

**THE QUR'ĀNIC VERSION OF THE
STORY OF YUSUF (JOSEPH): LABOVIAN ANALYSIS
OF AZĪZ-I-MIŞR EPISODE**

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Qur'ānic narratives mostly show great affinities with human techniques of narration. This paper analyses the linguistic aspect of Azīz-i-Mişr episode, a sub-plot of the story of Yusuf (Joseph) as narrated in the Holy Qur'ān. This episode maintains minimum standard to be a complete story. To highlight structural elements of this story, Labov's Model of Narrative Analysis has been followed. The Model gives description of a story through dividing it into six constituting parts, i.e. Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Result or resolution, Evaluation, and Coda. The study confirms the presence of all elements of Labov's linguistic model in the story. Although the model has been designed to examine the structure of the stories of personal experience, the Qur'ānic story of Yusuf (Azīz-i-Mişr episode) lends itself to Labov's Model of Narrative Analysis so admirably well. In this way, the affinity and deep-rooted relation of human narrative with Qur'ānic stories is established.

Key Words: *Azīz-i-Mişr, Yusuf, Qur'ānic narrative, Labovian model.*

Introduction

Narrative analysis is a common practice in modern literary and Linguistic research. The study of 'Narrative' comes commonly under the

purview of fiction and sociolinguistics. It is perhaps due to this fact that, researchers in the field of sociology, literature and linguistics need to look for common areas suitable for study through inter disciplinary approaches. The Qur'ānic narratives provide perhaps the best subject-matter for their quest. The stories from the Holy Qur'ān have been extensively explored from a variety of angles. This paper is an addition to existing practice through following a modern linguistic approach i.e., Labov's model of Narrative Analysis. The model has its origins in the stories of personal experience. However, its application to Qur'ānic narratives has been more appealing to modern researchers.

The significance of this area can be evaluated from the number of works produced by writers and scholars both from the East and West in the last two decades. Research outcome in the field is in such a bulk that sometimes it turns out to be very difficult to look for a topic to explore. Online resources in the field are enough to confirm that the study of Qur'ānic text as literature is not only fascinating for Muslim scholars but also for literary critics and researchers in linguistics believing in other religions. Majority of such researchers is supporting and encouraging research in Qur'ānic literature. Terri L. DeYoung and Selim S. Kuru jointly supervised Muḥammad Omer Iqbal's thesis, "The Qur'ān as a Literary Masterpiece within its Historical and Religious Milieu" (2013). It shows the worth of subject-matter deliberated in current paper.

This paper is an effort to trace the elements of Labov's model in Azīz-i-Miṣr episode of the story of Yusuf. Before we proceed to apply Labovian model, the nature and function of a narrative will be discussed in line with the theory being applied. For this purpose, the relevant part of the Qur'ānic text (XII: 21 to XII:56) will be thoroughly studied to find out specific Labovian components in certain lines of the story describing the life of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) (A.S.) with reference to his presence at the house of Al- Azīz in Egypt and his encounter with his wife. Six elements (abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, coda) will be identified in the light of Labovian definition of 'narrative'. It is expected that the elements being explored will be recognized in the body of the Qur'ānic text. In this way, the basic objectives of this exploration will be achieved. It will be followed by a concluding statement.

Objectives

1. To examine appropriateness of Labov's model of Narrative analysis to analyze Sub-plots of Qur'ānic narratives.

2. To establish link of Personal narratives to Qur'ānic narratives.
3. To demonstrate Qur'ānic narratives as modelwriting for story writers.

Literature Review

There are many critics and scholars who followed Labovian approach to analyze Qur'ānic narratives. It is beyond the scope of this article to overview all or even maximum number of such researchers. Commenting on Labov's model, Ayaz Afsar (2006) claims that "One reason for its popularity is that it enables rigorous comparisons to be drawn between literary narrative and the social stories told in everyday interaction. Its structure of six components tends to make it best suited to literary narratives that are short."¹ The model, in this way, appears to be more suitable for analyzing short stories and obviously apposite in examining the subject-matter of this paper.

Karen Ann Watson (1973),² an admirer of Labov's model believes that the proposed frame work by Labov and Waletzky is formal as well as functional. Although most analytical schemes for narrative analysis have been applied to literary narrative forms including myths, folktales, epics, and novel, but nothing can be learnt about their structure and functions without establishing their link to their social context. Another step in this direction has been taken by Nicole Eagles (1994),³ whose paper on is based on the data derived from tape recordings of past personal heartbreaks experienced by the speaker at one time. The data is analyzed in the light of Labov's model with six structural elements.

Scholars from different social sciences have been significantly attracted to Labov's model. Michael Toolan rightly observes that, "the attraction of their (i.e. Labov and Waletzky's) principles lies in their clarity, replicability, and their search for a basic pattern from which more complex narratives might be derived."⁴ Toolan's remarks show practical worth of Labov's model, and Rabia Bajwa's doctoral thesis (2012)⁵ is one of the best examples of Labovian analysis of Qur'ānic narratives which explores the application of narrative analysis to five Qur'ānic stories in Surat al-Kahf (Chapter Seventeen) of the Holy Qur'ān.

The current paper is however, partially inspired by the works of Ayaz Afsar and Rabia Bajwa. Ayaz Afsar (2006) provided theoretical framework for this paper while Rabia Bajwa's study (2012) gave practical application of Labov's model but her work does not include the story being discussed in this paper. Their works are focused mostly, on

theoretical aspects of narrative analysis without actively exploring the whole body of story. Ayaz Afsar's work however, encompasses practical application through identifying Labovian elements in the body of complete story joining three sub-plots into a single whole. His abstract is based on Yusuf's dream (eleven stars, the sun and the moon prostrating themselves to Yusuf) and Coda is the interpretation of dream (his brothers prostrating themselves to Yusuf). This paper is focused on one of the three sub-plots i.e., the second part (Azīz-i-Miṣr episode). Here, the story opens with Yusuf in the house of Al-Azīz (in chains and seriously in trouble) in Egypt and ends with Yusuf in power and to replace Al-Azīz. From persecution to gratification, the events of story are dominated by the narrator's (God) will.

Labovian Definition of Narrative

William Labov's definition of 'Narrative' can hardly be discussed as an independent unit. It needs to be deliberated along with other components of his sociolinguistic theory of narrative structure. He cautiously confined the limits of this term by interpreting it as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred."⁶ Labov's views about 'narrative' seem to be based on his sociolinguistic academic background, and personal narratives developed through social experience. He sets parameters for a linguistic study of stories particularly focused on their structural elements. He ponders a story to be a living body with different constituting parts. After having deep contemplation and expanding the horizons of theoretical views he puts forward the main features of his model. Labov believes that a narrative is composed of six elements. These elements include "1. Abstract: "what was this about?" 2. Orientation: "who, when, what, where?" 3. Complicating action: "then what happened?" 4. Evaluation: "so what?" 5. Result or resolution: "what finally happened?" 6. Coda: precludes further questions."⁷ In this way, he has added significantly to the scholarship on narrative analysis. Like other stories of personal experience, the stories of Holy Qur'ān can also be judged on the criteria set by William Labov. The main plots of Qur'ānic stories or even their sub-plots lend themselves to Labov's model admirably well.

If one goes through structural elements or categories, it obviously appears that each part of narrative structure serves different function within the frame of story. Every structural part is supplemented and

supported by relevant questions. The questions indicate the functions of different elements or categories. The opening lines of story (Abstract) are followed by orientation. The events of story shift to complicating action and proceed to the process of evaluation. At this stage, the events are concluded through resolution, and the listener is returned to present time (coda) with no further questions. Labov's narrative framework can be presented as follows:

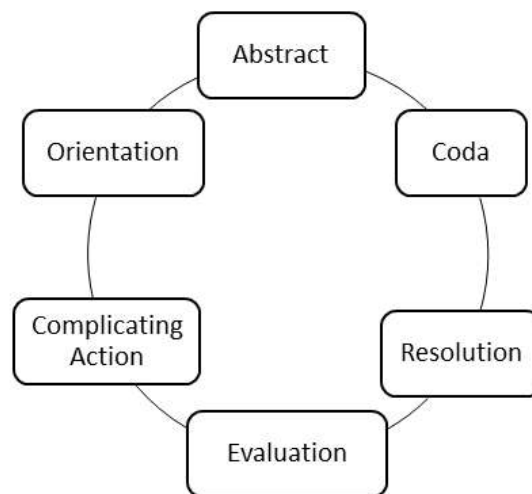


Fig. 1:

Labovian Framework

Abstract: What Was This About?

According to William Labov's model, an abstract is typically, but not always, found at the beginning of a narrative. It may be used to summarize the whole story within one or two clauses. It may also be used to describe the whole sequence of events of the narrative. The abstract may answer the basic question, "what was this about?" In this way, it can be safely stated that, the abstract can either be a response to a speaker's question or an utterance to minimize the gap between the question and the answer. Labov's abstract seems to serve the function of summary.

The Azīz-i-Miṣr episode of the story of Yusuf (Joseph) opens with specific declaration: "Thus, did We establish Yusuf in the land, that We

might teach him the interpretation of events.”⁸ The abstract of story appears to be the plan of God to establish Yusuf in Egypt to teach him the interpretation of events (the interpretation of dreams). Rabia Bajwa (2012) claims that, “God does not always provide a summary as His abstract. At times, His abstracts are functioning more like attempts to establish His right to tell the story or to simply dramatically announce to his interlocutors that He is about to tell a story without much of revealing what the point of the story is.”⁹

2. Orientation: Who, When, What, Where?

In the structure of story, an orientation section is usually found after the abstract. Orientation section is “formally, the group of free clauses that precede the first narrative clause. They serve to orient the listener in respect to person, place, time, and behavioral situation. Not all narratives have orientation sections, and not all orientation sections perform these four functions. The overall view of narrative shows that the orientation section is a structural feature of a narrative structure.”¹⁰ The nature and function of orientation in the structure of a story has been broadly contested from a variety of perspectives. However, the views of Labov and Waletzky interpreted by Anna De Fina are in line with the structure of the selected story. “Following their characterization, orientation has generally been viewed as: controlled and administered by the narrator in order to direct the listener and constituting a sort of background to the main action in the story world.”¹¹

The introductory lines in the story set a stage for complicated action in near future. The orientation is designed in two facets. At first, the status of Yusuf is going to be changed from slavery to socially admirable position. “And he (the man) from Egypt who bought him, said to his wife: “Make his stay honourable, maybe he will profit us, or we shall adopt him as a son.”¹² It seems to be based on his righteous behaviour that Azīz formed higher opinion about Yusuf and expressed his hopes for Yusuf’s good future. Secondly, as soon as, Yusuf is grown-up, he is bestowed with the prophetic wisdom and knowledge. “And when he attained his full manhood, We gave him wisdom and knowledge.”¹³ It confirms that Yusuf is being prepared to face the challenges of life in near future. The narrator (God Almighty) is fully controlling the events of this story. Anna De Fina’s views become more pertinent in this case who critically examines views put forward by Labov and Waletzky (1997)

about different stories of personal experience where the narrator is supposed to be able to control the sequence of events and fully in position to provide the interlocutors with necessary details of sequential progress.

Complicating Action: Then What Happened?

According to Labov and Waletzky (1997), “the main body of narrative clauses usually comprises a series of events that may be termed the complication or complicating action.”¹⁴ In other words, it is the main body of story. This section of story relates the sequence of clauses to that of events which actually happened. Complicating Action section answers the question, then what happened? As this is the main section of the narrative, it may be the longest part of story. It usually links orientation to evaluation. The result or resolution is naturally based on it. The final narrative clause that answers the question “what finally happened? is an extension and outcome of complicating action.

In the story under discussion, there are three important features of complication or Complicating action, i.e., desire, dialogue, and action. At first, it is human nature that humans are inclined to follow their desires. And she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him (XII:23), and he would have inclined to her desire, had he not seen the evidence of his Lord(XII:24).¹⁵ And secondly, it is comprised of dialogue or specifically defined as constructed dialogue. A constructed dialogue according to Tannen (2005) is “animation of speech framed as a voice other than the speaker’s”.¹⁶ These dialogues seem to be performing key role in complicating situation with every passing moment. Constructed dialogues give clear picture of events in succeeding parts of story. The dialogue between Azīz’s wife and Yusuf:

Aziz’s wife: Come on, O you.

Yusuf: I seek refuge in Allah, Truly, he is my Master, He made my living in a great comfort, Verily, the wrongdoers will never be successful.¹⁷

It is perhaps a turning point in the story of Yusuf. Every other dialogue that follows is used for complicating the events of story and aggravate it. The dialogue between Azīz’s wife and Azīz, (Qur’ān XII:25), Yusuf and Azīz (Qur’ān XII:26), witness from the family and Azīz (Qur’ān XII:27), Azīz and Azīz’s wife (Qur’ān XII:28), and Azīz to Yusuf and

Azīz's wife (Qur'ān XII:29), and the most important dialogue between Azīz's wife and Women in the city (Qur'ān XII:32).

Thirdly, the action on the part of different characters makes the situation more serious. There are three major actions which make the situation more complicated. First, Yusuf and Wife of Azīz raced with one another to the door, and she tore his shirt from the back (Qur'ān XII:25), Second, the Women in the city (in their astonishment) cut their hands (Qur'ān XII:31), and third, Yusuf was sent to prison even after his innocence was proved (Qur'ān XII:35). In this way, the Azīz-i-Miṣr episode of the story of Yusuf meets all requirements of a major narrative plot.

Evaluation: So What?

Evaluation is the most important component of Labov's model of narrative analysis. Labov and Waletzky define it as "that part of the narrative that reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as compared to others."¹⁸ In this way, narrative analysis without evaluation seems to be insignificant. In this section, the narrator clearly defines the need of telling that story, and how it is more important and uncommon. In other words, Evaluation serves to answer the question, so what? According to Labov (1972), there are three main types of evaluation, i.e., External, Embedded, and Evaluative action. These categories of evaluation can be interpreted and traced in the frame of Qur'ānic narrative of Yusuf (Azīz-i-Miṣr episode) as follows:

External Evaluation

The narrator standing outside the action turns to the listener and tells about the point of narrative and thus interrupts the flow of the narrative. Interpreting the function of Labovian evaluation, Ayaz Afsar (2006) claims that it is "related to the point of the story, to perpetuate the notion of self-aggrandizement, the narrator's desire to make himself/herself look good in the narrative or create the best possible image of himself."¹⁹ The statements from the text of the story reveal the best image of narrator as (1) omnipotent: "And Allah has full power and control over His affairs" (Qur'ān XII:21), (2) Supporter of virtue: "Thus We reward the doers of good" (Qur'ān XII:22), (3) Omniscient narrator:

“He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower” (Qur’ān XII:34), (4) Sovereign: “The command is for none but Allah” (Qur’ān XII:40), and (5) Merciful: “Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving and Merciful” (Qur’ān XII:53).

Embedded Evaluation

The narrator describes feelings at the time of the happening, rather than at the time of the telling, or attaching them to a third party who acts as observer. There are three phases of emotional progress, i.e., anxiety-phase, transitional-phase, and pleasure-phase. At first, the narrator seems to be focused on representing anxiety and the feelings of desperation that Yusuf, the main character in the story experienced, as the narrator pronounces, “Thus it was, that We might turn away from him evil and immoral sins” (Qur’ān XII:24). The narrator presents emotional condition of Yusuf at the time of actual happenings. Secondly, Yusuf in the prison, the state of transition from anxiety to happiness, as stated in the story, “So his Lord hearkened to him (in his prayer) and turned away from him their snare” (Qur’ān XII:34). And thirdly, the state of being happy after being released from the prison, “Thus did We give full authority to Yusuf in the land, to take possession therein, when or where he likes” (Qur’ān XII:56). The narrator relates the feelings of main characters during the events of story as real as one’s own.

Evaluative Action:

Report actions which reveal emotions. In other words, the evaluation is dramatized. The narrator describes actions rather than words. This includes actions that reveal the tensions of the actors or reportable emotions. Peterson and McCabe (1997) claim that “Every narrative has an emotional point, and this point appears in the narrative through evaluation.”²⁰ There are four major actions which reveal the tension between different characters, (1) Seduction: Azīz’s wife closed the doors to seduce Yusuf and tore his shirt from the back. (Qur’ān XII:23,25) shows tension between Azīz’s wife and Yusuf. (2) Explanation of seduction: Azīz’s wife prepared a banquet for women in the city and gave each one of them a knife and they cut their own hands (Qur’ān XII:31), shows serious strain between Azīz’s wife and the women in city. (3) Yusuf’s imprisonment (Qur’ān XII:35) reflects emotional stress between Azīz and Yusuf, and (4) Yusuf’s release from the prison and Azīz’s wife’s

confession of sin before the king (Qur'ān XII:51) shows major stress between the King and Aziz, who is embarrassed. In this way, Labovian evaluation helps to penetrate very essence of narrative.

Result or Resolution: What Finally Happened?

Labov and Waletzky (1997)²¹ state that the resolution of the narrative is that portion of the narrative sequence that follows the evaluation. According to Ayaz Afsar (2006),²² the Resolution of a story is normally reported in the final clause(s) of the complicating action. Complication builds up to a final peak, after which comes a clause answering the question “what finally happened?”. There are two main points which set a stage for whole story, i.e., God's declaration to teach Yusuf the interpretation of dreams, and Yusuf being seduced by the wife of Al-Aziz.

The story of Yusuf (Azīz-i-Miṣr Episode) opens with “Thus did We establish Yusuf in the land (Egypt), that We might teach him the interpretation of events” (interpretation of dreams, according to Tafsir Ibn Kathir) (Qur'ān XII:21). The events in the story gradually proceed to complicating action which reach the climax with women in the city cutting their hands and Yusuf sent to prison (Qur'ān XII:35). Its resolution also occurs in two points, i.e., Yusuf's knowledge in the interpretation of dreams recognized through interpretation of the King's dream, and the King's investigation into what happened between the Wife of the Azīz, the Women in the City, and Yusuf (Qur'ān XII:51).

Coda: Precludes Further Questions

Labov and Waletzky (1997) claim that “the coda is a functional device for returning the verbal perspective to the present moment.”²³ Coda in the Qur'ānic narratives has specific function. God as a narrator, puts forward a moralistic message to complete His point and end the narrative. To identify ‘coda’ in Qur'ānic narratives seems to be comparatively easier than tracing it in other personal narratives. In the Labovian logic, the coda prevents any further questions about what happened and why it was significant. The significance of story is typically based on underlying moral lesson.

Ochs and Capps (2001) observe that “narrators of personal experience evaluate protagonists as moral agents, whose actions, thoughts,

and feelings are interpreted in light of local notions of goodness.”²⁴ In this way, abstracts and codas in Qur’ānic narratives are related to each other, the abstract opens the events of story and the coda closes them. The closing lines of the story of Yusuf (Azīz-i-Miṣr Episode) give two moral lessons, (1) “We bestow of Our mercy on whom We will, and We make not to be lost the reward of the good doers” (Qur’ān XII:56), and (2) “And verily, the reward of the Here after is better for those who believed and were fearing Allah” (Qur’ān XII:57).

Annotation

Labov’s theory of narrative analysis seems to have two major functions in the life of a story’s audience (listeners). At one hand, it has academic role, the components of labov’s model provide necessary guidelines for understanding the basic structure of a narrative. On the other hand, its inspirational function is equally significant, the listeners may be able to follow this framework in composing stories of their own. Abstract is the summary of the entire story which prepares the audience for what is going to be presented. The Orientation section contains such information which sets the stage for whole narrative action. The Complicating action is the peak of story which proceeds to resolution. Resolution section carries main events which form the body of narrative. Evaluation section is focused on plot, dialogue, action, and emotion, and Coda presents underlying moral lesson.

The story being discussed offers some qualities of God. The purpose of this story seems to be the introduction of God. He wanted to let Himself be known to the people. The qualities of God narrated in the story are, (1) Allah has full power and control over His affairs, (2) He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower, (3) the command is for none but Allah, (4) Allah guides not the plot of the betrayers, (5) Most Merciful, (6) We make not to be lost the reward of the good doers. It can be stated that God recounts past experiences of His (personal) experience to give some moral lessons and every moral lesson comes out of His specific quality.

Labov’s approach to story-telling is rooted in the real world and thus has excessive appeal for the story-tellers as well as their audience. The stories he is focused on, describe and evaluate personal experiences with themes like, fear, anger, happiness, jealousy, resentment, love, hatred, pride, and embarrassment. The opinion of story-teller becomes more

important which explains the status of a story, whether it is worth telling or not? The purpose and the need of Qurā'nic narratives is clearly emphasized within the frame of stories through "statements of moral lesson". Labovian analysis of Azīz-i-Miṣr episode can be summarized as follows:

1.	Abstract: What was this about?	Thus, did We establish Yusuf in the land, that we might teach him the interpretation of events (XII:21).
2.	Orientation: Who, When, What, Where?	And he (the man) from Egypt who bought him, said to his wife: "Make his stay honourable may be he will profit us, or we profit us, or we shall adopt him him as a son." (XII:21). And when he (Yusuf) attained his full manhood, We gave him him wisdom and knowledge (the Prophethood). (XII:22)
3.	Complicating Action: then what happened?	And she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him (to do an evil act), and she closed the doors and said: "Come on, O you." (XII:23) And indeed, she did desire him, and he would have inclined to her desire, had he not seen the evidence of his Lord. (XII:24). So, they raced with one another to the door, and she tore his shirt from the back. They both found her master (husband) at the door. She said: "What is the punishment for him who intended an evil design against your wife, except that he be put in prison or a painful torment" (XII:25).

		Then it occurred to the men, after they had seen the signs (of his innocence), to imprison him for a time. (XII:35).
4.	Evaluation: So What?	And the king said: "Bring him to me." But when the messenger came to him, (Yusuf) said: "Return to your king and ask him, 'What is the state of mind of the ladies who cut their hands Surely, my Lord (Allah) is Well Aware of their snare.'"(XII:50). (The king) said (to the women): "What was your affair when you did seek to seduce Yusuf from his (true) self?" The women said: "Allah forbid! No evil know we against him!" The wife of the Aziz said: "Now the truth is manifest (to all); it was I who sought to seduce him, and he is surely of the truthful. '(XII:51)
5.	Result or Resolution: what finally happened?	And the king said: "Bring him to me that I may attach him to my person." Then, when he had spoken to him, he said: "Verily, this day, you are with us high in rank and fully trusted." (XII:54) (Yusuf) said: "Set me over the storehouses of the land; I will indeed guard them with full knowledge."(XII:55) Thus did We give full authority to Yusuf in the land, to take possession there in, when or where he likes. (XII:56)
6.	Coda: Precludes Further Questions	We bestow Our mercy on whom We will, and We make not to be lost the reward of good doers. (XII:56)

Conclusion

Labov's structural model of analyzing narrative offers necessary framework to examine the effectiveness of narrative art developed by professional storytellers. Labovian model is based on the outcome of research focused on narratives of personal experience narrated in society, however, its aptness for analyzing the structure of Qur'ānic narratives confirms its probability to be used for a variety of narratives. This view of narrative structure, according to Labov and Waletzky (1997, p.38) may have greater significance in case of its application to narrative material derived from radically different cultures with similar research objectives to be achieved.

Six components of Labov's model placed in the text of the Qur'ānic narrative have been searched and highlighted. In this way, the sub-plot (Azīz-i-Miṣr episode) has been confirmed as a complete story as defined by Labov and Waletzky (1997). Labov's model is basically designed to analyze personal narratives. The stories of personal experience are supposed to lend themselves to this model. Through applying the model designed for personal narratives, to a Qur'ānic narrative, a link between personal and Qur'ānic narrative has been established. It also proves universality of Qur'ānic themes and compatibility of Qur'ānic style to modern literary technique of narration.

As compared to other models of narrative analysis, Labov's model seems to be more appropriate for analyzing short stories. If one examines the structure of Qur'ānic narratives, he can obviously find that the Qur'ānic stories are either short in length or a long story is divided into sub-plots. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that Labov's model is one of the most appropriate approaches to analyze Qur'ānic narratives. It can be applied to other narratives with moral and spiritual teachings like, biblical narratives, narratives of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christian mysticism and Şufism. As all elements of personal narrative have been found in the Qur'ānic narratives, it has been confirmed that, the structure of Qur'ānic narratives can be followed in composing modern literary stories. Basic objectives set for this article appear to be achieved through following Labov's technique.

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