## Narrative Analysis – by David M. Boje

Narrative analysis is the sequencing of events and character identities derived by retrospective sensory representation. Narrative representations includes first a chronology and second a whole structure of constituent elements that relate together in poetic form, in order to examine how past shapes present, present perspectives filter the past. Narrative analysis represents how the author and others value events, characters, and elements differently. Narrative analysis can be applied to cases used for pedagogy and theory building in the social sciences. Case narratives are sensory representations derived from oral, document, or observational sources (including dramaturgical gestures, décor, or architecture).

## Conceptual Overview and Discussion

Narrative analysis can be applied to case study research to do theory building. Narrative analysis problematizes the relations of the narrative case to its authors. Catherine Kohler Riessman, for example, looks at narrative as representation of others' experience, to which the analyst does not have direct access. Narrative cases attempt to generalize from source materials (interviews, observations, texts, etc.) to fashion an abstracted chronology of events, character identities, and theoretic elements (themes, concepts, & perspectives). Narrative expectancy uses deductive reasoning, by expecting that anticipatable character behaviors, elements or events are necessary to explicate and fit within particular kinds of plots or general models of human behavior and perception (tragedy, comedy, romantic adventure, or irony). Deductive narrative analysis that is retrospective sensemaking (past-looking) is a natural complement to *story analysis*, which completes a theory building cycle by acts of prospective (future-looking) sensemaking. Narrative

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analysis builds up a general narrative model (or theory) that emerges from *story-cases* collected in interviews, the fieldwork, or available texts. Narrative analysis ascribes patterns to events, character identities, and other poetic elements (thoughts, frames, rhythms, etc) across cases.

**Narrative Poetics** Since Aristotle's *Poetics*, a key aspect of narrative analysis is coherence of plot, an often-linear sequence of *beginning, middle, and end* (BME). The relationship of simple BME linear plots to more complex multiple simultaneous plots in epics continues to be a source of controversy. Narrative analysis can pose several challenges.

**Russian Formalism** In Russian Formalism, Narrative becomes a screen for stories. The concern is with moving about story stuff (fabula) to obtain an engaging or coherent plot (sujeuret). There is a hegemony here. Narrative ends up defining what is proper to story, and then changes the form, to represent what remains in different orders.

**Structuralism** Vladimir Propp analyzed narrative plots of folktales to identify functional components. Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes perform structural analysis of narrative. William Labov structuralist approach conceives narrative as amenable to formal theoretical frameworks, to the remodeling of human experience into narrative forms. Tzvetan Todorov coined the term 'la narratologie' in 1969 to designate what he and other French structuralists (e.g., Roland Barthes, Claude Bremond, Gérard Genette, and A.-J. Greimas) imagined as a science of narrative modeled after the 'pilot-science' of Saussure's structural linguistics. As such, a narrative enters the biography of the speaker, placing events into sequence, and a memory of experience that loosely corresponds to originary events. Polkinghorne theorizes that people try to organize temporal events into meaningful experiences using narrative forms and patterns.

Alternatives to structuralist narrative are poststructuralist and postmodern narrative analysis, where the underlying assumption is narratives are forms of social control over human identity and subjectivity.

**Narrative as Hegemonic** Mikhail Bakhtin in *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, asserts that narrative genres are constructed as solid unshakable monological frameworks. There are several implications for case research. Who decides what is the plot? Is it the author of the narrative or the narrative analyst? When people present the narrative analyst with multiple plot constructions, how are these to be sorted out? For example, there can be official plots advanced by owners and managers of enterprises that do not match the plots perceived by employees, customers, vendors, regulators, and other stakeholders. Narrative analysis asks how many narratives are there, and how are they distributed across the social scene. Verification of narrative content becomes a matter of triangulation. Narratives presented in cases are co-constructions by the analysts' and subjects' predispositions, subjectivities, and expectations about what constitutes a 'proper' narrative.

**Historical Narrative Fictions** When plots change over time, a historical or genealogical approach to narrative analysis is warranted. Hayden White asserts that historians oftentimes construct histories into narrative fictions that disguise author's moral arguments for particular historical chronicles. The implication for case study, is that the narrative of the case can appear factual or empiric, but mask an ideological position, such as managerialism (constituting characters, event-plot-lines from manager's point of view, or imposing structure/form onto the chaos of human experience). Freidrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and other genealogists trace the social construction of narrative perspectives, looking at who has the power and knowledge to set up narrative order for others.

**Poststructural Narratives** There are a number of poststructuralist approaches to narrative analysis. For example, Norman Denzin looks at narrative interviewing as an interactional, contextual production, even before its read and interpreted. Narratives are rooted in family beginnings, gender, race, and social class.

There is the poststructuralist challenge from Jacque Derrida about the ethics of an analyst doing an inquisition to elicit narrative. The persons may not be ready to narrate something that has been traumatic, or eliciting narrative can be a demand for a confession, or forcing people to put more order to events and characters than may be the case. This raises the question: where does the narrative chronology, form, or structural poetics reside? Is it in the mind of the analyst, an expected type of narrative that is popular, or a resident in Being?

**Postmodern Narrative** The postmodern narrative challenge is to modern narrative. Mark Currie develops postmodern narrative theory as a way to analyze the social and cultural function of narrative. For example,

As the narrative analyst becomes immersed in texts of all kinds, there is a temptation to present a case that is an amalgamation of details (quotes, observations, facts, references) and ignore characters, events, and elements that do not fit constructs under study. For example, in case books, the case can be constructed to illustrate particular social science theories, models, or concepts. While pedagogically expedient, the amalgamated case narrative can be an oversimplification of the complexity of the human condition. The amalgamated case, constructed by the analyst can be so selective that many others' plots and character perspectives are marginalized, or erased.

The demand for narrative closure in case research can be a matter of projecting moral re-presentation of selected events, rendered into a narrative sequence that becomes intelligible in retrospect.

It is recommended that narrative plots and structures be treated as representations, as impressions or fictions that need verification. Preoccupied with demonstrating theory in cases, cases can be constructed to narrate events according to closure suggested by said theory. Over the course of case study, numerous narrative plots and forms are likely to emerge, but may be ignored to fit the case as demonstration of theory expectations.

**Methods**

There are a variety of methods for narrative analysis.  Theme analysis is a categorization of observations, documents, and transcripts of meetings or interviews rendered into text, assessing events, viewpoints, identities, topics of speech acts, or whatever suits the imagination and interest of participants or the theoretical preoccupation of analysts. Plot analysis is a comparison of plot lines between subjects, noting various improvisations and omissions. Network analysis presents narrative themes or plots into a graphic display. Deconstruction analysis assesses such facets of narrative as binary oppositions (male-female, boss-worker, black-white, etc), the hierarchical order presented in the narrative, exceptions to narrative closure, marginalized voices or plots, and possible resituations to the narrative pattern.

**Application**

Two exemplars of narrative analysis are Hayden White and the Project on Disney by Karen Klugman, Jane Kuenz, Shelton Waldrep, and Susan Willis.  Hayden White looks at history as narrative fiction. So a case can exemplify various plot structures (romantic, tragic, comedic, or satiric), and these can be in complex combinations (complex plots as Aristotle noted). Hayden

looks at types of world hypothesis (following Steven Pepper's work), the representation of the world (or its organizations) in formalist, mechanistic, organic, or contextualist terms. A formalist narrative is about types and classifications, and extends to a sort of abstraction. A mechanistic representation is as a machine. An organic one is as a cell, a plant, tree, or some other biological metaphor. The contextualist representation is about stands, and stranding, about moving around blockages (novel emergence) in one's path, sort of feeling one's way forward, without being able to chart a course be looking ahead. It is the contextualist representation that looks most at the historical narrative to reckon what is the way forward.

In the Disney ethnographies by Klugman et al. they worked on the case by speciality. One focused on the narrative of the architecture, its more postmodern narrative rendering of traditional Disney narrative themes. Another looked at the work of Disney employees, their emotional labor, and being forced to smile, having to wear costumes instead of uniforms, being on stage, instead of at work. Forget to do that robotic smile, and you might lose your job. Another noticed the spectacle of the crowds, what they looked at, made the crowd the focus of observation, even taking photos of other people taking photos. The Disney project team noticed that as one enters the theme parks, they enter a sort of theatre peopled by cast members instead of employees. The architecture itself scripts a story supported by auditory and olfactory cues, such as to give the impression of small town American on Main Street, or another country, in Epcot (at least its capitalist products). The effect of narrative control is the erasure of spontaneity in highly orchestrated narrative-programming of prepackaged limited set of choices, each fully narrated in explication so guests do not need to think, and can just relinquish control.

## Critical Summary

Every case has an implicit narrative. Narrative analysis can make the implicit narratives in case study explicit. Each case is one or more representations in narrative. Narrative analysis from the poetic and structuralist approaches assesses forms and thematic content. Poststructuralist narrative analyses trace the hegemony of narrative form onto human experience. Postmodern narrative analysis.

Narrative is monological/monovocal, even in its act of double narration (including some sound-bites used by some other narrators), is a linearization, a beginning, middle, and end (BME) form-formula, quite compatible with the model-theory of empiric science and its abstract-frame.

- David Michael Boje

**See also** Storytelling; Deductivism; Inductivism

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