



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Eco-Syntax Analysis of Jameel Akhtar's Short Story "ٹوٹی ہوئی سڑک"

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the eco-syntax structures of the short story "ٹوٹی ہوئی سڑک" written by Muhammad Jameel Akhtar. In the examination of this short study, the eco-syntax structures were analyzed by using Labov's model presented in 1972 on Natural Narratives. The narrative structures and the techniques used in the language highlighted the inherent connection between the natural environment and the characters of the story. It focused on the six elements of Labov's model Abstract, Orientation, Complication, Evaluation, Resolution, and Coda where their eco-syntax structures were analyzed. The application of Labov's model to written narratives brings out the cognitive-linguistic functioning into the act that helps to understand the impact of one action on others. The results of this study revealed how literary text's understanding was enhanced through the narratives and the connection of humans with the natural world.

**KEYWORDS** Eco-Syntax, Labov's Model, Natural, Environment, Cognitive Linguistics

## Introduction

A narrative is a story, regardless of whether it is written in prose or verse composed of a complex network of interconnected events, characters, etc. (Abrams et al., 1999). According to Childs (2008), a narrative has a way of revealing a sequence of facts or occurrences and demonstrating how a narrative structure can create a fluid connection between them, supporting the story's progression. Labov et al. (1967), variable morphosyntactic forms that are not interpretable at the clause level should be clarified in the context of the expanding narrative discourse. It is widely acknowledged that the origins of the story lie in the ordinary conversation practices of actual speakers in actual social contexts (Smith et al., 2006).

The "Natural Narrative Model" developed by Labov (1972) is used to perform an eco-syntax analysis of Jameel Akhtar's short story "ٹوٹی ہوئی سڑک" in this study. Akhtar's short story presents a rich tapestry of narrative elements and linguistic devices that deserve examination through a structured analytical framework. Labov's Natural Narrative Model offers a systematic approach to deconstructing narratives, providing a lens through which to explore the storytelling techniques employed by the author. However, despite the potential insights it may offer, there exists a gap in the scholarly literature regarding the application of Labov's model to contemporary literary works, particularly those of non-Western authors such as Akhtar. Therefore, there was a need for a focused investigation into the eco-structural analysis of story "ٹوٹی ہوئی سڑک" through the lens of Labov's Natural Narrative Model to bridge this gap and contribute to the understanding of narrative dynamics and the connection between the environment and humans in contemporary

fiction. Despite the qualitative nature of this research, a simple descriptive statistical analysis is also performed to emphasize the importance and usefulness of the structural categories that the model identifies.

### Literature Review

A key method in literary studies is narrative analysis, which provides an understanding of the composition and significance of fictional works (Klarer, 2013). Labov's Natural Narrative Model provides a systematic framework for analyzing narratives, encompassing elements such as abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda (B'aanoon et al., 2023). Previous studies have applied Labov's model to various literary works, including short stories, novels, and oral narratives, demonstrating its versatility and analytical utility (Ryan, 2017). Culpeper (2014), In contemporary fiction, scholars have utilized Labov's model to explore narrative techniques, thematic elements, and character development in works by authors from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the application of Labov's model to the stylistic analysis of specific short stories (Dawson et al., 2023).

Al-Duleimi (2023), conducted a narrative-stylistic analysis of Ernest Hemingway's "Cat in the Rain" using Labov's Natural Narrative Model. By examining six narrative components, the study reveals social relations embedded within the text. It suggests that the model effectively captures the story's complexities and provides insight into its meaning. Additionally, the study hypothesizes that Labov's model applies to written narratives, demonstrating similarities between oral and written narrative structures. Fludernik (2023) examined William Labov's influence on narrative studies within narratology, highlighting the predominance of discourse analysis over conversation analysis (CA). It argues for the integration of CA insights, particularly in short story research. Additionally, it explores how Monika Fludernik's episodic narrative model can be applied to small stories analyzed by Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou. The study advocates for collaboration between CA researchers and narratologists for a comprehensive understanding of narrative structures. Tanoli et al. (2024) conducted a study on "Exploring Narrative Patterns in Zubair Ahmed's Waliullah is Lost Using Labov's Sociolinguistic Model" which examines the narrative structure of the Punjabi short story through Labov's model. Through qualitative analysis, researchers demonstrate the model's effectiveness in understanding linguistic and narrative techniques. The study enriches comprehension of the story's themes and authorial choices, contributing to Punjabi literature research.

Khasandi-Telewa (2023) examined how the ecosystem of the earth is narrated in the tales produced by the Luhya community residing in the rich natural atmosphere of Kenya, the Kakamega forest. The five oral narratives were taken into the study to investigate ecocentrism in the stories and the behavior of the community with the natural atmosphere of the forest. The results showed the mixed approaches of the people toward the sustainability of the ecosystem but all of the stories have discussed the ecocentrism and social practices of the Luhya community in perseverance and destruction of nature. Further, this paper suggests that there is less work has been done to address the ecocentrism in the short stories and requires scholarly attention. It is found through the in-depth investigation of the previous studies and to the best of researchers' knowledge that there is no study has been carried out to address the eco-syntax analysis of short stories using the Labov Natural Narrative Model. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by conducting an eco-structural analysis of Akhtar's short story "سڑک ہوئی ٹوٹی" through the

lens of Labov's Natural Narrative Model, thereby contributing to the understanding of narrative structural dynamics in contemporary fiction.

## Material and Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research design, focusing on the detailed analysis of eco-syntax narratives in the selected short story. The qualitative approach allows for in-depth exploration and interpretation of the text's eco-structural components. The primary data for this study consists of the text of "سڑک ہوئی ٹوٹی" by Muhammad Jameel Akhtar. The story was read multiple times to identify and extract instances of each structural component. The data collection process involved close textual analysis and annotation to document relevant passages and examples. The analytical framework for this study is Labov's Natural Narrative Model, which comprises six structural components: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. Each component was identified and analyzed systematically within the narrative context of the short story. Each component was examined for its narrative function and thematic significance within the overall narrative of the story.

The findings of the data analysis were interpreted to uncover patterns and insights regarding the eco-narrative structure of "سڑک ہوئی ٹوٹی". The interpretation focused on clarifying the narrative's coherence, progression, and thematic development through the analysis of each eco-structural component. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation of data sources and researcher reflexivity were employed. Ethical considerations included maintaining integrity in data interpretation, respecting the author's intellectual property rights, and ensuring confidentiality when quoting from the text. Proper citation and acknowledgment of sources were observed throughout the research process.

## Adopted Model

This section's primary focus is on presenting Labov's Natural Narrative model (1972). Labov's Model seems to be one of the most profound models in contemporary story theory (Klapproth, 2004). A narrative has a beginning, middle, and conclusion at the center of this model, while other components of narrative structure can be traced in more fully developed, expanded varieties.

In a nutshell, Labov proposes that a story has the following six structural elements:

**Abstract:** How does it begin? /What was this about?

**Orientation:** Who/what does it involve, and when/where?

**Complicating action:** then what happened?

**Evaluation:** so what?

**Result:** what finally happened?

**Coda:** What does it all mean (It prevents any further questions regarding the story events). (Simpson, 2004)

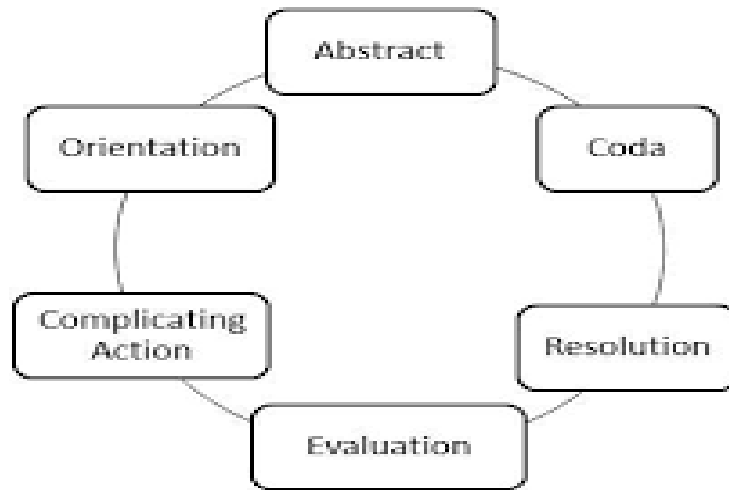


Figure 1: Labov's Model on Natural Narratives (1972)

## Results and Discussion

The short story "سڑک ہوئی ٹوٹی" consists of only 1011 words, but it still carries numerous implications that are socially viable in society. It exemplifies that literary work may not have an abundance of words but the artistic value and social message through using language. Barthes (1973) states that every narrative always has narrative codes. Further, it is carried out by Leech states that an idea transformed into a product that has social potential and deals with a pragmatic message is believed to be the soul of art (Leech, 1989). This story was analyzed under the guidance of the model presented by Labov on natural narrative, which is comprised of six headings, and all of them are categorized to explain the eco-syntactic structures of this short story.

Labov (1997) defined an Abstract as 'a starting part that carries the complete order of the events in the narrative'. It expresses the reason for the story: what is it all about? An abstract works in both ways. On the one hand, it helps the reader comprehend the story and prepare for building cognitive function through the mainstream of the story. On the other hand, it expresses the narrating theme on which the story is told to the audience.

Akhtar begins the story with the line, "There was a small broken street in a small village," which expresses the global structure of the story because the story revolves entirely around this theme. The text comprises abstract structure and characters, and it is found to be hypothetical, centered around the flashback of the village's good ecosystem. Van Dijk (1977) The story's mainstream can easily be gained by the reader from its title. Therefore, if the title is expressed in the initial part of the story, it captures the reader's attention before the narrator begins the actual story, so it is used in this story. Moreover, the story carries the eco-syntactic structures that build the story to provide the message of the natural environment.

The initial textual lines of the story "there was a small broken street in a small village surrounded by trees, and there was a building of school behind those trees" (کی گاؤں سے چھوٹے ایک وہ) (تھی۔ عمارت کی سکول پیچھے کے ں درختو تھے درخت ہی درخت گرد ارد کے جس تھی، سڑک سی چھوٹی ایک) explains the eco-system of the village where a small broken street was covered with trees and it seems that those trees are no more there because the narrator expresses the past last in the flashback and those memories are evident of the existence of trees which makes the environment beautiful. Linguistically, the narrator has used "گاؤں سے چھوٹے" (small village) where he creates the imagery for people to feel a sense of belonging and helps the readers

to create a mental attachment to the mainstream topic of the story. Further, it is carried by the narrator to "درخت ہی درخت" (*trees*) the repetition of the word tree represents the abundance of trees that exist in the small village shows he is inclined to the environmentally strong natural world.

Furthermore, the story narrates "When we go through the street, we find a hospital passerby where a doctor used to treat people and give bitter medicine to all people" اگر آپ پر سڑک اس دیتے ادویات کڑوی کی طرح ہی ایک کو سب جو تھے، بیٹھتے صاحب ڈاکٹر ایک جہاں جائے گا اسپتال آگے تو جائیں چلتے تھے۔ It explains that the reminiscences of life are connected to the road and it also signifies the daily life moments people spent. The bitter medicines set the stage for the human elements in the story where the ecosystem of the village is discussed accompanying road, hospital, bitter medicines, and humans. Linguistically, the term "ادویات کڑوی" (*bitter medicines*) is used metaphorically because it does not only talk about the bitter taste of the medicines but also the realities that were harsh in nature people faced in the village.

### Orientation

Orientation presents characters, situations, sequential events, and settings and it usually occurs at the beginning and if needed sometimes used at any other point of the narrative (Johnstone, 2016). Likewise, Klapproth (2004) proposes that the narrator always carries the components that respond to the questions of what, when, where, and who, as it sets the stage for the events of narration. In this section of the narration, there is mostly use of past verbs and adverbs that show manner, place, and time.

The eco-orientation of the narration expresses that the story begins in a small village where the narrator has targeted the broken street and it continues to disclose the settings further by keeping its plot to a small village.

"تھی سڑک سی چھوٹی ایک کی گاؤں سے چھوٹے ایک وہ" *There was a broken street in a small village*

"تھے درخت ہی درخت گرد ارد کے جس" *It was surrounded by the trees.*

"تھی۔ عمارت کی سکول پیچھے کے درختوں" *There was a school building behind the trees.*

"محبت سے پرندوں کے وہاں اور سے سڑک اس سے گاؤں اسے" *He loved street and birds of the village* تھی۔

"تھا گزارتا نیچے کے دوپہر درخت ساری جو وہ" *He used to roam under the trees all afternoons.*

These textual lines of the short story "سڑک ہوئی ٹوٹی" signify the values of the character "a boy" through eco-syntax structures, who is inclined toward his village and the eco-system that makes his village environmentally rich. The narrator has disclosed the characters where he identifies a protagonist as a boy and an antagonist as a land mafia owner. There are some minor characters; a doctor, friends of a boy, and birds. The narration style is used in the third person where the story is being expressed by someone who was a member of this village but left for the city before the village was colonized by a land mafia owner and his servants. Further, the eco-syntactic structures are carried out where the story narrates that by disturbing the ecosystem of the village there came a flood that washed out the broken street.

Linguistically, the narrator has used the phrase "محبت سے پرندوں" (*love with birds*) presenting an inherent connection and love to nature and suggesting that a boy had a strong bond with the natural world. Further, it is carried to "نیچے کے درخت" (*under the trees*)

which signifies that the natural world provided the safest and most protected feeling to the boy where he used to roam under the trees for hours in a single day.

### Complicating Action

The series of underlying or influential events are concluded in the part of the narration and mostly reported in the specific text (Labov, 2013). It shows the happenings of the story where sequential events are classified through clauses that present the maximum suspense point and the climax of the story. They are categorized to be used in present or past simple tense, set in an order of narrative clauses, and used chronologically (Toolan, 2015). This story highlights the eco-syntax complicating action structures of the sentences that can help the readers to reflect on the natural message of this story.

The story has a significant series of complicating actions where they are assisted to extend the story and tell the audience what happens next to the orientation of narration. This textual line of the story that says "لے کشتیاں اپنی اور ہوتا پانی ہی پانی پر سڑک تو ہوتی بارش بہت جب" (*when there was heavy rainfall, the street becomes full with water and people used to take their boats to the street river*). It extends the story by presenting the condition of the village when they face any natural challenge and how they adapt themselves to the conditions shows their resilience. Even the narrator has not expressed any complaints from the local people. Linguistically, it is expressed by the narrator "دریا کے سڑک" (*street river*), metaphorically representing that even in harsh situations villagers are flexible and adaptable to the situations, as they are surrounded by the water everywhere which means the difficulties but they opted to use boat over it that signifies to always look for solutions.

Moreover, the narrator has further expressed that "کے اور اس تھی گئی ٹوٹ زیادہ اور سڑک" (*The street was broken even more, and the bushes were overgrown over it.*) it symbolizes the decay that happened due to disturbance of the ecosystem that leads to the village's decline. Further, cognitive linguistically the clause "گئیں لگ بڑھنے بھی جھاڑیاں" (*bushes were also overgrown*) signifies that when the people start neglecting the ecosystem and add their part into the disturbance of ecosystem, it destroys the environmental and social fabric of the society. Additionally, the narrator carries complicating clauses to this textual line, "بھی اب وہ شاید لگا، رونے کر بیٹھ کنارے کے سڑک وہیں لڑکا وہ، بو۔ رہا رو بیٹھا وہیں" (*That boy started crying while sitting near the bay and he must be still sitting there*). The tears of the boy were in response to the decay of his village and its deforestation which signifies the emotional impact of this natural world's loss that also affects the social and environmental life of people. Linguistically, the phrase "اے نہیں پرندے" (*Birds never came back*) represents that the cutting of trees also detaches us from the very natural element that helps us to understand the meaning of innocence, it breaks the connection of humans with nature because we lose the birds who provides the tranquil moments through their beautiful voices and keep us connected with the nature.

### Evaluation

Johnstone (2016), evaluation of the narratives often comes before the resolution where the results are expressed by the narrator. It also occurs at different parts of the story to demonstrate something stimulating or unfamiliar regarding the story that keeps the reader intact reading the story. Riessman (2003), the narrator carries the complicated action in the story and shares his perspective to communicate emotionally to the reader which is the essence of the evaluation in the narration and makes the story clear for all. Lobov (1972), the force of the evaluative process helps the narrator to bring the complicated actions to the path of the resolution. Evaluation occurs at different parts of the story and can be executed by using any structure of linguistics.

The narrator has exemplified the evaluation part through these textual lines, "جو وہ" (He used to spend all afternoons under the tree and he loved the village where peace and tranquility existed). The action of disturbance comes to the evaluation part where every part leads to its decay. So, the boy is not there anymore because he used to love the trees that existed there and the village where peace was practiced. It explains the deterioration of the ecosystem and how it affected the humans' lives. Linguistically, "وسکون امن" (peace and tranquility) symbolizes that peace is always concerned with the natural elements, and if we disturb the environmental fabric of society, it will make us cry and suffer from its repercussions.

Moreover, the narrator has expressed in the textual line, "تھی۔ سڑک سی عام پی بالکل وہ" (That was a quite normal street) represents that the street was exemplified with different actions and was considered as the mainstream of the story but in the evaluation part the narrator shares that street was a quite normal street but only valued because it plays its part to sustain the ecosystem of the village. It also draws a line between the materialistic and natural elements where a boy is inclined towards the natural aspects of the village and the land owner who wants to destroy all and build big buildings there. Cognitive linguistically, "سڑک سی عام" (normal street) symbolizes that everything in the world is normal unless it is emotionally attached to someone. That street was given all importance in the story but still, it was normal. So, language can help us to comprehend the in-depth understanding of the elements that are presented throughout the story.

## Resolution

It clarifies all the actions that happened in the story and the tension of the story is eased in the section of the narration (Johnstone, 2016). The plot's outcome is expressed in the portion of the resolution in the story (Riessman, 2003). The resolution in the story comes after many events reportedly occurred in the section of the complicated actions. The complicated actions share that 'then what happened' and the resolution expresses that 'happenings at the end' of the story. It is the closing part of the plot where all the actions are combined to provide the end of the story (Klapporth, 2004).

It is expressed in the narrative textual lines, "خالی گھر بھی اور ہمیں آئے کارندے کے دیو جب" (When the people of land colonizer came and asked us to vacate the house) shows the ending of the story is tragic where the people are forcefully asked to leave their houses in the village and the story comes to its end when everyone leaves their house and moved to the city except the boy. Linguistically, the phrase "تھا بیٹھا وہیں لڑکا وہ" (That boy was still sitting there) symbolizes that the people who are attached to nature cannot leave their roots because the love of nature is grounded into their identities. Even when everyone left the village the boy was still sitting under the tree talking to the birds and hoping that everything might become normal again. This story is a perfect example of a flashback and it can considerably be said the writer shares his own story through this technique of narration. Additionally, the narrator has also expressed through this textual line, "میں اور" (And I came to the city) that he came to the city and left the village. It all happened forcefully and he evacuated from village to city but the boy remained there. The boy was possibly aware of the decay of the village after everyone left it and he wanted to save it from deforestation and materialism.

## Coda

The coda describes the clauses that come at the end of the story and are considered free clauses. They form the coda which helps the narrator to end the story comprehensively. For Instance:

"تھا۔ اداس تھے، کھیلا کرتے بچے شام ہر نیچے کے جس کہ کھمبا وہ" (*That tower, under whom children used to play was sad*). It metaphorically talks about how the ecosystem only exists when all the things are perfectly matched and available. Even, the tower cannot be sad but it is linguistically personified that it was sad because there were no more children to play under it. It signifies that every part of nature is very much necessary to build the perfect ecosystem.

According to Labov's Natural Narrative Model, the clause distribution of the story is represented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Clauses Distribution in Syntactic Categories**

Syntactic Categories	Total No. of Clauses	Percentage of Clauses
Abstract	04	8.33%
Orientation	06	12.5%
Complicating action	05	10.41%
Evaluation	10	20.83%
Resolution	21	43.75%
Coda	2	4.16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100%</b>

This story consists of the four (04) clauses of the "abstract" that provide the focus point of the narration and mainly appear at the beginning of the story and six (06) clauses of the "orientation" which may come at any point before resolution that helps the readers to get familiar with characters and objects of the story. Further, it has five (05) "complicating action" clauses that lead the story to a climax, and ten (10) "evaluation" clauses that extend the story and comprehensively discuss the actions that create complications. This story ends with twenty-one (21) "resolution" clauses that close every action and it has two (02) "coda" clauses that provide the ending lines to the story connected to the main theme and abstract of the story.

## Conclusion

In narrative analysis, the expression of meaning is taken out from the events of reality. The examination of the text was done under the Labov Natural Narrative Model on eco-syntactic structures of the narrative. It was followed with six elements Abstract, Orientation, Complication, Evaluation, Resolution, and Coda. It was carried out to create a comprehensive understanding of the individual parts and how they collectively create a narrative and the story's emotional impact on the audience. The story is analyzed through narrative structures and cognitive linguistic functioning to understand the underlying messages in the text. It is significantly important to express that this model provides detailed information about the narratives with its linguistic functioning (Annamalai et al., 2013).

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