

# Narrative illocutionary acts direct and indirect

Neal R. Norrick\*

Saarland University, Campus C 5 3, 66123 Saarbrücken, Germany



## Abstract

The pragmatics of narrative can approach functions of narrative in context from the outside in or from the inside out. In this short essay, I will take an outside-in perspective, considering what speakers accomplish in telling stories in interaction. When we take an outside-in approach to conversational stories, we find them functioning not just to entertain or to illustrate a point, but with illocutionary forces like confessing and indicting, even apologizing and warning, albeit indirectly, but seemingly not with the illocutionary force of commissives or declarations, either directly or indirectly. When the data come from natural everyday conversation, and the stories analyzed are just a few moves long rather than the extended products of written literary fiction, it becomes natural to see stories as fulfilling (direct and indirect illocutionary) speech act functions.

© 2015 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Narrative function; Illocutionary act; Storytelling; Indirect speech act; Outside-in

## 1. Introduction

A complete pragmatics of narrative must by turns adopt both an outside-in approach to functions of narrative in context, looking at what we accomplish in telling stories, at what effects they have in speech events, and an inside-out approach, looking at how recurrent units function within narratives. In this short essay, I will take an outside-in perspective, considering the overall force of conversational stories, a matter which has received no systematic attention in the literature to date, with an eye to identifying significant questions and suggesting avenues for future research.

## 2. Outside-in

When we take an outside-in approach to conversational stories, we find them functioning not just to entertain or to illustrate a point, but with illocutionary forces like confessing and indicting, even apologizing and warning. Literary scholars have integrated aspects of speech act theory into narratology, and a number of them, such as [Mary Louise Pratt \(1977\)](#), [Michael Kearns \(1999\)](#) and [Lars Bernaert \(2010\)](#), have granted it a prominent and permanent position in their narratological models: compare the more linguistic perspectives of [Watts \(1981\)](#) and [Toolan \(1998\)](#). All these sources basically argue from the inside out that what authors, narrators and characters do with words—i.e., the illocutionary force or point of the represented utterances—is a distinguishable and intrinsic part of the meaning of a text. That is, speech act theory has been drawn upon to analyze the force of what narrators and characters say in individual turns/moves, based on long fictional texts. But my rather different focus from the outside in will be upon narrative in conversation, and what a whole story does in illocutionary terms, acting as an excuse, a warning, a confession and so on. This approach follows

\* Tel.: +49 0681 302 3309; fax: +49 0681 302 4623.

E-mail address: [neal@norrick.de](mailto:neal@norrick.de).

Tsiplakou and Floros (2013) in their concern with textual (illocutionary) forces such as instructing and entertaining for narrative texts like fables and jokes, but it goes on to consider both direct and indirect forces, extrapolating from Searle (1975). In speech act terms, narratives count as representatives in describing events, but I will argue that they develop the indirect forces of expressive and directive in context as well. Tsiplakou and Floros differentiate textual forces from what they call text types like narrative, which are based on structural criteria such as discourse markers and tense. In concrete contexts, knowledge of culturally defined genres further allows identification of narrative genres such as fable versus joke, parody and so on. When the data come from natural everyday conversation, and the stories analyzed are just a few turns long rather than the extended products of written literary fiction, it becomes natural to see stories as fulfilling (direct and indirect illocutionary) speech act functions.

Consider an initial example of a story from the Saarbrücken Corpus of Spoken English (SCoSE) told as a confession (and something more) within a circle where four participants are contributing to the overarching topic of early sexual experience. Here Jim has already described his (innocent) relationship with the girl who lived next door to his grandparents, when the narrative turns to focus on a specific scene relating to the theme of children's sexual curiosity, namely the classic scenario of 'playing doctor', with the twist that Jim includes his younger brother as the 'model' for purposes of demonstration.

- 1 Jim: so we had such fun as kids.  
 2 and it was she,  
 3 and her sister,  
 4 to whom I was exposing my brother's penis,  
 5 when my-  
 6 Teddy: ((laughs))  
 7 Vera: ((laughing)) I'm sure yeah.  
 8 Jim: in the famous incident,  
 9 when my grandmother BROKE in on us,  
 10 and SHAMED me for life.  
 11 y'know really.  
 12 I'll never forget this treMENDous weight of guilt.  
 13 and 'JIM what are you DOing'.  
 14 Teddy: ((laughs))  
 15 Jim: 'COME out of there.'  
 16 y'know 'GIRLS go home'.  
 17 and y'know.  
 18 Pamela: wow.  
 19 Jim: then I remember.  
 20 just sitting in the livingroom.  
 21 with my grandparents y'know pointedly ignoring me.  
 22 Vera: trying to act normally.  
 23 Jim: and just y'know making me feel terrible.

The initial confession already comes in lines 2–4, where Jim admits to engaging in acts within the sexual sphere in the home of his grandparents. Even though the initial scene is tellable in its own right, it is perhaps not surprising that the grandmother intrudes in the following scene to disrupt the (to her) abhorrent activities, and that her old-fashioned morality prevails as she 'shames' the teller 'for life' and sends the girls home. As the story continues, the moral perspective clearly moves from the young boy (and the teller) to the grandparents, who do not share his more realistic attitude toward children's curiosity about differences between girls and boys. The story works not only as a confession of early sexual experience in keeping with the current topic of conversation, but also as an indictment of conservative attitudes regarding children's natural inquisitiveness about the body. Still, confessing and indicting are both specific types of representative speech acts, not yet indirect illocutionary acts like expressives or directives distinct from representatives. Confessing is simply a species of representative in which the speaker divulges his/her own culpable activities. For a proper indirect speech act there must be an inference from the direct force to another type of illocutionary distinct from representative, say expressive as in an apology. We need a pragmatic perspective on narrative to sort out these functional matters, not just in personal contexts, but in institutional ones and in the workplace, where praise and blame, guilt and innocence bear existential consequences.

A second sample story functions from the outside in as an excuse for failing to accomplish a piece of work. In the excerpt from a telephone conversation below, taken from the London-Lund Corpus (8–4), Betty tells a story to explain why she has not yet taken care of a pending task in response to a query regarding the status of the item in question.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/932573>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/932573>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)