

# ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Argumentation And Self- Representation In Everyday Narratives: The Logo Activity



## *1. Introduction*

The central research problem presented in this paper is the relationship between argumentation, self-representation and narrative activity. Our main goal is to describe how group identity is collaboratively narrated in and through the arguments displayed in a group discussion activity that took place in a computer literacy program (*La Gran Dimensión-LGD*-) for adult Mexican immigrants in San Diego, California.

For this purpose we need to focus, first on the relationship between narrative and argumentation and second, on the one existing between argumentation and identity. Our analysis shows that argumentative structures are part of the narrative activity embedded within the group discussion activity taking place in *La Gran Dimensión* (LGD). Group-discussion activities, such as the one presented in this paper, serve to construct a group identity, based on argumentative structures related to linguistic, national origin, friendship, and goal-oriented cultural identifications.

## *2. Narrative and argumentation*

Generally, when we think of narratives or stories, we think of them in terms of past events that contain *a setting, a complication action and a resolution* (Ochs, 1996). Classical sociolinguistic definitions of narratives (Labov and Waletzky, 1967, 20) consider them as a sequence of two or more clauses, which are temporally ordered. In this way, the overall structure of a narrative consists of the following elements (Labov, 1972): *abstract* or one or two clauses summarizing the whole story; *orientation* or set of clauses which identify the time, place, persons, or situation; *complicating action* or narratives clauses comprising the sequence of events; *evaluation* or clauses giving the point of the story; *resolution* or the part following the evaluation; and *coda* or the ending that brings the listener back to the present. Labov and Waletzky's model distinguished two main functions in the

narrative, the *referential* and the *evaluative* function. The referential function referred to the ability to match temporal sequences and the evaluative function consisted of that part of the narrative which reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative. Although the evaluative function of narratives implicitly conveys the speaker's stances[i] and dispositions towards the events portrayed, narrative and argumentation have been studied as two separate fields of studies (Carranza, 1999).

Sociolinguistic and discourse analysis definitions of narrative as a discourse analytic category which involves an evaluative point (Labov, 1972) of characters and events have exceptionally been related to argumentation (Van Dijk, 1984). Recent discourse analytic approaches have shown how argumentative stories are told to back up positions, opinions and interpretations of experience related to characters and events (Schiffrin, 1985; Van Dijk, 1993; Carranza, 1999; De Fina, 2000). These studies also agree on the complex interrelationship that exists between argumentative and narrative structures in concrete communicative situations. Rhetoric studies (Antaki, 1994; Fisher, 1987) remind us of the existence of reasoning schemas among the rhetorical operations available to the storyteller. As Fisher (1987) points out: "narrative rationality does not deny the fact that discourse often contains structures of reason that can be identified as specific forms of argument and assessed as such." However, the complexity of the relationship between arguments or "structures of reason" increases in conversational narratives.

Conversational narratives are part of people's everyday life, which include speakers' social activities. As Ochs & Capps (2001:18) indicates: "conversational narratives routinely involves questions, clarifications, challenges, and speculations about what might possibly have transpired." That is, conversational narratives can be part of speakers' different discursive activities, which are dependant on the communicative situation they are involved. From this angle, accounts of different personal experiences can be embedded in ordinary conversations, part of explanatory texts, descriptions, interviews, chronology, group discussion activities, etc.

Narrative constitute in this way a genre and activity which can be examined in terms of a set of *dimensions*. The narrative model proposed by Ochs and Capps (2001), focuses on the dimensional aspects of the narrative. For these authors, instead of thinking of a fixed temporal and spatial narrative structure applicable

to any narrative, it is important that researchers think of *narrative dimensions*, which “establish a *range* of possibilities” having to do with the following five factors:

1. the number of interlocutors telling the narrative;
2. how tellable the account is;
3. how grounded it is in the surrounded discourse;
4. whether it follows or not a temporal and causal organization;
5. how much of a moral stance the narrative reflects (Ochs and Capps, 2001: 23).

From this approach, narratives become part of social life and can adopt different forms in discourse, from prototypical narratives, with a clear delimitation of a *setting*, *complicating action* and a resolution to other kinds of narratives that do not contain all these elements and can take the form of plans, agendas, news, scientific presentations and even prayers (Ochs and Capps, 2001).

In this paper, we approach discourse as being multi-embedded so we can always find narratives or different dimensional aspects of narratives as part of individuals’ discursive activities, including group discussion activities.

### *3. Argumentation and Identity*

The relationship between argumentation and identity presented in this paper is based on the cultural historical approach to identity (Werstch, 1991).

Our discussion centers on three main theoretical assumptions:

1. identity as a situated and mediated action;
2. Identity as a communicative action;
3. Identity as a rhetoric action.

First, we are concerned with *identity as a situated and mediated action*. We understand that the actions that people engage in keep a close relation with the contexts in which these actions develop, and with the mediational means people use. In addition, we understand *identity as a communicative action*, with teleological, dramaturgical and normative components (Habermas, 1979). That is, people’s performance of certain cultural identification acts tend to be ratified in front of an audience who can identify with their state of consciousness and private world. The dramaturgical action takes a special value when we talk about cultural identity, since it is part of the tapestry that, together with other identities, constitute our private personal world. Then, when we talk about our cultural identity we are performing a manifestation of our thinking that has as referent a part of ourselves, a part of how we perceive ourselves, and in sum, a

part of our subjective world. In addition, identity constitutes a rule-governed action, which is a socially situated component of cultural identity. In this sense, a social group can demand a given actor to behave in a given way depending on the agreements/treatments that regulate interpersonal relations in that social group. Finally, we understand identity as a *rhetoric action*. That is, identity is not mere informative action. Identity acts are argumentative manifestation of the self. They are created to persuade and convince our audience of our belonging to a certain cultural group. Moreover, we understand identity as collaborative constructed in communicative events. The acts of identity (cultural, ethnic, professional etc.) are rhetorical actions when they become either ratified or rejected in the presence of "others". In fact, many times we are aware of our cultural identity when we expose ourselves to an audience. In these cases, rhetoric acts of identity are a moral instrument to persuade an audience and aim at influencing and modifying their point of view. That is, individuals engage in argumentative discourse to position themselves toward the social representations they share on certain issues (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969; Antaki, 1994). As Billig (1988) explains: "the structure of the way we argue reveals the structure of our thought". In the process of deliberation, we use the same arguments that we employ when we try to persuade others".

In the following section, we analyze how the relationship between narrative, argumentation and identity is played out in the unfolding of a group-discussion activity.

#### *4. The discussion group: an ideal setting to study and construe acts of cultural identity*

The discussion group has a special psychological significance to study cultural identity in formation because of its interactive nature. The discussion group requires and permits exposition, conflict and negotiation of individuals' points of view and experience meaning, involving an effort of behalf of the participants to create shared realities. It permits access to new ideas, the search of agreements, and the possibility of arguing and counter-arguing to expound own opinions and to persuade others of the validity of different points of view. These are features that finally redound to new ways of understanding the others and ourselves. Since negotiation in an inter-psychological plane is explicit, discussion groups facilitate observation of the process of individual appropriation of ways of argumentation, self-reflection and group-belongingness, that are initially founded on a social plan. Therefore, the discussion group offers the ideal setting to study how the

acquisition and mastering of new forms of thought and speech genres are used to construct cultural identity. In a discussion group, we can examine how individuals' acts of identification are constructed and reconstructed both externally and internally in the course of the discussion activity.

In addition, we believe that group discussion activities foster a dialogic construction of identity in the sense that people create, and recreate identity when they are confronted with others (Bakhtin, 1981). Dialogicity is also important in literacy activities (Shor & Freire, 1987), as the one we are analyzing in this paper. Freire's pedagogical ideas claim that all educative practices must adapt themselves to the best of their ability to the social and cultural reality of students, reflecting the problems of the community, and at the same time giving them an active role in the teaching-learning activity. Real dialogue about "generating topics" is the only way to accomplish this goal, by making the students "voice" (Bakhtin, 1981) emerge and by creating a group consciousness of "oppression" (Shor & Freire, 1987).

We believe that in the context of a minority bicultural educational setting, group identity is a meaningful "generative topic" to deal with. Individuals build arguments by mediational means. We can study the way we build our identity through the discursive 'acts of identification' individuals engage in. Then, through the analysis of people's discourse about their identity, we are analyzing how they are constructing their identity. In our example, we show how this construction is collaboratively constructed in a guided activity designed to promote the shared construction of group identity in an bi-cultural educational setting works. The analysis shows how the identification act of a group identity can be read as a piece of argumentative discourse intended to convince the audience, namely the instructor and the adult students, of the acceptability of a group identity.

## *5. Data Collection*

Data was collected through participant-observation in a bilingual/bicultural after-school computer literacy program for adult Mexican immigrants in San Diego, California. Observation sessions took place twice a week in two-hours classes for six months. Some of the sessions were videotaped and transcribed according to conversation analysis conventions (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974).

### *5.1 Setting: LA GRAN DIMENSIÓN (LGD)*

*La Gran Dimensión* is an adult computer program whose main goal is the use of technology as a resource to effectively making transactions and access

mainstream institutions in Mexico and the U.S. Adults of Eden Gardens, a predominantly Mexican-Latino community in North San Diego county become familiar with health and social resources available to them in their community through the use of technology[**ii**]. LGD is part of a larger project called La Clase Mágica or LCM, founded in 1989 by Professor Olga Vásquez and her team at the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition at UCSD. LCM was created as an after-school program to satisfy the linguistic and cultural needs of the Mexican/Latino community in San Diego. UCSD undergraduate students, under the direction of the project director or collaborating colleagues assist the instructor in providing individualized instruction to participating adults. *La Gran Dimensión* (LGD) evolved from a demonstrated interest of parents of children attending *La Clase Mágica*. LGD was developed in an effort to provide the adults of the community in Eden Gardens in Solana Beach with the resources that would enable them and their children to successfully navigate the professional and academic pipeline. Adults currently attending are from working class background and are mostly dominant Spanish speakers. Both Macintosh and PC computers are used to introduce adults to various computer literacy and language skills.

### *5.2 ACTIVITIES AT LGD: the Logo Activity*

Activities at LGD included initial evaluations about computer knowledge, language, students' personal interests, expectations and motivation to take the class. Based on the initial evaluations, the instructor developed activities accordingly, having to do with computer set up, use of disc drives, organization of the information in folders, Microsoft word, printers usage, Internet workshops, and e-mail accounts. One of the main activities at the time the data was collected was to use computer knowledge to create a magazine, which would bring participants' interests and cultural experiences together. For this purpose, the instructor designed a group activity in which participants were to work collaboratively in the design of a Logo for the quarterly magazine. The main goal of the Logo activity was to foster the empowerment of the Latino community through the commonality of their multiple identities.

### *6. Data Analysis*

In the following segment the instructor, a group of eight members of the Latino/Mexican community of Eden Garden in Solana Beach (Técnico, Lucía, Gloria, Benito, Isabel, Rita, Ana, Sole, Javi), two UCSD students (Molly and Jean) and two of one of the participants' sons (Angel y Manuel) gathered to discuss

about the title and best logo for the quarterly magazine. The following piece takes place after participants had been discussing the best titles for the magazine such as (*Una Nueva Experiencia / A New Experience*); *Express Ourselves*; *Aprender es un reto / Learning is a challenge*; *El espacio del conocimiento / The knowledge space*. The instructor poses the question: “¿quienes somos?” (who are we?) and the group collaboratively provide the answer to the question.

## 6.1 CO-CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

1. I: somos un grupo de ((writing down in notebook))

2. I: *we are a group of* ((writing down in notebook))

3. (.5)

4. Is: de amigos=

5. Is: *of friends*=

I: venga ayudadla=yo voy escribiendo y después alguien lo escribe a ordenador

(.3) somos un grupo de amigos

I: *let's go help her*=*I keep on writing and then someone else writes it down in the computer* (.3) *we are a group of friends*

6. [((looking at Isabel

7. Is: [((Isabel addresses Benito)) tú también  
*you too*

8. A: [de distintas nacionalidades

A: [*from different nationalities*

9. I: de distintas nacionalidades

I: *from different nationalities*

10. A: (.2) y culturas

A: (.2) *and cultures*

11. (2.0)

12. L: pero una misma:: (.)

L: *but the same::* (.)

13. A: p-e-r-o una misma lengua

A: *b-u-t the same language*

14. Is: [con una misma meta

Is: [*with the same goal*

15. L: con una misma cultura (.) en una misma ((gesturing )) (.) con una misma

L: *with the same culture (.) in a same ((gesturing)) (.) with the same*

16. (...) ((Lucía looks towards Bea and Marita)) ESO!!

(...) ((Lucía looks towards Bea and Marita)) *THAT'S IT!!*

17. Is: [aprender

*Is: [to learn*

18. I: ILUSIÓN

*I: ENTHUSIASM*

19. L: [con una misma:::

*L: [with the same:::*

20 A: [con un mismo interés

*A: [with the same interest*

21. M: [con un mismo impulso

*M: [with the same drive*

22. L: no otra palabra (.) con una misma ((gesturing with hands as if looking for words))

*L: no (.) with the same*

23. T: (...)

24. L: con una misma ((gesturing))

*L: with the same*

25. B: (((gesturing)

26. Is: intención

*Is: intention*

27. L: con una misma:::

*L: with the same:::*

28. A: (más concreto)

*A: (more concrete)*

29. L: ((gesturing))

30. A: ((turning aside and gesturing)) a ver=trae la caña de pescar

*A: let's see=bring the fishing rod*

31. HA HA HA HA HA HA ((everybody laughs))

As we can see in this piece, the instructor starts constructing the group identity by letting participants elaborate and complete the sequence she starts in line 1. Isabel brings in the first identity group marker when she elaborates on the instructor's suspension of the sentence (a group of friends/ un grupo de amigos) in line 3. Amigos/friends is one of the main identities in LCM design where any participant observing at any time in LCM is considered an "amigo", someone who is there to help, facilitate, mediate in the successful completion of the activity taking place at the time. UCSD undergraduates are considered *amigos* and as such are well received by the kids in MCM and LCM. It is interesting that Isabel,

who is a newcomer to the program at that time, brings up “amigos” as the first group identity marker. After participating in the program for one month at the time of the recording, Isabel is one of the most enthusiastic followers and supporters of LGD. Her final evaluation at the end of winter quarter showed her as the highest achiever in the program. She also attended the spring quarter and was very eager to learn. In line 4, the instructor encourages the rest of the group to help Isabel with more ideas. Ana, from Argentina, brings the first differential group identity markers in line 6. She acknowledges the different nationalities of the group, which includes Mexico, Argentina, Guatemala, Spain and the U.S. She immediately adds to the sequence in line 7, the different cultural experiences of the group.

The second common identity marker of the group is language in lines 10-11. Both Lucía from Mexico and Ana from Argentina agree on language as a shared cultural identifier in this context. Despite dialectal, regional, prestige and other sociolinguistic differences, Spanish as opposed to English brings unity to the group. From line 13, Lucía tries to develop an idea that does not come to her mind at the moment. The repetition of *con una misma* in lines 13, 20, 22, 25 ends the sequence with a collective laugh.

Isabel brings another common identity marker (line 12), which is the shared goal of the group. She later defines that common goal as “learning” (*aprender*) in line 15. In trying to scaffold Lucía’s ideas the instructor suggests *ilusión/enthusiasm* in line 16, which overlaps with Ana’s “*interés/interest*” and Marita’s “*impulso/drive*” in lines 18-19. The last attempt to elaborate on Lucía’s sequence is done by Ana in line 24. She refers to “*intención*” (intention) as another shared identity markers of the group. We can see how participants in this group identify themselves as sharing the same language, learning through the different experiences, motivations, interests they share and building a common identity through the different national and cultural identities they display.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has looked at the relationship between narrative, argumentation and identity within a group discussion activity with members of the Latino community in California. The analysis of the Logo activity has dealt with the interrelationship between narrative and argumentative structures. The analysis shows how argumentation can be collaboratively constructed through group-identity acts of identification which are part of a group-discussion activity.

Literacy activities such as the Logo activity presented in this paper, contributes to the creation of group consciousness (Shor & Freire, 1987), which finds its logic within the narrative framework. The data analyzed in this paper brings out definitions of argumentation which find their logic within the discursive activity taking place during the group-discussion activity. More than persuading an audience participants collaboratively construct acts of identification based on national, linguistic, and goal-oriented cultural identifications.

## NOTES

**[i]** Stances refers to the position adopted by the narrator regarding characters and events portrayed in the narratives.

**[ii]** For more information visit the LGD web at: <http://communication.ucsd.edu/LCM/lgd.html#english>

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