

Storytelling at DARC Meetings: Focusing on “Orientation to” the Topic of the Story⁰¹

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Purpose of the Study

Our ethnographic understanding and analyses show how people tell their stories, how others react, and how this interaction strengthens recovery efforts. Here, we'll walk you through a key episode from our research—where a participant's expectations of storytelling and audience response didn't quite match up.

DARC Meetings

DARC members attend three meetings a day, mainly in Narcotics Anonymous (NA) style—“speak and listen, but no crosstalk” format. In addition to or instead of NA-style meetings, DARC also hosts SMARPP (Serigaya Methamphetamines Relapse Prevention Program) sessions, which happen once a week. We recorded one season of these meetings over 17 sessions held between January and May 2018, using two video cameras and IC recorders (Original Data in Japanese).

Our Data is on the “check-in” (the beginning) phase, participants reflected on their week, discussing their physical and emotional states and significant events. (Minami 2019). Our research method is Video-based Ethnography.

Bridging Ideals and Practice in Recovery

In DARC recovery program, participants deepen their experience as “fellows” and respond to each other's actions and words based on principles or “Code and Maxim”. As the participants listen to each other's narratives and respond to them, this process helps them to make “incarnate” these “Code and Maxim”, guiding participants to act as “fellows”. One of the key aspects of DARC meetings is how participants reconcile recovery principles with real-life experience. The codes and maxims they follow provide ideals and guiding philosophies, but the real challenge is integrating these into day-to-day life and personal narratives.

Through storytelling, they reframe their experiences in relation to these recovery principles, which allows them to explore who they are and who they want to become.

By analyzing Shin's story, we examine how personal narratives interact with local (a big hit)

expectations and collaborated laughing with response, which brings us to Episode 4. Before we focus on Shin's story in Episode 4, let's first break down our research data into its structures.

Data structures: 4 main episodes

Opening: The facilitator asks each participant about how they'd been spending their time.

Episode 1: A hospital visit for eye trouble.

Episode 2: Got a new girlfriend (although for a short while).

Episode 3: About an argument a participant had the night before with an NA member (Expected Story-Telling).

Episode 4: Participated in a women's NA meeting, usually closed to non-female participants. It was a "re-birth" day, an anniversary of getting off drugs.

Closing

Background Information

Now, let's look at background information. Participants included users, and staff. One staff member acted as the facilitator during the meetings. Staff members are recovering addicts themselves. And the following is the key individuals shaping this session.



Fig.1

Shin – A long-term member, previously an inpatient, now an outpatient, navigating his recovery journey.

Taka – The facilitator, also an outpatient, guiding discussions and setting the tone.

Kiyoo – Another long-term member, currently an inpatient.

Yoshi & Masa – Both staff members, with Masa transitioning into the role recently. Masa plays a key role in Episode 4, guiding the conversations unofficially.

Episode 4 Phase 1 When Story Expectations Don't Match Responses

Now, let's talk about Episode 4, which highlights something interesting. Namely, how audience reaction to storytelling don't always align with speaker expectations and occasion pursuit for expected response. While Shin continues his story, Masa interrupts with an observation that there was no "douun" moment in reaction to Shin's episode 3. "douun" moment is a term used within the group for reactions like laughter, applause, handclapping or verbal encouragement.

Episode 4 Phase 2

In response, Shin relates a different story. For this telling, the target is a big hit. He talks about how the NA women approved and understood his assertion that "women are fellows too". He is expecting his local NA group members to approve of this story. Shin is bragging about his having one-upped the NA women like that.

Episode 4 Phase 3

Shin's Episode 4 is again interrupted by Masa who calls Shin out for being untruthful. Shin "retreats" from his position and indicates that his "douun" expected story is finished by a "huh? (Post-Completer)". The group didn't give Shin a "douun" reaction.

Episode 4 Phase 4

Next up, Yoshi does one better than Shin's "braggish" "story" with his "belief".

In response to Yoshi's story, the group responds with a "douun" reaction, in the round, with their reactions sometimes overlapping each other.

Transcript for Shin's retreat and Yoshi's big hit :

Shin: so on the women's side they need to look at us men as their fellows on both sides us
men and women then right there we can sort of understand one another

Shin: huh? ((Snigger))

Taka: well

Yoshi: you know to me it's like you're still talking about it now?

I've always thought that way

((A big hit "douun" in the round))

Episode 4 Phase 5

Then, Masa strengthens Yoshi's assertion with his words "To everyone, right?" (Extreme Formulation)

Episode 4 Conclusion

Episode 4, which began with Masa's observation that the "douun" reaction was missing ends up without bringing on the "douun" that they expected. Episode 4 was a conversation with an expectation of a "douun" reaction. Let's now look at the fundamental structure of news and reactions in this episode.

Let me show you basic structure of News delivery sequences and character of
[big hit - no response] spectrum

News Delivery → Response to the News
Big News, Fresh News → Big Responses
Small News, Old News → Weak Responses
No News ← No Response

*Reversed arrow means retrospective construction of meaning

Telling another story aiming for a big hit

Shin's telling is one of some practices used to pursue a big response. Episode 4 was a conversation with an expectation of a "douun" reaction. I will pick out some examples of the "douun" reactions from the actual data. First, I will show you Shin's news and "douun" response.

Shin's "douun"

In Episode 2, Shin had told the group that he "got a new girlfriend", essentially just his news. This got a huge "douun" reaction with hand clapping.

Transcript for Shin's "douun" :

Shin: by the way got a new girlfriend on Saturday

Masa: ((Handclap))

Taka: ((Handclap))

Yoshi's "douun"

After Shin's story with no "douun" reaction ends, Yoshi begins his story from a position which contrasts with Shin's, but Yoshi's convictions are expressed as being so strong as to be unlikely. It was a way for Yoshi to one-up Shin and negate Shin's claim to have one-upped the NA women. The group responded with a "douun" reaction, in the round, with their reactions sometimes overlapping each other.

Kiyo does not get a “douun” reaction either

Kiyo relates his story of growth, following on from Shin’s Episode 4 story, after Masa had called Shin out for being untruthful. Kiyo expects but does not get the “douun” reaction either. Kiyo indicates with his triple repetition of “well? well? well?” that his story is at its end.

Transcript for Kiyo’s repetition:

Kiyo: I was different though at the start I was just looking for that purpose
 But as I progressed with this program uh I found myself changing my mind
 (2.0)

Kiyo: well? well? well?

Taka: what do you mean how was that?

Now, let’s analyze the story contents told by Shin, Yoshi, and Kiyo by looking at how they relate to the “codes” and “maxims” which underpin the stories.

The maxim ‘women as NA “fellow”’ underpins the Episode 4 story

Stage 1: Looking at NA members of the opposite sex only in terms of sexual desire

Stage 2: All NA members should be seen as “fellows” (according to the “code” among NA members)

The story told by Kiyo is fundamentally a story of growth from Stage 1 to Stage 2. Almost all the members present nodded or laughed and approved of this story in overlapping words.

The two assertions made during Episode 4 (1)

Shin points out the importance of “fellowship.” By using a strong expression like “I told them what’s what”, he is asserting that he understands “fellowship” and had demanded of his listeners (the NA women) to understand this too.

The two assertions made during Episode 4 (2)

Shin wants the approval of the group for getting his assertion understood. He wants the current listeners in his group to approve of his getting the women (his listeners yesterday) to approve of his story.

Masa calling Shin out

Masa points out the discrepancy between Shin’s story and his actions.

Shin's retreat

Shin walks back his assertion by changing "all" to "some".

Yoshi and Masa's reactions

Yoshi and Masa nods at the end of the story.

Shin's disappointment

Shin's post-completer "huh?" shows his disappointment at there being no response to his story.

Shin's story ends, but there are only a few nods in response to his story.

The significance of Yoshi's utterance one-upping Shin's story

The phrase "to me, it's like" positions Yoshi's assertion directly in contrast with Shin's. The content of his utterance divides people into "those who know and do" and "those who don't". Yoshi is calling out Shin by reporting his own "belief" and at the same time Yoshi is boasting that he is someone who "knows".

The "douun" reaction to Yoshi's utterance

The content of Yoshi's assertion aligns with the DARC's "Principles." The members of his local NA group react with a mix of honest and positive reactions and sarcastic reactions, but on the whole saying things like "amazing" and the like, interjecting comments as though singing in rounds. This was almost like a "douun" reactions.

The meaning of Masa's utterance

Masa expands the scope to which the "principle" Yoshi asserts is applied by his expanding the principle to a "We". Now, the principle is expanded into a category distinction between "We/They".

What's more, Masa further using the Extreme Formulation "everyone" makes a strong impression of the "code" contained in Yoshi's utterance. For members of DARC, the ideal of "fellowship" is "self-evident" and accounts for the reason why Shin's report did not lead to a "douun" reactions.

Kiyo

Kiyo starts his utterance with "Same with me", seemingly intending to continue from Yoshi's report which had not resulted in a "douun" reaction.

The story of Kiyo's personal growth, and how it was compared to Shin's story

After Yoshi ends his story, Kiyo starts his utterance "In my case" (using the topic particle "wa" in Japanese which indicates comparison). This places Kiyo in a position which contrasts with

Yoshi's assertion of "ideal fellowship".

In Kiyō's case, he tells a "personal story of growth" from someone who sees women as sexual objects to someone who sees them as "fellows".

Kiyō's Post-completer (with repetition)

This being purely a report of a personal experience, this does not result in a "douun" reaction. Kiyō ends his report with a post-completer "well? well? well?". Taka makes fun of Kiyō's "well?" by saying "got a nerve to ask "well?" like that.

Kiyō responds to Masa's unexpected approval of him by modestly saying "Yeah, not much", which gets a big laugh from Taka. Further Kiyō repeats "not much" each time, so he says "not much" three times in this section.

At this point, Masa (who is guiding the flow of this SMARPP session) pulls facilitator Taka into the conversation. Taka asks Shin a question ("How are you today, by the way? ") to effectively terminate Shin's turn.

The significance of this report for pragmatics

Just as "interruption" is seen as "rudeness" (Sacks, 1970) and "Story-Laughter" pair is treated as "Story-Agreement/Approval" pair (Jefferson et al., 1986), this is an example of how a linguistic practice can be given a name to formulate it. We have shown the practice of how orientation of a story to a topic will lead to collaborative practice for *a big hit*.

Discussion

Shin have used the onomatopoeia "douun" twice with both hands gesture to signify a strong reaction to news or story and have found that the absence of "douun" can be pointed out in 2 ways. The first way is formulation, where Masa says 'that did not go "*douun*" twice with *figurative hands gesture*. This formulation leads to collaborative practice for *a big hit*. The other is the post-completer such as where Shin says "huh?" or Kiyō says "well? well? well?".

After a post-completer indicating that the expected reaction did not come, comments making fun of it in follow. The conversation continues to confirm each other's identity. We may see this as another indication that the speakers in this Episode 4 are oriented towards a "douun" reaction.

Note

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