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Narrative competence in a second language

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Introduction

Narratives are the central means by which people make sense of their experiences. Their functions also include presentation of self, organization of autobiographical memory, socialization of children into cultural membership, and mediation of ways of thinking about problems and difficulties. These functions are crucial for adult second language (L2) learners who are looking for ways to become ‘meaningful’ in the new environment since “ the person can only be a meaningful entity, both to himself or herself and to others, by being ‘read’ in terms of the discourses available in that society” (Burr, 1995: 142). A misunderstood narrative becomes an inappropriate presentation of self – or of a sequence of events – and may result in cross-cultural miscommunication.

And yet foreign language (FL) and L2 curricula and classroom practices continue to privilege acquisition of linguistic, or, at best, pragmatic competence, and rarely focus on the teaching of narration. Several factors explain this oversight, including the perennial lack of time and the mistaken belief that learners who can construct ‘correct’ sentences should be able to string them together into narratives. Yet nothing could be further from the truth – learners who are very skillful at the sentence level may still fail to construct language- and culture-appropriate narratives because narrative competence is not tantamount to linguistic competence and does not fully correlate with measures of syntactic complexity or vocabulary size (McCabe & Bliss, 2003).

What does it take to tell a story well? Even in one's native language this is not an easy task and some of us are better storytellers than others. In a second language, the task is made even more challenging by the ongoing search for the right word or the correct tense. Yet the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, that emphasize narration and description as two critical features of advanced language proficiency, do not elaborate on what constitutes L2 narrative competence and offer only assessment guidance (Breiner-Sanders et al., 2000). The Guidelines state that speakers at superior and advanced-high levels should be able to provide lengthy and coherent narrations, in all time frames, with ease, fluency, and accuracy, without hesitation. They should exhibit good control of aspect, a variety of narrative strategies, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, or illustration, and the ability to separate main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic and lexical devices, and intonational features.

This paper aims to address two gaps in the field of applied linguistics – the gap in theorizing of L2 narrative competence and the gap in the teaching of L2 narrative skills in the FL and L2 curricula. Due to space limitations, this discussion will focus mainly on oral narratives, leaving out the work on L2 reading and writing and on contrastive rhetoric. The discussion will be based on the synthesis of three types of research: (a) cross-linguistic studies of narrative construction, (b) studies of narrative development in monolingual and bilingual children, (c) studies of second language acquisition (SLA) and bilingualism that involve elicited and spontaneous narratives. The need for triangulation of findings from distinct research paradigms stems from the fact that until now the construct of L2 narrative competence has not been elaborated in any of the paradigms, yet each has something important to contribute to this enterprise.

Cross-linguistic studies offer important insights into similarities and differences in narrative styles among speech communities (Chafe, 1980; Henkin, 1998; Holmes, 1998; Tannen, 1980, 1982, 1993). At the same time, precisely because these studies focus on narrative construction in a single language by native speakers of that language, we do not learn from them which differences may cause problems for L2 learners.

Studies of narrative development of monolingual and bilingual children acknowledge cross-linguistic differences, advance a specific construct of narrative competence, and examine the development of this competence in a variety of languages (Berman, 1995; Berman & Slobin, 1994; McCabe & Bliss, 2003; Minami, 2002; Pearson, 2002). The focus of these studies however is on the development of narrative competence in the light of children's overall linguistic, cognitive and literacy development. Not all of the narrative components examined in these studies are relevant for analysis of the stories told by adolescent and adult FL and L2 learners. Comparative studies of children's and adults' narratives show that narrative development in child L1 and adult L2 acquisition are qualitatively different processes, because children are still in the process of acquisition of cognitive and linguistic skills necessary for competent storytelling, while adults already have the requisite skills (Berman, 1999; Henkin, 1998; Strömquist & Day, 1993). Consequently, when dealing with adult L2 learners we do not need to be concerned with all aspects of narrative competence outlined in the studies of narrative development, rather we need to focus on aspects that are critical for competent storytelling in a second language. Yet studies of narrative development for the most part fail to inform us what these areas of difficulty might be.

On the other hand, studies of narratives in the fields of SLA and bilingualism (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000; Berman, 1999; Ordóñez, 2004; Pavlenko, 2002; Rifkin, 2002; Rintell, 1990; Verhoeven & Strömquist, 2001) focus on difficulties experienced by L2 learners in several aspects of the storytelling activity. At the same time, they fail to examine L2 narrative competence in a comprehensive manner as studies of children's narrative development do, nor do they take into consideration cross-linguistic differences in narrative styles uncovered in cross-linguistic studies of narrative construction.

To date, the only attempt to describe components of L2 narrative competence comes from Berman (1999, 2001). Based on her studies of storytelling by L2 users of Hebrew and English, Berman posited a four-tiered hierarchy of distance from native-like norms. At the first level in this model is core grammar and thus errors in word order, case marking, and grammatical inflections. The second level of difficulty lies in the domain of lexical selection, that is, the choice of specific and appropriate vocabulary. The third level involves rhetorical expressiveness, that is, competent expression of a variety of discourse functions. The fourth level involves register appropriateness, that is, the ability to vary linguistic choices according to context, cultural norms, and genre conventions.

This hierarchy is undoubtedly useful for research purposes, but it is not specific enough to offer implications for FL and L2 curricula. In what follows, I will advance an alternative construct of L2 narrative competence, applicable for classroom instruction. I will begin with a definition of L2 narrative competence, then I will outline three components of this competence that are particularly relevant for adolescent and adult FL and L2 learners, and point to ways in which these components can be investigated and incorporated into FL and L2 curricula.

1. L2 narrative competence

The term *narrative*, as used here, will refer to “all types of discourse in which event structured material is shared with readers or listeners, including fictional stories, personal narratives, accounts and recounts of events (real or imagined)” (Mistry, 1993: 208). Narrative studies commonly differentiate between two broadly defined types of narratives, fictional and personal. *Fictional narratives* are stories about fictional events; in the study of second language learning, they can be elicited with verbal and non-verbal prompts, such as pictures or videos, that allow us to obtain comparable language samples from a variety of speakers. *Personal narratives* are stories based on speakers’ personal knowledge and experience; researchers can examine both spontaneously told stories and those elicited with verbal prompts, such as interview questions or key words.

L2 narrative competence, in the view adopted here, refers to L2 users’ ability to interpret, construct, and perform personal and fictional narratives similarly to the reference group of native speakers of the target language. The reference group involves speakers who are similar to the L2 users in age, gender, and socioeconomic and educational background, because narrative styles have been shown to vary along these sociolinguistic parameters within speech communities (Henkin, 1998; McCabe & Bliss, 2003). Elsewhere I offer detailed recommendations on collection and analysis of L2 narratives (Pavlenko, in press). Below I focus exclusively on three interrelated components of the L2 narrative competence: (1) structure; (2) evaluation and elaboration, and (3) cohesion. In each section, I first discuss cross-linguistic differences in realizations of the component in question, then methods of analysis of this component, and, finally, ways to incorporate this component in FL and L2 classroom activities.

2. Narrative structure

2.1. Cross-linguistic differences

Competence in terms of *narrative structure* involves the use of language-, culture- and genre-appropriate narrative components. Sir Frederic Bartlett, a celebrated Cambridge psychologist, was the first scholar to investigate and theorize cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences in narrative construction. In Bartlett's (1932) classic study, Western subjects were read a Native American story, *The War of Ghosts*, and then were asked to retell it. Because the participants found both the story structure and many accompanying details unfamiliar, they repeatedly transformed the tale in recall, both through omissions of details and through rationalizations, which made the story conform to a more familiar Western pattern. On the basis of these observations and experiments, Bartlett (1932) developed his theory of schema that informs much of contemporary cognitive science, psychology, and narrative study.

Cross-linguistic studies show that narrative schemas or structures differ across languages and cultures in both fictional and personal stories. Western narratives, in particular those in the Anglo-American tradition, favor a *topic-centered* chronological structure that focuses on a single event. In contrast, Japanese narratives may combine two or three similar incidents into a single story (Minami, 2002), and speakers of Spanish highly value performative *topic-associating* narratives that combine things that happened at different times and places, and to different people (McCabe & Bliss, 2003). Conventional Western narratives also require a resolution, while in Maori stories, for instance, the conflict is created but not necessarily resolved (Holmes, 1998). Differences have also been observed within particular genres: traditional Western folktales, for

example, posit a goal for the main character to achieve, while Japanese folktales do not require such a goal (Matsuyama, 1983). Speech communities may also favor unique story genres – contemporary Russian society, for instance, favors complaint stories or litanies that do not require problem-solving solutions (Ries, 1997).

Speakers whose narrative styles diverge from the mainstream standard are often perceived as lacking narrative competence. Thus, Maori stories appear incomplete to the ears of white New Zealanders waiting for a resolution and a coda (Holmes, 1998). Topic-associating narratives of Spanish speakers are perceived as incoherent leapfrogging by the Anglo-American interlocutors who expect stories about a single event (McCabe & Bliss, 2003; Riessman, 1991). And Americans who offer problem-solving solutions to Russian litanies find their contributions ignored by their Russian interlocutors who respond to complaint stories with similar complaints (Ries, 1997).

Consequently, the first component of L2 narrative competence is the knowledge of narrative structures conventional in the target language, and the ability to appeal to these structures in a context-appropriate manner. The use of language- and culture-appropriate structures greatly contributes to the positive perception of the story coherence by the target language speakers. In turn, coherence, or the feeling that the text makes sense, is often seen as a defining characteristic of a competent narrative.

2.2. Methods of analysis

Five approaches are commonly used in analysis of narrative structure: high point, story grammar, stanza analysis, narrative assessment profile, and form-function analysis.

High point analysis examines narrative functions of particular utterances and episodes in terms of the structure outlined by Labov (1972, Labov & Waletzky, 1967), based on a large sample of elicited personal narratives. This structure consists of an abstract (or narrative opening), orientation (time, place, character identification), complicating action (what happened and how), evaluation, resolution, and a coda (or narrative closing). This approach has been successfully applied to analysis of narratives told by L2 learners of English (Berman, 1999; Ordóñez, 2004; Rintell, 1990), Hebrew (Berman, 1999), Japanese (Maeno, 1995), Spanish (Lafford, 1998), and Swedish (Viberg, 2001).

Story grammar analysis was developed by Mandler (1982) and Stein and Glenn (1979), based on Propp's (1968) analysis of Russian folktales. This approach investigates the degree to which the story is structured around the explicit goals of the protagonist and thus examines the following components: setting, initiating event, character's internal response and plan, character's attempts to solve the problem, consequences. This approach has been successfully applied to analysis of L2 learners' narratives by Leppänen and Kalaja (2002).

Critics argue, however, that high point and story grammar analyses may be biased toward Western narratives, and more specifically, toward the European tradition (Mistry, 1993; McCabe & Bliss, 2003). This concern is addressed in the third approach, *stanza analysis*, advanced by Hymes (1981) and extended by Gee (1985). Stanza analysis breaks the narrative into lines and then groups the lines into hierarchical levels, such as verses (a simple sentence or clause), stanzas (a group of lines about a single topic), scenes, and acts, presenting the narrative as if it were a prose poem. This approach was successfully used by Maeno (1995) to examine narratives of American L2 learners of Japanese. At the

same time, even though it is helpful in illuminating the structure of Japanese or Zuni narratives, stanza analysis does not apply well to all cultures (McCabe & Bliss, 2003).

The fourth approach, *narrative assessment profile*, advanced by McCabe and Bliss (2003) on the basis of many years of work with children from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, addresses cultural concerns through its multidimensionality. This approach, developed to evaluate discourse coherence, examines topic maintenance, event sequencing, informativeness, referencing, conjunctive cohesion, and fluency, and has been successfully used by the authors in analysis of bilingual children's narratives.

Finally, *form-function analysis* (Berman, 1995; Berman & Slobin, 1994) considers how linguistic forms are deployed to express narrative functions, i.e. encode temporal relations (temporality) or create textual cohesiveness (connectivity). This approach has also been successfully applied to L2 learners' narratives, in particular in the analysis of the deployment of tense and aspect (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000).

The analyses of L2 learners' narratives conducted to date demonstrate that, when the narrative structures of the L1 and L2 are similar, learners do exhibit appropriate narrative structure in the target language stories (Berman, 1999; Ordóñez, 2004; Rintell, 1990; Viberg, 2001), and when the narrative structures of L1 and L2 are dissimilar, learners can acquire some new structures (Maeno, 1995). The main weaknesses of the L2 learners' narratives identified in these analyses are the lack of appropriate linguistic markers of particular narrative structures and functions and insufficient elaboration and evaluation (McCarthy, 1991; Ordóñez, 2004; Rintell, 1990; Viberg, 2001).

2.3. Incorporation in the FL and L2 classrooms

Among the most common exercises that allow students to practice narrative structure are sorting and sequencing activities, where students are asked to put disconnected parts of a narrative (either pictorial or verbal) into a logical sequence (cf. Wajnryb, 2003). Exercises, such as “Choose your own adventure”, may be used to practice particular elements of narrative structure, such as complication, resolution, or a coda. Unfortunately, these activities are often used by North American teachers with an assumption that a conventional Labovian structure applies to all target languages. A variation on a sorting or sequencing activity would involve a larger array of pictures, so that Japanese and Spanish learners, for instance, could also create narratives that combine two or three similar events. Even more important for advanced narrative competence are consciousness-raising and noticing activities that have students analyze the structure of conventionalized narratives in the target language and notice linguistic markers of particular narrative components, including openings (e.g., This reminds me of, Did I tell you about the time when...), complicating events (e.g., suddenly, out of the blue...) and closings (e.g., makes you wonder) (McCarthy, 1991).

Students should also be encouraged to experiment with unconventional and unfamiliar formats, such as topic-associating narratives in the Spanish class or litanies in the Russian one. This is not to say that they should be forced to produce narratives in these formats but that they should learn to, at least, recognize them as legitimate, follow them, and behave appropriately as interlocutors, for instance, providing adequate back-channeling or abstaining from offering problem-solving solutions to Russian litanies. McCarthy (1991: 140-142) offers several useful suggestions for teaching students how to be active listeners and how to participate in joint storytelling.

3. Evaluation and elaboration

3.1. Cross-linguistic differences

To capture listeners' attention and to ensure their involvement, narratives have to be not only appropriately structured, but also vivid and engaging. This function is accomplished through *elaboration*, that is, skillful uses of lexical choices, figurative language, reported speech, imagery, and descriptive details. *Evaluation* is an important function of elaboration and a prominent component of narrative structure in the Labovian model. The role of evaluation is to convey the narrator's attitude toward the events and to make the story worth listening to or reading. This narrative component differs from others in that it occurs throughout the story, rather than at one point, and is marked lexically, syntactically, and prosodically. Thus, at any point in the narrative, evaluation may appear directly, as a lexical item (e.g., emotion words), a separate clause or a set of clauses (e.g., causal explanations), or indirectly, as prosody, repetition, intensification, mitigation, metapragmatic descriptors, or figurative language.

Cross-linguistic studies demonstrate that narrative traditions vary in conventionalized uses of evaluation strategies. Classic studies by Tannen (1980, 1982, 1993) compared recalls of the same elicitation stimulus, the *Pear film*, by Greek and American women. She found that American women treated the recall as a memory task and attempted to report the events in the film in detail but without much added interpretation, except for comments on the film itself. On the other hand, Greek women did not say much about the qualities of the film, but offered abundant evaluation and interpretation of the story line. Spanish speakers recalling the same film also tended to provide their own interpretations and inferences and appealed to a wide array of

evaluative strategies (Blackwell, 1998). Berman (1997) also showed that some narrative styles require more evaluation than others: in her study stories elicited by the same stimulus from English- and Hebrew-speaking children contained a higher amount of evaluation than stories elicited from Turkish- and Japanese-speaking children who avoided making explicit references to psychological states of the characters.

Speech communities may differ not only in the conventionalized amount of evaluation and interpretation but also in preferred evaluation strategies. For instance, evaluation in Maori stories is often implicit, while in white New Zealanders' stories it is often made explicit (Holmes, 1998). Personal stories by Palestinian Bedouin children and adults were shown to favor repetition and direct speech and make little use of other evaluation and involvement strategies (Henkin, 1998).

These studies suggest that in the context of the same task different narrative styles may require different amounts and strategies of evaluation and elaboration. L2 speakers who use an inappropriate amount of evaluation or inappropriate strategies may be misunderstood or even penalized, either for telling boring or incomplete stories or for telling overly dramatic stories and for overinterpreting events. Consequently, the second component of L2 narrative competence involves familiarity with evaluation strategies common in a particular speech community, and the ability to provide a language- and culture-appropriate, that is, conventional for a particular context, amount of evaluation.

3.2. Methods of analysis

Elaboration and evaluation can be analyzed on four linguistic levels: prosodic, lexical, morphosyntactic, and discursive. On the prosodic level, evaluation can be

signaled through three clusters of *prosodic cues*: (a) frequency (pitch, tone, intonation), (b) intensity (loudness, stress), and (c) duration (rhythm, rate of articulation). The social meanings of these cues differ across languages and cultures (for a review, see Pavlenko, 2005) and thus analysts need to consider both L1 and L2 meanings when interpreting prosodic cues in L2 narratives.

On the lexical level, elaboration and evaluation are accomplished through lexical selection and lexical diversity. *Lexical diversity* is typically measured through a type-token ratio that compares the number of different words (types) with the number of total words (tokens) (for alternative measures see Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2003; Jarvis, 2002). To analyze *lexical selection* in a particular domain, scholars identify all references to specific target denotata (e.g., deer, stag, antelope, elk), including circumlocutions (e.g., little animal), and analyze them in terms of context and register appropriateness.

The third, morphosyntactic, level of narrative competence involves the selection of appropriate *morphosyntactic options* for alternation between background information and foregrounded events (e.g., tense-aspect switches), for offering agent and patient perspectives (e.g., shifts in voice or valency), or for situating the narrative within an appropriate temporal, spatial, and discursive frames (Berman, 1999).

The discursive level involves the ability to choose appropriate *rhetorical options* for expression of various discursive functions, and *strategic competence*, that is, the ability to select an appropriate register and to use a variety of narrative strategies.

Studies of L2 learners' narratives conducted to date show that competent narratives are distinguished by appropriate lexical, discursive, and register choices and by skillful uses of paraphrasing and circumlocutions in cases of difficulties with lexical

retrieval. Weaker narratives display (a) insufficient elaboration and evaluation; (b) the absence of figurative language, reported speech, epithets, and depersonalization; and (c) the overuse of compensatory strategies, such as repetition, pausing, lexical borrowing, code-switching, omission, and explicit attempts at word retrieval and requests for help (Berman, 1999; Cenoz, 2001; Lafford, 1998; Ordóñez, 2004; Pavlenko, 2002; Pavlenko & Jarvis, 2002; Rintell, 1990; Viberg, 2001). Lafford's (1998) cross-sectional study of American L2 learners of Spanish shows that the transition from intermediate to advanced level of proficiency involves an increase in the amount of narrative evaluation.

3.3. Incorporation in the FL and L2 classrooms

Several types of exercises promote the skills of evaluation and elaboration. In consciousness-raising and noticing activities students may be asked to analyze the means of elaboration and evaluation in the stories they read or listen to (cf. Hatch, 1992: 170-171). Then they can be given 'bare bones' stories and asked to elaborate on these stories and make them more vivid and engaging. To make this exercise easier and more focused, they can be asked to do one thing at a time: creatively use a set of new lexical items, appeal to reported speech, incorporate specific types of figurative language, etc.

The newly acquired skills of elaboration can then be practiced in the context of personal storytelling as illustrated in McMahill's (2001) study of a feminist English class in Japan. The researcher demonstrates that Japanese women in this class appeal to a wide array of elaboration strategies that increase the listener's emotional involvement: repetition, use of emphatic particles such as 'very' and 'just', use of parallel structures, prosodic cues, in particular stress, and reported speech. She then shows that the students'

success in telling such emotional and dramatic stories stems from the fact that they have learned the strategies of emotional involvement in the context of telling narratives meaningful to them, the stories of their own lives, oppression, and resistance.

4. Narrative cohesion

4.1. Cross-linguistic differences

To construct coherent narratives it is not sufficient to follow a context-appropriate narrative structure and to provide sufficient evaluation – coherence also relies on *cohesion*, or surface links between clauses and sentences. Two types of resources are used to create cohesion. *Lexical resources* include lexical ties (e.g., reiteration, collocation, synonymy) and deictic markers, which include personal deixis (e.g., pronouns), temporal deixis (e.g., temporal adverbs), spatial deixis (e.g., demonstratives, verbs of motion), social deixis (e.g., forms of address, kinship terms), and discursive deixis (e.g., context-dependent references, such as ‘next chapter’); *grammatical resources* include reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, and tense and aspect (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Hatch, 1992; McCabe & Bliss, 2003; McCarthy, 1991).

Below I will highlight three areas where cross-linguistic differences in the means of cohesion are particularly apparent. The first area is *reference*, that is, identification of individuals, objects, features, locations, and events, most often expressed through personal, social, and discourse deictic markers, such as pronouns or demonstratives. Differences in this area exist in ways in which people and objects are divided into categories and in ways in which these categories are invoked in narratives. For instance, Spanish-language narratives told by Puerto-Rican adults were found to contain a

significantly greater percentage of reference cohesion than narratives produced by English-speaking adults (McCabe & Bliss, 2003). The authors attribute this finding to Spanish speakers' preference for references to family members, a strategy that serves to create cohesion and ground the narrator and the listener. In turn, Japanese storytellers tend to dispense with nominal references to entities they assume to be in the focus of the listeners' consciousness (Chafe, 1980; Minami, 2002).

The second important area is *temporality*, that is, tense and aspect deployment in the context of various narrative structures and functions. Tense and aspect systems vary significantly across languages and, as a result, are used differently in narrative construction: in Slavic languages, for instance, the discussion of past events will encode whether the actions were accomplished or not (perfective/imperfective aspect), while in English the same events may be described in terms of 'now-relevance' (present perfect) and 'break with the present' (past simple) (Hatch, 1992; McCarthy, 1991).

Differences also exist in the area of *conjunctive cohesion*, that is, the use of connectors (and, then, but, because, etc.) to mark a variety of semantic and pragmatic functions and relationships. Members of different speech communities may differ in patterns of connector use. For instance, Zambian L2 learners of English rarely use 'and' and 'but' in contexts where native speakers of English commonly do (McCarthy, 1991).

4.2. Methods of analysis

Studies of reference typically focus on *character introduction* and *reference continuation* and examine lexical and morphosyntactic resources learners use to introduce characters, objects or places (e.g., name, extensive description) and to maintain reference

(e.g., personal pronouns that can be clearly interpreted) (McCabe & Bliss, 2003; Nistov, 2001; Ordóñez, 2004; Strömquist & Day, 1993).

In studies of *temporality* clauses are coded for anchoring tense and then patterns of tense maintenance and shift are considered in the light of narrative functions, such as foregrounding or backgrounding. Bardovi-Harlig (2000: 279-337) offers an excellent discussion of distribution of tense and aspect across different narrative structures, types, and functions, and an overview of the studies of temporality in L2 narratives.

Studies of *conjunction* examine the uses of connectors that signal pragmatic functions and mark semantic relationships, such coordination, subordination, causality, juxtaposition, or temporal sequence (Berman, 1999; McCabe & Bliss, 2003; Strömquist & Day, 1993; Viberg, 2001).

Together, studies of narrative cohesion in L2 learners' narratives show that learners experience difficulties in acquiring language-specific patterns of reference continuation, temporality, and connectivity and that their choices are affected by universal and by language-specific factors, such as L1 influence. In the beginning stages, L2 learners may favor one type of pronominal reference or connector over all others and even when they have acquired the other connectors, their patterns of use may still be different from those of native speakers of the language (Viberg, 2001). It was also shown that when learners attempt to incorporate more advanced linguistic resources into their narratives, narrative cohesion may be sacrificed – in other words, with increases in linguistic competence, narrative cohesion may temporarily weaken before it becomes stronger (Strömquist & Day, 1993).

4.3. Incorporation in the FL and L2 classrooms

Classroom activities can offer learners multiple opportunities for practicing the use of cohesive devices in the context of narratives. In noticing and consciousness-raising activities, students can be asked to locate all connectors or particular deictic markers in the text and to identify their functions (cf. Hatch, 1992: 213, 215-216, 227-228). Fill-in-the-blank activities may require students to fill in the blanks in the narrative with particular types of cohesive devices, such as personal references, and to explain their choices (cf. Hatch, 1992: 212-213). To practice causality markers, students may be asked to argue a case or to make a complaint (Wajnryb, 2003).

Interesting ideas are offered by Byrnes and Sprang (2004) who discuss the teaching of narration in a college-level German classroom. The instruction offered students a variety of scaffolds to aid in retelling of authentic texts. For instance, to master the intricacies of temporal cohesion, students were offered visual aids that graphically represented temporal adverbs and adverbial phrases on a time line. These aids allowed learners to move beyond minimal conjunction *und dann... und dann...* (and then... and then...) and to use more complex linguistic means to signal temporality and to foreground some events and background others.

Rifkin's (2002) study of Russian narration by American learners suggests that the use of cohesive devices benefits from the classroom emphasis on narrative skills. His analysis of narratives told by native speakers of Russian, American students in a traditional conversation class, and American students in a class designed to promote the learning of narration, established that learners from the experimental class produced more complex sentences than learners in the traditional class and approached native speakers of

Russian in the frequency and accuracy of relativization. The study made a convincing argument for the fact that conversation classes alone may not develop narration in a satisfactory manner and that more attention to development of narrative proficiency is needed to help students make a transition from intermediate to advanced level.

Conclusions

To sum up, I have argued that FL and L2 curricula should incorporate activities that promote L2 narrative skills, critical for assessment purposes and for interaction with target language speakers. I have outlined three components of L2 narrative competence – narrative structure, elaboration and evaluation, and cohesion – that are often not only language- but also culture-specific and thus particularly difficult to acquire. I have also provided recommendations on how these components can be analyzed and incorporated in the curricula. Further recommendations on narrative analysis can be found in McCabe and Bliss (2003) and ideas for narrative activities in L2 classrooms in Wajnryb (2003).

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