

### Constructing Stories in a Foreign Language: Analysis of Iranian EFL Learners' Lived Narratives Structure

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**Abstract:** Most popular models of narratives and narrative analyses have been drawn on native stories, yet EFL learners' narratives have not received due narrative analysis. The present study then aims at scrutinizing the structure of personal English stories as told by EFL learners. To this aim, three hundred narratives were collected through classroom discussions and interviews. Qualitative analysis methods were utilized to find how narratives were recounted. The results of data analyses indicated that EFL learners' narratives consisted of 4 parts with the abstract and coda sections absent from them. Besides, there were other differences between the collected narratives and those told by English native speakers.

**Keywords:** Narrative, Narrative Analyses, Narrative Structure, Abstract, Coda.

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## Introduction

Regardless of time and place, whether in a store, along the road, at work, at play, at home, or other settings, when there is a situation for talk, people get involved to talk about the events they have experienced, witnessed, read or heard directly, or have imagined (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Narrative is part of conversation when people turn to tell or retell an experience that is assumed to be interesting for the interlocutor(s). This definition of narratives reveals that events are fundamental in narratives. Narratives move around events which are of interest to recipients. People talk about different things in the past, present, and future in their conversations though narrative is mostly about past experiences. According to Labov and Waletzky (1967), narrative is assumed as remembering past experiences as a sequence of events. However, a narrative moves beyond this assumption and it, somehow, means fitting the past experience to the present and new context.

Stories almost happen in past time rather than the time they are narrated (e.g. Barkhuizen, 2008; Berman, 2001; Chafe, 1994; Pavlenko, 2007). However, some scholars (Currie, 2010; Norrick, 2000) maintained that stories can be unreal and the upshot of imagination. These types of stories might happen in the future.

For Labov and Waletzky (1967), a narrative consists of six stages, namely, *abstract*, *orientation*, *main action*, *evaluation*, *result or resolution*, and *coda*, respectively. Although they claim these six stages are ordered in narratives, they mention that in some narratives the place of stages can be changed and in some cases one or more stages may be absent (Rühlemann, 2013).

The first part of narratives is *the abstract*. This part was absent in Labov and Waletzky's (1967) and was added in the Labov's following works on narrative analysis. The abstract is optional in narratives. It is the initial point of the story that summarizes the main point of the story (Norrick, 2000). Through using abstract, the narrator gives a general statement that he/she is going to exemplify in the narrative. The abstract implies general propositions that usually come beyond the immediate events in the narrative (Cortazzi, 1993). It can be claimed that the abstract of a narrative is its summary. Rühlemann (2013) defined the abstract as what expresses the plot of the story in summary. Labov (2008) mentioned that abstract is normally followed by *How'd that happen?* Cortazzi (1993) stated that almost in all narratives, the abstract is told in past tense.

The second part of narratives is *the orientation*. Orientation (setting or background) is the information that the narrator provides for the audience (Cortazzi, 1993). Person, time,

place, and behavioral situation are four functions that orientation of a narrative performs (Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Labov and Waletzky (1967) mentioned that orientation is the groups of clauses that precede the first narrative clause (clauses are units of narratives). De Fina (2003) stated that orientation is a dynamic process throughout the story. In fact, narratives or more accurately, narrative events, happen in a place that the audience requires to know about to understand the internal meaning of a story. Orientation devices are used by narrators to indicate apprehension, reconstructing, and representing personal and social experiences (De Fina, 2003). Thus, orientation devices highlight the role that participants have in a story. Orientation provides sufficient clues for the context which the storyteller tries to make the events understandable for the audience. Labov and Fanshel (1977) claimed that narrative orientations are devices that show the narrative is interactive. Orientation is part of a narrative which is present in different parts. The narrator can use adverb of time to mark some particular aspects of the narrative. Places that are part of orientation are the cornerstone of narratives. Narratives are experiences, narrated, and understood through referring to particularity of places (Baynham, 2003; Herman, 2001).

The third part of narratives is the *complication*, “the main body of narrative clauses usually comprises a series of events which may be termed complication or complicating actions” (Labov & Waletzky, 1967, p. 32). Complication is the related sequenced events of a narrative that are narrated in past simple tense, or sometimes in present tenses (Cortazzi, 1993). In a co-constructed narrative, the response to the audience’s question as to what happened is labeled as complication. Complication is the most reportable part of a story in which a narrator sets the floor through abstract and orientation to talk about it. In fact, complication is the content of a narrative. Complication at least must have an interesting event (Labov, 1972).

The fourth part of narratives is the *evaluation*. A narrative without evaluation is difficult to understand (Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Narrative is “the means used by narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its *raison d’être*, why it was told” (Labov, 1972, p. 366). In fact the evaluation wards off the question *So what*. The evaluation is the main point of a story that the audience expects to know about. Evaluation does not provide information about context and participants, but it conveys the significance of the narrated events. According to Labov and Waletzky (1967) evaluation part of a story is the section in which the narrator provides his/her attitude toward the main point of the story. Evaluation highlights the main

subject in the narrative and the story is constructed to emphasize some important narrative units that are conveyed by using evaluation devices.

The fifth part of narratives is the *result*. Results or resolution of a narrative express the results of a narrative. It answers this question: what finally happened?

The sixth part of narratives is the *coda*. In fact, coda returns the audience to the present time, the context and time in which the narrative is told, but not the time during which the narrative has happened. Most of narratives end in results, but some of them have coda at the end. It means that coda is optional to the narratives (Labov & Waletzky, 1967). There is no corresponding question for this part of narratives.

Middletone and Edwards (1990) stress the influence of the local context and social norms on how an individual verbalizes remembered events. The field of narrative study proposes that the context of a narrative can be viewed from two perspectives. First, the context in which the story (act or event) happens. Second, the context in which the story is told.

Context of a story is beyond what have been mentioned in the literature. In addition to the two mentioned aspects of the context, another context exists as well. It is better to term it as global context. The global context covers the other two contexts as it means the context in which the events happened and narrated. The global context deals with the geographical place, community setting, or language area in which the tellers of different cultures and languages recount stories. The Iranian, American, and Chinese contexts might need different types of narration since they are different regarding their culture and language. Besides, when people of distinctive cultures rehearse stories in another culture, they may generate stories differently from both the target and their own culture. Due to this, it is worth studying how EFL learners formulate narratives in the target language which might increase our understanding of the ways they are told.

The present study aims at analyzing Iranian EFL classroom narratives to see which factors are present in them. The main purpose of the present study is to see whether cross linguistic issues influence the organization of classroom storytelling regarding their structures. The research question is how do Iranian EFL learners construct the structure of personal English stories?

## Method

### Design

Narrative inquiry, which is set in individuals' stories, is a framework through which human experiences of the world are investigated (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method of data collection and analysis which can use different methods such as interview, observation, and conversation in order to fulfill its goals. However, most researchers prefer unstructured interview to collect data in their studies on narratives (Elliott, 2005). The present study used unstructured interview. According to Elliott (2005), there are two approaches toward narrative inquiry; a focus on *content* and a focus on the *form* or *structure*. While the former is used when the research aims at finding details such as identity through which concepts and categories are detected, the latter aims at finding out how storytellers, the condition of storytelling, and cultural differences affect the shape of stories.

Labov and Waletzky's (1967) analytical model which was used in the present study is the most famous one used in narrative inquiries (Riessman, 1993; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The present study focused on the form of the lived stories as told by Iranian EFL learners.

Reliability and validity of narratives are controversial issues. Although it is mentioned that the concept of reliability and validity in qualitative research is different from quantitative one, Bruner (2003) and Geelan (2003) believe that this concept is much different in narrative inquiry. Polkinghorne (1988) argues that validity in narrative is associated with meaningful analysis rather than the results. For Riessman (1993) narratives do not mirror all details of experienced stories, but they reveal the narrators' understanding of the events. Thus, they may be rehearsed as different as they are told. Ferber (2000) also believes that narrators express salient part of their experiences rather than all details. Kvale (1989, 1996) argued that validity of narratives depends on the nature of research questions.

The present study aimed to explore the form of narratives rather than their content. Thus, valid methods for recording and transcribing the narratives confirm its validity. Polkinghorne (1988) maintained that reliability in narrative is not consistency of measurement, but trustworthiness of the note or transcripts. Narrative inquiry is not going to generalize the findings, but it seeks for broader understanding of culture. Thus, applicability of the results across samples is not of concern in narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

One more point in this regard is the use of multiple-method data collection approaches in narrative inquiry. According to Riessman (1993), narratives are expected to be told

differently in other performances. Thus, use of different methods for data collection in order to reduce the effect of methods is meaningless. She used triangulation as an example and proved it to be unnecessary to use triangulation and other methods in narrative inquiry. The present study used voice recording methods to collect data. Even though nonverbal language has a great role in narrative construction, it was not possible to video record the storytelling events because of some religious and cultural constraints regarding female participants. Nonetheless, the present study focused on the form of the narratives which means video recording could not add to the validity and reliability of the study.

### **Participants**

The present study aimed at analyzing narratives in different settings and through different perspectives. Thus, there were different types of participants in this study. Two hundred narratives which came from male and female pre-intermediate and upper-intermediate language learners in the classroom were analyzed. Pre- and upper-intermediate language learners were selected because: (1) Participation of two different groups of participants made the data more comprehensive and valid, (2) Experts have confirmed that both groups can produce narratives, (3) The influence of L2 knowledge could be detected if needed, and (4) (Real) Advanced language learners are difficult to find and lower than pre-intermediate language learners cannot produce narratives well. In addition, 50 narratives were drawn from interviews and 50 from written texts. In sum, there were 300 narratives. The participants were not prepared for narration and it was done without informing them beforehand. No instruction was provided for them before asking them to narrate a story. The reason was that we were going to study what was going on in the classroom regarding narratives. All participants were from Esfarayen, North Khorasan, Iran and their first language was Persian. They were learning English as a foreign language at private institutes. The present study enjoyed nonrandom sample selection method. In fact, the participants were selected according to convenient sampling selection principles.

### **Procedure**

All narratives were voiced recorded. Then, they were transcribed by the researchers (a senior lecturer in Discourse Analysis and a PhD student) two times. In order to make a consistency in transcription of narratives, a transcription convention was defined (see appendix). Finally, 10 narratives were selected randomly and checked by the researchers in order to confirm the

accuracy of transcriptions. The transcribed narratives were analyzed according to Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Labov's (1972) analytical models. Since the study focused on the form and structure of narratives, concept detection and categorization approaches were not needed to be employed. Thus, the researchers analyzed the collected data considering the six parts of narratives according to the mentioned models without using any computerized methods of data analysis.

## Results

Narrative structure includes six parts which are *abstract*, *orientation*, *main action*, *evaluation*, *resolution*, and *coda*.

### The abstract

Abstract as the first part of narrative structure was absent almost in all language learners' narratives of different genders and ages. They did not initiate reporting their narratives with a summary which helped the audience understand the matter easily. Although the abstract was not present in all English narratives (Labov & Waletzky, 1967), it was absent in almost all EFL learners' narratives except for a few cases (seven cases out of 300).

#### Narrative 1 (male pre-intermediate language learner)

- Two years ago I went to the street
- And this street uh very big
- And I then going to go to the super market
- After that I went to the super market

#### Narrative 2 (female pre-intermediate language learner)

- I think I was in high school
- That my cousin decided to marriage to someone
- She don't didn't know him so good
- And all the family (...)was not agree

#### Narrative 3 (male upper-intermediate language learner)

- About 10 or 11 years ago, I was at university with my friends @
- And we study studied English there
- We didn't pay attention to our lessons to our books and to our exams
- But one time, at the end of a semester I decided to study for an exam
- But my friends said don't study

#### **Narrative 4 (female upper-intermediate language learner)**

- Four or five years ago that we went to a trip with our family
- And my old younger brother was about 5 years old that time
- And we looked at shopping shops and stores to find something some clothes souvenir or something like these
- The mas says the man of the office of that places says a boy I don't know about 8 years old with a blue jeans and orange t-shirt has lost

As the abstract is told at the beginning of a story, only the initial parts of some English narratives by language learners were brought here. None of these narratives included a summary which gave a general statement that the storyteller was going to exemplify in the narrative. According to the analysis of the collected data, it can be concluded that English narratives by Iranian language learners did not contain the abstract section.

#### **Orientation**

The second part of narrative structures is orientation which provides the audience with necessary information about time, place, setting, and behavior. All information is needed to help the recipient understand the story. The analyses of the collected data showed that language learners mostly focused on time and they did not pay equal attention to other elements of the orientation. In some cases, they referred to places in which the stories had happened. Setting was not too obvious in the narratives whereas behavior was more highlighted in the stories told by the tellers.

#### **Narrative 5**

- → I think it was about 5 years ago
- → I was a second grade of high school
- → And it was the last day of my exams
- And it was the English
  - → I was very happy that day
- I went to my friend and said
- Please give me your bicycle
- I want to just go around the school
  - → And I will take it back to you after 30 minutes
- I went went speed
- Because I was very happy

- → And promised my friends to give him back his bike in half an hour
- And then he thought that I might steal his bicycle
- He thought like this
- And he came after me
- I mean he ran after me
- He wanted to catch me
  - → And then when he just caught me
- Then I went to the tree
- And the branch of the tree went into my ear
- And that was very frightening
- Because I just got my ears ((...)) up
- That was very terrifying
- I really didn't understand this
  - → My friend told me in that time
  - → In that time I was somehow unconscious
- I really didn't understand where I am
- Because it hit my head
- And my friend told me what happened to you?
- Why your ears like that?
- When I checked my ear, I saw it bleeding
- When I saw this
- I said wow @@@
- It is torn
  - → Yea I went to the school after that immediately
  - → I gonna go home first
- My friend told me that
- You should go to school
- And they will call the ambulance to take you are
  - → There I waited for some minutes
- Then they called the ambulance
- Emergency
  - → after that they took me to the ambulance car
- I just remember that very specifically or yea

- → The time that I was in that on the car I was unconscious
- → Um (...) I was unconscious for 20 minutes I think
- And then they took me to hospital
  - → And I just went into bed after 15 minutes
- I remember the stiches that they used for stiches my ear my skin
- And when needle went to my bone into the skull
- That was very very bad
- You know I could feel I could feel that pain in my head
- I just remembered I was crying, screaming
  - → I was 11 years or 12 years old
  - → My brother came and visited me that time
- He was so stressed
- I cried
  - → I came home after one hour
- My mother cried
  - → For 15 or 20 days my ear was covered by some bandages
- And I was I shouldn't have gone mustn't sorry
- I mustn't have gone to showers
- And actually I couldn't cut up my ear

In this narrative, the language learner generated a story about a dramatic event that he had experienced several years ago. The arrowed lines show the use of time in the narrative. Time is used by the narrator constantly all over the story. He embarked on his narrative by articulating time in lines (1) and (2). This issue used in the following clauses of the narratives which were marked by putting an arrow at the beginning. The narrator of this story used 20 clauses with time expressions which was almost one third of the entire narrative clauses.

The narrator rarely used space in the story, and only in some cases, he talked about school and hospital, lines (2, 8, 38, & 47). Even though he used some other expressions of place in the story, their proportion in comparison to the time expressions was low. The narrator did not speak about the name of his city, school, and hospital in where the incidents had occurred. Setting, which refers to the information that the narrator provides about people and participants of the narratives, things, and condition in which the event happens, could not be observed in this narrative. The narrator did not reveal who was at school or who called the emergency. He just mentioned that *they called the emergency* (line, 41) which was not a clear

sentence as there were different people at school. In addition, the storyteller did not say that how his brother or his father got informed. He did not touch upon the school officials' reaction to that event which was a serious problem.

Behavior as another element of orientation was somehow obvious in the story as the narrator talked about his friend's reaction to borrowing the bicycle and the way his friend thought about the narrator. His friend thought that the narrator intended to steal the bicycle as the storyteller mentioned in line (13). The other signs of behavior are about the narrator's family members' reactions to the referenced event which were stated in lines (56, 59).

### **Main Action**

The third part of a narrative is its main action. It is also termed complication and is comprised of the most reportable part of a narrative in which the content of a story and what happens are being elaborated. The main action of a story in learners' narratives was narrated in different parts of them. The narrator sometimes talked about the main action and then provided some causes for the event whereas some narrators supplied reasons or causes for the main action and went on different events until they reached the most tellable event of the story. This chronological and causal links among different parts of a narrative was managed through using conjunctures. However, it was not streamlined from less reportable events to the most reportable ones. They occasionally provided other information such as time and place which were not related to the events or it was not the right place to talk about. In any case, the main action existed throughout the narratives. Although the narrative contents go around the most reportable events, there were several events in some stories that sounded as if they were equally tellable. Furthermore, some narrators did not provide reasons or causes for the main actions and they went to the resolution part straight away. In fact, what was of high significance for the storytellers were the events which happened after the main action of the story.

### **Narrative 6**

- The first day of schools was always
- And I have a memory about an old friend
- ((...)) was good
- My mom was a teacher herself
- That true
- Then on the first day

- S1: She mentioned the name of a school (maybe they have been in the same school for a time)
- No no no , in another school
- Then I went to school for the first time
- She (her mother) just put me in the front of the door
- She didn't come inside even
- She said OK
- It is your school
- And you are going to have new friends
- And new teachers
- I said Ok I will go to school
- And then I went in
- And everyone was with her mom and dad
- And everyone was happy, shinny
- I was sleepy
- And I thought I don't have anything that moment
- Where are my parents?
- My mom goes (.) Went to her school
- And then I was at school alone
- Happy //their teacher entered the class]
- // umm, I am recorder]
- T: I am listening
- And then I came home happy
- And I found lots of friends
- I didn't like to quiet
- It's a good memory or bad memories?
- I didn't think it is a good memory
- But now it is good
- And that day it was just good
- Because I felt happy
- S2: did you found friends?
- Yes I found friends
- It was the first day

- And it was interesting that everyone was with his parents
- And they cry
- ((...)) @@@@
- All the time until now
- I tell my mom
- Am I your child?
- Because for my sister my mom came
- My dad came everyone came
- And sent her to school
- And for me no
- And my mom says. No come on
- You were a very good girl, very extroverted
- And you could stand on your knees
- @@@@ ((...)) @@@
- And it finished happily.

In this story, the main action is not easily recognizable. There are several events that can be considered as the main action or the most reportable events. First, the narrator mentioned that her mother had left her alone in front of the school while the narrator went to school for the first time (line 10). Second, the recipient might expect to hear about the reasons for this act. The other implication is that the audience expects to know about some events that the narrator had experienced at school because she had been left alone there. Third, at the beginning of this story (line 2), she talked about finding friends which implies that the story could be about this matter. Furthermore, she hinted at this topic in the middle of the story (lines 13, 26, 33, 34) which strengthens the probability of perceiving finding friends as the main action of the story. Forth, the storyteller talked about her conversation with her mother constantly until the present time (lines 40-46). This event was also prone to be the most reportable event of the story. It can be concluded that the main action of a narrative had no special point. It was of different types and could be incorporated in different sections of a story. It is also possible that a story has more than one main action and the vantage point of the narrator and even the audience can change a mundane coincidence to the main content of the story.

### Evaluation

The evaluation section of narratives consists of the narrators' points of view which are expressed in different ways. There are different types of evaluation techniques which have been recognized common in storytelling. The evaluation part was not limited to one part of narratives. Every event could be followed by a point which showed the narrators opinion. Narrative 6 was used again to show how evaluative clauses were formed in narratives. Line 1, 9, 18-21, 24, 28, 33, 38, 41, 49, 50 were evaluative clauses or clauses which included evaluation. They were distributed in different parts of narratives. They mostly followed events of the story.

### Resolution

The fifth section of a story, resolution, is the result of a narrative which answers the corresponding question *what happed at last?* To elaborate on this part, narrative 7 is analyzed from another perspective which is the resolution. In this example, the most reportable event was the narrator's accident and his ear injury. The audience expects to know what finally happened to the narrator after that event. The narrator explained his injury, the way he was taken to the hospital, his treatment, his family members' reactions, and his recovery from the injury. All these acts are explained in lines (25-63). Even though these lines were about resolution, they consisted of orientation and causes for other events. This means that the narrator talked about time, space, and behavior. In other words, it is impossible to draw a boundary line between different parts of a narrative.

### The Coda

The last section of a narrative is called the coda. It is a return to the present time through which the narrator calls the audience attention to the present time and is different from the time the story was narrated. The results of data analysis showed that almost in all English stories by EFL learners, the coda was absent. According to the previous studies in this account, this section is an optional one which is absent in most narratives. In fact, it is common to end a story with resolution and rarely the storytellers make use of coda at the end of their narratives.

### Narrative 7

- They divorced

- And my cousins (she didn't know the meaning of adopt and asked the other students) adopted the boy
- And just (...)
- S<sub>2</sub>: She lives alone

### **Narrative 8**

- But I think the boy in the office is but my brother is 5
- Maybe it is that my brother is so much tall
- Because ((...)) he sounds more than 5
- And finally we went and get my brother

In these two stories that were presented as examples, there was no coda. As the coda comes at the end of narratives, these examples were the last lines of the stories. To save space, other examples were not presented here, but the results of data analyses showed that the coda was not employed in narratives by Iranian EFL language learners.

This part of data analysis focused on Iranian EFL learners' narrative structure. In general, it was revealed that the abstract and coda parts were absent in almost every narrative. The other conclusion was that narrators used time in orientation more than space, setting, and behavior. Additionally, comparing the four present parts of narratives showed that orientation was the largest part. The main action was narrated in a great many different ways in the elicited narratives. In some cases, the main action was recounted first, and then chronological and logical reasoning was used to make it comprehensible. However, in some other cases, the main action followed the reasoning part. In fact, the storytellers recapitulated the events of the story to provide the prerequisites for expressing the most tellable events. Some stories consisted of more than one main action in which it was difficult to identify the main action. It depended on the audience background knowledge and implicature.

The resolution part was present in all narratives and it followed the main action; however, there was not a clear-cut location for result in the narratives. It seems that narratives tended to be terminated in the resolution.

### **Discussion**

The results of data analyses indicated that EFL learners did not express the abstract and coda parts in their narratives. The abstract and coda parts are known as two optional parts in narratives which means that their absence was to be expected. However, their absence almost in all narratives was something unusual. Looking back in the history of narrative and

narrative analyses showed that in cases in which the stories were elicited through questions, the abstract was absent in narratives. Labov and Waletzky (1967) reported that in five types of narratives the abstract was absent. Although it has been mentioned that Labov and Waletzky's (1967) model consisted of six parts in many following works, the original published paper by them did not count the abstract as an essential part of stories. Then, Labov (1972) maintained that narratives contained six parts in which he added the abstract as the first part of the stories. However, he regarded the abstract as an optional part. Labov and Waletzky's (1967) model was proposed based on elicited data collected through employing interview. Labov (1972) heavily relied upon naturally told stories by black Americans. The point was that in the interviews, the elicitation questions themselves were a kind of abstract as the interviewers, for instance, asked *have you ever been hospitalized*. In case the interviewee's response was affirmative, it was clear that the storyteller was going to talk about being hospitalized. Thus, the interviewer's question was the abstract of the story as it summarized the unsaid narrative. The conclusion was that Labov and Waletzky (1967) ignored the summary of the narratives and did not include it in narrative structures. The present study elicited narratives through asking questions in interview forms or classroom discussion ones. In any case, the participants were asked to tell a story, using more general questions first such as '*can you talk about an exciting event in your life which you have experienced, witnessed, or heard*', and making it narrower such as '*can you talk about an accident*' in case the participants could not answer the first one. Therefore, this type of data collection might be the reason that the abstract part was absent in Iranian EFL language learners.

Coda was also known as an optional part of the story. Labov and Waletzky (1967) maintained that most of stories terminate in resolution. The coda is more complicated than other parts of the story. Labov and Waletzky (1967) also mentioned that coda was not easily identified in stories. The participants of their study were so proficient in English that could easily make a connection between the story time and present time to signal that it was over. They stopped the story and mostly used gestures or intonation to signal the end of it. Furthermore, when a person is asked to tell a story, he/she goes to the main action and feels no need to bring the audience to the present time as he/she has been asked to do so. In natural storytelling, turn taking, through which a storyteller takes the floor and narrates a story, is of high importance. The narrators are expected to signal the end of their stories as the audience(s) is waiting for taking turn and starting recounting a narrative (Moerman, 1973). In

interview or discussion forms in which the narrators are asked to tell a story, they hardly ever need to use words to signal that the story is over. Kang (2006) showed that Korean EFL learners heavily relied upon the coda in their English stories. Besides, Lee (2003) found that Chinese tellers used more coda than English storytellers. Ho (2001) found that the coda serves important functions in Chinese narratives.

The orientation as the second part of narratives almost entirely focused on time than other elements of background information. According to Baynham (2003) and Herman (2001), place is the cornerstone of narratives which was not to the interest of EFL narrators in comparison to time. In all narratives, time was highlighted more than other dimensions. Labov and Waletzky (1967) maintained that orientations are a string of free clauses that precede the events. The results of the present study were not in line with this claim. The orientation was distributed all over the narratives before and after the events. Although these scholars introduced orientation as the first part of narrative structures meaning that orientation mostly preceded the events, they believed in rearrangement and redistribution of narrative structures as well. The findings of the present study indicated that orientation clauses were recounted wherever the storytellers felt more explanation was needed. This finding was in line with Shokouhi and Shirali's (2011) findings in which they showed that Iranian EFL learners used orientation in different parts of English narratives. Setting and behavioral situation was the same as what Labov and Waletzky (1967) retained. They were used by the narrator due to the context and topic of the story. This part of the study findings was in line with Söter's (1988) findings in which the results showed that narrator with different mother tongues focused on different aspects of orientation. Baynham (2003) also proved that space (place) and time were of high significance in preconstruction and construction of narratives which is in line with the present study's findings. De Fina (2003) also named time and space as narrative orientation devices which indicated that time and place were of high importance. The orientation, additionally, was larger than other parts of narratives. This was in line with Johnstone (1990) and Porter (1989) that mentioned American storyteller overwhelmingly focus on the orientation. On the contrary, Kang (2006) Mullen and Yi (1995) reported that EFL learners mostly relied on the coda than the orientation.

The main action was found as a combination of different events which were recapitulated to pave the way for expressing the most tellable events in the narratives. Apart from few cases, it was the same as what Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972) stated about the third part of stories. In some narratives, it was assumed that there were two or more

than two most reportable events in them. It occurred because a lived experience might contain more than one important event. The decision that which event was the most tellable one was on the shoulder of storyteller. Men's gender, background knowledge, age, and social factors affect the way they look at the phenomena; thus, reportability degree of the event is a dynamic concept that is different from person to person and context to context (Riessman, 2000; Kang, 2006; Rühlemann, 2013).

The findings of the present study showed that the resolution could not be restricted to the most reportable event of the story. It was mentioned that resolution (result) of a story answers the question *what finally happened*. The results of data analyses made known that EFL narratives consisted of more than one resolution. Not only did the most reportable events of the recorded narratives consist of resolution, other events of a narrative were also followed by resolution. Thus, it can be claimed that a story might have a general conclusion which follows the most tellable event and some other resolutions that follow other events. An event that is assumed as a resolution in a narrative might have a resolution on its own. The other point of the findings was that the results of stories included orientation devices specially time and place. The results indicated that drawing a boundary line between the orientation and resolution was impossible. This finding was important because it showed that orientation, on one hand, cannot be restricted to the first part of narratives, and disordering and redistribution were the natural features of narratives on the other hand. This was in line with Labov and Waletzky's (1967) findings in which they centered upon redistribution and rearrangement of narrative structure. The order of six parts in narratives was mostly mentioned for a normal and logical story in which a narrator provides a summary at the very beginning, sets the ground, goes to the most reportable events, and makes a conclusion. This type of storytelling is favored by a very professional storyteller (Labov, 1972). Daily and natural stories obey no predetermined rules. They are told according to the context, audience, and their genres.

The findings of the study, in general, showed that in some cases, the most reportable event was recounted at first, and the clauses which were assumed as pre-constructed ones succeeded it. In a normal situation, the narrator paves the way for expressing the most tellable event, but he/she sometimes states the most reportable event and then brings up cause and reason. This was in line with many studies that were mentioned in this section in which the researchers found that different parts of stories could not be restricted to a specific place of the story. The reason is forgetfulness in oral storytelling. Currie (2010), Riessman (2000), and Norrick (2000, 2003, 2005) were of the view that human mind cannot record every detail

of an event. Storytellers cannot remember everything when embarking on expressing past events, but as they step ahead, their mind is activated and more details are retained. Thus, during narration, they add more information which had not been mentioned in the beginning part of the stories, but should have been told for the story to make sense.

## Conclusion

In this study, we aimed to examine Iranian EFL learners' narrative structure to find out how the narratives are formulated in target language. Generally there were 300 narratives which were drawn through different methods of data collection. Most narrative analyses have focused on English native narrative, and most analytical models for narrative and narrative analyses have centered upon English narratives. In fact, only few works have paid attention to EFL or ESL narratives especially those produced by language learners. In order to fill this gap, the present study scrutinized Iranian EFL learners' narratives which indicated how stories were recounted in EFL setting regarding their structures. The findings of the study revealed that EFL learners did not express the abstract and coda parts. Besides, there were some other differences in other sections of the narratives. These findings improve our understanding of EFL stories and their similarities and differences with English native narratives. Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Labov's (1972) models which were proposed based on English native narratives were used to make a comparison between EFL narratives and English native ones. The results showed that hegemony of native speakers should be lowered as EFL learners might have a different system of language use from what a native speaker has. Additionally, it was revealed that different story's sections, namely orientation, main action, evaluation, and results cannot be limited to specific parts. They were found in different parts of the narratives. In addition to the most reportable event, each coincidence in a story might have a result since it does not happen in isolation. This was true for orientation as well. Although orientation is expressed to pave the way for recounting the most reportable events, other coincidences in the stories need a context before occurring which necessarily should be provided.

The findings of the present study can be a basis for future research to understand the structure of EFL narratives. It also helps prospective researchers to be cautious about the culture and context in which stories are reported. Additionally, it can pave the way for proposing a new framework for EFL narrative analysis as it was revealed that language learners did not organize their lived experiences in the same way as English natives do.

However, naturally told narratives by EFL learners might be different from classroom ones. Thus, it is suggested that naturally told narratives by nonnative English users are analyzed to see how they are different or similar to classroom and English native stories.

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## Appendix A: Transcription System

Line	Independent clause or utterance marked as separate by intonation
((...))	Incomprehensible
(.)	Short pause
(...)	Noticeable pause
( )	more explanations by the researcher
[ ]	Uncertain transcription
//	The beginning of an overlap where the other speaker(s) talks
]	The end of an overlap where the other speaker(s) talks
	Clause in focus
<u>Line</u>	Stressed elements
@	Laughter (@@@ means long laughter)
Numbered line	Narrative clause

