Narrative Structure and Tense Use in the Narrative Genres of Korean EFL Learners*

Shim, Eunsook
(Sangji University)

I. INTRODUCTION

Narrative discourse has been extensively researched in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) in that this genre is "an important one both in language teaching pedagogy and in the assessment of foreign language (FL) competence" (Kormos, 2011, p. 148). Moreover, a narrative genre can be used as an effective tool that investigates English language learners’ language competence and performance by examining how they produce appropriate narrative texts (Kang, 2005). In analyzing the structure of narrative discourse, some linguists such as Hopper (1979) have argued that it is useful to view narrative information as two level of structures, composed of the actual events belonging to the skeletal structure of the narrative (i.e., foreground) and the supportive material which comments on the main events (i.e., background). The background clause may contribute to the interpretation of the narrated events by "revealing a prior event, making a prediction about the outcome of an event, referring to a simultaneous event, or evaluating an action reported in the foreground" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, pp. 282-283).

In a case study of interlanguage, Bardovi-Harlig (1992) reveals that English language learners tend to use the past tense to mark foreground

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clauses and non-past to mark background clauses in narrative discourse. Flashner (1989) reports that Russian speakers use the past tense in main–line events and non-past forms in background events. In order to produce linguistically and culturally appropriate narrative texts, verbal morphology is likely to be an important component of second language acquisition (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2000; Bayley, 1994; Devise & Vandelanotte, 2011; Hopper & Thompson, 1980; Lee, 2011; Salaberry, 1999, 2000; Schumann, 1987; Shirai & Kuroko, 1998). When English language learners produce a narrative discourse, they tend to be governed by the availability of linguistic forms and thus narrative production is "not only culture-specific, but is also language-specific" (Kang, 2005, p. 261). Thus, verbal morphology can be an important device "to establish time reference as well as to express how the speaker views the temporal contour of a situation" (Shirai & Kuroko, 1998, p. 246). The purpose of the study is to investigate how Korean learners of English express temporal information and use the tense–aspect to report chains of events in their narrative discourse.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Grounding in Narrative Discourse

Narrative discourse is a significant genre that can provide important information about English language learners' linguistic competence and pragmatic sensitivity in the target language. Labov (1972) defines narrative as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred" (pp. 350–360). Focusing on mainly oral narratives, Labov identifies the six main parts of a narrative structure: abstract, orientation, complicating action, result or resolution, coda, and evaluation. Each element may not appear in a specific order and some components may be optional (see Table 1).

Drawn on the schema as Labov (1972) has proposed, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2010) describe a conversation between two mothers. The

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