

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

Writing is not a natural activity. As Nunan (1989. p. 36) stated, "all physically and mentally normal people learn to speak a language. Yet all people have to be taught how to write". Due to the fact that writing is usually learned through formal instruction rather than through the natural acquisition processes, becoming a writer is a complex and ongoing process. "Beyond extensive previous learning, a writer must know and use orthographic forms, lexis, syntax and morphemes" (Hughey, 1983. p. 5). It is, therefore, not surprising that writing is a very difficult skill for the learners to acquire.

As mentioned above, writing is generally recognized as the most difficult language skill and its processes are very complex. In addition, writing is one of the most important skills that we use as a means of communication in our daily life. As White and Arndt (1991. p. 1) stated, "through writing, people are able to share ideas, arouse feelings, persuade and convince as well as to discover and articulate ideas in the ways that only writing makes possible". Moreover, writing can enable writers to clarify their thoughts and to think critically as well as to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter and to extend knowledge to new areas (D' Angelo, 1980; Shih, 1986).

Thus, at present, writing has become an essential skill not only in education but also in communication. That is the reason why people need to learn to write in English for both occupational and academic purposes.

✎ According to Dagher (1976. p. 201), he stated "it was once common to say that there were four kinds of writing: description, narration, exposition, and persuasion". The

four kinds of writing are commonly found in various types of written work; business letters, business and technical reports, public relations releases, new stories, editorials, professional journals, and other magazines and newspapers, even essays, manuals, and textbooks. Thus, to choose an appropriate kind of writing for a specific purpose could help writers to develop their ideas successfully and make all kinds of writing more interesting.

In general, narration is a kind of writing related to storytelling. Nadell, McMeniman, & Langan (1994) define this kind of storytelling as stating that it means telling a single story or several related stories. The story can be a means to an end, a way to support a main idea or thesis. Moreover, they also comment that narration is powerful as it lends force to opinion, triggers the flow of memory, and evokes places, times, and people in ways that are compelling and affecting.

In addition, writers use narrative writing for a variety of purposes. "Much of our daily communication is some form of narration. Newspapers, magazines and short stories are very largely narrative" (Dagher, 1976. p. 206). It not only plays a number of roles in writing but also creates a vivid imagination. McMahan and Day (1983. p. 8) also state "Narrative ties ideas to real, sensory, day-to-day experience: it binds the abstract to the concrete. That's why narrative helps make all kinds of writing more interesting and meaningful".

As mentioned above, narration is an important kind of written discourse, which is interesting to be studied. An analysis of rhetorical organization such as narrative writing has been developed for applying to study student's writing. Some studies have shown that to represent a structure of narrative could help writing a kind of story more successful. According to Martin and Rothery' study (1986), it dealt with the narrative pattern in the study of students' writing stories. In order to evaluate students' narratives or teach students to write- well formed stories, Martin and Rothery (1986) developed a story grammar analysis, adapted from Labov and Waletzky's narrative pattern (1967).

The schematic structure of typical narrative writing for school assignments includes four parts; orientation, complication, resolution and evaluation or coda. Based on their research in Australian school. Martin and Rothery (1986) reported "the stories classified by teachers as the best or most successful pieces usually conform closely to a structure of this kind".

According to Labov and Waletzky's study (1967), the narrative pattern is characterized by four factors; Orientation, Complication, Resolution, and Evaluation. Based on the pattern, a writer firstly needs to have a clear Orientation, which uses for representing some background knowledge of a story. Then, Complication is used for telling a reader of what happens with a sequence of events leading to a crisis. Resolution is a final event that supports the complication and tells a reader what the story resolved. Finally, the writer establishes the last part, Evaluation, to signal that the story has ended with a moral statement or an attitude towards a story for completing a whole story.

In addition to the study of L1 writing, the narrative pattern proposed by Labov and Waletzky (1967) was also applied to the study of L2 writing. As some studies have shown, narrative patterns such as Labov and Waletzky's (1967) follow certain prototypical patterns or grammars, and this pattern may be universal across cultures (Rumelhart, 1977; Mandler, 1994). Thus, the pattern for narrative analysis such as Labov and Waletzky's (1967) can be applied to stories written by ESL students from different cultural backgrounds to assess their narrative quality (Wu, 1995)

The elements of the structure of the narrative pattern that Labov and Waletzky (1967) proposed are reliable since the data were applicable to other studies related to both L1 and L2 writing. Thus, this study also applied the pattern to analyze narrative compositions written by the fourth-year English major students in Thailand in order to see if there was a major characteristic of the narrative pattern in EFL compositions.

Statement of the Problem

In ESL writing, students should be familiar with narrative writing since this kind of rhetorical organization is commonly used for many purposes. As Axelrod and Cooper (1988, p. 420) stated "Writers use narrative for a variety of purposes: they illustrate and support their ideas with anecdotes, entertain readers with suspenseful or revealing stories, predict what will happen with scenarios, and explain how something generally happens with process narrative". Thus, to provide ESL students with the effective way to complete narrative writing will enable them to write for both occupational and academic purposes.

In order to help EFL students to write a narrative composition effectively, they should be familiarized with this kind of rhetorical organization. Meanwhile, teachers should have an effective guideline for evaluating the student's narrative writing. However, most teachers rather use intuitive yardsticks to evaluate their students' compositions (Davies, 1983; Makhzouny & shorafat, 1993; Takashima, 1987;). Holistic grades are usually awarded on the basis of the teacher's perception of whether a good story has been told-a good story being defined by the teacher's perception of what constitutes a good story. Thus, writing teachers should have some guidelines for evaluating the quality of narrative writing.

Purposes of the Study

This study aimed to find out the rhetorical organization of the students' compositions written by 43 fourth-year English major students at Naresuan University. The researcher focused on the following questions:

1. What was the basic generic structure of narrative compositions written by 43 fourth-year students at Naresuan University who studied English as a foreign language?

2. What were the differences, if any, in the use of narrative factors between the high-rated and low-rated compositions?

Significance of the Study

This paper was designed to identify the structure of narrative compositions written by fourth-year English major students of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. It provided us with the information about how a narrative composition written by the group of Thai students looked like and if the way they wrote was effective as evaluated by English teachers. Moreover, it also provided us with the information about the difference in the use of narrative factors between the high-rated and the low-rated compositions. This information could represent their major characteristics of narrative compositions and also provided us with insight about how to teach this rhetorical organization to students and supplied EFL teachers with a concrete guideline for evaluating a narrative composition.

Limitations of the study

This study aimed to investigate the narrative compositions written by fourth-year English major students at Naresuan University in the academic year 2001. The students' compositions were analyzed using narrative pattern proposed by Labov and Waletzky (1967). In addition, it was not intended to analyze the overall quality of writing compositions but only on the use of narrative pattern consisting of Orientation, Complication, Resolution and Evaluation. This study was not designed to discover the best way to write a narrative composition but to provide a better understanding of how to write a kind of storytelling.

Regarding the research design, the study was conducted by using intact groups without random sampling. It was because the two intact groups had the same background knowledge. It might not cause the variation on the outcome of the study due to the reason that the two intact groups were taught by the same instructor and they also received the same assignments. In addition, the number of the data collected was quite limited. Given these limitations, the results of the study were not generalizable to other groups of Thai students.

