16 Incorporating Sociolinguistic Narrative Model into EFL Writing for Testing Purposes

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While previous literature has focused on classroom assessment, writing for examinations presents a different social context that requires efficiency under time constraints. This study aims to examine the theoretical integration of Labov's narrative model in Taiwanese EFL students' writing for high-stakes tests, e.g., the college entrance examinations, including General Scholastic Ability Test (GSAT). Noting the recent trend in GSAT, where picture writing prompts are employed to test high school students' ability to compose narrative essays, the present framework serves as a means to prepare students for better understanding of the narrative structure and to help teachers assess students' works with a clear rubric. An online survey is devised to elicit English-speaking and Chinese-speaking teachers' responses to applying Labov's model to three Taiwanese high school students' essays based on a picture prompt (CEEC, 2014). Preliminary results show no significant difference between the two groups, suggesting the model's cross-cultural applicability. Furthermore, seven high school students were recruited for a writing course to get students' feedback on the incorporation of Labov's model in class. Students were found to be more confident in composing narrative essays based on picture prompts.

Introduction

Responding to the call for interdisciplinary collaboration within the field of English as a foreign language (EFL), this paper incorporates the sociolinguistic model of narrative (Labov & Waletzkey, 1967; Labov, 1972) into the instruction and assessment of EFL writing in Taiwan's examination-driven context. This approach follows the contention that language teaching and learning can gain insights from a wide range of methods from second language acquisition (SLA) to sociolinguistics, among others (Grabe, 2002). In addition, as Grabe and Kaplan (1997) explain, teachers of a writing course should strive for the connection between writing and language theories, which can better inform decision-making in the course. Therefore, this study proposes an integrated model that draws on the narrative model in sociolinguistics and focuses on the organization dimension of writing to help EFL teachers to prepare their students for high-stakes tests. This study draws on students' works archived online (College Entrance Examination Center, CEEC) and survey responses. The findings aim to show useful insights into how narrative is constructed, organized, and evaluated by English native speakers in comparison to Mandarin Chinese speakers, most of whom are teachers. Also, this study presents the results of adopting this model in class to assist Taiwanese EFL students in improving their writing over drafts.

EFL writing has been shown in previous studies to pose great challenges both for students and for teachers. Writing in a second language, as Silva (1993) observes, is "strategically, rhetorically and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing" (p. 669). Writing, after all, requires not only *linguistic competence* (see Chomsky, 1965), which emphasizes the correct use of grammar and vocabulary of a language, but also, more closely related to the studies in sociolinguistics, *communicative competence* (see Hymes, 1972), which considers the context of using a language, including the topic, setting, and relationships that are involved in communication. When it comes to language learning and teaching, while the former relates more to the learner's structural knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, i.e., how to "produce and comprehend well-formed sentences in the language" (Fisher, 1984, p. 35), the latter refers more to using the language to "send and receive messages in concrete situation and for specific purposes" (Fisher, 1984, p. 36). Full acquisition of a language lies in the integration of both, as well as other types of competences, such as pragmatic, discourse, and strategic competence (see Hedge, 2000, p. 44-56, for more discussion). This holds true for dealing with EFL writing in the context of examination in that writing is also the most used skill in evaluating students' performance in almost all levels of education (Afrin, 2016). Therefore, for Taiwanese EFL students, it is imperative to demonstrate one's knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and an understanding of overall text organization, with patterns that include description, narration, and argument (see Cumming, 2001; Hyland, 2002) in examinations.

For teachers, assessment of EFL writing can be a challenging task (e.g., Hidayati, 2018; Susser, 2010). Studies in multiple countries have indicated likewise, including Palestine (e.g., Abas & Bakir, 2013), Pakistan (e.g., Bilal, Tariq, Din, Latif & Anjum, 2013), Thailand (e.g., Mustika, 2016) and Vietnam (e.g., Thuy, 2009). For example, Thuy (2009) discusses some of the problems that arise in teaching and learning EFL writing, and suggests that language teachers should help learners become aware of the social context to develop their pragmatic competence (p. 63). Diab and Balaa (2011), on the other hand, examine the importance of developing rubrics for accessing Lebanese students' writing. They state that "[a]ssessing writing is one of the most demanding tasks language teachers face" (p. 52). Therefore, having rubrics for writing assessment not only provides feedback and saves grading time (Stevens, Levi, & Walvoord, 2013) but helps to reduce subjectivity in grading (Flynn & Flynn, 2004). Some studies have looked into designing a rubric for EFL writing (e.g., Arikan, 2006, in Turkey; Iida, 2008, in Japan).

In response to the above two problems, this paper presents the sociolinguistic model of narrative proposed by Labov and Waletzkey (1967) as a possible integration for EFL writing. This integration aims to help both EFL students and teachers prepare for high-stakes tests such as the college entrance

exam in Taiwan. As this model describes the common organizing structure for English-speaking narrators, this study hypothesizes, it shows the potential for serving as a framework both for students learning EFL writing for testing purposes and for teachers assessing students' performance in test preparation. The study is thus guided by the following research questions:

1. With respect to the applicability of the narrative model, do English native speakers apply the narrative elements differently than speakers of Mandarin Chinese?
2. How can the narrative model be incorporated into the EFL classroom and help students with their narrative writing?

In what follows, I first introduce Labov's narrative model and explain how it informs us of the organization of narrative writing. Then I describe the study design before moving on to the findings and application. Finally, I conclude with some discussion and future directions based on the study limitations.

Literature Review
The Labovian narrative model

Seeing that narrative is a fundamental way in which human beings organize discourse and convey meanings, scholars have studied extensively its social significance in various contexts (e.g., Johnstone, 2001; Linde, 1993; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Schiffrin, De Fina, & Nylund, 2010). Of them all, remaining influential for decades is the structural model for oral narrative put forth by Labov and Waletzky (1967) and later revised by Labov (1972), which consists of the following six sequential elements:

- Abstract: an introductory part of the narrative that summarizes the event.
- Orientation: information about the time, place of the events, and the participants.
- Complicating action: sequential clauses that lead up to their climax.
- Resolution: how the protagonist manages to resolve the crisis.
- Coda: a final clause to show that the narrative has ended.
- Evaluation: expression of attitudes or opinions to make the point of the narrative.

Studies have continued to examine narratives based on this model (e.g., Özyıldırım, 2009; Swanson, Rahimtoroghi, Corcoran, & Walker, 2014; Wang, 2017) despite its limitations (e.g., Patterson, 2008; Schegloff, 1997). Criticisms include the model's dependence on monological narratives elicited in interviews, thus neglecting the co-construction between story teller and audience. In this case, however, this fits well with the context of writing for testing purposes because it is characterized by a lack of co-construction between the person who writes, namely the student, and the person who reads

and grades, usually the teacher. Given this , Labov and Waletzky's model is in fact suitable for being applied to EFL writing in an examination-driven context.

Narrative writing for EFL students

Narrative essay itself constitutes a specialized mode of writing. A shift of writing mode in college entrance exam in Taiwan in recent years can be observed as the direction of writing moves away from predominantly argumentative or descriptive in the 1990s toward narrative conducive with picture writing prompts in the early 2000s (see more discussion below). This shift coincides with the growing interest in research on EFL narrative writing (e.g., Huh & Lee, 2018; Lin, 2016). For example, Jafari, Ameri, Tajalli, and Rajeian (2013) examine EFL narrative writing in the Iranian context as a means for learners to think critically through reflection and thereby take a more active part in class. This approach not only "affects learners' outlook toward the world" (p. 1460) but can inform EFL teachers to practically apply critical reflection to contemporary education system so that learners become more responsive. Abdalla and Adam (2015), on the other hand, study how teaching short stories can facilitate Saudi Arabian students' narrative writing by comparing the students' progress between a control group and an experimental group. Including short stories in the curriculum, as the results show, "develops students' imaginative thinking abilities" and helps to develop language skills such as vocabulary building (p. 7). However, how to formulate a reliable framework for assessment is not clearly addressed, even though the works of students who participate in the study are assessed with a set of "test achievements," which are listed as followed.

- A protagonist and an antagonist
- Point of view
- Dialogue
- Chronological order
- Resolution

In fact, despite the burgeoning research, assessment methods for EFL narrative writing remain to be explored. Gearhart and Wolf's (1994) work outlines a clear rubric for assessing narrative writing with the components that they emphasize, each of which has a dual dimension. The following list shows only one for each category (p. 75).

- Theme (explicit ↔ implicit)
- Character (flat ↔ round)
- Setting (backdrop ↔ essential)
- Plot (simple ↔ complex)
- Communication (literal ↔ symbolic)

In a case study, Yi (2013) mentions how this framework makes relevant the communication dimension of narrative writing that overcomes the "simple

reliance upon linguistic competence" (p. 74). The Labovian model, as shown in the previous section, encompasses these components while showing them in a different way. "Character" and "setting" fall into the "orientation" part, whereas the "plot" mainly manifests in "complication action" and "resolution." "Theme" and "communication" in Gearhart and Wolf's (1994) rubric are reported to confuse teachers as they are "more difficult to analyze and to integrate successfully within a narrative" (p. 87). They can be conveyed through "evaluation" in the Labovian model, which, in Labov and Walezkey's (1967) terms, and be defined as clauses that indicate the significance of the narrative. This way, "evaluation" can be more readily identifiable for both teachers and students in the classroom as well as for researchers. In addition, "abstract" and "coda," which are said to be optional in oral narratives (Labov, 1972), add to the overall structure when they are present.

EFL writing for testing purposes

Indeed, EFL writing for testing purposes is different from what it is in other contexts. Teaching EFL writing, for example, deals with familiarizing students with writing as a process that entails planning, drafting, and revising (Hedge, 2000). Unfortunately, as Susser (2010) mentions in the discussion of writing as a construct, considering the time constraints in most high-stakes tests, planning and revision are rarely assessed, thereby casting doubt "on the claim that such essay tests assess 'writing' in a meaningful way" (p. 46). Nonetheless, the pressure to prepare for these tests is real and should not be ignored. Although the growing research focuses on promoting students' motivation in writing outside of the context of high-stakes tests (Hashemian, & Heidari, 2013; Özdemir & Aydın, 2015), and at times tests are dismissed as "measuring not the construct of *writing achievement*, but the construct of *compliance to the rubric*" (Nichols & Berliner, 2005, p. 97, emphasis in original), students still need instructions as to how to respond to essay writing in these tests. No matter how "decontextualized" a test setting may be, teachers can direct students' attention to different aspects of EFL writing in classroom instructions and activities, including process modeling, text modeling, raising audience awareness, and providing feedback. As some past studies that investigate writing in standardized high-stakes testing instead of classroom assessment suggest (e.g., Melissourgou & Frantzi, 2015), it is of great importance to consider students' view on writing in that it would be "regrettable and problematic in all contexts" for research on students taking writing tests to lack students' responses (Hamps-Lyons, 2003, p. 168). For this reason, this study includes a second part where students are involved in the development of this narrative model for EFL writing.

Method

The study context

The college entrance examination in Taiwan has gone through a major reform in 2002, when a system involving two major exams were implemented: General Scholastic Ability Test (GSAT) and Advanced Subjects Test (AST) respectively. English is a required subject in both exams while writing is featured in both of them. While the essay writing for AST remains mostly argumentative throughout the years, GSAT introduced picture writing prompts in 2004, with a three-frame comic strip illustrating the general plotline. Students were asked to write a narrative essay based on the provided pictures. This continued for three more years until a revision of the format was employed in 2007; in addition to the three frames in the comic strip, one more empty frame with a question mark was incorporated (see Appendix A for example). This was meant to give test-takers greater room for creativity and individuality in their writing. In the 12 years to follow, such picture writing prompts have appeared 6 more times, and have influenced how teachers prepare their students for English writing. The teaching of EFL writing in Taiwan, however, has remained prevalently reliant on Grammar Translation Method (GTM) over the decades (Kung, 2013). Traditionally, teachers provide feedback on grammar and vocabulary with an emphasis on accuracy (see Lo & Hyland, 2007). Such method, as Lee (2013) points out, draws students' attention to grammatical errors and away from their control of language (p. 37). With the reform in examination in Taiwan education and testing system, and the introduction of a more narrative heavy type of essay writing, the current pedagogy needs to adapt. This is why a narrative approach in sociolinguistics can be merged into the teaching and learning EFL writing in Taiwan.

Online survey

In the first part of the study, in order to see how students' works are perceived in terms of Labov and Waletzky's framework, an online survey was designed. Two pieces of writing (Student A and B) were selected from CEEC website, where, each year, a number of high school students' works that score high in the exam are displayed. The work of one more high school student (Student C) is selected from a local educational institute in Taipei, Taiwan. The student was fully informed of the design and purpose of the study and consent was obtained to have the student's work used as part of the study while the student remains anonymous. Their works were transcribed for the survey questions. The survey briefly explains the six elements in Labov and Waletzky's narrative model and asks the respondents to mark whether they think a particular paragraph contains one or more of the narrative element. The survey is in both English and Mandarin Chinese for two different populations (see Appendix B for one section of the survey in English). The sample included seven native speakers of English and two native speaker of mandarin Chinese.

Data was stored and analyzed using Excel spreadsheets. Results are discussed in relation to the Taiwanese context and to existing literature with some pedagogical implications for future improvement.

Writing course

In the second part of the study, seven high school students from the same educational institute were recruited to participate in a one-month intensive writing course using the Labovian narrative model. The seven students first finished the writing task based on the same picture prompt (see Appendix A) prior to the course. After instructions, the students revised their first draft according to the narrative structure in Labov's model. A combination of process-focused and text-focused orientation is adopted; while the former emphasizes writing strategies such as planning, drafting, and revising, the latter treats L2 writing in terms of textual features such as vocabulary and syntactic structures. Despite the different focus, both orientations highlight the value of modeling for students, as Barkaoui (2007) suggests, thereby "encouraging learners to engage in writing frequently" and "providing them with useful and appropriate feedback and support" (p. 37).

Results
Research Question 1

The sample gleaned from the online survey is not large enough to perform a test on the comparison of distribution among two populations and generate a conclusive commentary. Nonetheless, from the preliminary results, similar patterns can be noticed through the response to Student A's, B's, and C's essays. Between English group (N = 7) and Mandarin Chinese group (N = 2), "abstract" and "orientation" are identified to appear toward the beginning, "complicating action" more centralized, and "resolution" clustered at the end. This convergence between the two groups aligns with the observation that Labov's narrative model has "provided a general frame for understanding the narrative structure cross-culturally" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 34). Therefore, in response to research question 1, it is likely that Labov's narrative model can be applied to EFL writing in the Taiwanese context.

The identification of "evaluation" in student essays possibly points to something worth exploring further. While the number is fairly low in the English-speaking group, most of the time it is simply absent in the responses by Mandarin Chinese speakers. It remains to be tested whether this is still the case when the number of responses increases, but since evaluation, as previously mentioned, is related to theme-building and communication-facilitating in narrative essays, it actually stands out to be an important part of the narrative because of its role in narrative writing. The difference will then be of significance as to how Taiwanese EFL students can improve their writing in a substantial and meaningful way.

	Paragraph 1	Paragraph 2	Paragraph 3	Paragraph 4	Paragraph 5	Paragraph 6
Abstract	4	0	0	0	0	0
Orientation	5	3	1	1	0	0
Complicating action	1	7	7	7	1	0
Resolution	0	0	0	2	7	3
Coda	0	0	0	0	2	4
Evaluation	1	1	2	1	2	4

Table 1. English speakers' responses to Student A's essay

	Paragraph 1	Paragraph 2	Paragraph 3	Paragraph 4	Paragraph 5	Paragraph 6
Abstract	2	1	1	1	1	0
Orientation	2	1	2	2	1	0
Complicating action	0	2	2	1	1	0
Resolution	0	0	0	0	1	2
Coda	0	0	0	1	1	2
Evaluation	1	0	0	0	1	2

Table 2. Mandarin Chinese speakers' responses to Student A's essay

	Paragraph 1	Paragraph 2	Paragraph 3	Paragraph 4	Paragraph 5
Abstract	7	1	0	0	0
Orientation	3	7	0	1	0
Complicating action	0	0	7	1	1
Resolution	0	0	1	6	1
Coda	0	0	0	3	6
Evaluation	1	1	1	1	5

Table 3. English speakers' responses to Student B's essay

	Paragraph 1	Paragraph 2	Paragraph 3	Paragraph 4	Paragraph 5
Abstract	2	1	1	0	0
Orientation	2	1	1	1	1
Complicating action	1	2	2	1	1
Resolution	0	1	1	1	1
Coda	0	0	1	1	1
Evaluation	0	0	0	2	2

Table 4. Mandarin Chinese speakers' responses to Student B's essay

Student C's essay is included with the expectation that the difference in responses would reflect how essays that are graded poor might lack coherent components in Labov's model. As it turns out, respondents located Labov's narrative elements in the student's work nonetheless. The essay, however, was considered poorly written because the structural elements remain unexplored and could have been expanded and elaborated on better.

	Paragraph 1	Paragraph 2
Abstract	2	0
Orientation	5	0
Complicating action	4	4
Resolution	0	4
Coda	0	1
Evaluation	1	2

Table 5. English speakers' responses to Student C's essay

	Paragraph 1	Paragraph 2
Abstract	2	1
Orientation	2	1
Complicating action	1	2
Resolution	0	1
Coda	0	0
Evaluation	0	0

Table 6. Mandarin Chinese speakers' responses to Student C's essay

Research Question 2

In response to research question 2, a writing course based on Labov's narrative model was designed. In the writing course, seven high school students were given hands-on tasks to familiarize with this model and to understand its application in an EFL classroom. Writing samples were provided for participants to work on identifying the structural components, which can be combined with other existing models for EFL writing and serve as rubrics for teachers to assess students' comprehension of textual coherence and their ability to reproduce it. This is intended to show how Labov's model can encourage students to engage in writing by paying attention to its organization. Simultaneously, this model will serve as an assessment tool that provides teachers with useful and appropriate feedback on students' writing achievement. Authentic texts were provided to help students learn the linguistic conventions and strategies. In so doing, students were encouraged to engage and respond to the context and acquire knowledge on "how to structure their

writing experience according to the demands and constraints of target contexts" (Hyland, 2002, p. 81).

Considering that EFL writing for examinations is, by nature, different from classroom writing (Hedge, 2000, p. 319), both process modeling and text modeling were employed to develop efficiency. Students were first shown the framework of the narrative model and explained what each element referred to and how each of them contributed to the overall organization of a narrative. This part aligns with the planning stage of process-focused orientation, where students can think aloud while responding to the prompt and verbalize their thoughts while composing (Barkaoui, 2007, p. 37). Next, blending in the text-based approach, students were shown pieces selected from CEEC website to draw their attention to usage, structure, and the correct form in order to develop their ability to accurately produce those features of texts. Afterwards, students started writing in class so that writing is not "relegated to homework and takes place in unsupported conditions of learning" (Hedge, 2000, p. 301).

The course then shifted back to a more process-centered mode, where students went through their writing again and discussed their works. With the help of Labov's narrative model, which emphasizes how clauses are organized into a cohesive whole, students become better writers who "sometimes re-read whole paragraphs" rather than "focus on re-reading smaller chunks" (Zamel, 1983, cited in Hedge, 2000). For the students, "the different versions of their writing serve as a tangible record of how their ideas got generated, clarified, rearticulated, and refined" (Zamel, 1982, p. 203). The teacher, on the other hand, had a clear rubric to examine the students' work. This part was conducted mainly in negotiation with the students regarding how they would convey the main point in their narrative essays. Teacher's role, in this case, is to involve the students in the revision process with "a combination of process instruction and attention to language development" (Myles, 2002).

Conclusion

Facing high-stakes tests like the college entrance exams, Taiwanese high school students need assistance with EFL writing. While the majority of research on EFL writing assessment focuses on classroom assessment, writing in L2 for testing purposes can induce stress as it is a "daunting experience" (Plakans & Gebril, 2015). Therefore, this study has proposed the incorporation of Labov's narrative model in the field of sociolinguistics to meet this need. Its potential can be seen in the following three aspects.

First, responding to the trend of narrative essay in GSAT in recent years, a narrative model that helps students to prepare for narrative writing is necessary. By familiarizing themselves with the elements that make up a narrative, students have a framework to understand works in the form of narrative and, in turn, be better equipped with the knowledge to produce narrative essays themselves. At the same time, with this model, teachers have a clear

framework with which narrative essays can be assessed in terms of their organization. By drawing attention to the organization of a narrative, teachers can better implement a combined approach of process-focused and text-focused orientation. This way, grading students' works is not simply giving feedback on grammatical errors in the traditional GTM manner. Furthermore, The outline of Labov's narrative model provides a clear coding scheme for even more detailed analysis for future research. Referring to the large body of scholarly work within the Labovian paradigm, researchers can understand with more certainty how a narrative essay is organized and structured to create coherence.

As any other study, this study has some limitations. First of all, in the piloting study, the number of the responses elicited from the survey sample size and the number of students enrolled in the writing course are too small to yield meaningful statistics. Future research can follow this approach and collect more responses and recruit more students to see the possible correlation between the narrative elements in Labov's narrative model and other assessment tools. Second, the Labovian narrative model may not be familiar to respondents without a linguistics background. This can influence what they identify as a particular narrative element or even affect their willingness to participate in the study. Bridging the gap between research and practice remains a task to be completed. Limitations notwithstanding, this study has pointed out what the research on EFL writing for testing purposes in Taiwan can further explore and put forth a interdisciplinary theoretical integration as a plausible solution.

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Appendix
Appendix A. Picture Writing Prompt Designed by CEEC for 2014 GSAT.

Appendix B. Survey Questions (in part)
Please read the following passages of a student's writing. The essay is broken into paragraphs as in the original. All texts remain the same. All sentences are numbered for identification.

Check the boxes of the narrative elements for each passage. At the end of this page, you will be asked to rate the student's writing based on vocabulary, grammar, and overall organization.

Student C
(1) Two years ago, I was a kid. (2) My mom took me home from school. (3) There were a couple on the road. (4) The girl was using cellphone that she didn't notice her boyfriend dancing beside her. (5) No longer, she got hit by the boy and hit the tree hardly. (6) After that, the boy didn't know what happened and keep going by his own.

☐abstract ☐orientation ☐complicating action ☐resolution
☐coda ☐evaluation

(7) The boy was listen to the music, but the volume was as large as he couldn't hear the voice outside. (8) He didn't notice the car after him was angry. (9)The driver came out the car, and shout to the boy. (10) The boy put the music down and said sorry to the driver immidiatly. (11) The driver accepted his apology and drive away. (12) After that, the was blame himself.

☐abstract ☐orientation ☐complicating action ☐resolution
☐coda ☐evaluation

What do you think of the student's work? (Based on High Plains Regional Technology in Education Consortium Model, 2010)

	Complete knowledge	Extensive knowledge	Moderate knowledge	Limited knowledge
topic (ideas and content)				
sequencing (organization)				
adding personality (voice)				
word choice				
sentence structure (fluency)				
grammar and spelling (conventions)				