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Exploring Structures of Oral Personal-Experience Narratives of Female Egyptian EFL Learners

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Abstract

Humans are born storytellers as they use oral narratives as a vehicle to share their experiences. This study aimed to study how female Egyptian speakers formulate their personal experiences in oral narratives in the English Language. A need of this study was felt because not much is known how Arab EFL speakers build their oral narratives when its structure is talked about. The sample of this study comprised 24 female students from an Egyptian university pursuing a program in English language and literature, divided equally into two groups of intermediate and advanced levels. By using a non-experimental mixed model research design, the data was collected through semi structured interviews. The quantitative results were based on Mann-Whitney Test, which compared two unpaired groups to investigate the differences between the frequencies of the moves in the oral narratives as well as their use of structural tools; while the qualitative results were obtained from the participants' responses in the interview, which gave insight into how the participants formulated their narratives. Results show variations in the moves of narratives in both groups; however, there was no significant difference in the overall structure of each narrative. The study also attempted to compare the narrative structure of the female Egyptian EFL learners with that of their peers. It was found that there was no relationship between EFL proficiency and the structure of the narratives of female Egyptian at both advanced and intermediate levels. These findings will provide useful insights about the structural aspects of the oral narratives of Arab EFL learners.

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Keywords: Oral Narratives, Arab EFL Learners, Coda, Structural Tools, Storytelling.

Introduction

Human beings have the capacity to communicate their countless personal experiences to one another through oral narratives around the age of five (Berman, 2014). Recounting personal experience as a storytelling act to their audience through oral narratives is independent of (il) literacy because humans – by

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default – are born storytellers. In addition, people narrate their experiences within the course of performing different language functions. They can be complaining, presenting excuses, giving advice, presenting arguments, instructing, entertaining or socializing with one another. In this context, Vásquez (2007) refers to entertainment, expression of solidarity, establishment of social relationships, resolution of tensions, and justification of one's actions as possible communicative outcomes of narrating personal experience. Likewise, Lakoff (2003) refers to persuasion, entertainment and education as functions of narrating personal experience.

There are various approaches to understand oral narratives including the Labovian approach, which was also known as structural approach due to its emphasis on the scrutiny of internal structures of oral personal narratives, and investigating the way in which narrators structure their narratives. First introduced through the work of Labov & Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972), this approach, drew conclusions about the structure of oral narratives related by native speakers of English. Another approach, known as conversational approach, criticized the Labovian model of oral narratives arguing that it minimized the richness of genuine conversational narratives. Schegloff (1997) strongly argues that construction of oral narratives is a locally governed speech event which depends on the storyteller, the listener(s) to the narratives, their number, their relations to one another; hence the structure is insignificant as it might vary because the oral narrative can be interrupted by comments and/or questions from the listeners. Thus, the listener(s) also participate in the co-construction of the narrative, and the narrator may eventually modify its structure accordingly. Hence, this approach was referred to as the conversational storytelling approach. From the discourse analysis point of view, too, this approach is considered as a conversational interaction between a storyteller and a listener or a group of listeners, all of whom contribute to the formation of the narrative in the form of comments, questions, acceptance and rejections.

Finally, there exists a third approach known as the functional approach, which focuses on different functions of narratives at personal, social, professional and political levels. This approach combines the previous two approaches, and emphasizes on studying the functions people perform through storytelling. This approach thus investigates both structural and conversational aspects of an oral narrative. The chief proposition of the functional approach is that what distinguishes oral narratives from other discourse genres is not only the structure they have but more importantly the function(s) each 'act' of recounting personal experience performs in a certain context in relation to different aspects of human life. In this sense, the function of a personal narrative greatly exceeds the functions of its constituent components in importance.

There is a dearth of research studies on oral personal narratives of Arab ESL/EFL learners. Few studies that refer marginally to oral personal narratives in the context of Arab ESL/EFL learners focus only on certain syntactic, semantic and discursive aspects of these narratives. For instance, Bardovi-Harlig (1992) investigated grammatical aspects; Al-Kahtany (1998) examined the use of third person zero-anaphora by Saudi EFL learners; Badawi (2010) studied the types of clauses and their role in gaining proficiency by Arab EFL speakers; Rabab'ah (2005) utilized oral narratives as a tool to examine the communication strategies particularly of the low proficiency speakers in the context of Jordanian EFL learners. Tarone and Tarone and Parrish, cited in Ekiert (2004), the oral narratives of Arab ESL learners to investigate the acquisition of the English articles. Studies (Anderson, 2008; Änggård, 2005; Cheshire & Williams, 2002; John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003; Olinghouse, 2008; Verdoolaege, 2009) have studied gender as a variable to study how it affects narrative production in terms of content, form and fluency. Lastly, Soter (1985) studied the narrative structure used by Arab ESL learners. None of these studies examined the structural aspects of narratives of Arab ESL learners, particularly the female ones. Hence, there is a lack of studies about how native speakers of Arabic orally narrate their personal experience in Arabic. This deficiency deprives the detection of traces of L1 narrative conventions transfer in the ESL/EFL narratives of those learners. Therefore, there a minimal knowledge about the competence of female Arab EFL learners in narrating their personal experience.

The current study aimed to build up a wide repertoire of research about various aspects of narrative ability of native speakers of English, particularly about the various aspects of narrative ability of female Arab EFL learners. The data was collected qualitatively to attempt to acquire first-hand information. The study aimed at investigating how female Arab EFL learners structure their oral personal-experience narratives in advanced and intermediate EFL proficiency levels. The study is based on the premise that EFL learners at these levels have developed enough language repertoire to narrate their personal experience in full narratives. The study also attempted to achieve its aim by comparing the narrative structure used by advanced female Egyptian EFL learners with that of their intermediate peers.

Literature Review

Structural Approach to the Study of Oral Narratives of Native Speakers of English

Labov & Waletzky (1967) published a paper entitled "*Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience*" which started the era of narrative analysis in English linguistics. This research focused on oral

narratives which considered personal experience and prioritized vernacular unmonitored speech as the basis of oral narratives. This approach of analyzing English oral personal event narratives eventually came to be known as Labovian approach to the study of oral personal narratives, which emphasized on the structures of a native speaker's narrative. Labov & Waletzky (1967) defined a narrative as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred" (p. 20). Therefore, a minimal narrative structure must consist of two narrative clauses (i.e. clauses which restrict placement in the narrative because they function to maintain a certain temporal sequence). It was also argued that this match between the sequence of clauses in a narrative and the sequence of events they represent was significant because any change in the order of the verbal clauses must change the meaning of the narrative. This match also denotes the 'referential' function of a personal narrative. The other indispensable function of a narrative, they argued, was the 'evaluative' function which referred to the narrator's attitude revealed in the narrative.

In other words, Labov & Waletzky (1967) did not consider a narrative which lacks an evaluation section a complete narrative in the true sense of the word. For example, using the prompt 'Were you ever in a situation where you thought you were in serious danger of getting killed? What happened?', Labov & Waletzky (1967) elicited 14 oral personal narratives from African American participants in an interview context. The data analysis revealed that a structured narrative in English should comprise: an **abstract** or the summary of the narrative; **orientation** to identify the time, place and characters of the narrative; **complicating action** representing the events of the narrative; **evaluation** to judge the narrator's attitude; **resolution** that concludes the narrative; and a **coda** marking the close of the narrative. A few years later, however, Labov (1972) argued that a narrator of an emotional experience (whether life threatening or embarrassing), who "seems to undergo a partial reliving of that experience" (p.355), feels free from the constraints to monitor his speech and thus tends to be more vernacular.

Labov (1972), reiterating the structural approach and to study the evaluation techniques, analyzed three fight narratives elicited from three African American clique leaders, namely, external evaluation, embedded evaluation and evaluative action. In the first type of external evaluation, the narrator occasionally halts the narrative to explain significant points; in the second type, embedded evaluation, the narrator maintains the continuity of the narrative and quotes sentiment as something occurring to him /her at the moment, quoting himself/herself as a different person evaluating the action, thus embedding evaluation; in the third type, the storyteller focuses on the evaluative action of the narratives, thus giving a dramatic effect to the narrative. Labov (1972) also identified structural and syntactical tools of evaluating a narrative like the use of negative sentences, questions, imperatives, modals, future tense, intensifiers and comparatives. Paralinguistic features such as gestures and lengthened vowels were also suggested as evaluation techniques. The repetition and use of deictic expressions were also suggested to be used as evaluation tools. Some of these syntactic devices were complex, so only the adolescents (13-16 years) or the adults showed the ability to use them. Finally, the study also introduced the concept of "reportability" or "tellability" as an evaluative technique which may justify the narrator's point of view in telling the story, and which allows the narrator to continue the narration till the end of the narrative, without any interruption from the audience.

Three decades after his first study on elicited oral narratives, Labov (1997) analyzed one fight narrative with the aim of introducing some new narrative-related concepts. These concepts included the convenience of his approach for analyzing personal narratives and its relation to reportability and credibility, assignment of blame and praise in a personal narrative, and the relationship between narrative construction and theory of causality. He also argued that there is an inverse relationship between reportability and credibility. Labov termed this inverse relationship 'reportability paradox'. As a result, a narrator should maintain a balance between reportability and credibility because lack of credibility can be a threat to the automatic assignment of the turn to the narrator. In other words, listeners would let the narrator hold the floor as long as those listeners perceive the narrative to be truthful. The Labovian concept of credibility exactly coincides with Grice's conversational maxim of quality which requires speakers to say only what they believe to be true. Closely related, Labov (1997) also indicated that the credibility of a personal narrative refers to the degree to which the audience of a story believes that the events occurred in the same way described by the storyteller.

Being aware of the criticism directed to his model, Labov (1997) asserted that his approach to the analysis of personal narratives could be only applied to decontextualized monolog narratives elicited in interviews in which the interviewer represents an interested and attentive audience. In this case, the reportability of the narrated event justifies the initial assignment and the automatic reassignment of the turn to the narrator until the end of the narrative (the coda) which brings the audience back to the present time and signifies the availability of the floor to the listener(s). Labov admitted that conversational narratives could not be analyzed using his approach. He also drew attention to a situation when narrators often resort to praise and blame in personal narratives, when any unpleasant experience like death, disease or conflicts occur. The storytellers make use of this opportunity to portray themselves aligned with the social norms and to assign blame to others.

Finally, Labov (1997) suggested that awareness of narrative construction is related to understanding the causal relation among the clauses in a narrative. Planning the narrative, a narrator usually decides to start

with the most reportable event to which the question 'how did that happen?' is most relevant. Then, the narrator decides on the preceding event which caused this most reportable event. The narrator then decides on the preceding event that brought about this later event. The process continues until the narrator reaches an event which requires no further justification. This event, which can be accepted without any requirement for further justification, usually refers to the orientation section of the narrative. According to Labov, the verbalization of the narrative requires the reversal of the pre-construction process so that the narrative starts with the least reportable marked event, which is orientation, and proceeds through complicating action towards the most marked event.

Subsequent studies of Labov (2001, 2004), tended to restate rather than add to the findings of the previously mentioned pioneering studies (Labov, 1972; Labov, 1997; Labov & Waletzky, 1967). For instance, Labov (2001) examines two personal narratives of South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was established during the post-apartheid era in South Africa, to enhance national unity and reconciliation. The aim of narrating these narratives was to provide a verbal narrative account and make inferences about the actual events which really occurred. The study concluded that narrators deliberately avoid recounting certain objective events but still leave traces which enable analysts to reconstruct the narrative to uncover the truth of what has really happened. Labov (2001), applying the concept of blame and praise to the two narratives, differentiated between polarization in which a narrator categorizes himself/herself as 'good' and the other participant(s) as 'bad'. In other words, the narrator depicts himself as blameless, the credibility of which is achieved by deleting events that might assign blame to the narrator. The narrator might also manipulate agency, create ambiguity and choose biased lexical tools to alleviate or deny responsibility for the tragic incident. As an example, Labov (2004) cited a narrative in which the narrator uses such linguistic tools like third-person quotes and causal narrative clauses, that exonerate the protagonist from the blame of the death of another character. To sum up, Labov thus has significantly emphasized on the internal structure of oral narratives of personal experiences. He shows how a native speaker can utilize English structures to suit his monologues and oral personal-experience narratives.

In line with Van Dijk (1976), too, presented a model which tended to be highly more speculative than other studies on oral personal narratives. Van Dijk (1976) referred to the components of a narrative as narrative 'macro-categories'. According to van Dijk, a personal narrative includes the elements of a **setting** which describes an initial state and presents a varying number of propositions, **complication** which is an action or a group of actions occurring after an earlier event, **resolution** which refers to the successful or unsuccessful actions of an agent to prevent the undesired outcome of the complicating events, **evaluation** which reflects the narrator's attitude, and a moral in which the narrator draws consequences for his/her own or the listener's future actions. This model referred to all the structural components of a personal narrative mentioned by Labov except for the abstract. There also exists another structural model, postulated by Trabasso and van den Broek cited in Georgesen & Solano (1999). According to this model, a narrative includes five elements: **settings** to represent time, location and the characters of the narrative; **cognition** to represent the thoughts of the characters of the narrative; **emotions** to express the feelings of the characters; **attempts** referring to the actions of the characters; and **consequences** to represent the outcomes of the actions of the story.

In conclusion, studies analyzing the structure of English narratives referred to the same elements which constitute a narrative. These studies used different terms to refer to the same move in a narrative. For example, sentences which refer to time, place and characters were referred to as 'orientation' by Labov, as 'setting' by van Dijk and 'settings' by Trabasso and van den Broek.

The Conversational Approach to the Study of Oral Narratives

Almost three decades after Labov and Waletzky's foundational study (1967), during the 1990s, linguists started to question the findings of Labov's work as well as those of the studies based on Labovian approach. Their criticism was mainly directed to the validity of Labov's findings, and on his approach to the study of oral narratives. In this context, Johnstone (1990) criticized the unjustified tendency of most sociolinguists to generalize the findings of their studies of the oral narratives applicable on certain American ethnic or regional groups to all American narratives. For example, Johnstone (1990) referred to Labov's studies on the narratives of New York African American youth, Polanyi's (1978) study on the narratives of New York Jewish community, and Schiffrin's (2003) study of the narratives of Philadelphians.

In this context, Johnstone (1990) examined a corpus of 58 personal experience narratives told by middle-class male and female Caucasians who were native or long-term residents of Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA. The study concluded that American Midwestern narrative style is characterized by what she called "extrathematic orientation" (i.e. over-specified details in the orientation section of a narrative). According to Johnstone, a narrative is anchored in the real world mainly through the orientation details. The number of details is supposed to be determined by Grice's cooperative maxim of quantity which requires the speaker (the narrator in this case) to be as informative as required. This maxim was flouted by the study participants in 41 out of 58 of the corpus narratives. The participants tended to provide what seemed to be excessive orientation details

about names of the narratives' characters, times and places. In addition to questioning the validity of Labov's findings, the conversational approach to the study of oral narratives adopted a substantially different attitude towards oral personal narratives. In her criticism of the Labovian approach, Johnstone (2005) also argued against the 'the normative sound of Labov's terminology, and rejected Labov's claim that a “normal structure of narrative” can be fully developed or "complete" or universal. She also observed that not all stories may have abstracts or codas (p. 639).

Johnstone (2005) thus propagated a common principle which most discourse analysts believe in that oral narratives are conversational interactions between a narrator and their audience. They argue that the Labovian model of narrative analysis minimizes the richness of genuine conversational narratives. Schegloff (1997), for instance, argued that construction of oral narratives is a locally governed speech event which depends on the storyteller, the listener(s) to the narratives, their number, their relations to one another, and the listeners' prior knowledge or ignorance of the experience narrated. In addition, he argued that the role of the listener(s) is not passive because the narrator of the narrative can be interrupted by comments and/or questions. Narrators may modify their narratives depending on these comments and/or questions. In this way, the listener(s) participate in the co-construction of the narrative.

Similarly, Lambrou (2003) presented examples of peer group interviews designed to elicit personal experience narratives, turning into sessions for collaborative storytelling. Building on the premise that context determines the outcome of a speech event, Lambrou analyzed a corpus of 100 personal narratives, comprising 29 preadolescent, adolescent and adult British participants who belonged to the London Greek community. The participants were all native speakers of English. They were invited to relate a dangerous, happy, sad or embarrassing personal experience. Generally speaking, Lambrou (2003) concluded that there was a 'genre shift' from interview situations to cooperative interactive conversational storytelling sessions in different groups across various age groups and genders. The collaborative storytelling was carried out through 'explicit and implicit collaboration'. Explicit collaboration occurred through direct prompts (i.e. when a group member (a listener) volunteers to stimulate the narrator by providing a story topic or a coda). On the other hand, implicit collaboration occurred when the story of a narrator represented an indirect prompt that triggered the narratives of the following group narrators. In this way, the narratives produced were much less monologic and more conversational than it could be expected for narratives provided in an interview context.

In the same manner, Georgakopoulou (2006) investigated a corpus of 20-hour audio-recorded conversational data among three Greek female teenagers. The conversations mainly concerned their romance and intimate relationships. These three participants had been best friends for about ten years which meant that their shared history was recognizably evident. Data also included 600 brief private email messages and their replies exchanged between six Greek adult friends. The data analyzed were chosen to epitomize non-canonical narratives (i.e. interactive storytelling which occurs within a conversation, and in which listeners to the narrative take part in its co-construction. Georgakopoulou (2006) scrutinized the occurrences and facets of non-canonical stories in both face to face and computer-mediated modes of communication. The first category of narratives in interaction was 'stories to be told' in which the narrator provided the story's abstract and put the complete telling of the narrative back to a more opportune time. A second category showed the narrators' tendency to provide the events of an ongoing story in the form of 'breaking news'. These events were chosen for their high degree of reportability. Moreover, narrating the prospective events of future actions (projection in the Georgakopoulou's terms) was the most recurrent type of storytelling in the participants' data. In this case, the storytellers collectively provided sequences of temporally ordered future events. In each turn, one interlocutor provided a planned event, and details (particularly those of orientation) were negotiated until the projection was completed. The last category of collaborative storytelling was reference to shared experience by more than one narrator. Those references were selectively presented as 'mini-tellings' that had considerable significance for the interlocutors.

The Functional Approach to the Study of Oral Narratives

The first decade of the 21st century has witnessed increasing interest in studying the various functions of oral personal narratives. Linguists representing this line of research have argued that studying the functions people perform through storytelling is as important as investigating what constitutes a narrative either structurally or interactively. The chief proposition of the functional approach is that what distinguishes oral narratives from other discourse genres is not only the structure they have but more importantly the function(s) each 'act' of recounting personal experience performs in a certain context in relation to different aspects of human life. In this sense, the function of a personal narrative greatly exceeds the functions of its constituent components in importance. In their extensive review of different approaches to the study of narratives, de De Fina & Georgakopoulou (2008) proposed the social interactional approach as an alternative framework for the study of narratives. They suggested that the insightful study of narratives requires "the investigation of intimate links of narrative-interactional processes with larger social processes" (p. 379). Admitting the limitation of the Labovian model and the conversational storytelling approach for accounting for the social meanings of a narrative and for transcending the level of its internal structure, they

recommended that social and discursive functions of a narrative such as exclusion of social or ethnic groups and performance of institutional and social roles be scrutinized.

As a result, personal narratives were viewed as expressions of identity at the professional (Dyer & Keller-Cohen, 2000; Holmes, 2005; Kanan et al., 2023; Vásquez, 2007), social (De Fina, 2000; Weldeyesus, 2007), ethnic (Gone, Miller, & Rappaport, 1999; Majors, 2007), national (Hammack, 2008) and political (Shenhav, 2005) levels. Closely related was the study of the various functions of personal narratives in distinct communication contexts. Consequently, the narratives presented in courtroom and interrogation sessions (Hale, 2002; Harris, 2001; Stygall, 2008), newspapers (Aucoin, 2007) and media in general (Lakoff, 2003; Schejter, 2007) were the subject of thorough investigation.

The Study of ESL/EFL Learners' Narratives

The narratives of ESL/EFL learners may be shaped according to the conventions of the native language. Pavlenko (2002) referred to this possibility which proposed a sociocultural approach to the study of English language learning narratives that integrates contextual, social and cultural dimensions. Pavlenko (2002) also referred to negative consequences of lack of awareness of such a possibility which could result in favoring narratives constructed according to native English narrative norms over English narratives formed in accordance with narrative conventions of the native languages of ESL/EFL speakers. The study cited an example provided by Riessman of an interview in which the European American interviewer was able to “follow and collaborate” with the temporally organized narrative told by a middle-class Caucasian American woman. In contrast, when interviewing a working-class Puerto-Rican woman, who organized her narrative episodically, the interviewer was confused and the interview witnessed many communication breakdowns.

Framing an English narrative according to the narrative norms of another language represents only one possibility for ESL/EFL learners' narrative structure. The second possibility is that ESL/EFL learners fully acquire the English narrative structure and adopt it in their narratives. The third possibility is that those learners reach a developmental stage in which their narratives have the aspects of storytelling norms in both their native languages and English as a target language. This case is a representation of the concept of interlanguage which refers to the successive linguistic systems which are internally developed by second or foreign language learners on their way to master the target language (Sridhar, 1981). Those systems belong to neither the learners' native language nor the target language and they appear when learners try to use the target language.

Closely related, Pavlenko (2003) reported differences between ESL and EFL speakers concerning their performance during narrative recall tasks. Building on the Sapir-Wharf hypothesis, which proposes that each language determines the way its speakers view reality, Pavlenko hypothesized that "discourses as social practices play a key part in constituting the speakers' worlds" (p. 261). Consequently, two languages are expected to have two different frameworks to describe the same reality. Applying this approach to narrative discourse, each language is likely to have a certain discourse framework that governs the way its speakers think about past experience. As a result, ESL and EFL speakers may have two or more frames (the frame of their, native language and that of English) for shaping their personal experience. To test this hypothesis, Pavlenko (2003) investigated narrative recall by 18 EFL and 32 ESL adult speakers of two short silent films about violation of personal space and privacy. The findings reveal that Russian EFL speakers resembled monolingual native speakers of Russian in their recall pattern. They both did not refer to the concept of private personal space in their narratives. In contrast and like American native speakers of English, Russian ESL speakers showed a considerable ability in expressing their awareness of the concept of privacy. In other words, ESL learners tend to show a pattern of narrative recall that is very similar to that of native speakers of English while EFL learners tend to show a pattern which is similar to that of Ll.

In conclusion, the study of ESL/EFL narratives is far from being easy because those narratives represent a multi-layered type of discourse in which interplay between L1 and ESL/EFL linguistic and cultural factors is decisive. Awareness of the role of factors such as overall ESL/EFL proficiency, context of acquisition of English, ESL/EFL narrative competence, first language transfer and probably L1 narrative competence is central to the study of those narratives.

Narratives of Arab ESL/EFL Learners

There is scant information about structural aspects of oral narratives in the context of Arab ESL/EFL learners. Previous studies have examined in isolation individual aspects like grammar and use of tense (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992); use of third person by Saudi EFL learners (Al-Kahtany, 1998); and types of clauses and their role in gaining EFL proficiency (Badawi, 2010). In a study by Tarone, and Tarone and Parrish, cited in Ekiert (2004), acquisition of English articles was studied; and Rabab’ah (2005) used oral narratives as a tool to study the use of communication strategies by Jordanian EFL learners. Thus, previous research focused on investigating specific areas of Arab ESL/EFL oral narratives.

Soter (1985) examined the narrative structure used by Arab ESL learners in the written form. Taking the

example of a bedtime story written for Grade 6 and Grade 11 Lebanese ESL learners living in Australia, the study investigated the narrative structure of the English language narratives of Australian native speakers and compared with those of Vietnamese ESL learners. The study investigated the elements of storytelling using the 'storygraph analysis' technique, which included the elements of setting, introduction of characters, plot actions, information dedicated to description as opposed to plot information. The study found out that Arab EFL learners, irrespective of the grades, emphasized on setting, characters, thoughts and emotions in their narratives. This finding was a unique feature of Arabic narratives transferred to the English narratives by the Arab ESL participants. Compared with the native English story pattern which appeared in the stories of all native English participants, the stories of Grade 6 Arab learners tended to diverge from the native English narrative style due to limited writing ability whereas the stories of grade 11 learners tended to assimilate the native English narrative style.

Badawi (2010) examined the written narratives of 102 young Egyptian EFL learners to investigate the types of clauses used to achieve EFL proficiency. The study participants were asked to recount in writing the events of a story depicted in a five-picture storybook. The study also dealt with the analysis of the 'components of a narrative', taking the studies which analyzed picture-stimulated narratives in English as L1 as a reference point. As for the analysis of components of the narrative, the study concluded that the structure was not uniform not only in function but also in form. While Badawi's (2010) study gave us insight into the structure of written narratives produced by young Egyptian EFL learners, there is still a need for studies that investigate the structure of oral narratives of adult Arab EFL learners.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a non-experimental mixed model research design. Being a criterion-group study, it did not manipulate its variables. The quantitative independent variable of the study comprised EFL proficiency level while the female Egyptian EFL learners, formed its quantitative dependent variable. The study compares the structure of oral narratives across two levels of EFL proficiency. This type of research design represents mixed model research wherein data, which comprises participants' narratives, is analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. This study also comprised control variables of gender and age group to understand the relationship between variables.

Sampling and Population

The sample of the study comprised 24 female Egyptian university students in their second, third, and fourth-year at the Department of English, Colleges of Arts and Education, Monofia University, Egypt. The sample was randomly selected from the population of 120 students pursuing a program in English language and literature. All participants were Arabic native speakers, who had commenced their EFL learning around the age of nine (4th grade) in public schools. In spite of having completed the study of EFL for at least 9 years, their use of English had almost entirely been limited to the classroom environment. In addition, none of them had ever lived in an English-speaking country.

All participants were made to give a written informed consent, and had to confirm that they had never taken a standard test to assess their English language proficiency nor had received any training session on TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or ITP (Institutional TOEFL Program). The session provided the potential participants with information about the test sections, parts as well as test-taking rules. The aim of this procedure was to guarantee a uniform background about the test and alleviate the influence of test novelty. One day after the orientation session, all participants were provided a retired version of ITP test. Kuder-Richardson Coefficient (KR20), a statistical tool was used to test the reliability of binary measurement such as exam questions, and to investigate the reliability of the TOEFL test. The reliability of the TOEFL test was measured as 0.970; according to (KR20), a coefficient of 0.9 or more indicates reliability.

Participants were divided into intermediate and advanced levels of EFL proficiency depending on their test scores. Participants whose scores ranged from 450 to 549 were considered intermediate EFL learners while the participants who scored from 550 and above were classified as advanced. The intermediate students with the lowest scores and the advanced students with the highest scores were selected as participants in the study to avoid choosing students who scored near the cut-off scores. Based on these criteria, 12 intermediate and 12 advanced students were selected to provide elicited oral personal-experience narratives. The intermediate group (henceforth IG) scores ranged from 450 to 488 with a mean of 466. 7 (SD = 13.42). Their ages ranged from 18 to 21 years with a mean of 19.3 (SD = 1.055). The advanced group ((henceforth AG) ranged from 586 to 633 with a mean of 613.8 (SD = 14.28). Their ages ranged from 17 to 19 years with a mean of 18.2 (SD =.058).

Data Collection Instruments

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. All the sampled participants were individually asked to elicit oral narratives about a difficult or a dangerous situation they had experienced. They were asked 'Have you ever been through a dangerous or a difficult situation that you will never forget? Tell me what happened.' Each of the participants shared their experiences in oral narrative form. Each narrative lasted for about five to fifteen minutes, varying in length due to the narrative chosen by the participant. This duration also included pauses within a narrative. All narratives were given in the English language. During the narrative sessions, the interviewer was a passive listener, giving only the paralinguistic expressions of interest and attentiveness such as nods, 'hmm', and 'yeah'. All the narratives were audio-recorded and later transcribed following the list of sounds and symbols listed in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

To answer the study research question, each narrative was analyzed into its constituent moves. The structure of oral narratives described by Labov & Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972) was used as the main framework for data analysis. Table 1 shows the moves included in this model along with their definitions.

Table 1: *Model of Narrative Move Division.*

Move 1	Abstract summarizes the story.
Move 2	Orientation gives details about time, place and people involved in the story.
Move 3	Complicating Action shows what happened and how events developed.
Move 4	Evaluation gives the narrators' perspective on what happened.
Move 5	Resolution shows how the story ended.
Move 6	Coda signals to the audience that the story has finished.

Each move was identified by inferring their meaning from the context as well as by referring to linguistic clues in sentences. Examples of these clues included phrases that refer to time or place (e.g. 'six years ago', 'last year', 'on the fifth of November', 'in Jeroland', and 'in a mini-bus'), which were used as clues to identify the orientation move. Each move was analyzed in terms of function, lexical markers (when applicable), move density (when applicable), place and frequency of occurrence. The frequency of occurrence of moves was statistically calculated.

The Mann-Whitney Test, a nonparametric test that compares two unpaired groups, was used to investigate the differences between the frequencies of the moves in the narratives of the two study groups. This led to a comparison of the general structure of moves in the two groups. Related to the analysis of moves was investigating the density of the moves when applicable. This was achieved through analyzing the details provided in the move. In this regard, orientation and complicating action and evaluation were analyzed in terms of their density. The Mann-Whitney Test was again used to scrutinize differences between the frequencies of narrative as well as evaluative clauses in the two study groups. Other moves (i.e. abstract, resolution and coda) are often represented by a single sentence. This is largely due to the functions of these moves. An abstract gives a summary of the story. Resolution refers to an event which concludes a story and a coda that signals the end of the story. Consequently, they were excluded when analyzing the density of the moves in a narrative.

Results

Move Structure in Narratives

The Mann Whitney Test was used to investigate the difference between the two EFL proficiency groups as regards the use of moves included in a narrative. Table 2 offers a comparison as regards the frequency of narrative moves in the two study groups and the correlation between the frequencies of the same move in the comparison groups. As the table shows there is no significance between the two study groups as concerns the frequency of moves in the narrative. In other words, EFL proficiency level does not play a significant role in determining the frequency of moves that female Egyptian EFL learners use in their narratives.

Table 2: *Frequencies of Moves and their Relationships.*

Move	Frequency of Occurrence AG	Frequency of Occurrence IG	Z Score	Sig. at 0.05
Abstract	3 (25%)	3 (25%)	1.33	Not sig
Orientation	12 (100%)	10 (83.3%)	1.48	Not sig
Complicating Action	12 (100%)	12 (l00 %)	....	....
Evaluation	11 (91.7%)	10 (83.3%)	0.60	Not sig
Resolution	12 (100%)	11 (91.7%)	1..02	Not sig
Coda	8 (66.7%)	4 (33.3%)	1.64	Not sig

Note: IG-Intermediate Group; AG- Advanced Group

Move Analysis in the Narratives of the Study Groups

Move 1: Abstract

An abstract summarizes the story and indicates to the audience what the story is generally about. This move carries out the same function of a headline in a newspaper article. As shown in Table 2, Move 1 is the least frequent move in the narratives of both the AG and the IG. In addition, it shows the same degree of frequency in the two study groups. The following examples explain the function of this move:

-Last week last year, I eh I put myself in a very hard (+) trouble. (Narrator 6 AG)

-...eh eh the third year the third year of college eh was a turning point eh in my (++) mind in my plan for my future. (Narrator 12 AG)

Everything: I live in now (+) resulted by a hard situation eh (Narrator 7 IG)

As the above examples indicate, all the narrators who provided this move commenced their narratives with the abstract. This move, when provided, appeared only at the beginning of a narrative. In this sense, the abstract provides a framework for the story to be narrated. It also signals that the narrative was going to start. Three narrators out of 12 (25%) in each group provided abstracts. The low degree of frequency for this move indicates that this move is not one of the basic moves that female Egyptian EFL learners include when narrating their personal experience. In addition, the same degree of frequency for this move in the two study groups shows that there is no relationship between EFL proficiency and the use of this move.

Move 2: Orientation

Orientation provides the listener(s) with information about the story's time, place and characters. The following examples show how narrators used this move to carry out this function.

-Last summer, I was walking em in Alex with my cousins. (Narrator 10 IG)

-My father had an accident (+) a couple of years (Narrator 8 AG)

-Last year, I was I was with my cousins and my sister eh in Jeroland a city of games (Narrator 1 IG)

While 100% of the participants (N = 12) in the AG provided details about time, place and people involved in the story, 83.3% of the participants in the IG (N = 10) provided the same move (i.e. orientation).

Move 3: Complicating Action

Complicating action represents the main body of a narrative. It shows how the events of the story developed. Therefore, it is an essential element in any narrative. Without providing this move, nothing is being narrated. The following moves cited exemplify how narrators use this move to tell what happened.

-When he got out of the car, he was going upstairs. He feels dizzy and he fell. He cut his veins on the edge of eh the stairs. We heard a loud a loud noise. When we went to check him, we found out that his face was filling of blood. My father didn't know what happened to him. We eh hold him and we went upstairs to our house. He put some water on his face to know what happened to him and then he found that he cut the veins in his nose. (Narrator 5 AG)

-I was I was returning from a course with my friend and then hear someone running (+) he was a thief and he (+) eh catch my friend from her hair and eh call her to give him her mobile eh and -w: hen I tried to shout. He threatened me with his knife. eh and when she tried to give him her mobile, he saw her !!Old necklace and take it and ran away .(Narrator 9 IG)

As it appears in the above examples, this move shows how events in each narrative developed. Narrator 5 (AG) described how her brother was injured and what action developed after that. Likewise, Narrator 9 (IG) described how she and her friend were attacked by a robber and what happened next.

The complicating action move is characterized by the use of verbs that refer to actions *(e.g. fell, hold, cut, heard, called, went, put, tried, threatened, saw, take. and ran away).* These verbs refer to the actions of the narratives. Although narrators in the two groups showed inconsistency in tense use, all the verbs refer to actions of the narrative. The complicated action move is always presented after the abstract and the orientation moves (when provided). In narratives which lack abstracts, the complicating action appeared after orientation. Therefore, it can be argued that the complicating action appears in a central position in narratives after the less frequent abstract move (when provided) and the orientation move. Because complicating action represents the core of a narrative, this move has the highest degree of frequency in the narratives of the two study groups. All the narrators in the two groups provided this move in their narratives. Therefore,

there is no relationship between the frequency of the use of this move and the level of EFL proficiency.

Move 4: Evaluation

Evaluation is also one of the high-frequency moves in the data as shown in Table 1. However, there is a slight variation in its frequency in the two study groups. Whereas 11 AG narrators (91.7%) included evaluation in their narratives, 10 IG narrators (83.3%) provided this move in their narratives. The Mann-Whitney Test indicated that the relationship between EFL proficiency and the frequency of the use of evaluation was not significant. Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that the frequency of the use of evaluation in the AG and IG shows slight variation. Statistical analysis of this variation indicates that there is no relationship between the frequency of the use of this move and EFL proficiency level.

Evaluation was sometimes presented in various locations in the participants' narratives. As can be observed in the below examples, where Narrator 8 (AG) concluded her narrative with evaluation, and Narrator 2 (IG) provided evaluative clauses in multiple locations of the narrative.

-I was at home alone and I didn't know anything about them and eh half an hour later maybe my father came and they were carrying him. He had an accident. Another motorcycle crashed into him and eh he broke his leg and it was very hard [ya'ni] I mean I didn't know what to do actually. (Narrator 8 AG)

- It was about two or three years ago. My father is a police officer (++) was dangerous for him. Once, ... In this time h in our home, we are staying to see what will happen to Imagine yourself sitting in your home waiting for your dad if he could come or not. (Narrator 2 IG)

Move 5: Resolution

Resolution is the move through which a narrator tells what finally happened. It shows how the events of the story ended. The following examples indicate how narrators used this move.

-He got out of that surgery eh eh as he became well after that. (Narrator 5 AG)
-em we (++) came to Cairo Airport eh eh very late. (Narrator 1 AG)

Like the complicating action move, resolution is marked by verbs which refer to actions (e.g. *ran away, arrested, chose, told, punished, came true, went back* and *decided*). All these verbs refer to the events that concluded their stories. As can be seen in the participants' narratives, resolution always appeared after the complicating action move. This place of occurrence can be explained by referring to the function of this move. Since this move refers to the event that concluded the action of the story, it appears after the complicating action itself.

Data analysis in Table 2 shows that this move is one of the high frequency moves in the two study groups. Therefore, this move can be considered one of the basic moves that the study participants included in their narratives. However, this move appears slightly more frequently in the narratives of the AG. While all the 12 AG narrators (100%) provided resolution in their narratives, 11 IG narrators (91.7%) included this move in their stories. Narrator 11 in the IG was the only participant who did not provide this move. The Mann-Whitney Test result indicates that the difference between the two groups as regards the frequency of this move is not significant.

Move 6: Coda

Coda is the move through which a narrator signals that he/she has finished narrating the story. It brings action back to the present moment. It also draws the listeners' attention to the availability of the turn. The following examples show how narrators used coda to signal the end of their narratives.

-When Allah closes a door, HE opens another. (Narrator 1 AG)

-I didn't want to lie to them anymore and if anything, happens in my life. I will I must tell

them. (Narrator 6 AG)

-eh eh that's all. (Narrator 6 IG)

As it appears in the above examples, narrators used coda to draw the listener's attention that they finished the story. After narrating how the action of her story ended, Narrator 1 (AG) used coda to signal the end of her narrative. She used coda as the moral of her story. Similarly, Narrator 6 (AG) provided a coda that implies the lesson she has learnt from her experience. In this case, her coda points to the future and signals the end of narrating the past events. Unlike the two above-mentioned narrators, Narrator 6 (IG) provided a coda that explicitly signaled the end of the narrative.

Analysis of data indicates that coda is one of the least frequent moves as shown in Table 1. However, this move appears more frequently in the narratives of the AG than it does in the narratives of the IG. Whereas 8 AG narrators (66.6%) provided codas, only 4 IG narrators (33.3%) did. The Mann-Whitney Test result

indicates a non-significant relationship between EFL proficiency level and the use of coda.

As can be concluded from the above analysis, Move 1 (abstract) and Move 6 (coda) are low-frequency moves in the two study groups while the other moves have a high degree of frequency (see Figure 1). In addition, there are no significant differences in the frequency of the use of moves between the intermediate and advanced female Egyptian EFL learners (see Figure 1).

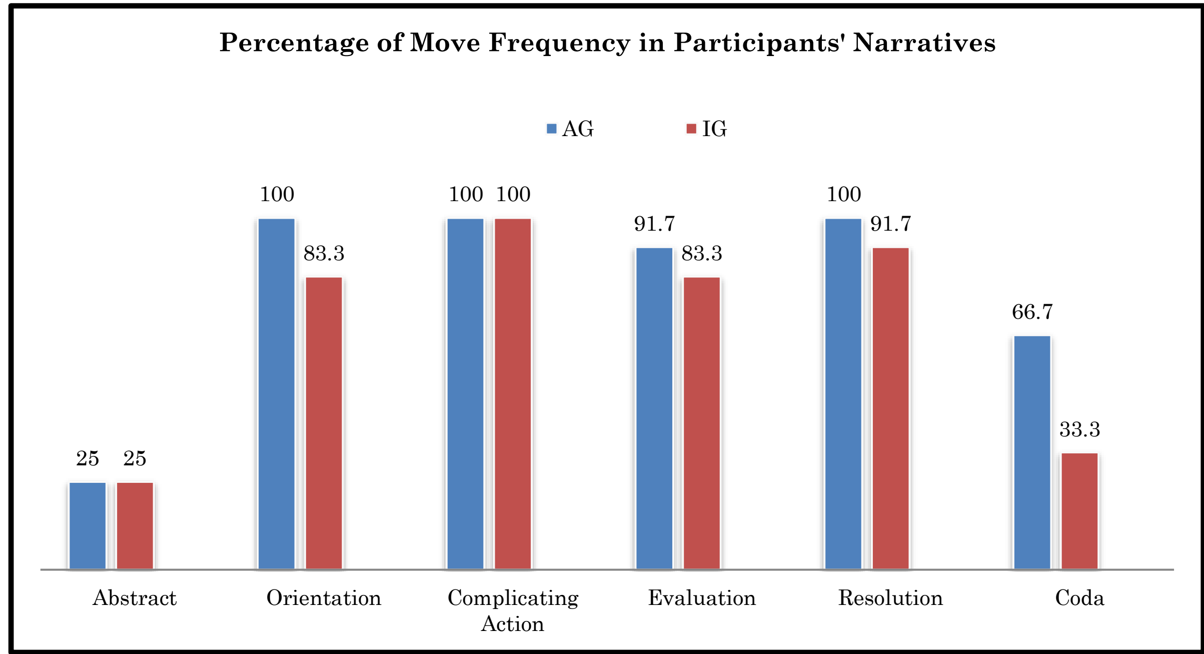

Figure 1: *Frequencies of Moves in The Two Study Groups.*

Density of Narrative Moves

Density of narratives discusses the number of details provided in the orientation, complicating action and evaluation moves. Data indicates that narrators show variation in the number of details they provide in these moves. Density is not applicable to the abstract, resolution and coda moves because these moves - by default - tend to be concise. The functions of these moves require that they be concise. While an abstract is a summary of a narrative, the resolution reports the final event of the story and coda merely signals the end of the narrative. In other words, the concept of density is not applicable to abstract, resolution and coda moves because they are always represented in one single sentence.

Density of Orientation

A full account of the orientation move gives details about time, place and characters of the narrative. It is noteworthy that not all the narratives have details about place and characters because they either recounted emotional experiences with no reference to place or because narrators primarily focused on their own actions. Narrators varied in the number of details they provide in the orientation. While some narrators provided very detailed information about time, place and characters, others gave fewer details in the orientation.

> *-That happened eh last year on the seventh of October eh two hundred and eighteen two thousand and eighteen.* (Narrator 6 IG)

> *-One day, I was I was in my I was in a difficult situation. It was (++) a difficult situation a very difficult situation in my life.* (Narrator 5 IG)

As it appears in the examples, Narrator 6 (IG) provided elaborate details about time of her story. She provided the day and the year of the situation she experienced. Conversely, Narrator 5 (IG) pointed to the past using the phrase 'one day' without giving any details about time either in the orientation move or in the following moves. Related to this lack of elaborate details in orientation is some narrators' tendency to present the orientation and abstract moves in one sentence as in the above example of Narrator 5 (IG).

Data analysis indicates that the AG narrators tended to provide more precise orientation details than the IG narrators. While 3 narrators (25%) in the IG (Narrator 4, Narrator 5 and Narrator 8) used the phrase 'one day' without referring to any time details in the following moves of the narrative, all the AG narrators (except Narrator 1 0) provided precise details about time (e.g. a few months ago, in Shams-Anaseem, a couple of years ago, on the fifth of November). Even when Narrator 7 (AG) started narrating the complicating action with

providing time details, she gave time details in the middle of the complicating action move as stated in the following example.

-"I then asked him eh "is it my name the second name that win eh was it the second name that win in the competition?" he said to me 'yes'. eh (+) this this dream I dreamed it "'h eh before eh before the result of eh eh before the week a week before the result eh the results (+) eh it it eh come true. In the first eh year for me in the faculty, I was the second. (Narrator 7 AG)

In conclusion, while narrative in the AG did not include precise details about time, 3 IG narratives did not refer to any details about time. It can be concluded that AG narrators relatively tended to provide more detailed time details.

Density of the Complicating Action

Narrators can show variations as concerns the number of details they include when they narrate the complicating action. This number of details is reflected by the number of narrative clauses. As a result, some narrators provide more detailed narratives than others do. The following narratives exemplify variations in providing details about the complicating action.

-After high school, I joined the American University and I had 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 w̄e used to. So I missed their (o) support I missed them (Narrator 9 AG)

-we went to the airport with some Egyptian families. We were very happy and spent eh about 3 hours waiting for the plane eh we were we were joking and taking photos. eh the plane took off and after 20 minutes. the pilot told the passengers not to move. em we noticed some strange movement in the plane em (++) 5 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. em(+) fortunately. the em pilot (+) managed to land safely. At Jeddah Airport, we were told that without the American pilot who were on the plane to (+) train the Saudi pilot, the plane would have fallen because there was an engine left. em we (++) came to Cairo Airport eh eh very late. (Narrator 1 AG)

As can be noticed in the examples, the two narratives vary in the number of details provided in the complicating action. Whereas Narrator 9 (AG) provided 6 narrative clauses, Narrator 10 (AG) provided 15 narrative clauses. This variation can be due to the nature of the experience narrated, different degrees of comfort with the interview situation, or differences in narrative fluency. The same variation also does exist among narrators of the IG. The narratives of some IG narrators had more complicating action details than those of their counterparts in the same group. For instance, Narrator 5 (IG) provided 14 narrative clauses while Narrator 10 (IG) included just 5 clauses in the complicating action move.

In addition, there is variation between the two study groups in the number of narrative clauses they provided. Quantitatively speaking, the AG narrators provided a higher number of narrative clauses with a mean of 12.83 (SD = 5.36) whereas the IG narrators provided fewer narrative clauses with a mean of 10.08 (SD = 5.14). The Mann-Whitney Test result indicates that the relationship between the frequencies of narrative clauses in the two study groups is not significant.

However, the number of narrative clauses is not a reliable indicator of the narrative skill of the narrator. A longer narrative may be full of unnecessary repetition of the story events and/or irrelevant digression while a shorter narrative may be communicatively effective because its narrative includes only relevant details and avoids meaningless repetition. In other words, a skillful narrator is required to be as informative as needed and to avoid repetition and pointless digression.

Repetition in Narrating the Complicating Action

The study findings revealed that some narrators tended to repeat narrative clauses that refer to ordinary events in the complicating action. In this case, repetition does not fulfil any evaluative function. It is observed that these repeated narrative clauses are preceded by pauses and gap fillers (eh and em). These repetitions proved a useful strategy to gain time to plan for what to say next. The following example illustrates the repetition of narrative clauses.

-the building elevator eh stopped and eh began to(+) go up and down eh (+++) and I eh I knocked knocked the door but(++) he couldn't open and it couldn't opened and I (++) I was afraid and eh (+++) and eh(+++) the building elevator got up and down without stopping. (Narrator 5 IG)

As it appears in the example, Narrator 5 (IG) repeated a narrative clause which referred to one of the events of the complicating action. Repetition is preceded by two gap fillers (eh) and two very long pauses.

Data show slight differences between narrators in the two study groups concerning their repetition of narrative clauses. While two narrators in the AG (16.6%) had one instance of repetition for each one of them, three narrators in the IG (25%) had various instances of repetition for each one of them. For example, Narrator 1 (IG) repeated each of the following clauses twice within the course of narrating the complicating action.

-we decided to have fun, to play all games. We get we go to play a game named ( ) this is a very dangerous game eh really dangerous difficult. Okay we decided to get this game. We did sit in this game. We we em we eh sit in the end of this game. em this position is very difficult very dangerous. eh we decided to have fun anyway. (Narrator 1 IG)

In conclusion, the repetition of narrative clauses referring to ordinary events of the complicating action was possibly used by some narrators as a strategy to gain time to prepare for what to say next. Although instances of this kind of repetition are slightly more frequent in the narratives of the IG narrators, narrators in the two study groups do not show tendency to repeat narrative clauses that refer to ordinary events. Therefore, this kind of repetition does not affect the conclusion we made about density of the complicating action in the two study groups. The other factor that needs to be considered when analyzing density of the complicating action is digression. The following section takes interest in investigating digression in narrating the complicating action.

Digression in Narrating the Complicating Action

Digression refers to narrators' tendency to narrate about events that are not relevant to the development of the complicating action. This can be due to the nature of storytelling as a type of unplanned speech. However, data analysis shows very low frequency of this tendency among the study participants. There is one case of digression in the IG. Narrator 6 (IG) was narrating about how she suffered from 'Bell's Palsy'. She narrated details about how she discovered the symptoms and visited a neurologist. Then, she digressed to talk about the physiotherapist she visited without completing the story she started. She did not provide resolution to her narrative. The following example illustrates this case of digression.

-My mother and my father take me to the doctor neurosurgery eh eh. He told me I had I I should have a natural medicine irritation (++) eh and take me and gave me a lot of medicine. In my natural medicine. I eh I meet I met Dr. Abdeen eh. This doctor I can say, changed my life. eh he teached me a lot of things in life and (+) and made me know a lot of things eh that existed in myself but I didn't know it at all (Narrator 6 IG)

As can be concluded from the above analysis, the tendency to digress is not common among the study participants. There is one case of digression in the intermediate group. Therefore, digression does not also affect the conclusion made about the density of the complicating action

Density of Evaluation

Evaluative clauses fulfill the evaluative function of a narrative. Their function is to relate how the narrator reacts to the events of the story. A narrator’s attitude might vary in accordance with the density of evaluation. Hence, a few narratives are “heavily evaluated” while others receive a mild evaluation. This suggests that a few narrators made use of a higher number of evaluative clauses than others. Examples can be cited to depict the variance in the density of evaluation in the two study groups.

-After high school, I joined the American University and I had a couple of friends there. 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 AG)

-This situation is the most hardest situation that happened to me. it was about two or three years ago..... 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.(Narrator 2 IG)

In the above examples, Narrator 9 (AG) used one evaluative clause while Narrator 2 (IG) used 5 evaluative clauses in their narratives. This happens because the number of evaluative clauses depends on the type of evaluation used by the narrator. The analysis of these narratives indicates that evaluative clauses have a slightly higher frequency in the narratives of advanced-level participants. While the AG narrators provide a slightly higher number of evaluative clauses with a mean of 2.75 (SD = 1.66), the IG narrators use fewer evaluative clauses with a mean of 2.08 (SD = 1.50). The result of the Mann-Whitney Test

shows that there are no significant differences between the frequencies of evaluative clauses in the two groups.

Based on the above analysis of the density of narratives, it can be concluded that advanced-level narrators tend to provide more precise orientation details. However, density of evaluation and complicating action tends to be similar in the two groups. In addition, there is no common tendency to repeat narrative clauses and digress in the two study groups.

Discussion

This study attempted to build up a wide repertoire of research about various aspects of narrative ability of female Arab EFL learners. The study also attempted to achieve its aim by comparing the narrative structure used by advanced female Egyptian EFL learners with that of their intermediate peers. The findings reveal that a majority of participants provided narratives which did not include an abstract and/or a coda. This result supports the findings of Johnstone (2005) who argued that not all the narratives produced by native speakers of English include abstracts or codas. However, this result does not discredit Labov's model of the structure of an elicited oral narrative. The high frequency of all the moves Labov included in his approach, except for the abstract and coda, indicates that female Egyptian EFL learners tend to include the same moves referred to by Labov. The low frequency of the abstract and coda moves can be explained by referring to Carter et al. (1997) who argued that the Labovian approach introduces the typical structure of an elicited oral narrative, and this structure still allows variations. They referred to the case of not including the abstract when the narrative is invited by the listener. Therefore, the present study gives credence to the results of Labov and Labov & Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972) because it refers to the same framework for the structure of an elicited oral narrative that recounts personal experience with some variation which represents one of the characteristics of language use.

Statistical analysis of data indicates that there is no significant relationship between the frequencies of all the six moves in the two study groups. In other words, there is no relationship between L2 proficiency of female Egyptian EFL learners and the way they use their L2 resources to structure elicited oral narratives. One explanation of this result is that- even at advanced level of L2 proficiency female Egyptian EFL learners are not able to use L2 resources at their disposal to produce 'fully formed' narratives. This explanation coincides with the findings of Pavlenko (2003) who found that "L2 linguistic repertoires emerged only in the narratives of L2 users who took part in discursive practices in the target language community- but not in the narratives of FL users who learned the language as a code" (p. 278). She argued that ESL speakers are able to make use of L2 resources in narratives because they practice this kind of discourse in the target language community. However, EFL learners who do not participate in these discursive practices in the target language community lack this ability. However, this argument is not valid because the study participants provided all the moves referred to by Labov in various degrees of frequency. The low frequency of the abstract and coda moves can be accounted for by referring to the conclusion made by Carter et al. (1997).

Analysis of data regarding the place of occurrence of moves perfectly coincides with the pattern referred to by Carter et al. (1997) who argued that while evaluation can occur at any point in a narrative, other moves occur in order of an abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution and coda. This pattern matches the pattern shown by the study participants in the two study groups.

The data analyzed shows variations in the orientation section as concerns the amount of time details they included. In general, the advanced- level narrators tend to give more precise details about time in their narratives. In this sense, they show greater ability to achieve the goals of providing adequate details in the orientation section. These goals, as referred to by Tannen (2007), include setting the scene for the details to be narrated, creating a sense of authenticity through the narrator's naming of identifiable names of people, times and places, and contributing to the point of the narrative. Conversely, the intermediate-level narrators are relatively less able to provide precise time details in the orientation section.

One plausible explanation of this result is that advanced-level narrators have a considerable degree of pragmatic competence which enables them to conform to Grice's maxim of quantity which requires speakers to be as informative as they should be (i.e. they provided sufficient details and avoided both overelaboration and under-elaboration). As a result, it can be argued that EFL narrators show tendency to acquire the ability to provide precise orientation details as their overall language proficiency develops. However, the present study did not give credence to the findings presented by Johnstone (1990) which referred to the tendency of some American native speakers of English to overelaborate about time, place and characters of their narratives. The analysis of data does not show any evidence for developing such tendency among the Egyptian female EFL learners.

Conversely, data analysis indicates that the difference between frequencies of narrative clauses in the two study groups is not significant. This implies that female Egyptian EFL learners develop the

ability to use L2 to narrate past events related to their personal experiences at intermediate level of EFL proficiency, if not earlier.

The above-mentioned conclusion about density of the complicating action move is not affected by repetition of narrative clauses that recount ordinary events, and digression. There are no differences between participants in the study groups as regards repetition of narrative clauses and digression. The few cases of repetition of ordinary events can be explained as a sign of lack of fluency. In such a case, repetition of sentences may serve as a time gaining strategy. Less fluent EFL speakers may tend to repeat previously mentioned sentences to get some time to think about they can say next. Tannen (2007) referred to this possibility in her analysis of narratives when she explained that repetition helps narrators generate more language especially "for individuals and cultures that value verbosity and wish to avoid silences" (p. 58).

The study results do not find out differences between the two study groups as concerns the density of evaluation. The participants provided similar numbers of evaluative clauses regardless of their proficiency level. This agrees with the findings of Montanari (2004) which argued that there is no relationship between the ability to provide evaluation and ESL language proficiency level.

Conclusion

This study attempted to build up a wide repertoire of research about various aspects of narrative ability of female Arab EFL learners. The data was collected qualitatively to attempt to acquire first-hand information. The study aimed at investigating how female Arab EFL learners structure their oral personal-experience narratives in advanced and intermediate EFL proficiency levels. The study is based on the premise that EFL learners at these levels have developed enough language repertoire to narrate their personal experience in full narratives. The analysis of move structure shows no significant relationship between the frequencies of moves in the two study groups. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no relationship between EFL proficiency and the structure of the narratives of female Egyptian advanced and intermediate EFL learners. Moreover, whereas the orientation move provided by the AG narrators included more precise details, density of complicating action and evaluation moves was similar in the two study groups.

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Appendix A Symbols used to transcribe participants' narratives

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