

## **Positioning with Master and Counter-Narratives**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Recent narrative studies have witnessed a growing interest towards positioning analyses and the analysis of master and counter-narratives. While the work on narrative positioning tends to prefer small story approach and to draw on Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis, the work on master and counter-narratives seems to inspire a variety of methodological approaches and work with narratives of varied sizes, often within institutional and political contexts. Counter-narrative is a positional category already by its name, yet there is little systematic work applying these methodologies to same materials and with the intention of enriching both approaches. What is more, master narratives tend to be located only on the third level of positioning (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008), whereas we argue the juxtaposition between master and counter narratives to emerge on all levels of positioning. In this article, we consider the three analytical levels of narrative positioning in terms of master and counter-narratives and the broader idea of narrative contest. By analyzing an interview of a 92-year-old Finnish woman, we argue for the empirical relevance of master and counter-narrative frames within positioning analysis, and the existence of counter-narratives in the form of ‘middle-sized’ stories.

Key words: master and counter-narrative, positioning, middle-sized stories, canonicity, narrative contestation

At first sight, the sociolinguistically nuanced positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997; 2004a; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008; Deppermann, 2013a; 2013b; 2015) and the analysis of master and counter-narratives (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Frandsen et al., 2017) might appear entirely different, even contradictory approaches to the study of narration. Harré and van Langenhove (1999, p. 1) notably depict the positioning theory as “the study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting.” Lyotard’s (1993) *Grand Narratives*, launching the most varied ideas about master narratives, instead refer to such cross-national and trans-historical discourses as “progress” or “science.” These “totalizing narratives or metadiscourses of modernity” (Chandler & Munday, 2016) are, of course, a long way from the local moral orders theorized by Harré and van Langenhove, and equally distant from the requirement of detailed empirical documentation in positioning analysis, highlighted by Deppermann (2013a; 2015). The broad, top-down cultural theories of totalizing master and counter-narratives arguably suffer from the distance from empirical analyses of narratives as action and

interaction. Furthermore, the connotation of resistance tends to make the concept of counter-narrative a popular catchword for various kinds of oppositional acts, narrative or not. Yet, the two theories exhibit surprisingly similar historical trajectories with overlap in definitions. Subject positions, as identities provided by discourses, were originally suggested by Foucault (1972) during his structuralist period (cf. Deppermann, 2015, p. 370–371), and it was Davis & Harré (1990) who eventually moved the emphasis away from the pre-existing, structural “positions” into active “positioning” as something that people routinely do within social interaction. Master and counter-narratives similarly were coined as structural and abstract concepts, and only recently have been modified into concepts of everyday interaction and telling. This has taken place especially since Bamberg & Andrews (2004). More precisely, the pair of concepts enables theorizing narrative structure (pre-existing narrative scripts) and action (telling a narrative) within the same conceptual frame. The important implication is that a narrative cannot be a master or a counter-narrative in isolation, without the existence of other, competing narratives and discourses.

The frame of master and counter-narratives is also relevant within different categories and sizes of narrative, from talk-in-interaction into works of historiography and fiction. In each case, the critical motivation for counter-narratives is to tell differently, to take a stance by telling (2<sup>nd</sup> level of positioning) and within telling (1<sup>st</sup> level of positioning). Furthermore, allusions to cultural master narratives may be used to argue a point within telling in interaction. The study of counter-narratives in action, therefore, resists categorical distinctions<sup>1</sup> between “small story research” (Georgakopoulou, 2007; 2015; Bamberg, 2006) and “big story research” (Freeman 2006), or between fiction and non-fiction (Cohn, 1999; Anderson & Sandberg, 2018). Within the larger frame of narrative contestation (Phelan, 2008), narratives belonging to any of these categories have the capacity to reinforce or challenge master narratives. We proceed to illustrate that big story research might remarkably benefit from the theoretical concepts of master and counter narratives as well as positioning. Consequently, it could find overlapping areas with small story approach. Instead of choosing between big or small stories, we focus in this article on the study and relevance of middle-sized stories.

We begin with a theoretical discussion about the ambivalent nature of master narratives. By drawing on the work of Jerome Bruner and David Herman, we suggest that counter-narratives typically are more tellable and embody more narrativity than master narratives. Master narratives, instead, may rather be abstractions of or allusions to previously told narratives and prevailing expectations of event sequences than articulated narratives. (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008, p.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that we do not question the relevance of these distinctions but their categorical use in this particular context.

381; Author 1, forthcoming) However, there is also another version of master narratives, namely established narrative genres that exist in an explicit narrative form, being able to evoke contestation by counter-narratives (e.g. Maagaard & Lundholt, 2018).

#### Master and counter-narratives – an asymmetric pair?

The term ‘master narrative’ refers at least to two different modes of discourse, cultural expectations and dominant narrative genres. Bamberg (2004b, p. 360) observes how “master narratives are setting up sequences of actions and events as routines and as such have the tendency to ‘normalize’ and ‘naturalize’ – with the consequence that the more we as subjects become engaged in routine, the more we become subjected to them.” Such normalizing, expected sequences of events, however, are not usually called narratives but, for example, cultural or cognitive scripts. According to David Herman (2009, p. 20), who explicitly follows Jerome Bruner (1990; 1991), “narrative is a cognitive and communicative strategy for navigating the gap, in everyday experience, between what was expected and what actually takes place.” As Andrews (2004a, p. 5) aptly notices, the “counter-narrative is one of disruption, fragmentation and incoherence...”

Herman’s (2009, p. 14) prototypical definition of narrative helps to outline the difference between master and counter-narratives. By defining narrative prototypically, Herman intends not to draw an exact line between narrative and other forms of discourse; instead, he describes the representations we most likely and fastest recognize as narratives. It is characteristic that all the four “basic elements” of Herman’s model discriminate against the master narratives described by Bamberg. *First*, prototypical narratives are situated presentations, which need to be interpreted within “a specific discourse context or occasion of telling”. The normalizing and naturalizing discourses, instead, are by definition relevant across situational cultural contexts. *Second*, narrative representations “cue,” suggest a “time-course of particularized events.” Excluding the stories of history, master narratives do not exhibit particular events since they rather invest in presenting the canonical, proper, and recurrent course of events. *Third*, for Herman, proper narratives “introduce some sort of disruption or disequilibrium into a storyworld.” The normative core of master narratives, however, discriminates against deviating from the expected and accepted courses of events. *Fourth*, the narrative representations also “convey the experience of living through this storyworld-in-flux” (Herman, 2009, p. 14). Experiencing does not profile high in the sequences of expected, normal events. Considered with Herman’s criteria, master narratives defined as normalizing and naturalizing discourses can only marginally be narratives (see also Nelson, 2001, p.

158). However, a dominant historical narrative (genre), say about 9/11, can of course meet most of these terms.

Scholars have seldom discussed this asymmetry explicitly, yet the usual research settings reflect it unmistakably. Very few empirical studies – if any – compare *similar* narrative sources in studying master and counter-narratives. Andrew's (2004b) much discussed article on counter-narratives "of early maternal influence" already documents this asymmetry. The material Andrews analyzes as counter-narratives consists of stories told by her interviewees. The description of the master narrative, however, is mostly provided by its critics and does not rest on articulated narratives. As an example, we offer the same quote as Andrews (2004b, p. 8):

In its essentials, this patriarchal story of mothering is of a woman, entirely nurturant and provident, whose shadow side – potential or realized – is entirely wicked and withholding [...] it is understood in this story that only the selflessly loving mother is good. (Pope, Quinn, & Wyer 1990, p. 441)

This, of course, is not a narrative. We could characterize it as a theoretical summary, abstraction, or description of what the contents of many similar narratives might be. More precisely, it might be recognized as an allusion to a story that the readers are supposed to know already (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008, p. 381; Pöysä 2010, pp. 164–165. In the paragraph preceding this excerpt, Pope, Quinn & Wyer exhibit their wider understanding of stories in a culture and suggest that it "has been said that culture is a set of stories told over and over again. If this is so, then the symbol-ridden, cultural construction known as the 'story of mothering' must no longer be told." (p. 441) Stories are culturally significant, yet the claim that "culture is a set of stories" is vastly exaggerated and it arguably simplifies the discursive and material constitution of cultures. Cultures also include the argumentative, instructive, and descriptive genres (Fludernik, 2000), ideological discourses and inescapably material aspects that cannot be reduced to any "set of stories." The authors, tellingly, also employ the parallel concepts of "cultural conceptions," "cultural expectations of mothering," "the myth of the ideal mother," and "the ideology of mothering." In brief, the discussed master narrative expresses itself as cultural expectations, an abstraction of routinized stories as well as an ideology, comes much closer to Bruner's idea of canonicity, the expected sequence of events, than a proper, tellable story. In such a case, a short, coded expression or "trope" (Sandberg 2016, pp. 154-155) can substitute for a telling full version of a too familiar, culturally shared story (cf, Gülich & Quasthoff 1986, pp. 223-225).

The term master narrative refers thus to a variety of prominent cultural beliefs, without a clear reference to an individual narrative or distinct collection of stories. This seems to lead to another asymmetry between master and counter-narratives. Counter-narratives are articulated in interaction and in that way exist textually, told by the interviewees themselves, as in Andrews' case, or otherwise display the connection between teller and the story. Master narratives, on the other hand, cannot be caught in the act as they seem to exist as implicated resources to draw meaning from or dialogically 'ventriloquited' by the tellers of counter-narratives (Cooren & Sandler, 2014).

Methodologically, this also means that master narratives are interpretative in nature and inferred by the researchers based on the analysis of interactional narratives. In the extreme case, we only know about master narratives because someone is countering them, making them visible by invoking them, as Pope et al. (1990) are doing in their article. This is also reasoning for the fact that counter-narratives embody more narrativity than master narratives. Counter-narratives never simply account for one, natural course of events, they always need to invoke the other, dominant cultural resources, stories and voices they are resisting. Because of this double-voicedness (Bakhtin 1986, pp.110-112), counter-narratives also exhibit richer narrative potential for complications to be resolved in the narrativizing process.

Because of the outlined asymmetry, empirical studies cannot be confined to dividing stories into master and counter-narratives. Master narratives seem to be difficult to find on the textual level and are therefore often inferred by the researcher and rely quite heavily on their cultural competence. What is more, because of the multilayered and complex nature of cultural expectations, empirical narratives seldom if ever manifest sheer counter-narrativity, even if examples of counter-narratives are easier to find articulated. This leads to the methodological suggestion that it might be reasonable to consider master narratives as shared cultural resources that individual tellers are able to invoke and mobilize (Author1, forthcoming). Even if – or perhaps just because – master narrative are not usually vocalized but counter-narratives are, the two are resources in narrative contestation that cuts through all levels of narrative positioning in interaction. Therefore, it is important to study signs of and hints to counter and master narratives throughout narrative positioning. In what follows, we test the possibilities of studying narrative contestation in narrative interaction with the analysis of an interview of a 92-year-old woman.

The levels of positioning

Recent research into positioning suggest at least two different versions of the levels of positioning and positioning analysis. Bamberg's original proposal, building on the double-temporality of narration, contains three different levels. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008, p. 385) formulate them the following way:

1. How characters are positioned within the story (level 1);
2. How the speaker/narrator positions himself (and *is* positioned) within the interactive situation (level 2);
3. How the speaker/narrator positions a sense of self/identity with regard to dominant discourses or *master narratives* (level 3).

It is noteworthy that Bamberg has changed the formulations of the third level several times. At first, it is about "How do narrators position themselves to themselves?" (Bamberg 1997, p. 337); then "how speakers and audiences establish and display particular notions of selves" (2004a, p. 137) or "Positions taken vis-à-vis Normative Discourses and 'Self' (2004b, p. 347). Arguably, the level three positioning is a response to the older, structuralist theories of positioning, which understand positions as something that the (dominant) discourses provided. "It is at this juncture that we come full circle in observing how subjects position themselves in relation to the discourses by which they are positioned" (Bamberg 2004a, p. 137).

Deppermann (2013b, p. 68), who prefers a two-level model of positioning, has pointed out how "(c)onversation analysts are likely to have problems with the discourse theoretic heritage of 'positioning', namely with level-3 positioning..." More precisely, the "identification of D-discourses [as the societal discourses and master narratives are called] is all but self-evident" (Deppermann 2015, p.381). The first problem to be faced, according to Deppermann, is about how to "determine what are dominant and what are counter discourses?" The difficulty of identification, as such, is an insufficient argument for ignoring the possible influence of societal master narratives. Furthermore, it is not necessary or particularly useful that the researchers would try to "determine what are dominant and what are counter discourses?" Shuman (2005, p. 18) already turns her attention to the work the participants themselves do: "I am [not...] proclaiming that certain kinds of counternarrative are subversive. Instead, I am taking as a given the fact [...] that tellers do claim counternarratives as emancipatory." Author 1 (forthcoming), similarly, suggests that the analysis of positioning with the counter-narratives does not require any pre-existing division of narratives as counter and master narratives if we assume that the tellers of counter-narratives themselves frame their narratives in opposition to prevailing narrative genres and expectations. The whole aspect of "dominance" is relative and depends on the context. Empirically it materializes in the orientations

of situated participants. For example, in the “manosphere” narratives, Feminism is typically framed as a master narrative to be countered by the self-conscious men (Nurminen, forthcoming). In other words, there is no need to presume a pre-existing conflict between “hegemonic” and “marginal” narratives if the analysis focuses on how the discourses are evoked, endorsed and resisted in the interaction studied (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Similarly, we argue that there is no need to conceptualize all interactional “narrative contests” (Phelan, 2008) in terms of master and counter-narratives.

Analytically, we argue that contesting narratives should not be associated with any single level of positioning only. Bamberg’s model explicitly situates master narratives on level three. The following analysis aims to exhibit how both master and counter narratives occur on all levels of positioning and are used as part of narrative contest in interaction. The analysis is carried out in the following manner: First, we introduce the data and some of its interactive particularities; second, we analyze how the interviewee portrays the stories of meeting her husband and of succeeding through hard work; third, the analysis concentrates on how the interviewee and her daughter also present in the situation contest over how to narrate the deceased husband and father. In conclusion, we return to the benefits of understanding master and counter-narratives as flexible narrative resources employed on all levels of positioning.

### Positioning within an interview

Our data comprises a life-story interview of a 92-year old woman. The interview was conducted in 2012, as a part of a larger public health research project called *Vitality 90+* in Tampere University. As such, the stories we analyze are far from the small stories Bamberg and & Georgakopoulou (2008, 381) analyze, those that “can be about very recent (‘this morning, ‘last night’) or still unfolding events [...] They can be about small incidents that may (or may not) have actually happened [...] Small stories can even be about – colloquially speaking – ‘nothing’”. The stories told by “Aila”, as we call the interviewee, are not about very recent nor insignificant events but part of a life-story interview. However, in our analysis we do not “remain fixated on the represented contents of the story” (p. 393), but instead, try to “scrutinize the inconsistencies, contradictions, moments of trouble and tension, and the tellers’ constant navigation and finessing between different versions of selfhood in local context” (p. 393). Therefore, we reject the idea of trying to find or construct a single storyline throughout the interview and concentrate instead on passages of storytelling with manifest examples of master narratives. The studied interview does neither

constitute one and coherent story rendered by continuous, sovereign narrator nor a coherent interview as a conversation following the rigid question-answer-sequence (Potter, 1996, p. 135). Our approach is an attempt to apply the small-story approach to middle-sized conversational stories.

Two significant irregularities shape the conversational quality of the interview. Firstly, Aila's daughter is present in the room for about two thirds of the interview and actively participates in framing the event and advancing competing interpretations about her father. Secondly, both the daughter and mother show photographs and tell about the pictures. The participants also drink coffee, made by the daughter, and the participants have an informal discussion about the possible family connections between the interviewer and interviewee. As an event, the interview attests to Speer's (2002, p. 518) observation that the prior categorization of a conversation as an "interview" does not determine its nature as actual interaction (cf. Potter 2002; 2004). As Speer maintains, the participants themselves locally negotiate the rules and rights of the conversation. We have thus followed De Fina's (2009, pp. 234–237) proposal and analyzed the interview as a site of narrative positioning. More to it, we argue for the benefits of analyzing long interviews as interactional series of small or middle-sized narratives.

The original word-by-word transcript of the interview turned out to be somewhat unreliable. Most dramatically, there was a confusion about the first scene, taking place before the interview properly begins, during a discussion about the length of the interview:

Abbreviations for participants:

I: Interviewer

A: Aila, the interviewee, the mother

D: Daughter

Excerpt 1: Some coffee anyway

1 I: Noin

**Like that.**

2 D: Kuinka pitkään toi haastattelu (--)?

**So how long will the interview (--)?**

3 I: Tää ihan riippuu että,

**Well it depends on,**

4 I: lyhyin on ollu tunnin ja pisin on ollu kaks ja puol tuntia.



**the shortest one's been one hour and the longest one two and a half hours.**

5 D: Jaa. Mä nyt laitoin sen kahvin päälle kuitenkin.

**Uh-huh. Well I put on some coffee anyway.**

6. I: [naurahtaen] No niin, joo.

**[short laught] Well alright, yeah**

7 D: Sammutat sitten nauhurin välillä--

**You'll just turn off the recorder then—**

The first transcriber had attributed all the daughter's turns above to the mother, which would indicate the mother's will to control the situation. In closer analysis, it turns out to be the daughter who exits the position of an auxiliary listener or bystander. She claims herself a position of the hostess who is in charge of the situation, disregarding the facts that the interview takes place in her mother's home, the mother is the intended interviewee, and for many commentators, the interviewer is supposed to have a full control over the situation (e.g. Kvale 2006). We can see either that the positioning begins here before the narration, or alternatively, that the daughter and interviewer collaboratively create a future mini-narrative. In this story, the expected interactional positionings are transgressed. The interviewer complies with the position as a guest and closes the recorder when the daughter is ready to serve the coffee. In contrast to the question-answer-orthodoxy, the interviewee has so far been quiet, and interviewer has been answering, not posing questions.

We have elsewhere documented the ways in which active, varied and interactional positioning permeates the whole interview (Authors 2019). In this article, we focus on how the stories told and the identifications portrayed infuse in ongoing storytelling constantly interacting with and drawing from the resources of master and counter-narratives on all levels of positioning (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 385). The character of the deceased father is crucial in the narrative contest between the interviewed Aila and her daughter.

Contesting stories: The husband as a handsome man and a disappointment

Let us first turn to the first appearance of the marriage story in the data. In the beginning of the interview, the interviewer poses several questions concerning Aila's life course, and asks then a rather technical question:

Excerpt 2: Getting married

1 I: Minä vuonna te ootte naimisiin menny?

**I: So what year did you get married?**

2 A: Vuonna '42.

**A: Year '42.**

3 I: Joo

**I: Yeah.**

4 A: Juu ja se oli helluntaipäivä.

**A: Yep and it was Whitsunday.**

5 A: Mä oon silloin menny naimisiin ja,

**A: That's when I got married and,**

6 A: jota minä olen sitten monta kertaa, olen katunu

**A: and many times I've then, I've regretted it**

7 A: mutta, tässä mää nyt kumminkin olen, ja tämmösenä olen vielä.

**A: but, here I am now, and like this I've made it so far.**

8 A: Ja ankaraa työtä kuule tehny koko koko ikäni.

**A: And hard work I've done, you know, all of my all my life.**

A question about the wedding date brings about a story of marriage, disappointment and managing with hard work. While the interviewer asks about when “*you* got” married in plural form (in the original language, line 1), Aila answers when “*she* got married” using a first person singular (line 5). Despite the romantically sounding beginning – Whitsunday used to be one of preferred wedding days in romantic films and love stories – no “we” of the couple is established, and Aila expresses her open disappointment and regret on line 6. No doubt, this is a counter-narrative to all normalized or happy marriage stories. Yet, how can we argue exactly and empirically that Aila is telling *against* any expected family master narrative? The story establishes no happy state. Also, Aila’s marriage stories never portray the script of starting the life together, getting and raising children, or the story of family homes as expected. Instead, the disappointment, the “this is how it turned out then”

regularly profiles high in the story. On the textual level, the mentioning of Whitsunday is a marker activating assumptions on romantic and happy expectations for a marriage. The disappointing turn, however, is what makes the story tellable, worth accounting, in other words, different from common cultural expectations we can call a master narrative of happy marriage. Disappointment is vocalized repeatedly in the telling.

The story seems to follow the Labov and Waletzky (1997) model of oral stories accurately. In the place of “complicating action,” however, the story only offers the line 5, getting married, and immediately jumps into the evaluation of the marriage as a disappointment on lines 6-8. In this version of the marriage story, as in the other versions, there is the sudden turn from getting married to the disappointment, without a clear middle. The interviewer could have asked her to continue about why she was so disappointed. The role of hard work, drawing on the master narrative of managing the hardships with hard work, is conspicuous in this version. As much as Aila is countering the master narratives of happy marriage, she still relies on the master narrative of success with hard work (Kortteinen, 1992). Furthermore, the discursive formulations and perspectives chosen evidence that Aila is telling a story about herself as a person, which is in line with the expectations of an autobiographical interview. Casting oneself as the protagonist at the core of events is following the expectations of interactional activity going on. Despite some similarities regarding the coping, this is not the American redemptive story outlined by Dan P. McAdams (2013). Aila’s story is not a bit religious or even spiritual, and in her story the work “to promote the well-being of future generations” (McAdams 2013, xvii) is dubious and colored by conflicts and narrative contest.

The issue about the father comes up several times during the interview. Mother and daughter have different versions of the past events they may have discussed numerous times previously. Aila tells the last version of the story after her daughter has left, while she is once again browsing the photo album and arguably humoring the interviewer.

Excerpt 3: Handsome man

1 A: [...] kato kuule tämmö- tämmönen jätkä tulee kuule..

**A: [...] you know, this- this kind of fella comes up and**

2 I: Niin..

**I: Yes..**

3 A: [naurahtaa] Kysyyn. Joo.

**A: [short laugh] Asks me. Yeah.**

4 A: Ja pentele, menin sen kaa naimisiin ja..

**A: And heck, I married him and..**

5 I: Niin

**I: Yes.**

6 A: 26 vuotta kun oli.

**A: 26 years I was.**

7 I: Juu

**I: Yep.**

8 A: Mutta, katos kun mä näytän sulle viel.. Tässä kun mä.. [5 s] Mul ois mul ois sitä.. [8 s]

**A: But, look I've something to show you.. Here's when I.. [5 s] I got, I've got it.. [8 s]**

9 A: Kato se on veljensä kanssa tossa.

**A: Look he's with his brother there.**

10 I: Joo. Joo.

**I: Yeah. Yeah.**

11 A: Joo mut ei se veli oo ollenkaan yhtä hyvän näkönen.

**A: Yeah but the brother isn't nearly as good-looking.**

12 I: Niin. [naurahtaa]

**I: Yes. [short laugh]**

13 A: Ei kyllä mä sen paremman siitä nappasin mutta, [tuhautaa] (--) [nauraa],

**A: No but yeah I caught the better one but, [chortles] (--) [laughs],**

14 A: tämmöstä siitä sitten tuli

**A: this is how it turned out then**

15 A: mutta en mä tiedä

**A: but I don't know**

16 A: hyvin mul mennä on kato--

**A: I've got along alright, you know—**

At first, the first steps of the relationship between Aila and her future husband unfold as a normal boy meets girl story – story, where “this guy” comes to ask Aila to dance with him, but rather quickly, it turns into a girl meets boy version where Aila attests to her own, strong agency in choosing her husband (“I married him”). On line 8, Aila keeps the turn and pursues to show something of interest to the young interviewer. Whichever way the story ends, Aila shares her proudness of catching the better one of the brothers (lines 11, 13) and her shameless evaluation of the looks of the brothers. The remark on the line 14 is thus a rather unexpected turn, this time without further explanation, obviously because of the previous discussion. Suddenly, we have a marriage story gone sour. However, after expressing some epistemic insecurity on line 15, Aila emphatically points out that she is doing all right. What she accomplishes in the end draws on the Finnish master narratives of working life: “It has been difficult, but after hard work I am doing well”. Here the romance story without a happy ending is turned into a success in another meaningful narrative frame, that of the working ethos. (Kortteinen 1994.)

The narrative contest: a good father but a husband who wasn't alright

The most prominent topic of the narrative contest seems to be the gap of the previous story, the evaluation and positioning of the father. In the previous excerpts, Aila has been the solitary narrator. As previously mentioned, the daughter steps in by serving coffee and breaking the storytelling of her mother, presents a photo album and starts telling about the photos. With the help of the pictures, the daughter begins to tell about the father, his work (“his life's work”), and about his death of lung cancer. The daughter is the primary narrator for a while, before the narrative contest breaks fully out in the following section.

Excerpt 4: Good father

1 D: Nolo juttu,

**D: It's a shame,**

2 D: että isä niin nuorena kuoli – hyvä hyvä isä.

**D: that Dad died so young – good, a good father.**

3 A: Mutta ne jotka sieltä sodasta jonkinlaisina palas,

**A: But those who came back from the war in some way,**

4 A: niin ei ne tullut terveinä.

**A: they didn't come back healthy.**

5 A: Kun tämäkin oli kuule viisi vuotta siinä,

**A: And this one too stayed for five years there,**

6 A: kun laulussa sanotaan että kun pohja

**A: as they say in the song that when,**

7 A: Vienanlahdesta Laatokkaan me miekalla piirrämme rajat, näin,

**A: with a sword we draw the border from Dvina Bay to Ladoga Lake, like this,**

8 A: ja isä oli tässä sillanpääasemassa viis vuotta.

**A: and Dad spent five years at this bridgehead.**

9 A: Kun se tulee sitten kuulkaa tänne, ja rupeaa elään

**A: And then he comes here and starts to live,**

10 A: ei ne ollut terveitä.

**A: they weren't alright.**

11 A: Ei kukaan ollut terve joka sieltä tuli.

**A: Nobody was alright who came back.**

12 D: Ei ja vaikkei fyysisesti ollut

**D: No and even though not physically**

13 D: mutta henkisesti oli,

**D: but mentally he was,**

14 D: se on ilman muuta kun ajattelee, mitä se oli,

**D: that's for sure when you think what it was,**

15 D: koko ajan pelkää siellä sitten.

**D: all the time being afraid there.**

16 A: Niin, kun ne vähän ajan päästä aina öisin näki sitten unissa niitä,

**A: Yes, when they after a while every night in their dreams they saw those,**

17 A: helevetti soikoon.

**A: goddamit.**

This excerpt manifests all three analytically different levels of positioning. Firstly, we have the acute contest over story contents between the mother and daughter about the evaluation of the father. The opening moves (“good, good father” – “But those who came back from the war [were not] healthy) position the father quite differently, even though the narrators evade confronting each other directly. Secondly, we have the active, interactionally performed positioning. The prerequisite for the whole contest is the move by which the daughter has interactionally positioned herself as an epistemically and situationally fully entitled participant of the discussion, the presupposed interview. In the above excerpt Aila and the daughter have different stance towards the deceased husband and father: Aila recalls someone who suffered from war trauma, the daughter recalls a good father. During this contest, thirdly, the participants present images of themselves and the family as a whole drawing on different master and counter-narratives.

The references between the lines 11 and 13 are vague and challenging to interpret. Mother responds to the daughter’s statement of the father being a good father with contrastive ‘but’ and saying that no one who returned from the war was healthy (line 11). Daughter confirms this and produces a continuancy marker ‘no and..’, adding “even though not physically, but mentally he was” (12-13). Despite semantic contradictions mother and daughter seem to agree upon interpretations of father’s state, and the tones of both are here rather cooperative and aligning. Earlier in the interview, Aila has explicitly mentioned that her husband was not wounded in the war, which supports our

suggestion that the missing word in the daughter's line is not the logical "healthy" from the mother's line but its opposite term "ill". For obvious reasons of delicacy, neither mother nor daughter prefers to position the father as explicitly ill. The same discreetness is visible in mother's turn on lines 9 and 10. On line 9, "he" returns from the war but on the next line, a more general "they" were not all right. Aila both alleviates and enables her darker positioning of her husband by repeating, on lines 10-11 that "nobody was alright who came back." Nevertheless, within just a few turns we have moved from "good, good father" to men who "after a while every night in their dreams [...] saw those", thus returning the angle from daughter's point of view back on her, the wife witnessing her husband's recurrent nightmares at nights. The word nightmare is not explicitly mentioned, yet the earlier gap in Aila's short marriage story has received some content. Aila's cursing on line 17 attests to the intensity of the emotional experience, even decades after the husband's death. It seems that the contestation between the mother and the daughter revolves much around a struggle over focalization which in turn is entangled with ambivalent rights to tell the story.

In contesting the polished description of her past husband as a good father, Aila evokes on lines 6-7 a much larger master narrative. Her quote "with a sword we draw the border from Dvina Bay to Ladoga Lake" is an animation of the "March of Honor" of the influential, right wing Academic Karelia Society AKS (see Alapuro, 1973a & b). The society published, before the Second World War, even a guidebook for defense propaganda and celebrated, in the quoted march, the birth of the "Great Finland" by the war. With a few animated words, Aila contrasts the typical wartime propaganda and the ruined men who came home from the war, provocatively portraying two alternative versions of and perspectives on same social reality. We want to make two important claims to clarify the setting between a master and a counter-narrative. Firstly, we do not argue that the right wing, nationalistic March of Honor really was a hegemonic master narrative at the time of the Continuation War, in the years 1941–44. Instead of trying to prove this, we renounce all claims about a narrative having a historically documented hegemonic position, and instead, prefer to argue that Aila herself establishes the song conversationally as the master narrative she wants to counter (see Author 1). Secondly, the temporary arrangement of the counter-narrative is complicated, because Aila is recounting a counter-narrative to a wartime narrative of heroic struggle. However, after the Continuation War had ended with an armistice with Soviet Union, AKS was disbanded and its March of Honor was excluded from publicity. At least outside the closed rightwing circles, the song appeared to be almost forgotten.



In 2012, at the time of Aila's telling, the song is very far from expressing any contemporary master narrative, quite the contrary. The intentional and exact evoking of the words of the song – and Aila does it twice during the whole interview – frames her story as a counter-narrative as regards a past master narrative. Mobilizing a narrative which abounded the scene at the time of the storied events, deploys a contrast which has narrative relevance at the time of the telling. The grave contradiction between the heroic song and her husband's ruined mental health display a stance and organize the story and its tellability at the moment of the interview. The passage with the reference (lines 7-8) can also be seen as an attempt to consolidate the two points of view to her husband. Aila refers to her husband as "Dad" on line 8, assimilating the daughter's vocabulary and implicitly undermining daughter's description of the father as a good man. A further sign of compromising characterization is apparent in the use of the deictic references "I mean this one stayed" and "at this bridgehead", which invites the participants in the interaction to see the absent husband and father as a traumatized man and a victim of war. The formulation brings up the perspective of a poor individual soldier up against the propaganda. The daughter confirms this, though yet again, goes on defending the father saying that anyone in those circumstances would have been traumatized (lines 14-15).

What becomes clear is that the reference to the past master narrative of creating a "Great Finland" does not narrowly focus on the "Who am I?" question. With the reference to the song Aila positions herself strictly against the war-time radical right-wing propaganda and produces a more tellable story. She also sustains the memory of their false promises and in that way positions herself within the victims of the war. What is more, this reference frames the father as a tragic figure and gives justification for Aila's grim evaluation of her marriage, while also challenging the daughter's positive descriptions in the interview situation. As a partial explanation for the fate of the marriage, the opposition between the two stories about the war of course condenses something essential about Aila self-identification as well.

#### Master and counter-narratives in contest

After the previous excerpt, mother and daughter talk about various things, mostly about photographs, for about fifteen minutes. During this period, the interviewer tries to cease or defer the discussion on photos several times, but without success while the daughter insists on showing them. The fourth time the interviewer succeeds and Aila resumes her story. After a while, Aila accounts her working-life career and comes to the move of the shoe factory to another part of the city. Aila

tells that at first she went to work by bicycle, and later took a bus that went past the factory. At that point, the daughter intervenes again, presenting her version of the events. While Aila now concentrates more on how she worked hard and survived independently, the daughter tries to hold on to the story about the relationship of a normal couple, salvaging father's essential role in the picture.

Excerpt 5: Family providers

1 D: isä sitä oli suurin piirtein joka päivä vastassa sillon

**D: father was there to meet her just about every day back**

2 D: kun () isä eli. Niin se- isän kyydissä hän sää tulit kotia.

**D: when () father lived. It was- he did ride you home.**

3 A: joskus.

**A: sometimes.**

()

4 A: joskus.

**A: sometimes.**

5 D: ei se nyt ollu joskus se oli useemmiten mut, ei hirveen paljon

**D: no it was not just sometimes it was most of the time but, not all that much**

6 D: mutta se että kun isäkin teki pitkää päivää niin ei se, aina ollu (-)

**D: but it was that father worked long hours so he couldn't, always be ()**

7 A: juu ja se oli sitä mieltä sitten aina että kun, hän on päivän tehny

**A: yeah and he had the opinion that whenever he has finished his day**

8 A: niin hän on sitten niinku, työnsä tehny.

**A: he has done like, all the work for that day.**

9 D: [huokaus + tauko 5s] Hjoo kyllä se tuli kuule kymmenen ja

**D: [deep outbreath and pause 5s] hyeah he did arrive home at ten and**

10 D: yhdentoista aikaan monta kertaa kotiin. Ja se tuli pitkistä

**D: eleven o'clock many times. and he came from working long**

11 D: työpäivistä. Että kyllä sillä niitä pitkiä päiviä oli,

**D: hours. so that he did have those long days too,**

12 D: mutta oli sillä niitä lyhyempiäkin.

**D: but also shorter ones.**

13 A: oli.

**A: yes he did.**

14 D: Eikä se ollu laiska mies ei ollenkaan.

**D: And he wasn't a lazy man at all.**

15 A: Ei ei ja se sano monta kertaa että saatana ku,

**A: Nah nah and he said many times that I'll be damned as,**

16 A: (--) toi ämmähän saa parempaa tiliä kun minä. [naurua

**A: the wifey's making more money than me. [laughs] (--)**

17 A: että jassoo.

**A: allrighty then.**

18 D: No sehän nyt ei pitänyt paikkaansa

**D: Well it wasn't true**

19 D: mutta se että että tota isä oli tietyl lailla ylpee mies

**D: but so that Dad was a proud man in some way**

20 D: se oli kasvatettu siihen että

**D: he'd been raised so that**

21 D: että mies hoitaa perheen perheen elatuksen,

**D: that the man provides for the family the family,**

22 D: ja se suuttu siitä kun äiti meni töihin

**D: and he got angry when Mom took a job**

23 D: mutta sitten se leppy

**D: but then he stopped**

24 D: kun rahaa rupes tuleen.

**D: when the money started coming in.**

25 A: [naurahtaa] Niin!

**A: [laughs] Right!**

26 D: Ja oli pakko niinku s-sopeutua siihen

**D: And had to, you know, g-get used to it**

27 D: että äiti halus käydä töissä.

**D: that Mom wanted to go to work.**

28 A: Niin se oli se.

**A: That's how it was.**

29 D: Se oli helpompaa taloudellisesti sitten kun..

**D: It was easier financially then when**

39 A: Se sopeutu siihen sitten kato kun

**A: He got used to it then, you know, when**

31 A: minä toin rahaa niin

**A: I brought the money so**

32 A: että minä pärjäsin sillä rahalla. Niin. Niin.

**A: I would get by on the money. Yes. Yes.**

33 A: Ja ja sitten kuule semmonen (sorasta tullu) (-) mies..

**A: And then, listen, this kind of (back from the war) (-) man..**

34 D: Isä oli hyvin, hyvin sosiaalinen, sosiaalinen ihminen elikkä,

**D: was very, very sociable, a sociable person so that,**

35 D: se oli niinku semmonen jolla oli ystäviä

**D: he was one of those who's got friends**

36 D: ja ulospäinsuuntautunu.

### **D: and is directed outward**

37 D: Et sillä oli kamalasti näitä, tuttavias ja kavereita ja tämmöstä.

### **D: So that he had an awful lot of these, people that he knew and friends and so on.**

This conversation is too dense with competing positionings to be comprehensively analyzed within the space of this paper, yet the incessant contest over positioning becomes clear. Aila positions herself as a highly independent woman (lines 3-4, 39-32), while the daughter emphasizes her dependency on the father's help and support. At the same time, Aila portrays her late husband as a sneering, not-so-loyal husband (15-17), who, after all was "a back from the war" kind of man (line 33). The daughter quickly steers the talk away from the potential deficiencies of a man returned from the war and portrays him as a very sociable man with plenty of friends. On the interactional level, the daughter has taken an independent, active role in positioning her father and she consistently does this more favorably than Aila. In the beginning of the excerpt (lines 1-5), mother and daughter offer radically different versions about how (independently) the mother came home from work. Father came to fetch Aila either "just about every day" (line 1), "sometimes" (3-4), "or most of the time but, not that much" (5). The daughter, consequently, challenges Aila's epistemic privilege of telling about her own history and experience, yet, eventually mitigating the formulation from "every day" to "not so much", thus marking sensitivity to the epistemic primacy of mother's account or at least orientating to potential contestation between accounts. The daughter adds that the father was, however, no loafer, but worked long days too. Aila's response is interesting. She does not engage into an extended debate on the frequency of the father riding her home but sticks on to father's indifferent attitude towards household work after working days. On lines 7-8 and 15-16, she speaks in high pitch and clearly provocative tone, indicating that she disagrees with the polished story of the daughter. Daughter, instead, sighs loudly, takes a long pause, continues then in very low voice and slow speed (lines 9-12). The conflict over the divergent stories, apparently, is emotionally demanding for both participants.

Several times, the contrasting views are advanced by slight topic changes, as-if continuing the previous turn. On line 7, Aila confirms the long hours and then connects them with the father's indifferent attitude and minor role in household work. Similarly, on line 15, Aila begins with confirming that he was not a lazy man and continues – again without explicitly expressing opposition with a 'but' – to his sneer about her salary. On line 33, the daughter straightforwardly

interrupts her mother's sentence and talk about the war and moves on to display the sociable character of her father.

The conversation contains two obvious cases of level 3 positioning. While commenting his husband's long working days as his excuse not to participate in the household chores (lines 7-8), Aila draws on later, feminist discourses on the equal distribution of household work. The period between the story-time and time of telling witnessed, in most western countries, extensive debates on how to arrange the household work on equal basis. The daughter, in defending her father, was able to resort to the old master narrative of (male) breadwinners, who work hard during the day and are entitled to be free from household chores. Interestingly, the setting between the master and counter-narrative becomes activated during the conversation, when the daughter engages in the description of the very long working days of his father. In other words, she does not claim that the father did his share of the domestic chores, that is, she does not contest the story contents but how the father is ideologically portrayed in them. She contests the third level interpretation of her father's narrated actions and justifies them by aligning with the master narrative of male breadwinners. In this interpretative frame, the father worked long days and had particular attitude towards work allocation and duties because of his upbringing. Paradoxically, the same father who in the daughter's story worked long hours, often until to eleven o'clock, was still able to ride Aila home "just about every day". This contradiction demonstrates the crucial relevance and interconnection of interactional positionings in storytelling. The accuracy or consistency of literal accounts are less important than the contestation going on the level of interaction and identifications.

The ideological contest crystallizes when Aila complains the way the late husband had ridiculed her work and salary by claiming that she is earning more than he himself is (line 15). Again, the daughter does not refute her mother's claim, expressed in a clearly provocative tone, but instead offers an ideological explanation (line 19-24). According to the explanation, the father was "a proud man", and raised to the idea that the man provides for the family, and therefore "got angry" when his wife went to work. "Getting angry," therefore, is an expected and normal attitude within this frame. The daughter draws on the old master narrative of male breadwinners as a self-evident cultural background that renders the father as proud upholder of the inherited culture. This cultural claim, however, needs some specification. At the time Aila went to work, in Finland of the 1950s, the norm was almost the opposite among working class families. When the youngest child went to

school, mothers quite often went to work<sup>2</sup>. Yet the ideological discourse is strong enough to entitle the argument: the man who ridicules his wife for working is actually proud and follows his upbringing. During this section, we argue, the participants themselves orientate to the use of wider societal discourses (D-discourses) by offering competing ideological explanations during the narrative contestation (mother, lines 7-8, daughter on lines 10-12 and 19-22).

As was already suggested in the first excerpt from the interview we analyzed in this paper, Aila's life-story interview revolves around a failed marriage and success through hard work. As an ideal of a romantic relationship goes, Aila only passingly hints to the master narrative of living happily ever after since meeting someone. She is more inclined to use the story about her marriage only as an episode in the story of her becoming an independent woman through hard work. The daughter on her part is adamant in trying to uphold an image of a good father and a normal, canonical family life which also includes father's thoughtful gestures towards the wife such as meeting her after work to walk (or ride a bike) home together. the master narrative of a proud, traditional male bread winner, whereas Aila suggests a more modern conception on how to divide household chores between spouses. The political background for this all is the war, which Aila draws from to portray how well she survived even though her marriage turned sour.

## Conclusions

Based on this analysis, the master and counter-narratives we located in the interview should not be understood as background factors explaining and giving meaning to participants' thoughts and words. Rather, their relevance as available, actively used resources within the on-going narrative contest(s) should be recognized. Aila told a story of her independent work career and her independent way of arranging her ways to work and back. When her daughter challenged her independence and emphasized her dependency from the help and support of her husband, Aila retorted by bringing out her husband's less than helpful habits and used obvious feminist arguments in making her case. This narrative contestation cuts through all levels of narrative positioning, where Aila and her late husband are positioned as actors in the storied past, these positions are openly debated in the ongoing interaction at the same time contesting over the expected roles and behavior between spouses and how they participate in the society at large, especially through working life and as part of a war effort. In the analysis, we found the separate inquiry into the

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<sup>2</sup> Author 1, who is of the same age group as the daughter, grew up in an industrial village where most mothers went to work after the youngest child went to school, as did the author's mother. This happened in the countryside, not in such a biggish town as where Aila lived.

Bambergian level-3 positioning both relevant and productive. The identification of the societal D-discourses may be difficult, as Deppermann (2015, p. 381) argues, but on the other hand, Deppermann's own model does not properly sensitize the readers to find the relevant traces.

The interview is rich with middle-sized stories attesting to the narrative contest(s) between the interview participants. The narrative contestation covers both questions of identity – Aila as a victim of failed marriage or a hero of emancipation – and larger political struggles in the society. The use of master and counter-narratives in this material display complex temporal structures, as well. Past controversies still organize and motivate contemporary identity positions. As a result, Aila is able to narrate her life by mobilizing story-time counter-narratives, and at the same time, drawing from master narratives of time of the telling. What Aila accomplishes, is a story of an independent, powerful woman. Yet, this is not all that gets accomplished in the exchange.

No counter-narrative purity becomes articulated in this interview. Both master and counter narratives function as resources on all levels of positioning and are strategically used to accomplish evaluative stances and narrative contestation between the mother and the daughter. Going back to David Herman's idea of prototypical narratives, most of the master narratives in our material fall short in terms of situatedness, sequence of events, disturbance and experience. Even though master narratives in general are not expected to lay out particularized events, master narratives of national history in our analyzed example are presented as explicit narratives. The master narrative of AKS can certainly be seen as in that light, as a narrative prevailing in public discourse and outing the view of ambitious generals in the war. One can hear a tone of societal criticism in this account. Contextualizing her life in the frame of particular historical era also results in Aila living through a markedly generalized experience of having a war traumatized spouse.

In the material analyzed, master and counter-narratives as narrative resources in an ongoing interaction both change their status as dominant or resisting depending on the narrative context. Our analysis also showcases examples of master and counter-narratives on all levels of positioning. The militaristic song of the AKS, posed as a master narrative by the mother, was influential in the story time of the Second World War. The narrative contestation between Aila and her daughter at times addresses what really happened – the story level of whether Aila was often walked home by her husband – at other times what kind of an ideological interpretation to give to the narrated events and characters – whether the husband's scorn for the wife making more money was a sign of his chauvinistic attitude to women's work both inside and outside of home or prove of him upholding to a proud legacy. During the interaction, and despite the competing interpretations of her daughter, Aila sustains her position as an independent and able woman. The conceptual clarification of the



methodological hybrid we are suggesting continues, yet, it seems evident that the combination of positioning analysis and simultaneous attention to master and counter-narratives obtains potential to provide nuanced analysis of how narratives function in and through interaction. If the role of master narratives remains unacknowledged within positioning analysis because of the problems identifying them, we are afraid, the original mission of positioning theories vis à vis older theories of identity remains unfinished.

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