

## **A corpus approach to features of narrative accounts in interview situations and implications for qualitative educational research**

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the interactional features of narrative accounts. The narrative accounts in question were collected during audio-recorded researcher-led semi-structured interviews into the use and evaluation of digital media learning platforms that were conducted at a tertiary education institution. Participants, when formulating responses, were led to produce accounts (Antaki, 1988; De Fina, 2009; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1990; Morris, White & Iltis, 1994; Scott & Lyman, 1968) in order to provide information and justify opinions. Accounts, as a polyform discourse unit that spans brief, factual, statements and longer, more elaborate constructions such as narratives, provide the opportunity to better understand the mechanisms and forms of orientation to the subject of inquiry of an interview. Examining the implications, both interactional and pragmatic, of a participant's choice to couch her or his account as a narrative, or a choice to couch a similar response in a form that is more descriptive, more expository or more argumentative, allows insight into the salient characteristics of narratives in interview situations and the representativity of narratives when conducting educational research. This paper, in line with the small stories movement in narrative research, problematises clear-cut or binary distinctions between narrative and other discourse types and confronts some of the claims that are made for narrative such as its epistemic status, its allocation of interactional roles and turn taking as well as its segmentation of information. The structure of the paper is as follows: it first presents the theoretical and pragmatic background to the study. Following that the discussion moves to the data collected, the participants and the analytic methods. Findings are then presented. Four axes for the presentation and discussion of findings are the length of narrative projects, narrativity, participant inhabitancy of the roles of author, interlocutor and character and, finally, participant alignment with the subject of the interview. These axes of discussion open out on some conclusions concerning the nature and use of narratives when conducting educational research.

**Keywords:** Accounts; Narrative research; Educational research; Interviews; Narrativity; Role inhabitancy; Alignment