

Narrative Leadership: Storying Leaders in the Executive Business School Classroom

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ABSTRACT

I use interactional sociolinguistics to explore how participants in a thirteen-month-long executive master's program focused on leadership navigate leadership identities within the classroom, focusing on narratives of professional experience. As I will argue, narrators claim a professional identity semiotically by constructing a corporation and then claiming a position within or relative to it. Whereas in a related project I explore such work through the concept "discursive othering," in this project I focus on narratives. Specifically, I examine how agency is accomplished in these narratives at several levels: first, within the world of the story, second, at the interactional level, and, finally, at the intertextual level. Ultimately, I will consider what implications all of these processes have on the discursive construction of leadership.

This project draws from an ongoing ethnography at a business school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States. Data are drawn from video recordings of classroom interactions from an executive master's program focusing on leadership. As part of a larger project looking at the

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language of leadership, using interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1999), I focus on three narratives of personal experience, comparing these in terms of what they do for the narrator's claim to the identity of a leader. I will consider this at several levels: first, within the world of the story; second, at the interactional level; and, finally, at the intertextual level for the relationship that this narrative presents to the unfolding talk in the classroom.

Because language use in the executive education context (as indeed it is in most) is largely invisible to interactants, the very meaning of leadership gets negotiated in interaction even as it is enacted linguistically. This exploration is intended to illuminate some of the mechanisms by which talking like a leader are accomplished, with a focus on how this is accomplished through narrative.

As analysts, we can think about narratives doing many kinds of social and interactional work in the executive education classroom. On one level, they serve as an indication of what counts as memorable, or what is worth being remembered in this community. Additionally, they function as a particular type of identity claim, namely, a bid of access to knowledge and experience. Previous research on this community (Trester et al. 2013) has shown that for these business school students, personal experience is the source of knowledge ranked most highly as a way of knowing. Thus the linguistic choices made in narratively operationalizing such epistemological currency are well worth exploring. As we have now completed three years of participant observation in this program, we are able to compare similar contexts—same professor, same point in the semester, topic, readings, and so on, further illuminating the range of choices available to interactants—and thus are better able to understand each choice that is made linguistically. This rich understanding of the observed discourse variation helps further support the claim that for this community, the choice to tell a narrative (or not) is a key mechanism in claiming authority and ultimately in constructing leadership.

This applied ethnography has been conceived of as an opportunity for giving back to the community, which means that we have been sharing our research findings with community members by way of playback sessions and also as part of presentations that we use to share with them some of what we have been observing about their use of language. Every year, narrative has ended up forming a significant part of that presentation because narrative seems to play a crucial role in how this group does “being a leader.” This analysis also provides a view of corporations as emergent social forms that are presupposed and entailed by telling stories that are of and about those who occupy roles within the corporate groups.

Literature

By and large, the ethnographic research that has been done in the business school classroom has tended to focus on the strategies adopted by non-native English speakers to adapt to the norms of the English-speaking classroom (Northcott 2001; Kephart 2005), Ehrensals's (2001) ethnographic deconstruction of the hidden aims of business education being a notable exception. However, for interactional sociolinguists, every encounter may be understood as a cross-cultural encounter because everyone brings unarticulated assumptions and norms of interaction about which they are largely unaware (Scollon et al. 2012). With this analysis, we aim to make students' and professors' expectations about interaction more salient. Specifically, in learning to talk like a leader, how are authority and expertise established? In raising participants' linguistic awareness of their ways of talking like leaders, it is our aim to raise awareness of talking more generally, and we hope that this in turn will be better recognized and understood as highly transferrable—and not only in those interactions recognized as cross-cultural.

In interactional sociolinguistics, there is a long tradition of research into oral narratives of personal experience, including notably the work of Schiffrin (1996), whose foundational work on narrative as self-portrait provides rich imagery of how we conceive of narrative as a means of showing ourselves: "telling a story allows us to create a 'story world' in which we can represent ourselves against a backdrop of cultural expectations about a typical course of action; our identities as social beings emerge as we construct our own individual experiences as a way to position ourselves in relation to social and cultural expectations" (Schiffrin 1996, 170). We can conceive of narrative as a way of displaying aspects of our identities that we wish to make salient—for example, our membership in an institution (Trester 2013) or, in this case, leadership identities within corporations.

Sociolinguistic researchers are interested in exploring how narrators construe themselves and their experiences, how they position (Davies and Harré 1991) themselves and other individuals in the worlds of the story (Bamberg 1997), and how they weave, mold, and fashion (Gee et al. 2001) their identities moment by moment. More recently, researchers have been considering such identities in institutional and professional contexts, for example, Holmes (2005) in the New Zealand Language in the Workplace project, Linde (1993) in the context of an insurance agency, and de Fina (2003) in the context of institutional contexts of immigration. Of particular relevance to this project, works by Vasquez (2007), Gordon (forthcoming), Schnurr and Zayts (2011), and

Dyer and Keller-Cohen (2000) look at the construction of contested identities in workplace narratives of novices, student trainees, and apprentices. In these data, participants are leaders in a room full of leaders, but they are also students, and in navigating these dual identities, small and seemingly insignificant linguistic choices can be illuminating within the world of the story and in the storytelling interaction. By tracking such choices, we analysts have insight into who the narrator is showing himself to be and how this is accomplished linguistically, and then we can explore why this might be important.

As Becker (1994, 165) has observed, “social groups seem to be bound primarily by a shared repertoire of prior texts.” Further, a major part of how this group (or indeed any group) spends time together and does “being a community” includes referencing shared texts. Thus, it is worth our time as analysts to investigate which texts are used as well as how and why. In previous work, I have explored how it is that “through negotiation of a shared orientation to these texts . . . group members discuss and develop their own beliefs, sensibilities, and styles” (Trester 2012, 255). The what, how, and why of intertextuality in this analysis are what stories leaders tell about their organizations in the classroom, which in turn illuminates understandings about the relationship between experience and academic concepts that they are learning as part of their education. I will look at the linguistic choices made in these stories then to see how identities and relationships are constructed and negotiated through narrative in the contexts of the story, the classroom, and beyond, including membership (and perhaps leadership) within corporations.

This work is certainly not the first study to explore the language of leadership. Fairhurst (2005, 2011) focuses on the discursive act of framing, and Gargiulo (2006) and Smith (2012) both use a storytelling and narrative approach; however, this the only study of which I am aware that adopts an interactional sociolinguistic and ethnographic approach to the study of narrative in the executive education context. By focusing on a specific context, and the specific feature of intertextuality, I hope to achieve a deep and situated understanding for how a small linguistic choice can facilitate the discursive introduction of corporations into the classroom and in turn add to the understanding of the negotiation of leadership. In order to situate my analysis, I will now provide a bit of information about the context of executive education.

The Context of Executive Education

Executive education constitutes a unique academic environment in that students are already experts in their respective fields. Students come from various

professional sectors and industries, including education, the military, government, nonprofits and the for-profit world and typically continue to work while they progress through the degree. Further, because students are experts in their own right (having an average of eighteen years of leadership experience each), classroom interaction can often be as much about learning from peers as it is about learning from professors (or the readings). In interviews conducted with community members as part of this ethnography, students speak to the tremendous value of drawing expertise from the lived experience of their peers. Sharing knowledge about one's industry often manifests in intertextually constructed relationships of lived experience with the theoretical topic under discussion. Thus, classroom interaction often involves funneling the research through lived experience (or vice versa; see Trester et al. 2013), and narratives are crucial in this regard.

Resonant with Urban's (2001, 55) observation that corporations are an ideal site for "the motion of culture through the world as it is replicated," in narratives we have an example of a vehicle for dissemination that is "inextricably bound up with its replication." Thus, in thinking about how it is that a narrative can claim leadership for a speaker, it should first be noted that the move to take the floor to offer such a narrative among a room of leaders is itself an identity claim, a bid to expertise and authority, saying something along the lines of "I have expertise to offer," as opposed to a discursive act like asking a question. This is particularly true in cases (as we will explore) where the narrator holds the floor for a considerable length of time.

To establish this observation and situate it in context, before I delve in with the analysis section of this article, I would like to set the stage by looking briefly at some observed discourse variation in the form of a roughly twenty-one-minute sequence occurring as part of a "tell me about yourself" activity early in the program. This getting-to-know you routine took place as part of the first day with a new professor two months into cohort three. At this point in their cohort, students are still getting to know one another, but the professor is entirely unknown to them (and them to him). In an attempt to bridge this gap, he asked them to introduce themselves with the following instruction:

Example 1

- | | | |
|---|-----------|---|
| 1 | Professor | Um, maybe tell me or each other or us something about yourself that |
| 2 | | maybe you haven't shared before, |
| 3 | | OK? |
| 4 | | Be very quick in your introductions. |
| 5 | | Let's start here with Michael. |

6 Maybe just name,
7 where you're from and maybe something that is unique about you.

Pursuant to this summons, there was tremendous variation in how members of this class chose to introduce themselves. In the end, only five of thirty-two students told narratives, and only two of those students chose to tell a story about work. While both were effective in claiming authority, one was particularly so (for many reasons and at many levels), as I will now describe.

Example 2

1 Tracy I'm Tracy, um . . .
2 I spend my day overseeing the teams that raise money for the YMCA.
3 Uh, what my classmates don't know about me is how I started in fundraising.
4 So, at the age of twenty, I opened a dance studio, a small business.
5 And when children—and a small area—
6 they were not able to afford tights and tutus.
7 And so a year after I . . . opening the business, I started a 501c3
8 to raise money to help little girls who weren't able to buy their tutus and tights.
9 And so in ten years, I sold the for-profit arm of the business,
10 and I've been in the nonprofit segment since then.
11 Professor Wow, thank you.

I argue that this narrative is effective in claiming authority for the speaker because, within the world of the story, this narrator demonstrates insight and agency and shows that she recognizes opportunities and goes for them. No doubt there were many trials and tribulations and moments of anxiety and worry in starting her own business, but she chooses to not use this evaluative information. Although talking about how scared she was might have made her more relatable as a narrator or might have lent to a more dramatic narrative, her choice to use “So, at the age of twenty, I opened a dance studio, a small business” as her orientation clause is a maximally efficient example of the linguistic portrayal of agency. Creating a business was her decision, and the result of her knowledge, skills and abilities. Then, with the additional orientation information introduced in line 6, “they were not able to afford tights and tutus,” she demonstrates how she recognized this challenge as an opportunity. Thus in line 7, she tells the group, “I started a 501c3 to raise money to help little girls who weren't able to buy their tutus and tights.” With this turning point in the narrative, Tracy shows strength of character and steadfast intention rather than presenting this as something that just happened, or as luck, accident, or the result of someone else's help.

At the level of the interaction, or within the interactional world, her use of discourse marker *and* can be argued to have a couple functions. First, by cuing

a list frame, the listener is instructed how to listen for the events that led to her now being “in the nonprofit segment since then.” These *ands* convey her intention to hold the floor at the interactional level, even as they present the occurrences in the world of the story as somehow natural, inevitable. This aligns with Schiffrin’s (1987, 128) analysis of the discourse marker as “coordinating idea units and continuing a speaker’s action.” The linguistic evidence that we have for how this quick narrative is received is demonstrated by her professor’s enthusiastic ratification of her contribution to the floor in line 11: “Wow, thank you.”

Finally, at the textual level, or in the intertextual world, this little narrative teaches her classmates how to understand her current work (as being borne out of this past experience with her passions leading her to fundraising). It will also teach them how to understand her future contributions to the classroom discussion. In other words, this narrative shows the class how to understand her relationship to her current corporation by showing how she “started in fundraising” (line 3).

For this study, I tracked the length of time each participant held the floor as part of this introduction sequence. The interaction described above was fifty-one seconds long. The mean introduction was thirty-nine seconds, and I observed that all of the speakers who took the opportunity to tell a narrative had a turn at talk that was considerably longer than the mean. The woman who took up the longest turn at talk also told a narrative, but in her case, she told a personal narrative about a karaoke adventure that took place on a cruise. The story is entertaining, but consider how different this contribution is from that of Tracy above. For example, we see that the evaluation serves to amplify the degree to which this incident was embarrassing for the narrator (that she was dressed like Madonna, that she had to get up in front of the whole ship singing “Like a Virgin,” that the performance was made into a DVD, that it is something that only two people in the world know about her).

Example 3

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 1 | Kerry | [Pointing to the person who spoke before her] Perfect segue for me because I am an aerospace engineer. |
| 2 | | So talking about the Concord and parts, |
| 3 | | um, I’m a former airforce officer and I support the defense now. |
| 4 | | And something that you don’t know about me, |
| 5 | | actually only two people in the world know about me is that |
| 6 | | last summer I went on a cruise to the Carribean. |
| 7 | | Wait, I may have told you two. |
| 8 | | So they know, but nobody else knows. |
| 9 | | So last summer I went on a cruise, and there was this karaoke thing, |
| 10 | | and I was like, “Sweet, I’m gonna do some karaoke.” |

11 So I sang at it, and I was actually auditioning to be in the show
 12 at the end of the week for the entire ship.
 13 So I won, and I was cast as Madonna,
 14 dressed up like Madonna,
 15 singing like Madonna “Like a Virgin” in front of the whole cruise ship.
 16 May or may not have this on DVD.
 17 Class [Laughter]
 18 Professor Excellent!

Within the story world, here, we have a narrator who paints a picture of circumstances being out of control, that this was something that “happened” to her, not something that she chose to do. A story like this could have been used to show characteristics such as fearlessness, recognition, and taking advantage of interesting opportunities, not caring what other people think, but here we actually have no sense of why she chose to participate in the karaoke or even that it was her choice. While she does convey evaluative stance toward karaoke in line 10 (“And I was like, ‘Sweet, I’m gonna do some karaoke’”), this turn at talk can be analyzed as a missed opportunity for presenting agency. She introduces the karaoke with an existential “there was . . . karaoke.” Here, use of a list to convey information indicating that this was an audition seems to convey lack of awareness. As narrated, these are a series of things that happened to her, not choices made.

At the interactional level, we can observe that unlike Tracy’s use of the discourse marker *and*, Kelly employs the discourse marker *so* repeatedly. Interactionally, in reinforcing the sense of “this happened and then this,” repetition of *so* seems to instruct the listener to hear in a very different way than does *and*. Given that *so* is often used in closing sequences, it seems to be signaling the end of this turn at talk even before she begins it in line 8 (“So they know, but nobody else knows”). On the receiving end of the story, the facial expressions of many of her classmates seem to reflect confusion as to why Kelly would choose to share this particular story in this interactional moment.

Finally, at the intertextual level, the only information we have here about how this text is meant to be used in looking backward to look forward is that she “may or may not have this on DVD.” The work done by this narrative at the intertextual and interactional levels does not seem to be optimal for claiming a leader identity. As analysts here we of course are not able to speculate about intentionality of the speaker but only to comment on observed linguistic choices; but as these seem to be rather unexpected narrative choices to observe being made by an aerospace engineer, perhaps we might wonder

whether they have been made strategically to counteract assumed stereotypes about being uncool, unhip, or unapproachable.

But compare these examples with that of Sam, whose use of narrative will be analyzed in greater detail in the analysis section to follow:

Example 4

1	Sam	Um, my name is Sam Thompson, you guys all know where I work and what I do.
2	Class	[Laughter]
3	Sam	I work in paper manufacturing.
4	Class	[Laughter]
5	Sam	I'm down at the mill, where are you guys at?
6	Class	[Laughter]
7	Student	That operation's legit!
8	Sam	Yeah, exactly.

In line 1, beginning his contribution to this introduction sentence, the corporation is entirely presupposed when Sam says, “you guys all know where I work and what I do,” which elicits laughter in line 2. That he interprets their laughter as playfully teasing him is evidenced in line 5, when he counters “I’m down at the mill, where are you guys at?” While many members of the class are using this opportunity to tell their classmates and their professors where it is that they work, Sam’s workplace and affect toward it is not only understood, but put into motion as a challenge for authenticity of experience. His due is given (if begrudgingly) by a classmate with “that operation’s legit,” and while this interaction might highlight the liminality of Sam’s leadership more than anything, it does provide an example for how identity may be under negotiation. These three examples have previewed some of the ways that corporations get intertextually brought into the classroom and the work that they can do for those who introduce them once inside.

Data

This project draws from a three-year ethnography with a business school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States. Data are drawn from video recordings of classroom interactions collected over the course of these three years, with focus on the third cohort, which at the time of writing had just completed their graduation ceremonies. Within this cohort, this analysis focuses on Sam and a narrative he tells that I have called “I want you to come to my house.” Table 1 presents an overview of the three narratives to be explored in the analysis section to follow. Each of these narratives occurred sponta-

Table 1. Narratives at the story world and interactional levels

Narrative	Within the Story World	Within Interactional World
Example 5: Bull in a china shop (Brice)	Strong character established, agency emphasized	Successfully holds the floor Ratified by professor Not challenged by peers
Example 6: I run into situations similar (Alan)	Character omniscient but absent; agency not emphasized	Floor being sought by professor throughout
Example 7: I want you to come to my house (Sam)	Character gives commands	Hedging, followed by audience direct address, challenged by peers, referred to jokingly by professor

neously in the classroom, and these few examples have been selected for analysis from among many that occurred over the course of hours of emergent, naturally occurring discourse because they introduce the corporation. In other words, they present the narrator at work, or interacting with the organization, stakeholders, or employees in ways that demonstrate leadership, to greater or lesser success. Crucially, they portray the speaker as a leader and not just as a manager—note that for this community, while managers are people who have responsibility for deciding who does what and how in the workplace, leaders are called on to think more abstractly—to see the bigger picture and to make decisions that display awareness of broader implications.

This section will proceed by first examining the world of the story: who are the characters within the story world (people and corporations)? How are they established? How is causality presented between events—how do they lead one to the other? Additionally, these narratives exist in a context, thus, they can also be explored interactionally by asking things like, How are they occasioned? and How are they received within the world of the classroom? Finally, moving to yet another level of abstraction, these narratives may be considered at the level of how they work intertextually, which I consider at the level of what, how and why (cf. Trester 2012). If we define intertextuality as the relationships among texts and, in this case, focus on instances where one interaction is introduced into another via textual reference in narrative, we may explore intertextuality by determining what, how, and why. First, the what of intertextuality—what the other texts in environment (the literature, their own textual contributions to the interaction, those of their peers and their professors) are—and then the how—determining how these texts work to claim leadership identities by exploring how exactly they link experience to texts like academic liter-

ature. What relationships do they construct? And, finally, the why of intertextuality: why are stories told? What do the choices within them do? What do they accomplish? Why is this significant in this context?

Example 5 comes from a lecture about organizational culture, in which the professor is talking about a kind of hiring decision that a leader might be called on to make, that of “hiring a disruptor,” someone who will challenge the culture of an organization in a time of crisis or change. Brice tells a story in which he made such a decision to hire a “bull in a china shop.” Observe that throughout the narrative, Brice clearly establishes a strong character for himself within the world of the story, claiming agency by portraying himself in a superior position of knowledge throughout—before, during, and after hiring this person.

Example 5

- 1 Brice Yeah, I actually had an experience like that.
 2 Uh, I was working in a, um, in a small start-up company
 3 where any good number wasn't just a matter of doing good,
 4 it was a matter of survival, right?
 5 If we didn't make a number, we didn't, we had no business.
 6 So, I ended up hiring a guy in sales who, who was a bull in a china shop.
 7 I mean definitely was not someone that [laughs] I would have hired under
 different circumstances,
 8 and I knew that when I hired him
 9 because, you know, at the end of the day, he got things done.
 10 Not the way that I would've wanted them to,
 11 but, it worked!
 12 In the sense that we hit our numbers,
 13 and we sort of got out of the mini crisis that we were in.
 14 But just probably just as predicted, uh, eventually
 15 and not a not not not a very long period of time,
 16 he completely self-destructed.
 17 In other words, you know people just started, you know, revolting,
 18 and which, you know, yeah, which I kind of expected,
 19 but in a time that I needed, it worked.
 20 And then, you know, ended up having to let him go.
 21 But, but, I, I, you know, I had, I had, that very experience.
 22 And we were actually able to to clean up the mess, you know, after
 he was gone,
 23 because you know I just made it look as if I had just just made a poor
 hiring decision,
 24 but I did it, I knew what I was doing when I did it [laughter].

To understand this narrative first at the level of the story world, we can look to the entry into the world of the story at very beginning of the narrative and Brice's use of the first person pronoun *I* as narrator. Brice's *I* in line 1 (“I

actually had an experience like that”) points to his identity as a student in the classroom. Then in line 2, “I was working in a . . . small start-up company” moves us immediately into the world of the story, the world of the corporation. If the narrative itself entextualizes his professional experience, this laminated “I” links his professional character within the narrative to the “I” student in the interactional world of the classroom.

- 1 Brice Yeah, I actually had an experience like that.
 Uh, I was working in a, um, in a small start-up company

Once he moves into the world of the story, Brice then moves to the first-person pronoun *we*, throughout the orientation clauses right up until the moment he presents his choice to hire. This institutional “we” appears both before (in the orientation clauses that establish the financial circumstances that the organization was in) in line 5 (“If **we** didn’t make a number, **we** didn’t, **we** had no business”) and then again afterward (in the clauses that establish the resolution, the “what happened?” again in financial terms):

- 11 but, it worked!
 12 In the sense that **we** hit our numbers,
 13 and **we** sort of got out of the mini crisis that **we** were in.

Against this institutional “we,” Brice highlights his own agency within the corporation as the person who makes hiring decisions, exclusively using “I” in clauses that present the complicating actions:

- 6 So, I ended up hiring a guy in sales who, who was a bull in a china shop.
 7 I mean definitely was not someone that [laughs] I would have hired under
 different circumstances
 8 And I knew that when I hired him

Interestingly, there is no pronoun when Brice discusses the firing of this person, where Brice’s elision of a subject pronoun discursively distances both himself and the organization from the unpleasant action of letting an employee go:

- 20 and then, you know, [Ø] ended up having to let him go.

Brice’s observed use of the personal pronoun in this narrative is a powerful semiotic tool for constructing agency, positioning him to the one event in the

story world that involved decision making that had a positive outcome: hiring the disruptor.

This is the example par excellence for a narrator's identity construction in presenting how opportunities lead from one to another within the world of the story. Positive outcomes here are the result of his decisions, his knowledge, skills, and abilities, his foresight, his strength of character, and his steadfast intention, and as narrator, Brice wastes no opportunity to remind you of this. Three times, we are reminded that he knew what he was doing all along: first, after the first complicating action, that of hiring the disruptor:

8 And I knew that when I hired him.

Next, after revealing that other employees in the organization started "re-volting":

18 and which, you know, yeah, which I kind of expected,

And, finally, in the coda, as he is telling the take-away message:

24 but I did it, I knew what I was doing when I did it.

In presenting a narrative, narrators have a choice whether to emphasize their own agency or whether important events are presented as accidents (luck, force of circumstance, or the result of other people's efforts). Here we can see that external forces are deemphasized as turning points are presented.

Looking back to the original narrative and moving now to the interactional world, we can see that Brice's alternation of the discourse markers *and* and *but* also plays a role in emphasizing the counter intuitive nature of learning and lead his listeners through the discovery of this narrative.

8 Brice **And** I knew that when I hired him
 9 because, you know, at the end of the day, he got things done.
 10 Not the way that I would've wanted them to.
 11 But, it worked!

He begins discovery sequences with an "and" speaking to his knowledge state, ending with "but" to reinforce the outcome: **And** they got out of the crisis **but** the employee self-destructed (lines 13–16). **And** he expected it, **but** it worked (lines 18 and 19). **And** he had to fire the employee eventually **but** he how has

this narrative to talk about (lines 20–21). Turning now to how the narrative is received. In line 25, we see that the professor picks right up with the discourse marker *and*, and continues the narrative, bringing it out of that story/corporate world into this class/interactional world as a model for thinking about future hiring decisions through use of the pronoun *we*.

25 Professor And we don't like to think about people like in the short term,
 26 like is that really rude to take somebody out of a job
 27 who we know is probably only going to last a year.
 28 Um, well you never really know if they will last a year, could be more,
 29 the culture could modify along the way,
 30 and the results could be so amazing
 31 that people say, "You know what? this person is great, and I didn't like her
 coming in,
 32 but, you know what, she's got some really good ideas and so we should call
 her."
 32 So it could extend,
 33 also take a look at people's resumes, if they've job-hopped quite a bit,
 34 that's a good person to think about being a disruptor.
 35 If they've had a year here, and a year there,
 36 they're used to being let go in a year [huge laugh].

In line 33, the professor ends this discursive activity by giving the directive "take a look at people's resumes," borrowing the narrative frame to cast the listeners into the role of those who will hire, entextualizing the locally available resource of Brice's narrative of personal experience. This intertext can now be used to inform the future actions of members of the class in their respective workplaces. Aligned with the reading that he had been reviewing as part of this lecture, such a decision might be the kind of decision that a leader makes "and the results could be so amazing" (line 30).

As a point of contrast, in example 6, Alan offers a narrative to support the professor's point about thinking routines in which we assume that we are right and the other person is wrong. Beginning in line 11, after being called on by the professor, he tells a quasi-habitual narrative of occasions of misunderstanding that he has witnessed in his workplace. As he stages them in this narrative, in these encounters, the interactants never question their assumptions or ask about motivations directly by saying something like the hypothetical "why did you do this?" (line 29). With this narrative, Alan seems to be wanting to depict himself as being smart because he sees things that no one else sees; however, although the story begins with an "I" in "I run into situations similar," observe that Alan does not actually place himself as a character within the world of his own story.

Example 6

- 1 Aaron She can't even get him to text him back, how's she . . .
- 2 Professor OK, I think
- 3 you bring up a number of good issues, right?
- 4 The asynchronous nature of interaction,
- 5 which reinforces our thinking routines as being right,
- 6 so the more that we are in an asynchronous situation without the
- 7 visible (.) cues from the other person,
- 8 it once again reinforces our own kind of thinking routines,
- 9 which can make it even more rigid in that way.
- 10 Alan?
- 11 Alan I was just gonna say that,
- 12 you know . . .
- 13 Professor [to another student] But that's a good example.
- 14 Alan I run into situations similar i- . . . all the time at work, you know,
- 15 people will come in my office and be like,
- 16 "Well, this manager doesn't understand,"
- 17 and
- 18 Professor Right . . .
- 19 Alan and then the other person will show up and say,
- 20 Professor Right . . .
- 21 Alan "Well, they don't get it," or whatever.
- 22 Professor Right.
- 23 Alan And sometimes there's a lot of presumption in
- 24 what you're assuming the other person knows and doesn't know
- 25 Professor Right . . .
- 26 Alan and why they behaved in the way they did
- 27 without ever really confronting the true.
- 28 Professor So . . .
- 29 Alan "Hey, why did you do this?"
- 30 Professor so what we're trying to do is understand what are these thinking routines,
- 31 and one of them is thinking you're right and the other person is wrong.

Rather than saying that his employees come to him with a problem, he states in line 15 that they come to his office, a depersonalizing choice that depicts Alan as part of his organization and represents a missed opportunity to claim a space in the narrative, as the counterpoint to these voices that he "discursively others" (Trester 2014) to show that he thinks differently from them. In this narrative, these voices are presented in lines 16 and 21, prefaced with "Well," who are making assumptions and not confronting things. While he does an effective job as narrator in discrediting these voices, however, not giving himself a character is a missed opportunity for claiming authority and expertise within this narrative. This choice is probably best understood through contrast with the strategy employed by Brice in the above example, who took every opportunity to refer to his character (in every *and*-prefaced intonation unit), referring to his thinking, even as he aligned his character with decisive actions within the world of the story, claiming his own agency and individuality as distinct from

the organization. Brice accomplished this through use of pronouns and of discourse markers, through repetition of his knowledge state (what he knew when), and also by calling attention to moments of transition within the narrative as examples of his decision-making ability.

Let's contrast this with Alan's narrative here in example 6. As may best be seen through contrast to example 5, at no moment does Alan use any of these strategies to claim authority for himself in this narrative. Agency is elided in the presentation of information: "**and** then the other person will show up"; "**And** sometimes there's a lot of presumption." We are left with an image of the world of the corporate office that is rather without Alan, for Alan does not provide any descriptive details, a linguistic choice that undermines his ability to capture the imagination and make his narrative memorable with respect to him. His lack of agency is further mirrored in his choice to frame the entire encounter as a situation that he "[runs] into" at work, almost as if this knowledge is something that he gained by accident, by chance—something that he stumbled upon. This lack of agency is paralleled in the interactional world, where, unlike the other narratives considered here in this analysis, he has to contend with interruption to the extent that he is not able to even provide a resolution or coda to the narrative. Unlike in example 5, here, when the professor takes back the floor, she moves immediately out of the narrative frame that can partially be explained by context in that the class at this point had gone quite a bit off the rails, students had already had the floor for a long time and were joking and teasing at the moment Alan raised his hand. The narrative functioned in the interaction in the sense that it helped the professor get back on track, but it did little for him as narrator, and ostensibly we see that this use of this narrative to get back to "what we're trying to do" (line 30) at the interactional level is yet another aspect of this narrative that renders it somewhat ineffectual as a claim to leadership.

Lest it be thought I am calling attention to Alan's failings as a narrator, I would hasten to point out that Alan does a great deal to bring the narrative to life. He gives vivid voice to the characters within the story world of the corporate office, using "well" and "hey" to delineate their voices and perspectives from his own as narrator—"Well, this manager doesn't understand" (line 16) and "Well, they don't get it" (line 21)—and even the voice of what was not said but should have been: "Hey, why did you do this?" (line 29). This signaling of the shift from his own voice into the voice of another, a strategy that I have explored in previous work (Trester 2009) as being that of a skilled storyteller. Further, as we saw way back in example 1, his repetition of "and"

keeps his listeners waiting for the next item in the list and teaches them how to listen to “what comes next?” in the story. However, crucial to the point about agency here, at no point does he give voice to his own character—sharing his insight within the story world. Thus, while we see the potential for constructed dialogue to bring a character to life, and while this entire narrative speaks to his insight in recognizing what is “really going on here,” within the narrative, this is not presented as Alan’s (the character in the story) moment of insight, which means that we are not given the opportunity to see Alan’s (the animator in the classroom) claim to voice this knowledge and insight within the world of the interaction.

Because Alan does not linguistically and semiotically figure himself as a leader in the office, the general hearers are given a sense that the narrative is about the office rather than his leadership within the office. Problems arise for the professor because the class is on leadership and agency not necessarily the corporation (in which agency is performed). Hence, her efforts to take back the floor—aligning this interactional setting with that narrated world or maybe even trying to repair that world in relation to this narrating/interactional world. Because she cannot intervene and do the narration on behalf of Alan she seems to thus only be left with the option of taking the floor from him and/or quickly uniting the narrated text with the interactional text (and the theme of leadership).

Thus, perhaps the most striking feature of this narrative at the level of the interactional encounter is the degree to which the professor seems to be trying to get the floor back from Alan. She uses “right” throughout the narrative as a back channel and even interrupts his narrative in line 13 with a response to an earlier contribution from a different student in the interaction (“But that’s a good example”). Note how she expertly gets this comment in once a bid to the floor has been successfully accomplished by Alan so that the other student will not take the floor back; but observe that in so doing, she is also not granting the floor easily to Alan either, and she then takes it back immediately after the complicating actions of the narrative have been given, ultimately taking back the floor before he is able to offer any resolution or coda. Unlike the previous example, in which the professor joined the narrative frame providing his own examples of future possible resolutions and codas, we see here how the professor prefaces her turn with “so” indicating a shift in frame and an abrupt end to the narrative.

Unlike what was seen in example 5 and what we will see in example 7, example 6 does not get entextualized, much less connected with other texts for

their future use. To illuminate this point, let's now look at example 7, which also provides an example of a quite different reception at the interactional level.

This interaction took place during a lecture on leadership where the professor was sharing his own research on multicommuting. A student had confessed to struggling with the sheer quantity of relationships she must maintain in the course of doing business and she had asked her classmates for advice. After one or two other contributions, Sam (who works in a paper mill as we saw earlier) offers the following story of a hypothetical narrative in which he demonstrates how he overcomes the challenge of inauthenticity: he invites his clients over to his house.

Example 7

- 1 Sam Um, no, I just thought I'd share something that I've found to be
 2 successful in my line of work, and you guys can take away with this
 3 and
 4 maybe it's completely unorthodox and probably crazy?
 5 But,
 6 you know, you talk about "hey.
 7 I'm gonna have a client and I'm gonna go out to lunch or breakfast
 or whatever."
 8 You're really not gonna have that engaging conversation or that
 9 moment where you guys really do all the relationship?
 10 So what I've done,
 11 and this might sound crazy to you guys,
 12 but I just have,
 13 uh, people come over to my house,
 14 you know, and these are people I do work with, but they're very important
 and, you know,
 15 I might need you and I might need a favor from you, and I realize that,
 16 and so I want you to come to my house,
 17 spend some time with me,
 18 spend some time with my family, my wife, and my dog,
 19 and your—my relationship with those people
 20 has—I mean it's been tremendously incredible for our triple-bottom
 line as a company.
 21 I mean, these are people who, you know, we can call about our talks, you
 know,
 22 [claps hands]
 23 who can, you know, who can help me get into markets that we could never
 get into before.
 24 And part of the reason is because, hey, you know, you . . .
 25 was throwing a frisbee to my dog and, you know,
 26 Professor [nodding] He met your dog.
 27 Sam You know, it's just something I've found to be incredibly beneficial and, um,
 28 I don't know if you guys can try it, maybe try it.

This narrative is quite striking for the degree of hedging offered by the speaker in prefacing his turn at talk. While Alan in the previous example did hedge a bit, starting with "just" in "I was just gonna say" (line 11), here we have not

only a handful of “justs” but several lines of hedging from Sam in introducing this (“Um, no, I just thought,” “maybe it’s completely unorthodox and probably crazy”) as well as several instances of “you know,” a discourse marker that has been analyzed as having a heavy orientation to participation frameworks (Schiffrin 1987). This hedging may point to this speaker’s awareness of the weightiness of the interactional move he is about to introduce within the classroom using this narrative. Unlike the previous two narratives, which were recorded somewhat later in the course of the degree, when the cohort had gotten quite used to one another, this narrative was issued in the early months of this cohort’s time together and is in fact the first recorded narrative move that we observed as ethnographers. Its form may account for the high degree of hedging but also quite likely the function that this narrative seems to fill, that of telling his classmates what to do.

As with example 6, the narrative itself is quite minimal, with really only three complicating actions given in lines 16–18: “and so I want you to come to my house, spend time with me, spend some time with my family, my wife, and my dog.” This narrative also feels quasi-habitual; it is presented as a recurring action in line 13 with “people come over to my house,” in contrast to the specificity of example 5, in which the narrator talked about one specific employee. However, this narrator does move to specificity in a strategy that is intertwined with commands that serve to claim agency both within the story world and at the interactional world. Within the world of the story, the commands serve as transition points between “advice” and the more depicted events of bring at his house.

The examples below illustrate the series of commands through which “you” and “I” (his clients and him) come into the story world. In both lines 14–16 and lines 21–23, we see a shift from general **they** to specific “you” or “me” or “we” (the corporation):

- | | | |
|----|-----|---|
| 14 | Sam | you know, and these are people I <u>do</u> work with, but they’re very important and, you know, |
| 15 | | I <u>might</u> need you and I might need a <u>favor</u> from you and I realize that |
| 16 | | and so I want you to <u>come</u> to my house |
| | | |
| 21 | Sam | I mean, these are people who, you know, we can call about our talks, you know, |
| 22 | | [claps hands] |
| 23 | | who can, you know, who can help me get into markets that we could never get into before. |

This narrator places himself as a character within the world of his story here, using these observations in the guise of his character to claim expertise and knowledge. While none of the characters are given dialogue, the collection of

characters “you, me, my wife, and my dog” are shown as active, they are throwing a Frisbee and the protagonist is giving the commands “come over to my house” and “spend time with my family.” Interestingly, this detail of the dog and the Frisbee is again given by the narrator in line 25, the resolution section of the narrative, repeated by the professor in line 26, and entextualized as it referred to later in the course of this lecture as an example of a kind of engaged leadership style.

The narrator chooses to end the narrative with another command—this time in a coda in line 28 that works as advice for his classmates, suggesting that they follow this strategy themselves: “I don’t know if you guys can try it, maybe try it.” Like example 5, this minimal narrative is entextualized as an important business practice; however, unlike example 5, this rather elaborated resolution that takes place in lines 19–27 is issued by the narrator, that is, by a student instead of a professor.

Evidence for a challenging of this positioning may be found at the interactional level as this interaction continues in lines 29–32:

Example 7 (continued)

29	Kim	It doesn’t work in every industry,
30		but . . .
31	Student	What type of industry are you talking about?
32	Group	[laughter]
33	Sam	We have suppliers right?
34	Student	What kind of suppliers [unintelligible]?
35	Group	[laughter]
36	Sam	If you need paper, we make paper, right?
37		So we, we have . . .
38	Group	[everyone talking all at once]
39	Sam	I mean, it could work in any industry, in my opinion,
40		whether it’s your boss
41		or whether it’s . . .
42	Group	[everyone talking all at once]
43	Sam	create relationships your relationship with your dog,
44		having people over . . .
45		[Kim gives Sam a high five]
46	Professor	We’ve . . .
47		[talking stops and everyone turns back to face the professor]

Kim’s response “it doesn’t work in every industry,” although playfully delivered, and given the “but” that follows, seems to have been designed as an admission of recognition of value (if begrudging), but it serves as a direct challenge to Sam’s claim. This challenge is then built upon by the student in line 31 who playfully teases, “What type of industry are you talking about?” and in line

34 with the playful implication, “What kind of suppliers . . . ?” The interaction starts to go off the rails at this point, and the professor has to redirect, although interestingly refers playfully back to this example later in the lecture:

Example 7 (continued)

- | | | |
|----|-----------|---|
| 52 | Professor | And the most skillful manager |
| 53 | | probably |
| 54 | | is able to do both |
| 55 | | and, and “come over to the house, and . . . and let’s throw the frisbee and then tomorrow |
| 56 | | I’m the super problem solver. |
| 57 | | I’m myself. you can see me at a distance” |
| 58 | | You can see [unintelligible] |
| 59 | Group | [unintelligible] |
| 60 | Professor | I’m selling paper to the world. |
| 61 | Sam | If it works, what can I say, right? |
| 62 | Group | [laughter] |
| 63 | Professor | Let’s take our break here. |
| 64 | | Let’s take our break here. |

The professor’s playful reference to Sam here (and the resultant laughter of the members of the class) at the image of “selling paper to the world” serves as a bit of playful teasing to Sam here. It would seem to be a signal that there has been a bit of a transgression on the part of Sam, but what exactly? Within the professor’s visual here, Sam could be described as calling undue attention to himself. But can we point to what in the previous discourse this might be playfully referencing? I argue that the intertextual transgression (entextualizing his story and offering it as advice to his peers) is a discursive parallel to other aspects of Sam’s leadership claims that seem to “cross boundaries,” as I will now discuss.

Discussion

In the earliest recordings that we have of this group from the ethnography (we were not able to record during the first month of their cohort meetings, because we had not yet received permission forms from all participants), Sam’s contribution to the interaction is a celebration of what makes him successful—his energy level and ability to get things done.

Example 7 (continued)

- | | | |
|---|-----------|--|
| 1 | Sam | Yeah, um, just to kind of add on that, and maybe from a different perspective, is, |
| 2 | | I looked at physical ability, at least with myself, as your energy level, |
| 3 | | both in a professional level, and also with my wife at home. |
| 4 | Professor | Oh, interesting. |
| 5 | Sam | And I know that, people at work, they, they know that |
| 6 | | “Hey, he can get it done, he’ll go travel here, go there, wherever.” |

- 7 It's gonna get done, taken care of.
 8 And, you know, if I don't have to sleep, I don't have to sleep, I'll take care of it.
 9 And, I know one of the things my wife loves about me is like, "Hey, let's go."
 10 You've got an idea? Let's do it. Let's make it happen, let's go.
 11 You know, there's no No. We can, we can do it.
 12 So, I do put some weight to that physical ability but only in the level of,
 13 you're associating it to energy.
 14 You know, it doesn't matter how much, how many hours are in a day, you can
 15 still, you can still do this, so.
 16 Professor You don't need sleep, is that what you're saying? [Class laughs.] So, . . .

Sam presents an active, agentive self, in relation to the corporation or the family, which he wastes no opportunity to entextualize as he ends here with an imperative "it doesn't matter how much, how many hours are in a day, you can still, you can still do this" (lines 14–15). Various linguistic choices contribute to these positions of authority and are used to establish the agency of the protagonist (and how) including pronouns, constructed dialogue, speech acts such as commands, and constructing causality, and in this case entextualization, the "process of rendering a given instance of discourse as text, detachable from its local context" (Silverstein and Urban 1996, 21). These features of language in turn serve to construct and convey norms, values, and identities, which surround a concept of leadership.

Vasquez (2007) conducts structural and functional analysis of reflective and relational narratives—in this context, first person narratives of personal experience do both kinds of work (reflective and relational) because they are portraying the character at work, but they also occur within the classroom encounter, with professors and fellow students as audience, which shapes their reception and as we saw, shapes the delivery as well. At the interactional level, we observed some of the ways in which these narratives work to position the speaker within the classroom and then how these positions may be ratified or challenged by professors or peers. Our last example here (example 7) is the one that is (if playfully) most challenged by peers in this data set, and although we have considered some of the reasons why thus far, we can now turn to the intertextual level for yet another explanation.

Considered at the intertextual level, these narratives may be understood as vehicles for the intertextual linking of experience to research and the academic literature, which is another way in which the negotiation of norms, values, and identities may be accomplished. Example 5 was offered as an instantiation of hiring a disruptor, and Alan's narrative in example 6 seems to be intended as a

direct instantiation of the professor's claim that we tend to engage in thinking routines that assume we are right and the other person is wrong. Thus each of these narratives is offered in support of the professor's point as an exemplification of the analytical claim being explored through engagement with literature; however, the third narrative in example 7 is offered as a challenge to the professor's claim that we are called to be increasingly inauthentic in the workplace because of multicomputing.

Another thing of note is that while the first two narratives are largely in past tense, example 7 is in the present and future tenses. As we have explored in previous research (Trester et al. 2013), the directionality of the intertextual relationship between lived experience and literature is often reversed for the professor and the student. While the student uses past personal experience to enhance his understanding of the literature topic under discussion, the professor often wants the students to use the literature (and ensuing class discussion) to inform future actions. Here too is a way that Sam departs from the observed norms of talk observed among his classmates. He is intertextually looking forward rather than looking back.

Drawing from scholarship of the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1975/1981, 1984, 1986) on dialogism, understood as intertextuality in Kristeva's (1967/1980) account of his work, and through the work of linguists Barbara Johnstone (2002) and Norman Fairclough (1992), we understand that intertextuality is a process of referring to, drawing upon, or reshaping earlier texts within the context of a later one. Thus, when a student shares a narrative of personal experience, this experience is entextualized (cf. Bauman and Briggs 1990), but for this group, it is the how of intertextuality, namely, how intertextual relationships are established that we come to better understand what intertextuality means and what it does for this group. Thus, in recounting example 7, Sam not only disrupts the norm intertextually with the what he is talking about (he is offering evidence that contradicts the professor's point), he is also emulating the intertextuality directionality most frequently adopted by his professors—sharing an example that points to the future rather than the past. This point comes into clarity best perhaps at the end of the narrative when he concludes by addressing them directly, as would a professor.

Considering the narratives at the intertextual level points to different possible interactional aims, different purposes for the way narratives may be used in the endeavor of presenting expertise and claims to authority, which also can be explored in terms of how they are received. We saw how the first one, although it could be characterized as “dripping with corporate masculinity” for

its omniscience, seemed to be thoroughly ratified (endorsed) by the professor to such an extent that he jumped into the story world along with the narrator. The second was largely ignored, while the third is playfully challenged by the students and then jokingly referred to by the professor later in the lecture as a new intertextual resource available for humor.

Adopting an interactional sociolinguistic approach here, I have tracked the linguistic choices that contribute to positions within narratives that construct and convey norms, values, and identities surrounding leadership within the corporation. I have come to have particular focus on the intertextual linking of experience to academic literature in this process. This analysis has also provided a view of corporations as emergent social forms that are presupposed and entailed by telling stories that are of and about those who occupy roles within the corporate groups. All three narratives have exemplified instances in which students were able to entextualize their leadership experience from within the corporation and bring it into the classroom in alignment (or disalignment) with the point of the professor. Among the goals of our study have been to identify the mechanics of these “ways of talking” and to provide a means for accessing and articulating awareness of how they are learned (which, like most norms, tend to be taught and learned implicitly), with particular focus on how these may be transported to other contexts of language use. Interactional sociolinguistics has provided an approach for illuminating one of the specific mechanisms by which such ways of talking, get used to claim agency, in this case, entextualizing like a leader, which has been learned alongside (and by way of) the stated academic goals of the course. By focusing on one specific context, a specific unit and a specific linguistic feature within that unit (entextualization in narrative), I hope to have achieved a situated understanding for how and why the discursive introduction of corporations into the classroom can accomplish something for the narrator.

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