



# 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 transforming 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).

Evaluative 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 simultaneity 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

	Age	Education	Occupation	Where raised?	Aphasia severity <small>(Kertesz, 1982)</small>	
A-APH	#21	72	Some Bible college	Minister Crossing guard	Urban Louisiana	Moderate
	#17	55	Trade school	Cook	Small-town Texas	Mild-moderate
	#08	47	Community college	Car cleaner	Urban Texas	Mild-moderate
	#11	56	Community college	Supervisor	Urban Texas	Mild

- Two with no aphasia (non-brain-injured, NBI)

	Age	Education	Occupation	Where raised?	
A-NBI	#06	44	High school	Maintenance worker, gardener	Urban Texas and California
	#03	66	Community college	Airport skycap	Small-town and urban Texas

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

- Eight English-speaking, White women, living in urban Texas
- Four with aphasia (APH), non-Wernicke’s, of varying severity

	Age	Education	Occupation	Where raised?	Aphasia severity (Kertesz, 1982)	
C-APH	#35	64	High school	Sales	Small-town Texas	Moderate-severe
	#11	74	High school	Baker	Small-town Texas	Moderate
	#29	43	Trade school	Sales	Small-town Ohio	Mild-moderate
	#37	48	Some college	Sales, hotel management	Urban Missouri, Texas, Kansas	Mild-moderate

- Four with no aphasia (non-brain-injured, NBI)

	Age	Education	Occupation	Where raised?	
C-NBI	#08	67	Community college	Legal secretary	Small-town and urban Texas
	#13	49	Community college	Administrative assistant	Small-town and urban U.S. East Coast
	#17	67	Trade school	Licensed vocational nurse	Urban Texas
	#18	40	Community college	Waitress, bookkeeper, photographer	Urban Texas, Alabama, Louisiana

n.b. Six White narrators were self-reported practicing Protestants or Catholics.

### Narrative theme

Personal narrative of a frightening experience told in conversation, as part of larger clinical discourse interview

“...Think of a time when you were frightened or scared.”  
“What happened?”

Interviewers were females, race-matched to narrators

### Narrative data set

Group	Narrator	Narrative topic	Narrative length in propositions	Narrative structure (Setting, complicating event, resolution)
A-APH	#21	Stroke	16	Intact, with hortatory coda on ‘giving thanks to God’
	#17	Car accident	11	Intact, with coda of ‘first fearful event’
	#08	Stroke	17	Intact, with resolution of ‘prayer to Jesus’
A-NBI	#11	Flying in bad weather	12	Intact, with coda of ‘unnerving event’
	#06	Encounter with snake	37	Intact, with resolution of ‘we laughed about it’
	#03	Neighborhood violence	89	Intact, with coda of ‘true story’
	#35	Domestic violence	33	Compromised; unclear setting, no complicating action, repeated climax
C-APH	#11	Divorce, hardship	6	Compromised; no event line, all background info (expository)
	#29	Stroke	17	Intact, with coda of ‘have been getting better’
C-NBI	#37	Neighborhood violence	51	Intact, with resolution of ‘thanks to God’, and coda “It’s a crapshoot”
	#08	Break-in and theft	49	Intact, followed by description of current-day reactions to event
	#13	Tornado	52	Intact , with coda “It was scary”
	#17	Vehicle/car accident	18	Intact
	#18	Tornado	55	Intact, with coda ‘story from childhood’

### Analysis

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

- 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
  - exact repetition: “Uh woman uh um rude. Rude.”
  - parallel structures and expansions: “It was in church .... My stroke hit right here in church.”
  - paraphrase: “He just talked, talked, .... He was always running his mouth.”
- figurative language: “It’s a crapshoot.”

Syntactic

- negation: “I couldn’t use none of it.”

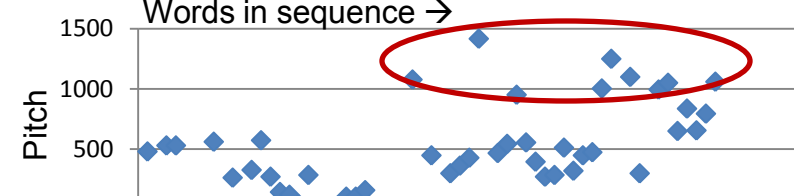
Lexical

- emotive lexicon (c.f Armstrong, 2005) : “petrified,” “crazy,” “idiot”
- intensifiers: “...so calm...” “...all along the street.”
- onomatopoeia: “I hear, Pow!”

Intonational

- Pitch maxima (Wennerstrom, 2001; measured with Pratt software, Boersma,2001)
  - Ten percent of words with highest fundamental frequency (F<sub>0</sub>) values for each narrator; F<sub>0</sub> converted to pitch interval in cents relative to narrator’s lowest F<sub>0</sub> (e.g., 1200 cents = 1 octave above narrator’s lowest pitch), to more closely reflect pitch perception (t’Hart et al. 1990)

“It seem<sup>1298</sup> like it took<sup>1085</sup> forever<sup>1390</sup> to get that plane stopped.”



- Overlap of more than one evaluation type in same proposition

e.g., Negative in direct speech with pitch peak  
“(He) ... says, “Son<sup>1586</sup>, you don’t<sup>1637</sup> need to go out nowhere today.”

- 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-03 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

Evaluative repetition, in some form, was included in all narratives

- Overlap of more than one evaluation type in same proposition \*

All narrators included multiple instances of evaluation overlap in their narratives

APH narrators included fewer types of evaluation overlap in their narratives, as compared to NBI narrators. However:

- Overlaps of pitch maxima with linguistic evaluation were found in all narratives
- Repetition, pitch maxima, or both were included in most types of overlap

A-APH: 90%    A-NBI: 80%    C-APH: 85%    C-NBI: 78%

n.b. Pitch maxima also marked narrative structural transitions in 13/14 narratives (c.f. Wennerstrom, 2001)

- Distribution of evaluation within narrative structure\*

Evaluation was concentrated at the climax of narratives in each group

e.g., A-APH-17: External evaluation, lexical intensifier, pitch maxima  
“That guy run a stop-sign and hit me. And ‘bout to killed<sup>1661</sup> me.”

e.g. A-NBI-03: Direct speech, repetition, pitch maxima  
“And then (he) came out, he, “Say<sup>2782</sup> man<sup>2576</sup>! Say, that<sup>2571</sup> dude<sup>2394</sup> shot<sup>2400</sup>, say that<sup>2461</sup> dude<sup>2450</sup> just<sup>2371</sup> turn<sup>2319</sup> around<sup>2383</sup> and<sup>2307</sup> shot<sup>2586</sup> John<sup>2302</sup> in<sup>2222</sup> the<sup>2222</sup> head<sup>[glottal fry]</sup>.” And we go, “What<sup>2985</sup>!”

e.g. C-APH-29: Repetition, external evaluation, pitch maxima, direct speech  
“So I layed in bed for um three days. And then I had a stroke. Um, um, then they noticed I had stroke. Yeah. Yeah<sup>917</sup>! “Oh<sup>629</sup>! Oh God<sup>749</sup>!””

e.g. C-NBI-18: Lexical evaluation, pitch maxima, repetition  
“And she opened up the door. And the screen<sup>2101</sup> door flew<sup>2249</sup> completely<sup>2149</sup> up against the wall. And everything<sup>2092</sup>, debris, and everything was like flying vertical.”

\* The one exception to the findings marked with \* was the narrative of C-NBI-17, which included only 4 types of evaluation and only one instance of overlap of evaluation types. Notably, her Western Aphasia Battery scores were below the normal cut-off for this test, despite reported normal neurological status and no history of aphasia.

## Discussion

Findings indicate that narrators with aphasia, as compared to narrators with no aphasia, use qualitatively similar evaluation types, and distribute evaluation 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 repetition and evaluative pitch maxima, especially in APH narratives, suggests their potential universality as evaluative devices, although confirmation with other ethnic/gender groups and larger sample sizes is needed. This study also provides evidence for the expression of cultural values, e.g. spirituality, and cultural identity in the form and content of evaluation.

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