Storying selves and others at work: Story ownership, tellership and functions of narratives in a workplace domain

Abstract

This paper examines the topic of storytelling as observed in a workplace domain, interrogating specifically issues of story ownership – so who owns a story, tellership – so who has the right to tell it, and functions of workplace narratives. Drawing upon discourse and narrative analyses, the paper examines the often incomplete and fragmented but also naturally-occurring narratives about selves and others at work, as well as their metacommentary as observed in a further education institution in the UK. Based on this analysis, the paper discusses the extent to which storytellers "own" the narratives that they tell at work, considering also the factors affecting story ownership and tellership – as well as what is considered "sayable" in workplace domains, this closely intersecting with functions of workplace narratives as well as broader social practices at work.

Keywords

Workplace discourse, linguistic ethnography, conversational narrative, metadiscourse, story ownership, tellership, social practice

Introduction

In line with the recognition that non-elicited narratives can differ greatly from those observed in the context of interviews, many researchers interested in narrative production turned their attention to more interactionally-negotiated instances of storytelling (Goodwin, 1990; Bamberg, 1997; Ochs and Capps, 2001). The analysis of conversational, and often less monologic, instances of narration that flouted the predicted "default" structure of a narrative provided fruitful means of the examination of the discursive storying of selves and others in talk.

In this paper, a similar focus will be placed on the meaning-negotiation potential of conversational narratives. Instances of storytelling that will be placed under scrutiny here will be those produced in the context of talk at work, and specifically narratives observed in the context of interactions among members of an IT team working in further education institution in the UK. Through the analysis of more fragmented, sometimes incomplete, narratives, accompanied sometimes by metacommentary, the paper will engage with the issue of negotiation of meaning in storytelling at work. Under particular scrutiny here will be the relationship between narrative production and the ecology of storytelling, and particularly how this affects story ownership and tellership. The paper will consider therefore the extent to which tellers have real ownership of the stories they tell at work, revealing the less idiosyncratic and more polyphonic nature of stories that get told at work. Such meaning negotiation in storytelling at work in turn will be interpreted also as a facet of negotiation of the functions that such workplace narratives are produced to serve, this including the valanced presentation of selves and others at work, and something influenced by the broader social practices of work, this entailing the specific expectations relating to how this presentation of (professional) selves should look like. In the paper, a view will be taken that

narratives inevitably form part of broader social practices observed in the context of work (e.g. performing being a competent or professional employee) and as such need to be considered in parallel to these practices as well.

The specific research questions that this paper will address then will include the following:

1. Who owns a story and who has the right to tell it at work?
2. What factors affect story ownership and tellership in the context of work?

The paper comprises five sections. Following this Introduction, the Background will provide a theoretical foundation for the work, discussing issues of the interactional achievement of storytelling, story ownership and tellership, and the use of storytelling in the specific context of work. In the Data and Methods section, the specific details of data collection, part of a broader auto-ethnographic study, will be discussed before moving on to outline the analytical approaches adopted in the paper, these entailing the use of discourse and narrative analytical tools. The Analysis section will provide the discussion of selected examples of interactionally achieved narratives observed in the studied workplace setting while the final section will offer a concluding discussion of the findings and their implications, addressing the aforementioned research questions and considering specifically factors affecting narrative production at work.

Background

Storytelling as interactional achievement

The rich array of forms and functions of narratives has been studied by linguists since the 1960s. Particularly in the early days of linguistic analysis of narratives, the focus has been

firmly placed on the more linear and coherent narrative forms (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972). Labelled later as "default" (Ochs and Capps, 2001) or "canonical" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008), such narratives were often elicited and produced in the presence of "an ideal audience: attentive, interested and responsive" (Labov, 1997, p. 397). Being often monologic, the narratives elicited within the specific context of a sociolinguistics interview had a clear structural blueprint, a clear beginning, a middle, and an end, deeming them "more amenable to formal analysis" (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 18).

Many linguists recognised however that such monologic and often elicited narration provided only a partial picture of the diversity of narrative forms (Goodwin, 1986; Blum-Kulka, 1993; Labov, 1997; Ochs and Capps, 2001; Bamberg, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2005), turning attention to the highly interactive and sometimes fragmented instances of storytelling. Here, consideration was given to the "less polished, less coherent narratives that pervade ordinary social encounters" (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 57) as well as the "fleeting moments of narrative orientation to the world (Hymes, 1996) [that] can be easily missed out by an analytical lens which only takes full-fledged ("big") stories as the prototype" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 116). Such more interactionally-emergent and sometimes fragmented or even incomplete narratives in turn were differentiated from the aforementioned "default" narrative forms through labels such as 'small stories' (Bamberg, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2005) or 'conversational narratives' (Ochs and Capps, 2001). These more interactionally negotiated forms of storytelling will also form the focus of analysis here.

Close attention started being paid also to how narratives emerge in conversations and how their construction can be highly dependent on the producers and audiences of such talk (Goodwin, 1986; Schegloff, 1997; Blum-Kulka, 1993; Ochs and Capps, 2001; Norrick, 2005). It was acknowledged then that narratives and the way that they are framed are "contingent upon the narrative input of other interlocutors, who provide, elicit, criticize,

refuse, and draw inferences from facets of the unfolding account" (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 2-3). As argued by Ladegaard (2018, p. 276), even in the case of the more monologic instances of storytelling, "other group members are in fact also taking part in the construction of the story".

The recognition of the frequent co-construction of storytelling in interaction has been captured effectively by Blum-Kulka's (1993) typification of the major modes of storytelling, those ranging from monologic performances (involving primarily one teller) through dialogic (structured around a question-answer format) to polyphonic ones (multi-voiced). Ochs and Capps (2001) place the monologic, "default" narratives on one end of a continuum of narrative performance, placing dynamic, co-constructed narratives at the other end. At this point, it is important to acknowledge that the emergence of monologic stories is not restricted to the context of interviews (Labov, 1997) but, even in the case of more monologic, dialogic or polyphonic narratives, there can be a degree of hybridity in the storytelling mode. Ochs and Capps (2001, p. 3), for example, emphasise that "interlocutors do not necessarily take on fixed roles of teller and listener, but rather may shift back and forth", allowing narration to take a more monologic or a more co-constructed form in the context of a conversational narrative. The level of co-construction of storytelling in turn is argued to rely upon the degree of involvement from other interlocutors (for discussion, see Tannen, 1984; Blum-Kulka, 1993; Ochs and Capps, 2001), with low involvement being linked to more monologic and self-initiated narration and high involvement resulting in more substantive contributions from different interlocutors. Although, as will be argued later, the audiences or potentially co-narrators of storytelling will not be the only factors affecting the production of conversational narratives in the context of work. In this paper, the issue of the interactional negotiation of meaning in storytelling at work is something that will be placed under scrutiny. Particular attention will be focused on factors affecting it, and how this interactional negotiation of

meaning in producing workplace narratives intersects with issues of story ownership and tellership, two notions that will be discussed in detail below.

Story ownership and tellership

Telling a story, as argued by Blum-Kulka (1993), is an act of narrating it in real time. The act itself, "telling" a story (the narration), is distinguished here from the "tale" (the narrative), and the events that this narrative depicts. Because individuals can interpret or frame events differently, potentially there could be a number of ways of representing them, so depicting them in the form of narratives, with different story tellers (narrators) being able to provide more convergent or potentially competing accounts of the events described each time a story gets told (Thornborrow, 2000). An issue related then to this potential multiplicity of forms of narratives and narration is also the question of "who has the right to tell a story, when and how members of the audience can intervene and what conditions have to be met for a story to be told" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 107). Ownership and tellership of stories can thus arguably become contentious issues, pointing to concerns over the ownership of experience, the rights to frame it and then recount it. These are also the issues that will be discussed in more detail below, and then further expanded on in the analysis.

Issues of story ownership, so who owns a story, and tellership, so who has the right to tell it, are arguably closely related to one another, as often to claim story ownership is to claim the authority to recount it as well. Claims of epistemological authority, so somebody's first-hand experience of the events that the story depicts (Sacks, 1992; Blum-Kulka, 1993; Shuman 2015), are frequently attributed to claims over story ownership. Tellers are therefore often interpreted to "own" a story and have the right to recount it if they have been directly affected by the events that the story depicts (irrespectively of whether they have participated

in or simply witnessed them), drawing upon experiential claims of authority and the emphasised focus on "the primacy of personal experience" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 137).

At the same time, owning a story arguably does also point to issues beyond the notion of ownership of experience, which - as argued by Sacks (cited in Shuman, 2015) - can still be contested. This can span also questions of whether the "owner" of the story controls its discursive realisation, the purposes of its telling, or even how it is produced. Access to linguistic resources, unequal status, ideology and other interlocutors' sense of entitlement to speak on behalf of the other are among some of the factors that can affect story ownership and tellership rights, being able to affect how a given story gets told (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012; Shuman, 2015). With regards to the form that narratives take, for example, storytelling can often entail a balancing of personal experience with trying to "situate that experience globally" as argued by Schiffrin (1996, p. 168). Bruner (2004) postulates that, in the case of the latter, this can sometimes mean that personal experience is framed along the lines of familiar and frequently repeated story templates, master or "grand narratives" (Lyotard, 1984). In this case, biographical information is often reinterpreted through existing symbolic means, highlighting the potentially problematic nature of viewing narratives as deeply idiosyncratic texts. Even in the case of story tellers making ownership claims over a specific experience then, the question arises of whether the same claim of ownership can be made in relation to the story that relies partially on intertextually, and thus drawing upon existing narrative elements. The inclusion of other voices in the narration can also be more local, context-specific, also in instances when storytelling diverges from monologic form and when members of audience potentially move into the roles of co-tellers. This also can have implication for issues of the story ownership and tellership, and control

over how the narrative gets framed and by whom. Finally, there are also instances when somebody's first-hand experience is recounted by somebody else.

In this paper, the focus will be firmly placed on such consideration of story ownership and tellership, examining simultaneously how these issues are closely tied to the context in which stories gets told, the setting considered here being a workplace one.

Storytelling in workplace settings

Narratives observed in the context of the world of work have been studied for three decades now. In line with the recognition that they "are shaped by the local, situated context in which they occur" (Thornborrow, 2012, p.54), an effort has been made to investigate their situated use, probing into the realisation of narratives in legal (Conley and O'Barr, 1990; Harris, 2001), healthcare (Greenhalgh and Hurwitz, 1998) and other workplace domains (Holmes, 2006; Mullany, 2006; Holmes and Marra, 2011).

In these contexts, narratives – also understood as forms of broader social practice - have been observed to perform a wide range of functions, this including allowing professionals to construct – often positive - (professional) identities and challenging organisational politics – these two potential functions of workplace narratives being something that we will be reviewed in detail below and something that will be considered later on in relation to the analysed narratives.

The ability of storytelling to construct often favourable (professional) identities has been tangibly observed in certain domains of workplace interaction, including specifically the gatekeeping context of a job interview but also on-the-job interactions in which the surfacing of identity construction becomes prominent. Linde (2009) highlights how this process is often guided by existing blueprints of what it means to construct acceptable or positively evaluated

professional identities along the lines of context-specific conventions of language use. In the context of the job interview, for example, job interviewees are often expected to reconfigure past experience for rhetorical purposes and to demonstrate how this experience deems them suitable candidates for the new role and to join the new workplace, and in order for these narratives not to be dismissed (Kerekes, 2003; Campbell and Roberts, 2007).

However, the construction of these institutionally-sanctioned identities is not only reserved for the context of job interviews but can also be observed in relation to the discursive evoking of leadership and professionalism. While some studies note the deployment of "hero manager" narratives in workplace storytelling (Holmes, 2006; Linde, 2009; Clifton et al., 2019), others reference the construction of "model" (Linde, 2009) or "successful professional" identities (Van De Mieroop et al., 2017), highlighting how professionals can align themselves with potent and sometimes hegemonic professional discourses, so dominant and prevalent ideas about leadership and professionalism that gain cultural capital over time (Bourdieu, 1986). This also ties in with Sarangi and Roberts's (1999, p.1) assertion that:

> "[w]orkplaces are held together by communicative practices … But workplaces are also sites of social struggle, as certain ways of talking, recording and acting are produced and ordered over time. This regulation of communicative resources, in turn, controls access to the workplace and opportunities within it."

Narratives can arguably then perform important rhetorical and self-promotional functions in the workplace, this being tied to the aforementioned existence of a linguistic marketplace (Bourdieu, 1986) in workplace domains, something which in turn can have implications for the employees' standing within them and with some professionals finding the construction of legitimate and acceptable professional identities doubly difficult (Mullany, 2006).

Aside from providing means of identity construction, narratives observed in the context of work can provide also means of commenting on or even critiquing the immediate contexts in which they are produced. This is in line with Mumby's (2005, p.33) assertion that "the struggle over meaning is always open-ended, always characterized by an excess of signification that makes available possibilities for constructing alternative, resistant, counterhegemonic accounts of organizing". In workplace domains, narratives have been observed thus to also provide means of challenging organizational politics (Gabriel, 2015), this including providing "legitimate and acceptable, but unofficial and off-record, outlet for dissatisfaction, jealousy, or irritation in the workplace" (Holmes, 2006, p. 186) and offering "discourses that contradict or contest "official" company discourses (or the so-called sanctioned grand narrative stories)" (Oostendorp and Jones, 2014, p. 25). Witten (1993) argues, perhaps somewhat pessimistically, that even in the case of such subversion, its effects can only be symbolic, not leading to real organisational change. Irrespectively of how "successful" such contestation of organisational politics really is the context of work, employees may not always deem such contestation possible. As argued by Linde (2003, p. 528), "what is relevant is what is saliently unsaid, what could be said but is not". While not always completely silenced, certain topics can be censored or reformulated in workplace storytelling, one such example including the discursive erasure of sexism in stories of female managers not being talked to by men (Jones and Clifton, 2017).

The topic of the pragmatic functions of storytelling as observed in the world of work is something that will also be fleshed out in the analysis presented in this paper, examining also how these can often intersect with issues of story ownership and tellership.

Data and methods

The data that is presented in this paper comes from a larger study of workplace interaction of an IT team working in a further education (FE) institution in the UK (Author, 2015). The data set comprises 30 hours of audio-recorded workplace talk, fieldnotes and contextual information gathered as a complete participant (Gold, 1958; Junker, 1960; Duranti, 1997). Therefore, at the time of data collection, I have worked at the studied workplace, having previously secured consent from both the organisation and the participants to carry out the research. The adoption of this under-researched auto-ethnographic perspective in the study provided a useful lens through which to examine not only the texts under scrutiny but also the ecology in which they were produced, this being premised on the idea that "[m]eaning takes shape within specific social relations, interactional histories and institutional regimes, produced and construed by agents with expectations and repertoires that have to be grasped ethnographically" (Rampton, 2007, p. 585). In keeping with such a linguistic ethnography perspective, the data from which this paper draws upon was collected over a period of time, two months specifically. During this time, the recording of research participants' discourse would be carried out every working day, with participants having the option to pause the recording at any point. Because the research participants were located in the same office, the recording process was able to digitise all of the interactions they would have in this setting during a working day, this entailing a collection of communicative events ranging from team meetings to more informal interactions.

Because this paper focuses on the analysis of workplace storytelling specifically, from this larger, 30-hour data set, I have selected specific instances of storytelling. The narratives that were selected for presentation in this paper included specifically those that were more discursively negotiated, either between the different interlocutors or in reference to the data collection process itself, so with research participants making explicit references to the recording. While relatively infrequent in comparison to the more uninterrupted, monologic

narratives, the stories that involved a higher degree of negotiation of meaning provided a good opportunity for investigating why such struggle over meaning, this being linked to issues of story ownership and tellership, was observed in the first place and how this was potentially informed by the ecology of this storytelling, the functions that such storytelling performs and the broader practices of work.

The narratives presented in this paper were analysed using tools from discourse and narrative analyses (Labov, 1997; Ochs and Capps, 2001), with the latter entailing also a focus on positioning (Davies and Harré, 1990; Bamberg, 1997). Aside from focusing on the discursive negotiation of meaning, attention is paid also here to the types of self and other-presentation made by the storytellers, and the related process of self or other-positioning. In doing so, the focus of the linguistic analysis is placed also on the use of naming strategies, evaluation (Labov, 1982), and transitivity (Halliday, 1985), the latter being concerned with the analysis of what processes are ascribed to specific characters introduced in the stories that were told, and for what means.

Analysis

Despite the process of storytelling being relatively frequent in the collected data, only a proportion of instances of storytelling bore traces of more overt negotiation of how the story gets told. In what is to come, two examples of such instances of narration will be presented and analysed in detail, probing more closely into narrative production, so how stories get told and for what purposes, and how this can be affected by issues of the context in which such stories are produced, such contexts entailing the here-and-now audiences and settings of storytelling but also the more enduring social practices of work. We will begin here with the discussion of Extract 1 that is presented below.

Extract 1

Context: Steve, the manager of the team, tells his colleagues (Poppy, Mike, Carl and Kathryn) about another employee of the organisation refusing to attend meetings where he is present. This disclosure prompts a number of questions from other team members. In the extract, real names of research participants were replaced with pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity.

01. Steve: oh I was telling the guys and it's important that you know I'm sure it's
02. really important that we tape this. Adam can't attend a- can't
03. attend any meetings that I go to,
04. Poppy: why?
05. Steve: he's explained to people that he's refusing to- he's refusing to attend
06. meetings that I attended. [because
07. Poppy: [you specifically?=
08. Steve: =yes. [he
09. Poppy: [uh why?=
10. Mike: =are you- do you feel discriminated against?
11. Steve: I- I do. [I think-
12. Mike: [put in a counterclaim. fuck the whole shit [up!
13. Poppy: [why?
14. Steve: you do know that we're recording now right?
15. Mike: yeah. I know.
16. Poppy: can't he- [he's really
17. Steve: [uhm
18. Poppy: literally said he can't go to [a meeting

19. Steve: [yes.

20. Poppy: that you go to. [why?

21. Steve: [that's true. because uh- uh he would be unable

22. to attend the meeting and work effectively in [my presence.

23. Mike: [((whistles a sad

24. melody)) /???/

25. Steve: it's the way I stand at the top of the meeting table like this.

26. Carl: ((chuckles))

27. all: ((laugh))

28. Steve: ((smile voice)) little bright lights coming out of me.

29. Carl: I told you last time you shouldn't - you shouldn't like [((smile voice))

30. just beat him up.

31. Steve: [((smile voice)) must not manifest as god! [((laughs))

32. Carl: [((laughs))

33. Steve: in meetings. ok. (2) spoilsport.

We observe the initiation of the storytelling in Extract 1 in lines 1-3. Here, before moving on to recount the specific events surrounding the tale, Steve establishes the tellability of the narrative (Labov and Waletzky, 1967). This is achieved through the use of evaluation devices (Labov, 1972) in lines 1-2 (“it's important that you know I'm sure it's really important that we tape this”), and the repeated use of the adjective “important”, which is then further boosted by the employment of high epistemic modality - expressed through the use of “I’m sure” (line 1).

In lines 2-3, Steve starts recounting events that are meant to be depicted in the storytelling that is just about to unfold. This entails the introduction of the narrative’s *most*

reportable event (Labov, 1997) - Adam's refusal to go to same meetings that Steve attends ("Adam can't attend a- can't attend any meetings that I go to"). The early inclusion of the most reportable event, on the one hand, renders the story newsworthy and therefore reportable, the breach of the story's chronological order bearing semblance to the discourse of news reports where "important information comes first" (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 65). The inclusion of the most reportable event in lines 2 and 3 can be also tied closely to emplotment (Young, 1987). This entails the introduction of the tale's ending at the start of the storytelling process in order to allow the narrator to construct a frame for the interpretation of the recounted events.

The consideration of the presentation of "agency (who does what to whom) and action (what gets done)" (Machin and Mayr, 2012, p. 105) is important in the process of the discursive framing of the interpretation of this storytelling. In recounting the most reportable event, "Adam can't attend a- can't attend any meetings that I go to" (lines 2-3), Steve is placing "Adam" in the subject position of the sentence. The verb attributed to the subject here, "can't attend", is one associated with dynamic modality, so the subject's own willingness to act in a particular manner. In the utterance, it is Adam who is presented as the agentive (and willing) performer of an action that has negative consequences for Steve, breaching Steve's sociality rights (Spencer-Oatey, 2000) – i.e. his rights to consideration, inclusion and being treated fairly. The positioning that is discursively constructed here through transitivity is one tied closely with presenting Adam as the perpetrator of a negatively valanced action and Steve as the victim. Similar discursive expression of positioning is also observed later in the interaction, in lines 5-6 ("he's explained to people that he's refusing to- he's refusing to attend meetings that I attended") and 21-22 ("he would be unable to attend the meeting and work effectively in my presence"). The recounting of the events featured in Extract 1 can be interpreted here to perform multiple simultaneous

functions. On the one hand, this is arguably a form of the aforementioned contestation of organisational politics (see Background), with the narrative providing a means for the expression of Steve's dissatisfaction with it, and venting workplace frustration to the colleagues of Steve. Steve's earlier reference to the recording process (lines 1-2), which highlights his marked awareness of it, is also important to note here. It arguably points to the recognition of the more sensitive nature of the recounted story but also highlights Steve's willingness to put it "on record" and to express dissatisfaction with the events that the storytelling presents to its audience. On the other hand, the narrative also allows Steve to assign blame in the context of the events that are depicted. This is also achieved through the description and evaluation of social actors and their actions, also relying on relational construction of identity. In the narrative, we accordingly observe the construction of the positively valanced (blameless) self and also negatively valanced other, the actions of whom have negative effects for Steve. Such assignment of blame to other (in this case, Adam) in turn can be hypothesised to act in a dialogic way with the allegations made by Adam, and recounted in the narrative, and allows Steve to align himself with potent discourses around professionalism and competence at work.

The recognition of the tellability of the story by other interlocutors is visible in Extract 1 through their responses to the initiation of storytelling. Both Poppy and Mike ask Steve multiple questions about the situation (lines 4, 7, 9, 10, 13 and 20) and employ a high-engagement conversational style (Tannen, 1984), with multiple instances of latching and overlaps. Among the responses to Steve's narration is also Mike's direct and aggravated advice-giving, "put it in a counterclaim. fuck the whole shit up!" (line 12). To this, Steve responds by producing an interrogative "you do know that we're recording now right?" (line 14). Significant in this context is the salient contrast between Steve's own earlier insistence on recording what is being said (lines 1-2) and his attempt to remind Mike about the

recording process (line 14). The latter can be interpreted in this case as a censoring attempt, also due to the dispreferred nature of this response - i.e. the fact that Steve's utterance is not the expected response to the turn produced by Mike as it does not adhere to the topic that has been discussed so far and does not express agreement in relation to what was said. Different hypotheses could be made about the emergence of this censoring attempt, one of which could be linked to the expletive language featured in Mike's turn (i.e. "fuck the whole shit up!"). This interpretation nevertheless is quite unlikely due to expletive language featuring commonly across the transcripts of this teams interactions, being used by all members of the team and not evoking such censoring attempts. I would argue instead that the attempt at stopping Mike from contributing to the storytelling visible here is linked closely to Steve's attempts at retaining control over what the narrative is doing in this context. While Mike's contribution in line 12 does not contest the events recounted by Steve, it can be interpreted to frame them differently from Steve, moving away from positioning discursively constructed by the main story teller. Mike's advice-giving specifically frames Steve's fictional future action as one associated with agency, conflict and arguably even aggression, something that jars with the previous depiction of self by Steve as somebody affected by negative actions of other, and therefore relatively passive and blameless. Steve's attempts to silence Mike can be hypothesised then to shed light also on Steve's insistence on the tale being interpreted and verbalised in a way that is deemed appropriate by him, this being closely tied to the functions that such narrative was produced to perform in terms of identity construction and assignment of blame, and the organisationally-sanctioned notions of professionalism and competence that affect such construction of identity.

In Extract 1, story tellership and ownership are illustrated to be tied not only to issues of who gets to tell the story but also how the story gets told. Arguably, the contestation of story ownership can thus take very subtle forms, not necessarily entailing the challenging of

the events that a story depicts. In the case of the analysed extract, Steve's ownership and tellership rights are contested by Mike not due to Mike providing an alternative account of what's happened but due to him, to an extent, contesting the interpretative frame of the storytelling produced by Steve.

The surfacing of the interactional negotiation of meaning in Extract 1 can be interpreted then to be indicative of the broader negotiation of story tellership and ownership rights along more nuanced lines of issues relating to the ownership of experience, control over how it is recounted and by whom, and also the functions that such tellership performs within the broader social practices of work. This is something that will be also explored in more depth in relation to Extract 2.

Extract 2

Context: One of the organisation's servers runs out of disc space, resulting in many of the organisation's online services (e.g. the website) ceasing to work. Poppy, who just arrives at the office, is unaware of the issue.

1. Poppy: (2) how's it going?
2. Mike: uh: just- the website's down.=
3. Poppy: =is down why!
4. Mike: (3) oh I think so is working the recording=
5. Kathryn: =yeah! [I can switch it off
6. Mike: [but the idiots in IT have failed to do their job yet again.
7. Poppy: uh: you're kiddin and a-=
8. Mike: =the server is running out of disc space=
9. Poppy: =but they're only=

10. Mike: = [unnoticed.

11. Carl: [((laughing))

12. Kathryn: so it's-=

13. Poppy: =what are they [doing today?

14. Kathryn: [is this- is it not working... externally?

15. Mike: uh anything that requires... access to the hard disc... brings up this error.

16. Poppy: is it- has Steve gone to... tell them? (2) is that where Steve is gone?

17. Mike: it might be.

18. Poppy: uh.

In Extract 2, the instance of storytelling that unfolds is elicited by an interrogative produced by Poppy in line 1 (“how's it going?”). In line 2, similarly to what was observed in Extract 1, the recounting of the tale involves the early inclusion of the most reportable event, so the reference to the consequences of the web server’s space being filled (“uh: just- the website's down”). The early inclusion of the most reportable event, as noted in the case of Extract 1, can be again tied to newsworthiness and emplotment. The interpretative frame for the storytelling constructed here is one associated with the expression of critique. The use of the downgrader “just” in the utterance “uh: just- the website's down” frames the utterance as an understatement, highlighting its ironic force (Leech, 1983). The use of the understatement provides discursive means for the expression of the incongruity between “expected and experienced events” (Colston and O’Brien, 2000: 1557), with the experienced events being more negatively valanced than the expected ones. The inclusion and the wording of the most reportable event in this instance provides then an interpretative frame for the story that is just

about to unfold, and allows Mike to express dissatisfaction with the events surrounding the tale.

Poppy's probing for further explanation of the situation (line 3) is met with Mike's reference to the recording in line 4 ("oh I think so is working the recording"), overtly signalling Mike's awareness of this. We will consider the potential sources of such signalling below. Despite the researcher's offer to pause the recording in line 5 ("yeah! I can switch it off"), Mike continues to tell the story. In line 6, he utters "but the idiots in IT have failed to do their job yet again". In the utterance, we see the visibility of the coordinating conjunction 'but', which initiates the clause and implies contrast with what came before. So, despite being aware of the recording process, Mike still goes on to voice the aggravated criticism, expressed here through the naming of those placed in the subject position of the sentence and then further intensified by the use of an adverbial expression "yet again" (which further strengthens the criticism's force). The instance of storytelling presented in Extract 1 provides then a very overt means of expression of evaluation, one tied closely to the negatively valanced depiction of both people described in the story as well as the actions ascribed to them. The story thus acts as means of, again, venting frustration and criticism of the other. Similarly to what was observed in Extract 1, we observe here also relational construction of identity, where the expressed criticism of the other, portraying them as neglectful ("the server is running out of disc space […] unnoticed") and incompetent ("idiots"), can be contrasted with the self-presentation of Mike, whom – through explaining the technical aspect of the IT problem in detail – presents oneself as somebody competent and skilled.

While, in contrast to what is observed in Extract 1, the main teller of the story does not encounter any challenges from other speakers to how the depicted events are framed, the marked awareness of the recording displayed by Mike arguably points to the possibility of such storytelling being affected by notions of professionalism. The use of the coordinating

conjunction “but” right after signalling awareness of being recorded and just before expressing aggravated criticism arguably points to Mike insisting on expressing this negative evaluation of other but also one’s awareness of this potentially transgressing specific norms or conventions. The instances of awareness of being recorded visible both in Extract 1 as well as Extract 2 arguably provide some indication of the research participants being tangibly aware of the regulatory frame pertaining to the workplace that how this can potentially limit their communicative autonomy in how stories get told at work. This regulatory frame in turn and the abidance by the organisationally-sanctioned social practices can point to the potential contestation of the claim that storytellers completely “own” the stories that get told at work.

Discussion and conclusions

As the foregoing discussion has hopefully suggested, the issue of story ownership is very multifaceted, spanning not only the consideration of ownership of experience, but also control over how it is framed and then also recounted. Any move away from monologic forms of narratives in turn, something observed frequently in the case of conversational – or, in this case, workplace - narratives, complicates this notion of who “owns” the story that gets told. The audience’s engagement in the storytelling process then leaves room for a more distributed ownership of different elements of storytelling, be it the control over how the narrative is verbalised or the issue of the story’s tellership. For the main story tellers, such co-construction of meaning can potentially pose a threat to their subjective interpretation of how the story should be worded or told. The discursive negotiation of meaning in storytelling in turn can point to struggle over who gets to tell the story and how.

In the case of the analysed data, while none of the presented extracts provided examples of the audiences or co-participants of storytelling challenging the main narrator’s account of the narrativized events, there is evidence of the discursive negotiation of how

these events are framed. In the case of Extracts 1 specifically, what is interpreted as the main story teller's attempt to censor the narrative contribution of another speaker acts as an indicator of the main story teller's attempt to retain control over the discursive framing of the events that the narrative recounts. This in turn is interpreted to be dictated closely by the function that the narrative is observed to serve and also, more broadly, expectations of social practices linked to the professional sphere. While the events recounted in Extract 1 can certainly be interpreted as means of venting frustration by the main story teller, the primary function of this story is arguably concerned with attribution of blame in the workplace, and the related process identity construction (in this case relational, in which the two main narrative characters are framed in oppositional terms, those of a victim and a perpetrator of a more negatively valanced act). Perhaps less tangibly, the construction of this positively valanced identity by the main storyteller could be also interpreted to form part of the broader social practices of this workplace, forming part of a construction of an identity of a competent (and therefore blameless) member of staff. Arguably then, elements of story ownership can be forfeited by story tellers not only by inclusion of new voices in the narration, giving up some of the control over the framing and voicing of the narrated events, but also by relying on prevalent workplace discourses (part of broader social practices) that can limit the repertoire of possible identities that storytellers can construct for themselves. Because the narrative contribution provided by one of the team members when the story gets told potentially poses a threat to the specific identity claims made by the main storyteller (that is also aligned with the organisationally-sanctioned notions of professionalism), this later results in the censoring attempt but also importantly points to the interactional struggle over the purposes that such instance of storytelling serves.

While Extract 2 does not demonstrate the same levels of interactional negotiation of meaning and specifically struggle over the form or function of the narrative told. The main

story teller's metacommentary about being aware of the story being put "on record" arguably, again, points to the recognition of more organisationally-sanctioned notions of professionalism, and the implications of this for the person's language use, so a recognition of the encroaching of the organisation on the story teller's ownership of the story with respect to how it is verbalised. The research participants' metacommentry or instances of self and other-censorship in particular pointed to the extent to which the "negotiation about what is sayable and interpretable at any particular discursive moment" (Coupland, 2003, p. 423) was intensely context-bound in this professional sphere. The main storyteller in this case nevertheless chooses still to frame the narrative that might potentially transgressed these organisationally-sanctioned ways of doing things.

In considering the notions of story ownership and tellership, so who owns a story and who gets to tell it, and also factors affecting these in the specific context of work, we have recognised then the important roles played by the ecology of storytelling, so how the specific audiences (who can also become co-narrators) and the setting of the storytelling (in this case, the workplace) can bear significant implications on the issues of story ownership and tellership. To "own" a story, a narrator often has to have experienced something first hand (claims of ownership of experience), and also have control over how this is then narrativized and told. With workplace settings frequently providing contexts for the presence of broad audiences and being characterised by a degree of regulation of communicative practices observed within their realm, many facet of story ownership can be potentially forfeited in workplace storytelling, arguably pointing to the assertion that storytellers rarely truly "own" stories that they tell in the context of work.

Of particular note then in relation to the discussion of story ownership is the evidence of these instances of narration forming part of the broader social practices of work, and therefore being subject to similar levels of regulation as these. In the context of the

aforementioned examples, the visible construction of a notion of competent professional (often entailing relational construction of identity) was particularly visible. Interestingly, this often entailed recounting both personal experience and the experience of other, blurring the boundaries between personal and vicarious narratives.

Overall, the foregoing analysis of the interactional achievement of storytelling provided an important glimpse into how storytellers weave narration in the context of work, such narration seemingly being inevitably affected by its immediate ecology. It is hoped that such analysis has demonstrated the value of looking at more interactionally-negotiated narration, even if there is still more room for analysis of many more further occurrences of workplace storytelling, not least the ones entailing more stark contestation of meaning than it has been observed here. Given the continuous predominance of analytical work concerned with elicited and monologic narration, I believe there is more to be done to probe further into these still under-researched instances of storytelling that are non-elicited, naturally-occurring and interactionally-achieved, such forms of narration permeating interaction (also as observed at work) and consequently warranting further analysis.

Transcription conventions

[	start of overlapping or simultaneous speech
= =	latching, no perceivable pause between two turns
(3)	length of a pause in seconds
...	micropause of less than one second
.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
,	intonation rise weaker than ?
hi::	a prolonged or stretched sound

wor-	cut-off
WORD	emphasis
!	louder talk
(word)	quiet or soft talk
hhh	exhale
.hhh	inhale
((smile voice))	transcriber's comment
<name of the organisation>	data anonymised
/???/	unintelligible speech
[...]	fragment of an interaction removed

Based on Schegloff (2000)

References

Bamberg, M. G. W. (1997). Positioning between structure and performance. *Journal of Narrative & Life History*, 7(1-4), 335–342.

Bamberg, M. G. W. (2004). "We are young, responsible and male": Form and function of "slut-bashing" in the identity construction of 15-year-old males. *Human Development*, 47, 331-353.

Bamberg, M. G. W., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis. *Text & Talk*, 28, 377-396.

Blum-Kulka, S. (1993). "You gotta know how to tell a story": Telling, tales, and tellers in American and Israeli narrative events at dinner. *Language in Society*, 22(3), 361-402.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In: J. G. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). New York: Greenwood Press.

Bruner, J. (2004). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, 71, 691-710.

Campbell, S., & Roberts, C. (2007). Migration, ethnicity and competing discourses in the job interview: Synthesizing the institutional and personal. *Discourse & Society*, 18(3), 243-271.

Clifton, J., Schnurr, S., & Van De Mieroop, D. (2019). *The Language of Leadership Narratives: A Social Practice Perspective*. London: Routledge.

Colston, H. L., & O'Brien, J. (2000). Contrast and pragmatics in figurative language: Anything understatement can do, irony can do better. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32(11), 1557-1583.

Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). *Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). *Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). *Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). *Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). *Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). *Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). *Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). *Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). *Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Conley, J. M., & O'Barr, W. M. (1990). *Rules versus relationships: The ethnography of legal discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Coupland, N. (2003). Sociolinguistic authenticities. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7(3), 417-431.

Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20(1), 43-63.

De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2012). *Analyzing narratives: Discourse and sociolinguistic perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Duranti, A. (1997). *Linguistic anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gabriel, Y. (2015). Narratives and stories in organizational life. In A. Georgakopoulou & A. De Fina (Eds.) *The handbook of narrative analysis* (pp.275-292). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Georgakopoulou, A. (2005). Small and large identities in narrative (inter)-action. In D. Schiffrin, M. Bamberg, & A. De Fina (Eds.), *Discourse and identity* (pp. 83-102). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). *Small stories, interaction and identities*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Gold, R. L. (1958). Roles in sociological field observations. *Social Forces*, 36, 217-223.

Goodwin, C. (1986). Audience diversity, participation and interpretation. *Text*, 6(3), 283-316.

Goodwin, M. H. (1990). *He-said-she-said: Talk as social organization among Black children*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Greenhalgh, T., & Hurwitz, B. (1998). *Narrative based medicine: Dialogue and discourse in clinical practice*. London: BMJ Books.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1985). *An introduction to functional linguistics*. London: Edward Arnold.

Harris, S. (2001). Fragmented narratives and multiple tellers: Witness and defendant accounts in trials. *Discourse Studies*, 3(1), 53–74.

Holmes, J. (2008). *Gendered talk at work: Constructing gender identity through workplace discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Holmes, J. and Marra, M. (2011). Harnessing storytelling as a sociopragmatic skill: Applying narrative research to workplace English courses. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3), 510-534.

Hymes, D. (1996). *Ethnography, linguistics, narrative inequality: Toward an understanding of voice*. Bristol: Taylor & Francis.

Jones, K. & Clifton, J. (2017). Rendering sexism invisible in workplace narratives: A narrative analysis of female entrepreneurs' stories of not being talked to by men. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 25(5), 557-574.

Junker, B. H. (1960). Field work: An introduction to the social sciences. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kerekes, J. (2003). Distrust: A determining factor in the outcomes of gatekeeping encounters. In J. House, G. Kasper & S. Ross (Eds.) *Misunderstanding in social life: Discourse approaches to problematic talk* (pp. 227-257). London: Longman.

Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Labov, W. (1997). Some further steps in narrative analysis. *Journal of Narrative and Life History,* 7, 395-415.

Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1967). Narrative analysis. In J. Helm (Ed.), *Essays on the verbal and visual arts* (pp. 12-44). Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Leech, G. (1983). *The pragmatics of politeness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Linde, C. (2001). Narrative in institutions. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen & H E. Hamilton (Eds.) *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 518-536). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Linde, C. (2009). *Working the past: Narrative and institutional memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Machin, D. & Mayr A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. London: SAGE.

Mullany, L. (2006). Narrative constructions of gender and professional identities. In T. Omoniyi & G. White (Eds.) *The sociolinguistics of identity* (pp. 157-172). London: Continuum.

Mumby, D. K. (2005). Theorizing Resistance in Organization Studies: A Dialectical Approach. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19(1), 19–44.

Norrick, N. (2005). Interactional remembering in conversational narrative. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 37(11), 1819-1844.

Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (2001). *Living narrative: Creating lives in everyday storytelling*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Oostendorp, M., & Jones, T. (2015). Tensions, ambivalence, and contradiction: A small story analysis of discursive identity construction in the South African workplace. *Text & Talk*, 35(1), 25-47.

Rampton, B. (2007). Neo-Hymesian linguistic ethnography in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 11(5), 584-607.

Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on conversation* (G. Jefferson, Ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Sarangi, S., and Roberts, C. (1999). *Talk, work and institutional order: Discourse in medical, mediation and management settings*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Schegloff, E. A. (1997). Whose Text? Whose Context? *Discourse & Society*, 8(2), 165–187.

Schiffrin, D. (1996). Narrative as self-portrait: Sociolinguistic constructions of identity. *Language in Society, 25*(2), 167-203.

Shuman, A. (2015). Story ownership and entitlement. In A. De Fina & A. Georgakopoulou (Eds.) *The handbook of narrative analysis* (pp. 38-56). Oxford: Wiley.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2000). *Culturally speaking: Managing rapport through talk across cultures*. London: Continuum.

Tannen, D. (1984). *Conversational style: Analyzing talk among friends*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation

Thornborrow, J. (2000). Principal, plausibility and the historic present: The construction of conflicting accounts in public participation TV. *Language in Society,* 29, 357–377.

Thornborrow, J. (2012). Narrative analysis. In. J. P. Gee & M. Handford (Eds.) *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 51-65). London: Routledge.

Van De Mieroop, D., Miglbauer, M., & Chatterjee, A. (2017). Mobilizing master narratives through categorical narratives and categorical statements when default identities are at stake. *Discourse & Communication*, 11(2), 179-198.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage.

Witten, M. (1993). Narrative and the culture of obedience at the workplace. In D. K. Mumby (Ed.), *Narrative and social control: Critical perspectives* (pp. 97-118). London: Sage.

Young, R. B. (1987). A model of professional education. *New Directions for Student Services*, 1987(37), 19-25.