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**Social identities are constantly reconstructed and
reevaluated by individuals**

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Social identities are constantly reconstructed and reevaluated by individuals

Argiris Archakis, Villy Tsakona. 2012. *The Narrative Construction of Identities in Critical Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan.

Two noted scholars from Greece, Argiris Archakis and Villy Tsakona, wrote this interdisciplinary book on pragmatic analysis linked with the narrative construction of social identities. This intersection between these two disciplinary fields is not new (Bamberg 2007), but this book brings a very original contribution and introduces a welcome educational dimension that is not common to most works in narrative studies. Their aim (and plea) is outlined right from the start. Firstly, Archakis and Tsakona want to show how identities can be constructed through what people say and the various ways they express themselves: “in conversations among peers or intimates, narratives are often used as a means of organizing and shaping experience and as strategies for constructing and projecting identities” (p. 2). Secondly, the authors aim for the inclusion of the conversational narrative methodologies for pupils, in order to make them aware of how discourses in the media and everyday life are made to be plausible and seductive: “there are important reasons for the integration of conversational narratives into language teaching curricula” (p. 2).

As many scholars in media education and in critical education already do (Giroux 2011), Archakis and Tsakona are very much aware that younger pupils have to be cautious regarding everything they hear, watch, and are exposed to, especially through the media: “the inclusion of everyday discourse in language courses is expected to contribute to the fulfillment of this goal through highlighting the resources for the strategic construction of identities, and diagnosing their ideological and evaluative loads” (p. 2). Incidentally, the concept of ideologies reappears frequently, although it was not listed in the index (see pp. 24, 27-29, 34, 135, 167 note 1).

This *Narrative Construction of Identities in Critical Education* comes into three parts. Although it might seem familiar to scholars in sociolinguistics, the theoretical framework described in the first two chapters should not be overlooked because it provides an excellent mapping of narrative studies. Then, Chapters 3-4 demonstrate through conversation analysis plus a variety of examples (even punch lines and jab lines) how teenage identities can be constructed through narrative mechanisms (p. 102). Finally, the last three chapters give and compare some new frameworks for the analysis of conversational narratives (p. 146). Among its numerous strong points, *Narrative Construction of Identities in Critical Education* is engaging right from the first pages. The basic definition of narrative studies given by the

authors in their Introduction is very clear and most useful, among the most efficient I have read: “The term narrative here refers to what in layman language is known as *story*, in expressions such as *He began to tell me incredible stories; His story had no interest (...)*” (p. 2).

In a few places, Archakis and Tsakona’s book also links pragmatics with narrative studies: “Pragmatic theories help us understand how meaning, conceived as interactional achievement of interlocutors, contributes to identity construction” (p. 22).

The whole book aptly demonstrates that social identities are not immutable but constantly reconstructed and reevaluated by individuals: “various pragmatic theories and analyses have suggested that speakers display multiple and not *a priori* given identities. They construct their identities by taking into account each recipient, and design their discourse to meet the goal they set each time” (p. 25). My only quibble would be about the numerous endnotes which should have been footnotes because they are so helpful and meticulously written, for example this definition of ideologies (p. 167) or this discussion about the various conceptions of narratives (p. 169). As such, this *Narrative Construction of Identities in Critical Education* is not meant to serve as an Introduction to narrative theory; nonetheless, it could successfully be used by newcomers in this field because of its clarity and wide spectrum.

References

Bamberg, Michael. 2007. *Narrative State of the Art*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Giroux, Henry. 2011. *On Critical Pedagogy*. London/New York City: Continuum Press.

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