

Introduction

Stories or *narratives* are a common discourse genre embedded in everyday conversation (Norrick, 2010). It has been proposed that a key function of narrative—perhaps the very driving force behind its existence—is to convey one’s point of view, attitude, or opinion about the event being narrated (Labov, 1972; Polanyi, 1989). This *transmission of significance*, i.e., the expression of the author’s stance on the ‘so what’ of the narrated event, is achieved through a process of (*narrative*) *evaluation*, and the linguistic and paralinguistic means of evaluation are termed *evaluative devices* (Labov, 1972). Evaluative devices appear to work in concert to selectively highlight or add prominence to information in the narrative (Polanyi, 1989; Olness et al., 2010). Notably, an evaluative device is not inherently evaluative, but rather becomes evaluative when its frequency of use departs from the baseline frequency of use of that device in preceding utterances (Polanyi, 1989, p. 22).

Clinical research on narrative evaluation may illuminate the mechanisms behind the paradoxical reality that speakers with aphasia are often better communicators than they are language users (Holland, 1977). Recent studies present evidence that the categories, distribution, and semantic coherence of evaluative devices may be comparable for speakers with and without aphasia, even when the referential content of the aphasic speakers’ narratives is not clear (Olness et al., 2010; Olness & Englebretson, In press). Clinical case data discussed by Nespoulous et al. (1998) similarly suggest that speakers with aphasia may be better at using language for the purpose of conveying the speaker’s personal attitude, than they are at using language referentially.

At the same time, the presence of aphasia in the narrator may place certain bounds on the use of evaluative devices. For instance, it has been found that certain evaluative devices are used by a lower proportion of speakers with aphasia, as compared to speakers without aphasia (Olness et al., 2010). Also, for narrators with relatively severe aphasia, evaluation may be all-pervasive throughout the discourse (Olness et al., 2010), a finding consistent with the observation of high frequency of use of single evaluative devices, such as direct speech, in the narratives of speakers with aphasia (Berko-Gleason et al., 1980). A too-pervasive use of evaluative devices would not allow the speaker to establish a baseline frequency of non-use, which ironically is the very baseline that allows the device(s) to fill their evaluative function in the first place (Polanyi, 1989, p. 22).

The current study extends prior research on aphasic narrators’ use of evaluative devices (Olness et al. 2010; Olness in press). Unlike earlier studies, the current study samples across multiple narrative elicitation tasks, many of which have been traditionally used in clinical practice, and which may vary in their ability to elicit evaluative language. It also specifically examines evaluative devices which may differ in frequency of use by speakers with aphasia as compared to speakers without aphasia. Finally, participants were selected to be ethnically homogenous, to control for the potential effects of ethnicity on the use of evaluative devices.

Method

Participants/interviewees

Participants were 39 English-speaking African-American (A) adults: Of these, twenty-one had aphasia (APH) associated with a history of left-hemisphere stroke, and eighteen had no neurological disorder or injury (NBI). Age, gender, education, and socioeconomic status of the two clinical groups are comparable. (See Table 1.) A range of aphasia severity levels was represented. (See Table 2.)

Narrative tasks

All participants were interviewed individually by a female interviewer, race-matched to the narrators. Tasks were selected based on their potential to elicit a narrative discourse genre. The five task types represent different points on a hypothesized continuum from those least likely to evoke an opinion, attitude, or stance from the narrator (and thus to elicit evaluative devices), to those most likely to do so, in order: retells of two stories presented verbally and in print; tellings of two stories based on a picture sequence; completion of a story for which only the setting and complicating action were provided; three stories told in response to single pictures; and two personal narratives.

Analysis

For each participant, responses to each task were categorized as either narrative or non-narrative, and non-narrative response were excluded from further analysis to assure genre homogeneity of the analyzed samples. For each response, individual propositions were identified and counted.

For each proposition, instances of each of seven evaluative devices occurring within that proposition were identified. These evaluative device categories were selected from a larger set of evaluative devices, based on prior evidence suggesting differences in the number of speakers with and without aphasia who use them. (See Appendix.)

For each narrative, the percentage of propositions that contained each evaluative device type was calculated.

Results

Complete data from 3 participants have been analyzed to date: one with moderate aphasia (A-APH26); one with mild-moderate aphasia (A-APH17) and one non-brain-injured (A-NBI06). (See Table 3.) Effects of aphasia and task were examined for their potential effect on the presence and percentage use of the seven evaluative devices.

Effects of aphasia

The individual with moderate aphasia did not use four of the seven evaluative devices (modals, expressive, “like/as” and idioms), and the mild-moderate aphasic and non-aphasic participants used each evaluative device at least once. Percentage use of direct speech was highest in the individual with moderate aphasia.

Effects of task

Across the three participants, there is no consistent effect of task type on the number of different evaluative device types used. All task responses displayed at least one evaluative device. The number of different evaluative devices used per task ranged from one to seven, but those tasks with the highest and lowest number of different devices was not consistent across subjects.

Interactions of task and aphasia

There were only two participants for whom a given evaluative device was produced at least once on every task: direct speech was used in responses to all tasks by the individual with moderate aphasia, and attributives were used in responses to all tasks by the individual with no aphasia.

Statistics

For analysis of the full data set, statistics will be selected for their ability to account, both descriptively and inferentially, for the effects of aphasia presence, aphasia severity, task, and aphasia-by-task on the use of the seven categories of evaluative devices.

Discussion

Narrators have a variety of evaluative devices to choose from to selectively add prominence to information in their stories. The current study is designed to examine how the presence and severity of aphasia and the type of discourse elicitation task may affect the use of evaluative devices, which are the tools essential for the function of *transmitting significance* of narrative content.

Findings hold implications for the assessment of *narrative evaluation*, namely, identification of those evaluative devices that are likely to be effectively used by individuals with aphasia, thus contributing to aphasic speakers' communicative competence; those that are least likely to be used, and are thus unlikely to contribute substantially to narrative evaluation; and those that may be overused, such as direct speech, thus detracting from their use as evaluative devices proper. Findings may further suggest those tasks that are optimal for the assessment of narrative evaluation, although analysis of the larger data set will be necessary to draw any inferences about these task effects.

References

- Berko-Gleason, J., Goodglass, H., Obler, L., Green, E., Hyde, M. R., & Weintraub, B. (1980). Narrative strategies of aphasic and normal speaking subjects. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 30, 370–382.
- Featherman, D. L., & Stevens, G. A. (1980). *A revised socioeconomic index of occupational status: Center for Demography and Ecology working paper 79-84*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin.
- Holland, A. (1977). Some practical considerations in aphasia rehabilitation. In M. Sullivan & M.S. Kommers (Eds.), *Rationale for adult aphasia therapy* (pp. 167-180). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Medical Center Print Shop.
- Kertesz, A. (1982). *The Western Aphasia Battery*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city: Studies in the black English vernacular*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Nespoulous, J.-L., Code, C., Virbel, J., & Lecours, A. R. (1998). Hypotheses on the dissociation between “referential” and “modalizing” verbal behavior in aphasia. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 19, 311-331.
- Norrick, N. R. (2010). *Conversational narrative: Storytelling in everyday talk* (Paperback edition). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Olness, G. S., & Englebretson, E. (In press). On the coherence of information highlighted by narrators with aphasia. *Aphasiology*.
- Olness, G. S., Matteson, S. E., & Stewart, C. T. (2010). “Let me tell you the point”: How speakers with aphasia assign prominence to information in narratives. *Aphasiology*, 24, 697-708.
- Polanyi, L. (1989). *Telling the American story: A structural and cultural analysis of conversational storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.

Table 1: Gender, age, highest education level attained, and socioeconomic status of participants (2 clinical groups of African American adults)

| <i>Participant group</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>Gender</i> | | <i>Age (in years)</i> | | <i>Highest education level attained</i> | | <i>Socioeconomic status (maximum = 7)</i> | |
|--------------------------|----------|---------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|---|--------------|---|--------------|
| | | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Median</i> | <i>Range</i> | <i>Median</i> | <i>Range</i> | <i>Median</i> | <i>Range</i> |
| African-American adults | 39 | 15 | 24 | | | | | | |
| With aphasia | 21 | 9 | 12 | 56 | 33-74 | 3 | 2-7 | 4 | 2-7 |
| Without aphasia | 18 | 6 | 12 | 54 | 44-71 | 4 | 1-7 | 4 | 2-7 |

Highest education level attained is specified ordinally by number; 1=less than 12th grade, 2=high school graduate, 3=community college or trade school, 4=some college, 5=four-year college graduate, 6=some graduate school, 7=graduate school graduate

Socio-economic rating was adapted from Featherman & Stephens (1980); higher numbers reflect higher socioeconomic status.

Table 2: WAB-AQ scores, and corresponding aphasia severity of APH participants

| <i>Participants</i> | <i>WAB-AQ (max = 100)</i> | <i>Aphasia severity</i> |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| A-APH04 | 59.5 | Moderate |
| A-APH21 | 53.8 | Moderate |
| A-APH22 | 50.1 | Moderate |
| A-APH26 | 50.4 | Moderate |
| A-APH27 | 52.4 | Moderate |
| A-APH08 | 77.2 | Mild-Moderate |
| A-APH10 | 80.8 | Mild-Moderate |
| A-APH17 | 74.8 | Mild-Moderate |
| A-APH23 | 80.4 | Mild-Moderate |
| A-APH03 | 92 | Mild |
| A-APH11 | 89.2 | Mild |
| A-APH14 | 90.5 | Mild |
| A-APH15 | 93.1 | Mild |
| A-APH18 | n.a. | Mild |
| A-APH28 | 93.4 | Mild |
| A-APH30 | 87.1 | Mild |
| A-APH32 | 93.6 | Mild |
| A-APH33 | 90.2 | Mild |
| A-APH09 | 99.7 | Very Mild |
| A-APH25 | 98.8 | Very Mild |
| A-APH29 | 95.1 | Very Mild |
| A-NBI (<i>n</i> = 18) | All > 98.2 | ----- |

n.a.= Test scores not available. Aphasia severity judged from spontaneous speech.

Table 3: Percentage of propositions containing evaluative devices, by task and device type, for three participants

| Task type | Stimulus | Evaluative Device Type | | | | | | | Number of propositions |
|---------------------------------------|----------|------------------------|--------|---------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--------|------------------------|
| | | attributives | modals | direct speech | predicate modifiers | expressive nominals and verbals | “like/as” (non-metaphorical) | idioms | |
| Moderate aphasia: A-APH26 | | | | | | | | | |
| Retell | F&S | 24% | 0% | 57% | 10% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 21 |
| Retell | Starfish | 4% | 0% | 36% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 25 |
| Picture seq. | B&A | 0% | 0% | 63% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 19 |
| Picture seq. | C/T | 0% | 0% | 29% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 21 |
| Completion | Mrs. W. | 0% | 0% | 45% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 11 |
| Single pict. | D/T/A | 8% | 0% | 40% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 25 |
| Single pict. | EM | 16% | 0% | 12% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 25 |
| Single pict. | FloodR | 12% | 0% | 18% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 17 |
| Personal narr. | FE | 10% | 0% | 10% | 5% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 20 |
| Personal narr. | SO | 6% | 0% | 53% | 6% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 32 |
| Mild-moderate aphasia: A-APH17 | | | | | | | | | |
| Retell | F&S | 8% | 31% | 23% | 23% | 0% | 8% | 0% | 13 |
| Retell | Starfish | na | na | na | na | na | na | na | na |
| Picture seq. | B&A | 22% | 0% | 0% | 33% | 0% | 11% | 0% | 9 |
| Picture seq. | C/T | 38% | 0% | 0% | 8% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 13 |
| Completion | Mrs. W. | 45% | 0% | 0% | 36% | 36% | 0% | 9% | 11 |
| Single pict. | D/T/A | 27% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 11 |
| Single pict. | EM | 0% | 14% | 0% | 14% | 0% | 14% | 14% | 7 |
| Single pict. | FloodR | 57% | 14% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 7 |
| Personal narr. | FE | 0% | 12% | 25% | 37% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 8 |
| Personal narr. | SO | 0% | 0% | 19% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 16 |
| No aphasia: A-NBI06 | | | | | | | | | |
| Retell | F&S | 18% | 6% | 15% | 6% | 6% | 0% | 0% | 34 |
| Retell | Starfish | 50% | 0% | 27% | 14% | 4% | 0% | 4% | 22 |
| Picture seq. | B&A | 15% | 0% | 0% | 4% | 0% | 0% | 4% | 27 |
| Picture seq. | C/T | 22% | 4% | 11% | 22% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 27 |
| Completion | Mrs. W. | 13% | 22% | 22% | 9% | 17% | 13% | 0% | 23 |
| Single pict. | D/T/A | 21% | 0% | 0% | 7% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 14 |
| Single pict. | EM | 10% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 20 |
| Single pict. | FloodR | 9% | 0% | 18% | 18% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 11 |
| Personal narr. | FE | 8% | 0% | 32% | 5% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 37 |
| Personal narr. | SO | 16% | 3% | 35% | 6% | 3% | 3% | 1% | 103 |

na = data not available (participant not tested on this task)

Appendix

This appendix contains examples of the seven narrative evaluative devices included in the analysis. These were selected from a larger set of evaluative devices (Olness et al., 2010), to represent those whose frequency of use may be different for speakers with aphasia, as compared to speakers without aphasia.

| <u>Evaluative device type</u> | <u>Hypothesized frequency of use by speakers with aphasia, as compared to speakers without aphasia (Olness et al., 2010; Berko-Gleason et al., 1980)</u> | <u>How this evaluative device is purported to function (Olness et al., 2010)</u> | <u>Example</u> |
|---------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Attributives | Less frequent | By intensifying information; associated with adjectives | <i><u>petrified</u>; <u>crazy</u>: You're in a strange theatre...and here sit...<u>10, 12</u> boys...</i> |
| Modals | Less frequent | Through use of irrealis; mention of unrealized events | <i>They <u>could</u>'ve killed her. And they <u>had to</u> come get me.</i> |
| Direct speech | More frequent | By slowing or suspending the narrative event line, and increasing "vividness" | <i>He said, "It's <u>important</u>." I go, "Say man! John sit down!"</i> |
| Predicate modifiers | Less frequent | By intensifying information; associated with adverbials | <i><u>so</u> calm; <u>all</u> along the street</i> |
| Expressives (nominal or verbal) | Less frequent | By intensifying information; associated with nouns and verbs | <i>i. nominal: <u>idiot</u> ii. verbal: <u>careened</u></i> |
| "Like/as" (non-metaphorical) | Less frequent | Through comparison with other entities | <i>I knew that my son had not been <u>as</u> active as he had been <u>before</u>.</i> |
| Idioms | Less frequent | Through comparison of metaphorical entities to literal situation | <i><u>Freeze on that</u>. ('don't do that')</i> |