A Review of Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou's Analyzing Narrative: Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives from a Natural Storytelling Environment

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Abstract

It was rather serendipitous, not that I broke my wrist, but that I chose to bring Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou's 2012 book, Analyzing Narrative: Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives, to my physical therapy appointments. Three times a week for several weeks, I read left-handed with my right arm trapped in a device that radiated extreme heat or numbing cold. I encourage anyone with an interest in narrative analysis to read this book, especially, if possible, in the company of people with stories to tell (but minus the temperature variations). There are six chapters and I recommend that it be read in thirds.

Keywords

Narrative Analysis, Story, Story Tellers

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It was rather serendipitous, not that I broke my wrist, but that I chose to bring Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou's 2012 book, Analyzing Narrative: Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives, to my physical therapy appointments. Three times a week for several weeks, I read left-handed with my right arm trapped in a device that radiated extreme heat or numbing cold. I encourage anyone with an interest in narrative analysis to read this book, especially, if possible, in the company of people with stories to tell (but minus the temperature variations). There are six chapters and I recommend that it be read in thirds. Key Words: Narrative Analysis, Story, Story Tellers.

Sitting in the hand/wrist therapy room, while reading the first couple of chapters of Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou's 2012 book, *Analyzing Narrative: Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, I disappeared into the work and didn't pay attention to what was going on around me. The first chapter reviewed the back-story of narrative analysis, where it all started and how it has progressed. It is a must-read for any beginner or veteran looking for an account on the history of narrative research that focuses on definitions, structure, and analysis. Chapter two discussed the pros and cons of Labov's model of narrative analysis, ethnopoetics and conversation analysis. Although Labov's model is the foundation of most narrative study, I've not attempted to code a narrative using this model. After reading chapter two regarding issues with coding, I'm glad I haven't. I'm a fan of ethnopoetics and the importance of the poetic feel of a narrative, but the down side is that interpretive analysis is often subjective. Conversational analysis was highlighted for the positive stance of narrative "talk-in-interaction" and chastised for its tendency to focus on the beginning and end of the story while ignoring the middle.

The serendipitous moments became evident while reading chapter three which focused on the connections between narrative and context and the narrative in social life. While reading the section on oral storytelling and cultural variability examples played out in the room around me. At first I stopped reading, but didn't look up. Like a hunter in a blind, I remained disinterested on the surface in hopes that they wouldn't notice the researcher in the room. I suppressed the random flicker of a grin at the corner of my mouth as a patient told the animated story of what event lead to hand/wrist therapy. Stories of misfortune shared between patients of different gender, cultural, and socioeconomic groups. There were differences in ways the stories were told (by the cheerleader, sheet metal worker, IT network supervisor, and local business owner), but the common ground kept the group engaged. The examples continued to play out another day while I read chapter four on the interactional nature during the stories telling. How the story began, how it unfolded and how it concluded. Captive audience members (a pool player, a high school football player, a housewife, and a roofer) in the room related and interacted with the teller. This chapter also covered four narrative types counterfactual, habitual, second stories and argumentative.

The supporting evidence for chapter five became apparent in the waiting room one afternoon. A television newscaster pontificated his, or more likely his networks, brand of

dominant discourse. This chapter explores the relationship of the narrative and power and its connection to authority and truth. How at times people that are unaware and unfamiliar with the practice can be swayed by dominate discourse such as the stories told by the newscaster. As the news program continued, I discreetly looked at the faces of those around me to see if any bought into the story and reacted as intended. Most did. In the last chapter, the main topic was the relationship between narrative and identities and its connection to different research models. While reading, someone inevitably asked "How did you end up in physical therapy?" I dog-eared the page, closed my book, and join in to recount the event that lead me to this room and this moment of reading about narrative analysis while listening to narratives.

References

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Author Note

Robyn Jordan. B.S. Zoology, M.S. Biology, and a Ph.D. student in Marriage and Family Therapy from the University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM). When not buried in literature or my dissertation, I work at ULM where I have taught biology, worked in the Dean's office to helped students find their way and moved the never-ending piles of paper (as a result, I am leading the charge to eliminate paper flows in favor of electronic ones in the name of efficiency and trees everywhere). Correspondence regarding this review can be addressed directly to Robyn Jordan at Email: Jordan@ulm.edu

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