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Introduction to the volume

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Over the last two decades, self and identity have moved into the center-stage of the social sciences. Publications with '*self*' or '*identity*' in their titles, including monographs, edited volumes, and even new journals (*Identity* – first published in the year 2000, *Self & Identity* – first published in 2001) have sprung up in a number of disciplines. However, what exactly these terms denote has remained somewhat ambiguous. While it seems to be commonly agreed upon that neither 'self' nor 'identity' should be mere synonyms for 'person' and 'personality' (as suggested by Leary, 2004), it is debatable whether the terms self and identity should be preserved to refer to processes that are organized *within* a (coherent) self-system (as suggested by Morf, 2005). And while metaphors of self that view the self "*as-knower*", "*as-known*", or "*as-decision-maker and doer*" (see Leary, 2004) have a wider appeal, they leave out a vision of the self "*as-speaker/narrator*", a view that has become increasingly popular under the headers of the 'narrative' and 'discursive turn'. And although discourse-based approaches to self and identity have resulted in an explosion of recent books and special issues, they by no means represent a unified and harmonious field.

This is partly due to the fact that these kinds of approaches to self and identity have emerged and developed within different traditions and disciplines. In the case of the present volume, the different traditions that have inspired the contributors to this volume can be divided, in broad strokes, along three different orientations, one that is rooted predominantly in *sociolinguistics*, a second that is *ethnomethodologically informed*, and a third that came in the wake of *narrative* interview research. All three share a commitment to view self and identity not as essential properties of the person but as constituted in talk and particularly in social practice. Moreover, since self and identity are held to be phenomena that are contextually shaped, they are defined and viewed in the plural, as *selves* and *identities*. Below, we will elaborate on how these three approaches converge and differ in their emphasis on narrative.

Sociolinguistic traditions

To begin with, within the traditions of sociolinguistics, issues of identity are not intrinsically tied to narratives. The analysis of variations across particular populations starts from the basic conviction that speakers have choices: They can deviate systematically from some standards in terms of their lexical, syntactic, prosodic and even phonetic choices of formal devices. These preferences usually characterize speakers along regional or socio-cultural dimensions, marking them in terms of particular group (social) identities. Work by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) on processes of pidginization and creolization has taken speakers' choices of linguistic varieties to be tokens of the emergence of social identities. Repeated choices in language use and changes of these choices over time are taken to be "acts of identity in which people reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles" (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985, p. 14). John Gumperz's more interactional approach to sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982a, 1982b) also oriented along similar lines to the close relationship between language choices and speakers' gender, ethnic, and class identities as communicatively produced. His analyses of face-to-face verbal exchanges focused on the inferential processes that result from situational factors, social presuppositions and discourse conventions, establishing and reinforcing speakers' social identities.

It is interesting to note that sociolinguists like Le Page and Gumperz, who displayed an explicit interest in identity and who often worked with narratives as their empirical data, did not attempt to link narratives to identity in a more direct way. Other sociolinguists, in contrast, had already established this link relatively early. William Labov explicitly analyzed narrative forms and contents. However, this move was more of a by-product of his sociolinguistic study of variable rules in Black English spoken in the Inner cities. And Labov's early attempts to use "narratives as a method of recapitulating experiences by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which had actually occurred" (Labov, 1972, p. 360) have become widely discussed and critically evaluated (cf. Bamberg, 1997). They nevertheless, over the years, turned into a "*theory of ... the narrator* as an exponent of cultural norms" (Labov, 1997, p. 415, our emphasis), where the narrator became a more explicit target for the analysis of social and personal identity.

In contrast to Labov's more traditional sociolinguistic framework, Dell Hymes (1981) established a close link between sociolinguistics and narrative and theoretically elaborated it in more recent writings (1997, 2003). Following in the footsteps of Boas' 'ethnography of speaking', Hymes made narratives the central object of ethnographic analysis. His program of ethnopoetics explicitly suggested the analysis of speech patterns in the forms of verses and stanzas, taking fuller account of the performative aspects of language use as narrative performance.

In recent articles and edited volumes that address more directly the central themes of identity and identity analysis, these different schools of thought that emerged from more traditional sociolinguistics (e.g., Labov) and interactional sociolinguistics (e.g., Gumperz) in overlap with ethnographic traditions (e.g., Gumperz and Hymes) have been reworked and partly transformed in order to develop tools for the analysis of narratives as a special genre for identity analysis (cf. Blommaert, 2006; De Fina, 2003; Johnstone, 1996, 2006; Schiffrin, 1996, 2006; Thornborrow & Coates, 2005); and a number of contributors to the current volume are operating within these traditions. While some of them explicitly frame their chapters as studies of sociolinguistic repertoire (e.g., Davies, chapter 3), others more implicitly draw upon variationist and interactional frameworks (cf. Gordon, chapter 6; Korobov & Bamberg, chapter 10; Moissinac, chapter 9) or position themselves within a more ethnographic tradition (Minks, chapter 1).

Ethnomethodologically informed traditions

Although a number of sociolinguistic approaches to the exploration of identities and selves make use of the terms 'discourse' and 'discursive' in their self-descriptions and align themselves closely with interactional frameworks, we reserve these terms here for three different – though related – approaches. All three are somewhat ethnomethodologically informed, though in different ways.

The first is an offspring from Sacks early work on 'category bound activities' (Sacks, 1972, 1995). Authors within this tradition (see especially the work of the late Carolyn Baker, 1984, 1997, 2002; and the collection of chapters in Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998a) have explored identities by use of *membership categorization analysis* (MCA), a branch of conversation analysis and ethnomethodology that pays close attention to the commonsense knowledge which speakers are invoking in the conduct of their everyday talk. Sacks who had proposed that categories may be linked to form classes or collections, which are termed membership categorization devices (MCDs) (Sacks, 1995) tried to tie these categories to the kinds of local and situated activities that go along with them, "category bound activities." Two contributions to this volume frame their work squarely within this tradition exploring how mothers and daughters project their identities (Petraki, Baker & Emmison, chapter 5) and how Australian women of Italian descent project a sense or ordinariness in the interviews conducted (Paoletti & Johnson, chapter 4).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), the second framework to be mentioned in this context, bears a number of resemblances to MCA insofar as critical discourse analysts attend to categories within which, and by use of which, identities are framed; though, in contrast to MCA, not as locally established, but as aspects of

larger political and ideological contexts (cf. Fairclough, 1989). Typically, within this framework, identities are explored as spaces in which the articulation of voice is 'repressed', and several contributions to this volume analyze identities as positioned along these lines. For CDA researchers the properties of speakers' gendered or racial identities may play an important role in the discourse that is under construction, contributing to the discursive reproduction of racism or sexism. Thus, while CDA is primarily interested in the reproduction of power and the abuse of power in discourse, the identities that participants are said to bring to the interactive encounters or materialize in texts may play important roles in this.

In contrast, traditional *conversation analysis* (CA) disprefers the analysis of conversational patterns as aspects of broader social situations and focuses instead on discourse and interaction as more autonomous concepts. Consequently, CA researchers argue that it is necessary to "hold off from using all sorts of identities which one might want to use in, say, a political or cultural frame of analysis" (Antaki, & Widdicombe, 1998b, p. 5.), and begin to ask "*whether*, *when*, and *how* identities are used" (Widdicombe & Antaki, p.195, emphasis in original). According to this view, identities are locally and situationally occasioned, and they only become empirically apparent, if participants in interaction "orient" to them. Deppermann's analysis of adolescent peer group interactions (chapter 11) and Fasulo's analysis of video-recorded psychotherapy meetings (chapter 13) are excellent demonstrations of this type of conversation analytic work.

All three approaches share a commitment to the empirical study of mundane practices through which particular social orders are coming to existence. Consequently, the emphasis is on the analysis of naturalistic data, the way discourse and interaction take place in often very mundane, everyday settings, displaying the participants' ways of making sense in these settings. A number of contributors to *Selves and Identities in Narrative and Discourse* are claiming these principles as most relevant to their work on identities.

Narrative traditions

Before turning to a brief overview of a type of identity analysis that explicitly takes recourse to narrative, we would like to note that what we have discussed thus far under the headers of *sociolinguistic* and *ethnomethodologically informed* approaches does not exist in clear-cut, separate and differentiated forms of, or approaches to, identity analysis. Rather, the boundaries are often transient and fluid, which may partly be due to the unfortunate tendency to apply the terms 'discourse' and 'discourse analysis' to all kinds of different forms of language-in-use and their analysis. However, it should have become clear that neither identity analysis within the

sociolinguistic tradition, nor within an ethnomethodologically informed discursive tradition is driven by any particular 'narrative approach'. Narrative often just happened to be the data researchers in these traditions work with, but in general there is no specific interest in narrative as a privileged locus for the expression or the analysis of identity.

In contrast, narrative approaches to selves and identities start from very different assumptions. While narratives can be said to be just one kind of discourse genre among others (e.g., description and argumentation), they have moved into the privileged mode for tying together existent analogies between life, biography, and story. And although lives are lived and stories told, and although there is a general openness to lived lives, 'narrative coherence' is seen as the guiding post for how lives are actually lived (Ricoeur, 1992) and made sense of in meaningful ways (Bruner, 1987, 2001). Coherence serves as the structural glue that is added on to life and history (White, 1980), or even the "fabric" with which life is imaginable (Freeman, 1998, 2004), enabling to locate a self with a beginning, a middle and an end (MacIntyre, 1981). While there are different assumptions as to where this glue is "located", either *before* the story-telling activity (as an internal, experiential, and basically cognitive, attempt to plot raw events into meaningful patterns) or in the actual act of plotting, i.e., the situated *telling* of 'the experience', narrative is the ordering principle that gives meaning to an otherwise meaningless life. In short, narrative functions as the glue that enables human life to transcend the natural incoherence and discontinuity of the unruly everyday (and the unruly body – see Punday, 2003) by imposing a point of origin and an orientation toward closure, and thereby structuring the otherwise meaningless into a meaningful life.

Identity research that rests on this tradition has opened up possibilities to study the recounting of lived experience along the dimension of lived time, and how, by way of reflecting on the past, a (more or less) coherent sense of self is re-created. Biographic, narrative analysis (cf. Wengraf, 2006; Fischer & Goblirsch, 2006) and *big story* research (cf. Freeman, 2006), mainly by means of interviews as elicitation techniques, have revealed a good deal of ruptures and continuities in peoples' lives and contributed widely to theoretically account for both the transformations and stabilities in human lives, attempting to reconcile how humans can see themselves as same in the face of constant change (see Bamberg, in press). A number of contributions to *Selves and Identities in Narrative and Discourse* actually start off from this tradition, but wrestle with how the narrative tradition may actually constrain more productive turns, in particular when it comes to a potential merger with other traditions such as sociolinguistic and ethnomethodologically informed approaches on topics of identity research.

The current volume

Selves and Identities in Narrative and Discourse brings together chapters that attempt to connect these three traditions in new and innovative ways. While a number of chapters start off from a sociolinguistic tradition, others adopt a more interactional, and ethnomethodologically defined orientation, and finally others take a more explicitly designed narrative vantage point. However, all chapters share a general orientation toward the use and the analysis of narratives. Rather than cementing an identity as an ontology of the person by use of language varieties, or by use of discursive repertoires or narrative inscriptions of the self, all contributions start from the assumption that narratives form something like a playground – a ground that allows us to test out identity categories (most explicitly Gordon, chapter 6; and also, though to a lesser degree, Korobov & Bamberg, chapter 10; and Moissinac, chapter 9). This orientation is in stark contrast to traditional identity research that aims to fixate these categories by turning them into 'ontologies of the person'. Thus, the contributions to this volume treat narratives as territories where 'identity ontologies' are allowed to be questioned, and the analysis of the narrative/discursive data is oriented toward the contextual and situational manifestations of different identities.

A second characteristic that unifies the contributions to *Selves and Identities in Narrative and Discourse* is the conviction that these narrative and discursive play- and testing-grounds, where individual and social identities are explored, are communal grounds. They are parts of interactive and communal practices with others whose actions range from support to challenge. These collaborative aspects of discursive/narrative practices, whether taking place and captured in one-to-one interviews (e.g., Fasulo, chapter 13; Guo, chapter 8; Sorsoli, chapter 12), group discussions (e.g., Korobov & Bamberg, chapter 10; Moissinac, chapter 9) or in observations and recordings in the field (e.g., Deppermann, chapter 11; Minks, chapter 1) are resulting in contextual and situated displays of identities, or even 'multiple identities' (as argued by Guo, chapter 8).

Overall, *Selves and Identities in Narrative and Discourse* comprises chapters that attempt to show how identities are constantly and continuously in the making. Thus defined, the contribution of this volume consists in a close documentation of the discursive and narrative processes that so-to-speak *generate* identities in the form of local and situated senses of ourselves. In the attempt of moving closer toward a process-oriented approach to the formation of selves and identities, this volume sets the stage for future discussions of the role of narrative and discourse in this generation process and for how a close analysis of these processes can advance an understanding of the world around us and within this world, of identities and selves.

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