THE APPLICATION OF THE LABOVIAN NARRATIVE ANALYSIS TO A SHORT STORY IN AN EFL CLASS

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ABSTRACT: The aim of the linguistic analysis of a text is to draw the student's attention to and to raise his interest in the text's linguistic properties. In order to study on a linguistic model to narrative, we should first fully grasp what "narrative" actually means. While defining narrative, Labov and Waletzky (1967) highlight the concepts of reporting past events and temporal juncture. To them, understanding of the temporal organization and evaluation of narrative are of crucial importance. Toprak (1992) points out that lexical and grammatical aspects and the representation of speech categories form a linguistic analysis. There are several linguists who study the linguistic structure of narrative. Among them is Labov (1972), who acknowledges a six-part analysis of the oral narrative of personal experience: abstract, orientation, complicating action, coda, evaluation, and result or resolution. The present study puts forward that Labov's narrative analysis steps may facilitate reading lessons in EFL classes.

Key Words: narrative analysis, EFL, Labov, short story

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LABOV'UN HİKAYE ANALİZİNİN YABANCI DİL OLARAK İNGİLİZCE DERSİNDE KISA BİR HİKAYEDE UYGULANMASI

ÖZET: Bir metni dilbilimsel olarak analiz etmenin amacı, öğrencinin dikkatini metnin dilbilimsel özelliklerine çekip bu konuda onda merak uyandırmaktır. Bir hikayenin dilbilimsel modeli konusunda çalışmak için, öncelikle "hikaye" kavramını tam olarak anlamamız gerekmektedir. Hikayeyi betimlerken, Labov and Waletzky (1967) geçmiş olayları aktarma ve zamansal uyum kavramlarını ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Yazarlara göre, hikayenin zamansal organizasyonu ve değerlendirmesi kavramlarını anlamak çok önemlidir. Toprak (1992), konuşma kategorilerinin kelime ve dilbilgisel özelliklerinin ve sunulmasının, dilbilimsel analizi şekillendirdiğini belirtmektedir. Hikayenin dilbilimsel yapısını inceleyen birçok dilbilimci bulunmaktadır. Bunlardan birisi olan Labov (1972), kişisel deneyimin sözlü anlatımının incelenmesinde kullanılmak üzere altı maddeden oluşan bir analiz yöntemi önermektedir: özet, oryantasyon, karıştıran eylem, koda, değerlendirme, ve sonuç veya tekrar çözüm. Bu çalışma, Labov'un hikaye analizi aşamalarının yabancı dil olarak İngilizce okuma derslerini zenginleştireceğini önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: hikaye analizi, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, Labov, kısa hikaye

INTRODUCTION

In all societies, experiences and thoughts are often put into words, i.e. narration, which refers to storytelling, both in written and spoken way. It mostly puts light on how people act, feel, and think, and what they value as individuals or as members of a community. Hence, "[t]he ability to narrate has to be seen as a creative artifact and therefore not necessarily a representation of actual events" (Davies, 2005: 99).

There are some definitions of narrative, e.g. Labov and Waletzky (1967), Butor (1969), Labov (1972), and so on. Among them is Schiffrin's (1981: 45) definition which views narrative as "a naturally bound unit of discourse in which both formal and functional aspects of grammatical variation can be examined in a controlled and systematic way". Additionally, Labov (2006) draws attention to that a narrative incorporates events linked causally to each other. This sequence of events signals their re-organization and transformation.

Narrative has been one of the most important subjects in humanistic and social scientific thought since the mid-twentieth century (Johnstone, 2001) because of the above-mentioned reasons. To Babel (2010) and Numanbayraktaroglu (2010), linguistic features play a significant role in a system of social meaning and thus gains meaning in social contexts. What is more, Labov (1997) reports that the issue of narrative analysis is a by-product of the sociolinguistic field methods. As a result of this, narratives have always been the concern of linguists. This interest may depend on two reasons according to Fabb (2001: 460): "The first is that narratives are one of the most common types of verbal behavior, existing not just as literary texts but also in everyday interaction. The second reason is that linguistic form is clearly exploited in narratives, and has some relation to narrative form." In line with this, Stark (2010) highlights the importance of analysis of the content of narratives since it points at how the linguistic domains influence narrative production.

Mishler (1986) acknowledges that Labov and Waletzky (1967) are the first to analyse narratives linguistically, which is a functional process. The field of narrative analysis has developed ever since. For instance, Fludernik (1996) enriches Labov and Waletzky's work by underlining that natural narrative has two basic levels: the communicative level between the speaker and the addressee, and the story level. The first level enables the transition to the proper telling of the story, i.e. to the second level. In this act of speaking, the story is being characterized and the indispensable background for the events that are about to happen is being introduced. Moreover, the conversational exchanges may appear instead of the incident-reaction sequence.

In spite of their success in the field, Schegloff (1997) criticizes Labov and Waletzky (1967) for not dealing with the dynamic co-construction of narratives by the narrator. On the other hand, Labov (2011) also adds some unfamiliar aspects of narrative analysis as follows (pp. 64 – 65):

The <u>insertion</u> of the narrative into the framework of conversational turn-taking by an *abstract*.

The <u>orientation</u> of the listener to the time, place, actors, and activity of the narrative.

The <u>temporal</u> organization of the *complicating action* through the use of temporal juncture.

The differential <u>evaluation</u> of actions by a juxtaposition of real and potential events through the use of irrealis predicates.

The <u>validation</u> of the most reportable event by enhancing credibility through the use of objective witnesses.

The assignment of praise or blame for the reportable events by the **integration** or **polarization** of participants.

The **explanation** of the narrative through a chain of causal relations from the most reportable event to the orientation.

The transformation of the narrative in the interests of the narrator through deletion objective events and insertion of subjective events.

The termination of the narrative by returning the time frame to the present through the use of a **coda**.

The literature includes various studies (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Schegloff, 1997; Labov, 1997; and so on) on the analysis of spoken narratives, either in the form of conversation or interview. Labov (1997) finds Labov and Waletzky's (1967) framework of narrative analysis, which deals with temporal organization and evaluation of narrative, useful for a great amount of narrative situations and types ranging from oral memories to traditional folk tales to avant garde novels among many others. In spite of these developments in the field of narrative analysis, Labov's (1972) model still keeps its significance as Masuda (2002) suggests. For these reasons, we suggest that Labov and Waletzky's (1967) narrative analysis model, later developed by Labov (1972), may also be applied to written narratives, which is quite rare if any.

A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS THROUGH A LINGUISTIC MODEL

As mentioned earlier, there are several definitions of narrative which are very close to each other. While Butor (1969) views narrative as a significant part of understanding reality, Labov (1972) differs narrative from any talk about the past or events and match it with paradigmatic in that the narrator transfers experience to the audience. In this sense, to be narrative, talk should embed a sequence of clauses matching a sequence of real events. Additionally, the Labov

and Waletzky's (1967) analysis introduces narrative as a way to report past events by means of temporal juncture, and to help understand the temporal organization and evaluation of narrative.

Linguists such as Labov and Waletzky (1967), Pratt (1977), Polanyi (1978; 1981), Tannen (1979), Schiffrin (1981), and Heath (1983), studied the linguistic structure of narrative. However, we make use of Labov (1972), which is still very functional since it handles narrative through very concise steps, which are given in details below.

Labov produced his essay in 1972 as a developed version of Labov and Waletzky (1967), in which the first steps in narrative analysis were suggested as a by-product of the sociolinguistics. It is impossible to disagree with Toolan (1988) when he implies that Labov (1972) draws particular attention to this by-product as his work includes the Labovian six-part analysis of the oral narrative of personal experience, and seems to underline the structures of many literary narratives too. Also, Toprak (1992) supposes that the aim of such a linguistic analysis of a text is to make the reader (particularly the student) focus on the text's linguistic aspects.

With special reference to Labov (1972, 1997), the six-part structure of a fully formed oral narrative may be posited as:

- **Abstract:** What, in a nutshell, is this story about?
- **Orientation:** Who, when, where, what?
- **Complicating action:** Then what happened?
- **Evaluation:** So what, how is this interesting?
- **Result or resolution:** What finally happened?
- **Coda:** That's it, I've finished and am 'bridging' back to our present situation.

Atkinson (1995) comments on Labov's evaluative model of narrative events with regard to such dimensions as: abstract, orientation (locating in time and place), complication (what happened), evaluation (how speaker views the events; conveying the point of narrative), result (resolution), and coda (optional - closing summary).

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The following part deals with more detailed commentaries on the six structural parts of Labov's linguistic model in order to help the students see how language works. In this process, a short story (SS) entitled 'Charles' by Shirley Jackson is referred to. We suggest that this analysis may be employed to enhance EFL reading classes.

Although there are lots of lines within the story to analyse in terms of the Labovian model, only some samples are dealt with in each narrative structure. In each sample, related words are underlined.

LABOV'S LINGUISTIC MODEL TO NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

The following definitions related to the structural types are suggested by Labov (1997).

Abstract

'An abstract is an initial clause in a narrative that reports the entire sequence of events of the narrative' (Ibid. pp. 4-5).

Parallel to Labov's definition, Johnstone (2001) views the abstract as the summary of a narrative available at the beginning of the story. Pratt (1977) and Toprak (1992) take a further step in their definition that the abstracts of most of the written narratives are minimally summarised in their titles.

Accordingly, our selection of narrative is about Charles, as the title indicates. Related to Labov's (1972) definition of abstract, this narrative is about a kindergarten boy called Laurie, who calls himself Charles while telling his parents about the bad things he does at school. This information gives the entire sequence of the events in the story.

The reader understands from the very opening paragraph of the story (Lines: 1 – 4) that it is about a kindergarten boy: "The day my son Laurie started kindergarten he renounced corduroy overalls with bibs and began wearing blue jeans with a belt; I watched him go off the first morning with the older girl next door, seeing clearly that an era of my life was ended, my sweet-voiced nursery-school tot replaced by a long-trousered, swaggering character who forgot to stop at the corner and wave good-bye to me."

Orientation

'An orientation clause gives information on the time, the place of the events of a narrative, the identities of the participants and their initial behaviour' (Labov, 1997: 5).

While Toolan (1988) connects orientation with the setting because it highlights the participants, place and time of the narrative, Johnstone (2001) informs that the orientation, not necessarily but, may take place near the beginning of the narrative.

Judging the definitions of orientation given above, orientation refers to the setting. Therefore, what we should do here is to deal with the narrator(s), the characters, time, and place.

With regard to the country where the events take place, it may be predicted from the proper names mentioned such as Laurie, Charles – as seen in the title and in the very opening sentence, that it is an English-speaking country. It is probably America in evidence with the author's being American and with such words as 'color' – uttered by Laurie – instead of 'colour' in line 28, and 'Pop' – uttered by Laurie again – instead of 'father' in line 47, and, finally, 'maneuvred' – uttered by the "I" narrator-author – instead of 'manoeuvred' in line 113. It is also difficult to be definite in terms of the year when the story takes place. Instead, some ambiguous time expressions are used such as 'the first morning' of the kindergarten (Line: 2), and 'the third and fourth weeks' (Line: 75), which may refer to autumn.

There are two narrators in this narrative: Laurie, a participant, and his mother, the "I" narrator-author. Laurie tells what he does at school by accusing a mock – character called Charles. He does this in terms of having dialogues with his parents mostly at lunch - so probably - in the kitchen at home, and sometimes at the entrance to their house at lunchtime again. This is seen in the following lines: 'At <u>lunch</u> he spoke insolently to his father, spilled his baby-sister's milk, and remarked that his teacher said we were not to take the name of the Lord in vain.' (Line: 7 – 8); 'The next day Laurie remarked at <u>lunch</u>, as soon as he sat down, "Well, Charles was bad again today."' (Lines: 21 – 22); and '"Charles," he shouted as he came up the hill; I was waiting anxiously <u>on the front steps</u>. "Charles," Laurie yelled all the way up the hill, "Charles was bad again." "Come right in" I said, as soon as he came close enough. '<u>Lunch</u> is waiting.'" (Lines: 39 – 42)

His mother, the "I" narrator-author, tells the story by means of two different ways: she tells the happenings and her feelings concerning them by addressing the reader directly, and shares some of her feelings in the dialogues she has with her son, husband and her son's teacher. The former way is seen in lines 1 – 4, which takes place on the first day of kindergarten – probably – in front of their house: 'The day my son Laurie started kindergarten he renounced corduroy overalls with bibs and began wearing blue jeans with a belt; I watched him go off the <u>first morning</u> with the older girl next door, seeing clearly that an era of my life was ended, my sweet-voiced nursery-school tot replaced by a long-trousered, swaggering character who forgot to stop <u>at the corner</u> and wave good-bye to me.' while the latter, which takes place at lunch time in the kitchen at home, is seen in line 42: '"Come right in," I said, as soon as he came close enough. <u>Lunch</u> is waiting.', and lines 55 – 56: '"Charles's mother?' my husband and I asked simultaneously. "Naaah," Laurie said scornfully.'

She has a conversation with the teacher at the second meeting – probably at school – one evening in the fifth week of school, which is clear in line 75: 'During <u>the third and fourth weeks</u> it looked like a reformation with Charles.', and line 87: '"The PTA meeting's <u>next week</u> again," I told my husband one evening.', and lines 103 – 104: 'My husband came to the door with me that <u>evening</u> as I set out for <u>the PTA meeting</u>. "Invite her over for a cup of tea after the meeting," he said. "I want to get a look at her."', and lines 111 – 113: "After the meeting I identified and sought out

Laurie's kindergarten <u>teacher</u>. She had a plate with a cup of tea and a piece of chocolate cake; I had a plate with a cup of tea and a piece of marshmallow cake. <u>We</u> maneuvred up to one another cautiously, and smiled."

In terms of orientation, this narrative does not include any explicit information about any physical description of the characters. That's why it can be considered as having a medias res opening, which means that orientation is interwoven with the narrative information (Pratt, 1977). Of the participants, Laurie may be predicted to be about six when the kindergarten starts, and changes into a naughty boy judging by the bad things the mock-character Charles, in fact, Laurie himself, does throughout the story.

Everything we know about the mother, the "I" narrator-author, is that she is interested in her child, and a bit anxious about him. The evidence for this is given in the following lines: '"<u>How</u> was school today?" I asked, elaborately causal' (Line: 9), and 'On Saturday I remarked to my husband, "Do you think kindergarten is <u>too</u> unsettling for Laurie? <u>All</u> this toughness, and bad grammar, and this Charles boy sounds like such a bad influence."' (Lines: 35 – 36)

What can be said about the father is that he is trying to be interested in his son and is calmer when compared to the mother as evidenced by the following lines: '"<u>Invite</u> her over for a cup of tea after the meeting," he said. "I want to get a look at her."' (Lines: 103 – 104), which he utters instead of going to the meeting himself; and to the mother's anxious question about Laurie and kindergarten, he just says: 'It'll be <u>alright</u>.' (Line: 37). All we know about Laurie's sister, a minor character, is that she is quite little judging by '..., spilled his <u>baby</u> sister's milk, ...' in line 7; and about the teacher is that she is a woman and also a patient teacher '"We had a little trouble adjusting, the first week or so," <u>she</u> said primly, "<u>but</u> now he's a fine little helper. With casual lapses, of course."' (Lines: 117 – 118)

We also have another minor character who is a girl older than Laurie – so, probably a primary school student – but we know nothing about her name or physical appearance (Line: 2).

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Complicating Action

"A clause of complicating action is a sequential clause that reports the next event in response to a potential question, 'And what happened [then]?' " (Labov, 1997: 5). It builds tension to keep the audience listening (Johnstone, 2001).

The complicating action in this narrative is revealed mostly in Laurie's narration of the happenings at school. Most of them are about what happened to "Charles" when he behaved badly at school while some refer to what "Charles" did in response to the teacher's action. The following lines illustrate this point: '"He was <u>fresh</u>. The teacher <u>spanked</u> him and <u>made him stand</u> in a corner. He was awfully fresh."' (Lines: 17 – 18), and 'He grinned enormously and said, "Today Charles <u>hit the teacher</u>."' (Line: 22), which is followed by '"Because she tried to <u>make him</u> color with red crayons," Laurie said. "Charles wanted to color with green crayons so he hit the teacher and she spanked him and said nobody play with Charles but everybody did."' (Line: 28 – 30).

Meanwhile, there is another complicating action which happens in the feelings of the mother, the "I" narrator-author. After hearing too much about the naughtiness of "Charles", she begins to see Charles as an 'institution in our family' (Line: 70). All the troubles within the family remind her of that Charles boy.

Evaluation

"Evaluation of a narrative event is information on the consequences of the event for human needs and desires" (Labov, 1997: 5). Johnstone (2001) acknowledges that it often comes before the result or resolution and consists of clauses highlighting the interesting or unusual events. It makes the teller keep talking and the audience keep listening.

What a narrator has to do is to evaluate events by comparing them with the ones in an alternative reality that was not in fact realized. The references to events that did not occur, might have occurred, or would occur, serve an evaluative

purpose. They are the comparatives, modals, negatives, futures, and superlative phrases. The use of simile or metaphor also shows evaluation, when these occur in narrative clauses (Labov and Waletzky, 1967).

As Labov (1972) notes, an evaluative clause causes suspense, pauses the narrative, and heightens the listener's interest. Our evaluation shapes our plot. The following extracts are discussed in accordance with Toolan (1988) based on the comments of Labov (1972), who divides evaluation into two as internal and external.

Extracts	Labov's Observation
'I watched him go off the first morning with the <u>older</u> girl next door, <u>seeing</u> clearly that an era of my life was ended, my sweet voiced nursery-school tot replaced by a long-trousered, <u>swaggering</u> character who forgot to stop at the corner and wave good-bye to me.' (Lines: 2 – 4)	Comparative phrases refer to an internal evaluation. This brings 'together events in a single independent clause,' and emphasizes 'simultaneity of occurrences of actions.' (Toolan, 1988: 161)
'My <u>sweet-voiced</u> <u>nursery-school</u> tot replaced by a <u>long-trousered</u>, <u>swaggering</u> character who forgot to stop at the corner and wave good-bye to me.' (Lines: 3 – 4)	Gerunds refer to internal evaluations. (ibid: 160) Double attributes refer to internal evaluations. 'These bring together events in a single independent clause,' and emphasizes 'simultaneity of occurrences of actions.' (ibid: 161)
'<u>Isn't</u> anybody here?' (Line: 6)	Negatives refer to internal evaluations. 'These evaluate indirectly, by drawing attention away from what actually happened by alluding to what might have been, what could be, but what doesn't happen.' (ibid: 160)
'"<u>Charles</u>", he shouted as he came up the hill; I was waiting on the front steps. "<u>Charles</u>," Laurie yelled all the way up the hill, "<u>Charles</u> was bad again."' (Lines: 39 – 41)	Repetitions refer to internal evaluations. (ibid: 160)
'"What <u>did</u> he <u>do</u>?" I asked again, but Laurie <u>slid</u> off his chair, <u>took</u> a cookie, and <u>left</u>, <u>while</u> his father was still saying, "<u>See</u> here, young man."' (Lines: 19 – 20)	Double appositives refer to internal evaluations. 'These bring together events in a single independent clause, and emphasizes simultaneity of occurrences of actions.' (ibid: 161)
'"<u>Do</u> you <u>think</u> kindergarten is too unsettling for Laurie?"' (Line: 35)	Questions refer to internal evaluations. (ibid: 160)
'"It'<u>ll</u> be alright," my husband said reassuringly.' (Line: 37)	Future sentences refer to internal evaluations. 'These evaluate indirectly, by drawing attention away from what actually happened by alluding to what might have been, what could be, but what doesn't happen.' (ibid: 160)
'On Friday Charles stayed after school again and so did <u>all</u> the other children.' (Lines: 68 – 69)	Exaggerating qualifiers refer to internal evaluations. (ibid: 160) 'Wholly external evaluations' refer to external

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'With the third week of kindergarten Charles was an institution in our family; the baby was being a Charles when she cried all afternoon; Laurie did a Charles when he filled his wagon full of mud and pulled it through the kitchen; even my husband, when he caught his elbow in the telephone cord and pulled telephone, ashtray, and a bowl of flowers off the table, said, after the first minute, "Looks like Charles."' (Lines: 70 – 74)

'"Wait and see," my husband <u>said</u> cynically.' (Line: 84)

'His father bent his head down and Laurie whispered joyfully. His father's eyes <u>widened</u>. (Lines: 95 – 96)

'"<u>If only</u> she is there," I said prayerfully.' (Line: 105)

evaluations. 'Here the narrator breaks the frame of the story telling itself to address the listener directly, interrupting the narrative to express a speaker's current or still - valid general evaluation of the distant events.' (ibid: 156), and they 'involve a temporary suspension of the action.' (ibid: 157)

Comments of another participant refer to external evaluations. 'Here the narrator breaks the frame of the story telling itself to address the listener directly, interrupting the narrative to express a speaker's current or still - valid general evaluation of the distant events.' (ibid: 156), and they 'involve a temporary suspension of the action.' (ibid: 157)

Gestures refer to internal evaluations. (ibid: 160)

Conditionals refer to internal evaluations. (ibid: 160). They put forward possibilities in a hypothetical way. (Pratt, 1977: 66)

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It is remarkable that evaluation occurred anywhere in the narrative. That is why MacIntyre (1973) proposes that evaluation is an obligation since it makes a bad or good character help to produce unfortunate or fortunate, unhappy or happy outcomes anywhere in the narrative.

Result or Resolution

Labov (1997: 12) states that 'the resolution of a personal narrative is the set of complicating actions that follow the most reportable event.' While Labov and Waletzky (1967) consider the resolution of a narrative as simply the ending, in Johnstone's (2001: 638) words, "[t]he result or resolution releases the tension and tells what finally happened."

It starts, in our narrative, from line 111 which answers the essential question for a resolution, i.e. 'What finally happened?' The "I" narrator-author, Laurie's mother, and his teacher come together and have a conversation which makes it clear that, in fact, there is no one called Charles in the kindergarten, and implies that Laurie was, himself, the problem at school.

The reader learns all this from lines 111 to 122, especially focusing on the teacher's sentences in lines 117 – 118, '"We had a little trouble adjusting, the first week or so," she said primly, "but now he is a fine little helper. With occasional lapses, of course."' and in line 122, '"Charles?" she said. 'We don't have any Charles in the kindergarten.

Coda

"A coda is a final clause which returns the narrative to the time of speaking, precluding a potential question, 'And what happened then?' " (Labov, 1997: 5). To Toolan (1988), a coda declares the end of the narrative, and makes it impossible and absurd to ask 'And then what happened?' It signals the end of the story, and thus, takes place at the end of the narrative (Johnstone, 2001). It enables the narrator to make a connection to the present. In other words, the narrator stops telling about what happened in the past and brings the audience to the present time (Toprak, 1997).

There are no lines in our narrative including any evidence to be the coda(s) of it. That is to say, there are no clues in this narrative in which the narrator stops reporting the event(s) which happened in the past and brings the audience to the present time. The coda may be referred to as an optional step to enrich narration.

CONCLUSION

In the previous section, a short story has been analysed to find out how language works in a narrative by means of applying Labovian linguistic model. In this process, six steps were handled: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result or resolution, and coda. The abstract aims to help the students learn how to appreciate what the text they are involved in is about. In other words, it signals the topic sentence which gives an overall message of the whole narrative. The orientation gives them a general idea about how to deal with the narrator(s), characters, time, and place, i.e. the setting itself. In this way, they will be able to understand the ingredients of the text easily. In complicating action, they have an idea about the interaction between the events. Namely, they raise awareness as to how to sequence a set of sentences to make up a meaningful story. The evaluation is the main section which teaches them how language works in terms of lexical and grammatical aspects, i.e. the comparatives, modals, negatives, futures, superlative phrases, and the use of simile or metaphor. By means of the result or resolution they learn how to decide how a text gets an end. Finally, the coda teaches them how to bridge the gap between the current place in the narrative and its beginning.

It is easy for anybody to understand an EFL text in details by analysing it in relation to the steps, whose advantages are summarised above. After such a study incorporated into an EFL reading class, the students will learn how to taste a narrative, how to read vividly and usefully, and how to raise language awareness as well as narrative appreciation. Additionally, as a post-reading activity, the students may be assigned with writing stories by following the Labov's framework.

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