

A Case Study of Constructed Dialogue Presented in Taiwanese Biographic
Narrative

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Abstract

It has been well acknowledged that constructed dialogues, as a technique of “showing” employed in oral storytelling, are associated with a theatric/dramatic scenic presentation (Wierzbicka 1974 and Li 1986), add vividness to narration (Labov 1972, Chafe 1982, Ochs 1979, Tannen 1982, Schiffrin 1981, among others) and create a sense of involvement both of the speaker and the audience (Tannen 1983 and 1986). The purpose of this study aims to explore how this linguistic device is used by a Taiwanese Granny, Ama Lin, in her biographic narrative along the line of work by Tannen (1986), where she identifies a range of the functions of constructed speech and distinguishes five types of dialogue introducer for this mimetic depiction skill. Following Tannen’s framework, three types of dialogue introducer are identified in this study: the verb “saying/gong,” the type of no introducer, and one instance of the type of graphic verbs - “scold/ma.” The form of the verb “scold/ma” along with the lines in the dialogue serve to enhance the hard life our informant had been through in her childhood. The lines of dialogue without any introducers are all associated with the picturing of informant’s mother in law as a person hard to live and deal with. The prevalence of the form of “say/gong,” also observed in Tannen’s study for English and Greek conversational and literary narratives, indicates that “say/gong” is the most frequent introducer the informant employed in her story telling. Along with the higher distribution frequency, comes the wide spectrum of discourse purposes represented by “say/gong” and the lines introduced.

Keyword : narrative, constructed dialogue, direct speech, Taiwan Mihn