

A MODEL OF NARRATIVE CIRCULATION

Vilma Hänninen

University of Tampere, Finland

This article suggests that narrative meaning structures have different modes of existence: the “told”, the “inner” and the “lived” modes. Their definitions and mutual relationships are presented in the form of a schematic model. The inner narrative represents the experiential mode of narrative form. It is an individual’s interpretation of his/her life, in which the past events, present situation and future projects are understood using cultural narrative models as resources. It is (partly) made external by told narratives, and validated/revise in that process. The lived narrative, again, refers to the real-life drama, which is shaped in the interplay between situational constraints and the inner narrative that guides one’s actions in changing life situations. The article reviews narrative research focusing on the studies and discussions related to the relations between the different modes of narrativity. (*Narrative Theory, Narrative Methodology, Inner Narrative, Lived Narrative*)

Recent decades have witnessed a rapid increase of interest in narrative in various branches of human science. This phenomenon has been called the “narrative boom”, “narrative turn” or sometimes even “narrative explosion”.

The fascination with the concept of narrative seems to stem from its ability to bring together various disciplines, as well as to bridge the gap between science and art. Narrative research is like a huge buffet to which different disciplines bring their own methods and views for others to share. Ideas, concepts and methods are mutually borrowed and a happy family atmosphere is created. Sometimes, however, this abundance may be difficult to digest, and some of the family members may feel they do not know each other after all.

Requests for further information should be directed to Vilma Hänninen, Department of Sociology and Social Psychology, 33014 University of Tampere, Finland.
E-mail: vilma.hanninen@uta.fi.

Less metaphorically speaking, the concept of narrative has the potential to integrate the knowledge and understanding provided by separate research fields of human sciences. I want to argue that this potential can be fully realised by conceptually organising this multiplicity and by recognising that the term narrative or story can be used to mean different things in different contexts.

In recent years, several authors have presented ways of organising the field of narrative research, especially that of narrative research on illness (Bury, 2001; Hydén, 1997; Mishler, 1995; Murray, 2000). This paper is yet another such attempt with the general aim of defining, organising, and discussing some of the main concepts used in narrative research.

To achieve this end I will propose a schematic model of different modes of narrativity in human life and use it as a scheme by which narrative studies can be classified and located in relation to each other. The scheme also makes it possible to identify the main theoretical and methodological questions and controversies related to narrative research. The model should be seen as a heuristic device for organising narrative research.

MODES OF EXISTENCE OF THE NARRATIVE FORM

The basis of the model is the concept of narrative form. It can be defined simply as a structure of meanings related to human events, by which the events are seen as parts of a plot, related to “human predicaments and attempted resolutions” (Sarbin, 1986). Thus defined, the concept of narrative form is not bound to a specific mode of existence, for example, a verbal account.

The narrative form can be seen to exist in three modes. The first of these is the most familiar and evident, namely the *told narrative*. The told narrative is what we encounter as an empirical phenomenon: the symbolic representation, most often verbal, of a chain of human events. In narrative research, the told stories of interest are most often autobiographical stories that people tell about their lives.

The concept of *inner narrative*, on the other hand, refers to the narrative organisation of experience, the story we tell to ourselves. The inner narrative is the focus of interest of narrative psychology. The idea that human experience is to a large extent organised through narrative form has been presented by several classic writers of narrative research. For example,

Theodore Sarbin has formulated the well-known “narratory principle” according to which “human beings think, perceive, imagine, interact and make moral choices according to narrative structures” (Sarbin, 1986, p. 9), and David Carr (1986, p. 65) has argued that narrative is a “primary way of organising and giving coherence to our experience”.

The concept of *lived narrative* is based on the idea that there is a narrative quality inherent in human life itself. As Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) has argued, human actions are to be understood as enacted narratives. Human life consists of interlocking narrative-like episodes which have their relative beginnings, middles, and ends. The narrative organisation of lived life can be seen as the basis of narrative organisation of experience, as David Carr (1986), for instance, has argued.

The fascination with the concept of narrative seems to lie precisely in its ability to refer to all these aspects at the same time, in the idea of a basic affinity between narrative expression, experience and life itself. However, in my view it is important also to see the differences between the modes of existence of narrative form. Making this distinction allows us to explore the dynamics of their relationships.

In narrative research, the empirical data typically consists of told narratives. The studies differ, however, in regard to their ultimate focus of interest.

In some studies, the interest lies in the told narratives themselves. For instance, the narratological study of literature or folklore focuses on the structures or tropes of narratives, and these are not studied as reflections of anything beyond themselves (e.g. Prince, 1982). In anthropological or social scientific studies on storytelling in various cultural groups or organisations, the told stories are analysed as expressions of the culture in question (e.g. Boyce, 1995; Steffen, 1997). Then again, sociolinguistic or microsociological studies analyse the structures of everyday stories (e.g. Labov & Waletzky, 1967) or interactional practices related to storytelling (see e.g. Ochs & Capps, 2001; Schegloff, 1997).

In psychological or phenomenological studies on narratives, on the other hand, the ultimate interest lies in the inner narrative, although this term is rarely used. In these studies, the stories people tell about themselves are supposed to reflect the inner workings of their minds: their identities, their sense of meaning in life, their conceptions of causal relations between events, their moral commitments, and their ways of understanding the past and anticipating the future (e.g. Crossley, 2000; McAdams, 1993).

Many social scientists and historians, in their turn, are interested primarily in lived narratives, that is, the actual lives of the narrators. In the realist tradition of biographical research, for instance, autobiographies are seen as windows to the lived life (see e.g. Kohli, 1981; Miller, 2000).

The differences in the ultimate interest of various kinds of narrative research give rise to different ontological and epistemological problems.

Ontological questions: The told narrative is ontologically rather unproblematic. It is an empirical phenomenon, and there seems to be no doubt about the existence of narrative form in symbolic representations of human events. The inner narrative, on the other hand, is a hypothetical, non-empirical construct, and its existence cannot be proved. The cogency of the idea regarding the narrative quality of experience lies mainly in its heuristic or suggestive power, and adopting it is ultimately a question of belief or personal resonance. As regards the lived narratives, there has been much controversy about whether there actually is a narrative structure in life itself or if life is after all a messy chaos on which we retrospectively impose a narrative form (for a presentation of this discussion, see Widdershoven, 1993).

Epistemological/methodological questions: Again, if told narratives are studied as such, there seem to be no special epistemological problems, as in this case it is quite justified to bracket out the questions of the truth of the told narrative – the narratologists actually study mainly fictional narratives. On the other hand, when inferences are made regarding the inner narrative, one should ask whether the told narrative as research data is “psychologically true”, that is, how authentically it reflects the conceptions and motivations of the narrator. There has been much controversy about whether autobiographical stories really reflect the subjective experience of the narrators or only the social conventions of storytelling (e.g. Atkinson, 1997; Horton-Salway, 2001). In any case, making inferences from the told to the inner narrative is an epistemological leap which, however, may be more or less grounded. The research concerning lived narratives aims at revealing the “historical truth”. The relationship between the told story and lived narrative is still more complicated, since the actual events are filtered to the narration both through the subjective interpretive processes and the sociocultural conventions of telling about one’s life. In the realist tradition of life history research, told stories are often complemented by other documents to validate their historical truth (Miller, 2000). However, an episode of lived narrative cannot be understood

on the basis of knowledge of the objective facts alone; knowledge of the actor’s motives and emotions is a necessary part of the interpretation.

THE MODEL OF NARRATIVE CIRCULATION

The most common conception among narrative researchers seems to be that there is indeed a narrative (or “pre-narrative”) quality both in experience and in life itself. Moreover, there seems to be a basic agreement that told stories reflect the inner and lived narratives, even if not in quite transparent fashion.

Starting from these assumptions, an underlying theory about the relationships between these modes of narrativity can be illustrated by the following figure:

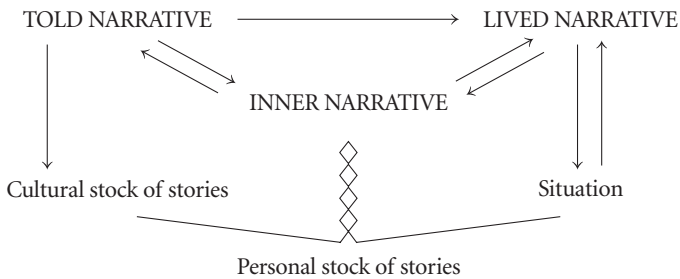


Figure 1

The model of narrative circulation

I suggest that with this scheme, the various branches of narrative research can be brought to the same framework, which enables us to articulate their relations and to connect their findings with each other. The figure depicts the relations between the told, inner and lived narratives. In addition to the terms told, inner and lived narratives, three additional concepts are introduced.

The *cultural stock of stories* is the totality of narrative representations that the person hears or reads in the course of his or her life, ranging from pieces of gossip and TV advertisements to novels and sacred texts, and from fairytales to real-life stories. In any culture or sub-culture some stories are more hegemonic, or powerful and normative than the others (dominant stories

or master-narratives); these may be challenged by counter-narratives which give voice to alternative interpretations (see Andrews, 2002).

The concept of *personal stock of stories* refers to the set of stories a person has stored in his or her memory, including both narrativised personal memories and those adopted from the cultural stock of stories.

The term *situation* refers here to the actual conditions of life, the various possibilities, resources and restrictions of action among which the person finds him or herself. These are partly beyond the individual's control, but partly results of his or her actions.

In Figure 1, the hypothesised relations between the modes of narrativity are presented by arrows. They are not to be taken as mechanical causal relationships but rather as ways in which meanings are transferred from one realm to the other.

This model is based on the ideas presented by Jerome Bruner (1987), David Carr (1986) and Theodore Sarbin (1986) about the narrative quality of experience. It also borrows from Rom Harré's (1983) theory of "psychological space" in which ideas are seen to circulate between the collective/public realm and individual/private realm through the processes of appropriation, transformation, publication and conventionalisation. Moreover, as the model relates the mental and discursive processes to the context of action and its conditions, it bears resemblance with the theory of structuration by Anthony Giddens (1982). The model entails a conception of personhood in which the self is seen as constituted in the network of social, cultural and material conditions and as an active agent in relation to both discursive and material reality. It also sees the person as (to some extent) capable of self-transformation. While it emphasises the role of language and discursive practices, it does not reduce the self to a product of these alone.

In the following, I will consider the figure in more detail.

The concept of inner narrative

The inner narrative can be grasped as a continuous mental process consisting of a multitude of subnarratives of varying time-spans and varying degrees of self-reflectedness. The inner narrative can be seen to serve several functions: it makes sense of the past, provides a vision of the future, defines the individual's narrative identity, articulates values and moral standards, and helps to regulate emotions.

Starting from the ideas of David Carr (1986; see also Crossley, 2000), there is a narrative-like quality already in the most basic passive experience, which reflects the intentionality and temporality of existence. Narrativity becomes still more central in active experience, that is, in the conscious forming of life projects, in which “we explicitly consult past experience, envisage the future and view the present as a passage between the two” (Carr, 1991). The more complex and extensive in time the narrative projects become, the more they require conscious planning and recollection. In constructing one’s whole autobiography the various subnarratives are consciously reflected and knit together. Thus the complexity and level of self-awareness of the inner narrative is related to the complexity and extension of the action structures in which the person is engaged.

Language has a central role in forming the inner narrative. We hear and tell stories mainly in linguistic form. Moreover, we use language as a means of inner organisation of experience (Vygotsky, 1962). In this way, the culturally developed ways of understanding of events penetrate each person’s private consciousness.

The inner narrative is not, however, necessarily to be seen as fully verbal. Although in some instances we may carry out explicit verbal storytelling in our minds, especially in situations requiring conscious reflection, a great part of the mental processing of events occurs on the level of meanings rather than verbal signs, and rather as images than explicitly unfolding narratives. Similarly, the inner narrative should not necessarily be seen as something that we are fully aware of, but mostly as a disposition to grasp events in certain ways (cf. Novitz, 1997).

One of the controversies around the idea of inner narrative has concerned the question as to whether it is actually or ideally a coherent unity with a singular self as the protagonist, or rather, at least in the postmodern world, a set of multiple and even contradictory selves (e.g. de Peuter, 1998; Hollway & Jefferson, 2001). As I see it, the concept of inner narrative does not as such entail a postulate of unity.

Finally, the concept of inner narrative does not necessarily entail that all mental processing is narrative in form, although such an idea also has its proponents (e.g. Howard, 1991). Rather the inner narrative can be seen as the central organiser of experience and action.

The inner narrative as a process of weaving together the situation and cultural story models

The formation of the inner narrative is depicted in the figure as a criss-crossing arrow, which means that it is formed as a process in which the potentialities of the actual situation and the events of the lived narrative are interpreted by using the cultural stock of stories and one's personal stock of stories as resources for interpretative models.

The relation between the situation and the inner narrative has been the focus of studies on the way in which major life changes, such as the onset of an illness, are made sense of (e.g. Crossley, 2000; Frank, 1995). As the disruption brought about by a life change often shatters the taken-for-granted frames of everyday life and breaks down the former life projects, these situations call for a conscious reformulation of a new narrative orientation. This makes the inner narrative amenable to research. The studies of illness narratives reveal the power of narrative interpretation to provide meaning and dignity even for the most painful experiences. The narrative studies of life changes also reveal the extent to which the autobiographical stories reflect the models provided by the cultural stock of stories (e.g. Frank, 1995).

A classic question of narrative theory is whether the cultural models shape the telling only or the way in which events are made sense of in the first place, that is, in the inner narrative. The proponents of narrative psychology usually seem to incline towards the latter conception (e.g. Bruner, 1987; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992).

Another important question regarding the relation between the cultural story models and the inner narrative concerns the space of individual creativity. Some authors view the cultural models primarily as resources or "tool kits" people creatively choose and use (e.g. Bruner, 1991; Frank, 1993), while some see them primarily as normative constraints that more or less violently mould their subjective experience (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). I would see them as both: people are not to be seen as mere products of their culture nor as completely free agents but as relatively free. In my study of people who had lost their jobs (Hänninen, 1991), many subjects actively resisted the dominant story models related to unemployment (the "tragic story" and the "welfare benefit abuser story"), and, often in collaboration with their peers, searched for alternative narrative interpretations. In a study I conducted with Anja Koski-Jannes (Hänninen & Koski-Jännes, 1999) on narratives of re-

covery from addiction, we could see that people use an array of culturally available story models as resources for interpreting their addiction and recovery.

The conception of relative freedom makes it possible to see that cultural settings vary in the availability of different cultural story models. In the post-modern society we are “bombarded with stories” and the choice of narrative models is seemingly infinite. On the community and group level, however, the options are often much more restricted in terms of what kinds of narrative interpretations are considered appropriate or suitable.

At the point of choosing and transforming the cultural story models to one’s own use, the concept of a personal stock of stories becomes relevant: people actively select and adapt, sometimes even resist the available cultural story models to fit their own past experience and world-view.

In any case, the sociological studies which focus on the cultural stock of stories and especially on the dominant public master narratives provide valuable information for the studies of inner narrative.

The told narrative as an expression of the inner narrative

The inner narrative is expressed and made explicit in the stories the person tells about his or her life.

The relation between the inner narrative and the told self-narrative is controversial. Some researchers see them as inseparable (Bruner, 1991) or identical (McAdams, 1998). Others seem to think that the inner narrative is constructed in the telling (Frank, 1995; Kerby, 1991). Some researchers (e.g. Gergen & Kaye, 1993; Horton-Salway, 2001) contend that told stories are not to be taken as reflections of an inner narrative but only as interactive accomplishments. As I see it, the inner and told narratives are closely interrelated but not in one-to-one way. In the terms of Rom Harré (1983), there is a threshold between the individual/private realm and the individual/public realm.

The distinction Lev S. Vygotsky (1962) made between external and inner speech can be used to highlight the differences between told and inner narratives. In Vygotskian theory, the origin of inner speech is seen to be in the external speech. The linguistic tools originally appropriated in external verbal interchanges become tools for inner functioning. In the same way, the cultural story models can be seen as tools for organising the inner narrative.

Seen in this way, these models are not present in the telling only but also in the inner narrative.

The main difference between external speech and inner speech, according to Vygotsky, lies in their functions. The function of external speech is communication, while the function of inner speech is mastering one's own psychological processes. From this difference arise the differences in their forms: external speech has to be full and explicit, while inner speech is abbreviated and idiosyncratic. Moreover, the inner speech is connected to non-linguistic psychological processes. In the same way, the inner narrative can be seen to function as an organiser of an individual's own psychological processes, while the told narrative functions as a conveyer of meanings to other people. The inner narrative can thus never be fully expressed as told narratives, and there are various kinds of filters between these two. The told narrative is never fully authentic or inauthentic in relation to the inner narrative, but something in between.

Telling one's story to others may serve various motives, ranging from a sincere desire to share one's concerns and experiences to highly strategic purposes for making a certain impression on an audience. In any case, the told story is always dialogical: it is partly constructed in relation to the listeners, taking into account their expectations and values, and using the vocabulary they understand. As Mikhail Bakhtin (1973) has said, every word is always half someone else's. In interactional settings, every told story is thus to some extent co-constructed with the listeners. However, as I understand Bakhtin, he also implies that every word, or every told story, is "half" one's own, too. It could be said that the proportion of self-expression and other-directedness varies. The studies of the cultural patterns and norms of storytelling illustrate how the social settings of telling affect the way in which a person can express his or her inner narrative. For example, studies on the telling of life stories in AA group meetings reveal how people are subtly induced to tell their life stories in certain ways (e.g. Arminen, 1998). People may give differing interpretations of certain events depending on the assumed expectations of the present audience (e.g. Ezzy, 2000). In general, in social storytelling settings such narratives are preferred that are dramatic and coherent, and which present the narrator in a favourable light. The inner narrative does not necessarily share these qualities, and thus it may remain untold. Especially those problematic experiences which carry potential stigma are often preferred to be held private (e.g. infertility, see Kirkman, 2001).

While the told narrative can be seen as the best window we have to the inner narrative, it is not in my view to be taken as a fully transparent one. When the told autobiographical stories are to be used as indicators of the narrator's inner narrative, the possible effects of the context of narration should be evaluated. Ideally, they should be collected in settings which resemble as closely as possible the ways in which people talk to themselves. Diaries, autobiographical writings and minimally structured narrative interviews (see Wengraf, 2001) and interviews allowing for free association (Hollway & Jefferson, 2001) seem to be the best means for this.

The told story as a shaper of the inner narrative

The arrow from the told narrative to the inner narrative depicts the reflexive capacity of telling one's story to mould the inner narrative. Dialogue with the listener(s) may open new perspectives and prompt the person to focus on previously unnoticed experiences, thus leading to new ways to tell one's story. The effect of forming new kinds of told stories has been the focus of studies related to narrative therapy (e.g. McLeod, 1997). The basic idea is that learning to tell new kinds of narratives in therapeutic settings leads to changes in the inner narrative. As James Pennebaker's (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999) studies have demonstrated, it is not even necessary to have a real audience to such a telling but the mere verbalising of one's inner narrative in the form of writing may have therapeutic consequences. Moreover, David Rennie's (1994) study on therapeutic storytelling has indicated that telling even superficial or defensive stories may set in motion deeper processes in the inner narrative. Seeing the told and the inner narrative as interdependent yet separate implies that merely learning to tell a new kind of narrative about one's life does not automatically lead to corresponding changes in the inner narrative. The new told narrative has to be felt as personally true and authentic. Only by reshaping the inner narrative can the told narrative have an effect on the way the person feels and acts. In Eugene Gendlin's (1962, p. 5) words: "Feeling without symbolisation is blind; symbolisation without feeling is empty".

Told stories enrich the cultural stock of stories

Told stories become part of the cultural stock of stories for those who hear them. In addition to the immediate listeners, some stories are made public to the wider audience via retellings, media and narrative research. The social processes which filter the circulation of private stories to larger audiences shape the recipients' narrative resources in important ways. For example, when I presented alternative ("comic") unemployment narratives I had found in my study (Hänninen, 1991), many unemployed people came to thank me for encouraging them to find such a new interpretation for their own situation and to tell it to others too.

The effects of the told story on the lived narrative

Telling one's story to others is always a motivated act: "For the most part, people tell stories to complain, to boast, to inform, to tease, to explain or excuse or justify" (Schegloff, 1997). Telling of one's story in a certain way often does have real consequences for the lived narrative by shaping the way the person and his or her actions are seen and evaluated by the audience. Some narrative researchers (e.g. Gergen & Kaye, 1993) argue that the main function of telling one's story is to produce social effects. These effects are most dramatic in situations where other people make decisions about a person's fate on the basis of his or her narrative, as in court, in recruitment interviews or asylum seeking procedures. A similar effect can also be seen in everyday interactions as well; the minor stories of everyday incidents shape other people's judgements and subsequent actions towards the narrator.

What is told, to whom, and how, is thus shaped by anticipation of the social effects of storytelling. The differentials in the storytelling skills may produce inequality as regards the social effects of the told story (e.g. Blommaert, 2001).

The inner narrative and the lived narrative

The potential of the inner narrative to shape the lived narrative is based on its prospective quality: the inner narrative not only organises memories of the past but anticipates the future and forms the narrative projects one sets to enact (Carr, 1986; Crossley, 2000).

The arrow from the inner narrative to the lived narrative depicts the process in which people enact the narrative projects they have formulated in their inner narratives. The inner narrative guides the person's actions by setting the values and goals, forming the conceptions of how the goals can be attained, and the moral standards regarding acceptable ways of acting. This process can best be illuminated by prospective studies in which the succession of interpretation and action are followed up. For example, the analysis by Jacquelyn Wiersma (1992) of "Karen's" story demonstrates how her successive and changing tellings about her life (which putatively indicate the changes in her inner narrative) lead to ever new kinds of changes she makes in her actual life. The analysis of a cancer patient's diary by Anja Riitta Lahikainen and myself (Hänninen & Lahikainen, 2001) shows how the patient's anticipation of the role of her illness as a turning point for the better leads her to act in accordance with that prospect.

The lived narrative and the inner narrative

The narrative projects formed in the person's mind are only one of the forces that shape the lived narrative, however. In the actual drama of life, these narrative projects encounter the foreseen and unforeseen conditions of acting as well as other people's actions, which is why they sometimes come true but sometimes do not. The course of the lived narrative may thereby take unanticipated directions. As Alasdair MacIntyre (1981, p. 201) has noted, actual life is a combination of teleology and unpredictability.

The lived narrative thus serves as a test for the adequacy or realism of the goals and strategies formed in the inner narrative. While no one can make accurate predictions about what will happen, these can nevertheless be more or less realistic. The unpredicted turns of events lead to revisions in the inner narrative, and what one learns from such experiences depends on their narrative interpretation.

The functions attributed to the inner narrative include maintaining one's self-respect and sense of agency, and regulating emotions (e.g. Baumeister & Newman, 1994; McAdams, 1998). Thus events that threaten one's self are often interpreted in ways which repair the damage. If the inner narrative accomplishes the task of reducing anxiety and enhancing self-respect by ignoring relevant aspects of the events or one's own motivations, it may be dysfunctional in a wider sense.

Finally, the intended and unintended consequences of acting in the lived narrative shape in their turn the situation (e.g. health, employment situation), which may consolidate or call for new interpretations in the inner narrative.

THE CRITERIA OF EVALUATION OF DIFFERENT MODES OF NARRATIVITY

The last point I would like to make about the distinction between the different modes of narrativity is that they should be evaluated by different criteria. The quality of a told story can be evaluated in terms of literary quality, such as coherence, suspense or originality. The inner narrative, on the other hand, should be evaluated in terms of its psychological qualities, such as its capacity to render one's life comprehensible and meaningful and to form realistic narrative projects. Moreover, the inner narrative should also be evaluated in terms of the ethical quality of the lived narrative it guides the person to enact, since in the lived drama every person's narrative is interwoven with those of other people.

CONCLUSION

The scheme I have proposed is just one of the possible ways of organising the field of narrative studies. I claim that some such organising is necessary in order to ensure fruitful dialogue between the various traditions of narrative research. It seems that different branches of human sciences have different tasks to fulfil in the common endeavour to comprehend the role of narrative in human life. In fulfilling these tasks, they encounter differing ontological, epistemological and methodological problems related to the differing truth claims they wish to make. These differences should in my view be respected.

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