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Aspects of voice in the use of positioning in polyphonic storytelling: Ventriloquial moves within a biographical interview

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Abstract

This article investigates the rhetorical use of voices and ventriloquism in occasioned storytelling. We explore the use of external voicing in the narration, arguing that to understand voice as an argumentative resource, it is important to include both material and metaphoric aspects of voice. Our article explicates the differences and relations between these two aspects in a polyphonic life story interview. The material voice involves the acoustic sphere of communication: prosody, intonation and tone, whereas the metaphoric voice is commonly understood as a marker of subjectivity or group interests. We juxtapose the latter ‘representative’ interpretation of voice by applying Richard Walsh’s (2007, 2010) recent theory of metaphorical levels of the voice. Our material consists of a biographical interview with a 92-year-old woman accompanied in the situation by her daughter. The daughter interferes in the interview by telling competing stories about the family past. To unravel the rhetorical moves in the interview, we apply the concept of ventriloquism and the theory of narrative positioning. Our analysis demonstrates how the purposeful use of the material voice transports and

signifies metaphoric voices as characters, actors and identities being negotiated in turn-by-turn unfolding narration.

Keywords

contestation

conversational storytelling

narrative positioning

polyphony

rhetorical approach

ventriloquism

Introduction

In this article, we are interested in the management of interrelated evaluative representations in spoken narration, in particular, through ‘external voicing’ that is by incorporating external figures into the narration. We will analyse these rhetorical moves in interaction with the toolkit of narrative positioning and put it in dialogue with the concept of ‘ventriloquism’. We argue that ventriloquism is not solely about identifying the source of voice; it is also about providing an asset for action and evaluative aspirations. The notion of external and internal figures is not new in the studies of social interaction. The conceptualizations of the footing and the participation framework by Erving Goffman bring up the multilevel complexity of communicative positions in interaction encounters. Goffman demonstrated that instead of a simple speaker–hearer pair, there are present in an encounter a multiplicity of participants, internal and external, in variable different roles. In storytelling research, the notion of participation framework has been further elaborated. Charles [Goodwin \(1984\)](#) traced the management of various

roles (on the production and reception side) in occasioned narration. A story told in conversation is expected to be aligned and affiliated with (Stivers 2008). Furthermore, narration allows *moral casting* (Rautajoki 2012), the evaluative organization of actors and events in meaningful temporal sequences. This makes narratives susceptible to contestation (Phelan 2008). In our data there emerges a scene of narrative contestation, in which both tellers mobilize a toolkit of ‘voices’ to compete with each other.

The early studies in qualitative research often promised to ‘give a voice’ and listen to interviewees speaking ‘in their own voices’ (Mishler 1986: 118; Roberts 2002: 21), as if transmitting their inner views into the situation. A similar representative use is also apparent in public discussion, politics and journalism, regularly stating that the ‘voice’ of a particular group is not sufficiently heard in an issue. Gubrium and Holstein (2001) criticize this view and suggest a more distinctively social and Bakhtinian understanding of the socially layered voice. Yet, an either–or answer to the owned vs. layered voice question hardly covers the problem field of voice. The situation of narrative contestation we focus on in this study foregrounds the question of who is entitled to speak and to be heard and be documented in and through narrative accounts. The constellation of voices launched in the telling is, however, much more complex than that of mediating subjective views. We approach the polyphonic contestation taking place from the perspective of ventriloquism, the importation of external voices into the setting. Ventriloquism highlights the common feature of life story narratives in which narrators and interviewees often quote other speakers and sources from the past while composing their own story. Our aim is to illustrate the rhetorical usability of these ventriloquial moves. Our point of departure is the irreversibly multi-layered, even contradictory,

character of the concept of voice. Rather than suggesting one and unconditionally privileged understanding of voice, we discuss and juxtapose some relevant proposals in this article, assess their merits and limitations, and try to ascertain their usefulness in the empirical analysis of a case of conversational narrative contestation between a mother, a daughter and an interviewer.

We begin by introducing Francois Cooren's theory of communicative ventriloquism and study the notion of voice within it. Next, we present Richard Walsh's narratological theory of the metaphorical voice in the rhetoric of representation. Finally, we contemplate the perspective of vocal and embodied 'acoustic' voice theorized by Adriana [Cavarero \(2005\)](#). After discussing these different conceptualizations of voice we move on to study the deployment of voices and identifications within narrative contests and introduce [Bamberg's \(1997\)](#) theory of narrative positioning. Having introduced our most relevant analytical tools we proceed to describe the particular qualities of our data, and then the actual analysis. We conclude by reflecting on the role of ventriloquism and the adopted aspects of voice in explicating the dynamic of interactional narrative competition.

Francois Cooren and ventriloquism

According to the dictionary, ventriloquism, 'speaking in the belly', means 'voice coming from a distance', nowadays associated with an entertaining puppet show onstage ([Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020](#)). In social scientific research the concept has been applied in various ways. In communication research, [Cooren \(2012, 2014\)](#) approaches ventriloquism pragmatically, in the framework of speech act theory, arguing that different sorts of 'figures' express themselves through what people say. Voices then are

equated with figures making agentive claims and executing actions through talk and communication. Ventriloquizing, drawing on voices from a distance, can be used to convey obligations, desires and experiences, for example to increase the appeal or authority of talk. A ventriloquial act is always expressing some kind of attachment to an external figure, in either a negative or a positive sense. In either case, voice is associated with agency and the source of talking action (Cooren 2014: 5–7). Furthermore, Cooren's understanding of ventriloquism is not limited to human figures, since material things and documents can also acquire agentive status through ventriloquism. We offer no further elaboration of this conceptualization in the article but acknowledge that photo albums, for example, are invoked as authoritative prompts documenting the family history represented in the telling.

Whereas for Cooren ventriloquism signals communicative agency attached to external figures, this article puts emphasis on the act of representation and approaches ventriloquism as a persuasive tool a storyteller can use to import voices into a narrative setting. To elaborate on the aspect of metaphorical voice, we next move on to Walsh's narratological theory of voice in the rhetoric of representation.

Walsh and the metaphoric voice

For Walsh (2007, 2010) the analysis of the distinct categories of metaphoric voice begins with a decisive distinction between diegesis (telling) and mimesis (showing). Building on this distinction, Walsh further differentiates between firstly, voice as instance, secondly voice as idiom and thirdly voice as interpellation. Voice as *instance* refers to agency in narration, to the teller of the story, the act of representation. In this limited sense, voice can indeed be someone's 'own voice'. In our data both the mother and the daughter act as

tellers, the daughter, however as one external to the interview situation. Voice as *idiom* corresponds to the mimetic presentation of a character's voice, pointing out that narrative language does not only represent voices but also exhibits them mimetically. This aspect of voice contributes, at least in fiction, to the job of characterization of the speaker, inviting the recipient to evaluate the subjectivity of that character. (Walsh 2007: 93–94). In a novel, the narrator's voice (as instance) informs about the events and the plot, while any form of mimetically represented voice is doing discursive evocation of the character of the speaker. The third level of metaphoric voice, *interpellation*, draws heavily on the Bakhtinian conception of socially layered voice and the Althusserian theory of ideology. This is the level of socially recognizable discourses and ideological claims that the speakers invoke and mobilize – and the level Gubrium and Holstein refer to when criticizing the concept of 'own voice' (Gubrium and Holstein 2001). On this level, voice is never anyone's own; it is always socially shared or contested. In fiction, which is where Walsh places his theory, the notion of ventriloquism, the echoes of external voices, becomes most relevant with the aspect of voice as interpellation. What Cooren and Walsh have in common is that they are both interested in the evocation of external items which 'have a voice', the former as communicative agents and the latter as representational assets.

Applying Walsh's theory of fictional voices to non-fictional narration is not without problems. Non-fiction, and most clearly autobiographical narration, does not incorporate the narratologically crucial distinction between author and narrator. For this reason, all autobiographical narration is also mimetic and characterizes the speaker at the same time as he or she is accounting for past events. All interview material can thus be

seen as presenting the voice both as instance (who is speaking?) and as idiom (how does the narration characterize the speaker?). And the complications do not stop here. Just as fiction, the interview material can and typically does, include ventriloquized quotes from people who may or may not be present at the occasion. In such cases, voice as idiom is actualized in a more radical way. Our case of narrative contestation illustrates the different rhetorical effects of using voice as idiom, as in invoking the voice of the deceased father, or invoking his presence and thoughts by methods of *diegesis*, by telling about them. External figures (people outside the storytelling situation) can thus be invited as parts of the story either in the form of direct or indirect quotations, free indirect speech (voice as idiom) or characterizations by the teller. Moreover, this importation of external figures necessitates a vehicle, a material medium delivering voices into the setting. In our case it is the human voice, to which we next turn to.

Cavarero and the acoustic voice

Perhaps the most material and embodied notion of voice has been introduced by [Cavarero \(2005\)](#). Cavarero specifically contrasts the ‘semantic voice’ with phonetic and non-semantic acoustic sphere, which for her emerges from the living body of the speaker. Cavarero calls this aspect a sonorous voice and associates it, in all its vibrant materiality, with the uniqueness of each individual human being through which humans are able to reveal themselves and express existence. It is easy to realize that the critics of ‘the own voice’ tend to focus on the semantic and thus more metaphorical voice and ignore this sonorous and subjective side of voice. Yet, the phonetic affordances of vocal voice are prone to intermingle and travel imperceptibly from the sonorous side to the semantic and metaphoric senses of voice. We relate to other people with our sonorous voice.

We concur with the views stating that the phonetic sound of voice, the acoustic sphere of the talk, is much broader in scope than expressing the uniqueness of the speaker. In this respect bodily voice resembles bodily gestures, which have also been investigated in the framework of self-expression ([Ekman 1982](#)). Gestures can be expressive, and indeed they often are, but they can also be used for communicative purposes ([Hochschild 1983](#); [Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori 2012](#)). Phonetic and prosodic markers share this affordance. Through vocal cues, the speaker can signal stance, alignment and evaluation ([Reed 2010](#); [Selting 2010](#)), which makes vocal voice an applicable tool to regulate positionings and characterizations in talk. In our research, we pay attention to the role of the material voice in transporting and signifying ventriloquized voices in a conversational setting, thus adding communicational overtones to the quotations and characterizations of external characters. The original ‘signature effect’ of the speaker remains to characterize an appearance of the phonetic voice in conversation but this is not all there is to the use of representational rhetoric.

To sum up, our task in this article is to shed light on the rhetorical use of ventriloquism in the vocalized art of interactional narrative representation and its contestation.

Research material and method

Our research data comprise an autobiographical interview of a 92-year-old woman. The data were collected in 2012 as a part of a larger public health research project entitled ‘Vitality 90+’ at the University of Tampere. The interview lasts for two hours and was conducted at the interviewee’s home. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed (see transcription symbols in appendix) after which the data have been anonymized. We

have used both auditive and textual data format in our analysis. Labelling the dataset as conversational narrative differentiates it from common narratological material such as written fictional novels, acknowledging though, that the setting for interaction is goal-oriented, and thus, semi-institutional ([Heritage and Drew 1992](#)). The talk takes place within a life story interview guided and recorded by a researcher. From the perspective of narrative identifications and evaluations, the fact that the interaction in the setting is not organized naturally makes little difference. Just as De [Fina \(2009\)](#) has argued, interviews can be approached as occasions of interactional storytelling. What is relevant is that in an autobiographical interview there are interactional privileges with regard to the teller position and poetic privileges with regard to the principal character (see [Goodwin 1984](#)).

What makes this sample of data interesting is the presence of the interviewee's daughter, who moves from the position of an overhearer in the encounter to that of an active participant with her own views and stories. In the beginning, she makes coffee and serves it during the interview, and steps into the discussion between interviewer and interviewee. From then on, she becomes increasingly involved in formulating accounts of past events, leading to a narrative contest with the interviewee, and ultimately ending up in an intervention by the interviewer, who asks the daughter to step aside from the scene. In spite of there being an interview set-up, the frame of an interaction cannot be determined in advance but is always negotiated and enacted by the local participants of the interaction, as [Speer \(2005: 518\)](#) points out. In our case, what was planned to be an orderly interview, turns gradually into a storytelling contest between the mother and daughter, who occasionally almost ignore the role of the interviewer. The setting is tricky for the competitors because they both have, at least partial, access to the events

described, and thus similar epistemic rights in the matter (Heritage and Raymond 2012). For narration, this means that there are present two potential storytellers and two 'knowing recipients' (see Mendelbaum 1987). The set of two competent tellers is prone to arouse monitoring, critical assessments and requests for verification (Goodwin 1991). This is indeed what happens but what is monitored most is not the story content but the characterizations and the evaluative implications made.

We approach the interview from the perspective of small story research ([Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008](#); [Georgakopoulou 2006](#)), meaning that instead of presupposing the interview to consist of a single, coherent life story, we view identities as occasioned constructions emerging in more or less scattered pieces of interactional tellings ([Hyvärinen 2008](#)). The interview we study turns polyphonic in many senses of the word. Polyphony is Bakhtin's term ([1984](#)) to describe a narrative that includes a diversity of simultaneous points of views and grants validity to the voices of various conflicting characters. In our data, the interviewer–interviewee pair is complemented by the voice of an external overhearer, the daughter, who becomes increasingly involved in the production of accounts of the family history. While the mother characterizes the father critically, pursuing identifications of herself as a strong and independent woman, the daughter starts defending the integrity of the deceased father's point of view in representing the past. What follows is a narrative contestation (see [Phelan 2008](#)) between mother and daughter in which the participants deploy voice both materially and metaphorically, by using ventriloquation and so reviving the presence of the late father in the accounts of the interview.

An applicable tool to recognize and explicate the multilevel uses of voice in evoking the past is provided by narrative positioning. Narrative positioning theory ([Bamberg 1997](#); [Deppermann 2013](#)) explores how identities and interrelations between actors are managed in storytelling. Taking distance from the more static and deterministic notion of a pre-structured cultural subject position, it aims to highlight how cultural identifications are managed in the process of conversational narration. People are position themselves and others on three levels: *firstly*, in the story told and characters involved therein, *secondly*, during the ongoing interactive encounter and the roles of participants in the telling and *thirdly* the culturally enduring identities answering questions like, who am I?, who is he?. It is easy to recognize that the level three positioning, mobilizing social discourses and master narratives ([Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008](#)), corresponds closely Walsh's voice as interpellation, and partly also Cooren's ventriloquation. We have discussed the theory and method of narrative positioning more thoroughly in [Hyvärinen et al. \(forthcoming\)](#).

Occasioned personal narratives most often involve mediating an experience, which, to succeed, necessitates a shared set of parameters (Labov and Waletzky 1997; [Fludernik 1996](#)). Yet in addition to that, stories told in social interaction are always context-sensitive and purposeful ([Bamberg 2004](#); [Rautajoki 2018](#)). In social interaction, being a first-hand witness to an event entitles one to 'own' that experience interactionally ([Sacks 1984](#)). This means that the one owning the experience has an epistemic privilege to tell about it. This assumption causes trouble in the interview, as the daughter starts challenging the mother's experiential accounts in the telling. While this disrupts the order of a biographical interview setting, which grants the role of teller to the one being

interviewed, neither participant is unable to fully refute the view of the other. These are not merely disagreeing parties; as members of the same family, they share equal enough epistemic grounds to recount the past events. As a result, there will be two sources of material voice present in the telling.

Moreover, in reference to the family unit, the identifications that the tellers pursue are interlinked and impregnated with mutual rights, responsibilities and expectations (Sacks 1974). The main disagreement between mother and daughter concerns a third family member, the characterization of the father, onto whom the mother projects much of the hardship she has overcome in life. To the mother's negative accounts, the daughter responds defensively, praising the father. Thus, the juxtaposition is set. The juxtaposition is not only apparent in the content of the accounts (semantic level) but it is also signalled through sounds and prosodic markers (the vocal aspect of voice). This *acoustic sphere* of the encounter (Cavarero 2005) is integral to the way *affective positionings* emerge and materialize in the interview (Giaxoglou and Georgakopoulou forthcoming). Furthermore, voices appear in the exchange metaphorically.

In the interview exchange that follows, the two tellers start competing in presenting the words, thoughts and experiences of the late father. Treating the father as the primary object of representation in the accounts casts him temporarily in the role of protagonist, which upgrades the validity of his subjectivity in the story and disrupts the autobiographical order of the interview. In ventriloquist fashion, this representational objectification of the father revives the view of a deceased figure in the past events. What becomes clear, however, is that quoting a character's words and mindset in non-fiction does not guarantee this person integrity and emancipation (see Walsh 2007: 100). Revival

through voicing can also be used for critical purposes. In any case, all objectified characterization is intertwined with the third aspects of voice, namely that of voice as interpellation. It refers to the effects of the idiom represented, to the inferences launched by ideological subject positions. The objectified character is subjected to the evaluative scrutiny of the narrative audience. Making perspectival choices, the teller can align sympathetically with the idiom represented or disengage from it through ironic inferences. In brief Althusserian terms, interpellation describes the relation between the teller and the recipients in *constituting an individual as a subject* (Walsh 2007: 98–99). From the perspective of ventriloquism, interpellation echoes the ideological voices of culture, which are harnessed to serve local narrative purposes.

To reiterate once more, our interest in voice does not focus on the question of ‘who gets to speak’ in the setting, associated with democratic and demographic representation and self-expression. Of course, the whole setting is built on the fact that the daughter can participate, as an outsider, in the discussion with her very own voice. Nevertheless, we do not focus on the transmission of views and opinions on matters (as referred to in the sentence ‘the voice of the people is not sufficiently heard in political decision-making’). We see voicing as an asset in the rhetoric of representation. Table 1 summarizes the multiple dimensions of voice in representation as discussed above. It also exhibits the grid of methodological aspects we deploy in the analysis to which we next turn.

Table 1: Material and metaphoric aspects of voice.

			Ventriloquism	Narrative positioning
Material voice				
Auditive				‘Operating on’

	Semantic aspect	What is said?	Quoting the words and thoughts of an external figure	Story level, interaction and identification
	Vocal aspect	How something is said?	Alignment with the external quotation: sympathetic vs. ironic	Story level, interaction and identification
	Agentive aspect	Who launches activities in talk?	Acquiring extra authority and appeal	Interaction
	Interactional aspect	What is accomplished through talk?	Amounts to agency in contestation	Interaction and identifications
Metaphoric voice				
Representational				'Consequential to'
	Voice as instance	Who represents?	External speaker	Challenges the interactional order
	Voice as idiom	Who is quoted?	External protagonist	Challenges the story line
	Voice as interpellation	Effects of the representation?	Competing ideological evaluations	Challenges the identifications portrayed

Analysis: Launching and importing external voices

The question format of the interview is very loose and basically the interviewer just encourages the interviewee to report chronologically how her life has proceeded. In the first extract the mother is telling about her work career, starting from a shoe factory where she went to work when the children began school. She describes how she used to ride a bike there and later on take a bus. The passage exhibits determination and independence. The daughter takes the turn and makes a corrective remark on the story.

Autobiographical interview of a 92-year-old 'stager' (excerpt 55:25 - 59:55)

M: 92-year old mother

D: daughter

I: interviewer

EXTRACT 1 - OBJECTIFYING AN EXTERNAL FIGURE

1 M: juu ja minä olin siellä kuule 23 vuotta.

yes and I was there for 23 years, you know

2 I: mm,

3 (1.0)

4 M: juu ja (.) sitten (.) se myi sen sitten, taikka- (.) ei se myyny,

yes and (.) then (.) he sold it, or- (.) didn't sell,

5 kun se teki ton X-pankin kanssa semmosen jutun, (.) se siirty

but he made a deal with the X bank, (.) it was transferred

6 Y-taloon siihen, (.) yliopistoo vastapäätä. (.) mun täyty sitte

to the Y house, the one near the university. I had to ride

7 pyörällä ajella. (.) ja sitten kun en mä enää viittiny pyörällä

ajella

a bike there. (.) and when I didn't want to ride a bike anymore

8 niin autolla sitten. (.) auto kulki silloin sitte tosta, (.) Z:n

I took the car. (.) the car ran cross the Z then,

9 varrelta (.) niin (.) siellä mää sitten kävin ja,

so (.) there I went to then and,

10 D: isä sitä oli suurin piirtein joka päivä vastassa sillon kun hh

(.)

father was there to meet her just about every day back when hh

(.)

11 isä eli. (.) niin se- isän kyytissä hän sää tulit (.) [tulit

]kotia.

father was alive (.) she was- he did tend to drive you (.) [ride

you]home.

12 M:

[joskus.

]

[sometimes.]

13 (.)

14 D: ei se [nyt ollu] joskus se oli useemmiten mutta, (.) ei
hirveen paljon

**no it [wasn't just] sometimes it was most of the time but, (.)
not too much**

15 M: [joskus.]

[sometimes.]

16 mutta se että kun isäkin teki pitkää päivää niin ei se, (.)

**but it was just that father too worked long hours so he couldn't,
(.)**

17 aina ollu siellä,

always be there,

The daughter makes a remark (lines 10–11) to complement the account. As stated, from the perspective of the material voice, the daughter's talk is external to the situation at hand. In the interview she is an outsider who is not supposed utter accounts. In terms of the voice as instance, the daughter takes part in the act of representation and voices an account. This challenges the interactional order of the encounter (level 2 positioning) within which the interviewee is supposed to be the one who has the privilege of giving the accounts about the past. Moreover, the remark is formulated to correct the preceding story (level 1 positioning): the journey to work was not as independent as the mother presents, and consequently, her autobiographical identification is also challenged (level 3 positioning).

One can see the transgression of epistemic rights in the interview being oriented to by the way the daughter backs off slightly and mitigates her claim when the mother, with a short response item and accentuated prosodic articulation displays indignation ([Selting 2010](#)) and in overlap denies that the complementary claim being all true (lines

12–15). The daughter hesitates, still sticking to the claim, and adds that the father was working long days too, meaning that he could not always be there to meet the mother (lines 14–17). At first, the addition about long working hours seems irrelevant and unfit, or even contradictory, to what the daughter said earlier about the father always driving the mother home from work. Yet it shifts the focus of representation towards the father. Upgrading the father's point of view in storying the events already executes a ventriloquial move, which shatters interactional privileges of the interview, as well as the autobiographical accounts and identifications of the interviewee. The mother, somewhat surprisingly, aligns with this perspective and continues.

EXTRACT 2 – INDIVIDUATING AND CHARACTERIZING THE DISTANT THIRD

18 M: juu ja se oli sitä mieltä sitten aina että kun .hh hän on päivän tehny

yeah and he always held the opinion that.hh whenever he hashad finished his day

19 niin hän on sitten niinku t- työnsä tehny.

he hashad done like a- all the work for that day.

20 (0.2)

21 D: hhhhhhhh

22 (.)

23 D: mhhhhhh

24 (0.5)

25 D: hjooh kyllä se tuli kuule kymmenen ja yhdentoista aikaan

hyeahh well he did arrive home at ten and eleven o'clock

26 monta kertaa kotiin hh (.) ja se tuli pitkistä työpäivistä.

many times hh (.) and he came from long working days.

27 (0.5) että kyllä sillä niitä pitkiä päiviä oli, (.)

(0.5) so that he did have those long days too, (.)

28 mutta oli sillä niitä lyhyempiäkin.

but also shorter ones.

29 (.)

30 M: oli.

he did.

32 (0.7)

33 D: eikä se ollu laiska mies.

and he was not a lazy man.

34 M: e[i.]

n[o.]

35 D: [ei] ol[lenkaan.]

[not] at [all.]

36 M: [ei.] ja se sano monta kertaa että saatana kun

(0.2) toi

[no.] and he said many times that bloody hell

(0.2) the

37 ämmä saa parempaa tiliä kun minä.

missus earns more money than I do.

38 (1.5) ((I nauraa)) ((I is laughing))

39 M: että jassoo. ((sarkastisesti))

yeah right. ((said sarcastically))

Both speakers in the extract persist in characterizing the father and placing him as the primary object of representation. Using primarily diegetic narration, mother and daughter are able to fashion father's thinking, behaviour and mindset as [Palmer \(2004\)](#) has suggested. Referring to father's ignorance towards the household work, the mother mobilizes the metaphoric voice as interpellation. Instead of articulating a particularized event, it makes a critical generalization about the father (positioning level 3). The

turnabout household work produced in steady tempo with tight voice and dense and accentuated syllables which marks it as complaint ([Selting 2010](#)). The remark positions the father ideologically, associating him with a cultural subject position of a chauvinist in the framework of feminist discourse criticizing gender inequality. The daughter responds to this characterization contrastively by heaving a very long sigh, thus using a non-semantic and decidedly embodied aspect of voice. The formulation of her following turn signals juxtaposition and promptly and slowly repeats the claim that father often did come home very late. He came home from long working days, she specifies, and ends up by rectifying the claim saying that the father had both long and shorter days at work. The mother confirms this. Then the daughter states a generalizing compliment about father's hard-working character (lines 33–35). Again, the mother confirms this and continues in a flow by telling how the father used to go around swearing and bemoaning how 'the Missus earns more money than he himself'. This sentence is a prime example of the use of mimetic voice as idiom. As Walsh argues, this kind of comment does not advance the story or the events; its function is to characterize the person quoted. This ventriloquial quotation is also said in a squeaky and ironic, slightly quieter voice, which sounds smily. The interviewer responds with laughter, after which the mother evaluates the words of the father by saying sarcastically 'yeah, right' (line 39).

The extract is filled with many different voices. In addition to the auditive voice of the interviewee, the interactionally external daughter constantly voices her view of the past (voice as instance). The father is retained as the primary object of characterization, this time by explicitly mimicking a line of talk he has supposedly uttered (voice as idiom) and his character is framed by portraying a generalizing ideological subject position, as a

chauvinist who thinks that women should not work and men need not do household work (voice as interpellation). Father's presence as 'a ventriloquial voice coming from a distance' is strengthened by quoting his exact words. The voice given to the father is not favourable though. The quotation rather serves as evidence of the father's harsh character the mother has had to deal with in her life. Again, the mother presents the father in a critical light while the daughter continues to praise him. The contrast between the speakers does not appear as outright disagreement. Both try to stay calm and balance in the epistemic crossfire, uttering their turns as if in alignment with the preceding turn. The disaffiliation between speakers is most apparent in small prosodic cues (overlap, accentuation, pause, heavy sigh, squeaky ironic voice), and also in the evaluative stance of the characterizations (positioning level 1). The narrative arm wrestling continues.

EXTRACT 3 – QUARREL OVER THE DECEDENT SURFACES

40 D: no se nyt ei pitänyt paikkaansa mutta se että, (.) että tota,
well, that was not true but just that, (.) that well,
41 isä oli tietyl lailla ylpee mies, (.) se oli kasvatettu siihen
että,
father was a sort of a proud man, (.) he was raised to think
that,
42 että mies hoitaa perheen (.) perheen elatuksen, (.)
that the man takes care of the family (.) is the breadwinner, (.)
43 ja se suuttu siitä kun äiti meni töihin mutta sitten se leppy
and he got angry when Mother went to work but then he calmed down
44 kun rahaa rupes tuleen.
when the money started to come in.
45 M: ↑niihih! ((naurahtaen))
↑yeaheh! ((with laughter))

46 I: .mmh

47 D: ja oli pakko niinku s-sopeutua siihen että äite halus käydä töissä.

and he had to like a-adjust to the fact that mom wanted to go to work.

48 M: nii [se oli se- sopeutu siihen sitte kato kun-] ↑minä toin rahaa

so [it was he- got adjusted to it when I-] ↑I brought in money

49 D: [se oli helpompaa taloudellisesti sitten kun-]

[it was easier financially when-]

50 M: ↑niin että, (.) eer ↑minä pärjäsin sillä ↑rahalla.

↑so that, (.) eer I ↑managed with that ↑money.

51 (2.0)

52 M: nii.

yeah.

53 I: .mhhm,

54 M: nii.

yeah.

55 (1.5)

56 M: ja- ja sitten kuule semmonen so[dasta palannut mies,

]

and- and then you know that kind [of a man back returned from the war,]

57 D: [isä oli hyvin,

]

[father was a very,

]

58 D: hyvin sosiaalinen, (.) sosiaalinen ihminen elikkä,

very social, (.) social person saying that,

59 D: se oli niinku semmonen jolla oli ystäviä ja ulospäinsuuntautunu.

(.) et

he was like the kind of type that had having friends and outward-looking. (.) so

60 sillä oli kamalasti näitä, (.) tuttavias ja kavereita ja tämmöstä.

that he had awful lot of these, (.) acquaintances and pals and such.

61 (1.0)

The daughter disputes the truthfulness of the preceding turn (line 40). It remains unclear if she is referring to the words of the father or to what the mother says. In any case, the narration goes deeper into characterizing the father. Telling about the father's background, upbringing and proud nature, the daughter proceeds to justify her positive description of the father. The male breadwinner figure relates the father to another ideological subject position (voice as interpellation), located within the traditional family values of the old times, to which the father was subjected as a child. She also describes how the father changed his attitude when he realized the financial advantages of the female going to work as well. The mother responds to this in emotive misalignment ([Reed 2010](#)) with a load and high-pitched gloating interjection 'yeah!', as if saying 'exactly, that's what I mean!' (line 45).

The mother takes part in the joint completion of the daughter's telling, shifting the focus from the financial status of the family to her own independence and 'managing with that money', which seems to be reclaiming the focus of the story for herself. After a pause (line 51), she continues with an emphasized and accentuated 'yeah', as if to further confirm her evaluation and looking for a response to it. The interviewer replies minimally

‘mhm’ and the mother repeats the prompt and reclaiming ‘yeah’. After a pause without any response, the mother continues to address the interviewer and starts a sentence with a critically oriented reference to the person in topic, ‘and you know, that kind of a man returned back from war’. The perspective again comes closer to that of a husband and wife, and thus closer to the mother telling her autobiographical story. However, the daughter interrupts her right in the middle of a sentence and persists in characterizing the father in a positive light, as a very social person having a lot of friends. The outright interruption makes the disagreement not only topical (on story level), but also more obvious on the level of interaction. It keeps echoing the particular voice of the deceased father, treating him as the protagonist, or at least as the primary object of narration, which the daughter persists in evaluating positively.

EXTRACT 4 - DISMANTLING THE ALTERCATION VOICES

62 M: juu mutta sitte kävi vaan (0.5) kerran (1.2) että kato sille tuli
**yeah but then it just happened (0.5) once (1.2) that he got the
kind of a,**

63 semmonen, (1.2) minä tiedä mikä sille tuli, (.) mutta lääkäriin
mää sen

**(1.2) I don't know what it was, (.) but I took him to the doctor
and**

64 vein ja kulkutautisairaalaan vietiin ja, (.) siellä se oli ja-
he was taken to the infection hospital and, (.) there he was and-

65 D: sille tuli diabetes, se- (.) [diabetes se tämmönen,]
he got diabetes, the- (.) [diabetes the kind of,]

66 M: [joku se oli.]
[it was something.]

67 D: sillä oli (.) haimatulehdus. (0.2) ja- (.) ja tot-

he had a (.) pancreatitis. (0.2) and- (.) and wel-

68 I: anteeks nyt mun on pakko sanoo et olis hyvä jos me saatais
tällain

**I'm sorry now I have to say that it were good if we got a chance
to**

69 keskustella, .h vaikka tulee vähän hitaammin niin ei haittaa mul
ei oo

**discuss, .h even if the pace is slow it doesn't matter I'm not in
a**

70 kiire täs,

hurry here,

71 D: ei kun nää- (.) on aika virheellisiä nää tiedot näyttää olevan.

no but these (.) are quite false information appears to be.

72 I: niin mut se on vaan et meille on painotettu et pitäs olla ihan
kahdestaan,

**yes but it is just that we have been instructed to stay one-on-
one,**

73 D: joo,

yeah,

74 I: tervas[kannon] k[ans]sa.

with [the] s[tag]er.

75 D: [se-] [joo]

[it-] [yes]

76 D: mutta se että (1.0) no et sä, (.) mä mä ihmettelen jos sä saat

but just that (1.0) you can't, (.) I I do wonder if you can get

77 aineistosta jotain kasaan mutta se että, .h kai sä joskus

something out of the data but that, .h I guess you will

78 saat sitten mutta se että kovan työn jälkeen ja varmasti

eventually but just that after hard work and surely

79 vääristynyttä ↑tietoo tulee. (.) mutta, (.) mää lähen, (.) mää
lähen tästä

the ↑information will be biased. but. I am leaving for home

80 nyttten kotio mä (.) mul on (.) mul on siel odotetaan (.)
odotetaan mua,

now I I've, I've there people waiting, people waiting for me so I

81 (.) mua niin mää tota- mää tiskaan nää- vaan nää tiskit tästä.

(0.5)

eem, I'll just wash up these () these dishes here. (0.5)

82 sit mää [häivyn.]]

then I'm off [out of here.]

83 M: [jätä sin]ne ny.

[just leave] it there.

84 D: sit mää häivyn.

then I'm off out of here.

85 (5.0) ((loud noise of banging dishes in the kitchen))

The mother takes a turn right after the daughter has finished her description of the father as a sociable person with many friends and acquaintances. She maintains her focus on the father but proceeds from generalizing characterizations to narrating a particular event in history (line 62). The turn is produced as a continuation of the preceding turn, though potentially contrastive to it (yeah but then it happened). The mother tells how the father got into a hospital and, searching a word for the illness, is again interrupted by the daughter who specifies that he got diabetes and then was diagnosed with pancreatitis. An illness which, in fact, is potentially attributable to alcohol abuse and puts father's alleged sociability in a different light. The daughter is about to keep the turn to herself and continue with her version of the story, when the interviewer steps in, this time

interrupting the daughter, apologizing but promptly restoring the interactional order of the conversation (lines 68–69) and making an appeal for a chance to discuss with the interviewee one-on-one, as stated in the data collection instructions of the research project (line 72).

The move, in which the interviewer aims to re-position the participant by ventriloquizing and appealing to the authority of the research project (see [Cooren 2012](#)), makes the transgression against the interactional order more evident, resulting in the daughter offering an excuse for her continued interruptions. She justifies herself with epistemic claims saying that the mother is producing false information about the past (line 71). She further suspects that the interview will probably be of no use to any research. The encounter ends with the daughter leaving the situation and going into the kitchen to wash the dishes before returning home ‘where people are expecting her’. One can hear her getting slightly insulted by the exclusion in the wording and the tone of the talk (lines 79–82). In the audio this is further evidenced by a demonstratively loud rattling and clashing of dishes soon coming from the kitchen.

Conclusions

Voice appears in many different forms in conversational storytelling. Materially this may refer to voicing out, that is, speaking up and uttering an account. It may also refer to the qualities and the tone of phonetic voice, the vocal gestures and prosodic cues launched in the talk. Metaphorically voice can be the act of representation, which in a conversational encounter comes close to voicing out an account. Voice may refer to practices evoking a character by quoting and characterizing them. An important asset in this characterization is drawing on resources from culturally shared ideological frameworks and subject

positions. From the perspective of ventriloquism, the strategic use of voice as a rhetorical tool becomes more obvious as the interlocutors start to race in reviving their versions of a deceased figure from the past in the telling. Ventriloquial quotations and characterizations serve as pieces of evidence documenting their respective stances towards the figure whose 'moral character' is under evaluation (see [Goffman 1959](#)).

External voices are imported into the interview situation in various forms, both materially and metaphorically. The daughter as a bystander in the interview claims for herself an active role in answering the questions, persistently challenging what the interviewee is telling about her life, especially regarding an absent third person (launching a parallel voice as instance). Complicating the situation is the fact that the daughter as a co-member of the family also has epistemic access to at least some of events being described, causing polyphonic dissonance, yet making it difficult to deny her comments altogether. The dispute concerns the father of the family. The two tellers disagree about the father's characterization in the story, and they become agitated in describing his character and thus evidencing contrastive evaluations about it through ventriloquial acts of voicing. The mother works to portray him in a critical light while the daughter continues to characterize him positively. This is not evidenced by data but the stubbornness of the juxtaposition implies that the parties share a history of debating the family past, which informs and influences the positionings.

Ventriloquist voicing in storytelling could be understood broadly to cover all acts of idiomatic characterization which objectify and revive a subject under evaluative scrutiny in the telling, not only those that mimic spoken words. That said, the quotations of talk nevertheless have documentary value and rhetorical power which may serve to

justify more concretely than generic descriptions the narrative claims made. In the interview, the external voicing initiated by the daughter manages to contest the order of the interview situation (positioning level 2), question the story told by the mother (positioning level 1) and also to challenge the identifications the mother is pursuing in the telling (positioning level 3). Contrastive positionings on all levels are accentuated with the help of prosodic cues and tones of talk, which manifest the ‘affective positioning’ of the speakers (see [Giaxoglou and Georgakopoulou forthcoming](#)).

As ventriloquism has also been called ‘throwing voice’, in this article we have shown how the participants in a storytelling situation ‘throw both material and metaphorical voices at each other’ in narrative contestation. Ventriloquism facilitates action. It functions as a tool to authorize narrative claims, regulate stances and evidence evaluations. The main strategy to revive the deceased figure in the exchange is to place him at the centre, as the primary object of characterization. Rich characterization of a deceased family member revives his figure and incorporates it in the telling, making it possible to blame him or stick up for him in the descriptions. Ideological resources are deployed by both speakers in justifying their case in the narrative contestation.

To understand the entanglement of identifications in storytelling, it is resourceful to keep an eye on interrelated narrative positionings managed through the acts of external voicing. These ventriloquial moves execute several material as well as metaphoric implications of voice that need to be taken into account to fully grasp the strategies deployed while representing and regulating identities in occasioned narration. Ultimately any manifestation of ventriloquism necessitates a material voice that transports the ‘voice

from a distance' into the situation. The phonetic affordances of human voice serve as an asset to exhibit voices, affects and evaluative stances in conversational telling.

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Appendix

Transcription symbols

ok.	falling intonation
ok?	rising intonation
(.)	short pause
(2.6)	pause timed in seconds
[]	overlapping talk or action
.hh	in-breath
hh	out-breath
↑word, ↓word	onset of pitch rise or fall in talk
wo(h)rd	"laughter" bubbling within a word
wor-	utterance cut-off
wo:rd	stretched sound
word=word	no pause between turns or words
word	stressed syllables
WORD	louder voice
°word°	quieter voice
>word<	faster speech
<word>	slower speech
@word@	animated speech
(words)	heard unclearly in transcription
((<i>sniff</i>))	analyst's comments (for example nonverbal happenings)

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