

6 Ethnographies on the move, stories on the rise

Methods in the humanities

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Introduction

Ethnographic research practices are increasingly favoured in the humanities and social sciences. They may be proposed as essential to research design or even the only legitimate means for making claims about the social world. Claims for legitimacy focus on the privileging of an ‘emic’ perspective of first-hand observation or what Geertz (1973) refers to as ‘first order constructs of reality’. However, what constitutes legitimate ethnographic practice is contentious. In recent decades ethnographic research has fractured into a proliferation of ‘ethnographies’ – traditional, realist, critical, contemporary, institutional, classroom, visual, walking, micro, auto-, etc. – with further sub-categorizations, such as evocative auto-, analytic auto-, critical-micro-, sound-walking-, etc. Bases of legitimation vary; in some cases they appear to be field oriented (institution, classroom, self) but most frequently suggest variations in means and/or gaze. In this chapter I consider what is at stake in this ongoing segmentation of ‘ethnography’ by exploring a common and privileged component of written accounts of ethnographic research: stories. The research draws on Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) to interpret storytelling as knowledge practices that vary with the nature of the intellectual field that shapes and is shaped by them. Detailed analyses of the discourse of stories draw on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as a ‘translation device’ (Chapter 2, this volume) or means of relating LCT concepts and data. The chapter concludes with reflections on directions of change in ethnographic research and the role of storytelling in the humanities.

The privileging of stories in ethnographies

To the extent that ethnographers regard an insider or ‘emic’ perspective on the social world as bestowing legitimacy on their research practices, the observed ‘world of everyday experience and knowledge’ (Smith 2005: 45) must retain a place in written accounts of research. The inclusion of stories is one means by which this is achieved. Stories are said to provide a connection

to local, lived, social practices and a space for subjective voices. They are also celebrated as challenging the hegemonic power of academic discourses. Stories are said to constitute ‘an intervention into the “factual turn”’ (Schlunke 2005: 413), represent a ‘post realist’ challenge to an ‘objectivity’ guilty of ‘standing over against individual subjects and subjectivities, overriding the idiosyncrasies of experience, interest and perspective’ (Smith 2005: 43), and offer ‘discursive spaces’ for ‘the exchange of narratives’ that has ‘the power to transform the crushing, impersonalized schooling that often characterizes “rigorous” scientific inquiry in a research institution’ (Brandt 2008: 719). Indeed, ‘the process of retrieving one’s own stories’ (or auto-ethnography) ‘allows us to think beyond the narrow and deadening influences of economic rationalist objectives and Western theoretical frameworks’ (Ryan 2008: 664).

Stories are thus widely regarded as a powerful knowledge practice. The research discussed in this chapter explores how they function in written accounts of ‘ethnographic’ research and, specifically, how ‘ethnographers’ employ story genres to move between an observed everyday world of commonsense and an academic world of uncommonsense knowledge. What happens to meanings in the re-instantiation of events from one world into the other? Do stories provide spaces for those who cannot speak for themselves? Does storytelling enable scholars to avoid ‘overriding the idiosyncrasies of experience, interest and perspective’ (Smith 2005: 43)? Are there differences in how stories are told that reflect differences in their informing intellectual fields? Making visible how storytelling functions as a knowledge practice has important implications. Pedagogically, it has significance for interventions in the development of relevant academic literacies. Intellectually, it can help clarify the bases of confusion, if not animosity and vilification, in struggles over legitimacy in research practices, and contribute to a more critical appreciation of the potential for interdisciplinary studies.

Analytic framework

LCT: Theorizing research writing as knowledge practices

The study enacts two theories from different disciplines: LCT and SFL. From LCT the study draws on the dimensions of Specialization and Semantics (see Maton 2009, 2013, 2014b; Chapter 1, this volume). Specialization conceptualizes the organizing principles underlying practices in terms of *epistemic relations* (ER) and *social relations* (SR). Epistemic relations concern legitimate objects of study and principles for generating knowledge; and social relations concern legitimate kinds of knowers and ways of knowing (Maton 2014b). Each set of relations may be more strongly (+) or weakly (-) bounded and controlled, and these strengths together generate *specialization codes* (ER+/-, SR+/-). The *specialization plane* models intersecting clines of ER+/-, SR+/- (see Figure 1.2, page 12) that generate four such

codes. This allows variations across practices to be plotted in both categorical and relative terms. Categorically, an intellectual field such as physics constitutes a *knowledge code* (ER+, SR-), while that of cultural studies constitutes a *knower code* (ER-, SR+). Relatively, each relation may also be strengthened and weakened (ER↑/↓, SR↑/↓), charting a topological space of infinite positions.

Specialization codes provide a means for analysing similarities and differences in research practices collectively described by proponents as ‘ethnographic’. To begin with one can say that ethnographic methods (such as participation, observation, unstructured interviews, reflection) constitute relatively weakly specified procedures for establishing knowledge claims, while who can legitimately claim to know (participants and first-hand observers with specific dispositions) is relatively strongly bounded and controlled: a *knower code* (ER-, SR+). However, there are differences among ethnographies – they may be knower codes, but they are not homogeneous. Specialization allows for not only a typological but also a topological mapping of differences, enabling such variations across ethnographic studies to be embraced. Such variations might be explored diachronically, as drifts over time within intellectual fields or (in this chapter) as synchronically differentiating intellectual fields. Storytelling in written research is here interpreted as constituting a knowledge practice. It represents a privileged means by which ethnographers appropriate events from an everyday observed world to be recontextualized as stories within written academic accounts of research. Differences in the practices of storytelling are therefore explored in terms of their strengthening or weakening of epistemic relations and social relations (ER↑/↓, SR↑/↓).

A second dimension of LCT drawn on here is Semantics, and specifically the concept of *semantic gravity* or the relative degree of context dependence of meaning. As outlined by Maton (Chapter 1, this volume), semantic gravity (SG) can be stronger or weaker (SG+/-) and strengthen or weaken (SG↑/↓). I use the concept to analyse the stages of story genres, especially in differentiating accounts of events from interpretations of their significance. I shall explain the concept further at those points in the analysis.

SFL: Identifying and differentiating stories

To determine detailed variations in the ways in which stories are told, I turn to linguistic theory. From SFL the key concept is *genre*, defined as cultural configurations of meaning (Martin and Rose 2008). Analyses of genre necessarily implicate other dimensions of the theory, in particular concerning kinds of representations of the world (IDEATION), and kinds of evaluative meanings (APPRAISAL). Each concept will be explicated when applied in the analyses (see also Martin 1992; Martin and Rose 2007). A theorization of genre, including story genres, in SFL originates from the late 1970s and early 1980s – Hasan (1984), Rothery (1990), Martin (1992), and Martin

and Plum (1997) – and is documented most recently in Martin and Rose (2008). The theory offers a framework for mapping story genres in relation to other kinds of genres and for differentiating kinds of story structures.

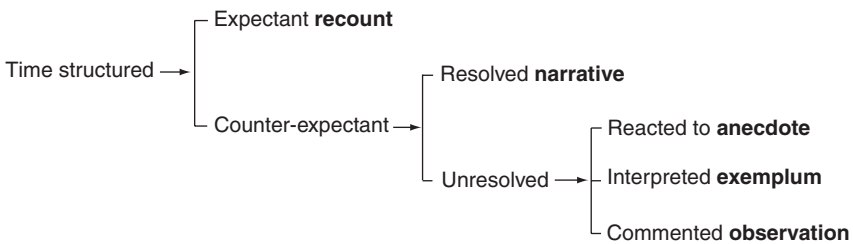
Some clarification of terminology is necessary. In narrative studies generally, the terms ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ are often used synonymously. However, SFL distinguishes between them to provide more delicacy of analysis: ‘story’ is the super-ordinate term for a family or taxonomy of genres that includes ‘narrative’ as one kind of story. Story genres collectively are genres which:

reconstruct real or imagined events and evaluate them in terms which enact bonds of solidarity among participating interlocutors. ... key social functions of stories include maintaining and shaping social relationships, particularly at the level of local communities and kin, through evaluation of events and behaviour.

(Martin and Rose 2008: 97)

Common to all story genres is telling and evaluating events, but how the events are told and evaluated differentiates one story genre from another. Systematic variations in configurations of these meanings can be represented as system networks. [Figure 6.1](#) shows a network of story genres that hold in common a chronologically sequenced representation of events but vary in terms of evaluation. Reading [Figure 6.1](#) from left to right, a first distinction is made between stories in which events unfold as expectant and without disruption – constituting the genre of recount – or as counter-expectant and disruptive of the mundane. In the latter case a story may offer a resolution to the disruption, constituting a narrative. Alternatively it may remain unresolved, in which case the story may be concluded with an evaluative response to the told events. This response may be: an emotional reaction, realizing an anecdote; a judgemental interpretation, realizing an exemplum; or a personal comment on some thing or event, realizing an observation. Anecdotes, exemplums and observations are therefore ‘differentiated according to the “point” of the story’ (Jordens 2002: 68).

The current study draws on storytelling encountered in random searches of ethnographic studies in journal articles from anthropology,



[Figure 6.1](#) A system network of time-ordered story genres (Martin and Rose 2008: 81).

linguistics, cultural studies, intercultural studies, history, and education. Stories may appear in different sections of articles and may be a singular occurrence or form part of a collection or sequence of stories. In all cases the stories are representations of happenings in the lived experiences of actors. The analyses of stories in this study involves: identifying the kind of story presented, its structuring and function; analysing meanings construed within its stages; and exploring how stories are integrated into the surrounding discourse of the article. Throughout, the aim is to consider the ways stories are recruited as different kinds of academic knowledge practices whose organizing principles are analysed in terms of specialization codes and semantic gravity.

Findings

An initial analysis reveals a range of story genres. Interestingly, these stories are rarely constructed as narratives with an unfolding complication–resolution structure (Labov and Waletzky 1967, cf. Martin and Rose 2008). More common are instances of anecdote, exemplum, and especially observation. All three kinds constitute stories in which a disruption or significant event remains unresolved around the participants in the events, and completion is realized instead in an evaluative response stage. The favouring of unresolved story genres over narratives in the academic texts is significant. Such stories require a response as a comment or interpretation by the research writer, in other words they require the writer to establish the point of the telling of the event(s). The last voice in such stories is therefore not that of the subjective participant(s) but rather that of the academic writer. In that sense the focus shifts from participants and events in an observed world to an abstracted issue in an academic world. The writer assigns relevance to events beyond the field in which they took place to make them relevant in a given field of academic knowledge production.

The question then arises as to how writers of ethnographic studies might differ in how they make the telling of the story relevant to the larger project of their academic research paper. In other words, how does the storytelling relate to the specialization code of its informing intellectual field? To explore this, I shall discuss in detail two instances of storytelling from written accounts of ethnographic studies in different intellectual fields. Story 1 (Taylor and Bain 2003), from the social sciences, was published in a journal of organizational studies. Story 2 (Simpson 2010), from the humanities, was published in a journal of cultural studies of education. As will become evident, the writers reveal two different strategies for recontextualizing events from the observed world as stories in their academic papers. The question is whether the differing strategies can be interpreted as revealing variations in the knower code within which ethnographic studies are generally positioned.

Storytelling from the social sciences: building knowledge in organizational studies

As noted above, stories located in ethnographic research papers are typically *not* narratives. Rather they are stories in which some significant or disruptive event remains unresolved and so requires a response to achieve completion. Story 1 is of this kind. It constitutes an anecdote and appeared in an article in a social science journal of organizational studies. The methodology employed is described as ethnographic, involving prolonged on-site engagement with significant periods of observation and extensive interviewing, resulting in an accumulation of accounts of subversive practices by participants. The article as a whole focuses on humour as a strategy for subversion of managerial authority in call centres. Anecdotes are often associated with humour, and in this case the occurrence of that genre connects to the particular object of study. The written anecdote recontextualizes events from a workplace as told to the researcher by agents from a French language section of a call centre in which the manager was unable to speak French. The wording of the written story is reproduced below (in *italics*), framed within the stages of the genre arrived at through linguistic analysis (in **bold**). These stages are labelled according to SFL conventions. An analysis of the story then explores the means by which, and ultimately the functions for which, academic writers recontextualize people and events from an everyday world into an academic one.

Story 1: genre of anecdote

Abstract

On one celebrated occasion, the manager sat beside an agent in order to monitor calls, asking him to translate customer queries and his responses. Months later the memory of this farcical incident induced wholesale derision of both the hapless manager and the company (Observation, 19 March 2000).

Remarkable event

Two agents, Diane and Saul, described how, after the failure of this monitoring exercise, the manager continued to hover near the French team, clearly within earshot of agents' conversations. Saul recollected that after a call had ended and the customer had hung up, he continued talking, pretending it was still live. He finished by saying, in French, 'Thank you very much for calling. We will send someone round to kill your wife and family.'

Reaction

Agents at adjacent workstations were scarcely able to contain their laughter. The manager's humiliation was complete when Saul reported, in English, how successful the call had been.

Coda

It matters little that this story was embellished in the retelling. What is significant is that it continued, months afterwards, to be a source of great amusement and had come to symbolize managerial incompetence.

Anecdotes are stories which ‘involve some remarkable disruption to usuality, which is not resolved, but [is] reacted to’ (Martin and Rose 2008: 51) with an affectual response of some kind. The Remarkable Event and the Reaction are the obligatory stages of the genre with the Remarkable Event stage forming the nucleus of the story. Here we are presented with an account of what specific people were saying and doing; in this case the participants are recalling an earlier incident. However, of more concern are stages that precede and follow the events. In the anecdote that is Story 1, this means a preceding Abstract and a concluding Reaction and Coda. These stages are crucial as it is here the writer connects the story to the broader context of the research paper and, accordingly, here that strategies of legitimation become most evident.

The initial Abstract provides a summary account of what happened, evident in the linguistic abstractions *occasion* and *incident*. It also primes us for the remarkable-ness in the pre-emptive evaluations of *celebrated* and *farcical*. Interestingly it is in the Abstract that the function of the story as a knowledge practice is first alluded to, in the minimal bracketed note (*Observation, 19 March 2000*). This insertion references the ethnographic method with the suggestion of a larger data set of accumulated observations over time. This reference hints at the potential for strengthening knowledge claims through the accumulation of supporting evidence and thus implies, however minimally, strengthening of epistemic relations (ER↑).

Following the Remarkable Event is an obligatory Reaction that provides the response. In Story 1 this is expressed as a reported response (*laughter*). It is assumed that the participants themselves referred to their laughter. However, the writers are responsible for the abstracted representation ‘were scarcely able to *contain their laughter*’ (in contrast to a likely more congruent response such as ‘we could hardly *stop laughing*’), and for the abstracted claim that ‘the manager’s *humiliation was complete*’. In these representations the writers insert an academic voice into the Reaction and in the process shift the significance of events from one world, where the shared reaction is about affiliation amongst a group of workers (see Knight 2010), into another in which it has quite a different significance. As readers, we may well join in an emotional reaction to the extraordinary events as we are positioned to. However, this account is recast from the context of a call centre into that of the research article for a purpose beyond our amusement and group alignment.

The concluding stage of the anecdote is a Coda, an optional stage that if present ends the story by returning the orientation to the here-and-now

(Martin and Plum 1997). In this case the here-and-now that the Coda returns us to is no longer the observed world of a specific group of workers interacting and responding, but rather the world in which the story is written, that is, the field of research and knowledge in organizational studies. The values reflectively assigned to the events in the Coda bestow significance in the context of an academic study of humour (*a source of great amusement*) and subversion of authority (*a symbol of managerial incompetence*). The world of everyday experiences of workers in their workplace has been transformed into the role of evidence towards an abstracted academic knowledge claim. As such the story plays a role in strengthening what can be known about the observed world, that is to say, in strengthening epistemic relations (ER↑).

Waves of semantic gravity in Story 1

Within LCT the flow of the discourse can also be viewed as shifts in strengths of semantic gravity (SG), which is defined as ‘the degree to which meaning relates to its context. The stronger the semantic gravity (SG+), the more meaning is dependent on its context; the weaker the semantic gravity (SG-), the less meaning is dependent on its context’ (Maton, [Chapter 1](#), this volume, page 15), where the context may be social or symbolic. Using this concept we can trace profiles of stronger or weaker context-dependence in the telling of the story as it moves from the workplace to the academic paper. As represented in [Figure 6.2](#), the stage

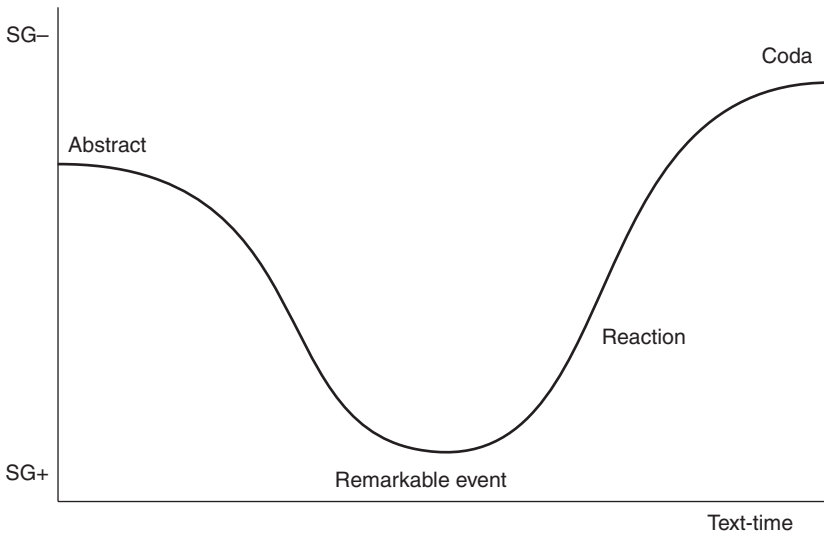


Figure 6.2 Story 1 as a semantic gravity profile.

of the anecdote that records the Remarkable Event (...*Diane and Saul, described ... the manager continued to ... Saul recollected ... a call ... ended ... he continued talking, pretending ... saying, in French...*) represents the point of strongest semantic gravity with people and their actions tied to a specific location. The Reaction stage (*Agents ... scarcely able to contain ... laughter ... The manager's humiliation was complete...*), while still relatively context-dependent, is constructed as reflective on the events and so standing somewhat apart from them, weakening semantic gravity. As we move to the optional surrounding stages of the initial Abstract (*one ... occasion ... farcical incident ... derision*) and the concluding Coda (...*retelling ... source of great amusement ... symbolize managerial incompetence*) specific events and consequences become kinds of events and kinds of consequences, weakening semantic gravity still further. Within the story itself we thus find the semantic profile illustrated in [Figure 6.2](#), with the stages connecting to the surrounding academic paper representing the points of weakest semantic gravity.

Story 1 in its surrounding co-text: Specialization and Semantics

From an analysis of the internal structuring of the story, I move to the surrounding text, or co-text, to consider the way in which the entire anecdote (Story 1) is positioned such that events from a world of everyday interactions can come to function in an academic knowledge practice. Here the anecdote is prospectively and retrospectively positioned in its immediately surrounding discourse:

Prospective positioning

Astonishingly, the manager of a French language section was unable to speak the native tongue of the majority of team members. Inevitably, this generated operating problems and undermined supervisory authority.

Story (anecdote)

On one celebrated occasion,...

Retrospective positioning

The French speakers constituted a work group with a high degree of self-organization, and their scathing humour served to widen the gap between themselves and the company.

Immediately preceding the telling of the anecdote is a claim about the incompetence of a particular manager and its consequences. The story that follows provides evidence for this generalized claim by exemplifying the manager's incompetence and the erosion of authority. On completion of the story the writers step back from the specific events to make retrospective and generalized claims about the specific group of workers, their humour, and their relations with the company. While the prospective positioning foregrounds the manager's incompetence, the retrospective positioning

shifts the focus to the workers and their subversive humour. The story sits between the two claims and exemplifies both. However, neither claim is tied exclusively to the events of the anecdote; each generalizes beyond those events. Contextualized in this way, the anecdote contributes evidence for a set of more generalized claims about the manager and the workers. This construction of claims based on evidence indicates some strengthening of the boundaries around procedures for building knowledge. This reflects a relative strengthening of epistemic relations (ER \uparrow), albeit in an ethnographic study that functions overall as a knower-code knowledge practice (more accurately, ER $-\uparrow-$).

Tracking back further into the preceding co-text (roughly two pages in length) we find a hierarchy of knowledge claims that stand above any specific workplace, participants or practice. These contextualizing claims, represented below, reflect a progressive strengthening of semantic gravity as they move from abstract claims that are thoroughly decontextualized (SG $-$) towards progressively higher levels of specificity and so context-dependence (SG \uparrow) until the story itself appears.

- 1 Section heading: high-level abstract claim (implied): SG $-$
Humour and the Erosion of Team Leader Authority
- 2 Some minimal unpacking of claim: SG \uparrow
joking ... becomes a means of conducting a satirical attack on management
(...)
- 3 Generalized claim for specific location: SG \uparrow
The joking practices of agents at 'T' confirm these insights,... that humour was directed at undermining team leaders' authority.
(...)
- 4 Further specifying claim in prospective positioning: SG \uparrow
Astonishingly, the manager of a French language section was unable to speak the native tongue of the majority of team members. Inevitably, this generated operating problems and undermined supervisory authority.
(...)
- 5 Story
<< anecdote >> [functioning as evidence]
- 6 Reiterative claim in retrospective positioning: SG \downarrow
The French speakers constituted a work group with a high degree of self-organization, and their scathing humour served to widen the gap between themselves and the company.

At the highest level, in (1), is a sub-heading of the section in which the story appears. From a linguistic perspective this represents an abstract claim of causality. Further into the section, in (2), the writers introduce a sub-section of discussion. Functioning at a somewhat lower level in the

hierarchy, *Humour* is now unpacked as the practice of *joking*, and *Erosion of Team Leader Authority* becomes *a means of conducting a satirical attack on management*. Further into this subsection, in (3), we encounter a claim at a specific level, specifying a particular workplace (*T*) and participants (*agents at T*), and this is further specified in (4). It is at this point, (5), that Story 1 appears, representing the strongest point of context dependency. It is followed by a reiterating claim in (6) that then weakens the semantic gravity somewhat. The dominant direction of shift in semantic gravity is $SG\uparrow$ as claims that stand above specific instances are progressively grounded in the events of the story. (For the semantic profile of the contextualizing discourse, see [Figure 6.4](#), further below, where it is contrasted with that of Story 2).

The hierarchy of claims and an associated accumulation of evidence in the flow of discourse around Story 1 reveal the means by which the story is given a point in the context of an academic paper. In its immediate co-text the story grounds a specific epistemological claim through exemplification, constituting evidence from a specific location involving specific people and activities. This epistemological claim sits within a hierarchy of knowledge claims, each enhanced with layers of evidence. The dominant pattern is one of claim–evidence–reiteration of claim. The entire section of the article functions to progressively strengthen epistemic relations ($ER\uparrow$).

Storytelling from the humanities: building knowers in cultural studies

A contrasting instance of storytelling comes from the humanities in a journal of cultural studies of education (Simpson 2010). The article focuses on the values and challenges in enacting principles of ‘critical pedagogy and cultural studies’. The writer describes her methodology as ‘auto-ethnography’ where analysis is interpreted as a reflexive focus on one’s own lived experience. The writer makes clear that she is a participant in the context in which the event of the story occurred. Versions of a specific incident are told in several iterations throughout the paper as the role of protagonist progressively shifts from one specific student to the writer herself. I focus here on the first account in the article, represented as Story 2. As with Story 1, the writer’s wording is in *italics* and the stages and phases (sub-stages) of the genre are in **bold**.

Story 2: genre of observation

Orientation

During the last course meeting of a class I taught in the fall of 2004,

Event description

a group of students presented on the ways in which the mainstream media had used fear as a way of garnering support for the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Immediately following their presentation, a young woman stated, 'I'm more afraid of the four of you than I am of the terrorists.'

Comment: (Phase 1, witnessed reaction)

A charged conversation ensued,

Comment: (Phase 2, symbolizing reflection)

one that seemed to displace 'the space of shared responsibility ... [with] the space of shared fears' (Giroux 2005, 214). While clearly an expression of agency,

Comment: (Phase 3, problem recognition)

the student's statement, however earnest, seemed to also be a rejection of all critique related to the war.

Story 2 constitutes an observation, a story genre in which some disruption or problematic happening remains unresolved and is responded to in terms of the significance of the event (see [Figure 6.1](#), earlier above). Jordens, with reference to Rothery and Stenglin (1997) summarizes the nature and function of observations thus:

Observations ... are ... a symbolizing genre: the 'snapshot frozen in time' gathers up preceding meanings into a symbolic image, and in doing so creates a critical distance that is somehow useful in the process of making one's experience meaningful to one's self and to others.

(Jordens 2002: 104)

Story 2 and specialization codes

For Story 2 (as for Story 1) two layers of analysis are undertaken, each providing insights into the function of the story as an academic knowledge practice. First the discourse is analysed at the peripheral stages of the story genre itself, that is, in the opening and closing stages that intersect with the surrounding discourse, and then attention is given to surrounding discourse of the article. Additionally, as we move from the social sciences (Story 1) into the humanities (Story 2), we can also explore variations in storytelling strategies as indicators of variations in underlying specialization codes.

Story 2, as an observation, begins with an optional Orientation stage that establishes the setting in place and time. However, in this instance it additionally explicitly places the researcher as a participant in the field in *a class I taught*. This move immediately indicates a legitimating strategy in which first-hand interactional relations with subjects are deemed relevant, constituting a strengthening of social relations (SR↑). This contrasts with the opening stage of Story 1 where a suggestion of multiple observations, in

Observation, 19 March 2000 implies not only a witnessing of events but also an accumulation of evidence as a basis for legitimacy, suggesting a minimal strengthening of epistemic relations (ER↑). Once again these variations across the stories can be interpreted as functioning within an overall knower code of specialization (or: SR+↑+ and ER-↑-).

The first obligatory stage of an observation is the Event Description. Here happenings are represented as a snapshot rather than an elaborated sequence of activities. In Story 2, the image of a challenging encounter in a classroom provides minimal detail of specific actions, and this relative vacating of content leaves little potential for the story to function as evidence for a generalizing claim about phenomena in the observed world. It simply does not say enough in those terms. However, it does suggest a symbolic significance, an incident around which bonds of shared values can be forged. The evocative references to *terrorists* and *the U.S. occupation of Iraq* in this short stage indicate that values rather than actions are to be foregrounded.

The second obligatory stage of an observation is the Comment, which responds to the disruption in the Event Description by establishing a point to the telling. In Story 2 the Comment is the concluding stage that intersects with the subsequent discourse of the article. It links two distinct fields, that of the classroom (in *conversation, statement, student, the war*), and that of academic theory (in *the space of...; Giroux 2005, 214; agency*) and thus bridges from one world into the other. The critical question to ask is what constitutes the nature of this bridge. How is the single incident, in this case in a classroom, given significance in the world of academic research? In Story 1 it was in epistemological terms as supporting evidence for more generalized and abstracted knowledge claims. In Story 2, however, a different strategy is evident. Here, the retrospective evaluative response to the incident assigns significance in terms of values. In other words it functions axiologically rather than epistemologically; the event symbolizes a set of values rather than exemplifies a set of knowledge claims.

The observation stories encountered in this study conform to the expectations of the genre in that Event Description stages are typically brief, unelaborated snapshots. The Comment stages, by contrast, tend to be more extended and complex than is anticipated, suggesting an evolution of the genre in this context of academic writing. The function of the Comment in Story 2 is represented above as a sequence of phases, and is further explored here for its role in the transformation of specific events to symbolic status.

The sequence of Comment phases reflect a shift in what is being evaluated and how, analysed with reference to the system of APPRAISAL in SFL (see Martin and White 2005 for a detailed account of that system). In the first phase the writer assigns feelings and emotions to the participants in the event as she witnessed them. The conversation is evaluated attitudinally as *charged*, as one of heightened feelings and emotions. These

evaluations are limited to the here-and-now of the observed world. It is the writer's co-presence that gives the evaluative interpretations their legitimacy. In this sense it is a commonsense interpretation that anyone observing might be expected to agree with. This phase of *witnessed reaction* assigns values in a here-and-now field from the perspective of a *participating observer*.

Phase 2 of the Comment represents a dramatic shift in stance as the event is elevated from the classroom to take on significance in an entirely different field. The evaluation is no longer about how participants felt; it is now about relevance of the event to an existing abstract body of theory and its associated values. In this move the event has come to instantiate a valued principle; it takes on the status of exemplar or symbol of those values. These values, as we shall see shortly, are explicitly articulated in the preceding discourse as those of critical pedagogy and cultural studies, constituting what Maton (2010, 2014b) refers to as a 'cultivated gaze'. In Story 2, as in many other stories from the humanities, the cultivated gaze that enables the move to exemplarize an incident is identifiable in a syndrome of choices. Typically reference is made to one or more high status knowers of the field, in this case *Giroux*. Typically too we find axiologically charged terms (Martin *et al.* 2010: 451) – here in *agency, space of shared responsibility, space of shared fears* – which provide essential referents for what the event is said to symbolize. Rather than functioning as condensations of knowledge, they subsume and stand for the values or dispositions of a field. They remain unelaborated, assuming a readership of a shared recognition, one that rests on access to the espoused values of particular intellectual fields. This phase of *symbolizing reflection* assigns symbolic status to the event from the perspective of a *cultivated observer*.

Phase 3 of the Comment in Story 2 constitutes the recognition of a problem, a necessary step in a story located in an introductory stage of a research article. Here the evaluative response returns to the stance of first-hand observer, but now extends beyond the specific actualized incident, *the student's (earnest) statement*, to query a potential, more generalized and problematic significance, a crisis in the conflict of positively charged student *agency* with negatively charged *rejection of all critique related to the war*. Recognition of a problem rests now on an observer with sufficient insight into both the observed world and that of the values of cultural studies and critical pedagogy. It requires the stance of a *participating observer* with a *cultivated gaze*.

Kinds of knowers and ways of knowing, conceptualized in LCT as kinds of social relations (Maton 2014b), are privileged at each phase in the Comment as the writer moves from insider/knower of the observed field, to insider/knower in the intellectual fields of critical pedagogy and cultural studies, and it is the potential to fulfill these dual perspectives that constitutes the basis for legitimacy. The stage, as a whole, functions in the service of strengthening social relations (SR↑).

Observation story genres displaying this kind of phased response occur frequently in ethnographies from the humanities. The phased response represents a typical trope as writers re-instantiate observed incidents then elevate them to symbolic status in their written accounts. In some cases the symbolizing is withheld to subsume a number of incidents. In all cases this kind of storytelling privileges a strengthening of the social relations (SR↑) and contributes to the building of a hierarchy of knowers.

Story 2 and semantic gravity

As with Story 1, we can map a wave of semantic gravity as degrees of context-dependence at different stages of Story 2. As represented in [Figure 6.3](#), a short Orientation sets the scene in time and place, leading into a specific incident as the point of strongest semantic gravity (SG+). Subsequent to the incident, in the Comment stage, semantic gravity is weakened somewhat as the writer evaluates the event first as a *participating observer*, then markedly weakened as events are made symbolic from the stance of *cultivated observer*. In the final phase of the Comment the semantic gravity is strengthened as the values of the field are reconnected to the events as an emerging problem.

In both Story 1 ([Figure 6.2](#)) and Story 2 ([Figure 6.3](#)) the stages of the genre that connect to the surrounding academic discourse of the article, especially those that conclude the storytelling, represent their points of relatively weakest semantic gravity. The decontextualized academic role of the stories intrudes most evidently at these points.

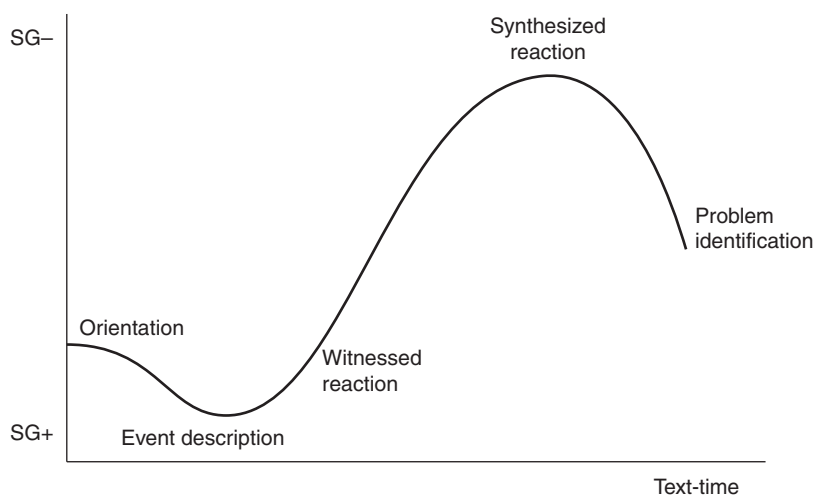


Figure 6.3 Story 2 as a semantic gravity profile.

Story 2 in its surrounding co-text: Specialization and Semantics

What of the discourse that immediately precedes the telling of Story 2? As was the case with Story 1, the discourse preceding 2 plays a significant contextualizing role, but in ways that differ from the first story. Story 1 is positioned as evidence in a hierarchy of knowledge claims about the object of study, contributing to a relative strengthening of epistemic relations (ER↑). In Story 2, the prospective positioning is in terms of values and dispositions. These are the lenses through which the incident must be viewed to be recognized as having symbolic status. The text that precedes Story 2 is presented below, segmented (by this writer) into three phases that are then explained further.

Phase 1:

Scholarship in cultural studies and critical pedagogy has played a particularly important role in higher education since the events of 9/11. Relying on long-held commitments to a critique of dominant ideologies, scholars have insisted on academic freedom (Ivie 2005b, Giroux and Giroux 2006), the patriotic aspects of dissent (Ivie 2005a), and the importance of tackling complex social problems (Carlson and Dimitriadis 2003; Glass 2004; Alanís 2006).

Phase 2:

In the classroom, issues including 9/11 and the occupation of Iraq often bring affective and cognitive investments among students and teachers to the forefront. Dialogue, conflicting viewpoints, and critical questioning, all central components of healthy democracies, become fraught with allegiances to long-held and frequently unseen norms.

Phase 3:

Issues such as 9/11 and the U.S. occupation of Iraq hold all that is difficult and promising about critical pedagogy and cultural studies: the necessity of looking plainly at the uses and consequences of power, and the possibility of seeing and acting differently. This article grapples with the often-charged field that exists between the difficulty and promise of seeing differently, particularly related to issues such as 9/11.

The discourse that precedes Story 2 begins with an articulation of the values of the informing intellectual fields. *Scholarship in cultural studies and critical pedagogy* is associated with *long-held commitments to a critique of dominant ideologies ... academic freedom ... patriotic aspects of dissent tackling complex social problems*. As the focus shifts in the second phase to issues of social concern (*the events of 9/11 ... the U.S. occupation of Iraq*) and classrooms in which they arise, the values of the intellectual fields are recontextualized as good and bad practices in classrooms. On the side of good are *affective and cognitive investments ... dialogue, conflicting viewpoints ... critical questioning ... healthy democracies*. On the side of bad are *long-held and*

frequently unseen norms. In the third phase these valued practices are recontextualized back into intellectual fields as *all that is difficult and promising about critical pedagogy and cultural studies ... the consequences of power, and the possibility of seeing and acting differently*. We are positioned to interpret the incident not in the light of a hierarchy of epistemological claims (as in Story 1) but in the light of clusters of axiologized abstractions (see Maton 2014b: 148–70). We are being compelled to align with the writer as a kind of knower who is committed to a *critique of dominant ideologies*, to exposing *unseen norms* and who can readily recognize *critical questioning, healthy democracies*, and the *possibility of seeing and acting differently* in classrooms. The discourse that precedes the telling of Story 2 strengthens the boundaries around and control over legitimate knowers, i.e. those who have acquired the cultivated gaze of cultural studies and critical pedagogy. Here too the writer works to strengthen social relations (SR↑).

We can also consider the three movements in the contextualizing discourse from the perspective of semantic gravity. As shown in the profile on the right in Figure 6.4, the text begins at a point of relatively weakest semantic gravity in the abstract realm of [*s*]cholarship in cultural studies and critical pedagogy. In the second phase semantic gravity is strengthened somewhat through location in the generic classroom and associated generic phenomena, *dialogue, viewpoints, questioning, democracies, norms*, as well as in references to abstract issues and events, *9/11 and the U.S. occupation of Iraq*. In the third phase semantic gravity is again weakened as generic practices and abstract issues are elevated into the abstract realm of the values of an intellectual field. From this height there is then a disjunctive drop to the relatively strongest point of semantic gravity in the specific incident, an

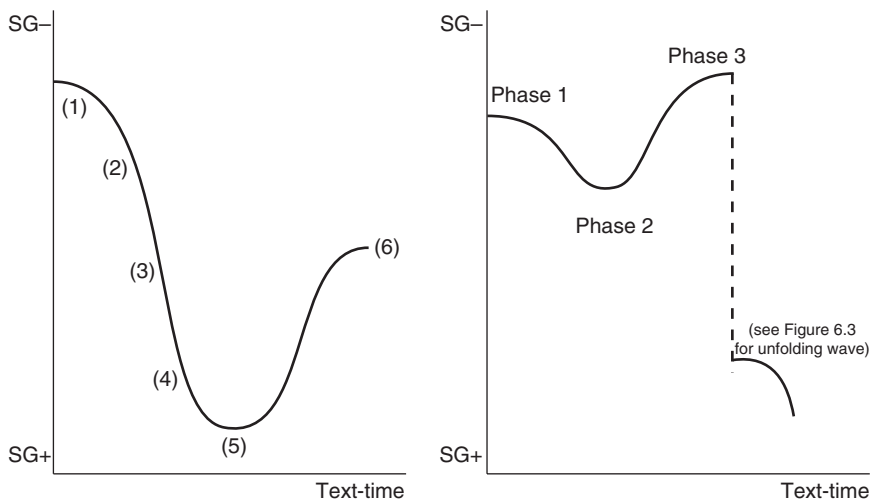


Figure 6.4 Semantic gravity profiles of surrounding co-text of Story 1 and of Story 2.

incident that initiates the body of the paper, as indicated in the disconnected waves for Story 2.

The profile of semantic gravity that encapsulates Story 2 reveals how the story is given a point in the context of the academic paper. In this case, the story as symbol is the catalyst for an elaboration of the values and attitudes of the intellectual fields that structure the research. It functions to legitimate those values, in the service of a hierarchy of values. The contrasting profiles of contextualization, as waves of semantic gravity around each story in [Figure 6.4](#), are indicative of the ways they function differently: Story 1 as *exemplification* in a hierarchy of knowledge claims; and Story 2 as *exemplarization* of a set of abstract values.

Consolidating and concluding

The term ‘ethnography’ has come to describe a loose set of methodological practices associated with a broad spectrum of intellectual fields. Within its home discipline of anthropology it was understood to involve detailed longitudinal observations and interpretations of the systems of meanings at work within the observed communities. It is this meaning to which the term ‘emic’ was first assigned by Kenneth Pike in the field of linguistics, and it is this notion of ethnography that characterized the linguistic ethnographic work of Dell Hymes. The term ‘ethnography’ has since entered into the practices of many other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. Along the way names assigned to ‘ethnographies’ appear to differentiate practices along several dimensions including the nature of the object of study (e.g. institutional, auto), the procedures by which a field is explored (e.g. analytical, walking), and the values and dispositions that are brought to bear on the observed world (e.g. critical, post-structuralist). The intention in the study reported here is to question the extent and means by which different kinds of ethnographies represent different kinds of knowledge practices.

The study excavates beneath surface naming to focus on variation in one particular feature of written accounts that is common across diverse kinds of ethnographies, that of storytelling. The detailed analyses of kinds of stories, their structures, and the meanings construed in their telling and in their positioning in the wider article, draw on dimensions of SFL. Variations in the telling of stories as knowledge practices are interpreted with reference to the dimension of Specialization in LCT as constructing knowledge practices with different strengths of epistemic relations and social relations. The concept of semantic gravity also informs an understanding of the means by which participants and activities in an observed material world are elevated to a place of significance in a world of academic knowledge and knowers.

To the extent that ethnographies share a privileging of first-hand observation and ‘first order constructs of reality’ (Geertz 1973) as the basis for

legitimate claims about social practices, then all ethnographic studies can be said to correspond to knower codes of specialization (ER-, SR+). Typologically they are positioned in the bottom right quadrant of the specialization plane (see [Figure 1.2](#), page 12). The issue of differences in kinds of ethnographies explored in this chapter is not about categorically different codes but rather about differences within a code, topographically represented by relative differences in strengths of epistemic relations and social relations, and the extent to which these differences within a knower code relate to the nature of the underlying intellectual field.

In the instances of storytelling explored in this study, the events and participants that constitute the basis of the story are observed within a field of practice, an everyday world of some kind, then re-instantiated into a different field, an uncommonsense world of academic research writing. As proposed by many ethnographers, the events of the observed world and the subjective perspectives of the participants who enact them may be given space within the uncommonsense discourse of the research writer. In other than a metaphoric sense this might mean transcription and direct quotation, although this has not been widely observed. More often participants appear to be paraphrased or summarized, without evidence of transcription. Significantly, in neither of the stories analysed in this chapter, nor in those of the broader study to date, can it be said that the voices of participants are assigned a dominant position. The stories are overwhelmingly of the kind that requires the writer to respond to an unresolved event in order to assign a point to its telling. The final word in all instances is that of the academic writer. This is not simply, as Wolf (1992) suggests, that the subjective voices are filtered through the researcher. The point of writing is, after all, to speak to an academic world in an academic voice and to establish the significance of observations in that world. Neither, then, is the ultimate word in the story that of subjective knowledges or commonsense ways of knowing the world. The writers' responses that give point to the tellings encode a higher level of abstraction, whether in epistemological or axiological terms, and often symbolization. In this sense storytelling in accounts of ethnographic research is not such a radical departure from dominant modes of academic discourse. It is, in this context, an academic knowledge practice. On these grounds claims that the telling of stories counters the objectivity that overrides 'the idiosyncrasies of experience, interest and perspective' (Smith 2005: 43) of participants in the world of everyday knowledge may need to be tempered or questioned.

Beyond the commonality of storytelling, some significant differences have been found in the ways stories are told. Stories may function as evidence for knowledge claims, contributing to a relative strengthening of epistemic relations (ER↑). Stories may function as symbols of values in a hierarchy of knowers, contributing to a relative strengthening of social relations (SR↑). Differences nonetheless are relative, reflecting differences within an overriding knower code. Within the specialization plane of 1.2,

page 12, they remain within the knower-code quadrant (bottom right) and the movements represent shifts upwards and rightwards, respectively. In other words, while sharing an overall basis of legitimation, there are significant differences among storytelling practices.

While the focus of this chapter is on current practices in ethnographies, the study also points to how analyses of storytelling can map the evolving nature of ‘ethnographic’ knowledge practices over time, exploring trends in dominant legitimation codes in the humanities and social sciences. Given the fragmentation of ethnography to date, continuing segmentation is expected, but along what kinds of fault lines? The examples analysed in this chapter, as well as recent literature in the field, give strong indications of a kind of fractal fragmentation. That is, differences *between* the specialization codes of intellectual fields are echoed by homologous differences *within* those codes. Although all ‘ethnographies’ appear to be knower codes, those situated within knowledge-code intellectual fields (such as many social sciences) are likely to be homologously characterized by stronger epistemic relations and weaker social relations than ‘ethnographies’ situated within knower-code intellectual fields (such as humanities subjects). On [Figure 1.2](#), a top-left/bottom-right distinction between code will thus be echoed by top-left/bottom-right differences *within* the knower-code quadrant. Hornberger (2009: 335), for example, refers to Hymes’ critique of ‘all too commonly encountered’ ethnographic practices that are ‘absurdly reductionist’. For Hymes ethnography constitutes ‘descriptive theory’ and an approach to description that is ‘in specific methodologically epistemologically grounded ways’ (Blommaert 2009: 262), that is ‘comparative across space, cumulative across time, and cooperative between analyst and practitioner’ (Hornberger 2009: 335), in other words ethnography that displays relatively stronger epistemic relations than most forms. In contrast, VanSlyke-Briggs (2009: 335), in discussing the ‘dichotomy’ of ‘the literature and the science of ethnography’, associates the former with notions of creativity, evocation, transformation, accessibility, and the latter with notions of tradition, rigidity, limiting, and narrowness.

Significant is the quote from Gallagher (2011: 52) who proposes ‘[s]tory telling not as a place at which to arrive, but as a place to begin inquiry’. At this point storytelling, rather than ethnography, becomes the overarching knowledge practice. The shift from ethnography to storytelling can be traced across a handful of new descriptors noted in recent literature. These include ethnographic fiction, the ethnographic novel, ethnofiction (at which point ‘graphy’ is lost), ghost-writing, literary tales, imaginings, and creative writing (Rhodes 2000; VanSlyke-Briggs 2009; Gallagher 2011). Having reached the position of ethnographer as writer of creative fiction, inspired perhaps but not necessarily constrained by any observation of an observed world, the fractal divisions continue. There is good and bad creative writing. For Gallagher (2011: 51) an ‘*anaemic version of storytelling*’ ... *devoid of imagination*’ will not do. This direction

of change in the naming of knowledge practices signals a distancing from any espoused connection to knowledge. It completes the shift of ethnography from social science into the humanities, where it must eventually be discarded in the continued quest for the new that underlies these highly segmented intellectual fields.