Abstract for Narrative Matters 2012 Paris (AUP)

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Title: Co-constructing the social and interactive *self* through narratives in online text-based chats

Individual narrative accounts provide researchers with the chance to explore how people structure life through language and culture. Drawing on Bruner's (1987) argument that the instability of personal accounts "makes life stories highly susceptible to cultural, interpersonal, and linguistic influences," as well as on Goffman's (1963, 1971) claim that *the self* is a social and interactive construction, I explore how language is used for maintaining social interaction and structuring experiences in online communication.

This study explores the online text-based chatting practices of two female participants who chat simultaneously in English (L2) and Macedonian (L1). Employing some of the analytical tools of conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1978), specifically, what actions participants project in each turn, I focus on how text-based chats, seen as personal life narratives, can illustrate the ways the two participants "structure experience" through linguistic and paralinguistic elements (e.g. emoticons and eccentric punctuation). Additionally, using reflective practice and interviews, I explore how the change of the country where these two females live has affected their motivation to chat online and affected their discourse. Findings point to the fact that regardless the language used, "orderliness", "nextness" and assumed roles of interlocutors are present in text-based chats. The co-construction of interactive selves seems to be crucial for maintaining social relations, by which I will demonstrate how the narrative concept combined with conversation analytic tools can contribute to better understanding of personal experiences and social action performed in online chatting.

How can the narrative concept help us to better understand experience, interpretation and action?

Bruner, J. S. (1994). Life as narrative. In A. H. Dyson & C. Genishi (Eds.), **The need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community** (pp. 28-37). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.