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Storytelling and stance-taking in group interaction

David Peplow, Sheffield Hallam University

This paper looks at two highly prevalent actions in naturally-occurring talk: stance-taking and storytelling. Stance-taking and storytelling have been shown to co-occur often (e.g. Siromaa, 2012), and this is especially the case in reading group talk, a discursive environment in which speakers are engaged in the joint enterprise of assessing the meaning and quality of a shared object: a written narrative text (e.g. a novel). Insights from conversation analysis and dialogic syntax are used to analyse interactional data from several reading group meetings, with a focus on the types of storytelling that are found in this talk, the relationship between the various stories told in sequence in the talk - including the relationship between the written narrative text and the spoken narratives, and the ways in which stance-taking and storytelling are intertwined.

Keywords conversation analysis; dialogic syntax; group interaction; second stories; stance; storytelling

Introduction

In the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 2008), the Host of the inn requests that each person on the pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral tells a story to "shorte with oure weye" (line 791). Twenty-four narratives follow, each told by a different narrator. It soon becomes apparent that these tales have more functions than just passing the time for the weary travellers: some stories are pieces of social commentary, some are gossip, and some are confessional; some of these tales stand alone, while others respond to tales just told in the sequence. Chaucer's text is, of course, a literary representation of storytelling rather than naturally-occurring telling, yet the text demonstrates the ways that stories organise our lives, both in terms of the tales we tell about ourselves and others, and the tales others tell.

The discussion of stories and acts of storytelling are particularly significant in the reading group. Also known as book groups or book clubs, reading groups are collectives that come together regularly to talk about written texts: fiction or non-fiction; literary or non-literary. Reading groups have been a popular social activity within the UK and many other countries since the 1990s, and the sociocultural significance of these groups has been documented (e.g. Long, 2003; Hartley, 2002), as has been the features of the talk and communication particular to this setting (e.g. Benwell, 2012; Peplow, 2016; Peplow et al., 2016; Swann & Allington, 2009). Talk is crucial to such reading groups, with discussions and debates over a text's meaning and quality mediated through verbal (and non-verbal) communication. Talk is not only the *method* through which the main actions get achieved in reading groups, it is also the primary *product* of their meetings. As talk is so central to the

functioning of reading groups, it is important that analysis of such collectives adopts an approach that is attentive to the role of conversation.

This paper explores the connections between the stories told in the literary texts under discussion and the stories told by readers in book groups. It is argued that storytelling is bound up with stance-taking in the reading group context, and that the acts of storytelling tend to follow a particular sequential structure that embeds these two social actions. Further to that, it is argued that the stories told in the reading groups follow on from other stories in sequence, with "second stories" being made conditionally relevant by "first stories" (Sacks, 1995). It is found that the text under discussion functions as a first story, structuring the kinds of responses that follow. In this way, the act of "reading" in (and for) the reading group is distinct from the solitary act of reading, which does not typically allow for the public display of stance-taking or the telling of related stories. The paper proceeds as follows: existing research on reading groups, storytelling and stance is discussed in the Background section, before the analytical methods are introduced: conversation analysis and dialogic syntax. Following this, two forms of storytelling are discerned and discussed in the Analysis section: firstly, occasions when group members retell scenes from the novel, and second occasions when speakers tell stories from their wider experience that are prompted by the text under discussion.

Background

Social reading and reading groups

Although reading is generally considered to be a solipsistic activity, it has been argued that books can also offer a "site of common ground, a territory which provides a location for discussion" (Collinson, 2009, p. 78; see also Long, 2003). If all reading has a communal component, creating the potential for discussion, then the reading group provides the most obvious realisation of this social reading (Peplow et al., 2016). Scholars working in sociology and sociolinguistics have focused on different aspects of reading groups, such as the relation between today's conception of the book group and its manifestations throughout history (Radway, 1987, 1997; Long, 1992, 2003, 2004), the act of reading as social practice (Allington & Swann, 2009; Benwell, 2009; Hartley, 2002; Procter & Benwell, 2014; Swann & Allington, 2009), and the role of social reading and interpretation in these groups (Peplow et al., 2016; Whiteley, 2011). It is widely accepted in this research that reading groups provide members with a space to understand themselves and the views of others, with the book serving as a pretext "for the conversation through which members engage not only with the authorial "other" but with each other as well" (Long, 1992, p. 194). At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the particular text is central to the discussion. As Nissi's (2013) discussion of Bible study groups shows, the task of reading collectives "is to generate meanings for the text under discussion" (2013, p. 788). If reading in these settings is necessarily and fundamentally social, then the talk generated cannot simply be described as a summary of each individual reader's private experience of reading the text. Instead, reading groups produce collaborative interpretations, or "co-readings" (Peplow et al., 2016), that are dependent upon, and reactive to, the context of the discussion. Co-reading often involves readers engaging in forms of storytelling and stance-taking, two discursive actions that frequently occur together. People take part in these groups in order to share opinions on a book and to debate meanings (Long, 1992; Peplow, 2016), so acts of stance-taking frequently occur. Storytelling is similarly ubiquitous in this talk, particularly because these reading

groups discuss narrative texts, which can prompt readers to tell their own stories in response (Sacks, 1995).

Storytelling and stance

The question of how storytelling and stance (co-)operate in reading group interaction is the focus of this paper, and conversation analysis (CA) and dialogic syntax (DS) have been selected as appropriate methods for investigating these interactional phenomena. Approaches to storytelling are introduced in this section, with particular reference to CA research on the sequentially ordered nature of stories in talk. Following this, the concept of stance is discussed, with DS recognised as an important method in the study of this phenomenon.

Storytelling is central to our lives, and the stories we tell about ourselves are crucial to the construction of our own identity and to the identities that we present to others. The "impulse to narrate is... natural, and apparently universal" (Riessmann, 1993, p. 54), and it is argued that through telling stories we "become" defined by these narratives (Bruner, 1986, p. 15). The telling of narratives is only one side of the story, however, as we also listen to other people's narratives, reacting to these stories in ways that can, in turn, affect the telling. For CA, the study of structures in talk (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008), storytelling is an interactional achievement that exists within ordered sequences of interaction (Bolden & Mandelbaum, 2017; Coates, 2001; Helisten, 2017; Jefferson, 1978; Norrick, 2005; Sacks, 1974, 1978, 1995; Selting, 2012; Siromaa, 2012; Stivers, 2008). Sacks recognised that "stories come in clumps" and that these "clumped stories have an apparent similarity between them" (1995, vol. 2, p. 249). In other words, when a speaker tells a first story, recipients are expected to display their "understanding of it", and this often involves them "telling a second story" in response

(Sacks, 1978, p. 261). This second story will tend to display thematic coherence and contiguity with a first story, often preserving a similar topic and following on directly, with minimal intervening talk (Coates, 2001). While it is possible for recipients to tell a "contrasting" second story that, for instance, counters an argument being made in the first story, these subsequent stories "need to be similar to such a degree as to be hearable as a subsequent story to the prior one" (Selting, 2012, p. 394).

Stories can perform a range of functions in talk, but often these sequences are found within wider actions of stance-taking, which Du Bois describes as "one of the most important things we do with words" (2007, p. 139). Labov similarly states that evaluation is arguably "the most important element in addition to the basic narrative clause", allowing the storyteller to reveal "the point of the narrative... why it was told" (1972, p. 366). Like storytelling, stance-taking is rarely an individual and monologic pursuit, rather, stance is a "public act" that involves the stance-taker doing three things simultaneously: "evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 163). This tripartite function of stance demonstrates the ways in which stance is a "collaborative social *activity*", with speakers constructing stances in response to the stances of other speakers (Haddington, 2004, p. 110 - emphasis in original). Within acts of storytelling, stance is often most evident in the story-preface, the part of the sequence that often informs recipients about the point of view that the narrator wants to convey and the "sort of response" that he/she seeks after the telling (Sacks, 1974, p. 341). On the audience's side, the telling of a second story in response can indicate the stance that the recipient is adopting in relation to the first story, with "shared stance, alignment, affiliation, and understanding" often displayed in the production of a subsequent narrative (Siromaa, 2012, p. 528).

In contemporary interactional analysis, stance has often been approached using dialogic syntax (e.g. Du Bois, 2014; Du Bois & Giora, 2014; Nir et al., 2013). Dialogic syntax (DS) aims to account for the complexities and nuances of spoken grammar in interaction, going beyond the bounds of traditional syntax by considering parallelism at discourse level, across multiple turns at talk. This parallelism is most evident when speakers build on some aspect(s) of another speaker's utterance using, for instance, repetition - when one speaker echoes the syntax, prosody, and/or lexical choices of another speaker (Tannen, 1987). Such parallelism involves "mapping" across utterances, which creates "the recognition of analogical affinities between matching elements" (Du Bois, 2014, p. 370) and "relationships between comparable linguistic elements" (Sakita, 2006, p. 468). Parallelism is usually found across turns at talk that are adjacent or at least near to one other, but can also be found extending over "longer distances" where speakers are offering affiliative stance displays (Siromaa, 2012, p. 541; see also Anward, 2004; Nir et al., 2013). DS is primarily interested in how speakers engage "with the words of those who have spoken before" (Du Bois & Giora, 2014, p. 352), recognising that turns at talk "have systematic relations to their sequential context" (Anward, 2004, p. 32), and in this way the approach shares many similarities with CA, especially Sacks' account of "tying rules" in talk (1995, vol. 1, p. 159), Goodwin's analyses of "format tying" - where speakers link their turns "not only to the type of action produced by the last speaker but also to the particulars of its wording" (Goodwin, 1990, p. 177), and Jefferson's (1996) focus on repetition of sounds and categories as evidence of poetics in talk¹.

¹ At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge that conversation analysis and dialogic syntax differ on epistemological grounds: dialogic syntax being grounded in grammatical approaches to language processing, and conversation analysis focused on the pragmatic functions of talk.

Analysis

Three extracts of reading group talk are analysed in this section, with a particular focus on how stance-taking and storytelling operate in the group interaction. Stance is understood as speakers' "personal feelings, attitudes, value judgements, or assessments" (Biber et al., 1999, p. 966), whether these are "communicated explicitly or implicitly" (Stivers, 2008, p. 37).

Storytelling is interpreted quite broadly to apply to instances where speakers relate a narrative event. Specifically in this analysis, however, storytelling refers to two distinct but conceptually and sequentially related phenomena: readers' summaries of the novel under discussion, and group members' anecdotes and/or autobiographical stories. Having set out these definitions, however, it is important to recognise that stance and storytelling often co-occur, especially in the data analysed, with acts of stance-taking often involving some narrative components, and storytelling sequences frequently framed by formulations of stance.

This specific data presented in this paper is from a longitudinal study of reading groups (for full details see Peplow, 2016). Four groups, all based in the UK, were audio-recorded across at least six meetings, with informed consent obtained from all participants. The groups' meetings lasted between 30 minutes and 90 minutes, and in total 24 hours of reading group meeting data was collected. Some of these groups were provided with a recording device, and were asked to record the meetings themselves, while the other groups preferred for the researcher to be a non-participating observer during meetings. The groups tended to discuss novels, and specifically contemporary fiction, so for shorthand in this paper the text under discussion will be referred to as a "novel", even though in some instances the text may have been short stories, memoirs, or poetry. The groups discussed in the present

paper were organised in an egalitarian fashion, in the sense that none of the groups had an individual who led or directed the meetings.

The first two extracts demonstrate storytelling sequences of talk taken from two different reading groups. In each of these extracts a specific action is being undertaken: “Retelling the written text” and “Written text as “first story””, respectively. In the “Integrated analysis” section following this, these actions are brought together in one extended analysis. Based on this analysis, two main conclusions are reached: one general and the other specific to the particularities of the reading group context. It is found that stance-taking and storytelling frequently co-occur in this talk, with recurring sequential structures utilised by speakers in order to present these narratives; and second, that the novel plays an important role in structuring the stories that are told in the groups, and that this text forms a “first story” that prompts subsequent stories from the readers.

Retelling the written text

When offering a stance on a novel, group members will often retell scenes from the text under discussion. This is exemplified in the below extract, taken from a reading group's discussion of the novel *Americanah* (Adichie, 2013). *Americanah* describes Ifemelu's movement between Nigeria and the USA, focusing on the effects of this migration on her life. In this extract, Debbie²¹ is describing Ifemelu's experience of attending university in the US, picking out occasions when the character's African, “non-American black” identity was made salient. Debbie quotes scenes from the novel, which for ease of reference are reproduced in italics on the right-hand side of the transcript:

² All participants' names have been changed to preserve anonymity, as have place names.

(1) Contemporary: *Americanah* discussion - "the black perspective"³

[7:10]

1 D I liked the way she did the (0.3) you

2 know the non-American black

3 [take on America

3 B [yeah

4 R [yeah it's brilliant

5 M [yeah yeah yeah yeah

6 D =I thought that was really really

7 interesting

8 M =and in fact er that was the the best

9 thing in the book

10 D [yeah

11 R [yes

12 M not the story much but that

13 particular aspect of it (0.2) I

14 thought was brilliantly done actually

15 R in fact it's almost a diatribe

16 against American mores isn't it

17 M yep

18 R the description of what it's like to

19 be black in er

20 D my part er (.) I thought it was (.)

21 again where she said er <this> again

22 I think it was like when the

23 university group got together (0.5)

*"Always attend African Students
Association meetings, but if you
must, you can also try the Black*

³ For transcription key, see Appendix

24 and the people were like (.) what is *Student Union. Please note that*
25 this (.) erm (0.5) and it was the (.) *in general, African-Americans go*
26 international students (0.5) and it *to the Black Student Union and*
27 was like what's this African American *Africans go to the African*
28 shit you know (0.5) you are not *Students Association... The*
29 African and there is nothing African *African-Americans who come to*
30 about [you *our meetings are the ones who*
31 R [yeah *write poems about Mother Africa*
32 D and so you know (1.0) so (.) I *and think every African is a*
33 thought that was interesting you know *Nubian queen" (p. 140)*
34 and then like when she said she was
35 sitting in the classroom and she was
36 asked to give (.) <the black
37 perspective> because at that
38 particular time she was the only
39 black student in the class and she
40 was supposed to give the black
41 perspective (.) she was like (0.5) ok
42 well I am not an American black but I
43 know what they want me to say
44 M =yeah [yeah yeah
45 D [because I have sat in the *Ifemelu raised her hand;*
46 class so I can give them what they *Faulkner's Light in August,*
47 want to hear (1.0) that it's so *which she had just read was on*
48 clichéd that she could give them *her mind. "I don't think it's*
49 exactly what they wanted to hear *always hurtful. I think it depends*
on the intent and also who is

using it" (pp. 137-138)

D = Debbie; R = Richard; M = Mark; B
= Ben

In this extract Debbie retells events from *Americanah*, describing occasions from the novel when "African-American" and "non-Black American" identities are highlighted: in an international student society meeting (from pp. 139-141 of the novel), and during a seminar discussion of the miniseries, *Roots* (pp. 137-139). The talk in Extract 1 follows a particular sequential pattern:

- speaker opens assessment frame with a telling of their reading experience
- speaker quotes (or paraphrases) from text
- speaker closes assessment frame with evaluation

This sequence of talk starts with Debbie recounting her experience of reading the novel with an embedded assessment between lines 1-3: she "liked the way" that the novelist approached the "non-American black take on America". Debbie then retells the relevant scenes from the novel in support of her point. In narrating these scenes Debbie moves into the imagined voices of the international students at lines 27-30: "what's this African American shit... you are not African and there is nothing African about you", and then animates the voice of Ifemelu across lines 41-43 and 45-47 in providing "the black perspective" during a university seminar. These are not direct quotations from the novel and, interestingly, Debbie's retelling is not particularly faithful to the precise events that took place in these scenes (compare the direct quotes from the novel in italics). Debbie's retelling is more like a paraphrase, capturing the gist of these scenes, and in particular the sense of opposition, difference, and conflict between African-Americans and "non-American blacks". Debbie closes the sequence by moving back into her voice, offering an assessment of the events

described in the novel from lines 47-49: "it's so clichéd that she could give them exactly what they wanted to hear".

This example illustrates the co-occurrence of stance-taking and storytelling, while also demonstrating one way that readers use the novel as a prompt for their own acts of storytelling. In this instance Debbie is retelling scenes from the novel, with these scenes altered through paraphrase - perhaps for dramatic effect, or to evidence her stance, or because she has misremembered the events.

Written text as "first story"

The novel can also act as a prompt for storytelling in another way, as speakers tell their own stories in response to the novel as a "first story". The following extract, taken from a different reading group, provides an example of this form of storytelling. At the start of the extract, Laura is giving her negative assessment of the novel *Flight Behaviour* (Kingsolver, 2012).

(2) Wanderers: *Flight Behaviour* discussion - "it just reminded me"

[15:34]

1 L I just thought this is just going to get
2 depressing erm (1.0) I just don't feel like
3 I am going to get anything from it
((lines omitted))
13 Mo I thought it was wonderful (.) wonderfully
14 written (0.5) but the first 80 pages I can
15 understand where you are coming from *A boy put up his*
16 and little details the erm (1.0) there was a *hand, pulled it down,*
17 bit where she had taken Preston he was in *then put it up again,*
18 the laboratory and the scientist erm (1.5) *and finally asked,*

19 oh it was when she had taken the "Are you the
20 kindergarten class out and the scientist had president?"
21 dressed up for the occasion and got the tie Ovid laughed
22 on (0.5) and erm (1.0) one of the little heartily. "No, I am
23 boys said are you the president (0.5) and he not," he said. "What
24 said why is that because of my dark skin (.) makes you think I
25 he said well no you are wearing a tie and I might be the
26 thought that was actually quite moving (2.0) president? Is it
27 and it reminded me when I was (1.0) my last because my skin is
28 OFSTED [place name] was quite (.) I mean you dark?"
29 know what (1.0) it is quite a poor area and The little boy
30 the OFSTED inspector went into my role play appeared forthright.
31 area and read a story to the children and "Because you're
32 one of the little boys was gobsmacked wearing a tie". (p.
33 because in his family none of the men could 356)
34 read
35 H ooh
36 Mo and it just reminded me
37 H that is awful
38 Mo yes it was terrible
39 H that is worse than [place name]
40 Mo I mean it wasn't (.) I am not saying that
41 was the norm (.) but it wasn't that uncommon
42 Ma but that is what he obviously expected
43 Mo well yes (.) yes (0.5) and that just
44 reminded me and I thought but it is that
45 same cultural poverty

Mo = Molly; H = Hannah; Ma = Max; L = Laura

Following on a few turns after Laura's negative assessment of the novel, Molly offers a counter-argument that *Flight Behaviour* was "wonderful" (line 13), while agreeing that some aspects of the novel were weak (lines 14-15). Molly then goes on to recount a scene from *Flight Behaviour* in which a scientist is mistaken by one of the children as the president because he has "got the tie on" (lines 21-22). Molly quotes from the novel, almost exactly repeating the conversation between the boy and the scientist (lines 23-25). This is a more faithful and accurate example of quotation than Debbie's account in Extract 1 because while Debbie embeds stance-taking into her paraphrasing, Molly frames her quoting with stance-taking. Having recounted the scene from the novel, Molly moves on to tell of her experience as a teacher in a school in "quite a poor area" (lines 29-30), and a specific occasion when an OFSTED inspector⁴ⁱⁱ visited her class and read a story to the children (lines 30-32). Molly reports that one of the boys in the class was "gobsmacked" because none of the men in his family could read (lines 32-34). Following some evaluation of her story from Hannah and Max (line 37 and 42), Molly closes her narrative by connecting it back to the event in the novel, highlighting that she witnessed the "same cultural poverty" as that found in the novel (lines 44-45). Storytelling and stance-taking are, once again, bound up with each other here as Molly uses the novel as a prompt for the telling of her anecdote, which serves as evidence for her divergent stance

The talk in Extract 2 follows the same overall sequential pattern as Extract 1:

- speaker opens assessment frame with a telling of their reading experience
- speaker quotes from text
- speaker closes assessment frame with evaluation

⁴ OFSTED stands for Office for Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills. It is a UK government department, and part of its remit includes paying visits to state-run schools to inspect and assess standards of provision and teaching.

Although there are structural similarities between the two examples of stance-taking and storytelling sequences presented so far, the talk in the second extract is doing something in addition. Molly is using the novel as a prompt for telling her own story, and in continuing on the same theme of cultural poverty, her personal anecdote stands in affiliative relationship with the literary text. The novel in this instance is the first in a chain of interlinked stories: a first story that prompts subsequent stories from the group members.

The two extracts presented have demonstrated the co-occurrence of stance-taking and storytelling in reading group talk, a recurring sequential structure for acts of stance-taking and storytelling in reading group talk, and the attention that readers can pay to the text under discussion when presenting their stance and offering their own stories. In addition, Extract 2 showed that the novel can function as a first story, prompting thematically coherent narratives to be told in response by the readers. In the next section a longer extract of talk is presented, with the view of exploring and extending these findings.

Integrated analysis

In this section a longer passage of talk is presented and analysed across two extracts. This passage of talk combines the features and phenomena found in Extracts 1 and 2. There are several stories being told across Extracts 3a and 3b: some stories concerning readers' individual reading experience and other narratives that are prompted by the events of the novel. Building on the above analyses, it will be shown that stance-taking and storytelling frequently co-occur, and that the talk follows a particular sequential pattern. The stories told in this discursive setting are a product of the novel under discussion and by the stories told by other readers in the group.

These two extracts are taken from a group's discussion of *The Restraint of Beasts* (Mills, 1998). The novel follows the lives of three rural labourers: Tam, Richie and the narrator who is referred to as "the foreman". The labourers travel from Scotland to England to find work, and much of the action takes place in Cumbria, an English county on the border with Scotland. The novel has a deadpan, comic feel, and across the meeting readers compared opinions on the novel, and specifically on the success of the novel's tone. At the start of the extract Lizzie is describing her "struggle" to read the novel.

(3a) Contemporary: *The Restraint of Beasts* - "accurate" or "bonkers"?

[28.10]

- | | | | |
|----|----|--|--|
| 1 | Li | I was just really struggling | <i>Tomorrow I had to lead Tam and</i> |
| 2 | | with those bits because (0.5) | <i>Ritchie into exile in England. Tonight,</i> |
| 3 | | because the bits where (.) do | <i>though, the lights of the Crown Hotel</i> |
| 4 | | you know what it reminded >yes | <i>offered some consolation.</i> |
| 5 | | the bits where they were like | <i>Word had apparently got round that</i> |
| 6 | | we are going to <u>England</u> < and I | <i>Tam was going to England. Several</i> |
| 7 | | was thinking (0.5) that is | <i>people had turned up especially.</i> |
| 8 | | ha::rdly like out of space you | <i>"You'll be back by Christmas, I hope?",</i> |
| 9 | | know you would have thought | <i>said Jock (p. 56)</i> |
| 10 | | they were going to Mongolia or | |
| 11 | | something | |
| 12 | D | [yeah | |
| 13 | Li | [for the kind of reaction (.) | |
| 14 | | and then the way it was like | |
| 15 | | (.) <will you be back for | |
| 16 | | Christmas> I was thinking | |
| 17 | | [hahaha | |
| 18 | M | [hahaha | |

19 Li they can drive back for the
20 weekend \$it is not like\$
21 M =yes but [that
22 C [they got rid of the *"Didn't you pay the instalments?"*
23 guitar because they didn't *"I kept them all up to date, but we*
24 think he was ever *didn't think you were coming back."*
25 com[ing back haha *(p. 212)*
26 Li [coming back ha yeah I know
27 yes that it was so
28 C =bonkers
... *((lines omitted))*
34 Li ya see the point of which it
35 reminded me (.) which I really
36 kind of (1.0) just if it
37 wasn't for book club I would
38 have put it down at this point
39 was where the first person
40 died
41 M [yeah
42 D [yeah
43 Li and they said what shall we do *After a long silence Richie said, "What*
44 and they were very (.) *are we going to do with Mr*
45 D yeah yeah *McCrinkle?"*
46 Li because it was like (1.0) at *"Well," I replied. "I suppose we'd better*
47 that point you have lost me *bury him." (pp. 43-45)*
48 because it wasn't SO weird
49 that that seemed like a normal

50 thing for them to (.) >do you
51 see what I mean<
52 M =yeah yeah
53 Li although everything was kind
54 of (1.0) it was obviously
55 meant to be a bit sort of
56 surreal and their reactions
57 (0.5) at the same time there
58 was a very everyday kind of
59 life so
60 M very ordinary yeah yeah
61 Li =apart from that and it is
62 like clearly no one
63 accidentally kills someone and
64 just shrugs and out of three
65 people just go oh we will bury
66 them then
67 D yeah

Li = Lizzie; D = Debbie; M = Mark; C = Colin

This extract shares some similarities with Extract 1: speakers retell and reanimate scenes from the novel in the service of offering assessments of this text. Lizzie and Colin, in particular, build up to a joint assessment that the novel is incongruous: simultaneously "bonkers" (line 28) and "surreal" (line 56), yet still "very ordinary" (line 60).

Lizzie begins by narrating her "struggle" to read the novel (lines 1-2), before moving into the voice of the characters (lines 5-6). Toggling between her description of her reading experience and her animation of the characters' voices, she reports her thought from the time of reading that the setting of the novel is not "out of space" in spite of how the characters act

(line 8), and then enacts the characters' voices: "will you be back for Christmas" (lines 15-16), before moving back to her account of her reading: "they can drive back for the weekend" (lines 19-20). Lizzie's story of her reading experience, her re-telling of events from the text, and her stance-taking are all intertwined. Her assessments of the novel are, therefore, documented in her account of her "struggle" to read the novel, while at the same time these assessments are also embedded covertly in her reproduction of the characters' voices. These voices are presented as different from the surrounding talk through containing marked prosodic features: sped-up talk and emphasis (lines 4-6), and slowed-down talk (lines 15-16). At line 22, Colin joins in with Lizzie's recounting of the narrative, picking out his own example of a scene from the text that he evaluates as "bonkers" (line 28).

According to Du Bois, the most "visible" manifestation of DS "occurs when one speaker constructs an utterance based on the immediately co-present utterance of a dialogic partner" (2014, p. 360). There is a great deal of parallelism in Extract 3a, both between the different speakers' utterances, on the one hand, and between the language of the novel and the speakers' utterances. Diagraphs will be used to represent utterances that display high levels of parallelism. The diagraph is an important part of DS, allowing analysts to see how the syntactic, semantic and prosodic elements of sequential utterances relate to each other, and to consider the jointly-constructed nature of interaction.

Both Lizzie's and Colin's retellings of scenes from the novel remain strikingly faithful to the wording used in the original text. The below diagraphs show the parallelisms between the novel (in *italics*) and the retellings. At line 6, Lizzie reduces the narrator's pronouns "*I*" and "*Tam*" to "we", while preserving the verb "*going*" and the object "*England*". The "*England*" is subsequently changed to "out of space" for contrastive effect at the end of her utterance (lines 7-8) - see Figure 1.

@@ Insert Figure 1 here

In Figure 2 Lizzie can be seen quoting from the original text even more directly, reproducing the text almost verbatim. The only difference is that Lizzie converts the statement form with tag question into a conventional polar question (see Figure 2).

@@ Insert Figure 2 here

The diagraph in Figure 3 likewise shows the similarities between the original text and the readers' retelling, with the direct speech from the novel preserved almost verbatim in Colin's utterance (lines 23-25). In this example there is also parallelism between Colin's and Lizzie's turns, as Lizzie completes the end of Colin's turn with him in chorus (line 26). The addition of the final response word "yeah" by Lizzie may work to "claim authority of knowledge" by offering explicit evaluation of Colin's account (Svennevig, 2003, p. 302). As Lizzie has been the principal stance-taker in this sequence, this interpretation is plausible (see Figure 3).

@@ Insert Figure 3 here

From line 34 Lizzie resumes the telling of her reading experience, picking out a scene from the novel that would have prompted her to give up on the novel "if it wasn't for book club" (lines 36-37). This scene is specified (lines 38-39), and at line 43 Lizzie moves into the characters' voices in order to retell a detail from this scene. This reproduction bears close resemblance to the words used in the novel - see Figure 4:

@@ Insert Figure 4 here

Lizzie then offers her stance on the characters' actions, negatively assessing the incongruity between their "surreal" reactions (line 56) and their "very every day kind of life" (lines 58-59). Following affiliative agreement from Mark (line 60), Lizzie again quotes from the novel to give a flavour of how the characters reacted to accidentally killing someone (lines 65-66) - see Figure 5 for the close parallels between original text and Lizzie's reproduction. As before, this quote is preceded by an overt critique - on this occasion a critique of the plausibility of the events depicted (lines 61-64).

@@ Insert Figure 5 here

In Extract 3a the readers have focused on the plausibility of the events described, criticising the novel for being "surreal" yet "very everyday". The overall structure of this action is similar to the structure identified earlier:

- speaker opens assessment frame with a telling of their reading experience:

"I was just really struggling"

"it reminded (me)"

"I was thinking"

- speaker quotes from text

"we are going to England"

"will you be back for Christmas"

- speaker closes assessment frame with evaluation

"no one accidentally kills someone and just shrugs and out of three people just go oh we will bury them then"

Although there is general similarity between the above structure for Extract 3a and the structure identified earlier for Extracts 1 and 2, in Extract 3a there are multiple speakers co-producing the assessment (Lizzie, Colin, Mark), even if Lizzie appears to be the principal stance-taker. In addition, the closing remark at lines 65-66 is simultaneously an example of stance-taking and a quote from the text, which further demonstrates the ways in which storytelling can be bound up acts of assessment and judgement. The readers' remembered impressions of excerpts from the novel are strikingly similar to the original quotes from the text, which shows the group's attention to the detail of the text. At the same time, excerpts from the novel also serve to prompt readers in the telling of their own related stories, as demonstrated in the next extract.

The second part of the extract (3b) follows on a couple of minutes after the end of Extract 3a. In the time between the extracts Lizzie has continued with her unfavourable account of the novel, specifically focusing on the plausibility of the characters. In Extract 3b three group members tell their own stories, using the novel as a prompt. These narrators have different forms of epistemic access to the events they describe in these stories, depending on whether or not the teller has direct involvement in the event recounted. The analysis below follows on from the earlier discussion in the "Written text as a "first story"" section, focusing on the ways in which speakers narrate their own stories in response to the novel.

(3b) Contemporary: *The Restraint of Beasts* - "accurate" or "bonkers"?

[32.30]

102 Lu I think a lot of it is quite
103 accurate
104 M accurate (.) in what (.) what
105 do you mean
106 Lu erm (1.0) like the manual

107 labour in rural areas (2.0) I
108 am not sure (.) you know just
109 kind of like that that not
110 everyone is ambitious and
111 career going
112 M yeah yeah yeah all they want
113 to do is have enough to go
114 down to the pub
115 Lu yes and that some people are
116 quite satisfied with that
117 M yeah
118 Lu and when he says kind of like *"You don't want to be swinging a post*
119 (.) well you don't want to be *hammer for the rest of your life, do*
120 putting these fence posts up *you?"*
121 your whole life and he goes *Tam looked at me and shrugged. "I*
122 (.) Tam I think it is (.) he *don't mind." (p. 257)*
123 goes (.) I don't mind
124 M =haha
125 Lu it is like yes (.) \$yes why
126 not actually\$
((lines omitted))
134 M yes I think you said to me
135 didn't you that somebody who
136 worked on the peat bogs (.)
137 cutting peat for 42 years in
138 Cumbria
139 B yes I remember someone (.) I
140 mean this is partly a book

141 coming from a very rural area
142 where er (1.0) up on the
143 borders there was er (0.5)
144 there was cutting peat was one
145 of their jobs and I know
146 someone who had actually
147 travelled quite a lot of the
148 world (.) and now lives in
149 Sweden (0.5) but he er (.)
150 sort of at one point in his
151 life ended up working on the
152 peat bogs (.) and he was
153 chatting to the people there
154 and one of them said (.) ooh
155 you know what are you doing
156 tonight he said ooh I think I
157 am going to have pizza for tea
158 (1.0) and this person had gone
159 (.) what is pizza
160 D \$mmm\$
161 B now that seems like a (.)
162 probably now that would be
163 incredibly strange
164 D yeah
165 B but this would probably be the
166 end of the 80s
167 M yeah
168 B and it wouldn't have been

169 unfathomable that a person at
170 the end of the 80s wouldn't
171 have any idea what a pizza was
172 Li yeah yeah
173 B someone who had existed in a
174 rural community
175 Lu who had never been abroad or
176 B who had never been abroad
177 D you don't even have to go (.)
178 I mean just (0.5) never goes
179 to a big city
180 M no no [that's right
181 D [ya know they just go in
182 to the local co-op (0.5) and
183 do their shop
184 B yes so so so that (1.0) I mean
185 it is probably a world
186 M gone (.) but you see (.) I
187 remember reading a set of
188 letters from people who had
189 left Cumbria to go to war
190 (1.0) and NONE of them had
191 been further than Carlisle and
192 the market for sheep and
193 cattle (0.5) that is the
194 furthest they had ever been
195 (.) and then they go off to
196 Greece (.) and the only way

197 you can compare it is what it
198 is supposed to be like in the
199 bible (.) that is the only
200 comparison and he does
201 Li yeah yeah
202 M he does look at the bible and
203 see things that are the same
204 (.) but it is great events
205 that change people's erm (1.0)
206 being sent to some ridiculous
207 (0.5) >well not ridiculous
208 but<
209 Li well yes lots of people yes
210 (.) because my uncle would
211 have travelled all around the
212 Middle East I think during the
213 war (.) and yet (0.5) other
214 than that he has never left
215 the country >well he is dead
216 now< but other than that he
217 never left the country so yes

Li = Lizzie; D = Debbie; M = Mark; C = Colin; Lu = Lucia;
B = Ben

There are three stories told by three different speakers in this extract. Ben offers the first of these narratives from line 139, with this telling prompted by Lucia's comments about the novel's "accuracy" at the start of Extract 3b. Lucia's comments are, in turn, offering a counter-argument to Lizzie and Colin's earlier criticism of the novel as "bonkers" and implausible,

and the story rounds from others in the group following this serve to provide evidence for the divergent stance in way that is similar way to Molly's anecdote in Extract 2.

Lucia argues that "a lot" in the novel is "quite accurate" (lines 102-103). With support from Mark (lines 112-114), Lucia follows this assessment by quoting a scene from the text that, in her view, demonstrates that the novel accurately captures the reality of rural life for many people (line 123). As with the retelling sequences discussed earlier, Lucia closes the assessment frame with a personal evaluation that endorses this way of life: "yes why not actually" (lines 125-126). Following this is a sequence of three stories from Ben, Mark, and Lizzie, respectively. These stories are prompted by the themes of the novel under discussion and by the prior talk focusing on whether the novel is "bonkers" or "accurate". The three narratives are also linked to each other, forming a chain of stories that build on each other, not just in sequential terms but also in terms of stance, with speakers incrementally "building their own stance according to what has been said in the first telling" (Siromaa, 2012, p. 538). See Figure 6 for the ordering of these stories:

@@ Insert Figure 6 here

Ben's story spans multiple turns at talk, as other speakers co-produce this telling with Ben and offer their own assessments of the situation that he is describing. Stories need "to be fitted into the conversation", either by the subsequent narrator or another speaker (Sacks, 1978, p. 261), and Ben's story is facilitated by Mark, who elicits the telling across lines 134-138. Ben takes up this prompt and, similar to Lucia's argument at the start of Extract 3b, the content of his story is aimed at demonstrating that rural living can lead people to have an unusual set of experiences and values. Working against a prevalent stance that has been established in the group, and particularly by Lizzie in Extract 3a, Mark and Ben use co-

remembering to ground an alternative claim (Bolden & Mandelbaum, 2017), with Mark recalling a memory at lines 134 ("I think you said to me") and Ben starting his story with a report of his memory: "I remember" (line 139). Co-remembering is used here to lend veracity to a stance different from those presented earlier in the discussion and to "establish tellability" (Norrick, 2005, p. 1826). As well as referring back to Lizzie's comments in Extract 3a and Lucia's assessment just offered, Ben's narrative also relates directly to themes emerging from *The Restraint of Beasts*, as he prefaces his story by noting that "this is partly a book coming from a very rural area" (lines 140-141). This preface ensures that the ensuing story is heard as relevant to the themes and setting of the novel.

Following the main telling, Ben reaffirms the relevance of the narrative for the present discussion, stating that although the events described in his story would be seen as "incredibly strange" now (line 163) these are not impossible (lines 168-169). Lucia and Debbie offer support, and to some extent co-produce the end of Ben's narrative, by speculating on the groups of people who might be similarly insular as the characters described by Ben (line 175, lines 181-183). In being closely calibrated to the novel, Ben's story is akin to a second story that has been prompted by *The Restraint of Beasts*, which stands as the first in a chain of interlinked stories. Following this, at line 186, Mark continues this chain by embarking on telling a "similar subsequent story" in response to Ben's (Selting, 2012, p. 394).

Mark "remembers" that he has read letters from soldiers who, in civilian life, led quite insular and sheltered lives, only to travel much further afield for military service (lines 186-200). There is "thematic coherence" (Coates, 2001; Sacks, 1995) with Ben's story, as Mark's narrative similarly focuses on lack of travel within some rural communities, and there is lexical recycling across the two stories, with Mark using "allo-repetition" (Tannen, 1987, p. 586) to echo the beginning of Ben's story ("I remember") and also maintaining the Cumbrian

setting. The stance projected by Mark aligns with Ben's story as his telling shares structural similarities, while also showing "affiliation" with Ben by telling a story with a similar stance (Stivers, 2008, pp. 34-35), namely that levels of rural insularity can be surprisingly high. The design of Mark's story also shows contiguity with Ben's, as the more thematically relevant aspects are foregrounded, while the less thematically relevant aspects of Mark's tale come later in the telling: e.g. the war theme, the lack of travel, and the biblical comparison. Unlike Ben's story, however, Mark's tale does not explicitly justify its own telling, and he does not link back to the novel. In spite of this, Ben has already established this form of storytelling as relevant in the discourse environment, and so Mark can afford to tell his story in a more abbreviated form that does not need to justify its own telling (Coates, 2001, pp. 94-95).

Mark's closing summary embeds an assessment that people are "changed" by "great events" (lines 204-205), such as being sent abroad. This prompts Lizzie to add her own short story in which she recounts her uncle's experience of travelling "all around the Middle East" during wartime, even though he did not leave the country "other than that" (lines 209-217). Lizzie's story has close thematic coherence with Mark's story as it also focuses on the contrast between living a relatively sheltered life and having to travel abroad during wartime. Lizzie's story also displays affiliation with Mark's narrative with the use of agreement token (line 209), and she aligns with the previous story by echoing Mark's "people" (line 205) with her upgrade: "lots of people" (line 209). However, Lizzie's story differs from Ben's and Mark's narratives through having first-hand experience of her uncle's lack of travel, and therefore greater "entitlement" to this experience (Sacks, 1995, vol. 2, p. 243). By contrast, Ben and Mark are reporting their stories from other sources: a friend and historical records, respectively.

The three stories in Extract 3b are told as part of a collective act of assessing the accuracy and plausibility of the world depicted in *The Restraint of Beasts*. This topic was

initially introduced by Lizzie at the start of Extract 3a as she criticised the novel for its lack of coherence, and subsequently re-introduced by Lucia in Extract 3b, who defended the novel against this criticism. The three stories are, therefore, tied to the prior discourse produced by the group and are successfully "fitted in" to the ongoing talk (Sacks, 1978, p. 261). In sharing structural and thematic similarities with each other, these successive stories display the "shared stance, alignment, affiliation, and understanding" achieved by the three speakers (Siromaa, 2012, p. 528). The close proximity of these three stories to each other supports Sacks's claim that "stories come in clumps" (1995, p. 249), and the similarities between the stories suggest that storytelling is an important way by which speakers react to the stance-taking done by others, while also providing a mechanism by which speakers can convey their stance (Siromaa, 2012, p. 538).

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has considered how participants in reading groups perform two interrelated actions: stance-taking and storytelling. While stance was understood as speakers' "personal feelings, attitudes, value judgements, or assessments" (Biber et al., 1999, p. 966), storytelling referred to two distinct but conceptually and sequentially related phenomena: readers' summaries of the novel under discussion in the group, and group members' anecdotes and autobiographical stories. While it is well-established in research that these actions often co-occur (Labov, 1972; Sacks, 1974; Siromaa, 2012), the contribution of this paper is in showing that, in the reading group setting, storytelling and stance-taking tend to occur in a particular sequential order that is linked to the specific interactional activity being undertaken.

Stance-taking is "one of the most important things we do with words" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 139), and storytelling is "natural, and apparently universal" (Riessmann, 1993, p. 54), providing a principal way through which we "reconstruct, relive and evaluate remembered experience" (Norricks, 2011, p. 2741). Stance-taking and storytelling are fundamentally dialogic, presupposing the presence of interactional recipients and positioning the recipient in relation to the item(s) being assessed or the story being told. In both forms of social action, the recipient of the stance-taking/storytelling is typically expected to respond in kind, with acts of stance-taking often precipitating subsequent stance-taking or assessment-giving (Du Bois, 2007; Pomerantz, 1984), and storytelling occasioning further acts of storytelling (e.g. Sacks, 1978). The fundamental dialogism of stance-taking and storytelling is further emphasised in the interactional environment of the reading group: first, these collectives exist to debate meaning and interpretation (i.e. to do stance-taking); and second, the object of their meeting is a narrative text, the discussion of which prompts storytelling in various forms.

This stance-taking and storytelling was found in two discrete, yet related, types of action in the group discourse:

1. tellings of the reading experience, with included retellings of the novel. In these instances, the structure of the narratives typically followed this sequential structure:

- speaker opens assessment frame with a telling of their reading experience
- speaker quotes from text
- speaker closes assessment frame with evaluation

This action can be performed by one speaker (e.g. Extract 1), or can be undertaken by multiple speakers, as in Extract 3a. Drawing on DS, this part of the analysis also demonstrated the close attention that participants pay to the novel when they retell aspects of the story. At the same time, however, it was evident that these speakers altered parts of the novel in order to present the text in a particular way, depending on their stance towards it.

2. tellings from the participants' wider experience and knowledge. In these instances, the structure of the storytellings followed the sequential order of "first story" - "second story" - and so on:

- first story
- second story
- third story etc.

In Extracts 2 and 3b, the relationship between the written text and the readers' reactions can be seen in terms of first and second stories, with the written text providing the initial narrative from which subsequent stories are built and configured. In this way, the written narrative text makes relevant the telling of subsequent stories, legitimising this discursive practice in the groups. In other examples analysed elsewhere, the storytelling found in this setting can be personal acts of self-disclosure (Peplow et al., 2016).

There are a number of possible functions that storytelling performs in this group environment. Bound up with acts of assessments, one function of the storytelling is to provide an evidential basis for a particular stance. Storytelling could also function to accomplish "solidarity" between group members through demonstrating the "close attention" that participants are paying to each other's turns (Coates, 2001, p. 95). Indeed, it has been argued that the telling of subsequent stories can lead to the feeling of "extended experiences" and indicates to the first teller that "my mind is with you" (Sacks, 1995, vol. 2, p. 257). If storytelling is a fundamentally collaborative exercise found across a range of different discourse contexts, then this interactional function is brought into relief in the reading group setting where the written text, as a narrative itself, stands as a prompt and a frame for storytelling, and a first story in itself.

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Appendix: Transcription key

Transcript feature	Key
(.)	brief pause – less than 0.5 seconds
(0.5)	timed pause

=	latching – no pause between speakers’ turns
[yeah [yeah	simultaneous speech
<u>Underlined talk</u>	speaker places emphasis on word or phrase
>yes<	speaker speeds-up
<no>	speaker slows down
:::	drawn-out sound
hhh	exhalation
xxxxxx	inaudible speech
\$seems like it\$	laughing speech

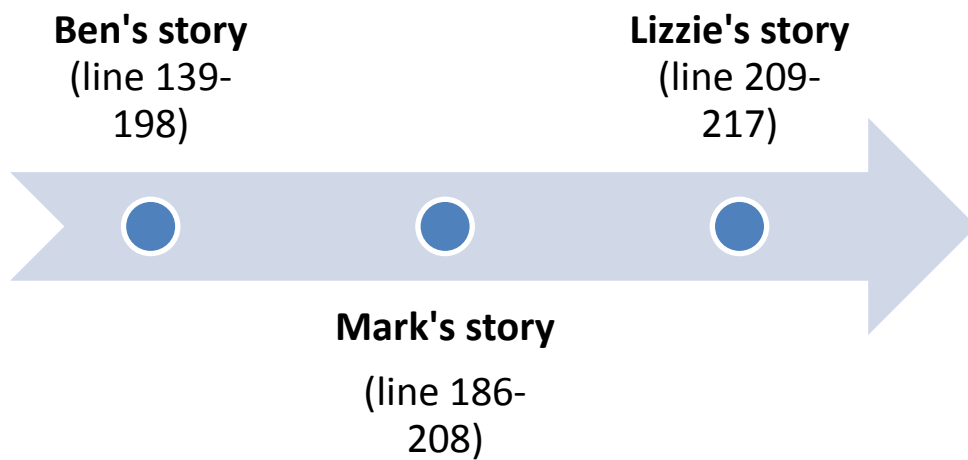
Figure 4: Diagraph for line 43 and p. 45

p.45	Novel	what	are	we	going	to do	with	Mr McCrinkle
l.43	Lizzie	what	shall	we		do		

Figure 5: Diagraph for lines 65-66 and p. 45

p.45	Novel	I	suppose	we	'd	better	bury	him	
ll.65- 66	Lizzie	oh		we	will		bury	them	then

Figure 6: Sequence of storytelling



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