Female Storytellers' Identity Construction on Social Media: A Sociolinguistic Study

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Article information	

Abstract

This present study aims to investigate how storytellers construct their identity in online written narratives as well as to identify what type(s) of identity are projected as a result of the narrator's linguistic choices. Labov's Structural Narrative model (1972), was employed to analyse a written success story with a tragic theme, published on a public social media website for Women for Women International Organization (WFWIO). Labov's model is a six-schema sociolinguistic approach that contributes to an improved understanding of narratives by offering insights into the author's linguistic techniques. This study offers a unique application of Labov's model, originally intended for analysing spoken narratives, to the examination of written narratives in an online context. The study finds that the Labovian structural components of storytelling: Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Resolution, Evaluation, and Coda, play an essential role in shaping the narrator's gender identity. In addition, the narrator employs evaluative strategies to strengthen her gender identity. Also, the analysis verifies that the structural components of the written stories, in alignment with the narrator's linguistic choices, significantly contribute to the manner in which individuals project their identity. Furthermore, the study finds that the structural analysis of the story largely reflects many types of identity, namely; personal, social, cultural, and evolving identities.

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بناء هوية الراوية في مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي: دراسة اجتماعية لغوية

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الملخص	معلومات الارشفة

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التحقيق في كيفية بناء رواة القصص لهويتهم في السرديات المكتوبة عبر الإنترنت وكذلك تحديد أنواع الهوية التي تشكلت نتيجة للاختيارات اللغوية للراوي. تم استخدام نموذج السرد البنيوي للابوف (1972) لتحليل قصة نجاح مكتوبة بموضوع مأساة، نُشرت على موقع ويب عام للتواصل الاجتماعي لمنظمة المرأة العالمية (WFWIO). نموذج لابوف هو نهج اجتماعي لغوي مكون من ستة مكونات, يساهم في تحسين فهم السرديات من خلال تقديم رؤى حول التقنيات اللغوية للمؤلف. تقدم هذه الدراسة تطبيقًا فريدًا لنموذج لابوف، الذي كان مخصصًا في الأصل لتحليل السرديات المنطوقة، لفحص السرديات المكتوبة في سياق الإنترنت. تجد الدراسة أن المكونات البنيوية للابوف لسرد القصص: التجريد والتوجيه والفعل المعقد والحل والتقييم والخاتمة، تلعب دورًا أساسيًا في تشكيل الهوية الجنسانية للراوية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تستخدم الراوية استراتيجيات تقييمية لتعزيز هويتها الجنسانية. كما يؤكد التحليل أن المكونات البنيوية للقصص المكتوبة، بما يتماشى مع الخيارات اللغوية للراوي، تساهم بشكل كبير في الطريقة التي يشكل بها الأفراد هويتهم. وعلاوة على ذلك، تجد الدراسة أن التحليل البنيوي للقصة يعكس إلى حد كبير العديد من أنواع الهوية: الهويات الشخصية والاجتماعية والثقافية والمتطورة.

الكلمات المفتاحية :

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1. Preliminaries and Theoretical Background

Sociolinguistics, as investigated by many researchers, is intricately related to studies on gender and identity, as language from a sociolinguistic perspective proposes valuable insights into the construction, perpetuation, and challenge of gender norms and social identities (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Tanimu & Nwaobasi, 2024). With reference to gender, sociolinguistic theories hold that men and women acquire distinct languages depending on the social context in which they find themselves. According to Eckert (1989: 245), "sex-linguistic correlations are just a reflection of the impact of gender on linguistic behaviour - the complex social construction of sex", instead of directly connecting gender to language performance, linguistic performance reflects complex social practice. Men and women thus have different identities, which show in their "linguistic performance and choices." (Bassiouney, 2020: 224).

In the literature of linguistics, gender identity is proposed as an individuals' inner perception of their gender, which may or may not conform with the sex they were given at birth (Beisembayeva & Issina, 2022). The expression and negotiation of gender identity within societal expectations and norms can be observed through pronoun usage, speech patterns, and discourse choices (Cameron, 2005). These elements serve as just a few examples of how individuals communicate and navigate their gender identity within the framework of sociolinguistics. Since gender identity is expressed clearly through the linguistic choices of the individual, it is best examined from a structural point of view.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, there are many different types of identity. The most prominent types and relevant to the present study are personal, social, cultural, and evolving identities. Personal identity is perpetually entangled in and emerges from the conflict between the desire to conform to society and others and the desire to pursue one's own aspirations, desires, and his hopes (Layder, 2004). However, social identity relates to how people view themselves in respect to different social groupings, including those based on gender, ethnicity, country, class, age, etc. Expression and negotiation of social identities depend heavily on language (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Cultural identity negotiates the common sense of identity, norms, values, and customs that characterise a group of individuals (Hall, 1990). It includes a range of aspects that set one group apart from another, including religion, language, traditions, customs, and heritage (Tajfel, 1982). Finally evolving identity provides us with a consistent understanding of ourselves over time. It develops as we commit to new activities, interact with many individuals, and reinterpret our life narratives within the context of emerging opportunities (Ibarra & INSEAD, 2004).

In the era of digital technology, social media platforms have evolved beyond their original purpose of facilitating communication, and now function as platforms for individuals to share their personal narratives (Boyd, 2010). Narrative in social media has become a primary vehicle for individuals to shape their identities (de Fina, 2015a). Social media platforms have offered individuals opportunity to share their personal experiences to a broad global audience (Marwick & Boyd, 2014). Stories, whether communicated through conventional written stories or posted on online platforms, function as influential means of communication, expression of identity, and social engagement. Individuals construct stories about their lives on social media platforms by sharing posts, images, and videos, which shape their online personas and interact with virtual communities. This process mirrors the intricate process of forming one's real-life identity (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

2.   Problem of the Research

The emergence of social media has revolutionized the way people convey their gender identity; yet, there is limited interpretation of how written stories shared on these platforms shape the construction of identity. The present study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how women communicate their gender identities using formal linguistic aspects, employing Labov's structural narrative model. The model, traditionally utilized for oral narratives, will be employed for the first time to analyse written narratives in an online context. Furthermore, this study will identify types of identity that have not been realized in prior studies by using Labov's model, addressing a significant gap in the existing research.

3.   Research Questions

In the present study two questions are addressed:

1. How is female storytellers' identity constructed based on Labov's (1972) Structural Narrative Model?
2. What type(s) of identity is constructed by storytellers' linguistic choices based on Labov's (1972) Structural Narrative Model?

4.   Hypotheses of the Research

The previous questions are directly addressed by the following hypotheses:

1. The study supposes that on public social media platforms, storytellers construct and convey their gender identity to their audience through their personal experiences written narrative, that employ particular structural linguistic choices.

2. The study suggests that the organization and the linguistic choices employed by the storytellers in their personal experiences written narrative may reveal the types of identity they construct.

5. Aims of the Research

1. The current study aims to investigate how storytellers construct their identity in online written narratives using the structural framework of Labov.
2. It also aims to identify the types of identity shaped as a result of the narrator's linguistic choices.
3. It also aims to adapt Labov's Structural Model to analyse written narratives instead of oral ones.

6. Analytical Model

The current study adopts William Labov's (1972) sociolinguistic, structural model for narrative analysis. It is originally produced to analyse spoken narratives within actual social contexts, bringing them out from daily discourse practices. It has also offered to be just as successful in investigating the style of short literary texts (Sheikh, et al., 2021). Labov's (1972) approach is particularly influential due to its systematic steps to address narrative and its emphasis on discourse structure over plot. It combines formalist and structuralist methodologies to analyse structure and function. The motive for selecting this model for the analysis of literary texts is grounded in its strong structural foundation and its practicality within both literary and non-literary contexts (Afsar, 2006).

Labov (1972) has identified recurring structural elements that form the basis of a "fully formed natural narrative." He put forward a six-schema sociolinguistic approach for analysing narratives after thoroughly investigating a considerable collection of natural narratives. The utilization of Labov's (ibid.) six schemas contributes to an improved understanding of narratives by offering insights into the author's narrative and linguistic techniques. This narrative framework can also be illustrated through a series of interrogative elements (ibid:370).

The following are the six essential components: (1) abstract, (2) orientation, (3) complicating action, (4) evaluation, (5) result, and (6) coda. They are elaborated in details in the following: Abstract: It is the initial element of the Labovian structure that includes one or two phrases aimed at summarizing the entire story and communicating its underlying message. Orientation: It is a clause that provides details about the place, time, and the characters' names and initial behaviour in a story and the precise setting or circumstances in which the story takes place.

Complicating action: It directs to the actual events in the story that drive the plot and grasp the audience's attention. This builds the heart of the story, including a sequence of storytelling elements that address the question, "What happened then?". Resolution: Labov (1997:12) defines this element as "the collection of complicating actions that follow the most reportable incident". The resolution reduces the tension and offers a response to the question, "What finally happened?". Coda: Codas, which are free clauses that are placed at the conclusion of stories, perform the purpose of signalling the end of a story. Essentially, the coda functions as a tool to lead the story perspective back to the chronological timeline of the tale. Evaluation: Labov (1972) provides a definition of evaluation as "that part of the narrative which reveals the narrator's attitude towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units compared to others." (ibid.).

These six-schema narrative categories are used as a powerful tool to analyse and explain how narrative patterns and recurring themes (or ideas), recognized in the stories considered in this study, contribute to the structural linguistic choices made by the storyteller in order to construct and reveal his/her gender as well as identify the type of this identity. Thus, gender identity in this model is identified from a structural perspective.

7.   Value of the Study

The research focuses on how gender identity is formed in written personal stories shared on public social media, using Labov's (1972) structural narrative model. It explores how formal linguistic characteristics are employed by individuals to construct their identity relative to their audience. By adapting Labov's (ibid.) model, typically used for spoken stories, to written narratives for the first time, this study presents a new perspective on how identity is moulded in online environments. This study's value lies in identifying the type of identities the storyteller projects through her linguistic choices employed in her written personal narrative, by using Labov's (ibid.) model for the first time. Thus, the study contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics and gender studies by demonstrating the influence of linguistic decisions on shaping gender identity in online context. It provides useful insights for researchers examining narrative analysis and digital communication. Further, it has the possibility to be practically applied by educators who are exploring language, identity, and narrative in digital settings.

8.   Methodology

For the present study method, a qualitative approach is employed due to the nature of the data and the study's objectives, as the study addresses social issues as a sociolinguistic study: gender, identity and ideology, concentrating on describing and analysing narrative written texts, and this requires a qualitative method.

The data in the present study is collected directly from the publicly accessible social media page the WFWIO, which is a global organization that offers support, education, and resources to women in war-affected areas, it is founded in 1993. This data is collected through the method of document analysis. Full written narrative is taken directly from a chosen publicly accessible social media page and then saved in Word files as it is (see Appendix), maintaining its original language, formatting, writing style, and structure, followed by commencing the analytical process. It is considered as secondary data, as it is already created and published by the editors of the website, and being reused for analysis in this study. As the data is publicly accessible online, no additional permissions are required. Regardless, the data and its respective source website is appropriately cited in detail to honour the author's property rights and uphold ethical standards.

As for the data sample in this study, it comprises a full written narrative story of a successful Iraqi woman's experiences, written originally in Arabic and translated to English Language by WFWIO. The story's website link:
https://womenforwomen.org.uk/saleha-iraq

9. Analysis and Results

The story analysed in this study is a success story with a theme of tragedy, it was published on the WFWIO website and shared on the organization's social media pages, with no date of publication. With the title "Saleha's Story", the story is about "Saleha Ali Jassim", an Iraqi widow who is an uneducated mother of eight children. She suffered a lot, due to the many shocks and challenges she went through after losing her husband. As she became a widow, she was forced to work and support her eight children financially. After a serious period of suffering, she and her children passed through, her maternal instinct pushed her to pull herself together and strengthen herself to develop her skills and potential, and start her own business. Fortunately, she received the help she needed from WfWIO, which convinced her to share her story for the first time as a source of hope and encouragement.

This story was not written by Saleha's hand, but it was transmitted from her orally and literally, without any single change affecting the wordings or contents, and translated by the organization into English. Therefore, Saleha is considered the narrator of her story in the present study.

Analysis:

1. **Abstract:**

In terms of formal and structural positioning, what the story about is summarized in the first two paragraphs, representing the abstract category in the Labovian sense, that are indicated in the following lines:

Story Text:

> **"SALEHA LIVES IN MOSUL, IRAQ. SHE IS A SINGLE MOTHER TO EIGHT CHILDREN - AND SHE IS A BAKER. SHE HAS STARTED HER OWN BUSINESS AND SHARES HER STORY OF HOPE AS SHE WORKS TOWARDS REBUILDING HER LIFE AFTER CONFLICT.**
> **This is the first time I have the confidence to share my story."** (Lines 2-6, Appendix)

In Saleha's story, lines 2-6, illustrating the abstract, are written in capital letters, as a structural technique, in order to make them more prominent and more important than the rest of the story's text; hence, to distinguish them visually. In this story, the capitalized paragraph is followed by a sentence in which Saleha says that she will share her story, and this sentence is the first sentence with which Saleha begins telling her story. The paragraph, which is written by the organization, is an introduction containing general information about Saleha, so that the audience/readers can get to know her before starting the narration of her story.

In terms of content, Saleha's story revolves around an indefatigable, strong, widow and sole breadwinner for her eight children, residing in the city of Mosul located in the north of Iraq. After the sad death of her husband who was the only supporter, breadwinner and protector for the family, Saleha realized soon that there was not a breadwinner for her children any longer, so she overcame her trauma at the loss of her husband, gathered her strength, and began her journey of self-reliance and exploiting her baking skills to open her own business.

The story calls attention to the struggles and triumphs she experienced, with reference to the challenges of bringing up eight children by herself, with no support of any effective kind, neither from the family, nor from the society.

The type of identity constructed by the storytellers (Saleha) throughout the use of linguistic properties in her story, is basically that of social identity, insofar as the narrative category of abstract is concerned. This type of gender identity is revealed here, due to the tendency of the storyteller who has conveyed her priorities and what she considers important or valuable to share through the use of the linguistic properties illustrated structurally in the abstract of her story.

2. **Orientation:**

In this category, the narrator (Saleha) talks about who and what is included in her story, and when and where the story's events take place. This is to help the audience identify the people, entities, places, and circumstances surrounding their story, and also to portray the narrator's life situation and provide clear insight into her experiences. All these elements are shown in the following lines:

Story Text:

"I'm Saleha Ali Jassim, I was born in 1980, and I am a widow with eight children (six boys and two girls). I live in Mosul city, specifically in West Mosul/AlZanjili area.

Let me introduce you to my eight children:

Salih, my oldest boy, 20 years old; Jassim, 19 years old; Ibrahim, 16 years old; Walla'a, 14 years old; Worrod, 11 years old; Omar, 8 years old; Ahmad, 6 years old, and the youngest little angel Zaid, 4 years old."

(Lines 7-13, Appendix)

However, the elements and information related to the orientation category in the story are summarized into four sub-categories showing the context of orientation:

Orientation's Sub-categories	Saleha's Story
Characters	"Saleha Ali Jassim": who is the protagonist and who the whole story revolves around, born in 1980. She is a widow and the mother of six boys and two girls.
	Salih: Saleha's oldest son. He is twenty years old.
	Jassim: Saleha's son, nineteen years old.
	Ibrahim: Saleha's son, sixteen years old.

	Omar: Saleha's son, eight years old.
	Ahmad: Saleha's son, six years old.
	Zaid: Saleha's son, four years old.
	Walla'a: Saleha's daughter, fourteen years old.
	Worrod: Saleha's daughter, eleven years old.
	Saleha's Husband
	Saleha's Relatives
Entity	WFWIO: an organization for helping women and empowering them.
When	The actual time to publish the story is not specified. But it comes to be four years starting from when Saleha's husband died and continues with her struggles to rebuild her family life.
Where	The city of Mosul in Iraq, specifically Alzanjili area (an area filled with poor and working class people)[1]

Within the narrative category of orientation investigated in the story, the type of the identity portrayed by the storyteller (Saleha) in the taleworld of her narrative is mostly that of social and cultural. These types of identity are reflected and expressed linguistically and structurally in Saleha's story by emphasising aspects such as the main characters' early life experiences, regional roots, cultural environment, and social affiliations associated with her gender identity.

3. **Complicating Action:**

By this narrative category, the core question raised in Saleha's story (Then what happened?) is to be answered, with reference to this category, in the following lines:

Story Text:

> **"I lost my husband four years ago due to liver disease. I was traumatised by the fact that my husband and the father of my children is no longer here to protect and support us. It was hard for me to accept that I am the one who should take the responsibility of raising our children, especially when our relatives have abandoned us. I was overwhelmed with negative thoughts and looking desperately at my family, wondering what should I do?"** (Lines 14-19, Appendix)

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[1] The information given in the parentheses are the researcher's comments and explanations

Saleha in her story, starts narrating specific events that represent the central crisis in her life in a clear progression of events and corresponding emotional responses, setting up the groundwork for the resolution. Saleha, then delves into the emotional consequence of her loss, portraying her trauma at losing the father of the family. She ends her expression of her suffering by asking this question "what should I do?", expressing her feeling of loss and seeking support, advice and guidance on how to deal with such a difficult situation. What happened in this story is illustrated in this part by the narrator. She expresses many conflicts. Her initial struggle is presented in her loss of her protector and supporter, her husband, leaving her alone to bear the responsibility of eight children. She encounters trauma and her relatives' abandonment. Finding strength by choosing not to give up, she determines to use her primary baking skills to begin a bread making business. Silent suffering is clear between the lines, viz Saleha as a woman that has no one to help endure her struggles silently. She also engages her two oldest boys in farming and working in construction work to increase their income.

As for the narrative category of complicating action examined in Saleha's story, the type of the identity formed is mostly that of a personal one. This type of identity is reflected and shown in the temporal order of the narrative clauses and utterances with the simple past/present of the verbs used in expressing the narrator's actions, choices, and reactions to the story's events.

4. **Resolution:**

The core question raised by Labov (1972) in this category is "What finally happened?". To provide an answer to this question, the final key (or important) events of Saleha's story are recapitulated and expressed linguistically as the last narrative clauses (structures) that started the 'complicated action' discussed above. In this regard, events realized structurally in the last clauses in Saleha's story, begin to change for the better and the solution to Saleha's problems are summarized in the following lines:
Story Text:

"I was looking for a place to be able to speak and find someone who listens to me and encourages me, and that day came when I heard about Women for Women International and the services they provided. I registered myself without any hesitation and was eagerly waiting to be included in their programmes.

I started joining the Mosul centre on 23rd December, the social empowerment sessions have helped me a lot by making new friends, listening to my group colleagues' stories, diving into the interesting topics of

social empowerment sessions knowing our value as women, growing our skills, and learning how to lead our families and our communities.
Day after day, I gained the strength and confidence to speak." (Lines 32-43, Appendix)

For Saleha, there are two things she seeks out at this phase; Seeking support and gaining confidence. After knowing about WFWIO, she registers eagerly for the programs. She starts attending the sessions of social empowerment, where she builds new friendships and realizes a lot about her self-worth, rights and abilities. With regards to gaining confidence, Saleha's participation in those sessions encouraged her to acquire the confidence to sincerely share her story for the first time. She discovers a welcoming community and draws strength from the shared experiences and stories of fellow women.

The type of identity constructed structurally in the story, with reference to the narrative category of resolution, is that of a personal one. This type of identity is shaped by the story's resolution that recapitulates the final master or key events of the Saleha's story.

5. Evaluation:

The evaluation category with its linguistic or structural tools, based on the core question: "So what?", in Saleha's story is not confined to a specific part; rather, they are distributed throughout various parts of the story. It serves to communicate Saleha's emotions, thoughts, and viewpoints regarding the events or the story by accentuating the relative significance of certain parts of the narrative in comparison to others.

The following table indicates the evaluation tools or strategies employed in the Saleha's story and the grammatical devices utilized to express them.

Strategy's Type	grammatical device	Text	Explanation
Internal Evaluation Strategies	Intensifiers	"traumatised by the fact" (Line: 14-15)	"traumatized", the use of this word intensifies the emotional weight of her husband's death, stressing the deep nature of her sorrow and disbelief.
		"It was hard for me to accept" (Line: 16)	The expression "hard for me" intensifies the emotional conflict

			she confronted while grappling with her recent responsibilities.
		"I was overwhelmed with negative thoughts" (Line: 18)	The use of "overwhelmed" heightens the depth of her despair, indicating that the pessimistic thoughts were nearly unbearable.
		"I was suffering in silence." (Line: 30)	The term "suffering" highlights the profound emotional grief she bore while internalizing her hardships.
	Comparators	"I just wanted … my family." (Line: 30-31)	The word "but" in this context emphasizes the contrast between her desire to give up and her commitment to staying resilient, emphasizing the internal struggle between her emotional disruption and her obligation to keep going.
		"This is the first … empowerment classes." (Line: 44-46)	The contrast between her earlier lack of confidence and her current willingness to share her story emphasizes how empowering the sessions have been.
External Evaluation Strategies	External Evaluation	"I was traumatised … and support us" (Line: 14-16)	This line not only conveys Saleha's personal sorrow but also addresses the broader societal norm dictating a husband's responsibility to safeguard and provide for the family. By underlining his absence, she draws attention to the societal hole that she is now compelled to fill.

		"I was overwhelmed … should I do?" (Line: 18-19)	This external evaluation extends her personal despair, situating it within a larger story of uncertainty and fear that anyone in her position could feel.
		"I must act strong for my family." (Line: 31-32)	This phrase acts as an external evaluation, reflecting the societal pressure on mothers to be the emotional support for the family, even when they are personally struggling.
Mixed Evaluation	Paraphrasing Feelings	"I had times … of everything," (Line: 30-31)	In these lines, Saleha paraphrases her strong feelings of helplessness and frustration, conveying the profound emotional conflict she is experiencing without explicitly articulating her emotions.
		"Day after day, … to speak." (Line: 42-43)	Saleha's increasing assurance is paraphrased in a manner that emphasizes the gradual development of her empowerment, demonstrating a slow yet sustained internal change.
	Supporting Others	"I encouraged Salih and Jassim to look for a job" (Line: 25-26)	This statement not only reflects her leadership within her family but also confirms her support for her eight children in making contributions to the household, accentuating the collaborative effort to overcome challenges.

The type of the identity identified in the story with reference to the narrative category of evaluation, is mostly personal. This type of identity is reflected by the narrator's linguistic expressions and utterances that have been used to express the narrator's feelings and attitudes toward the events she has narrated.

6. Coda:

The coda category, addressing the question: "How does it all end?", refers to the structural devices which signal that Saleha's story has come to the end, taking the listeners/audience back from past events to the present time, to the positive developments, to advanced situations of Saleha that she has recently reached in her life. Consider these last lines given at the end of the story:

Story Text:

"This is the first time I have the confidence to share my story as I didn't have the confidence to do that before joining Women for Women International social empowerment classes. I can't wait to start my economic empowerment sessions and my favourite vocational track will begin this March." (Lines 44-47, Appendix)

In this part of the story, Saleha displays her progress and positiveness for the future. The story ends on an optimistic note as Saleha eagerly looks ahead to beginning the economic empowerment sessions and seeking her favourite vocational training in March. Here she reflects her determination, ambition, and overcoming the difficult situation she went through in order to create a better future for her children. With her newfound confidence and skills, Saleha is excited about taking her business forward and gaining empowerment.

As for the type of identity revealed, in terms of the narrative category of coda, in the this story, is evolving identity. This type of identity is linguistically portrayed by the narrator though her attempt in relating her earlier gloomy experience to her happily current sense of self.

10. Findings

The current study employs The Structural Narrative Model of Labov (1972) in order to analyse a written story "Saleha's Story", which is a success story with a tragedy theme. It is published on a public social media website, specifically the pages of WFWIO. Facilitating investigation of the ways in which the narrator's linguistic choices are used to construct her gender identity within a sociolinguistic framework. The study's analysis has resulted numerous noteworthy findings:

1. The research reveals that the Labovian structural components of storytelling: Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Resolution, Evaluation, and Coda, are significant tools in explaining how Saleha has constructed her gender identity in her narrative story. The story represents her as a woman of great resilience who, despite facing important hardship, experiences a profound transformation into a strong, empowered woman. This evolution is effectively communicated through her personal experiences, which are structured to underline her progression from a state of victimization to one of self-reliance.

2. The study finds that in the story, the narrator employs a range of evaluative strategies, including intensifiers, comparisons, external evaluation, and types of mixed evaluation to bring out her emotional responses, her attitude, her opinion, and the importance of pivotal events in her life. These strategies serve to strengthen her gender identity, unequivocally indicating that her gender identity is not solely influenced by external factors, but also by her internal emotional responses and personal development.

3. The analysis verifies that the structural components of the written stories, in alignment with the narrator's linguistic choices, significantly contribute to the manner in which individuals such as Saleha shape and convey their gender identity.

4. The study finds that the structural analysis of the story largely reflects many types of identity: Personal, social, cultural, and evolving identities. As exemplified in the following table:

No.	Narrative Categories	Narrative Question	Identity Type	Explanation
1.	Abstract	What is the story about?	Social identity	The narrator Reflects this type of identity by conveying her priorities and what they consider important or valuable to share.
2.	Orientation	What and how are involved, and where and when does the story happen?	Social and cultural identity	The narrator Reflects this type of identity by emphasising aspects such as their early life experiences, regional roots, or cultural environment, thereby indirectly bringing to light the values or

				affiliations associated with her identity.
3.	Complicating Action	Then what happened?	Personal identity	The narrator Reflects this type of identity by showing her actions, choices, and reactions to story's events. The narrative decisions made in representing these actions illustrate the narrator's sense of control, beliefs, and her self-perception within the world.
4.	Resolution	What finally happened?	Personal identity	This type of identity is shaped by the story's resolution. How the narrator represents herself as defeated, victorious, or transformed by the experience exposes their perception of herself and her position in the world following the story's events.
5.	Evaluation	So what?	Personal identity	The narrator Reflects this type of identity by expressing her feelings and attitudes toward the events they are narrating.
6.	coda	How does the story end?	Evolving identity	The narrator Reflects this type of identity by the narrator relating her earlier experiences to her current sense of self.

11. Concluding Remarks

In the light of the findings of data analysis, the study has resulted the subsequent conclusions:

1. This study analysis reveals that storytellers who convey narratives, such as Saleha, shape their gender identity by employing the formal structure of the story and utilizing linguistic components to mirror their personal, social, cultural, and evolving identities. In the context of written narratives, Labov's (1972) model explains how each component of the narrative functions to structure and emphasize different aspects of the narrator's gender identity. The structural components, specifically abstraction, complicating action, and evaluation, allow

the narrator to highlight personal challenges, social positions, and eventual empowerment, thereby shaping a multidimensional gender identity.

2. This study confirms that analysing stories using Labov's (ibid.) framework identifies different types of identities, including personal, social, cultural, and evolving identities, for the narrator in each narrative category of Labov's (ibid.) model. Saleha's story portrays her as a mother and widow, navigating the confines of cultural norms while gradually transforming into an empowered and self-reliant woman. The construction of these identities is influenced by linguistic strategies, particularly through the use of evaluation. Emotional and personal perspectives are employed to add richness to the portrayal of gender identity.

3. The study produces new evidence for the significance and reliability of Labov's (ibid.) framework, as a powerful tool for investigating written narratives on public social media context with reference to the narrator's gender identity.

4. The current study not only addresses a gap in the application of Labov's (ibid.) model to written narratives but also offers valuable insights into the importance of narrative structure in shaping identity within a digital context.

Appendix

"SALEHA'S STORY"

"THIS IS MY STORY

SALEHA LIVES IN MOSUL, IRAQ. SHE IS A SINGLE MOTHER TO EIGHT CHILDREN - AND SHE IS A BAKER. SHE HAS STARTED HER OWN BUSINESS AND SHARES HER STORY OF HOPE AS SHE WORKS TOWARDS REBUILDING HER LIFE AFTER CONFLICT This is the first time I have the confidence to share my story.

I'm Saleha Ali Jassim, I was born in 1980, and I am a widow with eight children (six boys and two girls). I live in Mosul city, specifically in West Mosul/AlZanjili area. Let me introduce you to my eight children:

Salih, my oldest boy, 20 years old; Jassim, 19 years old; Ibrahim, 16 years old; Walla'a, 14 years old; Worrod, 11 years old; Omar, 8 years old; Ahmad, 6 years old, and the youngest little angel Zaid, 4 years old.

I lost my husband four years ago due to liver disease. I was traumatised by the fact that my husband and the father of my children is no longer here to protect and support us. It was hard for me to accept that I am the one who should take the responsibility of raising our children, especially when our relatives have abandoned us. I was overwhelmed with negative thoughts and looking desperately at my family, wondering what should I do?

I brought myself together and decided not to give up for the sake of my kids.

I started thinking of my strengths, looking for a way to work and make income.

I decided to use my basic baking skills and started to bake bread and sell it. I encouraged Salih and Jassim to look for a job; they started to work in construction buildings as daily workers with very low wages. We also worked together in farming to supplement the aid we received from local donors and charities.

Going through all of this, I was suffering in silence. I had times when I just wanted to scream and let go of everything, but I reminded myself that I must act strong for my family. I was looking for a place to be able to speak and find someone who listens to me and encourages me, and that day came when I heard about Women for Women International and the services they provided. I registered myself without any hesitation and was eagerly waiting to be included in their programmes.

I started joining the Mosul centre on 23rd December, the social empowerment sessions have helped me a lot by making new friends, listening to my group colleagues' stories, diving into the interesting topics of social empowerment sessions knowing our value as women, growing our skills, and learning how to lead our families and our communities

Day after day, I gained the strength and confidence to speak.

This is the first time I have the confidence to share my story as I didn't have the confidence to do that before joining Women for Women International social empowerment classes. I can't wait to start my economic empowerment sessions and my favourite vocational track will begin this March."

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