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ON NARRATIVE IN SUPPORT OF AN OPENING END-STATE STATEMENT: A CASE STUDY

ABSTRACT: This paper will carry out a detailed textual assessment of “narrative that supports an end-state statement,” in order to understand the composing challenges of this genre for high-intermediate level learners. The macro-design and developmental design-features of a prototype text of this genre are described. Learner prose is shown to evidence clear conformity to the macro-design, but less than full conformity to specific developmental and linguistic design-features, arguing for classroom intervention in this area of text composition.

KEYWORDS: narrative, Academic English, English as a Second Language, second language acquisition, discourse analysis

0. INTRODUCTION

There is limited assessment of ESL narrative in the linguistic study of ESL acquisition and use. ESL narrative has been examined in the context of the assessment of other linguistic items/issues (e.g., language fluency (Wood 2009), lexical richness (Lu 2012), reference (Chen & Pan 2009; Kang 2009; Tickoo 2002), tense and aspect (Ayoun & Salaberry 2008; Chiravate 2011; Bardovi-Harlig 1992, 1994, 1995, 2000; Tickoo 2001, 2005, etc.) rather than as a topic in itself. The rationale seems to be that ESL in higher educational settings serves primarily academic purposes, in which narration is assumed to play no significant role.

This assumption, however, overlooks two kinds of robust reliance on narrative in academic writing assignments. First, there is considerable use of personal narrative as a writing task in earlier stages of instruction-in-composition. Second, narrative is frequently used in support of a certain kind of statement: a statement that represents the end-state of a developmental process (‘end-state statement’ for future reference, e.g.,
“Edwardsville is a ghost town today”). Narrative in support of an end-state statement traces a path along successive chronologically sequenced events in the past to the end-state represented by the opening statement. It serves to account for the end state, by mapping out the route to its emergence. This is a use of narrative that is exploited across the curriculum in report and research paper writing; hence its importance to the ESL learner with academic goals.

Because all narrational skills are set aside as largely irrelevant to the understanding of ESL for academic purposes, the learning challenges posed by the conventions that shape this particular generic type also remain unaddressed. This paper will carry out a detailed textual assessment of ESL narrative that supports an end-state statement, to arrive at an understanding of the composing challenges this genre poses for the high-intermediate level learner. I will, first, identify key constraints that govern a prototype text, generated by a skilled writer. This will facilitate assessment of learner prose with respect to a conventionally recognized ideal. The assessment measures will gauge the approximation to this ideal, evaluating in relative rather than absolute terms with a measure of less or more skill, rather than as simply ‘right’ or ‘wrong,’ in order to carry out a careful assessment of whether and, if so, how the identified constraints are implemented in learner prose. Because of space constraints, and in the interest of readability in a short exposition, I will attempt an illustrative assessment of one representative writing sample. But I will also suggest how the identified findings speak to a collective body of 20 comparable essays. All these narratives were written as one-hour, in-class assignments on the topic of ‘My relationship with the English language,’ as part of a refresher course in academic English for learners of high-intermediate proficiency at a Swedish university. The students came from three different language backgrounds: Spanish, Swedish and Mandarin, but experienced a common set of challenges. These common learning issues are the focus of this preliminary assessment; the subtler differences in learners’ use of this genre will be addressed in follow up research.

In what follows, section 1 will examine Sample A, as a prototype realization of narrative in support of an opening end-state statement, to
point to the preferred discoursal conventions for this kind of textual development. Section 2 will then gauge learner use of these conventions, and represent the challenge they pose to the high-intermediate learner. Finally, section 3 will summarize key findings and consider their potential implications.

1. DEFINING A SUBGENRE OF NARRATIVE:
THE NARRATIVE SUPPORT OF AN OPENING END-STATE STATEMENT

Labov (2006, 2004, 2001) and Labov & Waletzky (1967) identify certain general developmental features of narrative prose. At the core of these is the defining constraint that, in narrative representation, past events are captured in their real-world order. For example, when real-world event a (riding my bike in the dark) precedes b (running into a lamppost), the clausal sequence will be a (I rode my bike in the dark) followed by b (I ran into a lamppost). Narrative clauses (i) uphold ‘temporal juncture’ (a change of clausal order correlates with a change in the order of the events they represent) and (ii) respond to the question ‘then what happened’?

Prototype narrative also comes with a unique discoursal development along the following well-defined stages: abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution and coda (Labov 2006, 2004, 2001; Labov & Waletzky 1967). The standard commencement at a summative statement, the abstract, serves to introduce the reader/hearer to the overall happening. The particulars of this happening are then fleshed out in the sequence of events that follows. For example, in response to the question of (1a) below (“Have you ever had a near-death experience?”), the narrative of (1b) opens with the abstract (“I once came within feet of a 50 foot drop”). This summative statement is then given a more detailed representation in the narrative events that follow. The prototype narrative close in the coda, a concluding statement which serves to return the narrative full-circle to the point of its beginning, is also realized in (1b) in the last sentence (“then we had to climb back up: that was a challenge”).
(1) a. Question: Have you ever had a near-death experience?

b. Response: I once came within feet of a 50 foot drop (ABSTRACT). I was with my boyscout troop when we came across a blocked off path. The path was slippery; slippery enough for us to slide down it. We thought that it would be a short cut but little did we know that it came to an abrupt end. It was all we could do to stop ourselves then we had to climb back up; that was a challenge (CODA).

(source: uk.answers.yahoo.com)

1.1. Macro-design of narrative in support of an opening end-state statement

While the point of commencement of narrative in support of an opening end-state statement is also a statement, it is not summative of the following sequence. Rather, it is the point of culmination of the event sequence that follows.

**Sample A: Drug Addiction**

(1) Her body no longer produced its own natural chemicals to manage pain, so not having the heroin caused her to become “dope sick.” (2) When the drug was not replenished, she went into withdrawal. (3) She never experienced this before … but after time, as she used more and more drug, and needed more and more drug, the abrupt removal of heroin was devastating….

(4) She didn’t start out that way. (5) When she was in eighth grade she and her friends were given marijuana to try. (6) Most of the kids didn’t like it … (7) But it agreed with Darcy, who also began to raid the family liquor cabinet when she couldn’t buy grass.

(8) One day, when she was just past her 14th birthday, she discovered some painkillers in her mother’s medicine cabinet. (9) Her mom had a back surgery and was prescribed X, but only took a couple of them, leaving a nearly full prescription in the bathroom.

(10) Even 14 year-old people can research on the internet and soon she learned that by grinding the drug and snorting it, the high was intense.
The chances for addiction were also intense and it didn’t take long before Darcy was seeking that euphoric experience over and over.

It was the only time she felt good. She solicited her friends to steal drugs from their parents.

Any kind of painkiller would do, but Y and X were preferred, and because they are prescribed so often, getting a supply wasn’t all that difficult.

She also became rather clever, as each time she visited the house of a new “friend” she would secretly check out the medicine cabinets….

Darcy soon realized that X was expensive, but heroin on the street was about a quarter the price, so see looked for suppliers. She didn’t have to search long.

Sample A is an excerpt from an exposition on drug addiction. The excerpt itself represents how one young person ended up a heroin addict. It begins with a description of the addict’s end-state condition: “not having heroin caused her to become ‘dope sick.’ When the drug was not replenished, she went into withdrawal” (sentences 1 & 2). The end-state statement is followed (in sentence 4) by an explicit claim indicating that this was not always her condition: “She didn’t start out that way.” This qualification indicates the temporal specificity of the end-state. It projects narrative as forthcoming to account for the end-state condition, and prospects a return to the relevant point of initiation, in this instance the point of first exposure to drugs: when Darcy realized that marijuana “agreed with” her, and “began to raid her family liquor cabinet when she couldn’t buy grass” (sentence 7). This point of initiation is followed by successive changes of state, which are collectively indicative of a growing dependency: She “discovered … painkillers” (sentence 8), “discovered…(that) grinding … and snorting” them the high was more intense (sentence 10), “solicited her friends to steal … from their parents” (sentence 12), and “became … clever …visited friends …would check out (their) medicine cabinets” (sentence 14). At the end point of this event sequence, “(she) soon realized that… heroin” was her drug of choice (sentence 15). With this, the narrative that started at the point of first exposure or initiation (sentence 7) has reconnected with the earlier represented end-state condition of dependence on heroin (in sentences 1 & 2).
We can conclude, therefore, that the prototype narrative-support of an opening end-state statement appears to conform to the following distributional envelope.

**Figure 1. Summary of the narrative envelope in sample A**

(I) End-state statement  
Sentences 1 & 2  

(II) The temporal specificity of end-state statement  
Sentence 4  

(III) Change of state sequence, in three phases:  
(a) *Point of first exposure/initiation*:  
Sentence 7  
(b) *Successive changes of state*:  
Sentence 8, Sentence 10, Sentence 12, Sentence 14  
(c) *Reconnection to opening end-state*:  
Sentence 15.

1.2 Developmental design features  
Also evident in Sample A are the following developmental design features:  

(a) Narrative once prospected must be embarked upon and followed through to the point of its completion:  
Once the narrative has been embarked upon, it cannot, in the normative case, be discontinued or suspended. By the ‘then what happened?’ condition, every narrative event prospects that another event that can appropriately follow will follow. This need to follow through on what is prospected applies to all genres of discourse. Every discourse type comes with an inherent development design, so the audience has an expectation of receiving the whole unit once it has been embarked upon.
(b) Narrative in support of an end-state statement must realize a hyponymic relationship\(^1\) (Finegan 2004) between the overall topic and the individual developmental components used in the treatment of that topic:

In Sample A the overall topic is addiction to drugs. Both the end-state statement (sentence 1) and each change of state of the sequence that follows (sentence 8, sentence 10, sentence 12, sentence 14) are manifestations, or hyponyms, of a single phenomenon, ‘addiction to drugs,’ the hypernym which is the overall topic of Sample A (cf. Figure 2, below).

Figure 2. Realizing the relationship of hyponymy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addiction to drugs (overall topic)</th>
<th>Hyponym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) end-state</td>
<td>“removal of heroin made her dope sick”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) first exposure</td>
<td>“marijuana agreed with her”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) change of state</td>
<td>“discovered painkillers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) change of state</td>
<td>“discovered grinding &amp; snorting them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) change of state</td>
<td>“became adept at obtaining them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) reconnection</td>
<td>“realized heroin was her drug of choice”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hyponymy is not characteristic of all narratives, but rather a unique feature of narrative in support of an opening end-state statement.\(^2\)

(c) Narrative in support of an opening end-state statement calls for the use of narrative clauses with verbs in the preterit which are lexico-aspectually achievement-events.

Sample A is in its entirety in the \textit{past tense}. The verbs of successive narrative clauses denote or represent achievement-events (i.e., events that are not durative). The use of achievement-event denoting verbs in

\(^1\) Hyponymy is the relationship that bears between a set and each individual element of it (viz. the relationship of ‘dog’/ ‘cat’/ ‘tiger’ to ‘mammal’).  
\(^2\) Consider, for example, the following narrative.  
(1) Last week my friend Mary had the worst experience of her life: she was mugged. She was taking an evening stroll down a jogging path at the back of her subdivision, (2) when a guy jumped out of nowhere and held a gun to her head. (3) He threatened to blow her brains out if she didn’t do what he said, and (4) proceeded to rob her, taking her wallet, jewellery and even the little small change she had on her person.
the past tense is particularly necessary when the textual development realizes the relationship of hyponymy.

We must note that hyponyms are not inherently developmentally differentiated with respect to each other; that is, one hyponym is not necessarily a preceding or following developmental stage of any other. They are, rather, merely alternative manifestations of a single phenomenon, and are readily seen as such in their contiguous appearance in a-f of Figure 3, in which the past tense has been removed. Once the past tense is removed, the want of a developmental hierarchy makes it difficult to perceive movement from one to another (a-f), by incremental progression, to an end-state condition.3

**Figure 3. Drug addiction: without the past tense**

|  (a) removal of heroin makes her dope sick  |
| (b) marijuana agrees with her  |
| (c) takes painkillers  |
| (d) grinds & snorts them  |
| (e) is adept at obtaining them…  |
| (f) heroin is her drug of choice…  |

However, the mere use of the past tense is also not enough, as is suggested in the sequence b’-f’ in Figure 3’, which remains ambiguous as to the presence or absence of movement in time. It is only the use of the past tense with verbs that are achievement-events (as in b’-f’ in Figure 3”) that conveys movement in time in an unambiguous way.

**Figure 3’. Drug addiction: without achievement verbs**

|  (a) removal of heroin makes her dope sick  |
| (b’) marijuana agreed with her  |
| (c’) took painkillers…  |
| (d’) ground & snorted them  |
| (e’) was adept at obtaining  |
| (f’) knew heroin was her drug…  |

3 Hyponymy is, in fact, better suited for an expository rather than narrative rendition.
(a´) removal of heroin makes her dope sick
(b´) she realized marijuana agreed...
(c´) discovered painkillers
(d´) discovered grinding & snorting them
(e´) became adept at obtaining them
(f´) realized heroin was her drug of choice

To ensure that hyponymic manifestations of a single hypernym effectively represent temporal passage along constituent developmental points, therefore, requires use of preterit forms of verbs that are semantically achievement-events, rather than accomplishment-events (durative events), states or activities. In fact, as we will see in our assessment of learner prose, the more stringently this requirement is put in place the more acceptable the resulting narrative development appears to be.

(d) Non-narrative clauses in the narrative sequence must mimic the formal characteristics of the narrative clauses they accompany.

This is evident in sentences 6 and 9 of Sample A (repeated below) which show both structural and temporal parallelism to their preceding narrative clauses.

Sample A: an extract

(6) Most of the kids didn’t like it … (9) Her mom had a back surgery and was prescribed X, but only took a couple of them, leaving a nearly full prescription in the bathroom.

If this parallelism is removed and 6 and 9 are represented as (i) explicit assertions that are (ii) temporally nonspecific (as in 6´ and 9´ below), the result is a noticeable break in the narrative flow, and greater difficulty reconnecting to the narrative storyline.

Modified extract of Sample A

(5) When she was in the eighth grade she and her friends were given marijuana to try. (6’) I think most kids don’t like it, because it tastes
terrible or they don’t like the feeling they get when the effects kick in. (7) But it agreed with Darcy …

(8) One day, when she was just past her 14th birthday, she discovered some pain killers in her mother’s medicine cabinet. (9') I think people have surgery and are frequently prescribed X, but only take a couple of them, leaving a nearly full prescription in the bathroom. (10) Even 14 year-old people can research on the internet and soon she learned that by grinding the drug and snorting it, the high was intense.

(e) There must be an appropriate level of detail in the capture of the events of the narrative sequence to suggest an effective culmination in the end-state.

The emergence of the end state is effected by the representation of successive preceding achievement-events at an appropriate degree of detail. Less than the represented degree of detail would take away this sense of culmination in the end state. Notice the advantage of (2b) over (2a) below, for this purpose:

(2)  

a. **He fell down.** He hurt himself badly, but luckily broke no bones.

b. **He missed a step, slipped on the thin layer of invisible ice, and landed on his back with a loud thud.** He hurt himself badly, but luckily broke no bones.

It is also true, however, that more than the represented detail in sample A would also diminish the effective build up to end-state by being perceived as excessively delayed, and therefore laboured. So Sample A represents an ideal, or at least preferred, degree of detail at which the culmination to end-state should be represented.

1.3. Summary of key developmental features

Sample A suggests that narrative-in-support of an end-state statement comes with a defining macro-design, which is constrained by a number of developmental features. It opens with the end-state statement, and then makes a statement on the temporal specificity of this end-state. The temporal specificity of end-state in the context of the end-state
statement projects narrative as forthcoming, and the narrative must, therefore, follow. The ‘then what happened?’ condition then ensures that narrative once embarked upon is sustained to the point of its completion. The narrative, once in place, is implemented in three phases: a point of inception, a following succession of changes of state, and a point of reconnection to the opening end-state. All the points of this development, inclusive of the opening end-state and the concluding reconnection to it, are hyponyms of a single over-arching hypernym, which is the topic of the text. To effect smooth narrative passage along the successive points of this development requires use of achievement verbs in the preterit. Any non-narrative, intervening statements must mimic the structural and temporal features of the narrative clauses they accompany, to help sustain narrative passage across these intervening nonnarrative clauses. There is also a need to build up to the end state condition, and this build up is implemented by the use of an appropriate degree of detail in the representation of successive events in the sequence.

2. A LEARNER’S ATTEMPT AT THE NARRATIVE SUPPORT OF AN OPENING END-STATE STATEMENT

I will now describe sample B, written by a L1 user of Spanish, as representative of high-intermediate learners’ attempts at narrative in support of an end-state statement.

**Sample B: My relationship with the English language**

(1) English language is very important in my life nowadays. (2) But this changed a lot along the time.

(3) My relationship with the English language started eighteen years ago, when I was twelve, taking lectures in primary school. (4) In that time I liked English but I didn’t learn too much. (5) Actually I think Spanish teaching-learning process in a second language is very bad, teachers don’t have a good pronunciation and don’t speak English with children, who only translate a lot of sentences word by word.

(6) After that my relationship with English was worse, when I studied in the High School, all the time learning grammar, was boring.
The main reason in my interest about English language in my adult life is that I love travelling and the first time I’ve been abroad I understood that you can travel wherever you want if you can speak English.

The second reason is I want to be a teacher in a primary school, and as a teacher you can choose different specialties but some of them are very crowded and it’s difficult to find a job. And in English specialty is easier to find it. At the moment bilingual schools are coming up in Spain, more and more people want that their children to learn a second language since they are three years old.

Now I’m studying English in another way, I try to give my best and I take lectures with natives by myself because at the university we are eighty people per classroom, more or less, and it’s very difficult to practice skills like speaking or writing, we are too many people and teachers can’t spend enough time with each person.

In addition, I hope my Erasmus experience in Sweden help me to improve my English a lot.

2.1. Macro-design of Sample B
Sample B opens with an end-statement in sentence 1 (“English is very important in my life nowadays”). The temporal specificity of the end-state is attempted in sentence 2 (“But this changed a lot along the time”). The change of state sequence follows, starting with a point of first exposure in sentence 3 (“My relationship with the English language started eighteen years ago, when I was ... in primary school”). What ought to be successive changes of state to achieve the needed level of narrative detail is attempted in sentence 6 with just one instantiation (“After that my relationship with English …”). It is followed by the reconnection to the opening end-state statement in sentences 7 (“The main reason in my interest about English language in my adult life …”), 8 (The second reason …”) and 11 (“Now I’m studying English…”).

2.2. Developmental features
(a) Narrative once started must be followed through to the point of its completion, with the ideal degree of detail in the representation of the event sequence.
The return from the end-state condition (sentence 1) to the time of first exposure to English (sentence 3) traces a semi-circle back in time, which then prospects the missing half of the evoked full circle. Sample B does, in fact, follow through, in suggesting that the return path back to the end state is in place. But the single instance (sentence 6) of what should be a sequence of changes of state along this return path diminishes the needed build up to it, and creates an inappropriate truncation of the narrative.

(b) Narrative in support of an end-state statement must realize the relationship of hyponymy.

As suggested above, the statement on the temporal specificity of the end-state normatively comes in the ‘this was not always the case’ form. Expressed as “But this changed a lot along the time” (sentence 2), with ‘this’ referring back to the whole preceding proposition, it suggests that the end state (sentence 1: “English is very important in my life nowadays”) changed a great deal over time. This cannot be the writer’s intent; the end-state (which in the present tense is also the condition at the time of utterance) cannot change in past time. But there is an intent to represent something related to the end state as changing over time. It is reasonable to conclude that this is the associated hypernym, ‘the importance of English in my life’ or more generally ‘my relationship with English/my feelings about English’ which is both constant across time, and amenable to differentiated realization in time. It can take on either positive realization (‘I value English’/ ‘It is important to me’) or negative realization (‘I don’t value English’/ ‘It isn’t important to me.’).

It is clear from this that one significant challenge posed by the narrative-support-of-an-end-state-statement is the need to effectively use the relationship of hyponymy. One way of accounting for this challenge is as a purely conceptual difficulty. That is, the difficulty lies in the necessity to (i) conceive of the represented end-state (‘English is very important in my life now’) as a hyponym of the associated hypernym (‘my relationship with English’/ ‘my feelings about English’), and (ii) to then regard the hypernym as the broad atemporal constant which can undergo differentiated realization, to emerge in the end-state in question. The relationship of hyponym to hypernym is less likely to pose difficulty
when it holds between meaningful entities (viz. ‘rose’/‘tulip’/‘daisy’ to ‘flower’), than when it bears between abstract notions (viz. ‘English is very important in my life now’ to ‘my relationship with English’).

It is also possible, however, that the challenge may not be a conceptual one at all. It might, rather, be the purely linguistic challenge of knowing how to give appropriate expression to each component, hyponym and hypernym, of the properly conceived relationship of hyponymy. In this case, also, the challenge is more likely to be associated with the realization of hyponymy by non-entities rather than entities. While in hyponymy between entities both the hypernym and the hyponyms are expressed by NPs (e.g., both ‘rose,’ the hyponym, and ‘flower,’ the hypernym, are NPs), this can be (cf. 3a and b, below), but does not have to be the case in hyponymy between nonentities.

\[(3)\]
\[\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \textbf{Drinking} \text{ can be a life-long problem.} \\
\text{b. } & \textbf{Drinking moderately} \text{ is not a concern, but } \textbf{drinking heavily} \text{ causes serious health problems.}
\end{align*}\]

Hyponyms that are nonentities can also be expressed by means of finite clauses (cf. 4b, below). The corresponding hypernym remains in the nonfinite form, since it is the overarching atemporal constant.

\[(4)\]
\[\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \textbf{Drinking} \text{ can be a life-long problem.} \\
\text{b. } & \text{If } \textbf{one drinks moderately} \text{ it is not a concern, but if } \textbf{one drinks heavily} \text{ it causes serious problems.}
\end{align*}\]

In sample B, the writer does not distinguish between the finite hyponymic realization of sentence 1 (‘English is very important in my life now’) and the nonfinite hypernym which is needed in sentence 2 (‘the importance of English in my life’). The proper use of ‘my relationship with the English language’ in sentence 3 (the assigned topic) convincingly evidences a conceptual association as hypernym with the hyponymic ‘English is very important in my life now’ in sentence 1. But it does not imply complete mastery of its linguistic form. Hence the challenge posed by the use of hyponymy in this instance may well be linguistic, rather than conceptual. The mastery of form has been said to lag behind the mastery of the conceptual in L2 acquisition (cf. Bardovi-
Harlig 1992), and variable formal accuracy goes hand in hand with this delayed mastery.

(c) Verbs in the event sequence must be achievements in the preterit tense

Sample B does fulfill the general need to realize hyponymy with each successive happening it represents. But because hyponymy places constituent hyponyms on a level or nonhierarchical plane, proper narrative passage requires the use of a succession of achievement verbs in the preterit tense. To implement such progression, happenings that follow “started” (sentence 3), which is an achievement verb in the preterit, must also be framed as achievements in the preterit. This means that the state “was worse” and the activity “studied in high school” of sentence 6 should be reframed as ‘became worse’ and ‘entered high school,’ respectively.

The narrative passage should also be sustained all the way to the culmination in the end-state, and so the state represented in 7, “I love travelling,” should be re-framed as an achievement in the preterit, as in ‘I have realized that I love travelling.’ Again, the state “I want to be a teacher” represented in 8 must be re-framed as an achievement in the preterit as in ‘I have realized that I want to be a teacher.’

(d) Intervening nonnarrative clauses should mimic the narrative clauses they accompany in structural and temporal features.

Since narrative of all kinds is constrained to sustain a temporal development, intervening non-narrative clauses are out of synchrony with the narrative mode of textual development.

As suggested in section 1, they are better accommodated when they mimic preceding narrative clauses both in temporality and structure, showing, in consequence, propositional delimitation by the time frame and structure established by the preceding narrative clause(s).

In the second paragraph of sample B, the general comment on the teaching and learning of a second language in the Spanish context (sentence 5) is not sufficiently well tied to the preceding text, which is
time-specific and focused on the writer’s English language learning experience in primary school. Its connectedness improves if the temporal specificity is made to match that of the preceding narrative clause, by explicit mention of primary school.

But the use of the simple present, and the explicit assertion mode evident in “I think…” still make the resumption of narration in sentence 6 difficult across this nonnarrative clause. By removing this overt marker of assertion, and putting 5 in the past, the resumption of narration across this intervening clause in sentence 6 becomes much easier (cf. 5’ and 6, repeated below).

(5’) Spanish teaching-learning process in a second language was very bad both in primary school and at every other stage of learning; teachers didn’t have a good pronunciation and didn’t speak English with the children, who only translated a lot of sentences word by word.

(6) After that my relationship with English was worse, when I studied in the High School, all the time learning grammar, was boring.

3. CONCLUSION

We can conclude that Sample B, a representative high-intermediate learner’s attempt at the narrative support of an opening end-state statement, shows a level of conformity to the macro-design of the prototype narrative of this kind. It does so in realizing the core macro-design components: opening end-state statement, temporal specificity of end-state, point of initiation/first exposure, succession of changes of state and reconnection to end-state. In consequence, the broad purpose that this genre of narrative development serves is realized: The text supports the claim, made as an opening end-state statement and qualified in the temporal specificity of the end-state, that English is very important to the writer at the time of the utterance. This support is given by means of retrospective return to the point of first exposure to English, and then backtracking along the path from this point of initiation to the specified end-state.
In this mapping of the passage in past time, however, it does not represent the change of state sequence to anything near the desired degree of detail. This truncation of the narrative diminishes the buildup to the end-state, which is a key objective of the narrative. The sample also shows some lexicalization difficulties in the consistent realization of hyponymy, with proper distinction between hyponym and hypernym in sentences 1 and 3, but not in 1 and 2. While this does not lead to misunderstanding, it would be perceived, by the average reader, as taking away from the impactful communication of the message.

Additionally, verbs in the change of state sequence are frequently non-achievements and are also not in all instances in the preterit. Like the insufficient detail in the representation of the event sequence, this decreases the dynamism, the movement in time quality, which is a defining feature of narrative, and therefore works against the core objective of the text. Finally, intervening nonnarrative clauses do not mimic the narrative clauses they accompany in structure and temporality, and therefore put in place a break in narrative flow at the point at which they appear.

This pattern of both conformity and nonconformity to the macro-design of the prototype narrative is representative of the set of 20 learner attempts at narrative in support of an end-state statement, regardless of the differences in linguistic background of the students who produced them. The macro-design is, in general, properly realized. The change of state sequence, however, is evident at less than the desired degree of detail in 18 out of 20 essays. The realization of hyponymy is also a consistent point of difficulty in all but two of the essays, with significant support for the interpretation of this difficulty as a linguistic rather than conceptual challenge. Fifteen out of twenty students also use achievement verbs inconsistently in the change of state sequence and twelve show variable use of the preterit for such verbs. Finally, only two students use intervening nonnarrative clauses with the structural and temporal features of their accompanying narrative clauses.

These micro-developmental features work both individually and collectively to put in place the core objective of delineating the narrative development to the stated end-condition. Their imperfect or only partial
realization, therefore, takes away from the particular kind of impact that is, in the prototype case, the functionality or, in more technical terms, discourse-pragmatic effect associated with the selection of this genre. So while conformity to the macro-design signals the use of the genre, the ineffective use of individual, micro-developmental features diminishes its functional impact. This suggests the need for some form of intervention, in the form of classroom practice and appropriate materials, to aid students to better tackle the effective use of narrative in support of an opening end-state statement.
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