Introduction

Whether in a store, along the road, at work, play, home, or other community settings, when people are together, they are inclined to talk about events – those they have heard or read about, those they have experienced directly, and those they imagine.

Ochs & Capps (2001: 1)

Narratives, it is widely claimed, abound in conversation. Ryave (1978: 113), for example, refers to them as a "commonplace conversational activity," Schiffrin (1996: 167) views them as "a pervasive form of text," Labov (1997: 396) maintains that narratives "play a role in almost every conversation" (Labov 1997: 396), and Ochs & Capps (2001: 54) consider them "a ubiquitous feature of ordinary conversation". Moreover, it is claimed, stories serve critical functions. As Ochs & Capps (2001: 17) note: everyday conversational narrative is "a site for working through who we are and how we should be acting, thinking, and feeling as we live our lives" (see also Schiffrin 1996: 167). Bamberg (2004a: 332) sees narrative as configuring self and identity. Pang (2010: 1322) considers a person's self "a macronarrative subsuming all her life-narratives." Blum-Kulka (1993: 361) goes as far as to maintain that "the essential nature of human beings is captured by the metaphor of man as *homo narrans*."

Given their (assumed) extraordinary frequency and social significance in conversation, it is hardly surprising that a plethora of research has been dedicated to the topic. Indeed, in discourse analysis, oral narrative is "one of the most developed areas" (Schiffrin 1984: 314). Most analyses, though, have been limited in terms of numbers of narratives considered (e.g., Schiffrin 1996), or have foregrounded non-conversational genres such as professional storytelling (e.g., Leith 1995) or stories elicited in sociolinguistic interviews (e.g., Labov 1972, Gwyn 2000). By contrast, stories from everyday multi-party talk in conversation used to attract much less interest. Only recent research has moved conversational narrative center stage. Both Ochs & Capps's (2001) pathbreaking volume as well as research into 'small stories' (e.g., Bamberg 2004a, Georgakopoulou 2006a) have advanced the theory of conversational narrative considerably. Another major step ahead,

both quantitatively as well as regards the 'naturalness' of the stories, is the *Saarbruecken Corpus of Spoken English* (SCoSE) (see Norrick 2000). However, the SCoSE is a small corpus which is not sociologically balanced or representative of American English narrative[1] and not annotated so that it cannot be searched using corpus linguistic methods.

This book breaks new paths into the study of conversational narrative thanks to the synergy of three technologies: (i) a corpus compiled for this study, which is heavily annotated for narrative-specific phenomena, the Narrative Corpus (hereafter NC) (described in detail in Section 2.2), and which is, given its annotation, the first of its kind,[2] (ii) the related query languages XPath and XQuery, which allow the retrieval of highly specific and complex data structures from XML-annotated documents such as the NC, (iii) as well as the programming language R, which facilitates sophisticated statistical evaluation and graphical representation.

The central topic I am concerned with is the co-construction of conversational narrative. Contrary to narrative research in the tradition of Labov & Waletzky (1967/1997), which foregrounded the concept of the single teller, a considerable number of narrative analyses emphasize the co-constructedness of narrative as "a distinguishing feature of stories told in conversation as opposed to, for example, stories told in performance situations" (Ryave 1978: 131) and, indeed, define storytelling in conversation as "an interactionally collaborative achievement" (Ryave 1978: 131; see also, for example, Duranti 1986, Goodwin 1986b, Schegloff 1997, Holmes & Stubbe 1997, Norrick 2000, Ochs & Capps 2001). The view of narrative as an interactional achievement is based on the observation that "the content and direction that narrative framings take are contingent upon the narrative input of other interlocutors, who provide, elicit, criticize, refute, and draw inferences from facets of the unfolding account" (Ochs & Capps 2001: 2–3). Authorship of stories resides not only with narrators but also, to an extent, with the 'other interlocutors,' the recipients, and the narrator–recipient relationship is not dichotomous. The relationship is more adequately described as asymmetrical, with tellers having a greater share in authorship than the recipients (see Chapter 6 on ways recipients co-author storytellings). Thus, the view of conversational narrative as co-constructed discourse is not new. Co-construction, however, has not yet been investigated using annotated corpora and with a focus on quantification. It has so far only been researched qualitatively. What is, then, new in this book is the two-fold approach to examining co-construction using both corpus-linguistic and quantitative methods. The central aim I pursue in this book is to provide statistically valid quantitative corpus evidence of the co-construction of conversational narrative.

How is co-construction defined in this study? I define co-construction as those actions and re-actions by participants that influence the course narrative discourse is taking. In speaking of participants I include both storytellers and story recipients and suggest that each of these broad types of participant

can contribute to the co-construction of stories. Accordingly, two basic types of co-construction need to be distinguished: narrator co-construction and recipient co-construction. The notion of narrator co-construction refers to a strategy, first noted in conversation-analytical work, of storytellers to 'recipient-design' their stories, that is, to anticipate the recipients' knowledge, interest, and needs and design stories in such a way as to exploit the recipients' knowledge, increase their interest in the telling, and respond to their needs (see, for example, Sacks *et al.* 1974, Sacks 1992, Goodwin & Heritage 1990). Given this strategy of recipient design, narrator co-construction is in operation independently of recipient co-construction (see Schegloff 1997: 102). Large parts of the empirical chapters will show that recipient design is indeed observable in narrators' discourse, although, as Sacks (1992: 238) pointed out, narrators "don't know that they do that designing." The notion of recipient co-construction, on the other hand, builds on the widespread agreement in narrative research that story recipients can influence the "story trajectory of a narrative through their differential interest and competence in the details of talk" (Norrick 2000: 68) and that recipient co-construction "can affect the in-progress unfolding of some relating of an event" (Ryave 1978: 131).

I will present evidence of the co-construction of conversational storytelling in a series of case studies, each pertaining to aspects key to narrative. Following Chapter 1, which provides a detailed working definition of conversational narrative, and Chapter 2, which describes the NC as well as major methods and tools underlying this study, the first of four analytical chapters, Chapter 3, explores the co-construction of turntaking. Chapters 4 and 5 take the narrators' recipient design in the use of discourse presentation into focus: Chapter 4 examines how narrators use interjections and pauses to flag discourse as quoted discourse, thus providing essential processing instructions for the recipient, while Chapter 5 investigates how narrators use discourse presentation to dramatize narrative performances thus increasing the recipient's interest in the telling. Chapter 6 approaches the question of how recipients co-author stories. The final chapter, Chapter 7, summarizes the main findings, considers conclusions, and suggests directions for future research into conversational narrative.

The following chapter, Chapter 1, undertakes to define essential characteristics of conversational narrative.

1 Towards a working definition of conversational narrative

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to delineate conversational narrative. This is a daunting task given that narrative "bows to no simple generic blueprint that sets it apart once and for all from other forms of discourse" (Ochs & Capps 2001: 18). The intention here is not to elaborate an all encompassing definition, but rather to sketch the outlines of the object under investigation by defining key properties of conversational narrative and discussing concepts considered fundamental in oral and specifically conversational narrative theory, thus setting the scene for the empirical chapters to come. The full-fledged case studies in the analytical Chapters 3 to 6, it is hoped, will facilitate a much richer and more adequate picture of conversational narrative than is possible in this preliminary chapter.

Conversational narrative is approached from several angles. Section 1.2 locates conversational narrative in a genre framework. In Section 1.3 I outline a participation framework for conversational narrative. Section 1.4 is concerned with temporal sequence as the semantic backbone of narrative. Section 1.5 emphasizes the importance of agent orientation. In Section 1.6, I introduce the notion of narrative structure and discuss the structural complexity of conversational narratives. Section 1.7 portrays recipient design as a macrostrategy underlying narrative-discourse production. Section 1.8 is concerned with the central function of storytelling to make sense, construct identity, and propagate moral stance. No definition of conversational narrative would be complete without discussion of co-construction. Since the whole book is dedicated to the topic of co-construction it was felt unnecessary to add a section on co-construction to this introductory chapter. I intend to give sufficient evidence of co-construction in Chapters 3 to 6.

1.2 Genre

On a simple technical definition, conversational narrative refers to the stories occurring in conversation. Conversation, it is widely agreed, is a core genre. Its special status is owed to three main reasons. To begin with, conversation

is, unlike highly specialized genres such as speech in academic settings, sermons, or sports commentaries which are used by few speakers only, "the most common, and, it would appear, the most fundamental condition of 'language use' and discourse" (Schegloff 1979: 283) in that it is received and produced by virtually every speaker (see also Goodwin & Heritage 1990: 298, Duranti & Goodwin 1992: 22). Second, conversation is 'archetypical' in the sense that other genres, both spoken and written, can be seen as departures from conversation (Longacre 1983: 44, Halliday & Hasan 1989: 11, Goodwin & Heritage 1990: 298, Biber *et al*. 1999: 1038). Third, conversation is second to none in terms of its innovation potential. As Halliday puts it: it is in conversation that "the semogenic potential of a language is most likely to get extended" (Halliday 2006: 294).

Given that conversation is, then, an essential component of the *condition humaine* it is small wonder that it is sometimes viewed as too vague a notion to qualify for the label of genre (see McCarthy 1998: 31); Swales, for example, characterizes conversation as a "pre-generic dialogic activity" (1990: 61). Also, it is hardly surprising that conversation is anything but a unified genre but host to a number of subgenres. These include: language-in-action, that is, language being used "in support of actions taking place at that moment" (McCarthy 1998: 111; but cf. Goffman who denies language-in-action the status of conversational subgenre arguing that it uses language "in a peripheral and functionally optional way" (1981: 143)). Another candidate for conversational subgenre are service encounters, that is, transactions of goods, information, and services (see McCarthy 1998: 27). Again, different researchers have come to different conclusions as regards inclusion or exclusion of service encounters from conversational subgenres. While McCarthy (1998: 9) accords them conversational subgenre status, Goffman (1981: 141f.) makes a clear distinction between service transaction and conversational genres. A less disputed conversational subgenre are telephone conversations. Although the lack of the visual channel divorces telephone communication from Lyons's 'canonical situation of utterance' (Lyons 1977: 637), which explicitly presupposes the participants' ability to see one another, telephone interactions seem to qualify as conversation maybe less because they are part of everyday communicative behavior (service encounters satisfy that criterion as well) but more because phone calls and face-to-face conversation share similar overall organizations (see Schegloff 1972).

While, then, the labeling of language-in-action, service encounters, and telephone calls as types of conversation may be seen as disputable, the inclusion of *narrative* among conversational subgenres is probably the least problematic and near-universal: to my knowledge, only Swales (1990: 61) views narrative as "pre-generic." The reason cited by Swales is the diversity of types of narrative. For decades, the focus of narrative research in the tradition of Labov & Waletzky (1967/1997) and Labov (1972) tended to be mono-generic in the sense that only first-person experience stories collected in sociolinguistic

interviews were deemed worth studying, and mono-thematic in that, typically, stories revolving around outstanding, life-threatening events ('danger-of-death') were examined. More recent research on narrative, conversely, has aimed to counterbalance the concentration on what Georgakopoulou (2006a) calls Labovian 'big stories' by emphasizing the role of 'small stories.' These stand in stark contrast to dramatic danger-of-death stories in that they are concerned with trivial-seeming, mundane events of everyday life, which are nonetheless far from irrelevant in that they offer, as already mentioned, "a site for working through who we are and how we should be acting, thinking and feeling as we live our lives" (Ochs & Capps 2001: 17). On the whole, recent narrative research stresses the nature of conversational narrative as a multi-generic activity (e.g., Norrick 2000, Georgakopoulou 2006a), following, for example, Ervin-Tripp & Küntay, who argue that "we are probably better off in considering narrative genre as a continuous cline, consisting of many sub-genres, each of which may need differential research treatment" (1997: 139).

That continuous cline consists of an apparently open-ended range of narrative subgenres. They include, most prominently, first-person experience stories, which are widely seen as by far the most frequent and, hence, the prototypical narrative subtype, as well as third-person experience stories, in which the experience of a non-present participant is recapitulated. The cline further boasts a large number of less central and less prototypical types, including: jokes; dream reports; generalized recurrent stories, which summarize recurring experience; fantasies, constructing hypothetical events; mediated stories, triggered by or recounting media events; retold stories, familiar to (some) participants; second stories, told in response to a first story (see Norrick 2000). The list could easily be extended. Ochs & Capps (2001), for example, also include prayers[1] and untold stories, that is, stories whose telling is obstructed or postponed for multiple reasons including, for instance, impropriety (see Norrick 2005a), painfulness, or memory failure. (For a description of the narrative types annotated in the NC, see Section 2.2.2.) The generic framework embedding conversational narrative is depicted in Figure 1.1.

1.3 Participation

A truism holds that "any tale involves a teller, and that, therefore, narrative study must analyze two basic components: the tale and the teller" (Toolan 2001: 1). It will become very clear in this study that narrative in conversation goes far beyond the supposedly essential dyad of tale and teller. Blum-Kulka (1993) proposes a more adequate conceptual framework, including not only tale and teller, but also telling: "the act of narrating in real time, the actual performance of a story before an audience" (Blum-Kulka 1993: 363). Although this definition of telling is helpful, the wording 'before an audience' is problematic in that it suggests a neat division between teller and recipients.

Conversation
→ Service encounters
Language-in-action
Telephone calls
General conversation
Conversational narrative
→ Big story
Small story
→ First-person experience
Third-person experience
Generalized recurrent experience
Fantasy
Dream
Joke
Retold story
Second story
Prayer
Untold stories
. . .

Figure 1.1 Conversational and narrative subgenres

Such a neat division is largely untenable for conversational narrative: here, tellings and tales are shared between tellers and recipients such that the latter, far from merely 'receiving' them, may in various ways actively participate in them. This study is in large part dedicated precisely to the contribution recipients make to the unfolding story. Expanding Blum-Kulka's definition and following Ochs & Capps, I define telling as 'the actual performance of a story to and with recipients' (see Ochs & Capps 2001: 2). This alternative wording leaves room for the "considerable variation across social groups and situations concerning the extent to which tellership resides in the hands of one teller or is distributed across several" (Ochs & Capps 2001: 24). The outcome of telling *with* recipients is "a jointly constructed narrative, where division lines between primary and secondary narrators are blurred" (Blum-Kulka 1993: 386).

For stories to be interactionally achieved, a simple condition needs to be satisfied: there need to be interactants. Some storytelling contexts, however, are constituted by just, or mainly, one actant, the teller. This is most clearly the case in literary storytelling, where the only way of interacting between author and reader is by way of the author second-guessing the reader's state of mind (their expectations, reactions, possible comprehension problems, etc.) and designing the written story accordingly (Widdowson 1979). Interaction is also drastically reduced in the oral stories underlying analyses in Labov & Waletzky (1967/1997) and Labov (1972) and a great many subsequent treatments of narrative (see Schegloff 1997: 101).

The following, (1.1), is a typical instance of a Labovian story. Labov and his associates used an interview method whereby, "at a certain point in the conversation, the interviewer asks, 'Were you ever in a situation where you

were in serious danger of being killed, where you said to yourself – "*This is it*"' " (Labov 1972: 354; emphasis in original). This initial *yes/no* question as well as the succeeding *wh*-question by the interviewer are arrowed in (1.1). Note that in Labov (1972), the two interviewer questions are given in parentheses, as in (1.1):

(1.1)
→ (You ever been in a situation where you thought you were gonna get killed?)
Oh, Yeh, lotta time, man.
→ (Like, what happened?)
Well, like we used to jump off the trestle
And the trestle is about six-seven stories high.
You know, we used to go swimmin' there . . .
We used to jump offa there, you know.
An uh-like, wow! Ya get up there
An' ya feel like
You're gonna die and shit, y'know.
Couple a times I almost . . . I thought I was gonna drown, you know.
(Labov 1972: 361)

The story in (1.1) is "minimally contextualized" (Edwards 1997: 140): the only context the reader is offered is provided by the two elicitation questions, which serve as standard stimuli in the interviews. Apart from the elicitation questions, Labovian stories "report nothing (no talk or other conduct)" (Schegloff 1997: 100) by the recipient(s) either in the course of the telling or on the completion of the story, nor do they systematically record forms of hesitations (but see the silent pauses in (1.1)) or major restarts. In short, "there is nothing interactional in the data at all other than the eliciting question" (Schegloff 1997: 101).[2] That is, once successfully put on the track of telling a story, the interlocutor turns mute and the teller is left to their own devices. Labovian stories are thus essentially monologic and monophonic: they are stories merely initiated by an interlocutor but not received and responded to by a 'participant' re-actively taking part in them.

Given this minimal contextualization, narrative analyses based on this type of data have attracted criticism. Schegloff, for example, argued that "storytelling abstracted from its interactional setting, occasioning, and uptake is an academically hybridized form" (Schegloff 1997: 104) and bemoaned the "artificial environment of the academic elicitation" (Schegloff 1997: 105). More recent narrative analyses have attempted to avoid the danger of decontextualizing stories by (i) turning away from interview-elicited stories to naturally occurring stories in conversation and, driven by the view of narrative as "an organic part of its interactional environment" (Schegloff 1997: 101), by (ii) investigating stories with a focus on both their conversational embedding

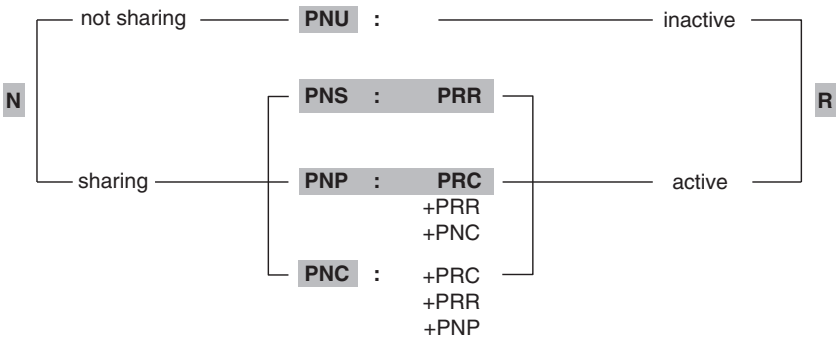

Figure 1.2 Participation framework for conversational narrative; P: Participant role; N: narrator; R: recipient; PNU: Unsupported Narrator; PNS: Supported Narrator; PNP: Primary Narrator; PNC: Ratified Co-narrator; PRC: Co-constructive Recipient; PRR: Responsive Recipient

and particularly the interaction between participants of storytelling, including the broad participant types 'narrator' and 'recipient' as well as a number of subtypes thereof. Crucially, this line of research builds on the assumption that "the recipient(s) is an irremediable component of the story's telling" (Schegloff 1997: 102). Seen from this perspective, conversational narrative is essentially dialogic and polyphonic.

Inspection of corpus data reveals that participant interaction indeed looms large in conversational narrative. The following gives a brief account of the participation framework for conversational narrative underlying this study. The account builds on previous work on participation in general conversation by Goffman (1981) and Rühlemann (2007).

Participant roles in conversational narrative are shown in Figure 1.2.

It has been noted repeatedly in the literature that the distinction between speaker and hearer in conversation is a gross oversimplification (e.g., Schiffrin 1987: 27). This point is all the more valid with regard to participation in conversational narrative. Here, the terms 'narrator' and 'recipient' are hypernyms for a broad range of subroles. A mere distinction between narrator and recipient, then, does not only overlook the polyphonicity of conversational narrative but also ignores the fact that story authorship is by no means the prerequisite of the narrator alone but shared between participants (see Goodwin 1986b).

As shown in Figure 1.2, I propose to distinguish altogether six active roles in conversational narrative, two for recipients and four for narrators. While, in some cases, narrators are Unsupported Narrators (PNU) doing the telling of a story single-handedly, without any backchanneling or other more content-oriented contributions from the audience, more typically the telling of narratives is shared between narrator(s) and recipient(s), with different types of contributions and co-construction from Co-narrators (PNC) and/or

recipients. Critical to participation in shared narrations are the subroles available for recipients in that the subroles available for narrators can be usefully defined on the basis of recipient subroles.

An initial distinction is between active and inactive recipients, with active recipients responding and contributing, in some way or another, to the ongoing narration and inactive recipients staying verbally blank. Verbally inactive recipients are far from irrelevant to tellers and telling; they too have an impact. First, they may communicate non-verbally, using gaze, nods, hand gestures, or facial expressions as means of reacting to the telling and interacting with the teller. Second, and more importantly, as noted above, even inactive recipients will affect the story's telling because tellers, in keeping with the principle of recipient design, tend to tailor tellings to any recipient present and ratified, regardless of their being active or inactive (see Schegloff 1997).

Any ratified recipient acts as a listener. Listening in storytelling is, as noted by Sacks (1992), a complex task: the listener's business is "not to be listening to a series of independent sentences, but to a series of connected sentences that have the connectedness built in such that it is required for the understanding of any one of them" (Sacks 1992: 232). Listening in this sense, that is, understanding the connectedness of storytelling discourse, is displayed by responses to storytelling: regardless of their further specifications, responses provide, for the narrator, feedback that the storytelling is being listened to, or, in Sacks's (1992: 650) terms, that a 'structural analysis' is being done in the storytelling's course.

Looking at what differential actions can be performed in providing this basic feedback, a division of recipients is suggested into Responsive Recipient (PRR) and Co-constructive Recipient (PRC) (a division which expands Goodwin's (1986a) distinction of recipient behavior as backchannels and assessments). The role of PRR is supportive in the sense of contributing tokens of listenership whose primary function, over and above a number of subfunctions, is to signal the aforementioned analysis and understanding of the connectedness that characterizes storytelling discourse.[3] The role of PRR utterances is interactional, vis-à-vis the teller and their telling (rather than the tale), serving to signal to the teller the recipient's active reception of the telling (see Blum-Kulka 1993: 370).[4] Crucially, utterances by PRR do not evidence an orientation to the tale, that is, to aspects related to the content of the story. Rather, PRR utterances can be seen as backchannel utterances in the sense of Gardner (1998) who noted for backchannel forms that they do not contribute to the ongoing discourse topically (see also Blum-Kulka 1993: 370).

The role of PRC is of a more complex order. Utterances ascribable to this type fulfill a dual role: seen as listener feedback as such, as *any* feedback, they too fulfill the basic role of registering the recipient's structural analysis of the connectedness of narrative discourse. Seen thus, they too have an interactional function. However, PRC responses go beyond merely signaling, to the teller, attention to the telling. Their focus is vis-à-vis the *tale* in the