

## FEATURES OF ENGLISH LEARNERS' NARRATIVES

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### ABSTRACT

This article reports the results of generic analysis on English learners' narratives. The purposes are to reveal (1) how students use language to achieve communicative purposes, (2) how students organize thoughts into stages, (3) how students realize those thoughts linguistically. The data are obtained by randomly taking ten out of fifty students' narratives produced when the students joined genre-based writing class in the academic year 2009/2010. The data are analyzed in two integrated parts, i.e. schematic structure analysis and lexicogrammatical analysis. The results show that the linguistic features of the learners' Narratives are similar with those of the English native speaker's Narrative, i.e. focus on individualized participants, use of material processes, use of relational (attributive) processes, use of past tense. However, some vocabulary and tense errors are made.

Key words: *Narrative, schematic structure, linguistic feature, genre, abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, coda*

### A. BACKGROUND

One of the goals to study English is to be able to communicate in English, writtenly and orally. As a teacher, the writer is really concerned about the writing mastery of the students. She wants to know the English the students use in writing, whether they have been able to realize meanings in the proper linguistic features / lexicogrammar. The writer chose narratives, one type of genre, as the data for the study, hoping that the result of the study will give contribution in the teaching of genre-based writing.

Kaplan's idea inspired the writer to conduct genre analysis on learners' narratives. He states that every language has genres but they are realized differently across cultures. Writers or speakers are bound by the resources of the language they use. There is a tendency to bring to a second language the resources available in the first, whether or not those resources are actually available in L2 (2000: 82 – 85). The writer wants to investigate the schematic structure and the lexicogrammar of the narratives produced by the students because schematic structure and lexicogrammatical features characterize certain genre.

Learners' narratives are narratives produced by students learning English. The texts produced display the English declarative as well as procedural knowledge the students have acquired. The texts of learners' narratives are a kind of genre. Genre is a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture (Martin, 1984) in (Eggin, 1994). So genre is a communicative event or social activity in which language is used to exchange meanings through a number of stages, each of which is given a function. Based on this meaning of genre, the generic structure analysis was carried out.

From the data collected, the writers want to know:

- (1) How students use language to achieve certain communicative purposes.
- (2) How students organize thoughts into stages.
- (3) How students realize those thoughts linguistically.

Those questions above aroused the writer's interest to conduct a genre analysis on learners' narratives in the hope that she can explain what communicative purposes created and what pattern employed by the students. The results of the analysis may be useful for the English teaching and learning. This coincides with Swales' idea "genre analysis as a means of studying spoken and written discourse for applied ends" (1990, 1). In line with this idea, Bathia (1983) in (Miller 1997: 134) has reiterated the importance of linguistic analysis in the practice of language teaching. Discourse analysis is viewed not simply as an act of linguistic description but more as linguistic explanation. Genre analysis, thus, has become one of the major influences on the current practices in the teaching and learning of languages.

## **B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **1. Realization of Meanings to Language Use**

Systemic functional grammar interprets language as a network system, or interrelated sets of options for making meanings (Halliday, 1994: 15). Thus, language is a resource for making meanings. Language is used to make meanings about fields (refer to social action), modes (refer to channel), tenors (refer to who are taking part) because those are the meanings that we want and need to make in interacting with each other and the world.

Systemic functional grammar illustrates the realization of meanings to language use. It explains that lexicogrammar is used to express meanings and phonological or graphological aspects are used to describe lexicogrammar. In line with this, Eggins (1994: 81) says that language as a system is composed of multiple levels or strata, i.e. strata of meanings, strata of 'wordings', and strata of sounds / orthography.

Resource for meanings, is realized by lexicogrammar, resource for wording meanings, by means of grammatical and lexical items. While lexicogrammar, resource for wording meanings, is realized by phonology (sequences of sounds, pitch, etc.) in a spoken language, and in a written language it is realized by graphology (sequences of letters, syllables, etc.).

At the semantic level, there are rich and varied system of speech functions such as informing, asserting, claiming, rejecting, denying, commanding, insisting, requesting, suggesting. These semantic features are realized by the grammatical system of mood, whose categories include indicative and imperative. Mood features are realized structurally through the ordering of

subject and finite but also prosodically at the phonological level by means of pitch movement (Matthiessen, 1995: 8). So in interaction, a speaker may give something to the addressee or demand something of him / her. The 'something' here, the 'commodity' being traded will be either information or goods and services. Giving goods and services is an offer, while demanding goods and services is a command. Giving information is a statement, while demanding information is a question.

Any text is the realization of meanings or semantics. Halliday (1994, 16) argues that there are different kinds of meanings constructed in language. Thus, any text is the realization of not just one meaning, but more than one kind of meaning. Eggins (1994, 82) says that any text is the realization of three kinds of meanings, i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings which are called metafunction.

Ideational meanings are realized by transitivity structures. Transitivity structures are the patterns of processes, participants, and circumstances carried by the content words of clauses, i.e.

1. verbs: which tell us about the kind of action (doing, feeling, saying, thinking, defining)
2. nouns: which tell us who is involved in the action
3. circumstances: prepositional phrases and adverbs which tell us where, when, how, why and with what the action took place

Interpersonal meanings are realized by mood structure. Mood structure includes the patterns of:

1. type of clause structure used, e.g. declarative, interrogative, imperative
2. modality: the speaker's judgment of the probabilities or the obligations involved in what he or she is saying (Gerot and Wignell, 1995: 28)
3. attitude: expressions of positive or negative attitude.

By interpersonal meanings, we communicate our feeling/attitude/intention. In grammar, it is laid in subject and finite. By manipulating the subject and finite, we manipulate the mood, the interpersonal meaning, the intent. Finite carries a lot of burden of the mood of the clause. It carries (1) primary tense, (2) positive and negative form, (3) modality, (4) agreement. Thus, by mastering grammar, we will be able to convey our interpersonal meaning well.

Textual meanings are realized by theme pattern in a text. Theme is point of departure (Martin et al., 1997: 21). The reiteration of theme choice expresses the textual meaning being made in the text.

## 2. Genre

Martin in Eggins (1994: 26) offers two definitions of genre as follows: "A genre is a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture" (Martin,

1984: 25). “Genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them” (Martin, 1985: 248). Swales (1990: 58) defines genre as “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes.” Gerrot and Wignell (1985: 192) state that genres are staged, goal-directed and purposeful. Eggins (1994: 32) argues that genre can be thought of as the general framework that gives purpose to interactions of particular types.

To provide a basic concept of genre, in this study the definition of genre would be restated as a communicative event in which language is used to exchange communicative purposes through a number of stages, each of which is given a functional gloss. Thus, there are three important elements in a genre, those are communicative events, communicative purposes, and stages.

A communicative event is a social situation, recognized by a community, in which written or spoken language is used for communication between individuals or groups. A communicative event is one in which language plays both a significant and indispensable (Swales, 1990: 45). The linguistic products of a repeated communicative event may be established as genres. There are as many different genres as there are recognizable social activity types in our culture.

### 3. Schematic Structure

Schematic structure refers to text structure (Martin, 1992: 505). Text structure refers to the overall structure, the global structure of the message form (Halliday and Hasan, 1989: 53). Eggins (1994: 36) states that schematic structure refers to the staged, step-by-step organization of the genre. Thus, genres employ stages or steps to achieve goals.

Some elements of schematic structure are obligatory and some others are optional. With regard to the obligatory and optional elements, Halliday and Hasan (1989: 62) explain that obligatory elements are the key elements in recognizing a genre, they are obliged to occur, they define the genre to which a text belongs, and the appearance of these elements in a specific order corresponds to our perception of whether the text is complete or incomplete. Optional elements are elements that are not obliged to occur.

To differentiate obligatory elements from optional elements in schematic structure, optional elements are put in parentheses, while obligatory elements are not, e.g

Genre	Generic structure
Narrative	(Abstract) ^ (Orientation) ^ Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution ^ (Coda)
Anecdote	(Abstract) ^ (Orientation) ^ Remarkable Event ^ Reaction ^ (Coda)
Recount	(Abstract) ^ Orientation ^ Record of Events ^ (Coda)

#### 4. Linguistic Features

Although identifying the schematic structure of a genre is a major part of generic analysis, it cannot be performed accurately without an analysis of the lexicogrammatical realizations of each stage of schematic structure (Eggins and Slade, 1997: 235). Lexicogrammatical realizations refer to the way meanings get encoded or expressed in a semiotic system.

Texts of different genres reveal different linguistic feature choices. Thus, realization patterns will differ across genres. Even the different stages of a genre will reveal different lexicogrammatical patterns. However, it is not that different stages will use totally different lexicogrammatical structures.

#### 5. Narrative

Narrative is a text to amuse, entertain, dealing with actual or vicarious experience in different ways. Narratives deal with problematic events which lead to a crisis or turning point of some kind, which in turn finds a resolution. Gerrot and Wignell (1995: 204) state that the significant lexicogrammatical features of Narrative are as follows:

- Focus on specific and usually individualized Participants.
- Use of material processes.
- Use of relational processes and mental processes.
- Use of temporal conjunctions, and temporal circumstances.
- Use of past tense.

The stages of Narrative and their linguistic realization will be discussed below.

##### **a. Abstract**

The Abstract in narratives functions as a generic indicator which signals that a story is about to be told and establishes the point of the text. So Abstract is thematic prediction of what the text is going to be about. The Abstract includes the activity sequence. It is the opening of Narrative and realized in declaratives, verbal processes, material processes

##### **b. Orientation**

The purpose of Orientation is to orient the listener with respect to place, time and behavioral situation [(Labov and Walezly, 1967: 32) (in Eggins and Slade, 1997: 233)]. So Orientation orients listener to what is to follow in terms of people, actions, time and place. The clauses are in simple past form. Temporal conjunctions, individualized participants, material processes are used in this stage.

##### **c. Complication**

Complication is the main section of a narrative. It presents sequenced events which culminate in a crisis or a problem. This Complication is realized in simple past mental, material processes, individualized participants.

#### **d. Evaluation**

The purpose of Evaluation is to reveal the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative (Labov and Walezly, 1967: 37) in (Eggins and Slade 1997: 234). So Evaluation presents appraisal of crisis. Evaluation is mostly realized in attitudinal lexis.

#### **e. Resolution**

Resolution shows how crisis / complication is resolved. The mental, verbal, material simple past processes are used in this stage.

#### **f. Coda**

Coda is the concluding stage. The purpose is to make a point about the text as a whole. One of the functions of a Coda is to return the text to the present and by doing so to evaluate the whole event. Coda sometimes conveys comment of the narrator towards the significance of the narrative. Besides material, mental processes, appraisal lexis is also included in Coda.

### **C. METHODOLOGY**

#### **1. Setting and Procedure of Obtaining Data**

The research is conducted at Faculty of Language and Culture, UNISBANK Semarang. The data are obtained by randomly taking ten out of fifty students' narratives produced when the students joined genre-based writing class in the academic year 2009/2010.

#### **2. Data Analysis**

The data are analyzed in two integrated parts, i.e. schematic structure analysis and lexicogrammatical analysis. The analysis follows the steps below:

##### **a. Recognizing the segments of the text**

This step is to identify the segments of the text of each learner's narratives. This is to indicate how each segment is different from the others, how the segments are interrelated and constitute a unity.

##### **b. Defining the sub communicative purpose of each segment**

In this step, the sub communicative purpose of each segment will be defined.

##### **c. Identifying and differentiating stages within the genre**

This step is to identify the constituent stages. The functional criteria will be applied in this genre analysis.

##### **d. Specifying obligatory and optional stages**

This step is to clarify which stage is obliged to occur, and which one is not obliged to occur. Obligatory element is the key element in recognizing a genre; it is obliged to occur. While optional element is one that can occur but it is not obliged to occur.

**e. Devising a structural formula**

This step is to devise a structural formula to describe the genre.

**f. Analyzing the lexicogrammatical features of each stage**

Each genre is made up of functionally related stages and this means that the different stages will reveal different lexicogrammatical patterns. The lexicogrammatical analysis reveals how each stage of a text realizes its particular purposes, how meanings are realized in linguistic features.

**3. Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis is clause. This coincides with Eggins' idea that we should focus on clauses. "We will only focus on describing the structure of the clause. This is because the clause is generally recognized to be the pivotal unit of grammatical meaning, and also because patterns which can be identified for the clause have parallels for units of lower ranks" (1994: 139). This is also in accordance with Gerrot's and Wignell's ideas that clauses and clause complexes are equally applicable to spoken and written language, and therefore are preferred (1995: 82).

**D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section provides answers to the problems, i.e. (1) The communicative purposes of learners' narratives; (2) The schematic structures of learners' narratives; (3) The linguistic features characterizing the learners' narratives.

**1. The communicative purposes of learners' narratives**

The communicative purpose of Narrative is to tell, to entertain, to gain the readers' / listeners' interest in a story of actual or vicarious experience dealing with problematic event. In order to achieve this communicative purpose, Narrative has sub purposes. The sub purposes of Narrative produced by the English learners are as follows:

**(1) To embody an interpersonal attitude of the speaker to the audience.**

This sub purpose is realized by vocative. The speaker uses this vocative or address because he / she wants to get audience's attention.

**(2) To indicate personal relation of the speaker toward the audience**

This sub purpose is realized by greeting. Hasan (1989: 63) states that greeting signals the recognition of the other participant as a potential agent in some activity.

**(3) To establish the point of the text**

This sub purpose is recognized from the Abstract stage of Narrative. This Abstract provides the summary of the text.

**(4) To orient the listeners in respect to place, time, people in the text.**

This is recognized from the Orientation of the text. It introduces the characters, the scene, the time when the story takes place.

**(5) To present sequenced events which culminate in a crisis or a problem**

This is realized by processes / actions leading to a crisis. Example: move 4-11, narrative 8 (Her father remarried another woman and later her step sister was born. Unfortunately, not long after that her father died).

**(6) To reveal the attitude of the narrator toward the narrative**

This sub purpose is recognized from the use of attitudinal lexis. Examples: move 12, narrative 9 (He was very pleased and grateful), move 27, narrative 3 (The next, the boy was angry with the population).

**(7) To show how a crisis / problem is resolved**

This is realized by the Resolution of the Narrative, the solution to the crisis. Example: move 58-65, narrative 10 (Then it was the last magic stuff she had in the bag. It was a shrimp paste or *terasi*. She threw it and it became a big swamp).

**(8) To make a point about the text as a whole**

This is recognized from the closing, concluding stage, e.g. "From this story we could take the lesson that we must smart and wise to solve the problem." (move 35-36, narrative 4

**(9) To thank the audience**

This is realized by a noun phrase, a formulaic expression, e.g. "Well, thank you" (move 64, narrative 1). This excerpt indicates the speaker's gratitude toward the listeners' participation / attention.

**2. The Schematic Structures of Learners' Monologues**

On the basis of functional labeling, the learners' monologues are divided into several constituent stages, in order that the schematic structures of learners' narratives can be realized, the actual or potential ones will be presented. The actual schematic structures of the learners' narratives are as follows:

**Learner's narrative 1**

(Address) ^ (Greeting) ^ (Abstract) ^ (Orientation) ^ Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution ^ (Coda) ^ (Thanking)

**Learner's narrative 2**

Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution

**Learner's narrative 3**

(Orientation) ^ Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution ^ (Coda)

**Learner's narrative 4**

(Orientation) ^ Complication ^ Resolution ^ (Coda)

**Learner's narrative 5**

Complication ^ Resolution

**Learner's narrative 6**

(Orientation) ^ Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Complication ^ Resolution

**Learner's narrative 7**

Complication ^ Resolution

**Learner's narrative 8**

Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution ^ (Coda)

**Learner's narrative 9**

(Orientation) ^ Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution ^ (Coda)

### **Learner's narrative 10**

(Orientation) ^ Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution ^ (Coda)

After a thorough study of the actual structures of the learners' monologues, the Generic Structure Potential of the learners' monologues can be stated below:

\*(Address) \*(Greeting) ^ [\* (Abstract) \* (Orientation)] ^ {Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution ^ (Coda)} \*(Thanking)

The asterisk indicates that the element following it is an unordered stage. The square brackets indicate a space within which elements may occur. Round brackets are used to indicate optionality of the enclosed elements.

Complication, Evaluation, and Resolution are obligatory constituent stages that are somehow defining the genre of Narrative. These stages characterize the genre of Narrative. However three (30%) (narrative 7, 5, 4) do not have evaluation stage. Four (40%) (narrative 2, 5, 7, 8) do not have opening. The learners directly state the complication without stating the orientation or the abstract. Four (40%) (narrative 7,6,5,2) do not have coda either. It means that the narratives are ended without being closed.

### **3. Linguistic Features Characterizing the Learners' Narratives**

After a thorough analysis on the linguistic features used in the texts of learners' narratives, some interesting points are found out.

#### **(1) Address**

In the text of a learner's Narrative, the Address is realized in a formulaic expression, in a noun phrase, i.e. "Ladies and gentlemen" (move 1, narrative 1).

#### **(2) Greeting**

Like Address, Greeting in the text of a learner's Narrative is realized in a formulaic expression, i.e. "Good morning. How are you today?" (move 2-3, narrative 1)

#### **(3) Abstract**

Abstract is the points that will be told in a Narrative. This stage is realized in declaratives, present future sentences.

#### **(4) Orientation**

Orientation deals with the background of the story. This is realized in past declaratives, material, existential, attributive processes.

#### **(5) Complication**

Complication is the main stage of Narrative. It presents a sequence of events which culminate in a crisis or a problem. The Complication stage of learners' Narrative are realized in simple past declaratives, information questions, yes/no questions, simple present tense of direct sentences, attributive, material, verbal, mental, existential processes. The mood persons included in this stage are varied: speaker (I), my baby (he), the fox, Salomon, and other minor characters such as the doctor, the psychologist, my teacher, mother. Temporal conjunctions, circumstances of time and place are found in this stage.

#### **(6) Evaluation**

Evaluation deals with the attitude of the narrator toward the narrative. Attitudinal lexis such as "surprised", "shocked", "sad", "patient", "angry", "happy", "worried", "pleased", "grateful" are

found in this stage. Mood adjuncts are also found in this stage. attributive processes dominate this stage. Material, mental, and existential processes are also found in this stage.

### **(7) Resolution**

Resolution shows how a crisis / complication is resolved. Simple present sentences dominate this stage.

### **(8) Coda**

Coda is the concluding stage. Moral values are also put forward in this stage. Attributive, material, mental processes are used in this stage.

### **(9) Thanking**

Thanking stage is realized in a noun phrase, a formulaic expression, e.g. "Well, thank you" (move 64, narrative 1).

The other findings of the linguistic features of the Narrative texts produced by the learners are as follows. The students make 38 (9%) tense errors, and 23 (5%) vocabulary errors. What is meant by tense error here is that the learner uses present tense, present perfect tense instead of past tense and uses past tense instead of present tense. What is meant by vocabulary error here is the proper diction, e.g. "brought the baby to the hospital" instead of "took the baby to the hospital", "life" instead of "alive", "success" instead of "successful"; the misspelling, e.g. "swam" instead of "swan", "populace" instead of "population".

## **E. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **1 Conclusions**

#### *a. The communicative purposes of learners' narratives.*

The communicative purpose of a learners' Narratives is to tell, to entertain, to gain the listeners' interest in a story dealing with a problematic event. This communicative purpose is achieved through several sub-communicative purposes such as: (1) to present sequenced events which culminate in a crisis or a problem, (2) to reveal the attitude of the narrator toward the narrative, (3) to show how a crisis / problem is resolved.

#### *b. The schematic structures of learners' narratives.*

The potential structure that generates Narrative is\*(Address) \*(Greeting) ^ [\*(Abstract) \*(Orientation)] ^ {Complication ^ Evaluation ^ Resolution ^ (Coda)} \*(Thanking). Thus, Complication, Evaluation, Resolution are obligatory stages in Narrative. The potential structures produced by the learners above are similar with those produced by the English native speakers as mentioned the theory. However, three (30%) (narrative 7, 5, 4) do not have evaluation stage. Four (40%) (narrative 2, 5, 7, 8) do not have opening. Four (40%) (narrative 7,6,5,2) do not have coda either.

#### *c. The linguistic features characterizing the communicative purposes of learners' narratives*

Features of declaratives (95%), individualized participant: mood person "non interactant" (91%), past (74.8%), material processes (57%), attributive processes (13%) take domination in the Narrative text. This implies that the Narrative text provides information about the past problematic event of the main character (the third party), and the narrator's attitude toward the problematic event.

The linguistic features of the learners' Narratives are similar with those of the English native speaker's Narrative, i.e. focus on individualized participants, use of material processes, use

of relational (attributive) processes, use of past tense. However, some vocabulary and tense errors are made.

## 2. Suggestions

Teacher should remind the students concerning the obligatory stages of a narrative since 40% of the narratives produced by the learners do not have evaluation stage which is obligatory. Teacher should also remind the students to open and to close the narratives they produce since 40% of the narrative do not have opening, e.g. orientation or abstract and do not have coda either. It means that the narratives are ended without being closed.

The English teachers and the English students can learn from the errors the students make in this study. The students should reflect on the problems concerning their weaknesses and study hard to compensate their weaknesses by doing a lot of exercises.

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