CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In **2.1**, important studies on the structure of stories are reviewed. Through an overview of the studies, the internal structure of English stories is clearly disclosed. In **2.2**, previous studies which focus on L1 or ESL/EFL narrative writing are presented. One of the studies aimed at investigating the story-writing skills of advanced ESL learners while four of them were cross-cultural narrative studies concerning the structural patterns of narratives produced by learners from different cultural groups.

2.1 The Typical Structure of English Stories

Research on the structure of a story dates back to British psychologist Bartlett's study of memory (1932). This study established the concept of story schema. In his study, the subjects were asked to read a Native American folktale and reproduce it later. The story "The War of the Ghosts" was used as the experiment material mainly for two reasons: First, the cultural context of the story was extremely different from that of the subjects; second, incidents described in the story lack obvious rational

order (Bartlett, 1932, p. 64). The research results showed that the subjects tended to

add or delete details according to their own cultural experience. Moreover, they would

revise the plot, such as changing the order of events in the story, in order to make it

consistent to a typical Western story schema. The existence of an abstract story

schema was thereby demonstrated. However, Bartlett's analysis was regarded as too

general for not specifying the constructed units of a story: the concept of story schema

only refers to a combination of "literary style, mood, and various classes of stories"

(Mandler & Johnson, 1977, p. 112).

Based on Bartlett's study, cognitive psychologists extensively studied the

underlying structure of stories during the 1970s (e.g. Rumelhart, 1975; Thorndyke,

1977; Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979). They specified the

components of a story and their relationships by grammar rules. Taking the notation of

a traditional phrase structure grammar rule, the grammars developed by cognitive

psychologists at that time were generally referred to as "story grammars." The content

of story grammars, namely the basic units of a story and their rules of combination,

varied with different researchers. One type of story grammar is given below for

illustration (Thorndyke, 1977, p.79):

(1) story→setting＋theme＋plot＋resolution

(2) setting→characters＋location＋time

(3) theme→event(s)＋goal

(4) plot→episode(s)

(5) episode→subgoal＋attempt(s)＋outcome

(6) attempt→event(s)/episode

(7) outcome→event(s)/state

(8) resolution→event/state

(9) subgoal→goal＋desired state

(10) characters/location/time→state

Although story grammars are frequently applied to language teaching and proved

to be a useful tool, they were found to be unsuitable for analyzing either the surface or

underlying structure of stories from other cultures than English (Matsuyama, 1983).

Minsky (1988), a researcher working in the field of artificial intelligence,

proposed that there exist "story-frames" in readers' minds. The story-frames typically

start with the setting of the scene. Then the characters are introduced, with

implications about their chief concerns. A problem will be developed; then resolved,

and then the story will end, probably with practical or moral advice. He noted that

story-frames are usually aroused by story-starting phrases like "once upon a time" or

"long ago" and so on. These formulaic phrases are also crucial to reminding the

readers that what follows is "fictional or…far too remote to activate much personal

concern," and therefore the readers could "disregard the normal sympathies one

should feel when real persons meet the monstrous destinies so usual in children's

tales" (Minsky, 1988, p. 265).

Martin & Rothery (1986), through an empirical study, perceived the schematic

structure of the typical narrative written for school assignments, including the four

sequential stages (p. 254, 255):

(1) **Orientation**: the major characters are introduced and a setting is established;

(2) **Complication**: a series of events unfolds which leads unexpectedly to a crisis;

(3) **Resolution**: the crisis is resolved, and things return to normal; and

(4) **Coda**: the final stage, in which the writer may express an attitude toward the story

or give his/her perspective on its significance.

Functional linguist Longacre (1983) explicitly described the structure of most

narrative discourses in *The Grammar of Discourse*. He proposed that there is a

difference between the notional (or deep) structure and the surface structure of a

monologue discourse. Notional structure is related to the purpose of the discourse, while surface structure refers to the formal characteristics of a discourse. A given notional structure type may be encoded in the form of a different surface structure type, such as a recipe realized in a story form and so on. The notional structure of a story characterized by Longacre is summarized below (Longacre, 1983, p. 21):

(1) **Exposition**: Introducing the time, place, local color, and participants.

(2) **Inciting Moment**: Breaking up the planned and predictable.

(3) **Developing Conflict**: Intensifying or deteriorating the situation.

(4) **Climax**: Bringing contradictions and adding all sorts of tangles until confrontation is inevitable.

(5) **Denouement**: Happening of a crucial event which makes resolution possible.

(6) **Final Suspense**: Working out details of the resolution.

(7) **Conclusion**: Bringing the story to some sort of decent—or indecent—end.

Through the studies reviewed above, we generalized a typical structure of English stories. Adopting Longacre's (1983) and Martin and Rothery's (1986) terminology, the typical story structure comprises

(1) **Exposition**: Introduction of the (a) time, (b) place, and (c) characters.

(2) **Complication**: A series of events leads to a crisis, including three phases—

    (a) Inciting Moment: Breaking up the planned and predictable.

    (b) Developing Conflict: Intensifying or deteriorating the situation.

    (c) Climax: Bringing contradictions and adding all sorts of tangles until

       confrontation is inevitable.

(3) **Resolution**: Involving three stages—

    (a) Denouement: Happening of a crucial event which makes resolution possible.

    (b) Final Suspense: Working out details of the resolution.

    (c) Conclusion: Bringing the story to some sort of decent—or indecent—end.

(4) **Coda**: The writer's attitude toward the story may be expressed; practical or moral

       advice is given implicitly or explicitly.

    A story may not necessarily contain all the elements shown above, and the order

might change with the purpose as well. However, it is generally recognized that

successful stories always conform to this structure (Martin & Rothery, 1986).

2.2 Previous Studies on Narrative Writing

    In this section, previous studies which focus on L1 or ESL/EFL narrative writing

are presented. In the first study, the narratives produced by advanced ESL learners in

Hong Kong were examined for the skills in creating a crisis in a story. The second study provided cross-cultural data, comparing the structure and content of narratives produced by Bhutanese and American children. The third study investigated the narratives of four cultural groups (African American, Japanese American, Latino American, and North American children) for the use of story components. The fourth study compared the structural patterns of narratives written by Arabic-, Vietnamese-, and English-speaking students. The fifth study compared the narratives of Thai and American students in terms of cohesion, narrative components, and discourse structure.

Adopting the view of Martin and Rothery (1986) that the most crucial part of a narrative is the crisis, Tickoo (2001) discovered that there is a set of writing conventions used to illustrate the crisis of a story. Also, she pointed out that these conventions are "customarily used by skilled writers to enhance the attention-getting power of their expository writing" (p.21). The crisis conventions identified by Tickoo include

(1) Structuring the build-up to the crisis: The crisis is created by the formal separation of the customary from the unexpected in the text.

(2) Visualizing the kinesics: The crisis is stressed by (a) "making clear the agent,

patient, and the effect on the patient," and (b) "expressing a micro-level

breakdown of the ordered kinesic components of the event(s)" (p. 25).

(3) Denoting the rapid transition between key events: The crisis can be developed by

(a) using verbs or adverbials which denote "the action and the quality of its

transpiration" (p.26), or (b) "formally signaling focal events and setting them apart

from supportive information" (p. 27).

(4) Suggesting the immediacy of the experience: Avoid "first-person reporting of the

critical events of the crisis" (p.28). This allows readers to project themselves into

the sequence.

According to the crisis conventions shown above, Tickoo investigated the ESL

narratives written by 35 advanced level Cantonese-speaking students (ages ranging

from 19 to 22) of a Hong Kong university. She reported that these students do not use

those conventions in narrative writing. Moreover, through examining one randomly

selected essay from the same group of students, she claimed that "ESL learners who

have not learned to use these conventions in narratives also do not use them in essays"

(p.21). To teach the crisis conventions and their lexico-syntactic correlates to the

advanced ESL learners, Tickoo suggested that "models can be used to illustrate the

presence or absence of the conventions, but the primary objective is to get the learners

to (1) assess text samples for the presence of the conventions and (2) make the needed

changes to ensure conformity to them" (p, 34).

Stein (2004) analyzed the L1 narratives of Bhutanese and rural American 7-year old children by comparing the narrative structure and content of 10 stories written by each group. The narrative structure was analyzed by using story grammar components (Stein & Glenn, 1979) and story structure levels (Glenn & Stein, 1980; Hedberg & Westby, 1993; Peterson & McCabe, 1983) while story content was analyzed through story resolution patterns (Maranda & Maranda, 1970), the presence of secondary characters, and the presence and quality of perspective taking. The participants were asked to tell "a story about a child who got lost in the woods" (p. 378).

In spite of the fact that Bhutanese "children had not been exposed to Western narrative style" (p.374), the research results showed that the narrative structures produced by the two groups are highly similar. The narratives produced by both groups contained goals, attempts to resolve problems, consequences, endings and multiple episodes. On the other hand, differences between the two groups were reflected more by story content where "evidence of the influence of culture and Buddhist thought on Bhutanese group was apparent" (p.387). For example, Bhutanese stories often end in the death of the characters because of Buddhist focus on death and reincarnation. American stories, in contrast, contained more successful endings which

are "typical of Western cultures" (p. 389). In addition, Bhutanese stories contained

greater presence of secondary characters and intense empathy for story characters.

This may be explained by the fact that Bhutanese society puts much emphasis on

family and extended families living together. American children rarely involved

secondary characters in their stories. "When they did, the appearance" of secondary

characters "was brief" (p.388).

McCabe (1996) explored cultural differences in the use of the following story

components:

(1) Boundary Markers: Typical ways of beginning or closing a story, such as "Once

upon a time," "And they lived happily ever after," or "The End."

(2) Information: Including two sorts--

(a) Description: Sentences that describe the characters, the time, and the place

where events happened, and what activities there were.

(b) Action: "Events given in the simple past tense that may occur in a sequence

of some sort" (p. 50).

(3) Reported Speech or Dialogue: Use of dialogues to develop the story.

(4) Evaluation: Emotional meaning embedded in the story.

She examined the oral stories and writings of 7-year-old African American,

Japanese American, Latino American, and North American children and found that

different cultural groups tend to emphasize certain components of stories over the

other components. For example, North American children tend to talk about one

important thing at a time, focus on the action plot, and produce a climatic centerpiece.

Japanese children tend to tell stories that are succinct, relying on their listeners to fill

in the details by themselves. Besides, other incidents are often inserted into the

narration of a focal event in Japanese stories. Latino children focus on description,

giving many details about the appearance of objects, and de-emphasize the

sequencing of events in their narratives. African American children tend to tell

dramatic, lengthy stories and they commonly use metaphors, alliteration, rhyme, and

other poetic devices in their stories. The climax formation that is typical in a North

American story is also found in the narratives produced by African American children.

Moreover, McCabe investigated story books from the four cultures and concluded

that "overall, there is a congruence of emphasis on the components of narration that

one finds in published stories and oral personal anecdotes in all four cultures

examined" (McCabe, 1996, p. 165).

Soter (1988) studied the structural patterns in the ESL stories of Grades 6 and 11

Arabic-, Vietnamese-, and English-speaking students in Australia. The writing task

assigned to these students was "a bed time story given to a child younger than the

writer" (p. 181). Soter designed a storygraph analysis to determine the structural use

in a story. The storygraph was composed of four categories:

(1) Story about Story: Reasons for writing the story, descriptions of the audiences, the

    author, or the setting, and so on.

(2) Setting: References to the place, time, action, and the initial appearances of

    characters in the story.

(3) Scene: Tone, point of view, attributes of the characters and setting, and interaction

    among the characters

(4) Plot: The sequence of actions and events throughout the story.

    Based on the story graph analysis, Soter reported that the English-speaking group

shows a consistent structural pattern for story writing (p. 497): First, little detail is

applied to serve as introduction to the story. Second, the plot begins almost

immediately. Third, little digression to attributes of characters or setting is presented.

Fourth, little reflection on action is given. Finally, a clear forward movement of the

sequence of events takes place. In contrast, Vietnamese stories tend to emphasize the

context for their stories and the mental states of story characters. Also, dialogue is

used more in the Vietnamese stories to disclose the reflection on action or attributes of

the characters rather than forwarding the plot of the story. Besides, Arabic stories

contain more information about the scene, which is possibly influenced by the Arabic literary style.

Moreover, the IEA (1983) evaluation scheme was used to "rate the compositions according to how effectively the compositions conformed to the English narrative conventions" (Soter, 1988, p. 183). Five major aspects are concerned in the IEA scoring scheme, including (1) Quality and Scope of Content; (2) Organization and Presentation of Content; (3) Style and Form; (4) Mechanics; and (5) The Affective Response of the Raters. The range of reliability for items concerning narrative organization, technique, style, and mechanics was from .75 to .88. The range of reliability for items concerning affective responses of the raters was from .63 to .69. The results showed that the English-speaking group can be considered to be the norm group for their high scores in quality rating. On the other hand, stories which contain the category "story about story" or lengthy digression and stories which are actually recounts[1] are perceived to be different from the conventional narrative structure and therefore received lower scores.

Indrasuta (1988) compared English narratives written by 30 EFL Thai students and 30 American students, ages ranging from 15.5 to 17.5 years. The students were

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[1] Recounts differ from narrative stories in that "nothing goes significantly wrong" (Martin, 1992, p. 565).

asked to write on two comparable topics, "I Succeeded, At Last" and "I Made a Hard Decision". Three approaches were used in her study, including:

(1) Cohesion Analysis: Reference, substitution, conjunction, and lexical cohesion;

(2) Narrative Component Analysis: Plot, conflict, setting, theme, character, scene, and figurative language;

(3) Discourse Structure Analysis: Beginning or introduction, sequential action, complicating action, climax, and ending.

According to Indrasuta, L1 influence was not evident on the macrostructure of Thai stories. She reported that both groups demonstrate common patterns of discourse structure. The sequential action and complicating action take the largest part while the climax takes the smallest. However, the conventions used in both languages influenced the use of narrative components. For example, she found that much more figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, and personification, is used by the Thai students. This is due to the fact that "analogy appears to be the preferred way of describing things in Thai" (p. 219). Moreover, Thai stories often serve the function of "giving or teaching moral values" (p. 220) while American stories are often created to entertain the readers. In addition, Thai students used more descriptions of the mental states in their stories, "since they tended to observe actions as outsiders and look into their minds to determine what they felt or thought about the actions" (p. 220). By

contrast, American students used more actions in their stories in order to hold readers'

attention.

On the whole, previous studies concerning narrative writings were mainly

conducted from a cross-cultural perspective. The researchers intended to describe the

similarities and differences among narratives of various cultural groups in terms of

structure, content, components, and so on. The findings of the previous studies are

summarized in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1

Summary of Studies on Narrative Writing from Different Cultures

REFERENCE	SUBJECTS		TEXT ANALYSIS
	Group 1	Group 2	
Tickoo (2001)		EFL L1 = Cantonese	Crisis Conventions: Not found in the participants' narratives or essays.
Stein (2004)	L1 = English	L1 = Bhutanese	Narrative Structure: Both groups contain goals, attempts, consequences, endings, and multiple episodes. Story Content: Differences were observed and cultural influence was apparent.
McCabe (1996)	L1 = English	ESL L1 = Japanese, Spanish, Black English	Story Components: Cultural differences were discovered.
Soter (1988)	L1 = English	ESL L1 = Arabic, Vietnamese	"Storygraph": Differences were found and cultural influences were discovered.
Indrasuta (1988)	L1 = English	EFL L1 = Thai	Discourse Structure: Both groups contain beginning, sequential action, complication action, climax, and ending. Narrative Components: Conventions in both languages influence the use of narrative components.

To sum up, American stories are characterized by actions. Appearance of

secondary characters is uncommon. The purpose of stories is often to entertain the

readers. On the other hand, stories from other cultural groups tend to put more

emphasis on descriptions and often carry the function of instruction. Bhutanese stories

present significantly more secondary characters and display intense interaction

between characters. Vietnamese stories emphasize the context and the mental states of

story characters. Arabic stories focus on the scene. Thai stories contain more

descriptions of mental states and explicit moral theme. Japanese American stories are

succinct. Latino American stories give many details about the appearance of objects

and de-emphasize the sequencing of events in their narratives. African American

stories are dramatic and lengthy. The findings from these studies correspond to the

cultural stratifications between Eastern and Western cultures proposed by Javidi and

Javidi (1997) that Eastern cultures value "being" and "group-concept" while Western

cultures emphasize "doing" and "self-concept" (p. 88). On the whole, the previous

research exemplified the significant differences between Western and Asian cultures

and showed the great similarities among Asian cultures.

In addition, evidence from these studies revealed that the quality of ESL/EFL

stories is always determined by "how successfully the nonnative writers were

perceived by the raters as observing the conventions of English narrative writing"

(Soter, 1988, p. 183). However, these researchers suggest that when assessing

narratives, it is necessary to take the cultural backgrounds of the learners into

consideration. If the cultural-specific writing preferences would not cause difficulty in

comprehension, there is no need to ask the learners to modify their writing styles to

conform to English traditions. As pointed out by McCabe (1996), cultural differences

in this regard "need to be appreciated instead of effaced" (p. 25).