

## CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL IDENTITIES THROUGH STORY-TELLING: TRACING GREEKNESS IN GREEK NARRATIVES\*

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### Abstract

The present paper is concerned with the narratives produced in the conversations of six young people in Greece. Drawing on the broader framework of Discourse Analysis and Sociolinguistics as well as on the Social Constructionist paradigm, our paper follows the line of research that focuses on situated analysis of identities. Initially, the paper sets out to examine the identity(ies) constructed through the stories these people tell in the specific encounters. The overall aim of the paper is to relate these locally constructed identities to the larger socio-cultural identity of the participants and to examine whether they can be seen as indices of Greekness. Our analysis shows that, in the course of their story-telling, the participants construct 'in-group' identities mainly by co-constructing their narratives and by performing successive narratives with a similar point. The interactants' foregrounding and cultivation of their in-group identity is probably an indication of their Greekness, namely of the attested tendency of Greek people to value and thus cultivate in-group relations of intimacy and solidarity in interaction.

**Keywords:** Co-constructed narratives; Greek socio-cultural environment; Identity construction; In-group relations; Parallel narratives; Positive politeness; Story openers.

### 1. Introduction

In the last fifteen years, there has been a considerable amount of research showing that 'narrative is an ideal locus for the study of identity' (De Fina 2003: 217), since the construction of identity can be achieved through what is related, to whom and in what way (cf. Schiffrin 1996: 168-169). Our paper is intended as a contribution to the line of research that focuses on situated constructions of identity and, in particular, on the role of sequential organization of story-telling in the interactive construction of identity (Cheshire 2000; Georgakopoulou 1999; Schiffrin 1996 among others).

The paper is concerned with the narratives produced in the course of two conversations involving four pupils, members of a close-knit group, and two university students who became acquainted with them for research purposes (see section 3 below). Our study focuses on the discursive means through which the participants in question construct and negotiate their identity(ies) in the given encounter. The main aim of the paper is to relate the identities that are constructed locally through narrative to the interactants' larger socio-cultural identity and to examine whether some aspect(s) of

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these people's 'Greekness' can be traced in the way they tell their stories and in the situated identities constructed thus.

In discussing the construction of identity, we draw upon the social constructionist paradigm according to which social reality is not uniform or objective, but created by human beings conceived as agents rather than passive organisms (Sarbin and Kitsuse 1994: 2, 8). Within this paradigm, language has a central role in the creation of the world. As De Fina (2003: 217) points out, discourse is not simply 'a tool for the expression of meanings that pre-exist in people's mind, but a practice constitutive of reality'. From this perspective, linguistic and conversational choices constitute the speaker's strategic means for constructing identity dimensions relevant at different points in the sequentiality of discourse. In other words, stylistic variation is not simply situational reflexes, but one of the speaker's strategic means for activating meaning potential and constructing identity (cf. Coupland 2001; Rickford and Eckert 2001). As Cameron (1997: 49) aptly points out

whereas sociolinguistics traditionally assumes that people talk the way they do because of who they (already) are, the postmodernist approach suggests that people are who they are because of (among other things) the way they talk.

In other words, identity is something people *do* in social activities, not something they *are* (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998). Thus, the assumption that underlies our work is that identities emerge through situated discourse, as they are constructed dynamically in context.

As a study of identities in context, our paper focuses primarily on the local context of interaction in an attempt to delve into the communicative functions of narratives in relation to the positioning of narrators vis-à-vis their audience in the encounter (cf. Bamberg 1997). We argue that the six interactants construct the identity of 'in-group' and 'close friend' through their story *telling* activities in their conversations. Attempting a thorough analysis on various levels of narrative performance description, we aim to show that these people convey in-group membership by using the inclusive *we*, by co-constructing their narratives via a collaborative, polyphonic floor and by performing successive narratives with congruent structure and evaluation. Following Davies and Harré (1990), we recognize both the constitutive force of discourse, in particular of discursive practices, and at the same time we recognize that people are capable of exercising choice in relation to those practices. For a fuller understanding of the narrative extracts under examination and of the identities constructed in this way, we also focus on relevant contextual properties which hold to be true above and beyond the local conversational situation (see Bamberg 1997: 337). Hence, our analysis also takes into account the broader Greek socio-cultural environment in which the conversations examined are embedded.

## **2. Previous studies on Greek storytelling**

As early as 1979, Polanyi pointed out that story-telling is influenced by cultural diversity since different socio-cultural values are reflected through narratives. In previous research aiming at the elicitation of narratives in a naturalistic experiment, Tannen (1979, 1980, 1982) compares how the same events, actually the events

presented in a film, are transformed into narratives by members of different cultures, in this case by American and Greek students. She (1980: 54) finds that the Americans seem “to be reporting events as objectively as they could, often describing action in detail” whereas the Greeks “tended to ‘interpret’ the events”, i.e. to narrate the film in a more dramatic way inserting comments and judgements. Tannen (ibid: 65) explains that her notion of ‘interpretation’ is related to what Labov (1972) calls evaluative elements in oral narrative, i.e. the means by which the narrators highlight specific parts of the story indicating the point of a narrative and thus illuminating why the story is tellable. In sum, the Americans “were focusing on the content of the film (its details and temporal sequence) treating it as a decontextualized object” whereas the Greeks “tended to draw upon interactive experience which was more focused on *interpersonal involvement* [our emphasis]: Telling the story in way that would interest the interviewer” (Tannen 1982: 5).

According to the analysis of oral Greek narratives in natural settings proposed by Tannen (1983) and, more recently, by Georgakopoulou (1995, 1997), the performance of Greek stories is usually based on the frequent co-occurrence of evaluative devices like narrative (historical) present, direct speech<sup>1</sup>, repetition<sup>2</sup>, ellipsis, the *na*-imperfect (a narrative specific structure), the deictic *tora* ‘now’ for ‘then’ and *edo* ‘here’ for ‘there’, and various instances of expressive phonology in the process of characters’ voices imitation. Georgakopoulou (1997: 141-142) has shown that these devices convey “a sense of proximity between the world of the story and the immediate conversational situation”, as they signal “a shift into the ‘visualizing’ mode of the ‘here and ‘now’ ”, adding also an “auditory element” through the animation of characters’ voices in the constructed dialogues. As a matter of fact, the audience become involved with the narrator since they both have the feeling of co-witnessing the narrated events (Georgakopoulou ibid: 143). More generally speaking, story telling seems to dominate Greek conversations giving to (non-Greek) outsiders the impression of a particularly vivid, at times dramatic, involving, and enjoyable discourse activity for both tellers and audiences (see Tannen 1989; Georgakopoulou 1995).

In another study of Greek narrative and identity construction, Archakis and Tzanne (2005) examine the relation between the stories told among a group of young people and the construction of conflicting identities in the specific encounter. By focusing on the narratives these people recount, their study discusses narrative positioning (Bamberg 1997) in relation to the plurality of locally situated identities which emerge dynamically in context. Archakis and Tzanne (2005) consider ‘in-group’ identity, one of the local identities they found emerging through discourse, to be of

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<sup>1</sup> Focusing particularly on direct speech emerging in conversational narratives of Greek youngsters, Lampropoulou (2007: 211) has found out that the features employed along with direct speech can be summarised as follows: “Employment of reporting verb in narrative present; omission of reporting verb; *kano* as reporting verb (although not regularly); repetition of reporting clause; employment of direct speech in adjacency pairs; position of direct speech in the complicating action; discourse markers, swearing and interjections included in the direct speech instances”. Lampropoulou (ibid) points out that these features “contribute to the removing of the events out of their past frame into the time of speaking, so that the audience feels as if they were present at the time of experience”.

<sup>2</sup> Tsitsipis (1998: 73), studying Arvanitika (Albaniana variety)-Greek bilingual communities and the narrative resources used by fluent speakers therein, elaborates on the evaluative use of repetitions pointing out that “[s]ame language repetition does not appear randomly but is planned by the narrator when a shift to a new, significant part of the plot is about to occur”.

particular importance to the interactants, as it appears to be the means through which a relation of intimacy and solidarity is built dynamically among narrators and their audience in the encounter.

In the last few years Georgakopoulou's research (see 2004 and mainly 2007 and references therein) focuses on certain types of everyday storytelling practices that depart significantly from the 'narrative canon' as has been described by Labov (1972), i.e. the non-shared, personal experience past events stories. Georgakopoulou's analysis, shifting emphasis to 'micro-cultures', suggests the importance of relatively small, conversationally emerging stories of shared-known past events, of unfolding events and even of projected-future events. These types of storytelling are based on strong in-group bonds and quite often result in co-constructions, i.e. to stories jointly performed by more than one teller who take over various narrative participation roles. In line with the ethnographic perspective she adopts in her most recent work, Georgakopoulou (2007: 22) dissociates the Greek narratives examined from the socio-cultural identity of the participants in her data, but leaves room for an interpretation that may connect the two.

In our study we will focus on specific story-telling techniques observed in oral Greek narratives with the twofold aim of, firstly, discussing the construction of identity(ies) as they emerge from the narratives, and, secondly, relating the locally situated identities to the larger social identities of the participants, especially to their socio-cultural identity. We would, however, like to state that, although we are intrigued by the possibility of linking the narratives we examine to aspects of Greek identity, we do not intend to make any general statements about, or impose on our data, the - admittedly vague - concept of Greekness in its totality.

### 3. Data

This paper is part of a large-scale research project<sup>3</sup> on everyday interactions among youth groups in Patras, Greece. The project involved the study of naturally occurring conversational narratives amongst young residents of Patras. In this paper, we report on two recorded conversations, which involve six participants, four 18-year-old male close friends (Alexis, Costas, Manos and Nikos<sup>4</sup>), and two 20-year-old researchers, Fanis and Tina<sup>5</sup>, who are in the third year of their academic studies.

The young male friends seem to conform to the two youth leitmotifs which Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou (2003: 4) have identified, namely adolescents' claims for independence from adults and adult authority, and their engagement in peer-group activities and youth cultural practices, which often involve a departure from mainstream norms and values. In addition, these people present attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity like heterosexuality, toughness, competitiveness and antagonism to school-based learning (Frosh et al. 2002; Coates 2003). In particular, they dress in a way that ostensibly departs from the norm, namely they wear their hair long,

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<sup>3</sup> The project (*K. Karatheodoris 2425*) was funded by the Research Committee of the University of Patras.

<sup>4</sup> All names in the transcripts have been changed.

<sup>5</sup> Although this is a mixed-gender encounter, which may have possibly affected discourse production, gender issues have not been considered in our analysis as they lie beyond the main concerns of the paper.

wear earrings and badges of punk groups on their jackets, and appear to have a scruffy look which, in their first conversation with the researchers, they explain in terms of their indifference towards clothes. They have also formed a rock-band which appears to be of special importance to them. The music they play is mainly heavy metal rock with heavy metal singers being role models for them. In the personal stories they recount, the four friends report to often engage in activities that could be characterized as mischievous or provocative, such as ringing the door bell of strangers in the middle of the night, or jumping from one parked car to another, which they call 'car walking'.<sup>6</sup> They also relate stories in which they appear to act in a way that gets them into trouble with their parents, teachers, schoolmates, and parish priests. Particular attention should be paid to the fact that the four youngsters appear to be interested in hot issues of social circulation related to politics, religion or extreme police activities and behavior. Nevertheless, they manifest their interest in a way that differentiates them from their peers (for example, although they claim to believe in God, they do that "in the wrong way", as they say), and, finally, they clearly orient to a particular subcultural category affiliation, since they call themselves anarchists.

The two researchers who are involved in the encounter are university students who spent two months attending classes at the school of the four friends, pretending that they were gathering material for their university essays. During the breaks they tried to get acquainted with the pupils and managed to develop a fairly strong bond with them and become their friends as peripheral members of the same group. The conversations analysed in this study took place in one of the researchers' place, after the two students had stopped attending classes at the school and had established a close relationship with the four youngsters. The researchers were instructed to moderate the conversation in as unobtrusive a way as possible.

The recorded conversations consist, to a large extent, of canonical narratives, that is recountings of past events in least two temporally ordered clauses (Labov 1972), but also a-typical, small stories (Georgakopoulou 2007) of shared (commonly known) past events told in collaboration. The remarkable number of narratives in these conversations (94 stories in 2 conversations), as compared with that reported in other studies (Coates 2003; for example, identified 203 stories in 32 conversations), seem to show the youngsters' strong wish to introduce the researchers to their every day life, designing their narratives particularly for them. As Blum-Kulka (1993: 391) points out, the presence of a supportive, new audience (the two researchers, in our case) can usually trigger the narration of memories from a shared past.

A lot of narratives are told in the first person plural, as they concern collective experiences, commonly known to the group. The stories cover a wide range of topics, with 'school' and 'religion' being the two most frequently recurring ones. Other stories concern 'the police', 'dress codes' or 'activities of the group'. In their stories the youngsters mainly define the characteristics and the behavior of people who do not belong in their group, by using implicit or explicit negative evaluation. Such people are usually figures of authority and institutional power like their relatives, teachers, priests or policemen, who are portrayed as 'opponents'. As we have argued elsewhere (Archakis and Tzanne 2005), through their stories, these youngsters aim at delegitimizing the figures that are invested with institutional power in the status quo,

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<sup>6</sup> This is probably their appropriation of an activity originally performed as a form of protest against cars parking on streets and pavements (McGurn 2005).

while at the same time trying to legitimate their own views and practices in the particular context of situation.

Their common social background, all the claimed or inferred common beliefs and practices of the four youngsters, their appearance and behaviour together with the narrative topics they select to relate show their common mode of socialization, their shared frames of identification, and, overall, indicate a prevalent group identity which, as van Dijk (1998: 123) puts it, ‘involves a complex array of typical or routine practices, collective action, dress, objects [...] and other symbols’. In Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s (1992: 464) terms, these people form a ‘community of practice’, since their group is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. As we shall see, the four friends invoke elements from their common experiences dynamically and selectively in their discourse while constructing their in-group identity in the encounter.

#### **4. Story-telling techniques as in-group identity markers**

An important distinction proposed by Blum-Kulka (1993) is that between ‘story’ or ‘tale’, where the description of at least two consequent and causally or temporally related past events takes place, and ‘performance’ or ‘telling’. As Blum-Kulka (1993: 363) points out, *telling* is the act of narrating in real time, the actual performance of a story before an audience, which, together with ‘tale’ are “sensitive indices not just of our personal selves, but also of our social and cultural identities” (Schiffrin 1996: 170).

In this section, we focus initially on the act of narrating in the sequentiality of discourse and place emphasis on the ‘micro-culture’ (Georgakopoulou 2004: 59) of the participants in order to examine how the four friends appear to find a way to integrate themselves and the researchers in their natural peer community. We argue that at least four story-telling devices are used by the narrators, in order for them to construct a collective, in-group identity in the course of the conversation (see also Archakis 2002). The four youngsters’ intention to foreground their in-group relations and project an in-group identity in the encounter is arguably made manifest almost from the beginning of their conversations with the researchers. This identity is built carefully through the sequences of stories they tell which are strong indicators of their common background and close friendship. It is fairly likely that, through this identity, the participants also make a move towards establishing a similar relationship with the researchers, to which the latter respond positively by using similar narrative devices (see section 4.4).

In more specific terms, we argue that the following story-telling techniques employed in the narratives at hand function as *in-group identity markers*:

- linguistic signals occurring in the development of the performed narratives like the inclusive *we* which stresses collective course of action, or comments that confirm the accuracy and completeness of the narrative, indicating knowledge of the narrated events;
- co-constructed narratives shaped on a collaborative, polyphonic floor;
- lack of explicit story openers, which indicates the opportunity for joint narration;
- parallel narratives, that is story sequences similar in topic, structure and evaluation based on common beliefs and values.

In what follows, we will elaborate on these story-telling techniques as ‘ways of telling’ and of constructing locally the identity of ‘in-group’.

#### **4.1. Linguistic signals of common background**

First of all, the in-group identity of the participants is constructed in their narratives through repeated use of the inclusive *we*, (‘we won’, ‘we locked the school’) which stresses collective rather than individual course of action (see De Fina 2003) and ‘ingroupness’ rather than ‘outgroupness’ (Duszak 2002: 3).

Similarly, ingroupness emerges when narrators seek confirmation (‘actually, we won most of the votes, right?’) from other members of the group also present (see also Norrick 1997: 206) in order to check the accuracy and completeness of their recollections of the narrated events. In this case, narrators assume and rely on the group’s shared knowledge of past events. In other cases, the hearer of a narrative often responds to the beginning of the story with expressions like ‘oh, right, are you gonna tell this one?’, implying in this way that he has also taken part in or, at least, knows the story that his friend is about to relate.

Furthermore, there are narratives where the story of one of the young people is interspersed with comments from the others in the form of clarification statements, requests and/or evaluations (cf. Cheshire 2000: 240-250). In some cases, the other youngsters may accompany the performance of the story with minimal responses as backchannel support, repetitions and/or details that confirm their familiarity with the story currently told.

We consider all these linguistic means as markers of shared or known experience, and thus as evidence of in-group membership. These markers seem to verify what we have already pointed out based on our ethnographic observations, namely that the four friends do indeed form a group with very strong bonds among its members.

#### **4.2. Co-constructed narratives**

The above devices relate to a central issue in story telling, that of narrative participation rights, namely who and to what extent can take part in the telling of a story. In the data examined, the different modes of performance form a continuum. At the one end, we have very few monologic narratives where one of the four youngsters holds the floor for a long time. At the other end, we have polyphonic narratives where two -or more- of the friends co-narrate a story by constructing a collaborative floor (see Edelsky 1981). In these cases, the distinction between ‘narrator’ and ‘audience’ is misleading, since, in fact, co-participants are always co-authors in some sense (cf. Coates 2001: 82). Thus, in telling the same story, co-participants collaborate closely taking the floor in order to add background information, to provide dialogues or to offer their own perspective of what is being narrated. In this way, they share responsibility concerning the development of the story, the direction it takes, and its conclusion (see also Monzoni 2005: 198-199).

Concerning narrative participation rights, our data constitute an interesting deviation from the general tendency for the autonomy of the teller, which, according to Georgakopoulou (1997), prevails in Greek narratives. In the stories we have examined, it is common for one informant to break into the telling of another, in order to jointly

perform the story with him. Quite illustrative is the following extract referring to the election of pupils' council at the school of the informants:

(1<sup>7</sup>)

- [1] Κώστας: Ψηφίζουμε τώρα για πρόεδρο, και βγήκε ο Δημήτρης, και με το που βγήκε ο Δημήτρης λέμε εγώ, ο Αλέξης και ο Μάνος φεύγουμε, δε σας γουστάρουμε //
- [2] Αλέξης: Ναι, δε ψηφίζουμε καθόλου. Μα ελάτε να ψηφίσετε, άντε ρε.
- [3] Κώστας: Δε σας γουστάρουμε ρε, φύγετε //
- [4] Αλέξης: Και την ίδια μέρα τους λέω, εγώ επειδή δεν τον γουστάρω το Δημήτρη, θέλω να του κάνω σπάσιμο, όπως μπορούσα να τον κάνω να πει ξέρω 'γω παραιτούμαι, δε ξέρω τι θα γίνει. Και τους λέω ότι εγώ τους λέω, με δικά μου αιτήματα θέλω συνέλευση. Και μου κάνει ο Δημήτρης θες να την κάνουμε σήμερα; Σήμερα. Μπαίνουμε μέσα, μπαίνουν όλοι μέσα, με περιμέναν μένα. Ρωτάγανε αυτοί, είχανε χεστεί ξέρω 'γω οι άλλοι, τι γίνεται, τι θα μας πουν //
- [5] Κώστας: Ναι, ναι, ναι, ρωτάγανε τι θέλει να πει ο Αλέξης; Ποιος Αλέξης; Ο Αλέξης (.) Ο Καλογεράς; λέω. Όχι ο άλλος ο Αλέξης με τα μακριά μαλλιά, ο φίλος σου ο ντράμερ, α, α ναι τι; Τι θέλει να μας πει; Αα αυτός κάνει τη συνέλευση; Δε το 'ξερα ρε παιδιά και 'γω ήξερα αλλά, τι να σας πω ρε παιδιά λέω. Έρχεται τώρα ο Αλέξης μέσα //
- [6] Αλέξης: Μπαίνω μέσα εγώ, κάθομαι, τι 'ναι ρε Αλέξη; Αράζω, τρία αιτήματα τους λέω πρώτον μη δώ σε κατάληψη τίποτα ΚΝΕ απ' έζω, τίποτα τέτοια (...)

- [1] Costas: We vote now for president, and Dimitris was elected, and as the results were announced, myself, Alexis and Manos say we are out of here, we don't dig you//
- [2] Alexis: Yes, we don't vote at all. But come on, come and vote. Come on *re*.<sup>8</sup>
- [3] Costas: We don't like you, go away //
- [4] Alexis: And on the same day I tell them, cause I don't like Dimitris, I want to give him a hard time, to force him in any way to say I give up, I don't know what is going to happen. And I tell them I want a meeting with my requests. And Dimitris says to me, do you want to do it today? Today. We get in [the meeting room], they get all in, they were waiting for me. They were asking, the others were scared shit, you know, what's going to happen, what will they tell us//

<sup>7</sup> Examples are presented in the Greek language (and alphabet), followed by their free translation in English. The following transcription conventions are used:

/	self-repair
//	latching and/or interruption
(.)	(foregrounded as) prolonged pause
(...)	part of a turn has been left out
(XX)	unintelligible talk
<u>text</u>	stressed parts of utterances
<i>text</i>	words or utterances that appeared in English in the original Greek text
[text]	clarification points made by the authors

<sup>8</sup> 'Re' is an untranslatable discourse marker which functions differently in different contexts (see Georgakopoulou 2001). In example 1, it indicates symmetrical power relations in a context of mild disagreement. In Tannen and Kakava's terms (1992: 29) "re is a pervasive formulaic marker of friendly disagreement". The same holds for 'more', another untranslatable discourse marker, in example 5 (for the same issue see also note 11 in Tannen and Kakava *ibid.*: 32).



- [5] Costas: Yeah, yeah, they were asking what does Alexis want to say, Alexis who? Alexis (.) Kalogeras? I go. No, the other Alexis with the long hair, your friend the drummer, ahh yes what? what does he want to tell us? ahh is he the one who asked for the meeting? I didn't know that, *re* guys, and I knew but, what shall I tell you *re* guys, I go. Alexis comes in at that time//
- [6] Alexis: I go in, I sit down, what's going on *re* Alexi? I sprawl out on the chair, three things, I tell them. First, I don't want to see any KNE [Communist Youth of Greece] members around in a sit-in again (...)

In this example Costas and Alexis are shown to take an oppositional stance towards their classmate Dimitris who ran for president. According to what Alexis mentions in turn 6, Dimitris must have close relations with members of the Communist party who attempt to take part in the school sit-in demonstrations, whereas Costas and Alexis are 'pure' anarchists according to our ethnographic information (and to what is also declared by the two friends in example 3). They both consider Dimitris as an out-group member, i.e. as an 'opponent' to their peer group, someone who does not conform to their values and beliefs. Thus, Costas and Alexis collaborate in the course of the story-telling performance in order to show their joint disrespect for, and disapproval of, Dimitris.

In more specific terms, while Costas has got the floor presenting the 'complicating action' (Labov 1972), Alexis interrupts him in order to add details and, moreover, to underline his participation in the narrated events. In what follows, the narrative is performed collaboratively by the two youngsters, actually in quite a dramatized way, as they take turns according to the demands of the represented dialogues. More specifically, at the points where the voice of any of the two people can be, or is going to be represented, this person interrupts in order to act out his own words, to represent his contribution by himself.

In co-constructed narratives such as this one, simultaneous talk and penetration or latching of one speaker's turn to that of the other is tolerable and perhaps also preferable to uninterrupted speech. The four youngsters seem to attach more importance to group talk and the camaraderie it seems to produce than to the autonomous development of their narrative turns. Thus, even the instances of disruptive interruptions which deprive the interlocutors from the opportunity to complete their contribution, appear to be interpreted not as attempts to dominate the conversation, but as a way of showing enthusiastic participation in the construction of a narrative.

The observed conversational behavior of our informants can lead to the conclusion that they show solidarity honoring their interlocutor's positive face, that is his need to be liked and approved of by others (Brown and Levinson 1987). As a matter of fact, their story-telling is performed on a collaborative type of floor, demonstrating a high involvement style (see Tannen 1984).

The co-construction of narratives as a result of occupying the floor collaboratively with a positive politeness orientation (re)constructs and clearly foregrounds the in-group identity of the four friends, the fact that they are not just any individuals who happen to take part in the same conversation, but close friends with common experiences and values.

### 4.3. *The initiation of narratives*

As we have already pointed out, the participation of one person in the narration of another ranges from short comments of various types to long contributions which lead to the co-construction of narratives. However, independently of the actual conversational involvement that takes place in every such case, it is important to note that quite often the interactants secure the conversational *possibility* of co-narration.

It has been found that an efficient way for a narrator to gain an extended turn for the relation of his/her narrative is a preparatory sequence comprising the narrator's offer to tell a story and the audience's request to hear the offered story (Sacks 1992; Georgakopoulou 2005). Turns [1] and [2] in the following example illustrate this preparatory sequence.

(2)

- [1] Αλέξης: Να το πω ρε τι 'χε γίνει πέρσι;  
[2] Τίνα: Τι είχε γίνει για λέγε.

- [1] Alexis: Shall I say *re* what happened last year?  
[2] Tina: Go on, say it.

When the informants preface their stories in such a way, they actually argue for the tellability and newsworthiness of their story, for the fact that they want to display interesting instances from their past. However, such story opening sequences (as in example 2) are usually missing from our data, as we can see in example (3), where the narrator immediately starts with the complicating action (turn 5) and is soon accompanied by his interlocutor:

(3)

- [1] Φάνης: Και τις προκηρύξεις ρε Μάνο, πώς τις μοίρασες; Πήγες //στην εκκλησία;  
[2] Μάνος: πηγαίναμε //  
[3] Φάνης: ή έτσι;  
[4] Μάνος: κόλλησα εκεί πέρα σε κάτι εκκλησίες //  
[5] Κώστας:

Αα [γέλια]. Πάμε σε κάτι γριές, γεια σας ξέρω 'γω λέμε αν οι παπάδες ξέρω 'γω μ' αυτά τα φράγκα που 'χανε τα δίνανε στα στο κόσμο, θα σωνόντουσαν; Ναι λέει ξέρω 'γω κι αυτό είναι κακό που κάνουνε που τα κρατάνε κάτι τέτοια //  
//

- [6] Τίνα: Όλοι τα καταλαβαίνουν αυτά ρε.  
[7] Κώστας: Άκου, άκου όμως, ορίστε μια προκήρυξη // ξέρω 'γω.  
[8] Μάνος: Όχι είστ' αιρετικοί.  
[9] Κώστας: Διαβάζει «Υποκρισία» από πάνω κι από κάτω ένα σήμα άλφα ξέρω 'γω //  
[10] Τίνα: Γιατί βάλανε το αναρχία από κάτω;  
[11] Κώστας: Γιατί έτσι πιστεύουμε //  
[12] Μάνος: Αναρχικοί. (...)

- [1] Fanis: What about the leaflets *re* Mano, who did you hand them out? Did you go //to any church?  
[2] Manos: we went //  
[3] Fanis: or what?  
[4] Manos: I hung around some churches //

- [5] Costas: Ahh [laughter]. We go to some old bags, hi, you know, we go, if priests, you know, with this money they had if they gave it to people, would they be saved? She goes yes, you know, and this is bad what they do, to hold on to it, stuff like that//
- [6] Tina: Everybody realises that re.
- [7] Costas: Listen, but listen, here's a leaflet, you know
- [8] Manos: No, you're heretics.<sup>9</sup>
- [9] Costas: She reads "Hypocrisy" at the top and at the bottom a sign [the letter] A, you know//
- [10] Tina: Why did you put [the symbol of] anarchy at the bottom?
- [11] Costas: Because this is our belief//
- [12] Manos: Anarchists. (...)

The main point of the narrative in example 3 revolves around the old people's ignorance in relation to the symbol of anarchy on the leaflet, and thus their mistaking the young people for heretics, as well as to their leaving the scene without giving them the opportunity to clarify or defend their position. It is reasonable to argue that this action may have provoked "a sense of social injustice" (Widdicombe 1998: 53) in the youngsters involved, in that they see their actions and beliefs interpreted solely on the basis of common knowledge or social stereotypes concerning the category in which they claim to belong (see Archakis and Tzanne 2005). The fact that the narrator immediately starts with the complicating action (turn 5) and is soon accompanied by his interlocutor possibly illustrates their common sense of injustice and their common anger towards the old people's behaviour.

The way this story is initiated shows that the floor is not meant to be engaged by one speaker only, but is also open to others to join in the telling in progress and build the story collaboratively. This is presumably indicative of the fact that most of the narrated events are not considered as property of individual speakers, but 'common property of the group', as Cheshire (2000: 253) would put it. The four youngsters seem to feel that they can always break into each other's telling, exactly because most of the times their stories are known episodes or snapshots taken from the common history of the group, where social rejection seems to be a recurrent phenomenon.

#### 4.4 Parallel narratives

The construction through narrative of the in-group identity of the four friends is not restricted to 'co-constructed narratives' concerning 'A-B events' (Labov and Fanshel 1977: 62), that is events known to both narrators, or 'G-events' (Norrick 1997: 202), that is events essential for their identification as a group. In our data, the in-group identity of the informants is also made manifest in 'parallel narratives' concerning *A events*, that is events known only to the teller (Labov and Fanshel 1977: 62). In particular, when one of the youngsters can not join in the current narrative, as he may not know the facts, it is possible for him to choose to tell a 'second story' (Coates 2003), immediately after the first one, which mirrors -at least to some extent- the action and the evaluation of the previous one. Quite illustrative is the following extract where,

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<sup>9</sup> In Greek, both 'heretic' (*αιρετικός*) and 'anarchist' (*αναρχικός*) begin with 'a'.

in two successive narratives, Nikos and Alexis present the similar ways in which they responded to their English teacher's request to write a composition on two separate occasions. Through their stories their opposition to school-based learning is clearly shown.

(4)

[1] Νίκος: Της λέω, κυρία εγώ βαριέμαι να γράψω έκθεση, please Niko, μου λέει ήταν εκατόν πενήντα λέξεις, τι εκατόν πενήντα λέξεις, να σου γράψω εκατόν πενήντα φορές της λέω ότι βαριέμαι; Τι να γράψω της λέω δε μου 'ρχεται τίποτα. Τέλος πάντων εγώ δεν το κατάλαβα το θέμα, κάτι για festival έγραφε και γράφω εγώ I am in the rock wave festival κι άρχισα να λέω μαλακίες για συγκροτήματα και τέτοια πράγματα, πρέπει να φρίκαρ' η γυναίκα.

[2] Αλέξης: Εν τω μεταξύ μας είχε βάλει κι εμάς μια και έλεγε ξέρω 'γω, γράφτε μια ιστορία, Σκεφτόμουνα σκεφτόμουνα από το Στάθη το είχα ακούσει, σκεφτόμουνα τι να γράψω ρε πούστη μου και γράφω I am a lonely ranger, ξέρω 'γω, walking in the night with my horse tic tic//

[3] Νίκος: Πο/ τώρα σοβαρά το 'χεις κάνει αυτό;

[4] Αλέξης: Ναι, tic tic tic tic tic tic όλη τη σελίδα ξέρω 'γω, τα άλογα, ρε παιδί μου περπάταγε το άλογο (...) και στο τέλος το The End.

[1] Nikos: I tell her, miss I can't be bothered with the composition, *please Niko*, she says, it was one hundred and fifty words, what one hundred and fifty words, shall I write to you one hundred and fifty times, I tell her, that I can't be bothered? What should I write, I tell her, nothing comes to mind. Anyway I didn't understand the topic, it was something about a *festival* and I write *I am in the rock wave festival* and I start bullshiting about bands and things like that, the woman must have freaked out.

[2] Alexis: Meanwhile, she had asked us to write also an essay and she told us, you know, write a story. I was thinking and thinking, this is something I had heard from Stathis, I was thinking what the fuck should I write and I write *I am a lonely ranger*, you know, *walking in the night with myhorse tic tic//*

[3] Nikos: Wo/ now have you really done that?

[4] Alexis: Yes, *tic tic tic tic tic tic tic* the whole page, you know, the horses, *re my man* the horse was trotting (...) and at the end *The End*.

In Coates' (2003: 82-3) terms, this is an example of a 'true' story sequence, where the two stories are contiguous and identical in topic. In the first story, Nikos refers to his unwillingness to write the essay requested by the teacher of English and to the fact that he actually wrote something absolutely irrelevant to the given topic and relevant to his music interests. In this way he shows his indifference to his school duties, and his lack of consideration for the face-threat thus being directed to his own as well as to the teacher's face. This event appears to be an A-event, to which Alexis has no access. However, he wants to show that both Nikos and he deal with similar situations in the same way. For this reason, he retrieves and recounts also an A-event story with similarly portrayed action (initial embarrassment for the teacher's request and then compliance in an unexpected way) and similar evaluation (deprecation of the school in general and in particular of the teacher) to the narrative related by Nikos. His narration shows that the behaviour of the two pupils, even if it does not concern their shared experiences, is based on common values which relate to their opposing to school as an institution and, consequently, school-based learning. In other words, it can be argued

that Alexis chose to perform his narrative on the structural and evaluative model of the previous narrative by Nikos in order to confirm their shared values and in-group relationship.

It is interesting to note that, in the data examined, parallel narratives and the construction of in-group identity involve not only the four friends, but also the students-researchers who are found to express their approval of the behaviour of the young friends in most narrated stories and make comments that indicate support for, and agreement with them. One of the researchers in particular, relates stories similar to the ones told by the four friends and thus appears to claim in-group membership for herself.

As we have already mentioned, at the beginning of their conversation the aim of the researchers was to record the youngsters' speech by backgrounding their own presence and maintaining minimal involvement in their encounters with them. In the course of the conversation analysed here, however, Tina, one of the researchers, allows us to assume that the identity she constructs in the encounter is noticeably affected by the *in-group* identity projected by the four friends. In particular, towards the end of the conversation, the researcher in question turns from 'audience' to 'narrator' and produces two 'second stories', that is two narratives which are similar in topic, though not contiguous, to some of the informants' previous stories in which they were presented to ridicule and belittle figures of authority and institutional power. In our view, this conversational behaviour indicates that Tina seeks to show to the other participants that the relation of ingroupness cultivated so far between them and herself is based on common values. This move may be due to the researcher's wish to express her liking, approval and acceptance of the four youngsters. In example 5 one of these second stories is presented:

(5<sup>10</sup>)

- [1] Τίνα: Έχω μια φίλη, ο πατέρας της είναι μπάτσος, μιλάμε/ είχαμε πάει στον Αλκαίο τώρα στο μαγαζί και πάμε/ αυτός εε του 'χανε κλείσει τραπέζι εν τω μεταξύ τσάμπα όλα αυτά κάθε μέρα γύρναγε σ' όλα τα μαγαζιά και οο/ στο Χριστοδουλόπουλο, πήγαινε σ' όλα αυτά τα //
- [2] Αλέξης: Τους γλύφουνε μωρέ, τους γλύφουνε, δε μπορείς να κάνεις αλλιώς.
- [3] Τίνα: Τζάμπα τώρα, και μπαίνω μέσα/ και μου 'χε πει η φίλη μου θα μπεις και θα πεις του πατέρα μου. Λέω ρε παιδί μου, ξέρω 'γω τον τάδε. Στην αρχή δε μ' άφηνε να μπω ξέρω 'γω, αλλά μετά κοπέλα μου καρέκλες φαγητά ποτά τζάμπα
- [4] Μάνος: Ναι ναι
- [5] Τίνα: Και λέω τι κάνει ρε αυτός (...) είναι και πατέρας της φίλης μου και τον είχα για καλό άνθρωπο, και πήγα κι είδα όλα αυτά και λέω ποιος ξέρει τι κάνει αυτός λέω
- [6] Αλέξης: (XX)//
- [7] Τίνα: Αυτός πρέπει να 'ναι πολύ χοντρά χωμένος.
- [1] Tina: I have a friend, her father is a cop, well/ we had gone together to Alkeos' [popular Greek singer] place and we go there/ he ehh there was a table reserved for him and everything was free for him, every day he would go to all these places and oh/ to Christodoulopos [another popular Greek singer], he would go to all these//
- [2] Alexis: [The place owners] suck up to them *more*<sup>11</sup>, they lick them, there's nothing you can do.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion of this example see Archakis and Tzanne (2005).

- [3] Tina: Free, I think, and I go in/ and my friend had told me you'll go in and you'll say [you come] from my father. Well I say I know that guy. In the beginning he wouldn't let me in, you know, but then he was like my dear girl table food booze everything free
- [4] Manos: Yeah yeah
- [5] Tina: And I think to myself what does this guy do (...) and he is my friend's father and I thought he was a good man, and I went and saw all these things and I think to myself who knows what he does I say
- [6] Alex: (XX)//
- [7] Tina: He must be real deep into some dirty business.

Tina's narrative is similar to the four youngsters' previous stories in a number of respects. Firstly, in terms of characters, it concerns the narrator-participant and another character (the 'cop'), who is a figure of authority and institutional power. Secondly, in her story she refers to the powerful character in derogatory terms ('cop'). Finally, with her story, Tina belittles the police officer, the institutionally powerful figure of the story, by implying that he is bribed by nightclubs and therefore corrupted ('he must be involved in some really dirty business'). By overtly criticizing the powerful figure in her story, the researcher clearly shows her alignment with the views of the four friends, thereby making it easier for her to claim ingroupness in the encounter. In other words, it is reasonable to argue that Tina chose to perform her narrative on the structural and evaluative model of previous narratives in order to show that she likes them and accepts them as they are and perhaps to claim a place in their group.<sup>12</sup> Telling a relevant second story means that 'My mind is with you' and this can be a powerful way of 'doing' friendship (Sacks 1992), which is what we feel the researcher is doing on this occasion.

## 5. Discussion

In this section we attempt to relate the identity of in-group constructed locally through narrative to the larger identities that participants bring with them to social encounters. In particular, we examine the possibility of linking the in-group identity constructed and maintained in the conversations in question to an aspect of these people's larger socio-cultural identity, namely the preference of Greek society to discursively cultivate and maintain in-group relations.

### 5.1. *In-group relations in Greek culture*

Greek culture attaches particular importance to the (verbal and interactional) maintenance and enhancement of interpersonal relationships. Discussing the socio-cultural context of Greek politeness from an anthropological point of view, Hirschon (2001) stresses the importance of sociable contact and solidarity for Greek people and points out that, in the Greek worldview, "a coexistent set of values, precepts and injunctions emphasise sociability, and a high positive value is placed on social

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<sup>11</sup> See footnote 8.

<sup>12</sup> As Goffman (1974: 510) argues 'an illustrative story by one participant provides a ticket another participant can use to allow the matching of that experience with a story from his repertoire'.

interaction and exchange” (ibid.: 22). Furthermore, in a study on Greek and German telephone conversations, Pavlidou (1994: 508) notes that “Greeks are strongly oriented toward the relationship aspect of communication”. In similar vein, analysing the use of Greek diminutives in male and female Greek conversations, Makri-Tsilipakou (2003: 717) claims that Greeks “place a high value on social interaction and involvement”.

In-group relations have been found to have particular importance for Greek people. Referring to ancient Greece, Freeman and Brockmeier (2001: 78) maintain that

In spite of often being described as the origin of western culture, Greek antiquity did not know the idea of individual who needs to develop an articulated version of his or her life. (...) Instead of telling narratives of events, thoughts, and intentions which were specifically personal and private, the main concern of the individual was to integrate him- or herself in what was regarded as the natural community of Greek culture.

Triandis and Vassiliou (1972) are among the first to discuss the organization of modern Greek society in terms of the distinction between in-groups and out-groups and to stress the importance in-groups have for Greek people. Similar argumentation on the centrality of the concept of ingroupness in Greek society is presented in Herzfeld (1983 and 1985), while quite illustrative are the remarks of Sifianou (1992: 41-42) on the issue:

For Greeks the limits to personal territories seem to be looser among the individual who belong to the same in-group. The barriers which will have to be removed to establish social relations are not so high (...) Very often the individual’s needs, desires, expectations, and even actions are determined by considering those of the other members of the in-group (...) The behavior of other closely related members of the in-group contributes greatly to the overall picture of every individual’s face.

The above remarks seem to explain why Greek society exhibits a positive politeness orientation, i.e. a tendency for the speaker to treat his/her addressee “as a member of an in-group, a friend, a person whose desires and personality are known and liked” (Sifianou 2006: 110). Other studies (Tzanne 2001 and 2007) on issues of discourse and identity on Greek television confirm this tendency as they show that, in programmes aiming to entertain and/or inform the viewers, positive politeness strategies abound and relations of intimacy and solidarity are cultivated through the construction of ‘in-group’ identity for all participants concerned. Finally, it has been found that, in their encounters, Greek people tend to cultivate – verbally or interactionally – relations of intimacy and closeness with their interlocutors, even with people they meet for the first - and sometimes last - time (Tzanne 1997).

## **5.2 *Tracing Greekness in Greek narratives***

Taking the above into consideration, we would now like to discuss the story-telling practices examined and the identities constructed thereby in terms of the broader socio-cultural context in which these narratives were produced. In particular, we would like to argue that, to our mind, the systematic construction and foregrounding of ‘in-group’ identity by the participants involved is closely related to the importance in-group relations have been found to have for Greek people. As we pointed out in section 5.1, Greek society displays a positive politeness orientation as it attaches importance to the

expression of closeness and solidarity. It is worth noting that the tendency of the interactants to construct 'in-group' identities for all people present and thus to establish and cultivate in-group relations is made manifest almost from the beginning of their encounters. Although the movement from the micro- to the macro- (and vice-versa) is not always clear-cut and straightforward but more often than not it is mediated by concerns related to specific communities of practice, we contend that the selection of 'in-group' identity for projection cannot be unrelated to the aforementioned importance of ingroupness for the Greeks.

Moreover, we would like to argue that by constructing this identity some of the participants have probably sought to establish a relationship of closeness and familiarity with the others. By (re)constructing in-group relations in the presence of the researchers, the four youngsters were probably also inviting them to share this ingroupness. To this invitation the students-researchers appeared to respond positively by expressing similar views to theirs, and, generally speaking, by offering them their support and sympathy, especially when the four friends narrated instances of social rejection. The repeated use of such positive politeness devices, so popular with Greek people (Sifianou 1992; Tzanne 2001 and 2007), cultivated an atmosphere of closeness and familiarity, which was maintained throughout the encounter. The performance of the 'second stories' volunteered by one of the researchers was, we believe, the ultimate response to the young friends' invitation to ingroupness, which confirms the crucial role relations of intimacy and solidarity play in Greek society. Thus we find it reasonable to argue in favour of a link between the ways of narrating stories in a Greek context and the general tendency of the Greeks to favour relations of ingroupness. In sum, we feel justified in confirming that the way a story is told in a particular socio-cultural context is likely to be (also) related to the socio-cultural identity of its teller.

## **6. Conclusion**

Identities are constructed discursively according to linguistic, social and physical context. Speakers make narrative choices in order to display a particular portrait of themselves constructed for a particular context. In other words, narratives are not simply mirrors of past experiences, but designed products for particular ends. In this respect, story-telling can prove to be a very efficient means for the situated identity construction conveyed to fellow members and/or to professional analysts (cf. Sarbin and Kitsuse 1994: 8).

In this paper we showed that social identities are constructed not only through the tales themselves, but also through the actual performance of the story (*telling*). In other words, the tellability of the stories examined is to be searched not only on their newsworthy content, but mainly on the dynamics of the narrative event itself (cf. Norrick 1997).

The context of the situation under examination involved six participants, four high school pupils and close friends, and two university students as researchers. In the course of their conversations, the participants' aim became clearer with each turn they produced. More specifically, we saw how these people employed the sequential organization of their story-telling to construct a local identity of 'in-group', which, for four of them, is directly linked with, and points to, their larger social identity of 'close friend'. It is our contention that the common experience of the storytellers gave them



the opportunity for high involvement in the course of the same narrative, whereas their common values and assumptions led to the performance of successive narratives with a similar point. These findings reveal how the telling of a story functions as a means to (re)construct the identity of the tellers.

In our study we have linked the way some stories were told by a group of Greek people not only to the identities that were constructed locally through these stories, but also to the larger social identities participants brought with them to the encounter. We made this interpretative link based on two main findings that can be summarised as follows: Firstly, of the social identities the four friends could construct locally (pupils, sons, musicians etc.), they foregrounded their 'close friend' / 'in-group' identity, and, secondly, both researchers responded by constructing a similar identity and by talking in a way that maintained and enhanced the atmosphere of intimacy, closeness and solidarity initially created by the four friends. The researchers' wish to align with the in-group identity constructed through story-telling was made even more apparent to us with the two parallel, successive stories one researcher produced in the course of the conversation. In our examination of narrative and identity construction in the specific encounters, we understood the construction of in-group identity to be a manifestation of the attested preference of Greek people for in-group relations. We were therefore led to the conclusion that it is possible to trace aspects of larger social identities such as one's socio-cultural identity in the ways people narrate stories and in the locally situated identities interactants construct through these stories.

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