

An Application of Labov's Narrative Structure in Jhumpa Lahiri's "A Choice of Accommodations"

G Sathya¹, Dr. S. Barathi²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, Srinivasa Ramanujan Centre, SASTRA Deemed to be University, Kumbakonam, Tamilnadu.

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Srinivasa Ramanujan Centre, SASTRA Deemed to be University.

Abstract

The present study is an attempt to bring out Lahiri's narrative pattern in her short story "A Choice of Accommodations" by applying William Labov's oral narrative structure. Lahiri is a prolific story teller received many honors from the literary field. Similarly, William Labov, a sociolinguist created a structure to analyse oral narratives of personal experience. The researcher has made an attempt to examine the oral narrative structure in written narrative. Through the analysis the researcher found that it helps the readers and students to do in depth research in short stories. The present study will help the learners to analyse a text in stylistic and linguistic point of view that help them to develop their analytical skills.

Key Words: Narrative, Narrative analysis, William Labov, Narrative structure, Jhumpa Lahiri, Linguistic, and Stylistic

1. Introduction

Short story is a form of literature which is concise and the entire writing could be read at a sitting. Since the short story has limited themes and characters, there are a wide range of readers for this genre. Recently, many writers have focused on short story writing to attract the readers and they have used different narrative styles. In this regard, it is worthwhile to analyse the narrative styles to understand its significance in the success of the writing. The present paper applies Labov's narrative model to Lahiri's short story "A Choice of Accommodations" to identify the unique strategies used by the author that makes her writing a success. The paper also, aims at exploring new tenets in the narrative structure of Lahiri's short stories.

2. Background studies

Lahiri's works were studied in various aspects. For instance, on the basis of thematic, psychological, diaspora, alienation, nostalgic and stylistics. Most of her works were studied from the perspective of diaspora writing. Her novels and other individual stories are based on thematic analysis, cultural studies and, feministic view point. In, "Cultural Dislocation

and Changing Identities in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Lowland" Richa Bijalwan (), focused on the cultural problems of the characters. Deepa Sarabhai (), in "Lexical and Syntactic Study of "Interpreter of Maladies" by Jhumpa Lahiri" deals with syntactic study. It addresses the lexical and syntactic features in Lahiri's work. But, the present study deals with the narrative strands and structure of Lahiri's stories. The researcher has attempted to bridge the gap with William Labov's model as a tool for better comprehension of the story.

2.1. Research gap

In Lahiri's works, it has been found that not much research is done from the view point of narratology. Many researches had been carried out on immigrant sensibilities, quest for identity, familial relationships and other themes. Though, there are a couple of papers that discuss the narratological elements in Lahiri's works, these articles had failed to use a theoretical framework. So, this makes it crucial to analyze Lahiri's works with some theoretical framework.

3. Methodology

William Labov is a sociolinguist and his prototype of a narrative structure has six aspects. They are like a device to the better observant of short stories. Based on his case study, Labov outlined six proportions to analyse every oral narrative. These aspects bring out the overall elements of a tale into focus. The implicit meaning of a text can be brought out through these aspects and also about the language, vocabulary, tense, strategy, etc. The following graphical representation signifies the narrative structure of Jhumpa Lahiri.

3.1. Theory in Detail

In Labov's narrative structure, he has identified the following elements as significant to the narrative:

Abstract gives an overview of the story. **Orientation** describes the time, place, and characters of a narrative. He specifies that these are contextual clues that precede the main story. The sub division **Temporal Organization** deals with the tense used by the author. Backstory provides the details of the characters' past lives. **Complicating Action** discusses the main story, during which the narrative discloses. A story may consist of multiple complication sections. **Most Reportable Event** is a narrative element which disturbs the characters physically and emotionally. **Evaluation** is an aspect where the author evinces self-awareness, giving explicit or implicit purpose to the retelling of the story. Thus evaluation gives some indication of the significance the author attributes to their story. The other narrative element **Reportability** offers the tellability of the narrative. **Causality** reveals the cause and effect of the events. The next element **Viewpoint** focuses the point of view of the story. **Resolution** gives the story a sense of completion and the last aspect **Coda** provides the moral of the story. (Labov, 1967, 2013)

4. Summary of "A Choice of Accommodations"

The story is about Amit and Megan, a couple. Both visited Berkshire to attend the wedding of Amit's schoolmate Pam. The central character of the story is Amit, of Indian origin, who married an American girl. At the wedding

party, Amit revealed that he had loved Pam during their school days. The remaining story revolves around the couple's emotions. Lahiri deals with the relationship between a couples and gives importance to feelings and emotions.

5. Application of Labov's Narrative Structure in the Story

5.1 Abstract

Abstract of the present story lies in the title "A Choice of Accommodations." Labov mentioned that the abstract reveals the story's main points in the opening paragraph. In the present story, the title hints to the readers about the story. As mentioned in the title, selecting accommodation in Berkshire was difficult for a couple named Amit and Megan from New York. They selected Chadwick Inn to stay, but Amit was dissatisfied. The opening paragraph of the story exposes their upset on lodging: "From the outside of the hotel looked promising, like an old ski lodge in the mountains: chocolate brown siding, a steeply pitched roof, red trim around the windows. But as soon as they entered into the lobby of Chadwick Inn, Amit was disappointed" (84). Thus the opening line says that the story is about lodgings. Though Lahiri exposes the accommodation issues, she also pointed out the importance of adjustments in a couple's life.

5.2 Orientation

Lahiri introduces the main characters in the opening paragraph. Amit and Megan, who were visited the Langford Academy to attend Pam's wedding. Eighteen years ago, Amit was graduated from the academy where Pam's father was working as a headmaster. Lahiri mainly focused on Amit and Megan. They are the protagonist, and Lahiri discussed their life events. Other minor characters like Maya and Monika, Amit and Megan, Pam's father, Ted, Tim, Ryon, and Dr. Sarkar helped the narrative provide the causal relationship of events.

The story's events take place in Berkshires, where Amit and Megan went to attend Pam's wedding. The following lines indicate the setting of the story: "But as soon as they entered into the lobby of Chadwick Inn, Amit was disappointed" (84). Chadwick Inn is located in Berkshires. The couple needs a map to know where they are

precise. The upcoming lines evidence that Megan was new to the place: “By the front desk a revolving brass rack filled with tourist brochures about the Berkshires, and Megan grabbed a handful as Amit checked in” (84). So they visited the place to attend the wedding and planned for a week's stay to visit places. They were from New York is known by the following line: “It had been a long drive from New York and Amit was in the mood for a drink” (85).

Lahiri indicates that the events occur in the Langford Academy, where Amit had graduated eighteen years ago. That is why he guided Megan to visit other locations in Langford. He was an immigrant, and his father belonged to New Delhi, India. It is vital to know the details of the setting and characters to interpret the story better.

5.2.1. Temporal Organization

Lahiri narrated the present story in the simple past tense, but she used the past perfect tense to give additional information about the characters' past events. The temporal juncture between past tense and past perfect tense helps the readers understand what happened in the characters' lives before the narrative events. The following example helps to know the backstory of Amit: “They were here for Pam Borden's wedding, which was to take place that evening at Langford Academy, a boarding school where Pam's father was headmaster, and from where Amit had graduated eighteen years ago” (85). In the above lines, the underlined past perfect tense indicates that Amit was an academy's old student. Lahiri used the old school as a setting because to reveal Amit's teenage love affair with Pam. The issue played a vital role in the couple's life.

5.2.2. Backstory

The use of past perfect tense helps to identify the backstory and the important backstories of Lahiri's story wherever necessary. The first backstory reveals that Amit's parents have belonged to India. The following line evidences the information clearly:

His parents had not stayed here for parents' weekends; when Amit was at Langford, they had lived in India, New Delhi. They hadn't made it to his graduation, either. They'd been planning to, but Amit's father, an ophthalmologist at one

of Delhi's best hospitals, was requested to perform cataract surgery on a member of parliament...(86)

The above passage indicates that Amit was from an immigrant family as his father belonged to India. Later they settled in Saudi Arabia. It shows that they never cared about Amit's career in the past. But it revealed how the immigrants survive in alien land.

5.3. Complicating Action

The first complication of this story is the couple's uneasiness in the Chadwick Inn. It was a hotel with inadequate facilities. Amit was disappointed when he entered the hotel. “It's not worth it, just for two nights, “Megan said” (87). They have the habit of staying in hotels, so they expected more rooms than hotels in Puerto Rico and Venice, where they spent their time happily. It is a minor issue Lahiri focused on. She used the complaint to start the narrative.

The next complication is Amit's continually thinking about his daughters. It seems he was thinking about the daughters but not Megan. He worried a lot about the two girls. The following lines expose how to contrast the couple towards the girls:

He sensed Megan's relief at not having Maya and Monika around, at being free. Amit wanted to share that relief, that sense of escape he'd been looking forward to all summer, after the invitation to Pam's wedding had come and they'd made their plan. But now they were alone he has nagged by the thought of Monika's runny nose, and wondered if his mother-in-law would remember that strawberries gave Maya a rash. (89-90)

The above lines indicate that Megan needed freeness with Amit. However, Amit worried about his daughters and their health. During the party, Amit and Megan met many people and enjoyed ourselves a lot. He consumed wine along with other guests. He expressed his wish to call his daughters, but Megan worried about his condition. He promised her that he would manage. But, due to too much liquor, he lost his way back to the party. Then he reached his hotel after many struggles. The next morning, he searched for Megan in the room, but she did not yet return to the hotel. The incident unfolds their strong relationship.

Thus the complications of the present story are ordinary and straightforward. Lahiri discussed the issue of a father's concern towards his daughters and the characters' routine experiences.

5.3.1. The Most Reportable Event

There is no most reportable event in this story. Lahiri narrated the characters' life events artistically. None of the events affected the characters much except the past love affair between Amit and Pam. It slightly off Megan at the end of the story but not reportedly.

5.4. Evaluation

Evaluation helps the story to analyze its reportability and credibility. The credibility in short fiction is not possible since the author includes imaginary events. The complications are not severe in the present story, but it is all help to justify the story's value. The problem of accommodation in the opening of the story is a routine issue challenged by people. In this story, the couple's expectations are reflected in the following lines: "In this case Amit reflected, they were already on the desirable side of the hotel-the rooms at the front would overlook the parking lot" (87). The hopes for better accommodation make the couple think about their previous notions when traveling to Venice and other places. Megan said that the hotel was not worth the money they have paid for it.

The couple sensed a kind of relief without their daughters. However, Amit worried about the daughters' throughout the trip. As a father, he loved and cared for his daughters. On the other hand, as a mother, Megan did not worry about them. The following example shows how practically Megan deals with the situations: "As apparent, she was less fussy, less cautious than he was. On her days off, she indulged them, baking with them in the kitchen, not minding if they skipped dinner because they were too full of cookies and cake" (90). The maturity she got from her profession as she met many people who were fighting for their lives.

Amit left Megan at the party and went to call his daughters. However, he lost the way due to the consumption of alcohol. Then he went to the hotel, and the next morning he realized the events. He searched for Megan and worried about her absence. When he found her, she was angry and blamed him for leaving her at the

party. They blamed each other for their faults. Thus, Lahiri briefly narrated the couple's argument to make the readers follow the story.

5.4.1. Reportability

The most reportable event of the story is Amit's affair with Pam in his school days. But it did not have a profound effect on the central characters. The possessiveness of Megan changed the situation to a peak. But it leads the couple to exchange love at last. Lahiri told an ordinary incident of a couple's life coherently. The narrative moves logically, and she never fails to maintain the readers' interest through her art of characterization.

5.4.2. Causality

The recursive process of the events from the reportable event allows the readers to understand the plot's causal relationship.

The causal relationship of narrative appears in an entirely distinct domain of narrative studies: the exploration of reading comprehension by psychologists following the model developed by Trabasso and colleagues. (28) For them, causal inferences are essential in predicting the listener's comprehension of a narrative. (26)

In the above lines, Labov tinted the importance of the cause and effect link of the story. In the present story, the couple's trip, the wedding ceremony of Pam and Ryon, Amit's love affair with Pam, Amit's drunken attitude, Megan's possessiveness, and at the end, their intimate love are logically arranged. Lahiri's art of characterization is shown in the story. She used numerous characters in the story to clarify the plot in detail.

5.4.3. Viewpoint

Lahiri told the story in the third-person viewpoint. However, she used dialogues in the story narrated by using the pronoun "his". She has chosen Amit to narrate the story to emphasize the Indian diaspora. The readers can interpret the plot from Amit's viewpoint, and it will make them justify the characters. The justification of the characters may vary if the viewpoint is changed.

5.5. Resolution

The reportability and causality of the plot resolve the story's issues and offer solutions

to reach the end of the story. In the present story, the issues are routine and not severe. For instance, the couple's worry about the accommodation in the story's opening is a routine issue that most people are faced. Though they are not comfortable with the hotel, they decided to adjust the problem. But through that, they recalled their past experiences, which support the narrative to form the orientation aspect.

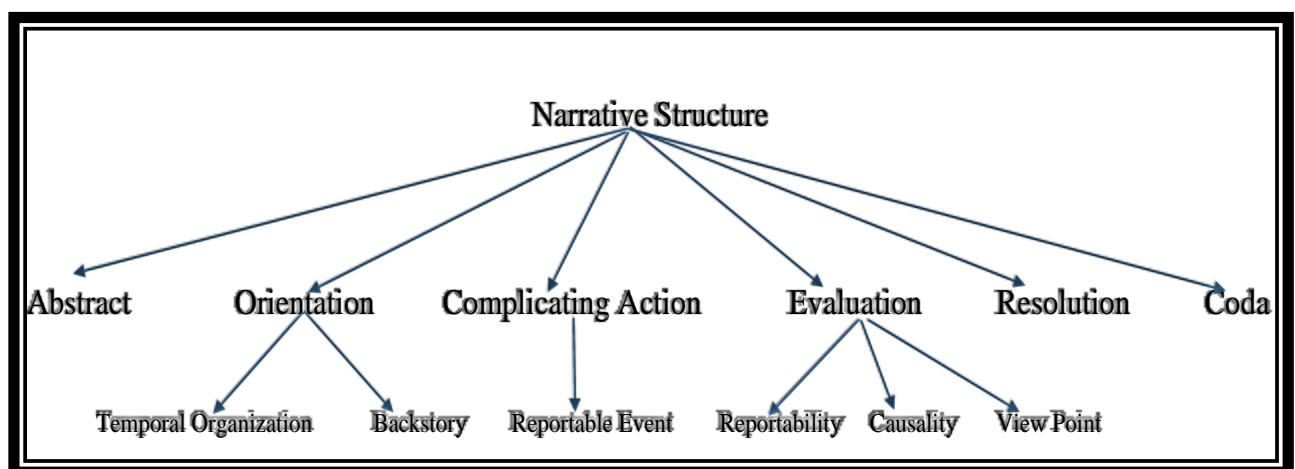
The couples' accommodation problem was solved once they adapted to the hotel. However, they are mentally not prepared for the wedding party. It is because of Amit's remembrances about his daughters. So he decided to call them, so he left Megan at the party and searched for a nearby telephone booth. But he lost his way, so he failed to contact his daughters. Thus the attempt to call his daughters was incomplete. The following lines evidence how eager he was to call his daughters: "He walked outside, to see if maybe there was a phone there. He found nothing. And yet he had

to call the girls, wanted to hear their voices, this was the sole thought in his mind" (116).

Next, Megan's doubt towards Amit and Pam's love affair during their college days is resolved at the end of the story. It was Megan who thought that Amit and Pam had a sexual relationship in the past. It tormented her mind and made her get annoyed with Amit. Her problem resolved when Amit elucidated her doubts. The following lines exemplified how Lahiri turned the situation to a romantic end: "It was nothing, Meg. We were friends and for a while I had a crush on her. But nothing happened" (125). Hence after the compromise, they made love, and the story ends up.

5.6. Coda

The coda plays a vital role in giving a story a satisfactory ending. In this particular story, Lahiri did not mention any cues to derive a moral. However, she discussed a very usual problem of a couple in this story, which helps to bring out her contemporary relevance to the story's reportability.



(Figure 1. Narrative Structure)

6. Conclusion

Thus the above analysis substantiates that Labov's oral narrative structure can be applied in written narratives. The profound analysis also brings out Lahiri's mastery in story telling pattern. As a popular writer, she use to entertain her readers and celebrated by her readers' community.

6.1. Scope for further study

The researcher has analyzed the narrative style of Lahiri and the narrative model

can be applied in other writer's works. Labov's model can also be focused on linguistic point of view to explore new perspectives in narratological study. In future, researchers can apply this model to analyse interviews, anecdotes, plays, and novels.

References

- [1] Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Singapore: Thompson, 1999. Print.

- [2] Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002. Print.
- [3] Diaspora Literature by Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor. (n.d.). Retrieved July 26, 2018, from <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/people/related-articles/diaspora-literature>.
- [4] Hansen, E. (2017, November 21). What Are Narrative Strands? Retrieved July 26, 2018, from <https://penandthepad.com/narrative-strands-12296078.html>.
- [5] *In Other Words* by Jhumpa Lahiri. (N. d.). Retrieved July 26, 2018, from <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/251467/in-other-words-by-jhumpa-lahiri/9781101911464>.
- [6] Labov, W. (1972). *Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English vernacular*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- [7] Labov's Model of Narrative Analysis. (n.d.). Retrieved July 26, 2018, from <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-language/labovs-model-narrative-analysis-2563.php>.
- [8] Lahiri, J. (2014). *Interpreter of maladies*. London: Fourth Estate. McLeod, J. (2016). *Beginning postcolonialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Narratology. (n.d.). Retrieved July 26, 2018, from <https://xiamenwriting.wikispaces.com/Narratology>.
- [9] Niazi, N., & Gautam, R. (2010). *How to study literature: Stylistic and pragmatic approaches*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Limited.
- [10] Toolan, M. J. (2014). *Narrative: A critical linguistic introduction*. Place of publication not identified: Routledge.
- [11] Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. Flamingo: Harper Collins, 2000. Print.
- [12] Lahiri, J. *Unaccustomed Earth*. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2008. Print.