7
Exploring the narrative construction of identities in class

7.1 Proposed tasks for analyzing and comparing conversational narratives

In what follows, we shall propose specific activities on the basis of the proposed re-evaluation of the role of narrative in critical language education, and specifically on the basis of the four domains of situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice discussed above (Section 6.7.2). The aim of our tentative proposals is to encourage students together with their teachers to collect narratives from their daily routine, to analyze them during the language course, and to critically approach the narrative construction of identities. Although the narrative examples analyzed in the present study come from conversations, the narratives analyzed in class could come from written or electronic sources, too.¹

We would like to point out that the proposed activities could not be included exactly as presented here in language teaching textbooks. Further work needs to be done with regard to the details of their presentation, the manner of their inclusion in separate units of the relevant textbooks, as well as the determination of the target students’ age, and the required teaching time. Hence, the role of the teachers is more than important in the detailed preparation of such material, since they have to take into serious consideration the particularities and preferences of their students. Furthermore, the topics included in the following examples are not binding: if such topics do not appeal to students or do not relate to their daily routine, the narrative activities selected could come from completely different sources and circumstances and concern different issues and experiences.
The following tasks are proposed for collecting and analyzing oral narrative material:2

**Situated practice**
- Students record (or videotape) conversations, in which they or members of their families or communities participate. They also collect relevant ethnographic information. They then transcribe the narrative conversational excerpts that have stirred their interest with the use of appropriate symbols (see among others, the list of transcription conventions at the beginning of the book).

**Overt instruction**
- Teachers and students work together to detect the structural categories of these narratives and, primarily, the complicating action and the evaluative elements, so as to understand why specific event sequences were judged as tellable. Emphasis is placed on those elements of the narratives which deviate from the sociocultural norms.
- Special attention could be given to the presence (or absence) of direct speech in these narratives. Their position (particularly in the complicating action, but not exclusively there) and their function in the narrative (for example, the achievement of immediacy and interpersonal involvement, argumentation, identity construction) are investigated. Moreover, grammatical and syntactical devices associated with direct speech are identified.

**Critical framing**
- Teachers and students work together to investigate diverse positionings at the level of the narrative world, the narrative interaction, and the wider socio-ideological context, so as to identify the narrators’ projected identities.

**Transformed practice**
- If students have collected and analyzed in class conversational narratives from peer communities of practice, they could be asked to produce narratives in their conversation with adults or with old people or with peers from different communities of practice, so as to obtain comparable material.

### 7.2 A comparative example of conversational narratives

In order to illustrate our proposal here, we present the analysis of an oral conversational narrative.