Conclusions: Narrative Revelations

Abstract: This chapter discusses the main conclusions of this study, focusing on three main “revelations” this piece of narrative research has put forward. First, the revelation about how narrative is one of the most powerful language practices human beings have for making sense of the world they inhabit and the particular emotional experiences they deal with everyday. Second, how the multidimensionality of narratives and particular storytelling practices, such as the ones described in this study, go beyond local contexts of storytelling and extend to global ones, namely how narratives of language experiences can offer an insight into other migration contexts. Finally, how sociolinguistic analyses of narratives can bring to light issues of identity and morality about the particular situation experienced by narrators and protagonists, in this case Mexican immigrant women’s contestation of the racialized social place they inhabit.

Keywords: emotions; identity; morality; multidimensionality

6.1 Revealing emotional experience

I started this book by emphasizing the power of narrative to provide for individuals’ yearning for past coherence and authenticity in the presence of others. The analysis of the language experiences Mexican women relived in the present moment of the interview has revealed how crucial emotion is as a means of expression and as a structuring principle of their narratives.

As a means of expression, emotion, or “affect” (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989) and “affect-encoding linguistic categories” (Besnier, 1990) permeates the telling of language experiences. In Chapter 4, the component analysis of the narratives showed how combative Mexican women self-presented in the emotional reactions to discriminatory complicating events of racialization. Mexican women’s contestation of social place in the racialized context of Southern California resulted in emotional stances leading to verbal responses to denounce and revindicate an alternative “moral language order” (Chapter 5). The analysis of emotions has centered, on the one hand, on the lexical description of emotional states that Mexican women felt as the targets of racialization events, and on the other hand, on the range of linguistic and paralinguistic affect-encoded devices that reveal the agency of these women to change the course of events in the story world whenever they could.

As an organizing principle of these narratives, emotions link past undesirable language experiences while at the same time function as pervasive evaluative devices in these narratives. As Chapter 4 put forward, the emotional map of racialization experiences evolves around shame and pride as the two main ambivalent emotions Mexican women felt and performed in their narratives of language experiences. The component analysis has revealed how emotional responses to complicating events related to racialization experiences were commonplace. The immediate reactions to these events, as analyzed in Chapter 4, were highly expressive and usually followed by verbal responses in the form of constructed dialogues introduced by the preferred quotation formula “le dije”. In addition, these emotional responses did not always target a specific agent or antagonist, but also represented cries for changing the social place assigned to those interviewed in the context of Southern California. As the performance of shame and pride in Chapter 5 evidenced, for this group of Mexican women, emotions are not fixed constructs distilled over time but deeply rooted in individual experiences that are relived in