



# Investigating Evaluative Tools in Oral Personal Experience Narratives of Female Egyptian EFL Learners

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Received 28 August 2023 | Received in revised form 30 November 2023 | Accepted 19 December 2023

## APA Citation:

Nureldeen, W., Alsabatin, H., Eskander, R., Nasr, W. (2023). Investigating Evaluative Tools in Oral Personal Experience Narratives of Female Egyptian EFL Learners. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 9(3), 122-132.

Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.903011>

## Abstract

Expressing emotions in a narrative requires a high degree of narrators' involvement in and reflection of personal experiences. An array of complex emotions is reflected in the narrators' use of a wide range of language and paralanguage tools when they share their feelings with their audience. This study attempted to investigate how female non-native speakers of English expressed their feelings towards their personal experiences while narrating them. The data was collected from 24 female Egyptian university students who were studying English language and literature. They narrated unpleasant personal experiences which they marked as memorable in the form of 'intense monologue narratives', collected in a series of structured open-ended interviews. Some of these experiences amount to 'trauma'. A qualitative analysis of narratives revealed that the density of evaluation – as reflected by the number of evaluative clauses used in the participants' narratives – varied. Results also showed that narrators employed 'direct evaluation, evaluation by suspending the action, embedded evaluation, and dramatized evaluation' as various types of evaluation. In many cases, participants used more than one type of evaluation within the same narrative. Besides, narrators were also able to use a wide range of linguistic (i.e. lexical, syntactic, and discursive), and paralinguistic (i.e. laughter and sighs) tools to showcase their emotions and stances towards what they had experienced.

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**Keywords:** Narrative Discourse, Personal Experience Narratives, Oral Storytelling, Evaluation in Oral Narrative.

## Introduction

In sociolinguistics, particularly in discourse analysis, oral narratives about personal experiences are viewed through various lenses since the 1960s. First, Labov & Waletzky (1997) and Labov (1972) drew attention to the need to study the structure of oral narratives in English. The Labovian approach generated interest in scrutinizing the internal structure of oral personal narratives, known as 'the structural approach' to narrative discourse analysis. This approach is often referred to in the literature as 'high-point analysis' of the oral narratives, and all texts using this approach are viewed to be structured around one high point. This

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.903011>

approach focused on the referential function of a narrative which refers to the sequential recounting of past events, and also the evaluative function which refers to expressing the point of the narrative from a narrator's perspective.

A second approach came to full maturity during the 1990s. This approach can be referred to as the 'conversational storytelling' approach. Discourse analysts representing this approach called for the study of narratives as a conversational interaction between a storyteller and their audience who can direct the formation of a narrative by commenting, questioning or even challenging what has been narrated. Thus, this approach called for the study of narratives as conversational interaction between a narrator and an audience. In this context, Sacks (1972) defined narratives as 'extended turns at talk in which utterances are sequentially organized' (p. 33). Thus, this approach has argued for the study of oral narratives in light of conversation analysis conventions such as turn-taking, the cooperative principle, and floor management.

A third approach focused on examining the functions of personal narratives. This 'functional approach' resulted in an extensive body of research on the different functions of narratives at the personal, social, professional, and political levels. In this context, Bamberg & Georgakopoulou (2008) express the need for a third approach to the study of narratives which focuses on the functions of narratives:

*While it is worthwhile to invest efforts in investigating what narratives are and what they consist of structurally as well as interactively. Our point of departure is more grounded in a functional perspective on narrative and language use in general. In line with a general shift towards narratives as tools of interpretation, we are interested in the social actions/functions that narratives perform in the lives of people: in how people actually use stories in everyday mundane situations in order to create (and perpetuate) a sense of who they are (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).*

This functional approach has substantially contributed to scrutinizing the personal, social, professional, and political functions of narratives.

All the above-mentioned approaches have given us insight into various structural, conversational, and functional aspects of the narratives of native speakers of English. The criticism directed to the structural (Labovian) approach by the linguists advocating the conversational and functional storytelling approaches does not discredit this approach for several reasons. First, although storytelling can be interactive, there is still a real possibility for a narrative to be a monolog dominated by one narrator since the story is both reportable and credible, and since the audience is attentive and interested. In various communication settings, the listener(s) may be interested in allowing the storyteller to fully narrate their story. Second, Labov (1997) pointed out that his approach is only suitable for analyzing monolog narratives, and not conversational interactive narratives. In other words, choosing an approach for analyzing a narrative depends on the nature of this narrative. The Labovian approach can be effectively used for analyzing monologue narratives whereas conversation analysis conventions are suitable for analyzing conversational interactive narratives. Third, the studies which questioned the generalizability of Labov's findings referred to the same pattern of narrative structure introduced by Labov with some minor regional or social variations in the use of some of the elements of this structure. In this context, Carter et al. (1997) argued that the Labovian approach introduces the typical structure of a 'fully-formed' narrative which still allows variations in the use of the elements of this structure. They gave an example of the case in which a narrator does not give an abstract because the narrative is invited by the listener. Therefore, it can be sensibly argued that the Labovian approach is appropriate for analyzing monolog narratives, their constituent parts, and underlying functions.

There is a dearth of research which investigates various aspects of the ability of Arab speakers of English as a foreign language to perform the evaluative function in oral narrative discourses. In an attempt to fill this gap, this study looks into the presence or absence of evaluation in the narratives of female Egyptian EFL university students, to examine the frequency and density of evaluation in their narratives – when provided – and types of evaluation used by them. This study thus attempted to investigate how female Egyptian EFL learners communicated the point of their monolog personal experience narratives (i.e. evaluation). In addition, the study also investigated both language and paralinguistic tools which the Egyptian EFL learners employed to fulfil the evaluative function in a narrative.

## Theoretical Framework

The current study aimed to evaluate oral personal narratives, a domain in which Labov & Waletzky (1997) and Labov (1972) introduced their pioneering model for analyzing elicited oral narratives in English. They argued that a 'fully-formed narrative' in English may include the following moves (i.e. different sections that make up a narrative): an abstract which summarizes the story; orientation which identifies the time, the place, and the characters of the story; complicating action which shows the development of events in the story; evaluation which tells the point of the story and conveys the narrator's attitude; resolution which shows the end of the events; and a coda which signals the end of the narrative. These models are the focus of the current study, that help to build the theoretical framework of the study.

Labov & Waletzky (1997) considered the evaluative function as an essential function of any narrative, and referred to different techniques through which the point of a narrative is conveyed. There are various theoretical underpinnings such as evaluation can be carried out through direct statement of the story point, use of lexical intensifiers, suspension of the action to provide evaluation, reference to symbolic action, reference to the narrator as speaking to himself, or introduction of a third person to provide evaluation. In a similar vein, arguing that a story that lacks evaluation is only a 'mass of details' which are temporally ordered, Polanyi (1979), too, referred to evaluation as a key 'structure' contained in a narrative. She defined its function as acting to 'tell the audience what the narrator feels is crucial information in the story he is telling' (Polanyi, 1979). She also pointed out that in monolog narratives, a narrator has a greater responsibility to keep the listener's interest through communicating the point of the story which has to be of interest to the audience at the cultural, social, and individual levels.

In order to build the discourse narrative framework and investigate the techniques used for evaluation in each narrative, Labov (1972) analyzed three types of narrative evaluations elicited from three African American clique leaders, namely external evaluation, embedding of evaluation, and evaluative action, utilized as three evaluation techniques. In external evaluation, the narrator stops the flow of the narrative to tell the point of the narrative. In contrast, in embedding of evaluation, the storyteller keeps the dramatic flow of the narrative and embeds evaluation through; finally, to evaluate the action, narrators quote sentiment as something occurring to them or quote themselves as addressing someone else, or introduce a third person to evaluate the action. Narrators can also provide evaluation by focusing on what people did rather than what they said.

In sum, Labov has given a clear description of how native speakers of English convey their feelings about personal experiences intriguingly. The work of Labov represented a basis for subsequent studies on English narrative discourse. For instance, a very similar structural model which was presented by Trabasso & van den Broek cited in Georgesen & Solano (1999), a study which divided evaluative clauses into *cognitions* which refer to sentences about the thoughts of the characters of the narrative, and *emotions* which refer to sentences about the feelings of the characters.

Since the present study was mainly interested in exploring this aspect of the narrative competence of this population, the Labovian approach represented a suitable framework for analyzing the narratives of the study participants. Additionally, investigating how a certain population adds meaning to personal-experience narratives is of prime importance considering what Mäkelä et al. (2021) referred to it as 'search for a compelling story', which happens due to the recent surge in storytelling, especially via social media platforms (Mäkelä et al., 2021). People usually instrumentalize personal experience narratives to convey certain messages.

## Literature Review

There are various studies that have discussed evaluation of the narratives of ESL/EFL learners. For instance, Hatch (1992) argued that what defines an ESL/EFL learner's ability to narrate personal experience is the ability to express the point of the story clearly and effectively. This ability plays a greater role than L2 proficiency in defining the narrator's storytelling ability (Hatch, 1992). Closely related, McClure et al. (1993) studied a corpus of 60 stories narrated by 20 monolingual English speakers, 20 monolingual Spanish speakers, and 20 bilingual English-Spanish speakers drawn equally from fourth and ninth graders. The stories were divided into orientation, six complication episodes, resolution, and an optional moral. The model of analysis also included elements of description of emotional states of characters and description of characters' traits. Spanish monolinguals included a more detailed description of the emotional states and personal traits of the characters. The tendency to provide a more detailed description of emotional states increased from fourth to ninth grade only in Spanish monolinguals. This was justified by the cross-cultural differences between English and Spanish speakers. Loosely related, Wennerstrom (2001) looked into the role high-pitch intonation plays in evaluation in the oral elicited narratives of native speakers of North American English as compared with Japanese ESL speakers. High-pitched intonation was employed as a tool of evaluation. This was explained to be an aspect of trans-linguistic storytelling (Wennerstrom, 2001).

Most researchers who studied the narratives of Arab ESL/EFL tended to use those narratives only as a means to investigate specific grammatical aspects such as tense use (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992), use of third person zero-anaphora by Saudi EFL learners (Al-Kahtany, 1998), and types of clauses used by pre-teen and teen Egyptian EFL learners to package information in relation to overall EFL proficiency and prominence of information (Badawi, 2010). The studies of Tarone, Tarone and Parrish cited in Ekiert (2004) also used the oral narratives of Arab ESL learners to obtain data to investigate the acquisition of the English article system. With some shift of focus from these studies, Rabab ah (2005) used oral narratives as a tool to study the use of communication strategies (i.e. strategies used by low-proficiency speakers of a foreign/second language to compensate for their lacking a language repertoire necessary for communication) by Jordanian EFL learners.

Despite investigating the written, not the oral, narratives of Arab ESL learners, Soter (1985) presented one of the few studies which studied some aspects related to evaluation in narratives of Arab ESL learners. The study investigated the narrative structure of a bedtime story written by Grade 6 and 11 Lebanese ESL

learners living in Australia, compared with the narratives of Australian native speakers of English, and those of Vietnamese ESL learners. The study examined the elements of the stories using 'storygraph analyses. The study concluded that Arab learners in both grades tended to include a more detailed description of – among other things – thoughts and emotions in their narratives. This conclusion was explained to be a feature of Arabic narratives transferred to the English narratives produced by the Arab ESL participants.

Although Labov (1972) tended to restate most of the findings of Labov & Waletzky (1997) concerning evaluative techniques, Labov re-introduced the concept of 'reportability' or 'tellability' of a narrative which justifies the narrator in relating the story – and more importantly – in keeping the turn until the end of the narrative. A reportable narrative has a point that makes it worth telling and prevents the audience from interrupting the narrator. In addition, the study revealed that compared to preadolescents (9-12 years) and adolescents (13-16 years), adults have the ability to use more complex syntactic devices to evaluate their actions in a narrative. Labov (1997) argued that personal narratives which revolve around unpleasant experiences such as death, disease, conflict usually represent a method of assignment of praise and blame. Narrators transfer this kind of experience portraying themselves as showing utmost commitment to social norms and assigning blame to another party. Therefore, narratives of personal experience can be seen as experiences colored by the narrator's attitude. It is noteworthy that in narratives where narrators recall traumatic experiences, the intensity of emotions becomes part of communicating the point of the narrative either intentionally or unintentionally. In such cases, narrators are emotionally stressed while narrating their personal experiences to the extent where there is still a possibility for narrators or listeners to (re)-experience trauma (Diebold et al., 2020).

In addition to that, Labov (2001) also analyzed two personal narratives presented at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (i.e. a commission formed in the post-apartheid South Africa to enhance national unity and reconciliation). This study elaborated on the concept of assignment of blame and praise as means to convey the point of a narrative. Labov differentiated between polarization in which narrators categorize themselves as 'good' and the other participant(s) as 'bad', and integration in which narrators tend to depict themselves and/or the participant(s) they like as blameless. Integration is usually achieved through not only deletion of events which could assign blame to the narrator or the participant(s) they like, but also manipulation of agency, creation of ambiguity, and lexical choices. In this case, a narrator uses these linguistic devices to alleviate or deny responsibility for a tragic event.

Emphasizing the findings of his previous studies, Labov (2004) analyzed one death story to investigate the linguistic tools a narrator employed for integrative disclaim of the responsibility of the protagonist for the death of another character. In an attempt to minimize the responsibility of the main character, the narrator deleted some objective events that could make the listener(s) apportion blame to the protagonist, used third-person quotes, and introduced some ordinary events which were not reportable, and which were not part of the chain of the causally-related narrative clauses. Moreover, the unjustified insertion of these ordinary events served the evaluative function of suspending the action and anticipating the tragic end of the action.

Presenting evaluative actions in their narratives, narrators dramatize the narrative action to convey the point of the story. Besides such main evaluation techniques, the study also provided an in-depth analysis of the use of negative sentences, questions, imperatives, modals, future structures, intensifiers, and comparatives as syntactic tools of evaluation. The study also referred to the use of paralinguistic features such as gestures and lengthened vowels as evaluation techniques. Repetition and use of deictic expressions were found to be other evaluation tools. Moreover, the study indicated that narrators can evaluate the events of the narrative they relate by considering alternative scenarios to what actually happened.

## Methodology

- *Research Design and Sampling*

The study adopted a qualitative research design, and aimed to investigate how female Egyptian EFL learners performed the evaluative function in their oral narratives of personal experience. This study controlled the variables of gender and age group by equating all the participants on these variables. Since previous studies refer to gender as a variable which affects narrative production in terms of content, form, and fluency (Anderson, 2008; Änggård, 2005; Cheshire & Williams, 2002; John et al., 2003; Olinghouse, 2008; Verdoolaege, 2009), this study was interested in exploring the narrative competence of a particular group of EFL learners, namely, females.

The sample of the study comprised 24 female Egyptian university students specializing in English language and literature. All the study participants were females and belonged to the same age group (17-21 years). They were randomly selected from a larger pool of 120 students. At the time of data collection, the participants were second, third, and fourth-year students at the Department of English, Colleges of Arts and Education, Menoufia University. They were all native speakers of Arabic who started learning EFL around the age of 9 years (4th grade) in public schools. Though they had studied EFL for at least 9 years, their use of English had almost entirely been limited to the classroom environment. None of them had ever lived in an English-speaking country.



- *Data Collection*

After obtaining the participants' written informed consent, all the participants were individually interviewed by the researcher on the same day to provide elicited oral narratives about a difficult or a dangerous situation they experienced. Using the prompt 'Have you ever gone through a dangerous or a difficult experience that you will never forget? Tell me what happened', the researcher asked each of the participants to give their oral narratives during a series of structured open-ended interviews. The time of each interview ranged from approximately five to fifteen minutes depending on the length of the narrative provided by the participant, as well as pauses within a narrative. All the participants provided their narratives in English. During the elicitation sessions, the role of the interviewer was restricted to the provision of paralinguistic expressions showing interest and attentiveness such as nods, 'hmm', and 'yeah'. All the narratives were audio-recorded.

- *Data Analysis and Evaluation*

In order to analyze the data, defining evaluation was a major requisite for identifying this move in the participants' narratives. For this purpose, evaluation was defined as 'the move which reflects the narrators' perspective on what happened'. This move was identified partly by inferring its meaning from context and also by referring to linguistic clues in the sentences. An example of these clues is the use of stative verbs and descriptive adjectives that refer to feelings (e.g. 'I thought that', 'I felt that', 'I was shocked', 'I was surprised', and 'I was terrified').

The frequency of the occurrence of evaluation in narratives and density of evaluation moves (when provided) were quantitatively scrutinized. The frequency of the occurrence of evaluation was investigated by calculating how often evaluation occurred in participants' narratives whereas the density of evaluation was measured by calculating the number of evaluative clauses in a narrative. In addition, the evaluative function of narratives was then analyzed in detail with particular reference to various types of evaluation introduced in the literature. Analyzing the evaluative function also included investigating linguistic tools used for evaluation (i.e. lexical, syntactic, and discursive) as well as paralinguistic tools (i.e. laughter and sighs).

Participants' narratives were also transcribed according to the list of sounds and symbols as shown in Table 1, to analyze these narratives and transcribe some special prosodic features in narratives.

**Table 1: Signs and Symbols Used in Transcription of Oral Narratives.**

Symbol	Meaning
(+)	a short pause
(++)	a longer pause
(+++)	a very long pause
Uppercase	stress (pitch and volume)
Underlining	lines relevant to the analysis
( )	inaudible or unclear utterance
(o)	the following talk is said softly
(**)	physical noise
<b>h</b> (in bold)	a sigh
hhhh	laughter
eh	a verbal pause filler
em	a verbal pause filler
[ [ ] ]	a narrator code switches to Arabic
A hyphen (-)	unfinished word (e.g. sto-, ke- etc.)

## Results

- *Frequency of Occurrence and Density of Evaluation*

As concerns the frequency of occurrence of evaluation in the participants' narratives, evaluation was found to be one of the highly frequent moves in the participants' narratives. Out of the 24 study participants, 87.5% (n = 21) provided evaluation in their narratives. Evaluative clauses presented the narrator's attitude to the events of the story. Participants showed variations as concerns the density of their evaluation. Some narratives were 'heavily evaluated' while others were not. In other words, some narrators included a higher number of evaluative clauses than others did. The following examples show how the density of evaluation varied:

*After high school, I joined the American University and I spent a year there and I had friends a couple of friends there. eh we were best friends. We did everything together and then eh after a year I had to transfer. It was eh the hardest experience ever. We were living in Cairo. Now we are living in Benha. So, we can't see each other anymore as we used to. So, I missed their (o) support. I missed them.* (Narrator 9)

*This situation is the hardest situation that happened to me. It was about two or three years ago. My father is a police officer ( ) was dangerous for him. Once, he was (++) coming returning from his job. Two or three (+++) eh two or three people (++) they were going after him and h with their gun trying to shoot him but thank God the bullet gets into the car. In this time h in our home, we staying to see what will happen to [[يعنى (I mean)]]. Imagine yourself sitting in your home waiting for your dad if he could come or not. It is the hardest moment h that you can't expect your dad come again to your home. So, it was difficult to all of us. This action was about 1:00 a.m. and he returned back about 6:00a.m. eh about 6:00 a.m. eh after this I felt that was (++) hard moment for all of us. So, He decided to choose another branch in police in booking I think it is good for now em [[ويس يعنى (That's all)]]. (Narrator 14)*

As the examples indicate, Narrator 9 provided one evaluative clause whereas Narrator 14 included 5 evaluative clauses in her narrative. It is evident that the number of evaluative clauses partly depended on the type of evaluation used by the narrator.

- *Types of Evaluation*

English native speakers often used various techniques to express their attitudes to the events in a narrative. These techniques included the use of direct statements to express attitudes about the events of the story explicitly (i.e. direct evaluation), suspending the action to provide the narrator's attitude, and then resuming narrating the events, embedding evaluation in the narrative, and dramatizing evaluation. It is noteworthy that one instance can fit under more than one type of evaluation. Direct evaluation, for example, suspends the action if it occurs in the middle of narrative clauses. Narrators also sometimes use more than one type of evaluation in the same narrative, a few of these types are analyzed as under.

- *Direct Evaluation*

Data analysis shows that direct evaluation was the most commonly used technique among narrators. Out of the 24 study participants, 62.5% (n =15) used 'direct evaluation' either by itself or along with other types of evaluation. In this type of evaluation, narrators explicitly express their attitude to the events of the narrated experience using a direct statement. It is the simplest type of evaluation and the easiest to observe. The following example shows how the study participants used direct evaluation:

*I (++) I tried to adjust (+) to be eh (++) friendly with them but even when I finished this year eh there were many problems troubles eh (+) because they they can't accept me eh as different (+) so this (+) was a very eh eh difficult year for me. (Narrator 15)*

As can be discerned from the above example, Narrator 15 expressed her attitude to the events of the story explicitly using an evaluative clause. She expressed her attitude to the experience of transferring to a new school using a direct statement at the end of her narrative.

- *Evaluation By Suspending the Action*

Data analysis shows that evaluation by suspending the action is the second most commonly used type of evaluation. Out of 24 narrators, approximately 33.34% (n = 8) used this type of evaluation. In this type of evaluation, narrators stop narrating the development of the complicating action at a certain point to provide evaluation. After providing their attitude to the events, they resume narrating the complicating action from the point at which they stopped, as seen in the following examples:

*I found the person whi- whom I will stay with phoning me and saying, 'sorry I don't want you.' hhhh It was a disaster. hhhh and there was still one day o one day only for changing my desires again. I didn't know what to do. I remained two days without talking to anyone just crying only. hhhh My future was ( ) what can I do? A lot of questions eh (+) eh after that I changed my desires again and chose Faculty of (+) Arts, Menoufia University hhhh. (Narrator 1)*

*When it get up and get down, I my HEART is stopped. I can't breathe. My cousins and my sister shouted. You have to please please wake up please. I felt it is the end of my life .em eh I felt it is really the end of my life. I can't breathe really. em my sister shouted and cried. I saw her but I can't ( ) they asked me please wake up please please and cry. I can't I can't. They they they asked the controller the controller of the game to stop this game. (Narrator 13)*

As it appears in the above examples, the narrators stopped narrating the developing action of the story to provide an evaluative clause and then resumed narrating the action. Narrator 1 stopped at the point when her relative told her that he could not host her. She gave her attitude to what happened and then resumed her narrative and pointed out that she chose to join another college. Similarly, Narrator 13 stopped at the point when her sister and cousins were crying and trying to bring her back to consciousness. After providing evaluation of this experience, she resumed narrating the action from the same point. In this way, the two narrators suspended the flow of the complicating action, provided evaluation, and then resumed narrating the action.

Data analysis indicates that narrators sometimes used the discourse marker 'anyway' to end the evaluation and resume narrating the developing action. In this case, this discourse marker served as a cue for the resumption of the story narrating as in the following example:

*Four years ago (+) my father eh died. eh h eh although I have strong belief, but I can't bear that. eh then I faced phys- psychological shock kept me silent em about 8 or 9 months. em everything in my life eh changed h em (o) Anyway em even my school I (+) didn't go to it h. eh my family forced me to take the exam. (Narrator 19)*

As the example indicates, the narrator used the discourse marker 'anyway' to mark the resumption of narrating the action. Only two narrators used this discourse marker to mark the resumption of recounting the complicating action. This also suggests that that evaluation by suspending the action can overlap with direct evaluation if the latter occurs somewhere in the middle of the narrative.

- **Embedded Evaluation**

In general, embedded evaluation is not commonly used by narrators in the study group. Only 3 narrators – equal to 12.5% – used embedded evaluation. Narrators sometimes show themselves as addressing a third person and they communicate their attitude to this person. A narrator can also address evaluation to the listener(s) to the story. In other cases, a narrator describes his emotions towards the events of the story as occurring to them at the time of narration, not the time of the experience. In all these cases, evaluation is embedded. The following example illustrates how embedded evaluation can be addressed to a third person: *eh somebody telephoned me and told me that (+) my best friend died. eh I was surprised and shocked about this eh news em (+) and I shouted em I shouted at my mother's face and said eh and asked her WHY? why she died? em she didn't make anything to deserve this end but my mother tried to eh (+) to tell me that this is the only truth in life. (Narrator 4)*

As can be discerned from the above example, Narrator 4 addressed her feelings of shock and discontent when she knew about her best friend's death to a third person (her mother). In this way, evaluation is embedded in the narrated events of the story. Another form of embedded evaluation can be observed when a narrator addresses their attitude to the audience. The following example illustrates the use of this form of embedded evaluation:

*In this time h in our home, we staying to see what will happen to [[يعنى (I mean)]] Imagine yourself setting in your home waiting for your dad if he could come or not. It is the most hardest moment h that you can't expect your dad come again to your home. So, it was difficult to (+) all of us. This action was about 1:00 a.m. and he returned back about 6:00 a.m. eh about 6:00 a.m. (Narrator 14)*

As it appears in the above example, the narrator addressed her evaluation of the story to the interviewer using the addressee forms of reflexive pronouns and possessive adjectives 'yourself' and 'your'. She also used the imperative verb 'imagine'.

The third form of embedded evaluation is used when a narrator expresses feelings about the story as occurring to them at the time of narrating the events, and not at the time of the experience. This form of embedded evaluation was employed by one narrator as in the following example:

*In the first eh year for me in the faculty, I was the second eh (++) eh eh really my dreams make me eh sometimes make me optimist. Other times I have eh difficult and bad dreams make me (+) eh eh pe- pessimist.*

*I think life may be (+) so difficult and so eh so ( ) to know about the future. (Narrator 7)*

As can be observed in the above example, the narrator finished narrating the events of the story showing how her dream came true and how she came second as concerns the results of the final college exams. Then, she talked about her feelings towards her dreams as occurring to her at the moment of narration. She uses the present form of verbs 'make', 'have' and 'think'.

- **Dramatizing Evaluation**

Narrators sometimes conveyed their feelings about the events of their stories by focusing on what they did to express these feelings. For example, a narrator, who went through a sad experience, can narrate how she cried for a long time. In this way, she is dramatizing evaluation by highlighting the actions that express her feelings rather than describing these feelings verbally. In this way, this type of evaluation keeps the flow of narrating the action and stands in contrast to evaluation by suspending the action. This type of evaluation is sometimes difficult to identify because it is conveyed through narrative clauses which refer to actions of the story. These actions, however, express the feelings a narrator wants to convey. The following example indicates how this type of evaluation was used:

*em the plane em was going to land in Jeddah Airport because there was (+) another engine broke down em (++) we were very afraid. My (+) when we heard this bad news, my mother cried and held us between her arms. My father began to read Qur'an. em I was very frightened to see all that. em (+) the plane was flying up and down. (Narrator 10)*

As can be observed in the above example, Narrator 10 expressed her family's feelings of fear through narrating the actions that expressed these feelings. Her mother embraced them and started crying and her father started to recite the Qur'an. Through narrating these actions, she implied that her parents were afraid. Like embedded evaluation, this type of evaluation was used by 12.5% (n = 3) of the study participants.

- *Using Multiple Types of Evaluation in A Narrative*

Narrators sometimes use more than one type of evaluation in the same narrative. A narrator, for example, can provide direct evaluation of the story before they use embedded or dramatized evaluation, and vice versa. The following example illustrates using both embedded and direct evaluation in a single narrative:

*Imagine yourself sitting in your home waiting for your dad if he could come or not. It is the most hardest moment **h** that you can't expect your dad come again to your home. (1) So, it was difficult to (+) all of us. **This action was about 1:00 a.m. and he returned back about 6:00 a.m. eh about 6:00 a.m. eh after this I felt that was (++) hard moment for all of us.** (2) (Narrator 14)*

As it appears in the above example, Narrator 14 used embedded evaluation when she addressed evaluation to the interviewer before she provided a narrative clause (written in bold) before she gave direct evaluation explicitly in the last sentence of her narrative.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the characteristics of two types of evaluation can overlap. For instance, if direct evaluation is provided in the middle of narrative clauses, it suspends the flow of narrating the action. Therefore, it bears similarity to evaluation by suspending the action. In conclusion, analysis of data indicates that narrators used direct evaluation more frequently than embedded evaluation, dramatized evaluation, and evaluation by suspending the action.

- *Tools Used for Evaluation*

In order for narrators to communicate feelings about their personal experiences in narratives, they employ both linguistic and paralinguistic tools to achieve this end. Linguistic tools are related to the narrators' use of various levels of language (i.e. phonological, lexical, syntactic, and discursive) to communicate these feelings. Paralinguistic tools, on the other hand, are not part of the language but they still communicate meaning. Paralinguistic tools include, among other things, laughter, sighs, and silence. Analysis of data indicates that the study participants used various linguistic tools to communicate their attitudes to the developments of their stories. These tools can be classified as lexical, syntactic, and discursive.

- *Lexical Evaluation Tools*

The lexical tools used for evaluation by the study participants include the use of descriptive adjectives which refer to negative feelings (e.g. shocked, surprised, terrified, disappointed, frightened, afraid, sad, and shy) as well as adjectives that have negative connotations (e.g. hard, horrible and difficult). The use of these adjectives can be accounted for by referring to the prompt used to trigger these narratives. The narrators were asked to narrate a story about a difficult or dangerous experience they went through. Related to the use of adjectives is the use of intensifiers (e.g. very, so, and really) before these adjectives. These tools also include the use of stative verbs (e.g. felt and thought). Moreover, some narrators, especially those who used dramatized evaluation used the verbs 'shout' and 'cry' which refer to actions expressing feelings.

- *Syntactic Evaluation Tools*

The use of rhetorical questions represents the main syntactic tool used for evaluation by study participants. These questions were framed to express dissatisfaction, complaint, and surprise rather than to seek answers to these questions. Narrators sometimes directed rhetorical questions to the interviewer. They also sometimes reported rhetorical questions they directed to themselves or a third person. The following examples illustrate the use of both direct and reported rhetorical questions as a tool for evaluation:

*It was a disaster hhhh and there was still one day o one day only for changing my desires again. I didn't know what to do. I remained two days without talking to anyone just crying only. hhhh My future was () what can I do? A lot of questions (Narrator 1)*

*He told me I have the seventh nervous (++) eh sore [[يعنى (I mean)]]. hhhh I can't believe. What happened?*

*Why? (Narrator 18) eh I was surprised and shocked about this eh news em (+) and I shouted em I shouted at my mother's face and said eh eh and asked her WHY? Why she died? (Narrator 4)*

As it appears in the examples, the first two narrators used direct rhetorical questions to the interviewer whereas the third narrator reported a rhetorical question she addressed to her mother in the situation she experienced. In the three cases, the questions did not seek answers. They expressed the narrators' feelings of discontent and complaint. Data analysis shows that 4 narrators – equal to approximately 16.6% – used this tool for evaluation.

- *Discursive Evaluation Tools*

Analysis of data indicates that most narrators who used repetition tended to repeat the meaning of evaluative clauses by paraphrasing these clauses. However, narrators sometimes repeated evaluative clauses verbatim. The following examples indicate the use of semantic paraphrasing and repetition of evaluative clauses to emphasize narrators' feelings about the events of their stories:



*em we noticed some strange movement in the plane em (++) Five minutes later, em the pilot told us that there was engine broke down. em we were was were very afraid and we noticed the em the em the fear on the faces em em even the hostess. (++) em em we all felt that the plane was about to fall em especially when the pilot told us that (+) we em the plane em was going to land in Jeddah Airport because there was (+) another engine broke down em (++) we were very afraid. My (+) when we heard this bad news, my mother cried and held us between her arms. My father began to read Qur'an em I was very frightened to see all that. em (+) the plane was flying up and down. (Narrator 10)*

*We staying to see what will happen to [[يعنى (I mean)]]. Imagine yourself sitting in your home waiting for your dad if he could come or not. It is the most hardest moment **h** that you can't expect your dad come again to your home. So, it was difficult to (+) all of us. This action was about 1:00 a.m. and he returned back about 6:00 a.m. eh about 6:00 a.m. eh after this I felt that was (++) hard moment for all of us. (Narrator 14)*

As it appears in the examples, Narrator 10 repeated the clause 'we were very afraid' and then paraphrased the meaning by using the singular first speaker pronoun 'I' and the adjective 'frightened'. Narrator 14 tended to paraphrase the meaning of the evaluative clause which reflected her feelings about the situation. She used the synonymous adjectives 'hard' and 'difficult'. She also used the adjective 'hard' as well as its superlative form. Data analysis shows that 8 narrators – equal to 33.3% – used this tool for evaluating their narratives.

- **Paralinguistic Tools Used for Evaluation**

Paralinguistic tools of evaluations refer to the tools which are not part of language but are used by narrators to communicate their feelings towards the events of their stories. The paralinguistic tools used by the study participants included laughter and sighs. Data analysis indicates that some narrators showed a tendency to laugh while providing evaluative clauses. Four narrators – equal to 16.5% laughed while giving evaluative clauses. Although these narrators recounted difficult or dangerous experiences they went through, they laughed while communicating negative feelings about their experiences. The following examples illustrate the use of laughter in evaluative clauses:

*It was a disaster hhhh and there was still one day o one day only for changing my desires again. I didn't know what to do. I remained two days without talking to anyone just crying only .hhhh (Narrator 1)*

*I can't believe what happened. Why? (++) eh so I (++) I have I have something different in my em in my (+++) in my face hhhh. (Narrator 18)*

As can be observed in the examples, the two narrators laughed at the end of the evaluative clauses they provided although they recounted difficult experiences.

A sigh is a mixture of audible breath and voice. Analysis of data indicates that some narrators tended to sigh while providing evaluative clauses. The use of sighs can be accounted for as a reaction to the difficult or dangerous situations they narrated. Three narrators – equal to 12.5% sighed while evaluating their experience. The following examples show how they used sighs in the evaluative clauses:

*I became disappointed. eh I didn't know what I (+) what I could do or what I say (+) to him. eh I can't I couldn't em I couldn't talk to anyone all the day. eh I **h** I became shocked. (Narrator 3)*

*I faced phys- psychological shock kept me silent em about 8 or 9 months. em everything in my life eh changed **h** em (o) Anyway em even my school I (+) didn't go go to it **h**. eh my family forced me to take the exam. (Narrator 19)*

As it appears in the examples, Narrator 3 sighed in the second evaluative clause she provided while Narrator 19 sighed at the end of the narrative. The first narrator was narrating how her father did not allow her to join the college she wanted to join. The other narrator was recounting the experience of the death of her father. However, sighs were not generally frequent in the narratives of the study group.

## Discussion

Narrators' tendency to use various evaluation techniques is quite evident. This includes direct evaluation, evaluation by suspending the action, embedded evaluation, and dramatizing the evaluation. This can be seen as an indicator of narrators' ability to employ the same evaluation types used by native speakers of English as referred to by Labov & Waletzky (1997) and Labov (1972). This result indicates that this sub-skill of the narrative ability of female Egyptian EFL learners possibly develops along with their overall language proficiency. Another plausible explanation is that using these types of evaluation is an aspect of narrative ability in Arabic transferred to the language repertoire of the study participants and used by them while narrating personal experiences in English.

The tendency to use direct evaluation by most participants could be attributed to the possibility the participants who used this type of evaluation and had not developed pragmatic competence to deliver more sophisticated types of evaluation though they generally possess language resources needed to perform

evaluation. An interesting observation related to the use of evaluation by suspending the action is that two narrators used the discourse marker 'anyway' to end the evaluation and resume narrating the action. This use supports the findings of Urgelles-Coll (2010) who explained that this discourse marker is used to aid the continuity of discourse. In her analysis of a story narrated by an ESL learner, she pointed out that 'anyway' is used by narrators to end what they may consider as a less important part of the narrative and to resume narrating the story. Similarly, 'anyway' was used here to end evaluation which participants may have considered a digression, and to continue narrating the action of the story.

To fulfil the evaluative function of narratives, the study participants employed various linguistic and paralinguistic tools. A tendency among narrators to use the same lexical tools for evaluation was evident. The use of intensifiers and adjectives before nouns refers to what Labov (1972) called 'double attributives' which refer to complex noun phrases that include these elements. He tracked the occurrence of such structures in the evaluation section of the narratives of African American narrators and concluded that this structure was common in the evaluation of narratives although not in casual conversation.

Another linguistic tool for evaluation is the use of rhetorical questions. Labov (1972) referred to the evaluative power of questions and gave an example in which the question 'where's the candy?' is framed as a threat in a fight narrative. Labov classified questions also under the category of comparators. Similarly, Koshik (2005) referred to the use of questions to frame dissatisfaction and complaint.

Repetition of evaluative clauses was the main discursive tool used for evaluation by the study participants. Repetition of evaluation can sometimes have a positive function to fulfil. Repetition of narrative clauses which recount ordinary events does not fulfil any evaluative function whereas the selective repetition of evaluative clauses and narrative clauses referring to pivotal events of the story emphasizes the point of the narrator. Therefore, it can be considered a tool of evaluation while the repetition of narrative clauses that refer to ordinary events is possibly used as a strategy to gain time until the narrator fills a lexical gap. For Labov (1972), repetition is another kind of 'intensifiers' which 'intensifies a particular action, and it suspends the action' (p.379). Moreover, Tannen (2007) referred to the term 'linking repetition' in the course of her analysis of film-stimulated narratives. She concluded that a repeated clause can facilitate producing more talk by serving as a frame for new clauses.

Narrators used laughter and sighs as paralinguistic tools for evaluation. Laughter was more frequent; although narrators recounted sad experiences, some of them laughed when providing evaluative clauses. Poyatos (2002) called this kind of laughter 'rueful laughter'. For her, it is caused by remembering something that inspires pity. The other plausible explanation is that laughter was meant to relieve the anxiety they experienced as a result of narrating traumatic experiences. Sighs were not frequent in the narratives of the study participants. The use of sighs in a few cases in the study can be accounted for by referring to the prompt used in the data collection that required the narrators to recall emotionally pressing experiences. In this case, the production of sighs can be justifiable as Poyatos (2002) explained: that 'it is generally a quality of emotional reactions, weariness, shock, confusion, anxiety, facing difficult decisions or answering difficult questions under tension' (p. 31). Therefore, it can be sensibly concluded that the participants, who sighed, narrated more traumatic experiences or they were more emotionally stressed while recalling these experiences. For example, one of these narrators recalled the experiences of her father's death while another told the story when her father was close to being killed. In this sense, their sighs can be categorized as a nonverbal expression of self-pity. The use of sighs in these two cases supports the purposes Poyatos (2002) specified for the use of sighs. She called this kind of sighs 'the sigh of bereavement' and explained that 'it is a spontaneous anguished reaction in many cultures, typically in lower-class women, not only during a wake and the days following, but as they muse and reminisce their departed'. (p. 112). In line with this explanation, Diebold et al. (2020) argued that when narrating a traumatic personal experience, narrators and/or listeners could (re)-experience trauma (Diebold et al., 2020).

## Conclusion

To sum up, this study indicates that the vast majority of the participants included evaluation as a basic move in their narratives. Besides, the study participants used various types of evaluation. Narrators tended to use embedded evaluation, dramatized evaluation, and evaluation by suspending the action less frequently than direct evaluation. To the same end, they employed various linguistic (i.e. lexical, syntactic, and discursive) as well as paralinguistic tools (i.e. laughter and sighs).

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