

“And the men
opened the boot of a very
very ancient car...”

Second stories, memory and identity in conversations involving dementia

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Daddy & Mummy's 25th Anniversary





Times of crisis – “the telephone exchange is down...”
“everyone’s gone on strike”, “the baby’s crying...”

Death – “Mother died yesterday. It’s just the same as when she died the last time”

Quaint expressions – “ye gods and little fishes”

Recovering sense and meaning through conversation –
“a child who doesn’t want to talk – and can’t talk anyway”

Story-telling in conversation

- The structure of stories – how they are told and how they unfold **in any conversation.**
- Features symptomatic of dementia...
 - Ordering of events
 - Who did what, where, when
 - Repetition
 - Not knowing where to finish the story - a circularity

These same features are found in conversations not involving dementia.

- Is it possible to talk about ‘distortions’ or ‘inconsistencies’ or ‘incoherence’ in narrative?

Story-telling and identity

- How can stories maintain and reflect a sense of self, relationships with others, and family identity?
- How might stories be employed and understood to display an individual's awareness and state of their dementia?
- Similarly, how might the co-participant's responses to the story-telling contribute to, reinforce, or ameliorate, the individual's state of dementia?
- The communication strategies, techniques and practices employed by co-participants to help the individual with dementia are a resource that reveal the impact of the dementia.

Questions for research in dementia

- Competence-based vs. deficiency-based approach
- Dementia as socially constructed
- Effects of different environments (home vs. institution)
- A study of one person's conversations, in which dementia began to feature
- As a close relative, you have a strong sense of the person with dementia. You have more to recognise and identify with. You also recognise what is lost and what has gone. When they tell a story, you want it to come off. You've heard the story before. You know it to be a good story...

