The Influence of Iranian EFL IELTS Candidates' Identity Processing Styles on Their Oral Versions of Personal Experience

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Abstract. This study aimed at discovering the influence of identity processing style on personal experience narratives of Iranian IELTS candidates in terms of the narrative structure used in oral narratives. For this purpose, 10 Iranian IELTS candidates' oral narratives were collected orally and analyzed. Personal narratives were examined in terms of Labov's (1972) narrative categories, and then compared between 2 groups based on Berzonsky's identity processing style ISI 5. The findings of the study suggested that there were some differences in narrative structures based on identity processing style of the members of each group. The personal experience narratives of diffuse-avoidant members seemed to have more "evaluation" while normative members seemed to have used more "complicating action". With respect to the obtained results, this study points to the fact that instructors and educators, can take advantage of identity surveys to construct improved learning opportunities. Test developers, on the same token, can use identity surveys to form a more comprehensive interpretive argument which can produce

relatively more plausible interpretations. This assists test users, in turn, to take more appropriate and fare decisions.

Keywords: Narratives, identity processing style, discourse, discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Making sense of one's world, and basic cognitive skills such as making decisions heavily depend on a coherent and well-integrated identity structure (Berzonsly & Ferrari, 2009, p. 145). Erik Erikson's (1968) life span theory, which was an effort to illustrate the search for and construction of a sense of identity was an inspiration to other paradigms in the field of identity. Hoare (2002) stated, "Erikson was the first to illustrate how the social world exists in the psychological apparatus of each person, a person he saw as a biopsychosocial being who lives in the flow of one seamless, personal narrative and in one niche of total historical time" (p. 4).

Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm was utilized as a framework against which identity was studied. Marcia's model is based on two simultaneous dimensions, crisis and commitment. Berzonsky (1989) explains that crisis involves an active exploration and examination of identity issues. Berzonsky (1989) defines commitment as personal involvement in the values and beliefs that one professes to. Marcia's classification is based on these two dimensions and introduces four statuses: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. The aforementioned conceptualization, however, sees identity as a final outcome. More recently, experts strived to focus more on the process by which identity formed rather than final outcomes.

Berzonsky (1990) established a social-cognitive model of identity formation that hypothesizes three different identity processing styles: informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant. Berzonsky (2011) states that these styles refer to stated preferences and inclinations in the social-cognitive processes deployed when individuals attempt to evade identity conflicts and decisions. According to Berzonsky (2011) individuals with an informational processing orientation purposely seek out, process, and

evaluate identity-relevant information. A diffuse-avoidant orientation involves a reluctance to confront and deal with identity conflicts. Individuals with a normative orientation internalize and adhere to goals, values, and prescriptions appropriated from significant others and referent groups in a relatively automatic or mindless manner.

Story telling and narrating personal events are a distinctive feature of human beings. Narrative has been used to refer to other concepts and notions such as stories, discourse and tale. Labov (2013) defines narratives as a particular way of narrating and retelling past events, by matching the order of narrative clauses. Narratives do not merely function as a linguistic action; they can be considered as a way to deal with the past. This viewpoint is indicative of the significance of the role of narratives in deeper psychoanalytical domains. Labov (1972) claims that narratives are roughly comprised of six groups of clauses with the following functions and order:

1 Abstract

2 Orientation

3 Complicating Action

4 Evaluation

5 Result and Resolution

6 Coda

De Fina (2003) states that in in this model, the axis around which the nature of narratives revolves is the complicating action which is also an indispensable feature of stories.

The present study is a qualitative effort to better understand the potential influence of identity processing styles on the way individuals narrate and retell their personal stories in a foreign language.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Identity
Identity is a fundamental construct in applied linguistics as it is inextricably intertwined with language. (Darvin, 2018). The concept of

identity has attracted interest in applied linguistics for a variety of reasons. One reason that the notion of identity has gained momentum is the fact that the performance of identities forms how linguistic repertoire is employed (De Fina, 2016). In addition, it links the level of the individual with the social and thus allows us to better understand the processes by which individuals affiliate with or distance themselves from particular communities, what kind of information they aim to convey about themselves and how this information in turn resonates with the ideas others hold about them (Zotzmann & O'Regan, 2016). De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg (2006) describe identity as, 'crucially, about conveying to one another what kind of people we are; which geographical, ethnic, social communities we belong to; where we stand in relation to ethical and moral questions; or where our loyalties are in political terms'. According to Erikson's (1968) theory of identity, a well-established and coherent sense of identity plays a crucially important role in an individual's life. A well- established sense of identity functions as a frame of reference for decisions, acts leading to a coherent pattern of behavior (Berzonsky, 2005). In other words, individuals' need to develop a stable and meaningful identity structure to effectively manage their lives. On the same token, this clear structure enables them to retain a sense of self-continuity over time and space and which provides a basis for making decisions, problem- solving, and inferring personal experience and external events (Berzonsky, Cieciuch, Duriez & Soenenz, 2011). Marcia's (1966) model has been referred to as a paradigm to define identity status for almost five decades (Berzonsky & Papini, 2014). According to Berzonsky and Papini (2014), "By crossing high and low levels of self-exploration and commitment, Marcia (1966) identified four different identity outcomes or statuses: achievement (high exploration, high commitment); moratorium (high exploration, low commitment); foreclosure (low exploration, high commitment); and diffusion (low exploration, low commitment)". However, it has been considered that not only do the final differences matter, the process through which identity is formed can also be a matter of research and study. As a result of this view, recent researchers have underscored the process of identity formation, one of the most important of which is that of Berzonsky's (1990). In the

first model of his proposition, Berzonsky (1990) focused on differences in the social-cognitive processes and strategies individuals use to engage or avoid the tasks of constructing, maintaining, and/or reconstructing a sense of identity: Three different social-cognitive identity processing styles are postulated within this model: Informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant (Berzonsky et al. 2011).

Individuals with an informational style intentionally seek out, process, and evaluate self-relevant information before solving identity conflicts and developing commitments. They are self-reflective, skeptical about their views, keen on exploring new things about themselves, and willing to evaluate and modify their identity structure in light of feedback. Findings indicate that an informational style is closely linked to self-insight, open-mindedness, problem-focused coping strategies, vigilant decision making, cognitive complexity, emotional autonomy, empathy, adaptive self-regulation, high levels of commitment, and a clear identity status (Berzonsky et al. 2011). Individuals with dominant informational style are willing to express themselves in terms of qualities such as personal values, goals, and standards (Berzonsky, 1994; Berzonsky, Macek, & Nurmi, 2003; Lutwak, Ferrari, & Cheek, 1998).

Individuals with a normative style more automatically accept the goals and principles of significant others and referent groups. A normative style accompanies high commitment levels, self-control, and a sense of persistence but also a need for structure and cognitive closure, authoritarianism, inflexibility, a foreclosed identity status and low tolerance for ambiguity (Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Soenens, Duriez, & Goossens, 2005). This external structure seems to provide the person with assurance and confidence without which they might feel lost and unsure about intrinsic and extrinsic feelings and events. Individuals with high normative scores tend to define themselves in terms of collective self-attributes such as religion, family, and nationality (Berzonsky, 1994; Berzonsky et al., 2003; Lutwak et al., 1998).

Individuals with a diffuse-avoidant style procrastinate and attempt to defer facing identity conflicts and problems as long as possible. When they have to act or make choices, their behavior is driven primarily by immediate external demands and consequences. Such situational ac-

commodations, however, tend to be short-term acts of compliance rather than long-term modifications in their sense of self-identity (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2009). According to Berzonsky's model, diffuse-avoidance is more than a fragmented or confused self; it involves strategic attempts to evade or obscure potentially negative self-relevant feedback. A diffuse avoidant style is associated with weak commitments, an external locus of control, impulsiveness, self-handicapping, and a diffusion identity status (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2009). Individuals with a diffuse-avoidant style tend to define themselves in terms of social attributes such as reputation and popularity (Berzonsky, 1994; Berzonsky et al., 2003).

2.2. Discourse analysis and narrative

According to McAdams and McLean (2013) human beings are natural storytellers. They add that people construct and share stories about themselves, detailing particular episodes and periods in their lives and what those experiences mean to them. This instinctive role of narrating and storytelling has caused decades of research and study on this human behavior. In the last two decades, personal narratives have attracted experts' attention in many fields. Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, (2013) elaborate on the history of personal narrative analysis and point out that contemporary narrative research has two academic antecedents. The first movement is under the influence of post-war humanistic movement. The approaches under this movement had holistic, person-centered perspective, often including attention to individual case studies, biographies and life histories, against positivist empiricism. The second academic antecedent to contemporary narrative social research is Russian structuralist and French poststructuralist, postmodern, psychoanalytic and deconstructionist approaches to narrative within humanities.

Personal narratives have been defined and looked upon in various ways by experts with different inclinations. Some have claimed that one of the deepest social behaviors of human beings can be considered to be retelling personal experiences (Bohanek, Marin, & Fivush, 2008; Fivush and Nelson, 2006; Habermas and Bluck, 2000; Bamberg, 2006; Thorne, Kirkham, & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004; Bohanek et al., 2008; Thorne & Nam, 2009; McLean & Thorne, 2003; Pratt & Fiese, 2004). It should be taken

into account that the act of narration should not be considered as the mere act of retelling a story, though. The act of narrating personal experiences has been studied with respect to the notions of power, politics, economics and personal identity.

A narrative can be defined as the linguistic presentation and reconstruction of a series of temporally and causally associated real or fictitious events which revolve around a shared theme; these events are heavily influenced by cognitive and affective conditions of the actors engaged. A well-formed narrative, therefore, has both a referential function and evaluative function. The referential function is carried out by plot-forwarding clauses giving information about the who, where and when of the action. An evaluative function is realized by clauses expressing the intentionality behind those actions and has a more abstract nature (Waletzky & Labov, 1967).

Narration and telling stories have also examined with respect to societal issues. Personal narratives provide a crucial developmental and societal function, by serving as a means to reinforce community value systems and ties, in addition to defining individual identity (Thorne & Shapiro, 2011; Thorne et al., 2007). This point of view towards this aspect of narration directed some theorists to claim that "the stories they tell" is the defining aspect of both individuals and cultures (Swanson, Rahimtoroghi, Corcoran and Marilyn, Walker, 2014).

The earliest stages of narrative analysis dates back to Aristotle who, in his work Poetics, defined the structure of plots in narratives (Gimenez, 2010). More recent frameworks of analyses have been influenced by Waletzky and Labov's (1967). In the aforementioned model, Labov and waletzky identified the 'narrative clause' (e.g. '[He got on the train] and [he said goodbye to the kids]') as the basic unit in personal narratives. In this model the order of clauses determines the sequence of events as they actually happened and in turn the meaning of the whole account. It needs to be mentioned that most narratives are not as simple as the one mentioned above; most narratives include a larger number of clauses including free ones. A well-developed narrative, according to Labov (1972), roughly consists of clauses with the following functions and order:

1 Abstract

2 Orientation

3 Complicating Action

4 Evaluation

5 Result and Resolution 6 Coda

The abstract consists of a clause or two at the beginning of a narrative summarizing the story to come. The abstract announces that the narrator has a story to tell and makes a claim to the right to tell it, a claim supported by the suggestion that it will be a good story, worth the audience's time and the speaking rights the audience will temporarily relinquish. Orientation in a narrative introduces characters, temporal and physical setting, and situation (Johnstone, 2001).

Complicating action clauses recapitulate a sequence of events leading up to their climax. These clauses refer to events in the world of the story and, in the world of the telling, they create tension. The result or resolution releases the tension and tells what eventually happened. Often just before the result or resolution, but also throughout the narrative, are elements that serve as evaluation, stating or emphasizing what is interesting or unusual about the story, why the audience should keep listening and allow the teller to keep talking. Finally, the teller may announce via a coda that the story is over, sometimes providing a short summary of it or connecting the world of the story with the present (Johnstone, 2001).

Given the importance of identity processing style with respect to language learning and production and the concept of personal narratives and the way it is indicative of deep psychological and identity issues, it is essential to find out how these two factors may affect each other. It is, therefore, crucial to find out how different identity processing styles may or may not relate to different functions of a personal narrative.

It is worth mentioning that narratives of personal experience do not necessarily have all the features above. Ochs and Capps (2001) claim that narratives of personal experiences occupy a number of 'narrative dimensions and possibilities' related to tellership, tellability, embedded-

ness, linearity and moral stance. Ochs and Capps add that a normal narrative exhibits a range of features based on the narrator's features and characteristics.

Similarly, a feature of the narratives which has been found of interest among experts is the way it gives meaning to personal experiences as an expressive device. Patterson (2013) states that personal narratives-oral history, dinner party anecdote, legal testimony, response to an interview question-it is always a narration of the self. Patterson adds that in personal narration, a number of underlying identity features such as personal, social, cultural, and political identity are claimed by the narrators. "Everything said functions to express, confirm and validate the claimed identity" (Mishler, 1986, p. 283). On the same token, Patterson (2013) adds that many theorists have bridged the notion of personal narratives and identity by claiming that personal identity is the accumulation of stories we tell about ourselves.

The fact that evaluation is said to be one of the most important elements in Labov's approach is due to the fact that it provides analysts with an extremely useful tool to interpret the perspective, and the claimed identity of a narrator.

2.3. Purpose of the study

In order to develop our understanding of the interplay between narratives and the concept of identity, through the study of personal narratives by applying the Labov's narrative structure, the present study attempted to explore how identity processing styles influenced the way narratives are formed. The present qualitative study examined the following research question:

Do identity processing styles influence the way personal experiences are narrated?

3. Method

3.1. Design

To carry out this study, the researcher employed a qualitative design in which 10 participants were involved. According to Dornyei (2007), " an area where qualitative research shows vulnerability is the usually small

sample sizes of the respondents examined. One way of dealing with this issue is to apply purposive sampling" (p. 172). As a result of the small sample size, the researcher included an initial questionnaire in the study whose role was to help to select the participants for the current study. Next, the oral narratives were recorded, subsequently transcribed into the written language, and repeatedly read through line by line to develop transient themes and categories which were accurately in line with Labov's definitions of narrative concepts. The narratives were, then, qualitatively coded. With respect to reliability, it was checked through interrater agreement. The researcher asked a peer to analyze the narratives qualitatively and code the narratives. He was well familiar with the notion of discourse and Labov's narrative categories. Any discrepancy in the emerging themes and categories was later discussed.

3.2. Participants:
The participants of the study were 10 people whose ages ranged from 18 to 28. All the participants had already passed 2 levels of IELTS preparation courses in a private language institute in Shiraz, Iran, and they were taking a consecutive third course. The sample consisted of 5 males and 5 females. All the participants were either undergraduate or post-graduate students. Language proficiency of the participants was checked through an IELTS mock exam which produced grades ranging between 6 to 6.5.

3.3. Instrumentation:
The objective of the present study was to determine the influence of identity processing styles on how personal narratives are formed. To this end, the Revised Identity Style Inventory (ISI-5) by Berzonsky (with reliability index of 0.89) (Berzonsky, 2013) was used. The questionnaire consisted of 36 items demonstrating three types of identity, Informational Style (9 items). Normative Style (9 items). Diffuse-Avoidant Style (9 items).

Items $4 + 8 + 12 + 16 + 20 + 24 + 28 + 32 + 36$ are related to Informational, $2 + 6 + 10 + 14 + 18 + 22 + 26 + 30 + 34$ to Normative, and $3 + 7 + 11 + 15 + 19 + 23 + 27 + 31 + 35$ to Diffuse-Avoidant. Likert scale, 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me),

had teachers rate 36 statements to describe their identity status. Due to the fact that the study was carried out according to Berzonsky's framework in which commitment style had no place, nine items of the commitment style were excluded from the analysis. The Cronbach alpha reliability used for checking the internal consistency of the items of the questionnaire was .722 which, is considered to be an acceptable index according to Pallant (2016).

Next, the participants were given an IELTS speaking task 2 cue card to tell a personal experience which they had in the past related to their best friend and how they became friends for the first time with details.

3.4. Procedures:

The instructions for the oral task were given orally. The participants were also informed that their narrative productions would be used in a scientific study. The reason for choosing this narrative was to find out its narrative structure. The oral narratives were recorded and subsequently transcribed into the written language according to our interests in this particular study.

In the coding task of the transcripts, six macro structures were examined. As suggested by Labov, these narrative structures fall into the following categories: (1) abstract, (2) orientation, (3) complicating action, (4) evaluation, (5) result or resolution and (6) coda. These categories were identified and coded as existent or non-existent in the narratives of the participants by asking the set of questions suggested by Labov (1972:365-370). The abstract category was identified by asking the question 'What was the narrative about?'. The answer served as a brief summary of the whole narrative. Orientation was ascertained through the questions 'Who was the person or persons involved in the narrative?', 'When did the events take place?', 'What were the events?' and 'Where did the events take place?'. The answers to these questions identified the time, place and people involved in the event or situation. The complicating action, which is obligatory for the formation of a narrative, was elicited through the question 'Then what happened?'. This reply often contained the climax or high point of the narrative. Evaluation, which forms the emotional side of the narrative, con-

veyed why the narrative was told in a particular way, and what the narrator's aim was in doing so. Evaluation also provided additional information about how the narrator felt about events he/she experienced. Result or resolution responded to the question 'What finally happened?'. At this stage, there was usually a sudden drop in tension. Coda clauses, which are located at the end of narratives, indicated closure. At this point, the narrator often provided his/her expressions and observations about the event connecting the past to the present.

The following table illustrates the demographic information of the participants:

Table 1: participants' demographic information

NO.	Name	Gender	Age
1	Arman	M	23
2	Mansour	M	26
3	Amir	M	25
4	Parvin	F	22
5	Maryam	F	27
6	Fereshteh	F	27
7	Ehsan	M	26
8	Elmira	F	25
9	Pouraan	F	26
10	Arya	M	18

The results of the participant's identity scales are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: participants' identity scales

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Informational	10	31.00	44.00	37.7000	4.76212
Normative	10	16.00	31.00	24.1000	5.04315
Diffuse-Avoidant	10	9.00	25.00	18.1000	5.15213
Valid N (listwise)	10				

As can be seen from the Table 2, the mean and standard deviation of the participants' Identity scores in Informational were 37.70 and 4.76,

respectively, Normative were 24.10 and 5.04 and Diffuse-Avoidant were 18.10 and 5.15.

Due to the fact that the sample size was too small (n=10), it was seen that all the participants were Informational (as their first identity processing style), normative (as the secondary identity processing style) and diffuse-avoidant (as the third identity processing style). To investigate all the possible impacts, it was decided that they be categorized in terms of the weight of their diffuse-avoidant identity scale score and its distance with normative style score: Group 1 (weak diffuse-avoidant) and Group 2 (strong diffuse-avoidant).

Table 3: profile of distribution between groups

Group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
1.00	5	50%	50%
2.00	5	50%	50%
Total	10	100%	100%

In terms of distribution between groups (1) and (2), half of the participants were in Group (1) (50%) and the other half were assigned in Group (2) (50%).

The results of the participants' identity scales in group (1) and group (2) are displayed in Tables 4-5.

Table 4: Profile of identity scale in group 1

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Inform.	5	39.00	43.00	40.6000	1.51658
Norm.	5	17.00	29.00	24.2000	5.06952
Diff.	5	9.00	18.00	14.2000	3.96232
Sex	5	1.00	2.00	1.2000	.44721
Valid N (listwise)	5				

Table 5: Profile of identity in group 2

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Inform.	5	31.00	44.00	34.8000	5.26308
Norm	5	16.00	31.00	24.0000	5.61249
Diff.	5	19.00	25.00	22.0000	2.44949
Valid N (listwise)	5				

As can be seen from Table 4 and Table 5, Group 1 (weak diffuse-avoidant) consists of 5 of the participants whose normative scores are at least 10 or more points higher than their diffuse-avoidant score. Group 2 (strong diffuse-avoidant), on the other hand, consists of 5 participants whose diffuse-avoidant scores are fewer than 10 points lower than normative scores. This categorization is in line with the literature that shows the identity processing styles are not mutually exclusive and individuals are under the influence of all the three to certain levels based on their strengths.

4. Result and Discussion

Having analyzed the groups' data with regard to identity processing styles and the narratives, the researcher came up with a number of factors in line with the literature. The qualitative data from the narratives were analyzed following the typical and conventional qualitative data analysis procedures. The researcher of the present study transcribed the MP3 recordings of individual narratives to familiarize himself with the data at hand. Transcriptions were made of the recorded accounts. Once transcriptions have been completed, the researcher read the transcripts several times, looking for salient and recurring structures emerging from the data. The researcher asked a peer who was informed about the notion of Labov's narrative functions to analyze the narratives qualitatively and code the narratives to check whether same themes emerge. Discrepancies in the emerging themes and categories were later discussed.

Interestingly, it was found out that there were profound differences among the functions that each group used more frequently and to a greater extent. Once the codes were developed, the researcher attempted to put the similar codes together by applying the Labov's narrative structure to arrive at findings.

Once the data were analyzed, the researcher summarized the data and then interpreted them. Two of the narrative functions were found to be more frequent with respect to two categories of identity processing styles. Evaluation function seemed to the most recurring in the personal narratives of the Diffuse-avoidant group while Complicating action function was dominant in the Normative group. The recurring functions

which the participants used in each group are described in more details below.

4.1. Evaluation

One major function that the participants in Group 2 (strong diffuse-avoidant) used prominently, sometimes even at the cost of sacrificing other functions, seems to be evaluation. For instance, Pouran's evaluation function comprised two thirds of her narrative:

"We had a lot to talk about and we were a perfect companies for each other and about what did it together better to say what we didn't do together actually we spent every seconds of our lives together until two or three years ago and the most joyful and amusing things we did together were the volunteer works that we attended for. Eeh besides that was great for our professional backgrounds. We had funny moments there and I owe her all those happy days and why I remember her? Actually I always have a high regard for her because she is the first person who could convince me to rethink about my values and correct them if they are they were wrong without any first actually charismatic personality is the reason that I never could and I never can get over her."

She avoided using any complicating function in her narrative while she was asked to describe how she met her best friend.

Similarly, Maryam, seems to have used the evaluation function in three distinctive parts of her narrative:

I'm not a stable person I haven't ever had a long term friendship and also I had lots of friends at school.
We thought that we were so similar to be friends.

That was memorable days you can't imagine how did it feel when our principal called us between the class for practicing. We were so close in that period. eeeh there are lots of things that makes her one of my special friends but I think her positive energy in all time I knew her was one of the most significant characteristics that she had. eeeh and she inspired me with her merry eyes and wide smile.
Parvin, also, used evaluation in two thirds of her narrative:

Talking about characteristic you know characteristic of his movies I can say that there is a sense of ambiguity in his style of film making

and also a mixture of simplicity and complexity. And characteristics of his photographs. It's you know he is obsessed with minimalism and it's really inspiring for me because I'm into photography and also the characteristics of his own character is unique in his life and his career and why I admire him? When I look at him when I watch his movies or read his poems I can see a kind of peace in all of his works and in his personality like you know an inner peace with himself and also a kind of peace with nature and everything. And actually I think this makes him really you know charismatic and everybody you know and attracts everybody to himself.

This pattern is applicable to all of the participants in the second group which consists of people whose diffuse-avoidant style seems to be higher to some extent.

4.2. Complicating Action

On the other hand, in group number one, which consists of people with weaker diffuse-avoidant style, it seems that speakers used longer complicating actions more. For instance, Amir used complicating in 3 distinct parts of his narrative and they seem to be the longest sections of his narrative:

so the teacher asked us to move our chairs to the back of the class so other students could see the board clearly and we weren't bothering them.

we used to bother our teacher a lot and our teacher would blame us for every little thing that happened in our school or in our classroom. Kasra asked me to go to their house and be their guest for one day and I can remember we played a lot of board game and we had a lot of fun in their house.

Mansour, also, uses complicating in seventy-five per cent of his narrative:

When our junior school was over we accepted in the different high school but I met him at language institute. One or 2 years later, on the beginning of the school year suddenly I saw him while I was surprised. Our friendship become even strenger (stronger) after that because of studied together for university entrance. We both accepted in same ma-

jor in our city in bachelor degree. We always go to the university library and at the weekends go out together. We were really happy together. For the master degree I accepted one year earlier but we both went to the military service at the same time.

Arman used complicating in most parts of his narrative as well:

We were playing badminton professionally, but we were good in football also and most of the time we had our teams and competed against each other.

We had been travelling to many city of Iran when we were young boys. Furthermore, we achieved many medals in different championships and finally joined the national team. In there, we were each other's partner in double game.

The above findings could be described in line with the literature on identity processing style in which individuals with a diffuse-avoidant identity processing style, procrastinate and attempt to delay dealing with identity conflicts and issues as long as possible. When they have to act, their behavior tends to be driven by situation-specific demands and consequences rather than rational explanations or normative expectations (Berzonsky, 1990, 2008). A diffuse-avoidant identity processing style is associated with decisional procrastination, limited introspective awareness, avoidant stress management strategies, academic and social difficulties, emotional and behavioral problems (Adams et al., 2001; Berman et al., 2001; Berzonsky, 2004; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005; Krettenauer, 2005; Soenens et al., 2005; Wheeler, Adams, & Keating, 2001).

This could also be seen from the vantage point of training courses and the requirements of tasks in high stakes exams such as IELTS. In training courses candidates are generally required to follow steps, strategies and techniques that can facilitate achieving goals in different parts of these exams. This makes more sense when we take it into account that individuals with a normative style have a strong need for cognitive closure and selectively seek confirmatory information when evaluating hypotheses (Berzonsky, 1999; Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Soenens, Duriez, et al., 2005). A diffuse-avoidant style is also associated with less adaptive cognitive and behavioral strategies, such as using avoidant

coping strategies, engaging in task-irrelevant behaviors, expecting to fail, having a low feeling of mastery, and performing less strategic planning (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996; Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997). In well structured situations characterized by relatively stable demands and problems, normative style should enable individuals to be relatively effective and successful (Berzinsky handbooks).

The literature on narratives sheds some light on the current study. According to Lieblich et al. (1998: 8) narratives are "usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these remembered facts." This shows that narrating a personal story engages the speaker in a deep task of choosing what to say and what not to say. Making decisions spontaneously and choosing certain items seem pertain to patterns of personality and identity. Based on the characteristics related to diffuse-avoidant style, it seems logical to conclude that steering clear from making a temporal joint, failing to give a personal account of incidents and events could be indicative of "engaging in task-irrelevant behaviors", "performing less strategic planning" and more importantly and "decisional procrastination".

The findings of the present study can also be considered under the light of the distinction between stories and non-stories. According to Polanyi (1985), for example, stories are usually conceived as texts that are hinged upon events that are 'tellable', i.e. interesting, surprising, or unexpected in some way with climax. Therefore, the idea of tellability is integral to the presence of a complicating action in the story and so examples of highly tellable stories both in everyday talk and in literature are those that present dramatic events, out of the ordinary occurrences, unexpected developments or resolutions. The fact that participants with higher normative style tend to use more complicating actions in their narratives seems to be indicative of the fact that, unconsciously, they try to follow the trajectory of the mental plotline of their stories. This is in line with Berzonsky's (2014) definition of the way individuals with normative style behave. He explains that individuals with a normative identity are self-controlled, committed, and purposive but

also have a foreclosed identity status and a strong need for structure. So, they are authoritarian, intolerant of ambiguity, and defensive. Another angle through which we can justify the findings of the present work is Labov and Polanyi's focus on the significance of reflection, interpretation and evaluation of the narrator on the elements of their personal narration. Both Labov (1972) and Polanyi (1979 and 1985) mentioned the importance of prototypical stories to have a point, i.e. to convey the narrator's interpretation and point of view on characters, events, or state of affairs. Labov talked about evaluation as a main component of stories and a section destined to carry out the function of responding to a possible: "So what?" coming from a listener. Diffuse-avoidant style's use of evaluation can be explained with respect to the way diffuse-avoidant style is explained in literature. A diffuse-avoidant style is positively associated with emotion-focused coping, self-handicapping, other-directedness, maladaptive decisional strategies, and a diffusion identity status (Berzonsky, 1994; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2009; Dollinger, 1995; Streitmatter, 1993). Being more emotion-focused might be an underlying incentive behind more evaluations while narrating personal stories and narrations.

With respect to Labov's points, it seems logical to conclude that individuals with higher diffuse-avoidant style still have some integral elements of stories and it seems simplistic to claim that they are not capable of maintaining the plotline of their story. This can remind us of the fact that the notions of identity and narration are too complicated and deep to have an all-or-nothing nature. It seems that instead of claiming that one identity style is capable and the other is not, one should hold that both follow their own stylistic features and are under specific influence of their own identity styles.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that identity processing styles affect how individuals form their narrative structures. Based on the questionnaire and personal narrative data, a number of identity related impacts were found on personal narratives. The personal experience narratives of individuals with higher diffuse-avoidant style seem to have a

larger number of "evaluation" while those with higher normative style seem to use more "complicating action". This is indicative of the fact that teachers can take advantage of being aware of their students' identity processing styles; this can help teachers better prepare their students and pupils for proficiency exams such as IELTS. On the same token, this can remind instructors and examiners that it is not mere linguistic proficiency which determines the quantity and quality of discoursal factors, such as cohesion, coherence and the unity of speech. It seems logical to conclude that identity of the speakers may be at play and in order to have a comprehensive view of speakers' ability to maintain the unity of their utterances, one needs to go beyond linguistic and instructional factors and take identity styles and features into account. This finding seems to be able to help test developers and test users improve the validity of their interpretations of test scores. Considering the fact that proficiency tests such as IELTS may have irretrievable consequences on lives of test takers, it should be borne in mind that features of cohesion and coherence seem not to be only the products of instruction and linguistic competency. As a result of this view, it seems logical to conclude that taking personality-related factors such as identity styles into account can better help test developers form a more comprehensive interpretive argument which can produce relatively more plausible interpretations based on individuals' scores and assist test users to take more appropriate and fare decisions.

In addition, the findings of this study can serve learners. By having a clear self-image and self-awareness, individuals and candidates may be able to better understand their weak points and alleviate them in order to achieve their goals in international proficiency exams.

Individuals with higher diffuse-avoidant seem to be reluctant to adhere to structures and seem to produce fewer coherent narratives while those with normative identity processing styles seem to be better at forming a temporal joint in their narratives. This helps both teachers and students come to the understanding that teaching mere linguistic structures and elements will not necessarily lead to acceptable and high-quality productions on the side of the learners.

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