

Abstract

The present study investigates advanced EFL learners' referential forms in their written narratives. The purpose is to specify the distributional patterns of referential forms and their discourse function in learners' narrative production. EFL learners' referential forms are divided into five categories: Zero anaphora, Pronoun, Definite NP, Name, and Name + modifier. It is found that all learners unanimously use abundant Names and Pronouns in their written narratives, whereas the least frequent types are Definite NP and Name + modifier.

With respect to the discourse function, advanced learners tend to perform the function of Introduction by Name, Name + modifier, and Indefinite NP. When maintaining same subject topics, advanced learners tend to use Zero and Pronoun. And the Reintroduction functions are often fulfilled by Name. Overall, Pronoun is more likely to cause ambiguity than any other forms. And the abundant use of Names may have something to do with the marking of episode boundaries.

The referential distance values of the referential forms comply with the cognitive need of readers' discourse processing. The more informative forms such as Name + modifier can refer back to their antecedents at a distance, while the semantically empty forms such as Pronoun can only refer back to their antecedents within few clauses. From readers' perspective, there remain a few inappropriate referential forms in learners' narratives, which may arise from L1 interference or ignorance of rule restriction. The problematic use of referential forms suggests that although advanced learners can produce grammatically correct referential forms, they have not fully acquired the discourse function of these forms. It is recommended that the discourse aspects such as distance and episodic unit be considered when EFL learners use referential forms.