stance with paralinguistic signs that indicate hesitation or lack of adhesion to the viewpoint expressed. Further, it is important to know whether, generally, a particular account type leads to projects that are more or less on task.

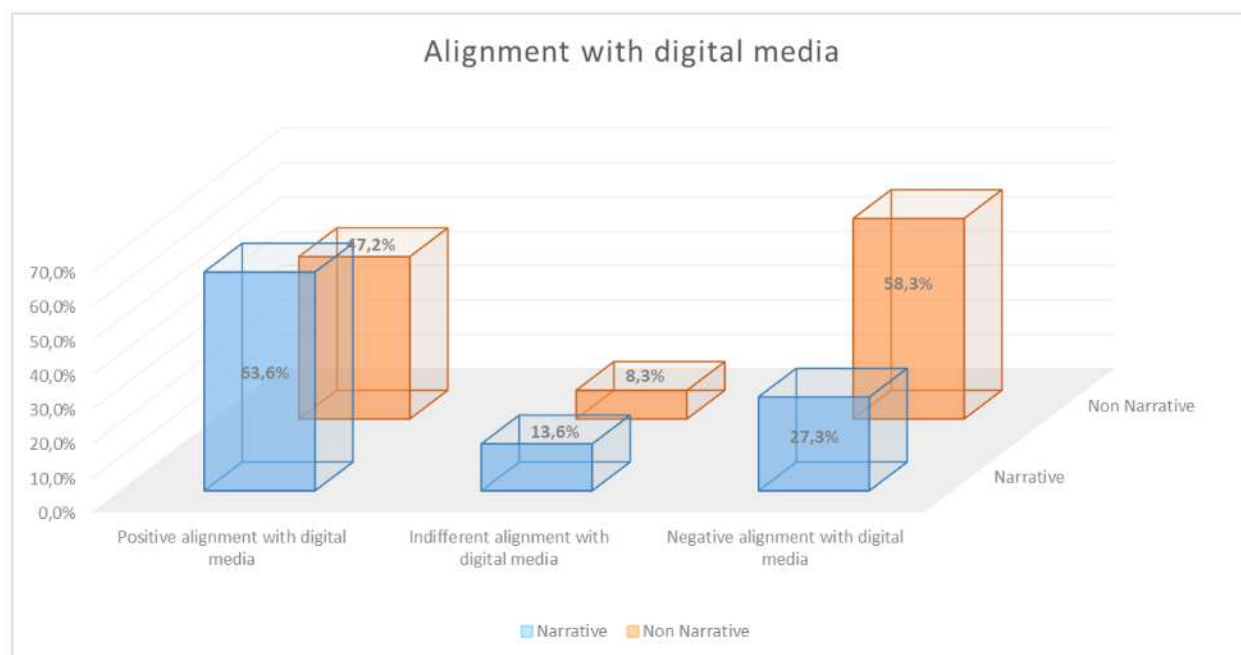
Data presentation 10 plots total narrative and non-narrative accounts against interview time in the vertical bars, and then, superposed on these bars, line graphs for those narrative and non-narrative accounts that deal specifically with digital media. These data have been grouped by participant in order to appreciate alignment per speaker. With respect to activity over time, mean values for narrative and non-narrative accounts are fairly close. With respect to time on task, however, non-narrative accounts are a full point ahead of narrative accounts. If then, generally, narrative accounts are less on-task than non-narrative accounts, Data presentations 11 and 12 make plain that narrative accounts are also generally more affirmative than non-

narrative accounts – relating more positive experiences, and doing so with more softening effects such as markers of hesitation and pausing.



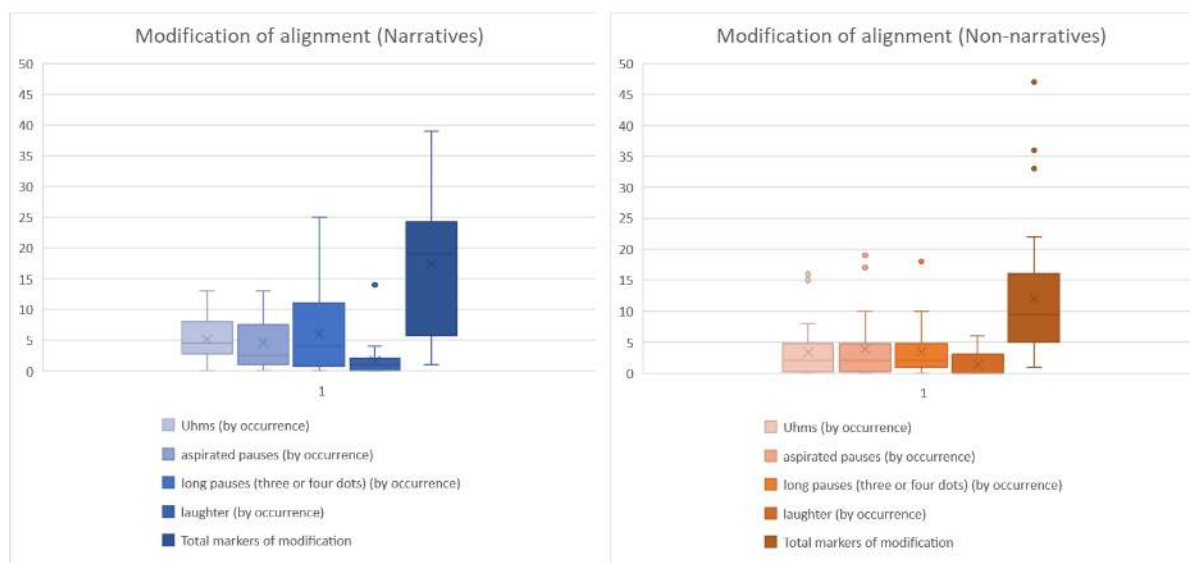
Data presentation 10 – Participant work over time: narrative vs non-narrative

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was performed to see if the median scores of the number of on-task accounts about digital media are the same between narrative and non-narrative. We fail to reject the null hypothesis that the median values are the same, the p-value $0.248 > 0.05$.



Data presentation 11 – Alignment with digital media across accounts

The Pearson chi-square (0.224) and Fisher’s Exact Test (0.283) were performed to verify whether there was an association between positive alignment with digital media and accounts. The p-values are >0.05 , in other words positive alignment with digital media occurs independently of account type.



Data presentation 12 – Modification of alignment across narrative and non-narrative accounts

Data presentation 12 shows how much more work is performed by participants engaged in narrative accounts. Total markers of modification of alignment are almost double for narratives. These totals can be read against Data presentation 7 which gave markers of interlocutor role and which again showed almost double the amount of work happening in the interlocutional space. Median tests were not performed for the totals of Data presentation 12.

The question of participant orientation to a subject of talk is highly pertinent in terms of language and literacy research. It demonstrates how important data selection is, and the need for care and coherence in selection across samples and cohorts. This is, firstly, because narrative accounts are less on task. Narrative methodologies are, secondly, more likely to return a positive evaluation. They therefore contain an inherent bias to the subject of research; tilting a study towards validating its initial hypotheses and aims.

6. Conclusion and recommendations for educational research and language and literacy

This study has looked at the interactional features of narrative accounts. The aim has been to allow a comparison of the interactional work done by participants in relation to discourse types, and thereby better understand the relationship between narrative and language and literacy research. Narrative and non-narrative accounts have been compared in terms of their: a) length, which is to say the number of turns and the relative number of items in each turn, b) their narrativity, and relative formedness, in terms of structural components, temporal/aspectual distribution, discrete series of events and story world, c) the roles of author (pronoun use), interlocutor (marked register, evaluative operators, interjections indexing affect, laughter, discourse markers, parenthetical remarks) and character (direct, indirect and free indirect speech constructions), and, finally, d) distribution and task-centredness of accounts over time as well as their alignment to the subject of talk.

Narrative accounts have, firstly, the possibility of deploying longer turns at talk than non-narrative (Data presentation 1). In terms of solicitation, which is to say the promotion of an environment conducive to the production of narratives, it is therefore useful to think in terms of length and quality of response time, where more expansive response time could favour more narrative projects. Scaffolding of responses can differentiate between ‘doxastic’ and ‘epistemic’ participatory styles (see Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2020). A doxastic style is focused on experience and an epistemic style is focused on co-constructing knowledge. Narrative research, in this light, would be more doxastic. Narrative accounts also involve more syntactic and discursive complexity. This is important in terms of preparatory work and cognitive engagement with a task. It also highlights the need to faithfully represent a narrative account. When quoting, excerpting and highlighting parts of a narrative it would seem important to respect at least utterance-level units and, preferably, allow restitution of at least the context of the account as a whole

Secondly, Data presentations 2 to 4 would seem to suggest that narrative discourse can be learned and taught. Narrative and non-narrative accounts exist on a continuum as concerns their form and they are constructed from fairly similar underlying personal experiences. This can be borne in mind during narrative tasks and research could perhaps prompt a participant as to the underlying experience or events that give rise to their account. In addition, Data presentations 5 to 9 tend to show that narrative accounts are more engaging. They include more identity work and more complex shifts in voicing, characterisation, and temporal and causal marking. They allow both individual and conjoint exploration of subject positions, experience, and orientation to that experience. The move from story to societal discourses and processes is both more indirect and more compelling than in non-narrative accounts, since narrative can imbricate differing views, roles, and orientations associated with different characters and voicings.

Thirdly, narrative accounts are less on-task and more positively aligned. Low times on task indicate that narrative research gains from sustainedly focusing on the desired subject of talk. Their more positive orientation and their tendency to contain more interlocutory softening such as long pauses, aspiration and uhhmming is a very important finding in terms of subjective bias and representativity. Narratives do not, generally, constitute a neutral or objective research methodology and this perhaps explains why they are often used to support innovative pedagogies or initiatives that run counter to institutional discourse.

Fourthly, if talk is conceived of as a series of interactional projects, some of which are narrative and some of which are non-narrative (which is to say expository, descriptive, argumentative etc) then, in compiling data, there is a choice that opens up for research processes. Either research can retain only the narrative projects and ignore the non-narrative projects, or the research can treat the entire series of projects as a combined testimony of experience. In the latter case, a possible research axis would be a comparison of participant responses, whilst, in the former case, an important research axis would be the structuration and positioning work performed by participants. Data presentation 2 (formedness), Data presentation 8 (voicing) and Data presentation 9 (self and other reference in constructed dialogue) give further criteria on which narrative structuration could be explored.

Finally, it is noteworthy that median tests in respect of the differences between narrative and non-narrative accounts did not always succeed in rejecting the null hypothesis of similarity. This is to say that observed differences in account features can be attributed to outlying or skewed participant response. This prompts two reflexions. Firstly, this study does not consistently confirm the epistemologic or ontologic particularity that is often claimed for narrative in the literature. Secondly, outlying or skewed response tokens derive from participant stylistic choices. Style is a form of identity work that involves marked lexical, interactional and structural choices. That style should be such an important factor in interpretation does confirm the recipient design of narrative data generally.

7. Limitations of the study

This has not been a complete study of all the features of narrative, but it has looked at those features that can be quantified and compared across accounts in a relatively consistent way. There has also been, in this study, a certain degree of recursivity. This is to say that, at least as concerns narrative accounts, the selection criteria for these projects (the existence of a temporal juncture, discrete events, and certain structural components) predicted some of the findings that have emerged. Thus, Data presentation 2 (structural elements), Data presentation 3 (temporal/aspectual distribution), and Data presentation 4 (discrete vs repetitive experiences) could, to a certain extent, be predicted from corpus selection. However, this recursivity should not be overplayed. Whilst it is true that narrative accounts could be expected to respond to selection criteria, this was not the case for non-narrative accounts. Further, the comparative findings of the study, such as tense/aspectual distribution, or relative proportions of discreteness, could not have been inferred from the selection criteria.

Declaration of competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Disclaimer

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All the views and analyses presented in this article are those of the authors and do not in any way reflect the position of the host university, nor that of the National Research Foundation.

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