Expression of One's Point of View by Universal Means: Narrative Evaluation in Language Dissolution

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**Background**

Narrative researchers have long recognized the importance of narrative evaluation as a means of transmitting a mere report of a sequence of events into a story that conveys the narrator’s points of view, and personal and cultural values (Labov, 1972). The process of evaluation assigns prominence to information in narrative, and engages the listener, by using forms that depart from the local norms of the text (Polanyi, 1989).

Evalitative devices are derived from all levels of linguistic structure, as well as intonation (Wennerstrom, 2001) and gesture. Detailed studies of individual evaluative devices (e.g., Ulatowska et al., 2000, 2003) are complemented by studies which examine their overlap and simultaneously of function across elements of the narrative structure (Wennerstrom, 2001).

Studies of the evaluative language used by narrators who have aphasia, a neurogenic language disorder, (Armstrong & Ulatowska, 2007), may also provide insights on the form/function relationships inherent in narrative evaluation.

The current work-in-progress explores the form, frequency, overlap, and distribution of evaluative devices in emotive narratives of personal experience told by narrators with aphasia, and demographically-similar narrators without aphasia.

**Methods**

**Participants/Interviewees**

- Six English-speaking, African-American men, living in urban Texas
- Four with aphasia (APH), non-Wernicke’s, of varying severity

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<th>Aphasia severity</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Where raised?</th>
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- Eight English-speaking, White women, living in urban Texas
- Four with aphasia (APH), non-Wernicke’s, of varying severity
- Three educated, African-American women, living in urban Texas
- Two with no aphasia (non-brain-injured, NBI)

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n.b. All African-American narrators were self-reported practicing Baptists.

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**Analysis**

APH and NBI narratives were compared to each other, within demographic group:

- **Narrative evaluation types (adapted from Labov, 1972)**
  - Discourse-level:
    - external evaluation: “This is for real!”
    - direct speech: “I go, Say man! John sit down!”
    - repetition of information: “Um, uh... I mean...”
  - Syntactic:
    - negation: “I couldn’t use none of it.”
  - Lexical:
    - emotive lexicon: e.g., “petrified,” “crazy,” “idiot”
    - intensifiers: “... so calm...” “... all along the street...”
  - Intonational:
    - pitch maxima (Wennerstrom, 2003)

- **Distribution of evaluation within narrative structure**

**Findings**

- **Narrative evaluation types**
  - Individual APH narrators used fewer evaluation types, as compared to NBI narrators:
    - e.g., A-APH: 21 used 3 types, and A-NBI: 3 used all 10 types
  - However, within narratives of each group (A-APH, A-NBI, C-APH, C-NBI), all types of evaluation were found (with the exception of paraphrase, which was not used by C-APH narrators)
    - e.g., syntactically complex paraphrase was used by A-APH: 21 (moderate aphasia): “While I was preaching, the condition happened. My stroke hit right here in church.”
  - Use or non-use of evaluation types did not pattern by aphasia severity
  - Repetition, pitch maxima, or both were included in most types of overlap
  - Distribution of evaluation within narrative structure*

**Discussion**

Findings indicate that narrators with aphasia, as compared to narrators with no aphasia, use qualitatively similar evaluation types, and distribution evaluate similarly in the narrative structure, unless the aphasia is severe enough that overall narrative structure is compromised.

While individual APH narratives included fewer types of evaluation than NBI narratives, interpretation of this finding is confounded by the reduced length of the APH narratives.

The ubiquitous use of repetitive and evaluative pitch maxima, especially in APH narratives, suggests their potential universality as evaluative devices, although confirmation with other ethnic/gender groups and larger samples is needed. This study also provides evidence for the expression of cultural values, e.g., spirituality, and cultural identity in the form of subjective content of evaluation.

**References**


**Acknowledgements**

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