

# *What happens next?*

*A narrative model for  
faith progress and change  
in adults*

Caroline Shepherd  
Heythrop College, London University

## *Research perspective*

- ¶ social construction
- ¶ language is....
  - social, performative, constructing
  - indexical and reflexive
- ¶ dynamic engagement with society gives...
  - sense of self identity
  - attribution of characteristics
- ¶ faith is socially attributed

## *What methodology?*

ethnography  
ethnomethodology or talk-in-interaction  
conversation or discourse analysis  
critical or rhetorical discourse analysis  
speech act theory  
critical language theory  
discursive psychology  
socio-linguistics  
narrative theory or enquiry

## *What analytic tools?*

- ¶ turn-taking in conversation
- ¶ personal discourses
  - other voices
  - memories
- ¶ narrative structures
  - plots and themes
  - consistency of characters
  - mythic 'gap'
- ¶ language structures
  - structural 'gap'
  - up and down voice intonation



## Sally's faith story 1

S: .....I'd say oh yes I do believe (0.75)  
 erm (.25) you know it started off when I was younger (.) my  
 ↑par↓ents were (1.5) both ↓Welsh .hh my father both from  
 (.) very, very poor I mean real poor backgrounds .hh my  
 mother's father was a miner she was one of six .hh and  
 they lived y:you know there was no running water there  
 was ↑no↓thing we were ↑rea↓lly poor .hh my ↑fath↓er's  
 family were er also hill farmers in (.) South Wales .hh so  
 ↑they were brought up in real poverty my ↑father was a  
 communist (.75) erm because of the ↑pover↓ty he'd seen  
 .hh erm my mother was they were both brought up chapel  
 (.75) which is you know (.) six hours on a Sunday enough  
 to put anybody off religion especially a child .hh so (.) we  
 ↑did go to church (.) as a fami↑ly (1.0) erm but I don't think  
 (.) we ever really thought about it and I was a Sunday  
 school teacher for ye:ars in my teens (1.5) you know every  
 Sunday I used to teach (.) Sunday school .hh and it I never  
 really ↑thought ↓about it it was just, (0.5)

## First faith – the 'start'

- ¶ new *locale*
- ¶ Sally's voice
- ¶ narrative details
- ¶ faith part of every day family life
- ¶ themes included...
  - family, working, rural life, church
- ¶ themes excluded...
  - social, Bible study, private devotion, ritual

## What changed? (1)



S: er I went to Oxford (.75) where of course there was a lot of  
(.) you know I I realise I I was from an in↑credi↓bly (.) .hh  
erm traditional background you go to away from your home  
.hh and wow you know there's all these new people and  
everybody talking, talking, talking the whole time and .hh  
and it was just ↑won↓derful really but it did (.) make me  
question (.) the sheer ↑existence of Go↓d .hh and you know  
how can there be a god when all these terrible things  
happen and so on all the usual things that (.) people ↑think  
.hh and I suppose (.) from being quite a (.) erm re↑ti↓gious  
(.) little girl and religious teenager .hh and erm (.) wanting  
to serve God .hh I really went the other w↓ay and became  
quite aggressively (0.5) a↑gain↓st (.25) the [idea of God

## What changed? (2)



I: [?was ?there ?any (.) did you  
have a friend or anything that that you teamed up with  
that was (.) anti =

I: = or .hh did any [thing happen (( ))

S: [n↓o most of my friends were  
↑Christ↑i↓ans actually [strange, strange thing

I: [right

I: mm

S: it's just I just (.) logically looked at the world and thought  
well there can↓not ↓be ↓a ↓god (0.5) if this happens can't  
be a loving god anyway (.25) and I read um Bertrand  
Russell 'why I am not a Christian' .hh and I read oh I read  
quite a lot of (0.5) anti-religious stuff .hh

## What changed...?

- ¶ Sally's first faith attribution
  - family, rural community, service church/school, non reflective and populated with experiences
  
- ¶ Sally's second faith attribution
  - peer group, urban community academic and abstract, non-experiential

## First and second faith together....



S: *and I've so I've done I did services for about ten years or I did six a year and I did Mother's Day .hh Harvest Festival .hh Christmas Day .hh anything that the children would be (.) would be there in force (.) I would (.) write and (.) do the whole service and I'd say to the vicar .hh 'please could you give us a sermon at this point' =*

S: = *but otherwise [it would all just run*

I: *[it would*

S: *oh I know*

I: *it sounds great did you enjoy it =*

S: = *yes, yes [I did yeah I did love it*

I: *[it sounds fun actually yeah*

S: *.hh and yet my friend ((name)) who I'd spoken to about it she said 'how can you do all this when you don't even believe in God' .hh and I said 'well I don't know if I believe in God or not but if I do these things (0.5) perhaps (0.5) I'll find out'*



## Sally's faith no. 3...

S: stood up .....and (.) he. you can imagine can't you he was faced with (.) .hh a fu:ll (.) chapel of grieving teenagers who are all thinking 'how can there be a god when this happens' .....and he made the most ↑wonderful .hhhh um ser↓mon (.) and it absolutely shattered me (.) and that was the [turning point for me =  
(((clicks fingers))

I: = ↑rea↓lly =

S: =↓yeah he stood up and I'll never forget it he said 'I ↓know ((girl's name)) is now in ↓heaven (0.5) I know that' .hh (2.0) °and I ↑looked ↑at ↑him and I thought ↑yea↓h° (1.0) an. and that's that's [when I came back

!

S: I know and that's when I came back and I looked up to the chapel (.) the window (1.0) and I saw the (.) image of God and Christ and everything and I thought °↓yeah (1.5) I'm ↓back°

## living life to the full...

- ¶ faith as social attribution - accounts for change
- ¶ openness, the belief in 'Large Gods', holding more than one story or theme are 'mature', 'healthy' and 'skilled' responses
- ¶ behavioural aporia are creative
- ¶ behavioural opportunities
- ¶ faith narrative provides creativity and consistency – spiritual health