E. Darics and J. Clifton

Making applied linguistics applicable. Discourse analysis as a management tool in organisational change

Abstract

This paper makes a case for increasing the discursive awareness of practitioners and developing their discourse analytical skills. Although the importance of such an awareness is being increasingly recognised by scholars and practitioners alike, the insights of fine-grained discursive analyses of talk-in-interaction have rarely been seriously considered as resources for accomplishing managerial objectives. Consequently, reflecting on naturally-occurring talk as a way of managing remains rare. In this paper, we provide an illustration of how the in situ practice of telling stories of organisational change could give change initiators the tools with which to make visible, and thus actionable, the seen but unnoticed underlying assumptions, unshared information, and patterns of collective thinking about change. We close the paper with a call for discourse analysis to be taken more seriously in management practice and training.

Key words

Positioning theory, identity, narrative, organisational change, diagnostic listening

Introduction

The importance of language in the workplace is being increasingly recognised. However, whilst this observation has been acted upon by linguists and practitioners in fields such as forensic linguistics (e.g. Haworth 2017), corporate communication (e.g. Fuoli 2017), and education (e.g. Seedhouse 2005), this has not so far been the case in management training and education. Despite the fact that both high profile business personae (e.g. Branson 2014) and respected organisational scholars (e.g. Cooren 2015) are speaking of the crucial role that language has to play in organisational life, attention to the way in which research that focuses on the fine-grained analysis of talk-in-interaction could be pertinent to practice is still in its infancy. Scholars within language-centred disciplines have repeatedly called for a deeper understanding of the role of language and linguistic choices (Author 2016; Jones and Stubbe 2004; and Mautner 2016, 2017). This call highlights the need for a change in the level of engagement with language-in-use. This is because although organisational discourse studies have, as Westwood an Linstead (2001) note, developed an interest in the relationship between language and organisation this interest is often 'couched in macro terms' with little attention to the micro level of language use and specific linguistic devices (Mautner 2017: 612).
On the one hand, while effort have been made to reconcile linguistic-discourse analytic work with organisational studies (see Mautner 2016, 2017; Pieterse 2014), on the other hand, there is little evidence that the findings of such work have actually made an impact on, or are properly acknowledged in, professional practice (see Alessi and Jacobs 2016). Answering Sarangi and Roberts' (1999: 399) call for studies with real practical relevance that will 'contribute to a greater understanding of workplace problems by those who have to tackle them', we therefore set out to provide an example of how rigour in academic work and relevance to practitioners can be combined. Consequently, we intend to go some way to offering a way of bridging the so-called rigour-relevance gap, which, to paraphrase Kieser and Leiner (2009: 516), is the gap between management education which is often perceived to be narrow and overly-specialized and the needs of practitioners to relate academic work to realistic management problem-solving situations.

The lack of uptake of discourse analysis by practitioners is particularly true in the field of organisational change management. Focussing on the discursive analysis of narratives of change, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the potential that discourse analysis has to

offer managers of organisational change. In order to do this, we take the example of a discursive analysis of a narrative told by an employee in a team of fundraisers in a hospice in the UK during a period of restructuration. We use this discursive analysis of the employee's storytelling as an illustration of how applied linguistics could provide change initiators with the discursive awareness to enable them to decipher the stories that circulate within the organisation and so to understand unfolding organisational processes at work and to devise strategies in response to these situations.

One of the main challenges of change management is that although leaders can initiate change, they cannot control how it is interpreted. Alternative interpretations of what is going on can create counter narratives that may have unintended and negative consequences regarding the outcome of the change processes. Therefore, the ability to assess the uptake of, and reaction to, a change initiative is a crucial management skill, and an essential first step in any effort that aims to influence the meaning-making of affected employees. To ensure the success of change initiatives, as Woodilla notes, managers 'must find a way of revisiting meanings that are unclear to any one person' (1988: 48). We argue that providing change initiators with the discursive tools necessary to analyse and reflect on circulating organisational narratives will allow them to make visible, tangible, and thus actionable, the seen but unnoticed underlying assumptions, unshared information, and patterns of collective thinking about change. This skill we call *diagnostic listening*.

Managing and understanding organisational change

Since organisations are in a state of perpetual change, it is not surprising that both academic and practice-based literature of change management is burgeoning (see Burnes 2014) and that much of this work acknowledges the importance of how organisational players interpret and make sense of change processes (Weick 1995; Grant and Marshak, 2011). Weick (1995) defines sense-making as the social interactional process in which participants jointly construct meaning, or in other words, interactions can be viewed as the site of the social construction of meaning. If we accept this constructionist view, we can see that language is a resource for negotiating meaning when initiating and driving change, and we can also agree with an increasingly significant line of scholarship that argues that the management of change

is essentially a discursive process (Löwstedt & Räisänen 2012; Marshak 2002; Pieterse, 2014). Further, rather than being a monologic top-down transmission of vision that is accepted willy-nilly by employees, the discursive production of change is a dialogic, negotiated process and so change initiators should be aware of how employees interpret and make sense of change (see also Grant and Marshak, 2011). This realisation is clearly reflected in the literature that purports to equip professionals with strategies to effectively implement change. Lawrence (2015), for example, devotes a whole chapter to the importance of 'listening' as a way of identifying and evaluating unshared information that circulates in the organisation during the process of change. Jacobs and Heracleous (2005) advise that change initiators should engage in reflective dialogue with those affected, and that through such interaction managers can explore and reflect on patterns of collective thinking and, importantly, use this knowledge to generate and shape new understandings. And, specifically as regards the focus of this paper, Reissner (2005: 492) notes that if practitioners are interested in how people make sense of their changing realities, they 'should be interested in listening to stories and sharing interpretations about what they mean!'

However, how advice from the researchers cited above is to be operationalised remains problematic. Grant and Marshak (2011) offer a useful overview of questions related to discourse that may aid change agents in implementing change, but overall what is missing from the literature is the articulation of a concrete strategy to establish a basis for reflecting on and understanding how organisational players make sense of change initiatives. What exactly should practitioners 'listen for'? How exactly can they interpret meaning to extract underlying assumptions, unshared information, or patterns of collective thinking from interactions circulating in an organisation? We, therefore, agree with Pieterse (2014) who calls for organisational change management to incorporate discourse analysis, and we argue that applied linguistics can offer such a 'way of listening'. It offers, as Mautner puts it, 'tools sharp enough' to explain the role language plays in how people constitute and make sense of their realities through discourse (2016: 21). One way that we advocate of doing such diagnostic listening is to focus on the storytelling that organisational players do. Therefore, throughout this paper, we advocate providing researchers and practitioners with tools, derived from fine-grained linguistic analyses of storytelling, which will allow them to reflect on the story itself as well as the way in which the story is constructed. Thus, we argue that

diagnostic listening can bridge the relevance-rigour gap by inducing academic-inspired reflection about, and discovery of, how change is lived by those it affects, rather than proving decontextualized top-down strategies for change management.

Narrative analysis in organisational change.

Stories are, as Georgakopoulou (2011: 190) noted, 'inescapably fundamental in human life, central to the (re)constitution and interpretation of personal, social, and cultural reality'. People are storytellers by nature, because it is through stories that they make sense of their experiences. This is because storytelling allows organisational players, to paraphrase Chia (2000: 513), to make sense of the flux of brute aboriginal lived experience that surrounds them and to fix, name, label, and classify it – all intrinsic processes of discursive organisation – so as to construct a (*their*) version of organisational reality. This observation has not been overlooked by scholars in the field of organisational studies, and since the 1980s the narrative turn has been gaining in credibility within organisational research. Many organisational scholars have turned to narratives as a means of understanding the process of change and meaning-making during change. For example: Boje (1991) and Dunford and Jones (2000) have considered narrative analysis as a way of understanding information processing and sense-making in organisations and they advocate the importance of good storytelling and story-interpreting as a way of improving the communication skills of managers; Reissner (2005) and Martens (2014) have considered the use of narrative as a tool in organisational learning and innovation; and Vaara (2002) has considered narrative as a way of understanding how people interpret or resist change.

However, as Boje (2001) points out, the dominant paradigm (though see Boje 1991, for a counter-example) for narrative research in organisational settings has been one in which narratives are considered to be 'products', which has placed an emphasis on the analysis of 'grand' narratives, plots, themes, and similar thematic concepts. This focus has meant that organisational narrative research may have overlooked precisely the linguistic cues that would be necessary for the analyst and practitioner to identify the underlying assumptions, unshared information, or patterns of collective thinking that affect people's understanding of organisational change. For example, Dodge et al. (2005) argue that encouraging practitioners to tell stories of their leadership experiences is a useful way of bridging the rigour/relevance

gap and learning about, and improving, leadership practices, yet, crucially they do not provide tools with which to carry out in-depth analyses of the narratives. Similarly, other academic research (see for example: Denning 2006; Flemming 2001; Ibarra and Lineback 2005) that seeks to advise managers on how to use stories as part of their workplace practice typically uses decontextualized extracts of stories to illustrate advice that the author is giving; no attempt is made to analyse the context of the telling, nor are practitioners given the tools with which to analyse the subtleties of the storytelling-talk for themselves.

Consequently, Feldman *et al.* (2004) warn that bypassing the linguistic minutiae of storytelling means that analysts may not be able to account for embedded and hidden information. In their study of rhetorical features of narratives, they advocate the use of micro-analysis and they argue that 'the in-depth analysis of the stories that participants tell provides insights not only into what is happening but also into the understandings of the participants about why and how it is happening' (2004: 150). In order to go some way to addressing this lacuna, we propose the use of positioning theory (henceforth, PT) which is a method, amongst others, of analysing stories that pays attention to the fine-grained linguistic details that are employed to construct stories (of change).

Method. Positioning Theory

PT, as developed by Bamberg *et al.* (e.g. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008; Bamberg *et al.* 2011), pays particular attention to identity work, which is essential to the sense-making that storytellers do. This is because it is through positioning the (changing) identities of people, organisations, and parts of organisations in relation to each other that a sense of what is, was, or has been, going on is enacted. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed overview of PT, which can be found for example in Deppermann (2015), suffice it to say that following Bamberg *et al.* (2011: 182), PT refers 'broadly to the close inspection of how speakers describe people and their actions in one way, rather than another and, by doing so, perform discursive actions that result in acts of identity'. Such an approach to identity therefore brackets cognitive notions of identities, thoughts, emotion, beliefs and values that are 'in there somewhere' and which are encoded and transmitted in talk. Instead, taking a social constructionist perspective, identity is regarded as something people do, rather than something they have (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) and PT argues that a fine-grained analysis of

talk can reveal how identities are talked into being in, inter alia, storytelling venues. Combining fine-grained analyses of talk with the analysis of emerging societal discourses, PT considers acts of identity at three different levels.

- Level one: how the characters, including the organisation/team, are positioned in relation to each other in the *there-and-then* of the story word
- Level two: how the interviewee/storyteller positions herself/himself in the *here-and-now* of the interview world and displays her/his stance to the emerging story and does things with the stories such as blaming, justifying, and otherwise accounting for actions
- Level three: how the story is constructed and *positioned* against wider social discourses.

At levels one and two, the participants enact identities through, inter alia, talk. In order to be recognised as having a particular identity, and to recognise others, participants have to 'pull off' these identities by displaying the 'right' actions, values, beliefs, and so on, for the 'right' audience, at the 'right' time (Gee 1994: 7). These 'right' actions, values, and beliefs are based on a shared understandings of what is appropriate for a particular identity and so, as De Fina (2006: 355) puts it, they 'link local identities to shared ideologies and beliefs' (level three positioning). Consequently, wider societal discourses form a backdrop against which speakers 'do' local identity work and these discourses are inextricably intertwined with both the interaction in the there-and-then of the storyworld and the here-and-now of the storytelling. This link becomes visible through its intertextuality whereby the talk is 'full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth' (Fairclough 1992: 84).

Moreover, as Kiesling (2006: 262) notes, discourses are more than 'just' talk and ideas, they are 'the entire interlocking web of practices, structures and ideologies: a system of understanding and exploration that prefigures which practices and interpretations are available, and how practices and structures are understood'. Thus, from a discursive perspective, talk has ramifications in practice because it legitimizes certain ways of be(hav)ing, whilst marginalizing others (Witten 1993: 105). To take a simple example from

organisational change: if a change manager gives an account of a change process s/he led, they will have to employ the 'right' language and display the 'right' beliefs and values that are acceptable according to the *zeitgeist* of the story. However, the language used to do this will inevitably borrow from pre-existing texts: s/he may draw on broader neoliberal discourses or specific discourses of change management to account for decisions. These broader discourses are never innocent, they instantiate a moral order that condemns or approves certain actions, concerning, for example: the decisions companies make; who they lay-off and who they do not; their priorities (profit over human capital); and even wider relations between business and stakeholders. Thus, talk (levels one and two) uses wider societal discourses (level three) as resources for storytelling and, reflexively, discourses of change permit certain ways of talking about change which endorse or sanction certain ways being and doing.

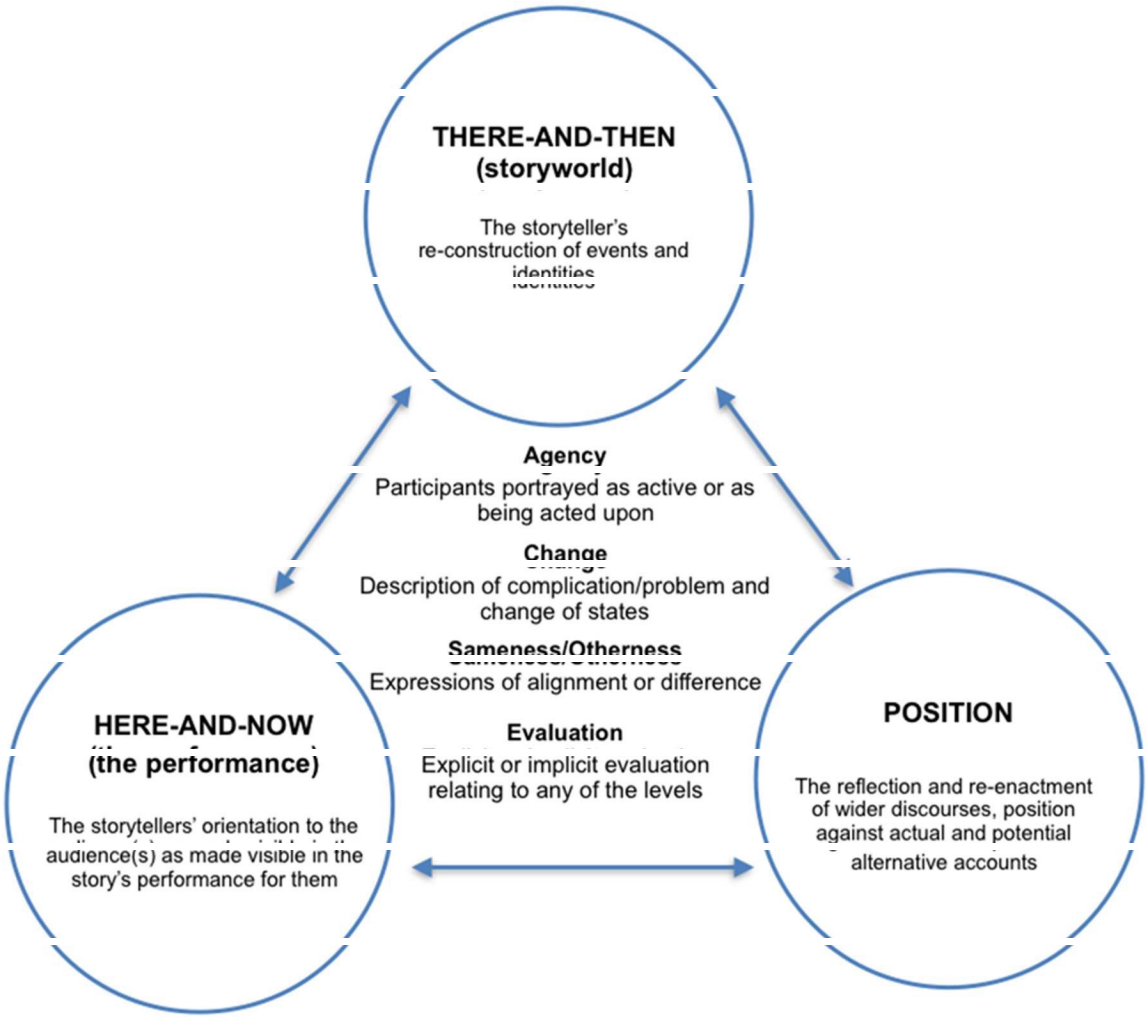
Further, following Bamberg (2011), stories can be analysed according to how the characters in the storyworld and the storytelling world navigate the dilemmas of: constancy and change across time; sameness and difference; and agency. First, constancy and change relates to the way in which the teller navigates who they are in relation to the organisational change; do they resist it and retain the same identity or does their identity morph with the changes. Second, sameness and difference relates to the way in which the teller is able to position himself/herself in relation to others and the organisation, and so establish in-groups and out-groups and a sense of belonging. This is especially relevant in aligning with, or resisting, change. Third, the dilemma of agency relates to whether the teller is constructed as an active agent directing his/her life or as an undergoer of external forces and thus, in relation to organisational change, as an instigator or undergoer of change. In sum, through drawing attention to these three central dilemmas, the researcher/practitioner can make them visible, and thus analysable, and thus ultimately actionable in their workplace practice. We add to these three dilemmas, the concept of evaluation[1] whereby the tellers underline the point of the story and its relevance in the here-and-now. Identifying how evaluation happens can help the listener make visible the teller's stance towards a change narrative and to the change process.

We propose that the essence of PT can be boiled down, without losing its academic rigour, to an accessible two-step process that is relevant and accessible to practitioners. First, diagnostic listening needs to start with an awareness that a story is not a recollection of

objective truths, rather it is a situated (re)construction of a particular truth that may challenge or align with other ways of making sense of a situation. The interpretation of the story should start with making visible the way in which the teller orients to the three levels of a story: the there-and-then of the storyworld in which people re-construct past events; the here-and-now in which the teller orients to the physically present hearer (the interviewer) and possible imagined future audiences; and the wider social discourses that are used as resources to build the stories and which reflexively enact these discourses. In the second stage of diagnostic listening, these three levels of analyses, could be combined with an awareness of four main themes to look for: constancy and change; agency; sameness/otherness; and evaluation (see figure 1, below).

****

Figure one: diagnostic listening



****

Data

The data are taken from a corpus of interviews that was recorded in 2015 in the course of consultancy work in which one of the authors was involved. The original goal of the project was to improve the communicative effectiveness of the fundraising team of a local hospice which provides crucial end-of-life care for patients in their own home, at an inpatient ward, and a day centre. The hospice's work is partially funded by the government, but the majority of their funding, over 70% or £5 million yearly, is – or rather, should be – raised from donations from the wider public. At the time of the consultancy work, the hospice had recently undergone a 'restructure' and the newly formed fundraising or 'income generation' team seemed to be struggling to achieve their targets. A social media agency invited one of the authors to join the team of experts with the brief to understand the communication issues that the team were facing. Following this brief, the main focus of the consultancy work concerned the team's corporate communication efforts, mainly on social media. To get a better understanding of the root causes of the problems and to contextualise the team's interactions, it was important to get ethnographic insights into the workplace in general and the team in particular. To that end, one-to-one interviews with the key team members were conducted, recorded, and transcribed (see appendix one for a list of transcription symbols used).

When the one-to-one interviews were conducted, the default identities (i.e. identities that are recognised as constituting a backdrop to the interaction (Richards 2006: 60)) that were oriented to by the participants were researcher/consultant interviewer and team member/ interviewee. Orientation to these identities no doubt affects what identities are 'pulled off' as storytelling in other venues or with other interlocutors (such as in the pub with colleagues or in an appraisal interview with managers) would inevitably produce different stories and different identities and therefore it is important for practitioners to understand the inevitable recipient-design of storytelling and to take this into account. In this case, the researcher's work was known to the team, and as an outsider she was treated as a *confidante* as well as a

consultant. This was important because it allowed team members to share personal interpretations of the change process, which – as the consultancy work revealed – caused considerable trauma among the existing team members. However, as well as a confidante, the researcher was also treated as an expert 'brought in' by management, and as a result of this multiple positioning, although the team members felt free to open up, they did so in a way that would not implicate them in front of the management.

The team in question consisted of five members: Adele the newly appointed head of income generation; Dorothy, one of the longest serving team members who had acted as an interim head before Adele; two other relatively new and young female fundraisers who reported to Adele; and a communications specialist who, despite not being officially part of the team, worked closely with them. This core team was surrounded by numerous on-site and off-site volunteers. The one-to-one interviews, although not specifically intended to focus on the restructuring that had taken place at the hospice, ended up revealing a great deal about how old and new members made sense of the changes. This paper focuses the account of the only team member (Dorothy) who had not only experienced the early stages of the restructuration changes but had an active part in their implementation.

Analyses

The analyses are divided into three sections. First, we present Dorothy's identity-work when describing the old team before the changes. In the second fragment, we consider Dorothy's story of successful and unsuccessful transition between the two teams. We then present her identity-work when describing the new team after the changes.

Fragment one: 'A family kind of team'

At the start of the interview, prompted by the interviewer's turn 'you saw all the changes happening', Dorothy starts talking about the changes. We join Dorothy in line 12 of the transcript when she begins to talk about the team she joined 'five and a bit years ago'.

12 IE sort of-I wanted-I needed to work I wanted to do something so I

joined a team of then we became six so another guy joined with me
erm and we were a real family kind of team (.) th::e erm head of fund
raising was a bit like the kind of mum of everyone (.) type of thing
and over there was erm a really old building lots of quirky little
rooms↑ and we had the top floor so-and before apparently with the
fund raising office had been in the town so it was a move already to
come here >which is< much much better because you get a link we
were out on a limb we were away from everyone so we were very very
close-knit and we worked very well together I don't I wouldn't say
we were particularly efficient↓[we were probably efficient at
IR [uhu
IE putting on events but we weren't efficient as er-as er money making
kind of machine as it were so although we were-we did communicate
pretty well very informal-it was very-it wasn't very business-like but
it was a nice environment↓ but because it was out and away from
everywhere else we were very much cut off from everybody so we
didn't really we didn't go onto the ward we didn't really see many
people although to get to the main hospice we used to walk through
the old day care so with patients we had the [erm the rapport which is
IR [uhu
IR really nice and we've had to really work hard to recreate that over in
the-have you been to the centre-someone give you a tour round

In lines 12-13, Dorothy begins the description of the team which is talked into being as a 'real family kind of team' (line 14) and the head of fundraising is categorised (albeit with three downgrades: 'a bit like', 'the kind of', and 'type of thing') as the 'mum of everyone' which implicitly positions the other team members as children within this family kind of team. Further, the team is deictically positioned as being 'over there' (line 16), 'out on a limb' and 'away from everyone' (line 20) which becomes a constitutive feature of the team identity. A consequence of being 'out on a limb', signalled by 'so' (line 20), was that 'we were very very close-knit and worked very well together' which becomes a further constitutive feature

of the team. These features are emphasised by: the repetition of ‘very’; the stress on knit; and the stress on the adverb ‘well’. Taken together, they provide an explicit evaluation of the characteristics of the old team.

Dorothy then continues by assessing the team before the changes and so makes relevant its constitutive features. In lines 21 following, she states ‘I don’t I wouldn’t say we we were particularly efficient↓ we were probably efficient at putting on events but we weren’t efficient as er-as er money making kind of machine’. She thus makes being efficient at putting on events, albeit it hedged by the adverb ‘probably’, relevant for the team before the changes and she makes, with the slight hedging ‘kind of’, not being a money making kind of machine a constitutive feature of the old team. The absence of this feature makes difference salient and relevant to the identity work that is being achieved, and thus being a ‘money making kind of machine’ becomes the constitutive outside which is contrasted with the old team. Dorothy then continues to talk into being another relevant feature of the team: ‘we did communicate pretty well’ (lines 25-26). This feature is hedged firstly by the use of the qualifier ‘pretty’, and secondly she assesses the way of communicating as informal and not very business-like (line 26: ‘very informal-it was very-it wasn’t very business-like’). The absence of communicating in a business-like way thus constitutes the team’s outside and makes relevant what it is not. Further, using the contrastive conjunction ‘but’, Dorothy sets up being business-like in opposition to being ‘a nice environment’ (line 27). It is thus noticeable that being efficient as a money making machine and communicating in a business-like way are specifically constituted as not being features of the team prior to the changes. After these assessments, she carries out a slight topic shift and she states that being ‘away from everywhere else we were very much cut off from everybody’ (line 28). The upshot of this was that ‘we didn’t really we didn’t go onto the ward we didn’t really see many people although to get to the main hospice we used to walk through old day care so with patients we had the the rapport which is really nice’ (lines 29-33). Thus, rapport with the patients is also a constituent feature of the group prior to the changes and it is evaluated as being ‘really nice’. In the continuation of her turn, Dorothy states that ‘we’ve had to really work hard to recreate that over in the’. The turn is not completed because she latches on a question to the interviewer and so changes topic to whether the interviewer has had a tour of the hospice or

not. However, the incomplete turn projects that a similar rapport ('that') has been recreated in the new team – now located over in the centre.

In short, in this analysis, using PT as a diagnostic listening tools we can see how Dorothy talks into being an identity for the old team, and begins to juxtapose it with what it is not. The old team is essentially family, close-knit, working and communicating well, and having rapport with the patients, but it is 'out on a limb'. Working first from the dilemma of difference, it is important for the practitioner/analyst to notice what is not. The old team was not communicating in a business-like way and was not efficient at money making. This sets up a constitutive outside, or difference and possible deficiency compared to 'something' outside. In this case, the constitutive outside is the new team which implicitly is efficient at making money and is business-like. Thus, the sameness difference dilemma becomes key to understanding Dorothy's sense-making. Further, by being aware that, at a third level, stories are not produced from 'thin air', rather they use wider societal discourses as resources, diagnostic listening encourages change managers to look for wider discourses that are used as resources for constructing the story. In this case, one can see that the virtues of being business-like and profitable borrow words and values from neoliberalism which are juxtaposed with the nice, close-knit, family environment of the old team associated with a paternalistic form of management with a 'human face' (see observations and conclusions where we discuss this point in more detail).

Fragment 2: 'we need to move on'

After a side-sequence (i.e. a break in, rather than termination of, an ongoing activity) concerning whether the researcher has already had a guided tour of the premises and if not, would she like one (line 34), Dorothy returns to talking about the changes by telling a story of the transition from the old team to the new team, as discussed below.

76	IE	the guilt of being the only person who wasn't affected (.) and then one
77		by one everybody just decided to take redundancy and leave (.) the
78		only person who came with me was an older lady who wanted to see
79		out her erm to get her pension and she came with me into that office
80		and was <u>so</u> miserable erm I actually had a word with HR and just said

look can you just give her the tools to-you know when you're sitting
across from someone and you just think they're so miserable because
it-her family had gone and we were moving on and she wasn't
moving on because she was older so she was just seeing out her time
and er but she felt passionate about the patients and the-and-she
was doing all the thank-you letters she wasn't even doing her job
she was just thanking everyone but that was really important to
her so we had to kind of engineer it in a very gentle way that she
could (.) that was the one thing I wanted to make it really gentle coz
then it was almost then okay we need to do this now we need to
move on so we've now ended up with taking new people on

In the lines immediately prior to this story, omitted for reasons of space, Dorothy tells of a system that was introduced whereby the team members were ranked on a scale of one to four. A score of 'one' meant that your job was safe and a 'four' meant that your job was cut, but that you were first choice for re-employment. Everybody in her team got a four and 'then one by one everybody just decided to take redundancy and leave' (lines 76-77). The only person who comes with her is identified as an 'older lady' (line 78). The relevant features of 'the older lady' are that she wanted to get her pension and she was miserable, this emotional state being emphasised by the stress on so (line 80: so miserable). This then becomes the complicating action in the story which the Dorothy-of-the-storyworld sets out to resolve by having 'a word with HR'. Dorothy then reconstructs a dialogue with HR in which she said 'look can you just give her the tools to'. Significantly, the reported turn-of-talk is not completed and what the tools will enable the older lady to do is not articulated. Chevalier (2009) argues that non-completion of a turn can be a way of avoiding delicate issues since the interlocutor is left to interpret the implications of what is said without the negative implications being specifically articulated.

Further, instead of completing the turn-of-talk in the there-and-then of the storyworld, Dorothy shifts to the here-and-now of the interview world and accounts for her actions. Significantly (line 81), she prefaces her upcoming turn with 'you know' and so she recipient-designs her turn for the interviewer and projects a common, taken for granted belief in the

correctness of the projected account which is that when 'you're sitting across from someone and you just think they're so miserable because it-her family had gone and we were moving on and she wasn't moving on' (lines 81-84). Thus, the 'older lady' is positioned as somebody who has lost her family (cf. the features of the team prior to the changes as previously discussed). She is also positioned as somebody who is not moving on, and this is contrasted with others who are moving on. Interestingly, Dorothy uses the pronoun 'we' to refer to those who are moving on. 'We' is notoriously ambiguous as a pronoun, yet in her prior talk we are given to understand that it was only her and the older lady who stayed, therefore implicitly the 'we' is the institutional 'we' (i.e., the organisation), though it could also refer to other employees who were also moving on. Thus Dorothy displays alignment with the organisation which is initiating the change and distances herself from the 'older' lady. The reason that Dorothy gives for the lady not moving on is that she was 'older' and 'was just seeing out her time' (line 84), and despite being passionate about the patients she was only writing thank-you letters rather than doing her job.

The resolution to the complicating action is that 'we had to kind of engineer it in a very gentle way that she could'. This is marked as a delicate issue in three ways: through the use of the pronoun 'it', what was engineered is not mentioned and so is marked as a delicate; the engineering itself is downgraded by the hedge 'kind of' (line 88); and what she could do is not mentioned since the turn is unfinished which thus marks it as an unmentionable. Moreover, Dorothy accounts for these actions by constructing for herself a 'good self' (Linde 1993) which allows her to take the moral high ground not only for herself but also for the ageist discourse which condones sacking older employees – as discussed in more detail later. First, by doing 'it' gently and by accounting for her action (albeit with the downgrade 'almost', line 90) she positions herself as responding to external forces and doing something that 'we' needed to do which is reinforced by the stress on temporal immediacy (line 90: now). Second, her own agency in this (unmentioned) event is downplayed further through the use of the institutional 'we' (line 90: 'we need'). Taken together, these discursive devices thus position her as having limited agency in doing 'it' which is implicitly sacking the older lady who has failed to move on. In this way, Dorothy is still able to talk herself into being as a good person, retaining the moral high ground and so she downplays her agency in sacking the

lady. Though, at the same time, she displays an orientation to the sacking and her part in it as a taboo subject and an unmentionable in the storytelling.

From a practitioner's perspective it is useful to be aware of what is not said as this may be a cue to understanding a delicate or problematic situation that could be the source of a malaise related to change, and thus something that a change manager should address. Thus, subtle linguistic cues are given that skirt around the event but never make it explicit and picking up these cues is something an awareness of language could reveal via diagnostic listening. Further, the use of the institutional 'we' is also a way of downplaying her responsibility in the sacking and so by encouraging awareness of pronominal use, agency, and thus acceptance of responsibility for happenings, can be made visible. This failure to take responsibility/agency for an event could also indicate unease with the event, and so could also be a situation that a change manager could take steps to address. Moreover, an awareness of the shift between the storyworld and the here-and-now of the interview world and how the interviewee draws the interlocutor into agreement (through the use of the generic 'you') is also something that can indicate a trouble source. This is because recruiting alignment from an interlocutor is a way in which a morally problematic position can be shored up. Further, through paying close attention to the use of pronouns and being aware of the sameness/ difference dilemma, a change manager can become aware of shifting in and out-groups. Dorothy's use of the organisational 'we' indexes her alignment with the change, but at the same time excludes the older woman who is not moving on. It also shifts responsibility for the actions from herself to the group, and so can also be used as a way of reducing her responsibility for a problematic event. Also, through the use of the adjective 'older', age rather than any other possible identity-feature (such as the fat lady, the Welsh lady, the beautiful lady, or whatever) is constructed as the key feature of the outsider. And, since negative characteristics such as just staying on to get a pension and not doing her job are attributed to the women, an ageist discourse is used as a resource for building the story. Close attention to the storytelling thus reveals that Dorothy recreates ageist negative stereotypes of older workers, as identified in ageist discourses by Posthuma and Campion (2009), who are supposedly: less motivated; less productive; less flexible; and more resistant to change. Posthuma and Campion (2009: 175) go on to argue that such stereotyping can have a negative impact on the employability of older people because older employees are more

frequently laid off than their younger co-workers. We argue that by using diagnostic listening which draws attention to the way in which wider discourses are dawn on, a change manager could be brought to reflect on the wider social and moral implications of their actions.

Fragment three: 'a younger team'

In the continuation of her turn, as discussed below, Dorothy provides the coda (relevance of the story) and its evaluation.

91	IE	move on so we've now ended up with taking new people on
92		erm we're a younger team er physically younger but also kind of
93		(.) mentally but I-although it was <u>awful</u> ↑↓ I <u>think</u> it for the hospice
94		it will once it all dies down I think it'll be really good erm and we just
95		like Adele says we've only-she's only been here nine weeks so she's
96		erm (.) we were kind of oh yeah we were floating around and then

The resolution of the complicating action of the transition is to take on new people (line 91). The team now consists of new people and is talked into being as a 'younger team' (line 92). The constituent features of this younger team are that it is not only 'physically younger' but, albeit with a downgrade, it is 'also kind of (.) mentally [younger]'. Through the use of the comparative 'younger', Dorothy thus displays her stance towards this new team and contrasts it with the physically and mentally older team which existed prior to the change. Then Dorothy displays an emotional stance to the change 'it was <u>awful</u> ↑↓' and contrasts this with the final evaluation of the story and its implications for the here-and-now: 'I <u>think</u> it for the hospice it will once it all dies down I think it'll be really good'. After this evaluation, Dorothy changes topic begins to talk about her new boss – Adele – in lines 95 following.

In the final fragment analysed, the sameness/difference dilemma is made relevant through the juxtaposition of the new and old teams, the key elements being age, which is the overreaching discourse through which sense is made of the changes. In short, ageism becomes a resource for storytelling and a resource for making sense. Moreover, this identity work is positively evaluated, displaying that Dorothy buys into the changes which is also shown through the inclusive use of 'we' which aligns herself with the new team/organisation.

Thus, using the diagnostic listening tool that we advocate, a practitioner could make visible whether or not a storyteller aligns with, or resists, change and what this change means in terms of buying into or rejecting wider societal discourses that the change manager may, or may, not wish to espouse.

Observations and Conclusions

Whilst it could be argued that managers know what to listen for and do this intuitively, we argue that by raising awareness of the linguistic resources that are used to construct a story as in situ social practice and by providing a simple guide of what to listen for (see figure 2), change initiators are more able to analyse the stories that employees tell about organisational change and so are more able to devise strategies that could deal with employee sense-making. Based on the case study above, the analyst/practitioner could make visible the three interrelated levels of storytelling and focus on linguistic and discursive manifestations of the three dilemmas that storytellers face and the evaluation of the stories (see figure 1) and how they are used as resources for enacting wider societal discourses. The analysts/practitioners' attention could be directed using the following questions.

Agency

- Who/what is portrayed as an active doer? Is agency strengthened or downplayed/ minimised?
- Who/what is portrayed as passive recipient?
- Does the storyteller refer to 'we'? What does 'we' entail? Does the meaning change throughout the story?
- Does to storyteller explicitly mention the listener or a general audience ('you')? Does this reveal an attempt to draw on hypothesised shared knowledge or get the listener on board?
- What wider societal discourses does agency, or lack of, it invoke?

Change

- How is the complicating action/problem articulated? What is chosen in the story to be the 'plot'?

- What language is used to describe states of being before and after?
- What wider societal discourses does change, or lack of it, invoke?

Sameness/Otherness

- What is articulated in terms of negative and in terms of positive attributes ('we weren't')? Is a hypothetical norm evoked through these references?
- Who does the teller affiliate with? How is difference expressed?
- What wider societal discourses do sameness or difference invoke?

Evaluation

- What strategies are used to evaluate the 'there-and-then', the 'here-and-now' and the 'position' of the story?
- What do these reveal about the tellers' emotions, stance, attitude, and evaluation of the events?
- What is not said?
- What wider societal discourses does the evaluation of the story invoke?

Examples of what a practitioner could look for as evaliation are summed up in the list below which is based Cortazzi and Jin (2000):

- Lexical elements (e.g., intensifiers; adjectives; adverbs; and modal verbs)
- Phonological features (e.g., stress; vowel lengthening; marked changes in volume, speech rate and pitch; non-linguistic sounds)
- Syntax (e.g., a change in grammatical complexity, or the use of 'conversational historical present')
- Discourse level (e.g., repetition; reported thought; flashback and flashforward; or explicit meta-comment)

To further aid the applicability of our proposed approach, in figure 2, we provide a concise summary of the two-step process, in which step 1 is the identification of the three levels represented by the outer circles. Step 2, using the prompts in the triangle, is the rendering visible of the three dilemmas and how they are evaluated.

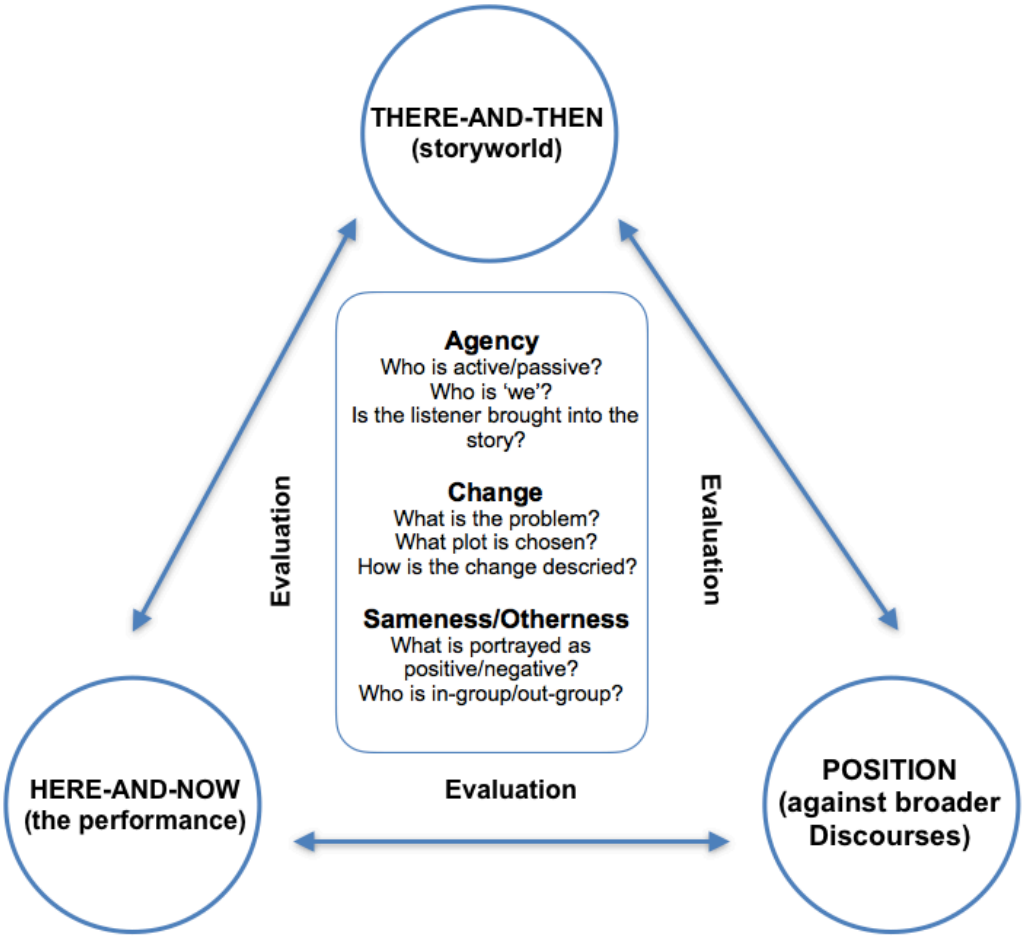


figure two

****

Encouraging the analysis of, and reflection on, stories of organisational change as they are produced gives the manager a context sensitive insight into employees' sense-making. It might, as in this case study, enable the analyst/practitioner to locate evens that have caused hurt and which may need to be addressed. Further, we would hope that diagnostic listening would also prompt reflection on the morality of applying widely circulating discourses to particular situations. In this case, it might be appropriate for change initiators to question the gatekeeping and policing of age-related identities that Dorothy enacts and which (potentially) give rise to, what Rudman (2015) calls, 'occupational injustice' whereby the organisation's employment policies effectively restrict older people's participation in the workplace. Also, the propriety of a neoliberal discourse of profitability and 'business-like' practices in a

hospice devoted to end of life care could also be called into question: should a health care service, albeit a fundraising one, resist, or accept, change that conceives of the organisation in terms of profitability and being 'business-like' rather than being a community oriented family?

Finally, we recognize that this is a single case analysis showing *one* way in which discourse analysis could become an effective management tool. We argue that other forms of linguistic analysis such as micro-interaction (Boje 1991), thematic analysis (Dunford and Jones 2000; Löwstedt & Räisänen 2012), metaphor analysis (Argaman 2008), and rhetorical analysis (Feldman *et al.* 2004) could also be offered to practitioners as ways of analysing organisational sense-making. Consequently, we end this paper with a call for action for linguists to provide further case studies which reveal how the insights of applied linguistics could be applied to management practice, and we also call for business trainers to take what applied linguistics can offer to practitioners more seriously.

Appendix one: Transcription conventions used

:	vowel stretching
(.)	micro pause
<u>word</u>	stressed word or syllable
word↑	work spoken with rising intonation
word↓	work spoken with falling intonation
-	indicates a cut off
[word	beginning of overlapping talk
(( ))	extra-textual information
>word<	word spoken more quickly than surrounding text

References

Author 2016

Alessi, G. M. and **Jacobs. G**. 2016. 'Reflections on the Ins and Outs of Business and Professional Discourse Research' in Alessi, G. M. and Jacobs. G. (eds.): *The Ins and Outs of Business and Professional Discourse Research.* Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 1-13.

Argaman, E. 2008. 'In the Same Boat? On Metaphor Variation as Mediating the Individual Voice in Organizational Change.' *Applied Linguistics* 29/3: 483-502. doi: 10.1093/applin/amn021

Bamberg, M. 2011. 'Who am I? Narration and its contribution to self and identity'. *Theory & Psychology,* 21(1): 3-24. DOI: 10.1177/0959354309355852

Bamberg, M. and **Georgakopoulou, A.** 2008. 'Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis,' *Text & Talk* 28/3: 377-396. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/TEXT.2008.018

Bamberg, M., A. De Fina, and **D. Schiffrin.** 2011. 'Discourse and identity construction' in Schwartz, S., Luyckx, K. and Vignoles, V. (eds): *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*. Berlin/New York: Springer, pp. 177-199.

Branson, R. 2014. *How language shapes the way we work*. https://www.virgin.com/richard-branson/how-language-shapes-the-way-we-work. Accessed 22/09/2017

Bucholtz, M. and **K. Hall** 2005. 'Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach'. *Discourse Studies*, 7/4-5: 585-614. doi/abs/10.1177/1461445605054407

Burnes, B. 2014. *Managing Change*. 6th ed. London: Pearson Education.

Boje, D.M. 1991. 'The storytelling organization: a study of story performance in an office-supply firm,' *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36/1:106-126. DOI10.2307/2393432

Boje, D. M. 2001. *Narrative Methods for Organisational and Communication Research*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chevalier, F. 2009. 'The facework of unfinished turns in French conversation,' *Discourse Studies*, 11/3: 267-284.

Chia, R. 2000. **'**Discourse analysis as organizational analysis', *Organization* 7/3/ 513-551. doi/abs/10.1177/135050840073009

Cooren, F. 2015. *Organisational Discourse***.** Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cortazzi, M. and **Jin, L.** 2000. 'Evaluating Evaluation in Narrative' in Hunston, S. and Thompson, G. (eds.): *Evaluation in Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 102-120.

De Fina, A. 2006. 'Group identity, narrative and self-presentations', in De Fina, A., Schiffrin, D. & Bamberg, M. (eds): *Discourse and Identity* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 351-375.

Denning, S. 2006. 'Effective storytelling: strategic business narrative techniques.' *Strategy and Leadership* 34/1: 42-48. doi.org/10.1108/10878570610637885

Deppermann, A., 2015. 'Positioning' in De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (eds): *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis.* Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 369-387.

Dodge, J., S. Ospina & **E. Foldy** 2005. 'Integrating rigor and relevance in public administration scholarship: The contribution of narrative inquiry.' *Public Administration Review* 65/3: 286-300.

Dunford, R. and **D. Jones.** 2000. 'Narrative in strategic change,' *Human Relations* 53/9: 1207-1226. doi/10.1177/0018726700539005

Fairclough, N. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Feldman, M., K. Sködberg, R. Brown and **D. Homer.** 2004. 'Making sense of stories: A rhetorical approach to narrative analysis' *Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory*, *14*/2: 147-170. doi:10.1 093/jopart/muh010

Flemming, D. 2001. 'Narrative leadership: using the power of stories.' *Strategy and Leadership* 29/4: 34-36. doi.org/10.1108/sl.2001.26129dab.002

Fuoli. M. 2017. 'Building a trustworthy corporate identity: A corpus-based analysis of stance in annual and corporate social responsibility reports,' *Applied Linguistics*, https://doi.org/ 10.1093/applin/amw058 **Gee, P.** 2014. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* (2nd edition). London: Routledge.

Georgakopoulou, A. 2011. 'Narrative' in Zienkowski, J., Ostam, J. and Verschueren, J. (eds.): *Discursive Pragmatics.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 190-207.

Grant, D. and **R. Marshak** 2011. Toward a discourse-centered understanding of organizational change. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 47/2: 204-235. doi/abs/ 10.1177/0021886310397612

Haworth, K. 2017. 'The discursive construction of evidence in police interviews: Case study of a rape suspect,' *Applied Linguistics* 38/2: 194–214. doi.org/10.1093/applin/amv009

Ibarra, H. and **L. Lineback** 2005. 'What's your story?' *Harvard Business Review* 83/1: 64-71.

Jacobs, C. and **L. Heracleous**. 2005. 'Answers for questions to come: Reflective dialogue as an enabler of strategic innovation,' *Journal of Organisational Change Management* 18: 338-352. DOI 10.1108/09534810510607047

Jones, D. and **M. Stubbe** 2004. 'Communication and the reflective practitioner: A shared perspective from sociolinguistics and organisational communication,' *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 14/2: 185-211. DOI: 10.1111/j.1473-4192.2004.00059.x

Kieser, A., and L. Leiner. 2009. 'Why the rigour–relevance gap in management research is unbridgeable'. *Journal of Management Studies* 46/3: 516–533. doi.org/10.1111/j. 1467-6486.2009.00831.x

Labov, W. and J. Waletzky 1966. 'Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience' in Helm, J. (ed.): *Essays on The Verbal and Visual Arts*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. pp. 12-44.

Lawrence, P. 2015. *Leading Change: How Successful Leaders Approach Change Management.* London: Kogan Page.

Linde, C. 1993. *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Löwstedt, M. and **C. Räisänen**. 2012. 'Playing back-spin balls': narrating organizational change in construction,' *Construction Management and Economics* 30/9: 795-806, DOI: 10.1080/01446193.2012.693189

Marshak, R. 2002. 'Changing the language of change: How new concepts are challenging the ways we think and talk about change,*' Strategic Change* 11/5: 279-286. doi.org/10.1002/ jsc.604

Mautner, G. 2017. Organizational discourse. In Mautner, G. & Reiner, F. (Eds): *Handbook of Business Communication, Linguistic Approaches.* Boston/Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter. pp. 609-628.

Mautner, G. 2016. *Discourse and Management: Critical Perspectives through the Language Lens*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pieterse, J. 2014. *Service Engineers in Change: Count your words.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation.

Posthuma, R. and **M. Campion.** 2009. 'Age stereotypes in the workplace: Common stereotypes, moderators, and future research directions,' *Journal of Management* 35/1: 158-188. doi/abs/10.1177/0149206308318617

Richards, K. (2006). Being the teacher: Identity and classroom conversation. *Applied Linguistics* 27/1: 51-77. doi.org/10.1093/applin/ami041

Reissner, S. 2005. 'Learning and innovation: a narrative analysis', *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 18/5: 482-494. doi.org/10.1108/09534810510614968

Rudman, D. 2015. 'Situating occupation in social relations of power: Occupational possibilities, ageism and the retirement 'choice',' *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy* 45/1: 27-33. doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2015/v45no1a5

Sarangi, S. and **C. Roberts** 1999. 'Introduction: Revisiting different analytic frameworks,' in Sarangi, S. and Roberts, C. (Eds.): *Talk, Work and Institutional Order*. Berlin, New York: Mouton De Gruyter. pp. 389-400.

Seedhouse, P. 2005. 'Conversation analysis and language learning,' *Language Teaching*, 38/4: 165-187. doi.org/10.1017/S0261444805003010

Vaara, E. 2002. 'On the discursive construction of success/failure in narrative of post-merger integration,' *Organization Studies*, 23: 211–248. doi/10.1177/0170840602232003

Weick, K. 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations*. London: Sage.

Westwood, R. and S. Linstead 2001. *TheLlanguage of Organization*. London, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Woodilla, J. 1988. 'Workplace conversations: the text of organizing' in Grant, D., Keenoy, T. and Oswick, C. (eds.): *Discourse and Organization*. London, Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 31-50.

[1] Whilst not arguing that stories have to be made up of certain constituent parts, we find it useful to use Labov's (Labov and Waletzky 1967) terminology to describe certain elements of the story.