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Narrative Inquiry in Applied Linguistics Research

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The importance of narrative inquiry as an alternative approach to research in the humanities and social sciences has grown considerably over the past 20 years or so. Over the past decade, it has also become an established approach to research on second and foreign language learning and teaching through the publication of numerous data-based studies and several texts on narrative inquiry for applied linguistics. Focusing on studies published since 2008, this article outlines the scope of narrative research on language learning and teaching at the present time. It discusses recent innovations in data collection (the use of mixed and longitudinal methods and the use of narrative frames and multimodal data) and data analysis (focus on the discourse of narrative and the use of narrative writing). It concludes that these innovations represent a welcome trend toward methodological diversity that is strengthening the contribution of narrative inquiry to our understanding of the experience of language teaching and learning.

Narrative inquiry, or the use of stories in academic research, dates back to the early 20th century, if not earlier. Freud, for example, used narrative case studies, involving patients' narratives of dreams, to elucidate the origins of neurosis (e.g., Rieff, 1996). In the field of sociology, the early work of the Chicago School included a powerful argument for the use of narratives as a source of data on social conditions, exemplified by an extensive biography of a Polish peasant (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1919). While interest in narratives in psychology and the social sciences subsided in later years under the impact of so-called scientific methodologies, over the past two decades the importance of narrative inquiry as an alternative approach to research has grown across the disciplines. Since the turn of the 21st century, it has also begun to play a significant role in applied linguistics research.

Narrative inquiry in applied linguistics includes a significant body of work on the discourse and sociolinguistics of narrative that could well be a subject of a review article in its own right (e.g., De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012; Schiffrin, De Fina, & Nylund, 2008). It also includes a growing number of studies of second and foreign language learning and teaching, which are the focus of this review. The number of data-based narrative studies in this area is increasing year by year, and this review draws on five book-length studies (Benson, Barkhuizen,

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Bodycott, & Brown, 2013; Craith, 2011; Kiernan, 2010; Simon-Maeda, 2011; Vandrick, 2009) and more than 120 articles published since 2008. Whereas applied linguists have hitherto tended to draw on methodological sources from the social sciences (e.g., Atkinson, 1998; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Linde, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 2008), they are now also able to draw on a number of texts that describe and discuss applications of narrative inquiry in applied linguistics itself (Barkhuizen, 2011, 2013, 2014; Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2013; Kalaja, Menezes, & Barcelos, 2008; Murray 2009).

NARRATIVE AND NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Narrative inquiry can be described as research in which narratives, or stories, play a significant role. It is often observed, however, that the concepts of narrative and narrative inquiry are "notoriously hard to define" (Barkhuizen, 2013, p. 2), as the kinds of texts that count as narratives, and how they can be used in research, vary from discipline to discipline. Polkinghorne (1995) makes a distinction between two forms of narrative inquiry: *analysis of narratives* and *narrative analysis*. *Analysis of narratives* refers to the use of stories as data, which are typically analyzed using standard procedures for qualitative content or thematic analysis. This is currently the most frequently used approach in applied linguistics. *Narrative analysis* refers to research in which storytelling is used as a means of analyzing nonnarrative data. It is less frequently used, but growing in importance. In applied linguistics, therefore, we find narratives used both as an object of inquiry and as an analytical tool or as a form for the presentation of research findings.

We also find four main conceptions of narrative, which serve as points of reference for the practice of narrative inquiry in applied linguistics:

1. The canonical story as described, for example, by Labov (1972): an account of experience consisting of an abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, evaluation, and coda
2. Life histories and autobiographies, or, in the context of research on narrative identity, the ways in which people make sense of their lives through the activity of storytelling (e.g., Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001)
3. Grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984) or the larger, culturewide ideologies that shape the themes and discourse of particular narratives (Tannen, 2008)
4. Narratives-in-interaction or more fragmentary accounts of experience in everyday talk, often called small stories (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008)

Because narrative inquiry in applied linguistics works with a range of narrative texts, its coherence as a field of inquiry lies less in its concern with particular text-types and more in its focus on the activity of storytelling. As Pomerantz and Kearney (2012) put it, applications of narrative theory in applied linguistics are

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wide ranging, but they "share a similar philosophical foundation by appealing to the primordial meaning-making functions of narrative" (p. 224). Making a similar point, Barkhuizen (2013) used the term "narrative knowledging" (p. 4) to denote "making sense of an experience through narrating, analyzing narratives, reporting narrative research, and consuming research findings" (p. 4). He emphasized that narrative inquiry is both a cognitive and social process and that it is carried out with the purpose of generating knowledge.

THE SCOPE OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

While the term *narrative inquiry* is often used to label the framework or methodology of published studies, many of the studies covered by this review do not, in fact, use this term. These include studies labeled by terms such as *life history*, *language learning history*, *language learning experience*, *language biography*, *autobiography*, and *autoethnography*. Narrative inquiry is thus used here as an umbrella term for a variety of approaches in which stories of the experience of language learning and teaching are in focus. Barkhuizen (2014) observed that narrative research is becoming a catchall term for qualitative research that focuses on participants' experiences. In this sense, narrative inquiry shades into approaches such as case study, ethnography, longitudinal research, and diary study, which are also sometimes described as narrative research. Pavlenko's (2007) critique of the use of autobiographic narrative in applied linguistics is, for example, largely a critique of diary studies.

The fuzziness of the boundaries within and around narrative inquiry reflects an open-ended and often experimental attitude toward research methodologies. Many researchers see narrative inquiry as an epistemological choice concerned with what counts as knowledge and the value of insider knowledge in domains such as teacher education where the traditional knowledge base is grounded in so-called outsider or objective' research (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Many researchers turn to narrative in order to free themselves from what they see as the methodological formalities of other approaches to qualitative research. The studies discussed in this article also shade into the area of language memoirs, which are typically reflective accounts of learning and teaching experiences, written by teachers, academics, or professional writers, which dispense with detailed descriptions of research methods. Collections by Casanave and Li (2008) and Nunan and Choi (2010) are recent examples of this genre, which raise interesting questions about the boundaries of narrative inquiry as applied linguistics research.

While Nunan and Choi (2010) acknowledged the question, "Are accounts based on introspection research or self-indulgence?" (p. 1), they placed the contributions to their collection of autobiographical writing firmly in the camp of research, because the authors explore issues of language, culture, and identity in the light of critical incidents in their lives. Studies that rely on autobiographical reflection also raise questions about the nature of method in narrative inquiry, which are now being addressed in studies that distance themselves from the

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category of language memoir by describing themselves as autoethnographic (e.g., Canagarajah, 2012; Choi, 2012). Autoethnography involves a systematic inquiry into past experiences, based on documents and self-reflection and the connection of "the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (C. Ellis, 2004, p. xix). Researchers also rely on the creative resources of writing as a means of generating, recording, and analyzing data. Introducing an autoethnographic account of his experiences as a nonnative speaker of English in the TESOL profession, Canagarajah (2012) stated that the act of composing the narrative enabled him to explore "hidden feelings, forgotten motivations, and suppressed emotions" (p. 261).

There are several historical points of departure for the entry of narrative inquiry into applied linguistics (see Barkhuizen, 2014, for a detailed timeline), including several precursors in the field of applied linguistics itself (notably ethnography, diary study, and longitudinal studies) that lend themselves to the study of participants' experiences of language learning as they evolve over time. Life history methods from the social sciences (Atkinson, 1998; Linde, 1993) have been applied in research on *language learning histories* (a term first used by Oxford, 1996). Educational research on teachers' lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Goodson & Sikes, 2001) has been a major influence on narrative studies of language teachers and teaching. Memoirs of migration and multilingualism have also been an important influence both as an inspiration for autobiographical work and as a source of data for more formal research on language learning in contexts of migration, study abroad, and intercultural communication (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). More recently, applied linguistics researchers have drawn on approaches from interactional sociolinguistics and discursive psychology, involving analysis of short stretches of interactively produced narratives, to investigate issues of language learning and teaching by examining narratives in short extracts of spoken interaction.

INNOVATIONS IN DATA COLLECTION

Most of the early narrative studies in applied linguistics relied on one of four sources of data: autobiographical records or reflection, published memoirs, written language learning histories, or interviews. Many studies were based on only one of these sources of data, which tended to be taken at face value as relatively accurate accounts of the experiences they described. More recently, narrative inquiry studies have been influenced by concerns, articulated most strongly in critiques of interviewing, that participants' accounts are mistakenly treated as "epistemological conduits" to "what 'really' happened, or what participants 'actually' felt" (Talmy, 2010, p. 131). Put simply, it is considered naive to rely on participants' accounts as sources of factual information without paying due attention to the social and interactional context in which they are elicited or the likelihood that other accounts might be produced in other contexts of interaction (De Fina, 2009; Pavlenko, 2007). Although these concerns are mainly about the interpretation of data, which I will return to in the next section, they have had three major effects on data collection in narrative research:

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the use of multiple sources of data, longitudinal methods, and narratives-in-interaction.

Multiple Sources of Data

Narrative studies based on a single source of data continue to be published. Hayes (2010a, 2010b) relied on life history interviews in his study of the lives of language teachers in Sri Lanka and Thailand, and Polat (2013) relied on what she called *language experience interviews* in her study of individual differences in language learning. Murphey and Carpenter's (2008) study of agency in language learning is based on detailed coding of 20 written language learning histories; Besemeres's (2010) study of emotional expression and bilingualism is based on six published language memoirs, and X. Gao (2011) produced a study of language learning motivation based on a Chinese novel. In recent research, however, there is a tendency toward the use of multiple sources of data, either in narrative studies that draw on several sources or in mixed methods studies in which narrative data plays a part. In both cases, this tendency is related to an increasing interest in corroborative methods and sources of data that arises from mistrust of conclusions based on single sources (Riazi & Candlin, 2014).

Recent narrative studies that are based on more than one source of data include Coffey (2010; written language learning autobiographies followed by one-and-a-half hour interviews), Ortaçtepe (2013; written language learning autobiographies, journal entries, and semistructured interviews), E. M. Ellis (2013; classroom observation, in-depth semistructured interviews, language biography interviews with teachers), and Rodriguez and Polat (2012; life history interviews with learners, focus group, journal entries, beliefs survey). Narrative data is also increasingly used as one source of data in ethnographic or mixed methods studies: Examples include F. Gao (2011; narrative interviews used in a study of overseas students in the United Kingdom, described as ethnographic), Kim (2011; language learning autobiographies used in combination with classroom observation, stimulated recall, and interviews in a longitudinal study of two Korean migrants' second language [L2] learning motivation in Canada), and Trang, Baldauf, and Moni (2013a, 2013b; a study of foreign language anxiety based on a questionnaire completed by 419 university students in Vietnam and interviews and written autobiographies from 49 students identified as anxious from the questionnaire).

While this move toward the use of multiple data sources is a welcome one, it can also be observed that researchers often find it difficult to do justice to all of the data collected within the constraints of the short article format. The advantage of multiple data sources and mixed methods is that insights from one source can be tested in analysis of others or through different approaches to data collection and analysis. Yet it is often far from clear that this has actually taken place. Different sources of data are often treated as a homogeneous block; there is little if any discussion of conflicts between data sources, and in some cases it is not clear that the narrative data plays any role in the data analysis at all. Trang et al.'s two studies, based on the same data set, are interesting in this respect.

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Trang et al. (2013a) is mainly based on the results from the foreign language anxiety questionnaire and does not cover the student autobiographies (though they are mentioned as a source of data). Trang et al. (2013b), conversely, focused on these autobiographies. They concluded that the English as a foreign language (EFL) students who wrote them had learned to be anxious and that four factors affected their anxiety: pedagogy, assessment, student-teacher relationships, and curriculum structure. They concluded that, "collecting such data would have been difficult using other approaches" and that an autobiographical approach is "appropriate for research that involves longitudinal and/or multidimensional issues, including anxiety" (p. 722).

Longitudinal Study

A second tendency is for narrative studies to be based less on one-shot data collection exercises (e.g., collection of a set of language learning histories written at a particular point in time) and more on data collected over relatively long periods. This is typical, for example, of the previously mentioned studies that involve working with students studying overseas (F. Gao, 2011; Kim, 2011; Ortaçtepe, 2013) and of studies of teachers in the tradition of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), in which the researcher works with the participants over a period of time to *story* and *restory* their experiences (Liu & Xu, 2011). Chik and Benson's (2008) study of a Hong Kong student's experiences of university education in the United Kingdom from departure to return and Ruohotie-Lyhty's (2013) of early career teachers' identity development were both conducted over four years, the data consisting of four in-depth interviews in each case. Chik and Benson (2008) showed how narrative inquiry can capture both retrospective and longitudinal accounts of language learning and, importantly, how the participant's narratives changed over the four years. Prior (2011) shows something similar by comparing two narratives of the same event, told two years apart, from 20 hours of ethnographic interviews with an adult migrant to Canada.

Narratives-in-Interaction

A third approach that is gaining ground in studies of language learning and teaching typically draws on research interviews, but instead of focusing on the narrative represented by the participant's contribution to the interview as a whole, it focuses on short stretches of narrative within the interview. This approach draws on studies of talk-in-interaction in naturally occurring conversation and, in applied linguistics, sometimes uses short extracts from transcribed research interviews as data. Advocates of this approach, who often refer to their data as small stories in contrast to the big stories of life history research (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Barkhuizen, 2010; Vásquez, 2011), argue that it provides insight not only into the discourse of narrative, but also into issues of language learning and teaching. This has been demonstrated in several studies of teacher identity (Barkhuizen, 2010; Pomerantz & Kearney, 2012; Rugen, 2010, 2013), in Simpson's (2010) study of adult language learner identities in English as a second

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language (ESL) classrooms, and in Holmes and Marra's (2011) study on the role of narratives in workplace communication for nonnative speakers of English in New Zealand.

One of the unresolved problems with the small stories approach lies in the conception of narrative that underlies it. For researchers who adopt this approach, the term *narrative* covers "tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell" (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. vii), or "simple utterances making reference to some event, attitude, action or saying to a protagonist in the past with little or no development" (De Fina, 2013, p. 163). If narrative can cover so many forms of discourse, however, what exactly distinguishes it from everyday talk more generally? In addition, it can be observed that most of the applied linguistics studies draw on interactions in which the researcher is a participant and that in some cases it is not clear that they succeed in going beyond the analysis of the discourse of storytelling to make a substantial point about language learning or teaching. I will return to this point in the discussion of data analysis.

Use of multiple sources of data, longitudinal methods, and narratives-in-interaction represent three ways in which narrative inquiry has responded to wider concerns about the application of narrative methods to the understanding of the reality (whether objective or subjective) of real-world phenomena such as language learning and teaching. In this sense, these concerns have provided an impetus to development and to the kinds of methodological reflection and reflexivity that are found in two recent collections, in which the authors were invited to be more explicit about methodological issues than might usually be expected in reports of empirical research (Barkhuizen, 2011). While they are less related to these concerns, two other recent innovations in data sources for narrative inquiry are worth noting.

Narrative Frames

Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) developed the narrative frame as an instrument that would help teachers to structure their experiences in narrative form and facilitate collection and analysis of narratives from relatively large numbers of participants. The narrative frame is a written story template consisting of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths, in which participants record their own experiences and reflections. Barkhuizen and Wette used a narrative frame to investigate the teaching and research experience of a group of 83 Chinese EFL teachers attending a teacher development workshop. The authors analyzed the data using qualitative content analysis and comment that, because the narrative frame constrains the quantity and structure of the data, it is a useful exploratory tool for gaining an initial overview of an area of study. Narrative frames have subsequently been used in studies of teachers' beliefs about task-based learning and teaching (Barnard & Nguyen, 2010), teachers' transitions from classroom to distance and blended settings (Shelley, Murphy, & White, 2013) and needs analysis for adult vocational language learners (Macalister, 2012). In the study by Shelley et al. (2013) of

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distance education teachers, the narrative frame proved to be an appropriate tool to gather data by email and to identify participants for follow-up phone interviews.

Multimodal Narratives

The use of multimodal data is a growing trend in narrative inquiry, especially in literacy research, and a number of studies have recently appeared in L2 learning contexts (for more detailed discussion, see Barkhuizen et al., 2013, chapter 4). These include studies in which visual material is used in conjunction with written explanations or language learning histories (Aragão, 2011; Chik, 2014; Kalaja, Dufva, & Alanen 2013; Nikula & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2008) and studies in which the data consisted of multimodal narratives (Chik & Breidbach, 2011; Menezes, 2008; Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010). Giroir (2013) used what she called *photo-narratives* in conjunction with interviews and classroom observation in a longitudinal study of two Saudi Arabian students studying in the United States. The visual material in these studies typically consists of drawings or photographs that represent something of significance to the participant in the context of the study. These are then used as a stimulus for writing or talk or analyzed directly. Chik (2014) includes a striking example of two contrasting pictures drawn by a Hong Kong student to represent herself as a learner of English and German. In the first picture she appears in her everyday clothes and in the second she wears a school uniform, which, Chik suggests, signals her different identities as a learner of the two languages.

INNOVATIONS IN DATA ANALYSIS

The most frequently used method of data analysis in narrative research is content or thematic analysis. This is typically applied in studies using *analysis of narrative* (Polkinghorne, 1995) in which narrative data is analyzed by coding and categorizing data extracts and reorganizing them under thematic headings. In this respect, narrative inquiry studies may differ little from qualitative case studies that use similar data analysis procedures. Innovations in data analysis, however, are evident in the use of discourse analysis methods to attempt to uncover meanings in narrative data. There is also a growing number of studies adopting *narrative analysis* (Polkinghorne, 1995) or using narrative writing as a method of bringing out the meanings of nonnarrative data.

Discourse Analysis Methods

Discourse analysis of narrative data has been employed by researchers who see language teachers' and learners' narratives not as factual accounts of experience, but as sources of insight into the discursive construction of experience. In these studies, the content and meaning of experience is investigated through

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the study of the structure, language, or use of narratives in the context of interaction. One approach has been to focus on metaphor. O'Sullivan (2010), for example, analyzed metaphors in published language memoirs to examine representations of relationships between native and nonnative speakers in language learning, while Coffey (2010) analyzed the ways in which France and Frenchness are represented in the stories that British adults told of their experiences of learning French. Focusing on narrative structure, Menezes (2008) examined the openings and closings of multimodal language learning histories as well as the networks of people and objects that they contained. In her study of language learner agency among immigrant small-business owners in the United States, Miller (2010) analyzed subject-predicate structures in a corpus of interviews in order to evaluate agency in "occasions when interviewees construct themselves as the subjects of predicates that position them as having 'the capacity to act'" (p. 472). In each of these studies, the analysis is analogous to thematic coding, inasmuch as there is systematic analysis of the narrative data as a whole, but it differs in its focus on language and discourse, as opposed to narrative content.

As noted, applied linguistics researchers who align with the small stories approach work with short extracts of data, which are often taken from interviews (Barkhuizen, 2010; Simpson, 2010) or less formal interactions between researchers and participants (Pomerantz & Kearney, 2012; Rugen, 2010, 2013). Positioning analysis (Davies & Harré, 1990) has been used in a number of studies and several have adopted the procedure outlined by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008), in which attention is paid to three *positioning levels*: (a) how the characters in the story are positioned in relation to each other, (b) how the speakers position themselves in relation to each other, and (c) how speakers construct themselves and others in terms of teller roles and dominant discourses. The second and third levels are important because they require the analyst to pay attention to the context of the storytelling. If the story is elicited in an interview, for example, the second step requires the analyst to consider the role of the interviewer, while the third requires attention to the broader context of the interview (Barkhuizen, 2010). One of the difficulties in making positioning analysis and the analysis of small stories, more generally, work is the problem of going beyond the analysis of discourse to draw conclusions about language learning, teaching, or use. In this respect, Simpson (2010) is effective in the way that it uses positioning analysis to show how classroom discourse constrains identity positions available to migrant language students and how one student resists this positioning. Although it is based on conversational interactions between the researcher and a group of preservice Japanese EFL teachers, Rugen's (2010) study of ratifications in out-of-class interactions among Japanese preservice language teachers says more about the use of narrative in identity work than it does about the participants' language identities. However, a later study uses the same data set to draw conclusions about contradictions between the participants' identities as learners and teachers of English (Rugen, 2013). These studies show that there is a fine line between studies of narrative discourse that are conducted in language learning and teaching settings and those that use discourse analysis for the more challenging

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purpose of working toward conclusions about language learning and teaching itself.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis refers, here, specifically to the use of narrative writing as a tool for the analysis of nonnarrative data. The outcome of the analysis is one or more narratives, written by the researcher, which bear on some research issue. Narrative analysis is not simply a matter of retelling stories that have been told as data, but of lending narrative coherence to nonnarrative data in order to bring out or highlight meanings in relation to the research issue in focus. Some recent studies that have adopted this approach involve autobiographical reflection and writing. The study by Canagarajah (2012) is largely based on reflection, Choi (2012) drew on personal diaries and documents to reflect on her experiences as a multilingual speaker of Korean, and Casanave (2012) used extensive journals documenting her attempts to learn Japanese over a number of years (see also book length studies by Simon-Maeda, 2011, and Vandrick, 2009). Other studies are retellings of research participants' autobiographical accounts of language learning and teaching experiences (Benson, 2013; Benson et al., 2013; Chik & Benson, 2008; Hayes, 2010a, 2010b, Liu & Xu, 2011; Mitton-Kükner, Nelson, & Desrochers, 2010).

Narrative analysis, or the telling of stories as a research outcome, is perhaps the most challenging aspect of narrative inquiry to researchers trained in both quantitative and qualitative methods. While studies using analysis of narrative approaches count as research partly because they draw on established methods of qualitative data analysis and discourse analysis, it can be difficult to understand how a story can encapsulate the findings of a research project. In our own work, my collaborators and I have experimented with several ways of using narrative writing in published work. In Chik and Benson (2008), the findings of the article consisted of a narrative of the research participant's experiences of studying overseas. An interpretation of the meaning of the story was added at the request of the editors, which consisted of our own understanding of the significance of the narrative in terms of the focal issue of changes in language learner identity over time. This interpretation, however, may well have cut across what is arguably one of the strengths of narrative analysis studies: their capacity to engage the reader in their own interpretations of the stories that stand in place of more conventional results and findings (Benson, 2013). In Benson et al. (2013; a book length study of L2 identity development in study abroad), the data consisted of predeparture and return interviews and a variety of forms of data provided by the participants while overseas. The four authors then wrote up these data as study abroad narratives that highlighted L2 identity development. A selection of the narratives were reprinted in the book and followed by further interpretive analysis by the authors, which highlighted how they illustrated developments and individual differences in three areas of L2 development that emerged in the course of the study. Using a single narrative from the same data set, Benson (2013) developed the argument that a narrative of this kind could reasonably count as the findings of a study without further analysis.

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WHAT ARE WE LEARNING FROM NARRATIVE INQUIRY?

As the number of narrative analysis studies grows, it is relevant to ask what they are telling us about language teaching and learning that we could not find out by other means. This is a difficult question to answer in any precise way, however, partly because narrative studies often paint a complex picture of the issue in focus, rather than provide clear-cut results or findings. Indeed, in reviewing narrative articles, it is often difficult to summarize exactly what the findings of the article are. This is not meant as a criticism, however, as the significance of narrative studies is often more that they lead us to look at issues in different ways or open up new avenues of inquiry.

The work reviewed in this article includes both studies of learners and studies of teachers. Studies of learners are somewhat in the majority, although many studies focus both on learning and teaching, irrespective of the participants. The studies reviewed also include a number of narrative studies of multilingualism, which focus on language use but also touch on issues of informal learning and access to language learning resources (e.g., Giroir, 2013; Miller, 2010). One of the more important characteristics that runs across these different kinds of studies is the way in which they approach research issues from the perspective of experience. Narrative studies of language teachers that have focused on the professional development of preservice and early career language teachers, for example, have elucidated the struggles to establish identities as teachers that novice teachers undergo, especially when they are nonnative speakers of the languages they teach (e.g., Canagarajah, 2012; Mitton-Kükner et al., 2010; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). Narrative studies of language learning variables also often involve the reconstruction of the variables in question as experiential realities. Kim's (2011) study of the language learning motivation of adult Korean immigrants in Canada, for example, reconstructed the variable of motivation as a dynamic process of motivation and demotivation that evolves over time. Kim also argued that it is "not the ESL context per se but each participant's recognition of it that plays a pivotal role in creating, maintaining, and terminating ESL learning motivation" (p. 91). This focus on participants' recognition of contextual variables is also apparent in Polat's (2013) use of narrative interviews to show how individual difference variables such as motivation, self-concept, self-efficacy, metacognition, learning style, beliefs, and anxiety are "inseparably linked in the learner's overall learning experience" (p. 78).

In the wider field of educational research, there are many narrative studies of teachers' lives, but few studies of learners. The focus on learners and learning in many applied linguistics studies, therefore, is a distinctive feature of narrative research in this field. The range of topics addressed is extensive, although there are relatively few classroom-based studies and relatively few that address traditional areas of language learning research such as the acquisition of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and other language skills (although see Marx, 2002, on accent, Holmes & Marra, 2011, on pragmatic skills, and Casanave & Li's, 2008, collection of narrative studies on academic writing). Among the more frequently addressed topics are informal and out-of-class learning, study abroad, learner agency, learner beliefs, emotion and anxiety, and motivation. This range of areas

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of inquiry reflects, perhaps, the particular capacity of narrative inquiry to provide access to what Benson (2011) called *language learning careers* or learners' retrospective conceptions of how their language learning has developed over the longer term. For this reason, narrative studies often offer a broader perspective on individual language learning experiences, covering both in-class and out-of-class settings and a range of contextual and psychological variables, than might be provided by other methods. Casanave's (2012) autobiographical study of her efforts to learn Japanese in Japan over a period of eight years is a good example of the outcomes of such studies. The focal issue is motivation and, like Kim (2011), Casanave provides evidence of the "idiosyncratic and fluctuating nature of motivation due to daily contextual, personal, and emotional factors that interacted in unpredictable ways" (p. 642). At the same time, the article paints a complex picture of the interaction of these factors in the contexts of the author's life in Japan, from which it is difficult to distill any generalizable conclusion.

Identity is an area of inquiry that was not mentioned earlier, because it deserves special attention in its own right. In the recent literature, there are numerous narrative studies of language teacher identities (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2010; Canagarajah, 2012; Mitton-Kükner et al., 2010; Rodriguez & Polat, 2012; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013) and language learner identities (e.g., Benson et al., 2012; Chik, 2014; Giroir, 2013; Ortaçtepe, 2013; Simon-Maeda, 2011). In many cases, however, both learner and teacher identities are at issue, especially in studies of teachers who are nonnative speakers of the languages they teach. This issue is explicitly addressed by Rugen (2013), who shows how Japanese preservice English teachers negotiate learner and teacher identities in their everyday narratives. In addition, there are studies that show how language learning is intertwined with social identities and their development (e.g., Choi, 2012; Coffey, 2010; F. Gao, 2011). Indeed, issues of identity are rarely far from the surface of narrative studies even when the focus is elsewhere. Miller's (2010) study of adult migrants' agency in language learning, for example, shows how their sense of agency is contextualized within social identities as migrants and small business owners. Although Marx (2002) has been cited as a study of accent, it is, in fact, a study of the ways in which the author's L1 (English) and L2 (German) accents expressed her changing sense of identity as she moved from Canada to Germany and back again. One of the more general outcomes of narrative inquiry in applied linguistics, therefore, lies in the way that studies repeatedly show that learning a language is much more than learning its forms and structures and developing relevant skills; it is also a matter of acquiring and developing new identities. Benson et al. (2013) attempted to substantiate and theorize this view by showing how in narratives of study abroad both linguistic gains and personal growth can be conceptualized in terms of L2 identity development.

CONCLUSION

This review of narrative inquiry in recent applied linguistics research shows that the use of narratives is a growing trend at a number of levels. The majority

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of studies use narratives as data, and they are, arguably, often indistinguishable from qualitative research more generally in other respects. The innovations in data collection and data analysis that have emerged in recent years, therefore, represent a welcome movement toward methodological diversity and a more intense focus on narrative as resource beyond the use of stories as a form of qualitative data. Attempts to work through the discourse of narratives on language teaching and learning toward an understanding of what they say about language teaching and learning as processes are one important development. The growing use of narration as a means of analyzing the experiences of self and others and presenting them as research outcomes is another. While these developments point to a greater acceptance of narrative inquiry in applied linguistics and a greater self-confidence among researchers who favor this approach, it is likely that narrative researchers will continue to struggle for some time to come against the view that research findings should be succinct, objective, and testable. The rich accounts of language learning and teaching experiences in their social contexts and as they evolve over time that have emerged in recent work will certainly help to counter this view.

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Barkhuizen, G. (Ed.). (2013). *Narrative research in applied linguistics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

This edited collection of papers by experienced narrative researchers consists of empirical case studies in which the authors also focus on methodological issues involved in their approaches to narrative inquiry.

Barkhuizen, G., Benson, P., & Chik, A. (2013). *Narrative inquiry in language teaching and learning research*. London, UK: Routledge.

This book is an introduction to narrative inquiry methods grounded in published work in language teaching and learning research. The monograph includes sections on oral, written and multimodal narratives, data analysis, and writing up narrative research.

Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (Eds.). (2002). *Teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

This is an edited collection of papers in which language teachers use narrative inquiry to explore and reflect upon their experiences of instructional practices, language learning, language teaching, and professional collaboration. The editors' introduction makes a strong argument for the role of narrative inquiry in teachers' professional development.

Kalaja, P., Menezes, V., & Barcelos, A. M. F. (Eds.). (2008). *Narratives of learning and teaching EFL*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

This international edited collection of data-based narrative studies demonstrates a variety of approaches and mainly focusing on the subjective experience of learning English as a foreign language. The book includes contributions on the experience of EFL in Brazil, Finland, Sweden, Japan, Spain, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom.

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Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, *8*, 5–23.

This seminal article discusses the place of narrative inquiry in qualitative research, introducing the important distinction between analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. Polkinghorne argues for more research that adopts narrative as method of data analysis and presentation of research findings.

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