Identity, small stories and interpretative repertoires in research interviews. An account of market researchers' discursive positioning strategies

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Abstract

My main purpose in this paper is to illustrate how participants in a research interview occasioned conversation make use of two important discursive devices, namely: small stories and interpretative repertoires for positioning during interaction in order to foster certain situated identity claims. The premises I work with in this paper are that identity is a practiced situated accomplishment, that small stories are devices employed frequently for identity work that are no less important than extended autobiographical expositions, and that interpretative repertoires are practiced ways of speaking that allow participants to manage their positions in certain ways. Moreover, I will try to show that positioning by means of small stories and interpretative repertoires should be understood in direct relation with the identities and other membership categories made relevant by the interviewer. When participants' positions are conflicting or miss-aligned, a more pronounced identity work is employed on the part of the interviewee, sustained by certain repertoires' management strategies: alternation, nuancing, or rejecting certain repertoires[2].

Keywords

Small story, interpretative repertoires, identity, research interview

Introduction

Beyond the institutionalized settings of story creation and storytelling in literature and other various media, where stories are at their home as artistic accomplishments, stories and storytelling are also to be found in other less artistical areas of our lives, namely in interviews, therapies and even everyday talk. Establishing temporal and spatial relations between events, stories accomplish an important role in structuring and ordering them in meaningful ways (Bamberg, 2012). However, stories do so much more: they are also scenes where special characters are cast, positioned and imbued with certain features, and also important sites for identity construction. A particular sort of identity that might be (and usually is) displayed in this configuration is the narrator's. As an important analytic resource, this type of identity display and identity work, in and through stories, is of most special interest for identity analysts from various fields of social sciences, especially in the last decades marked by the 'narrative turn'.

How is identity displayed in everyday talk, through stories in particular? I will start from a somewhat oversimplified but analytic approach that I intend to use. The identity that the narrator strives to achieve as relevant in particular conversational storytelling settings, might be accomplished in a number of non-exclusive ways:

a) by means of a self-reflexive engagement, where the storyteller is the main protagonist, and the story fulfills an illustrative/argumentative function for self-presentation;

b) by means of a story where, even if the narrator is the main protagonist, the account is not meant to explicitly expose an identity on the part of the narrator, but a series of events. In other words, the storyteller does not assume publicly an intention to speak about who he/she is;

c) by means of a story where the teller is not the protagonist. The story is about someone else, some other events, persons, places etc.

For cases b) and c), analyzing identity presentation is not a straightforward task, being embedded in the structure of conversation and achieved by means of interactional positioning before, during, and after the story, in the particular conversational settings (Bamberg, 2011b). However, analyzing storytelling activity that is not centered explicitly on the narrator's own self as the subject has its own benefits (see Bamberg, 2011a). A story-like discourse that is not deliberately constructed to become a coherent and consistent story about self (as is the case of auto-biographical expositions), may provide a more natural and insightful approach for analyzing identity. Thus, although the a) type approach had a privileged analytic status, researchers such as Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) aim to show that small stories that are not necessarily self-centered and highly elaborated, have at least the same relevance for identity analysis as those conceived as answers to 'big' 'who-am-I?' type of questions.

The analysis that I put forward in this paper will rely on Bamberg's approach to identity navigation by means of positioning in story and storytelling activity, considering stories as being relevant for identity dynamics, be it big or small, self centered or as second or third person expositions. Therefore, I will illustrate certain types of identity

navigation (Bamberg, 2011a; 2011b; 2012a; 2012b) and identity work (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996) done by means of storytelling by market researchers who are the subjects of a sociological interview conducted by academics. I will hold that in an interview situation, one can employ multiple instances of positioning strategies, mobilizing various and alternative interpretative repertoires, that can be understood only: from a micro analytic and conversational perspective; analyzing what stories do regarding identity in certain conversational settings; looking into the master-narratives that the storyteller indexes as relevant repertoires by means of which stories unfold. In particular, I will show that the intensity and navigation amplitude of identity work depend on the particular way in which the interviewer prompts for answers and makes relevant certain membership categories and dichotomies, and eventually on the degree of alignment/miss-alignment between participants' positions.

'Who-am-I?' question and the narrative imperialism

The relevance of narratives for identity (personal or collective) has been stated and studied in numerous forms and with various implications. Viewing story-telling as an important feature of 'phylogenesis of language, human social formations and the historically emerging vision of individuality and the modern person' (Bamberg, 2012a) is one way of agreeing that historically, language, narratives and different versions of identity construction (personal or collective) are very close related. In fact, glimpsing into somewhat more recent debates, once the narrative approach begins to penetrate more and more as a method and also as an ontological awareness (also known as the *narrative turn*), various advances from different fields (narratology, psychology, psychotherapy, sociology) begin to overstate, in some degree, the impact of stories on our life.

The overlap between life, self and narratives was taken rather far by statements such as those of Sacks who argued that 'narrative is us, our identities' (1987) or Bruner, who claimed that 'self is a perpetually written story' (1987: p.15). Adding the even more pronounced normative stances of MacIntyre, according to which 'when someone complains - as do some of those who attempt or commit suicide - that his or her life is meaningless, he or she is often and perhaps characteristically complaining that the narratives of their life become unintelligible to them' (cited by Sartwell, 2000: p.11) and Schechtmans suggesting that 'a person creates his identity [only] by forming an autobiographical narrative' (cited by Strawson, 2004: p.435), it is no wonder that such voices had become regarded as bearers of some kind of 'narrative imperialism' (Phelan, 2005).

This kind of approaches triggered passionate reactions, sometimes made in personal tone, against narrativity as an all-encompassing methodological, ontological and ethical claim toward understanding human life, such as the articles of Strawson (2004) and Sartwell (2000). For instance Sartwell (2000) adopts a very distinctive critical existentialist position toward the claims of linguists philosophers and narratology saying that this is an era and an academy obsessed with language where claims such as 'the

word were a story', 'we were words' and 'we would be the narrators of our worlds' are just a 'sick fantasy, a megalomaniac delusion' (Sartwell, 2000: p.4).

Strawson (2004) is also adopting a critical attitude, although not on existentialist grounds, as he focuses on the descriptive/empirical and ethical/normative claims of the narrative approach. Distinguishing between episodic and diachronic self experiences, he arguments that while diachronics (people who are naturally diachronic) have a narrative approach to experience, the episodics (people who are naturally episodic) just don't fall into 'story mode', being located by definition in a more perpetual present. Strawson (2004) placed himself in the episodic category, building his argument on his personal experience of not having any special interest (narrative) for his past or future.

Although Strawson's article was saluted by Phelan (2005) as being an important critique against narrativity, Eakin (2006) defends the position of narrative approach, and himself (being placed in the narrative imperialist camp). Regarding the ethical/normative issue, Eakin rightfully considers that Strawson misplaces his worries because the ethical problems related to narrativity stand not so much in an academic fashion of approaching life/identity as a narrative, but at the level of 'deep-seated social conventions that govern narrative self-presentation in everyday life' (Eakin, 2006: p.182). Also one important addition made by Eakin is that Strawson seems to confound his own belief that he has discontinuous identity with the (im)possibility to narrate as a resource available to him as to anyone. Whether someone believes that he/she has or not a life story, whether he/she is interested or not in his/her past or future and in storytelling, it does not mean that he/she has no story, that he/she is unable to tell it in certain circumstances, and that the others do not see it as such. According to Eakin, just by admitting that narrative thesis do not correspond to his experience of self, Strawson is actually presenting a story about himself.

In fact, a fundamental issue raised against the 'narrative imperialism', as has been briefly shown, seems to reside in the rebuttal of defining one's whole person(ality), experience, identity, life, in narrative terms. The core issue here is that such an identification has a strong existentialist and ethical stake: if someone's identity and life is the same thing as a narrated self and a narrated life, this may imply a normative pressure toward narratability, creating a serious pressure toward certain standards in storytelling for example, and it may also involve the worrying image of craftable, (solely) by means of narration, identities, personalities or memories. Indeed, if we regard identity as a fundamental psychological entity that constantly and systematically influences our behaviors, and this concept of identity can be studied and ultimately altered by means of big stories about oneself as a responses to big 'who-am-I?' questions, then this could become troubling from an existentialist and ethical perspective. However, from the perspective of a social analyst of identity, this may very well be the result of a misplaced focal point, as I will try to show further.

Situated identity as a practical accomplishment

The problem highlighted above might very well be somewhat false or at least exaggerated in its implications if we approach the concept of identity from a different angle. One of the assumptions of the debate on the importance of storytelling for identity, is the reliance on the assumption of an 'essential' identity construction by means of big-life-stories as 'definitive' answers given to 'who-am-I?' questions. The manner in which this story-like answer is given assumes a process of profound existential reflection on self. However, such a 'methodology' leaves out as taken for granted some otherwise important questions that may arise from a rigorous analytical and empirical stand point: Is there any 'essential identity' to reflect upon?; Do we have the tools needed to really access such an inner identity construction? Are story-like answers given to self-reflective 'who-am-I?' questions definitive?; Is there one, multiple, or countless identities that one can invoke?

The etnomethodological inspired approaches to identity construction in discursive settings, such as conversational analysis (CA) and discursive psychology (DP), build their argumentation on some of the above mentioned questions (and more). DP is openly critical of a number of established concepts in psychology and social psychology which imply the existence of a cognitive, distinct and stable internal universe, such as attitude, representation, attribution (Potter, 2003: p.784, Billig, 1987). More precisely, the critique is aimed at seeing discourse as an 'expression' of intentions, thoughts and cognitive structures (Edwards and Potter, 2005: p.242). Coulter for example denounces in a very unforgiving tone the telementational myth that conceives language as a system for the conveyance of thoughts (2005: p.80). Edwards labels critically as 'idealizations', Turner`s (1987) 'three hierarchically nested "levels" of the self concept': superordinate level (e.g. human being), intermediate level (e.g. female) and subordinate level (one's personality).

Having positioned themselves as anti-cognitivists and anti-essentialist regarding the construction of identity, DP and CA analysts changed also the scientific inquiries regarding identity. According to them, the identity issue is more a matter whether, when and how identities are used, rather than what identities are (Widdicombe, 1998: p.195). Thereby, for McKinlay and Dunnett 'the distinction between the experimentalist and the discourse or conversation analyst in terms of the reality of identity can now be seen to boil down to a distinction between "real" and "taken, by participants, to be real"' (1998: p.49).

Regarding the place of narratives, an extended work that focuses on the way in which stories might constitute significant resources for situated identity navigation, work and practical accomplishment, is Michal Bamberg's 'narrative practice' approach. Although he advances a somewhat more 'moderate' approach to identity than the orthodox CA, much of Bamberg's work draws on the ethnomethodological orientation and its crystallization in CA and DP. Concerning the relation between identity and narratives, he contrasts the small story approach or narrative practice approach to the 'essentialists tendencies' and 'big story' approaches in narrative inquiry that triggered a

serious set of critiques (see Schachter (2011) and Freeman (2011)) and eventually a debate around the relevance of small stories.

Next I will summarize some of the principles that underlie Bamberg's position, that include some of the arguments made in the above mentioned debate, as they also signal my own theoretical alignment in this study:

- Situational and functional perspective on the construction and display of identities, as positioning through storytelling practices (Bamberg, 2012b);
- Identity as a practiced activity: 'identity and sense of self are lumped together as made of actions in our daily practices and routines that contribute to becoming answers to the who-am-I questions' (Bamberg, 2012b: p.205);
- The relevance of small story for identity analysis. For Bamberg (2011b), there is no reason to disregard small stories in everyday talk as being less relevant to understanding identity than big stories that rely solely on 'I' accounts. In fact, big stories resulting from introspection, although important accounts, they are also situated, as they are mostly discursive responses given in various settings such as: therapy, religious confessions, interviews (job, sociological, journalistic);

In sum, the premises that underlie and grant me a methodological starting point are: a concept of identity as a situated practical and practiced accomplishment (1) by means of various narrating forms (small and big stories) and narrating related activities (discursive positioning before and after the actual story) (2) each fulfilling certain functions in the particular interactive site of a sociological interview (3). Next I will point out some of the main conceptual tools of CA and DP that are frequently employed in identity analysis, drawing afterwards the conceptual schemata by means of which I intend to make my own analysis.

Conceptual tools for analyzing identity accomplishment in interview occasioned conversation

Many of the conceptual tools employed in conversational analysis rely on Harvey Sacks' recommendations and empirical work on conversation. A crucial conceptual tool is that of 'membership categorization' (Sacks 1992), as a device employed by participants in order to signal the situated relevant categories and to 'sort' and order various 'objects' and 'persons' attributed with certain sets of category-bound features. In this regard, Antaki and Widdicombe sum up a number of premises and relevant research conceptual tools that, together, are systematically employed in CA analysis of identity: *categories and associated characteristics or features* (in conversation people cast themselves and others in categories that have certain category-bound features); categories casting is *indexical and occasioned* (' any utterances comes up indexically, in a here and now and is to be understood so'); *making relevant and orienting to* ('the analysts should pay attention to those categories that people make relevant, and orient to as significant features of their identity work'); *procedural consequentiality* ('researchers should take identites for analysis only in as much they have some visible effects on how the conversation pans

out'); *conversational structures* ('talk is organized along powerfull structural regularities, that do"things" for participants') (1998: pp.3-6).

Approaching the narrative identity issue also from a "situated" discursive perspective, Depperman (2012), argues that CA concepts such as "membership categorization" does not exhaust all the conceptual devices that may adress the issue of identity. As such, narratives and practices of positioning 'can index more complex identites than categorization and action description' (Depperman, 2012: p.8). The central concept that Depperman works to bring in front is that of positioning. This concept of positioning has certain analytic advantages: 'captures how identities are deployed in situated narrative interaction'; is 'sensitive to structural proprietes of narratives; to their situated construction in the context of practical action; and to the emergent recipient-design co-construction of narratives in interaction' (Depperman, 2012: p.2).

The concept of positioning is not new and has been developed in relation with a whole range of conceptual apparatuses. Relating it to the broader concept of 'frames', Goffman (1981) introduced the concept of 'positioning' in conversation, and later the concept of 'footing' as alignment. The concepts of 'footing' and 'positioning' have also been analytically approached from a more strict CA perspective by Ribeiro (1989). Building also on Goffman's earlier work, but also on the work of A. Cicourel and H. Sacks, Hadden and Lester (1978) are pointing toward the process of self-positioning (identifying process) by means of 'locating', 'retrospecting ' and 'prospecting' strategies.

However, according to Depperman, 'Bamberg was "the first to propose a notion of positioning designed to capture how identity work may specifically be carried out by narration"' (2012: p.5). Bamberg's work on positioning, narratives and the development of positioning analysis rests on the following assumptions: 'narratives are situated actions', 'co-constructed in interactive settings', having the function to 'reveal how what is said ought to be understood'; 'positioning analysis is an empirical grounded analysis of how subjects construct themselves by analyzing the positions that are actively and agentively taken in their narratives vis-a-vis normative discourses' (Bamberg, 2004: p.153).

Positioning analysis, as a methodological and analytical framework is to be employed on three levels (Bamberg, 2003, Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008):
- Level 1: how characters are designed and positioned within the story;
- Level 2: how the teller positions himself within the interactive situation for getting the story accomplished;
- Level 3: how the narrator positions himself with regard to dominant discourses/master narratives

The acknowledgement of multiple levels of positioning is an important analytical step for understanding the complex identity work and of the variety and amplitude of the resources invested in this process. Zimmerman (1998: p.90) pointed as well toward a somewhat similar distinction speaking about three types of identities managed in conversation: discursive identities (speaker, storyteller, questioner, answerer), situated identities (call taker, citizen complainant, interviewer, interviewee) and transportable identities – as latent identities that travel with individuals (young person, male, mother).

However, positioning levels and identities are different levels that support each other for the accomplishment of certain identitary work. For instance, positioning as storyteller (discursive identity; level 2 positioning) may also assist or be supported by the orientation to certain transportable identities such as for instance grandmother (level 3 positioning) and/or situated identities such as patients recalling life stories in a therapeutic setting.

As has been already shown, positioning analysis is directed toward a dynamic and co-constructed, contextualized view of identity. According to Bamberg (2011a), the identity navigation as positioning dynamic may unfold within three axes: the first axis is defined by the diachronic 'dilemma' of 'who-I-was' and 'who-I-am' (navigation between sameness and change across time); a second axis assumes an identitary positioning in regard to others, as a synchronic navigation (sameness-difference to others dilemma); the third axis is one of assumed and exposed agentivity, of a navigation triggered by the question of 'who is in control?' (the management of 'me' as an agent vs. me as undergoer as 'subject' of exterior forces). The conception of the last axis (agentivity), is employed by Bamberg in order to relate small stories to identity. Small stories are the conceptual cornerstone for Bamberg's identity analysis, being regarded as narrative devices that allow us to go beyond the auto-biographical accounts. In opposition to big-autobiographical stories, small stories are a much more versatile tool for analyzing identity work. Such as small stories are regarded as: 'an umbrella term that captures a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as telling of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to previous telling, deferrals of telling, and refusals to tell'…. They can be 'about small incidents that may or (may not) have actually happened, mentioned to back up or elaborate on an argumentative point occurring in an ongoing conversation. Small stories can even be about – colloquially speaking – "nothing"' (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: p.5). By means of small stories 'referential worlds' are constructed that 'points to how the teller "wants to be understood", or more appropriately, to how tellers index a sense of self' (Bamberg 2011a, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008). The focus on small stories 'allows for the study of how people as agentive actors position themselves—and in doing so become positioned' (Bamberg, 2011a: p.13). Agentivity is opposed to the view that participants in a conversational setting just pick up identites from a shelf of master narratives and display them. In conversational settings, people navigate, negociate and co-construct identity while the sense of sameness rely much upon practicing by means of narratives in everyday life (see Bamberg, 2011a).

Thus, the underlying tensions between identity as a contextually dependant and constantly changing construct, and identity as a construct with a certain constancy, is solved by viewing identity work as relying on everyday discursive practices by means of small stories and conceiving interpretative repertoires as (flexible) resources.

As mentioned, interpretative repertoires are also referred to as an important discursive resource for identity management as they bring forth a trans-situational 'historical' dimension (being learned and practiced). Interpretative repertoires represent a conceptual pillar for critical DP (Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Potter, 1988), inspired

by the article of Mulkay and Gilbert (1984) that also marks a departure from the orthodox conversational analysis in that it indexes discursive content and recursivity as significant (see also Wetherell's (1998) critical approach to Shegloff's methodology as being too restrictive). As such, interpretative repertoires are: 'recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: p.149); 'building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive procesess and other phenomena' and also a 'restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion' (Wetherell and Potter, 1988: p.172).

The important nuance that I would like to highlight so far is that interpretative repertoires as 'ways of speaking' in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion are discursive resources that are learned and practiced (recurrently used) and agentively employed in identity management. Thus interpretative repertoires may contribute significantly to identity work by signaling the transportable identities and positions (relevant for level 3 analysis) that the participants make relevant, orient to, and want to be regarded as, in a particular conversation setting.

Looking micro-analytically at the way people dynamically position themselves in conversations, telling small or big stories about self or others, we can depict the resources they use, the transportable identities they make relevant and want to be taken for, but more importantly, also their ingeniousness (Toth, Humă and Rughiniş, 2014)) as agents in employing different discursive strategies. Relying on the conceptual tool-frame that I have set so far, I will show an empirical illustration of the identity work and strategies employed by participants in a conversational situation occasioned by a sociological interview.

The sociological research interview as a conversational setting

The discussion schematized so far about identities and narration was oriented mostly toward the space of everyday conversation as its empirical grounding. However, the same discussion also touches critically on the most widely used technique in social sciences (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004), that relies on conversation for gathering data, namely the research interview. Thus CA and DP recommend not only to acknowledge the fact that the interview is an interaction and a social setting that assumes a continuous social construction of meaning by its participants, but also that the 'sanitation' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004) processes of controlling the flow of information (from recipients to researchers) is erroneous in that it relies on rather false or unwarranted assumptions of inner mental universes that are to be grasped. Identifying three analytical approaches to interview, Alvesson shows critically that whereas the *neo-positivist/naturalist* perspective tries to 'neutralize' the impact of exterior contingencies on information flow by standardization (of questions, interviewer behavior, physical settings) and the *phenomenological/interpretivist* perspective tries to elicit authentic, real information about the inner life of individuals by creating a more natural interview setting, the ethnometologichal/localist approach sets as object of study not the mental state of the individual, but the local, situated and interactional construction of reality (2003). Such as

from a conversational and discursive analytic perspective, according to Baker (2004), the interview is to be understood as an interactional event where questions are not neutral but a central part of data and responses are to be treated more as accounts than responses.

Moreover, Holstein and Gubrium (2004) argue that interviewing has become a wide social practice that is no less authentic than a natural occurring conversation. The interview is but a special form of conversation, as long as in any conversation a stage is set and characters are casted. However, the differences between spontaneous conversations and interview settings are that in the interview situation, the interviewer sets the stage (at least initially); the interview situation may more concertedly incite production of meanings that address research related issues; the research interviews are a more asymmetrical organization of talk (Baker, 2044: p.168).

Another important feature of the interview as a special conversational arena is that mostly or mainly interview elicited answers may be regarded analytically as narratives. Mishler (1986) argues that answers given to interview questioning mostly display the feature of narratives, and that the lack of story recording and analysis is due to standard procedures for conducting, describing and analyzing interviews.

I will start my empirical illustration viewing interview as a special kind of conversational arena (but a conversational arena nonetheless); where the interviewer sets the stage, characters and other relevant membership categories; where there is concertedly incitation for meaning production elicited by certain interview topics; where there is a certain asymmetrical organization of talk; where stories, big and small, about self and others are told and where all the above mentioned features are relevant for the local identity work done by interviewees.

Positioning in sociological research interview

To begin with, the interviews from which the excerpts analyzed further were extracted, were designed as 'classical' in-depth sociological interviews, not having in mind on the part of the researchers some explicit narrative or discursive approach.

In what follows I will highlight some of the relevant characteristics of the interview setting as a conversational arena where certain identity work is to be done:

1. The very broad publicly declared topic of the interview was that of the professional life of researchers that are working or worked in market research companies. Here different subtopics where followed flexibly across interviews including: personal professional histories, the way in which research is really done, the relation with the clients, and so on. However, the researchers were also preoccupied to find out how certain technical research issues are managed in market research companies.

2. All the respondents are former sociology graduates. Moreover, the respondents are also former students of the interviewer, their selection and availability being based on a positive former 'student-professor' relationship.

The above mentioned interview topics and transportable identities (professor, student, researcher) have been made relevant by participants' discursive orientation during the interview, and as such they seemed to provide the background in which their identity work unfolds. Moreover, these identities hypothetically, but plausibly, are regarded as conflicting at certain points eliciting certain positioning strategies assisted by two distinct repertoires. These repertoires are: an academic/school based repertoire, and a market/organizational repertoire. These repertoires may be described as follows:

1. *The market/organizational interpretative repertoire* has in its center the *CLIENT* as its main protagonist along with his needs. These needs are satisfied by profit oriented organizations where departmentalization, financial accountability, profit, employee task assignments, professional abilities, proficiency and efficiency constitute together a discursive space.

2. *Academic/school community interpretative repertoire* has as its central character, the archetypical protagonist, the *RESEARCHER*. Stories about their competency, about their scientific proficiency, their objectivity, analytic capacities, innovativeness, knowledge and so on are told in academic settings. Also, they are institutionally anchored in universities, a space of teaching and training future researchers, where professional norms and various technicalities are elaborated, debated and refined. This is a home for normative discourses about what is a good-bad/right-wrong research.

Market research has a peculiarity in that it brings together the aforementioned discursive logics: market-oriented and academics. Its members (researchers) have access and are at the same time accountable for both types of interpretative repertoires (market and academic). They are employees of profit-oriented organizations, but nonetheless they share an academic professional background and they are regarded as 'researchers'. What has been taught in school as defining a 'researcher' must face the 'clients'' demands and market rhetoric. Negotiating between these two discursive logics is not an easy, straightforward task for these researchers, especially because it implies significant identity stakes.

That being said, the interview setting became an arena where the interviewer makes relevant certain transportable identities and repertoires: researcher and professor, using mostly academic/research repertoires; whereas the interviewee navigates (adopting various positions) doing an identitary work, by means of various narratives and interpretative repertoires, in order to mediate between his summoned identity as a present/former member of a profit oriented organization and at the same time as a researcher and former student. In this regard, the interviewee's discursive accounts (explanation, justification, repairing (Scott&Lyman (1968)) are constructed in relation to the academic research norms and technicalities made relevant by the interviewer. Various strategies are employed depending on the positions made relevant by the interviewer (both for himself and interviewee). Certain positions and identities are made discursively relevant by announcing the interview topic, by certain question formulations and through certain vocabularies and repertoires used by the interviewer.

On the part of the interviewee, where there was an alignment with the interviewer position (as school/academic), coherent stories are told about self that do not imply intensive identitary navigation. However, where there were no certain clues on the part of the interviewer and his position and prompting is seen by the interviewee as conflicting with his own position (as employee in market research company) an identitary work is initiated.

In this latter case identitary work may take the form of either a careful rejection of the interviewer's position by not accepting his repertoire, either of alternating repertoires, giving multiple repairing accounts. Small stories are recalled to back up the acquired position.

I will present and analyze further four cases/fragments that I hope will illustrate the identitary work and positioning that the interviewee is doing by means of small stories and interpretative repertoires they use.

Fragment 1: It was too business like...

The *Fragment 1* is a short excerpt from an interview where the interviewee is a former market research employee. Here the respondent (IB) is building up an argument using an academic/school interpretative repertoire. She/he is giving an auto-biographical account, using the first person, on why she/he has left her/his last position as a researcher in market research. More exactly, *Fragment 1* is a response to a prompt in which the interviewer is asking for a reason of his/her dismissive attitude toward the way research was done in the company he/she has left.

Fragment 1 - IB

> I: Did you have the feeling, for example, that there are things there, in those data, that should have been known by beneficiaries but are overlooked because.…
>
> IB: No, no nothing was overlooked, effectively everything was told, but there was a lot more analysis on the data that we could have made. Everything that was asked for, anyway, it was made… and even more, if they were obvious… but you didn't start to .…. Ok, but neither to dig now for who knows what. **I had a few projects that were very dear to me, I really wanted to devote them some time, but I had no time, I mean I used to have an hour and a half, two to make a questionnaire.** However creative you would be, I don't know if you could make a questionnaire.….. and no matter how much experience you would have, I don't know whether you could make it right in two hours and pass it over. I don't know. Maybe after 15 years, 10 years you could make it right from the beginning, no?
>
> I: Yeah…
>
> IB: And to include all the objectives, to operationalize them right, to put in rightly all the choice variants, to be publicly understood,… yeah. I could not do that, I mean, I had to do this but I didn't do it how it should have been done, I mean… I was starting to formulate the question and I was thinking: 'Oh my

God! I have to get to those other objectives too, when will I be able to finish those?'
I: And at the level of data interpretation and reporting? Is it the same thing? I mean…
IB: There too…
I: Somewhere to improve or something to improve?
IB: There you had a certain timing too. It was supposed you could work faster. You had to work as fast… But I like to… I wish there would be a bit of 'heart' in all that stuff. It was to 'business' like.

In this fragment, IB's discursive display of identity is in alignment with the interviewer's, so there is little identity navigation and repertoire alternations. Small stories are invoked to back up a position in which he/she is criticizing the market research company. He/she orients here toward an identity of an academic passionate researcher, making relevant an opposition between the researcher in a business field that is prone to efficiency and timing constraints, and the researcher as a passionate, curiosity driven professional. IB is backing up his/her position here as a passionate and academic researcher by recalling small stories (highlighted in Fragment 1 above with bolded letters) about how he/she had to deal with business-like time constraints that impeded him/her to devote time to 'dear' projects, but also to make the things right from an academic normative perspective (line 4). He/she is constructing the 'research in business' category as being troubling for him/her due to time constraints and not to some inherent non-professional practices (see the correction he/she is making at the beginning of line 2). By that he/she is not dismissing the professionalism of the organization, but a rather general feature of business oriented companies: time pressure.

Summarizing, in *Fragment 1* we have an explicit autobiographical identity construction made in an academic repertoire, a perspicuously constructed opposition ('romantic' research vs. business research) and a firm positioning inside these constructed categories that has been built as a response to why he/she has left the company, and in alignment with academic/professor interviewer identity.

Fragment 2. This is a myth I strive to dismantle…

The second fragment is an excerpt from an interview taken with an actual employee in the field of market research (IC). Whereas in the first fragment we had an explicit autobiographical account, in this second fragment, a technical exposition is made in order to position the interviewee along an axis that has the 'school' at one end, and the 'real practice' on the other. These categories sit well on the aforementioned categories of market/organization vs. academics/school dichotomy. The interviewee is positioning herself/himself on the side of the 'real practice' telling stories about clients who, due to their limited research competency, make absurd claims.

Fragment 2 - IC

I: But this again, it is a question…. They already add up for me… But this is very interesting, about sampling, as we learn in school that a representative sample should have probably about 1000-1200 cases and… I suppose that in real practice, not all client ask for 1200 samples…. way to expensive

IC: Well, no, but this for me, for example, is a mistake. And the fact that… And the clients see this 1000 representative sample stuff at TV…. A sample can be representative for 500 too, but it has larger error margins….

I: Larger margins. Right, yes, yes, yes….

IC: And thus we have cases of clients, including here at the 'auto' department, that want to have '1000' samples with 1000 whatever brand car owners.

I: How… ? You won't find them in Romania….

IC: Just go and do it…, I couldn't find them, I am going nuts, because of 'would this be representative?''. Representative for what???

I: Yes, yes, yes…. if that is all the population….

First, you have to clarify which is the whole population, and afterwards the sample… Yeah, you make a smaller sample and assume a margin. But a sample of 200 might be as representative as one of 1000, only that you have a different margin. I mean you have much larger margins. I mean, this is a myth, that I at least I really strive to dismantle, because also at TV all you see is 1000, 1000, 1000.

In this particular setting we would expect that due to the 'professor' identity of the interviewer, the interviewee would have to initiate an identitary work. However, the fact that precisely the interviewer is the one who introduces and makes relevant the categories of 'real practice' as opposed to a 'diminished' category of school, IC has no identity and positioning dilemmas. The interviewer is on his/her side. In short, the position taken here should be understood as a reaction to the interviewers' own prompting about school and real practices, that allows IC to position as a professional that is fighting a 'schoolish' myth popularized at TV, that does not correspond to real practices. This is in line with his/her identity and activities scrutinized here, namely a researcher in a business company that has to face the clients' needs but also their budgets (also a topic made relevant by the interviewer prompting) and about whom he/she also recalls a small story.

Fragment 3. That has qualitative in his blood

In the following excerpts I will illustrate a different situation, namely where we could find a more elaborated identitary work, a more dynamic positioning. These situations call in for various strategies and discursive resources to be employed as responses to misalignment or ambiguities of the interviewer's position.

In Fragment 3, the interviewee (IC) has to react to a normative prompting made by the interviewer that brings him/her in front of a technical puzzle with identitary stakes.

Fragment 3 - IC

1. I: Is the organization of research differing from one company to another?
2. R: Yes
3. I: And where would the most important differences reside?
4. R: There was a time when the qualitative and quantitative weren't separated as departments, I mean to be…. Now, I think, almost all have quantitative and qualitative separated.
5. I: And isn't it better not to be separated? That would seem more….
6. R: Yes and no….
7. I: Knowledge integration… collaboration…..
8. R: You do collaborate anyhow; you do work very close together in projects. The idea is that never someone from qualitative, that has qualitative in his blood, will be able to perform on quantitative, just as much as someone from quantitative won't be… I mean no, no … It seems to me that in market research it's way too difficult…, not in sociology, because things are a little different there. To be able to have performance on Quali and Quanti. I mean we have**…. I mean I have worked with people that were on qualitative before and then they worked in quantitative and vice-versa. And then there were some serious quarrellings ….** For example, in qualitative when they say majority…. that most respondents… they either generalize… and moreover they beat about the bush. In quantitative if the numbers does not match…, there…, no. And that is why….

In this fragment the interviewer introduces explicitly both repertoires: organizational (line 1 and line 5) and later an academic one (line 7). Moreover, the interviewer introduces here a normative prompting (*isn't it better not to be separated? That would seem more…*) on academic grounds, urging the interviewee to give an account for some seemingly organizational inadequacy. This sort of prompting along with the identities already called for incurs on the part of the interviewee a need to solve a positioning dilemma/puzzle. More exactly, the interviewee as a researcher in a business company (identity called for across the interview) is urged to adopt an academic stance and debate on the inadequacies of the organization that he/she is working for.

In this situation IC proves to be ingenious and adopt the following strategy of positioning:

- first, IC ensures the interviewer that she/he is not rejecting the norm of 'collaboration', legitimating the claim;
- secondly, IC prepares her/his ground to begin an exposition in an organizational repertoire rejecting the academic repertoire: *'not in sociology, because there things are a little different'*;
- third, once the academic accountability is discarded, IC builds up an argument using an organizational repertoire about certain competencies that are 'in blood', making them incompatible with any integration projects;
- fourth, uses a small story to strengthen her/his argument and position (it happened but didn't work). The main characters here are 'the people that

were on qualitative before' and got into trouble once they worked in quantitative.

Of course, IC could have rejected the interviewers' question altogether as not being legitimate, but that would have called for another more difficult account (given the interviewers' identity); or accept the debate aligning with the interviewer position. But that would mean to become accountable for his/her professional competency identity as an employee in that particular organization. The rejection of academic repertoire, the organizational 'in the blood' argument, and the backup story, prove to be an effective strategy that resulted in a favorable position for IC as a researcher and employee in market research.

Fragment 4. Here is also a backside...

In the last fragment, the interviewee (AST) is explaining and narrating how research is done in a qualitative department, how the real experts look like and what are the most valuable skills regarding the focus group technique. This excerpt is part of a larger AST's account on different research stages in market research (investigation tools creation, moderation, transcripts, reporting etc). I have selected this particular excerpt as it illustrates another available strategy that involves an alternation of repertoires.

Fragment 4 - AST

> AST: Uhmmm…. After that, that is what I was saying…, in reporting… in fact this is where, I think people differentiate…. Provided that you see that they can get something out of that raw data. Those people speak…., well in moderation too….if… At the beginning you are certainly going to do bad moderation. **Because when you are going into..., you want to ask all the questions, you know…. You are not necessarily thinking that... You are stressed about asking all the questions…. Those people, who have a lot of experience in this stuff, don't even need an interviewing guide. They go and speak freely, because they have done it so many times**. Here is also a backside, that you can fall into your own information trap, the information that you already hold, and you are going to only check for stuff. When you are at the beginning you are going to ask all the questions, and you will get all the answers.

In the first part of the account, AST is making a portrait of the 'real' experts, that are capable of moderating and interviewing without a script or interviewing guide. This is part of an organizational repertoire about who is professional and admirable (*where the people differentiate...*). AST is telling short stories about what happens when you are at the beginning and when you don't have a lot of experience. However, in the last part of the excerpt she/he changes the repertoire and his/her footing, giving an academic account and making a repairing identity work. AST starts this repairing account with '*Here is also a backside...*' suggesting that there are risks involved by the lack of standardization in moderation and information traps. This repertoire variation (Wetherell and Potter, 1988) that comes along with his/her positioning shift, may be understood as a

reaction to particular interviewers' identities (academic researcher and professor), as one who is aware of the methodological rigors involved in research.

Although there are no explicit autobiographical identity displays here, and neither a school/organization dichotomy is mentioned, two repertoires can be identified, that show by their shifting that AST is trying to position himself/herself in relation to certain interviewers' identities and also in relation to 'those who have a lot of experience' (in his/her organizational field) and to certain methodological rigors (coming from the academic field and activated by the presence and identity of the interviewer). The characters of the story are the people who have a lot of experience, but also a 'you' that can fall into information traps and a 'you' that will do a bad moderation that 'want to ask all the questions, but nonetheless who will get all the answers'. All these characters allow AST to balance in the end his/her positioning and identity.

Final synthesis and comments

Interpretative repertoires and small stories constitute important discursive resources for identity work in conversation. Both devices are used in the above excerpts in ingenious and strategic ways.

Interpretative repertoires may signal certain positions that the participant adopts and makes relevant, thus accomplishing an important identity work. Interpretative repertoires support the participant in indexing his membership in various categories, and thus to solve in certain ways the diachronic identity dilemmas that he/she is accountable for in particular conversational settings. In *Fragment 1*, IB uses rather an academic research repertoire, whereas in *Fragment 3*, IC uses an organizational repertoire, rejecting certain other repertoires ('…*not in sociology…*'). In *Fragment 2* IC is using a technical organizational repertoire, that might be thus considered academic, but being constructed in relation to clients' needs, and as an argument against the myths of '1000' units samples is rather specific to the organizational field. *Fragment 4* illustrates an alternation of repertoires, first it begins as an organizational repertoire, and then a repairing account is given in methodological academic terms.

By means of narration, be it small stories or big auto-biographical expositions, the participants cast and evaluate characters and their actions, and position themselves in relation to them in a more or less explicit manner, thus displaying the identity that they whish to be attributed with. In *Fragment 1*, we have a rather biographical exposition (more like a big I story), where the research companies are depicted in rather negative terms as 'ime tyrants' in opposition to 'passionate' research. *Fragment 2* illustrates small stories about clients who have inappropriate technical demands, and thus the interviewee is seen as a specialist. *Fragment 3* is telling stories about employees that lack certain abilities in their blood. Such a story serves well the interviewee positioning and identitary stakes as a response to a provocative puzzle issued by interviewers' question. In *Fragment 4* we have small stories about who the real experts are in market research and what they do in opposition to those 'who ask all the questions'.

I assumed in this paper, on DP grounds, that the question should not be what identities are or do in terms of behaviors, but rather how and why certain identities are summoned discursively in certain situations. Therefore my aim here was to present several illustrations on how positioning by means of interpretative repertoires and small stories is constructed in relation to certain local 'events': the transportable identities made relevant by the interviewer, the interview topic, the effective promptings, and the alignment between the participants' positions (where the accountability pressure is put on the interviewee's shoulders). This does not mean necessarily that the content of these discursive stances are constructed from scratch here and now. On the contrary, I assume that what we have here are practiced discourses as parts of certain repertoires that are strategically employed. Nonetheless, these discourses should not be regarded as verbal expressions of some pre-constructed 'substantial' identities.

The examples offered here were selected for illustrative purposes to point out possible discursive strategies employed by interviewees as a response to the interviewer's position (and thus certain transportable identities) and the nature of prompting. Therefore I identified four types of reactions resulting from combining: (1) the nature of prompting: technical (normative: explicit request for positioning) or general (neutral: not an explicit prompt requesting positioning) and (2) the existence of an alignment between the participants' positions. The four types of discursive reactions are: (1) - mainly a big story about self without significant identity dilemmas involved resulting from a general, non-technical, neutral prompting where there is alignment with interviewer's transportable identity (*Fragment 1*); (2) - small stories and no significant identity work resulting from a situation where there is a technical prompting, but an alignment is assumed on the part of the interviewee (*Fragment 2*); (3) - small stories and an elaborated strategy of rejecting interviewer positioning by rejecting his/her repertoire where there is a technical prompting and no alignment (*Fragment 3*); (4) - small stories and identity work done by alternating repertoires where there is a neutral prompting and no assumed alignment on the part of interviewee (*Fragment 4*).

Whereas the big auto-biographical expositions may still be the privileged identity analysis focus in various fields, I tried to illustrate in this material that a lot of discursive identity work is to be observed at micro-level conversational settings. I am not denying, not nearly, the importance of the 'big' discourses and narration about self, but I privilege an approach according to which, big stories and repertoires are rather practiced activities, in everyday conversational settings (aligning myself here with Bambergs' approach), often by means of small storytelling, and these are the primary sites where we should look.

Acknowledgments

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