



An Application of Temporal Frame in Translating Chinese News into English

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Abstract. Many researchers have found that in acquiring the English tense system L2 learners often lack an awareness of tense conventions in the context of a text, which prevents them from using correct grammatical morphology. The present study reports the outcome of an experiment in which native Chinese speaking learners have shown significant improvement in choosing correct tense when translating Chinese news articles into English after being introduced to the concept of “temporal frame” (Matthiessen, 1996; Smith, 2003) in their News English classes over eight weeks. This study included an experiment group of 27 subjects and a control group of 75 subjects. Those in the experiment group were final-year undergraduate students of a News translation and interpreting program in a Taiwanese university; while those in the control group came from other discipline-specific translation and interpreting programs (e.g. Science and Technology and Trade and Economics) and the postgraduate translation and interpreting program of the same university. The results show that: (1) subjects from both experimental group and control group have no significant differences in terms of choosing correct English tense in the pre-test; (2) previous exposure to News English (News-specific vs other discipline specific) and the English proficiency level (postgraduate vs undergraduate) make little difference in subjects' command of English tense; (3) subjects from the experiment group perform significantly better than those from the control group in terms of choosing correct English tense in the post-test.

Keywords: translation Chinese into English; News; Temporal Frame; Discourse

Introduction

English tense and aspect has been recognized as posing great difficulties for learners, particularly those whose L1 has no tense and aspect morphological inflections (Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, 1998; Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig & Bergstrom, 1996; Coppieters, 1987; Guiora, 1983; Hinkel, 1992, 1997, 2004). As to native Chinese learners, a great deal of research has been devoted to identify the causes of errors in their uses of tense and aspect and help them improve (J. Cai, 2004; L. N. Cai, 2008; Chen, 2005; Hinkel, 1997; Li & Thompson, 1981; Yang & Huang, 2004; Zhang, 1995). Along with other difficulties arising from typological differences between the two languages, the authors point out that the native Chinese learners' misuses of English tense and aspect markers may result from their inability to distinguish between various contexts in which certain tenses and aspects are used. For example, Chen (2005) says that although Chinese learners are able to use tense and aspect correctly at the sentence level, they often make mistakes at the discourse level, and she suggests that this is due to their lack of understanding that “tense conventions at the discourse level override tense decisions at the sentence level”. Similar suggestions have also been made by Hinkel (1997) that nonnative speakers (NNSs), including native Chinese speaking learners, need to learn tense and aspect within contextual temporal frames.

In teaching translation from Chinese into English, we have observed that native Chinese speaking student translators heavily rely on temporal markers in the source text (Chinese) when they select tenses and aspects. When such markers are absent, they often fail to use the correct tense and aspect. Based on previous studies on the temporal frame in discourse (C Matthiessen, 1996;

Smith, 2003), this current study proposes that a contrastive temporal context teaching method can be used to help student translators better understand the tense-aspect types at a larger text level and make better tense-aspect choices in their translating Chinese news reports into English.

Literature Review

Studies on English tense have shown that there are tense conventions in English discourse. Dowty (1986) claims that the interpretation of tense follows what he calls a “temporal discourse interpretation principle”, which means that the tense interpretation of a sentence needs to be consistent with that of the previous sentence unless an explicit temporal adverbial is present. This principle applies not only to reading and interpreting the tense of discourse but to writing. As Chafe (1972) points out, tense is one of the constraints to formalize English discourse. She, along with many other theorists (Bull, 1960; Celce-Murci & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Comrie, 1985; Dry, 1981; Hopper, 1979; Kumpf, 1984; Longacre, 1981), proposes that when a time frame is set in discourse then tense must be used consistently except when a comment of evaluation or a new explicit temporal marker is used. For example, in the following past-time context, the past tense should be maintained even when talking about a current event (e.g. I still go to the same school).

- (1) My family moved to Taipei. I went to a new school and my grades declined.

The simple past tense in the following example should stay consistent except when the speaker steps aside to express personal comments or there is an explicit different time marker transition to another time frame. In this example, the sentence “You don’t hear that very often” indicates the speaker’s personal comment.

- (2) I went to a concert last night. They played Beethoven’s second. You don’t hear that very often. (Celce-Murci & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 165)

Tense conventions in discourse

McCarthy and Carter (1994) claim that in English discourse, there is a close relationship between patterns of grammatical choice and contextual features relating to the genre and/or text types. In a joke-telling situation, the teller starts with simple past tense to establish a discourse form and then switches to simple present tense. Such tense and aspect choices have become part of the convention of the joke genre, so that “we recognize the genre of joke by its use of certain regular patterns of tense and aspect” (McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 96). Matthiessen (1995) and Smith (2003) take a functional approach to looking at tense at the discourse level. Matthiessen (1995, pp. 740-745) points out that narratives usually invite a default tense choice, i.e., the simple past tense, that reports may concern different basic tense choices with different segments, and that travel itineraries will refer to temporal frames indicated by temporal circumstances for tense selection as the discourse unfolds.

Smith (2003) proposes a distinction of five modes of discourse, which are: Narrative, Description, Report, Information, and Argument. Each of these modes is characterised by two linguistic features. The

first one is that each mode introduces certain types of situation-event, state, generalization or/and abstraction-into the universe of discourse. The second is that each mode has characteristic principles of progression, temporal or atemporal. The temporal conveys that specific situations are described as located in a particular time and place, while the atemporal indicates that abstract situations are represented as located outside of the actual world, and that time seems not to have a function in the depicting of the abstract situations and seems to be an automatic linguistic element. She summarizes the main linguistic features of each mode as follows:

| Modes of Discourse | Situations | Temporality |
|--------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Narrative | Primarily specific Events and States | Dynamic, located in time |
| Report | Primarily Events, States, General Statives | Dynamic, located in time |
| Description | Primarily Events and States, and ongoing Events | Static, located in time |
| Information | Primarily general Statives | Atemporal |
| Argument | Primarily facts and propositions, general Statives | Atemporal |

According to Smith (2003), for news reports, texts progress mainly through the change of time, and a similar claim is also made by Metthiessen (1995, p744), who points out that in a news report “text segments are developed around different basic tense selections”, instead of around one default tense.

The convention of tense in discourse requires that writers/translators to be aware of the importance of context when they choose tense. However, many studies have shown that non-native English speakers, including those with advanced English proficiency levels, appear to have problems maintaining the time frame in their writing and translating (Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, 1995, 2000; Chen, 2005; Coppieters, 1987; Hinkel, 1997; Huang, 1994; Kuehn, 1998; Riddle, 1986; Yang & Huang, 2004; Yu, 1996). Hinkel (1997) examines how speakers of different languages (English, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesia) interpret and maintain temporal frames in a past time context. She finds that non-native speakers of English do not maintain the time frame in the same way as native speakers. In the following cloze test of the study, all the native English speakers maintained the past discourse frame in Verb Slots 6 and 7, but a relatively high number of non-native speakers employed the present tense, thus extending the textual frame from a past time to the present time.

The worst accident at a U.S. nuclear power plant (1. happen) _____ on March 28, 1979. One of the two reactors at the Three Mile Island facility in Pennsylvania (2. lose)_its coolant water because of several mechanical failures and human operator errors. The center of the reactor (3.become) _____partially exposed and (4. undergo)_____a partial meltdown. A small amount of radiation (5. escape)_____into the atmosphere. However, no one (6. know)____precisely

what this amount (7. be)_____. ... (Adapted from Hinkel 1997, p302)

In a study of native Chinese speakers that employs the similar method, Chen (2005, p. 102) finds that native Chinese speakers choose tenses “mostly in terms of temporality”, and that they shift tense when they interpret an event as relevant to the present and incomplete. She uses many student writing samples to illustrate this problem and one of them is reproduced as follows:

Later on, one old man who looks like a herb doctor led me to a small steak house. Unfortunately, the boss said it was closed at that day. (Adopted from Chen 2005, p 101).

She further claims that Chinese speakers do not really understand that tense conventions in English contexts should override tense use at the sentence level, which may contribute to the tense problem.

Yu (1996) examines the narrative writing of 15 English major freshmen and finds that although most of the learners choose to use past tense to narrate the event, they shift to simple present frequently and their inconsistency of tense use leads to disjointed paragraphs. Taking an example from Yu (1996):

The temperature kept on rising heartlessly. The only things that can cool people down during this sizzling heat are a cold shower, a cold blast of air from an air conditioner, and a tall glass of iced fruit juice.

This paragraph appears to be problematic with the first sentence being in the past tense and the second the present tense, yet both refer to the same event.

Based on all the above mentioned studies we can hypothesize that similar problem may be present in the translation of native Chinese speakers when they translate Chinese discourse into English. Huang (1994) and Wong (1999) analyzed the use of tense in translation works of high school students. The results from both studies revealed that the learners tended to misuse simple present and simple past in their translations. However, both studies provide little help for translation because the subjects of their studies were all high school students who were not tested on translating complex paragraphs and their research objectives were to identify error types instead of analyzing tense in context. It appears that there is a lack of study on how to help native Chinese speaking student translators learn the discourse convention on tense and to choose correct tenses when they translate from Chinese into English, their L2. A teaching method described in the current study is thus designed to achieve this goal.

Considering the features of English tense-aspect as being a complex system and subject to text-type related context, and the learner’s confusion of tense-aspect types, the importance of teaching tense conventions in discourse has long been recognized (Celce-Murci & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Comrie, 1985; Larsen-Freeman, Kuehn, & Haccius, 2002; McCarthy & Carter, 1994). Larsen-Freeman *et al* (2002) suggest that in teaching English tense-aspects it is insufficient to introduce one tense-aspect type independent of other types. As they suggest, it is important for teachers to recognize that the greatest challenge of tense-aspect teaching may lie in understanding the difference among the sets which easily gives rise to confusions. McCarthy and Carter (1994) provide some solutions to the appropriate

choice of the present or past tense in written discourse. For example, newspaper reports often start in the past tense (and, occasionally, in the present perfect) and shift to the present, whereas introductions to scientific articles may begin in the present tense and switch to the past tense.

However, traditional ESL syllabuses often fail to provide guidance as to the interpersonal and textual functions of tense choice in the discourse genres since the contrastive context of using tense and aspect has been dealt with at the sentence level (McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 97). Teaching tense and aspect in this way is unsatisfactory as the meanings and uses of tenses are rarely approached as a discourse convention (Hinkel 1997). It has been found that the traditional method focuses on rule explanations for a single tense-aspect type and thus provides limited help for learners to master the system. The traditional method is also deficient in a way that it uses sentences as self-content examples to illustrate the usage of English tense-aspect, the use of which should have been taught based on the speaker's attitude or perception of the event that is being described (Larsen-Freeman *et al*, 2002).

Given the fact that the traditional method appears to be inadequate, there is a need for a method that addresses the problems that the traditional method fails to capture. Therefore, the present study, integrating the suggestions made by previous scholars (Larsen-Freeman *et al*, 2002; McCarthy & Carter, 1994), proposes a teaching method that makes use of contrastive contextual analysis to teach tense and aspect. An experiment is then required to explore the effects of the newly proposed method. In addition, though the previous scholars have made some suggestions concerning the importance of using contrastive contextual analysis, so far there is still little attention being paid to the development of teaching materials based on the suggestions and searching for empirical evidence to support the method. The current study is also aimed to address this gap in previous research. Following the suggestion made by McCarthy & Carter (1994), this current study uses natural news report texts, a well-defined genre, as teaching material.

Teaching Contrastive Temporal Contexts

The literature review has revealed that tense selections in English news reports vary with basic tenses. It has also revealed that many Chinese learners fail to identify the basic tenses, which may present difficulties in their English writing and translation from Chinese into English. This current study thus introduces the notions of “foreground” and “background” to help translation students identify the basic tenses in Chinese news reports in a hope that it can ultimately help them choose correct tenses when translating Chinese news reports into English. Scholars have long noticed that narratives are basically composed of two parts: foreground and the background. The foreground contains temporally ordered events, while the background provides additional information to the major events in the foreground, such as comments (Hopper, 1979; Longacre, 1981). Studies have also related tense-aspect morphology to foreground and background (K. Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Dahl, 1984; Dry, 1981, 1983, 1992; Flashner, 1987, 1989; Godfrey, 1980; Kumpf, 1984; Longacre, 1981; Thompson, 1987). For example, Bardovi-Harlig (1992, p. 153) examines the narrative structure and tense use, and she

finds that “the foreground is characterized by the relative high rates of appropriate use of the past tense while the background shows lower rates of appropriate use of past and greater variety of forms. The present tense, which is virtually absent in the foreground, appears in the background clauses of both oral and written narratives”. Although their studies focus on narratives, this present study proposes that the notions of foreground and background can be applied to teaching tense selections in news reports.

According to many scholars (Attkisson & Vaughan, 2003; Ferry, 2006; Kershner, 2009), the classic structure of hard news generally follows an "inverted pyramid" style, which places facts in a descending order of importance. A hard news story usually consists of a "Lead" and a "Body". The "Lead" mainly answers 5W1H questions (when, what, who, where, why, how); the "Body", in addition to answering the questions that were not answered in the Lead, provides a more detailed description and background knowledge of the event. In the Body, there is usually a paragraph referred to as “Nut Graph”, which places the news story in a larger context and relates it to everyday life the reader. The nut graph shows the importance of the news to the reader. In simple stories the lead is the nut graph. Since the timeline is very important in news stories, it is always necessary to be very clear as to when things happened (Hough, 1984). Handbooks on news writing suggest rules for using tense. Attkisson & Vaughan (2003) states that the tense of the Lead is usually the past tense. However, the tense of the Lead may be present progressive if it is breaking news. Hough (1984) suggests that as the rule of thumb, wherever a past tense is used, a specific time element (e.g. Monday, this morning) should be included. Obviously, as Metthiessen (1995) suggests, text segments in news reports are developed around different tense selections, and the simple distinction of Lead-Body structure of news reports may not provide a sufficient guide for translation students to select correct tense when translating from Chinese into English. Thus in this current study, we further identify the “background” and “foreground” blocks under the traditional Lead-Body structure of news reports.

Our analysis of non-breaking hard news stories in English shows that the concepts of “foreground” and "background" can be used to identify not only the tense selection in narratives but also that in news reports. The Lead contains the main events of a news story; it is considered as a “foreground” segment, and therefore its basic tense or temporal frame is past tense. The basic tense of the Body paragraphs is more difficult to determine. Some may function as supplement to the Lead, providing answers to the remaining unanswered 5W1H questions. These paragraphs are considered “foreground” segments, and their basic tense or temporal frame is past tense too. Other paragraphs in the Body may provide further information on the main story or the comments and views of the reporter, and they are considered as “background” segments with a temporal frame of present tense. As the nut graph relates the story to its readers, it is considered as a "background" segment with the present-tense temporal frame. However, when a clear time marker appears in a paragraph, its tense choice should remain in line with the time. Appendix 1 contains an authentic "inverted pyramid" style news report. The tense selection of its paragraphs is mostly in compliance with the above mentioned "foreground" and “background” identification rules: the foreground paragraphs develop around the past tense, and the background ones, the present tense except when there is a past tense marker. It must be admitted that the distinction of "background” and “foreground” here only serves as a general guideline to show students that tense choices in a news story bear other functional meanings in addition to referring to time. The

tense choice in some paragraphs of this sample story is also debatable. For example, paragraph 3 reads:

The troops who crossed the border Sunday traveled in a 25-vehicle convoy from the U.S. Camp Virginia in the Kuwaiti. The convoy included armored vehicles, trucks, personnel carriers, and an ambulance.

The first sentence functions as a supplement to the Lead providing further information on the activity “crossing” and thus can be seen as “foreground”. The second sentence only provides detailed information on the convoy, and present tense would be a more appropriate choice since the sentence needs to be treated as “background”. However, in real life past tense was used, and our guidelines on tense choices based on “background” and “foreground” information seem not applicable to this situation. This example shows tense choices in real life situations could include other considerations, which are beyond the scope of this present study.

Acknowledging the limitations mentioned above, we propose a context temporal frame analytical method (CTFAM) for news stories based on the identification of foreground and background paragraphs. When translating Chinese news stories into English, if translators could apply this method to determine the foreground and background paragraphs in the Chinese news, they may find it easier to choose the past tense as the basic tense for the foreground paragraphs and the present tense for the background paragraphs. This study was designed to explore the effect of teaching students CTFAM on the accuracy of their tense selection in translation Chinese news stories into English.

Research Method

Subjects

All subjects of this study were recruited from the department of translation and interpreting of a Taiwanese university. The experimental group consisted of 27 fourth-year students of a news translation and interpreting course, and the control group consisted of 66 fourth-year students of non-news translation and interpreting courses and 9 postgraduate students of the translation and interpreting program of the department. The subjects in the experiment group received basic training on news English such as Journalistic English and Introduction to Journalism. However, they did not receive advanced training on translation Chinese news into English prior to the experiment. An oral survey of the subjects showed that they did not have systematic knowledge of tense selection in English news although they might have learned more theories on news writing and editing than the subjects in the control group, who enrolled in non-news translation and interpreting courses. None of the postgraduate subjects majored in translation or journalism in their undergraduate studies.

Experiment procedures

1. Testing materials

We singled out two authentic Chinese news stories written in the standard inverted pyramid style. Both articles had not been used as teaching material. The pre-test generated 14 clauses, and the post-test generated 26 clauses. The pre and post tests were included in Appendices 2 and 3. Each clause was listed separately in the first column of the tables, and the rest columns respectively showed the inverted pyramid structure, the function of the

paragraph, the background or foreground of the paragraph, and the correct tense that should be selected in translation. The correct tense in translation was judged by a native-English speaking teacher who had taught English and translation in a Taiwanese university for more than 5 years.

2. The implementation of Pre-test and post-test

In the pre-test, subjects were asked to provide basic information such as their name, program, and class. They were given 100 minutes to translate a Chinese hard news story into English using any dictionary. However they were not allowed to use the Internet because the use of the Internet could introduce uncontrollable variables to the study. For example, the subjects might find translated versions of the news story from some websites that offer online translation services. The post-test followed the same procedure. Both groups received the same pre-test and post-test with an interval of 10 weeks. The difference is that the experimental group received training on the context temporal frame analytical method (CTFAM) during the 10-week interval, while the control group did not. All subjects completed their translation within 100 minutes. To minimize the effect of short memory and preparation, both tests were carried out without prior notice. The implementation of the two tests spanned more than 2 months. Therefore, it was unlikely for the subjects to memorize the test items.

3. Teaching CTFAM

The experimental group were exposed to CTFAM in their weekly 2-hour journalistic English classes. The treatment took 10 weeks with one hour allocated to the experiment related instructions per week since there were other curriculum items to be covered in the class. The teaching of CTFAM was organized as follows:

Weeks 1 and 2: recognizing tense and aspect functions in news English. The group were first given an authentic English news article to read, and then were asked to fill in the blanks where the verb was only supplied with its infinitive form. The answers to the blanks were verbs used with the past simple and the present simple tense forms. The concepts of foreground and background in News reports were introduced, and the objective here was to highlight the use of tense and aspect in discourse. We then used an Associate Press news story titled "Japanese troops cross into Iraq from Kuwait" (refer to Appendix 1), as an example to illustrate how to identify foreground and background paragraphs in the Lead and Body segments proposed by the traditional news writing theory (Attkisson & Vaughan, 2003; Ferry, 2006; Kershner, 2009). We then explained the notions of basic tense and temporal frame followed by their application in writing English news.

Week 3: contrasting tense and aspect of different text types. The group were first taught how the past simple and the present simple were used to put information into the background or foreground in a news report and a narrative story. The subjects were then asked to read other narrative stories and news reports and identify foreground/background in these different text types. The objective was to raise their awareness of tense and aspect conventions across different discourses.

Weeks 4-8: contrasting different tense and aspect forms. The contrast between the past simple and the present simple was taught in Weeks 4 and 5, and the contrast between the past simple and present perfect, in Weeks 6 and 7, and the contrast between other combinations of tense and aspect was

briefly touched in Week 8. Various class exercises were arranged such as filling blanks, group discussion, quiz, and peer proofreading.

Weeks 9 and 10: reviewing and consolidating contrastive temporal frame knowledge. These two sessions mainly involved group discussions and exercises. The subjects were put into groups of 3 or 4 persons to discuss the themes covered in the previous 8 weeks. Each group gave an oral presentation of the experiences of learning CTFAM in the end.

Over the whole experiment period, the subjects were required to write news English compositions on a weekly basis reporting something in their life. The feedback and correction made on tense and aspect was marked with different color to attract the subjects' attention.

4. Analyzing the accuracy of tense selection in the pre-test and post-test

We marked each clause of all the translations produced in the pre-test and post-test. The accuracy count of tense selection by each subject was recorded as one entry and input into a SPSS database.

5. Statistical Analysis

We used the following functions provided by SPSS for Windows:

- Paired samples T test
- ANOVA test
- Descriptive statistics

Hypotheses

This current study explores the effect of teaching CTFAM to translation students in their news English classes. It is aimed to test whether the teaching method introduced in this study could help students choose correct tenses when they translate Chinese news stories into English. The following hypotheses were proposed:

1. Hypothesis 1: The accuracy rates of tense selection by subjects who were not exposed to CTFAM teaching do not show significant differences after 10 weeks of normal translation teaching.
2. Hypothesis 2: The accuracy rates of tense selection in translation Chinese news stories into English are not correlated with the subjects' English proficiency levels or prior knowledge of news English writing.
3. Hypothesis 3: The subjects who were exposed to CTFAM do not acquire the knowledge of tense selection in news discourse and show no improvement in tense selection when they translate Chinese news stories into English.

Results and Discussion

Test of Hypothesis 1

We used the "paired samples T test" to test the difference of the mean accuracy rates of the control group between pre and post tests. The results show whether the mean accuracy rate of the post test improves significantly after 10 weeks of normal translation teaching. Table 1 shows the results of the test.

| Paired Samples T test | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|---|-------|-------|----|-----------------|
| | Mean Difference | Std Deviation | Std. Error | 99% confidence interval of the Difference | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Control group pre and post tests | 0.477 | 4.648 | 0.701 | -1.411 | 2.366 | 0.681 | 74 | 0.499 |

Table 1: Pre and Post Tests Differences of Control Group

Table 1 shows that there is no significant difference between the mean accuracy rates of the control group in the pre and post tests ($p=0.499 > 0.01$), and Hypothesis 1 is supported. This result indicates that the subjects in the control group have not made significant improvement in their tense selection when translating Chinese news reports into English after 10 weeks of translation teaching. Previous studies have suggested that traditional English teaching provides limited help for students to improve their acquisition of English tense and aspect (Hinkel, 1997; Larsen-Freeman et al., 2002; McCarthy & Carter, 1994), whereas the result of testing hypothesis 1 indicates that traditional translation teaching programs do not help students select correct tenses in Chinese into English translation either. Once again it highlights the importance of teaching textual functions of tense choice in discourse. The following is an example of translation excerpts by a control group subject.

Example 1:

This summer, the entire region *experienced* the worst typhoon season in decades. (pre-test, clause 10, background)

In 1930s, the world economic panic *was* because of self protection. (post-test, clause 16, background)

Although there was a temporal adverbial (今夏, this summer) in the source text of the first clause and a temporal modifier (1930年代時的, of the 1930s) in the second, both clauses appeared in the Body paragraph as background information and needed to be placed in the present context. However, the subject chose the past simple to translate both clauses probably because he/she only relied on temporal markers in the source text without realizing the discourse convention of using present tense for background information. This problem is typical to native Chinese speaking learners as suggested by Chen (2005) and Hinkel (1997).

Test of Hypothesis 2

The subjects in the control group fell into three categories: postgraduate students, year-four students of news translation program, and year-four students of non-news translation program. They represented student translators of different proficiency levels and different disciplinary knowledge. Hypothesis 2 was aimed to test whether the mean accuracy rates of the control group differ significantly in the pre and post tests. We carried out the ANOVA test using "tense accuracy" as the dependent variable and "subject category" as the factor.

Table 2 shows that although the subjects of three categories differ in the “tense accuracy” the differences are not significant ($p > 0.05$). Hypothesis 2 is supported by the results.

| Multiple Comparisons | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------|--------|-------------------------|-------|
| Dependent Variable: tense accuracy | | | | | | |
| LSD | | | | | | |
| (I) subject Category | (J) subject Category | Mean difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| News | Postgraduate | -0.293 | 0.220 | 0.085 | -1.74 | 1.14 |
| | Non-news | -0.867 | 0.221 | 0.1916 | -1.30 | -0.43 |
| Postgraduate | News | 0.293 | 0.220 | 0.085 | -1.14 | 1.74 |
| | Non-news | -0.574 | 0.239 | 0.3302 | -1.05 | -0.10 |
| Non-news | News | 0.867 | 0.221 | 0.1916 | 0.43 | 1.30 |
| | Postgraduate | 0.574 | 0.239 | 0.3302 | 0.10 | 1.05 |

Table 2: Tense accuracy differences between subject categories of Control Group

The results show that postgraduate students and university students of news translation program do not differ in their “tense accuracy” when translating Chinese news reports into English ($p=0.085>0.05$). This indicates that English proficiency levels may not affect the “tense accuracy”. The results also show that students with more knowledge on news (students of the news translation program) do not differ from students of other disciplines (students of non-news translation programs) in their “tense accuracy”. This indicates that previous exposure to News English makes little difference in students’ command of English tense. Previous studies have found that non-native English speaking learners often fail to maintain the time frame of the context in their writing (Huang, 1994; Riddle, 1986; Yang & Huang, 2004; Yu, 1996). This study further looks at the tense conventions related to text types (genres) and finds that the tense problem is related not only to maintaining the tense in the temporal frame but also to compliance with the tense conventions of discourse. Therefore, teaching of tense and aspect may need to include contrastive analyses of both context and text types at the same time.

Test of Hypothesis 3

The purpose of this hypothesis was to test whether teaching the context temporal frame improves the “mean tense accuracy rates” of the experimental group in pre and post tests.

Table 3 shows the results of a Paired Samples T test. After the pre-test, 27 subjects in the experimental group were exposed to the new tense analytical method in their News English classes over a period of 10 weeks. In the post-test, their “mean tense accuracy rate” is significantly different from that of the pre-test ($p=0.000<0.01$).

| Paired Samples T test | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|----------------|------------|-------------------------|--------|---------|----|-----------------|
| | Mean Difference | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | 99% Confidence Interval | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Experimental group Pre and post tests difference | -4.973 | 5.693 | 0.465 | -6.186 | -3.760 | -10.695 | 26 | 0.000 |

Table 3: Pre and Post Tests Differences of Experimental Group

Hypothesis 3 is thus rejected. This may result from either an increase of post-test mean tense accuracy rate or a decrease of it. Therefore, we further present the descriptive statistical data as follows in

Table 4:

| | Mean Accuracy Count | Mean Accuracy Rate | Std. Deviation | Std Error |
|-----------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Pre Test | 6 | 42.8% | 3.983 | 0.558 |
| Post Test | 21 | 80.7% | 4.338 | 0.436 |

Table 4: Descriptive statistics

The mean tense accuracy rate of the pre-test was 42.8%, and the rate of the post-test has increased to 80.7%. This indicates that subjects from the experimental group perform significantly better than those from the control group in terms of choosing correct English tense in the post-test and that teaching the new tense analytical method has yielded positive results. The following example is extracted from a subject's pre and post test translations.

Example 2:

This summer, this entire region *passed* the most serious typhoon season in several decades. (pre-test, clause 10, background)

Japan believes that the US auto industry *has already been difficult* to manage since the oil crisis of as early as 1970. (pos-test, clause 23, background)

In the pre-test, the same subject chose the past tense for the first clause as most other subjects did, but in the post test, he/she chose the present tense even though there was a temporal marker in the source text of the second clause (早在1970年代的石油危機後, as early as after the oil crisis in the 1970s). Similar improvements were also present in the translations of other subjects from the experimental group. This seems to be an indicator that subjects in the experimental group have, to some extent, started to apply tense conventions to their translation as a result of learning CTFAM in News English classes. The fact that they improve significantly over 10 hours of class instruction shows English tense and aspect needn't to be a major difficulty for non-native English speaking learners if the teacher could teach

them not only basic grammatical rules but also those “rules” beyond the sentence level.

Conclusion

Temporal frame in discourse has been recognized as playing an important role in teaching English tense. However, traditional teaching of English tense based on sentence analysis is still practiced in many schools and even university classrooms causing difficulties for students to use correct tense in writing English compositions and translating into English. Through an experiment introduced above, the present study has tentatively concluded that traditional ESP (teaching News English) and translation teaching at the university level provide little help for students to master English tense. However if tense conventions in discourse along with simple methods to use them can be introduced in the classroom, students will make significant improvement in tense selection in producing tasks such as translation into English. In this current study, introducing the concepts of “foreground” and “background” and the corresponding tense conventions in the News English classroom has proved effective to improve tense accuracy rates of students when they translate Chinese news stories into English

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Teaching material

Japanese troops cross into Iraq from Kuwait

Updated Sun. Feb. 8 2004 12:05 PM ET (Associated Press)

1. KUWAIT CITY -- A contingent of Japanese troops crossed Sunday into Iraq from Kuwait as part of the country's first deployment to a combat zone since 1945. 「**foreground**」
2. The troops, most of them engineers, are part of a deployment slated to total about 800 troops in a humanitarian mission in southern Iraq. Another 200 are to remain in Kuwait. 「**background**」
3. The troops who crossed the border Sunday traveled in a 25-vehicle convoy from the U.S. Camp Virginia in the Kuwaiti. The convoy included armored vehicles, trucks, personnel carriers, and an ambulance. 「**foreground**」
4. The number of the troops in the convoy was not disclosed. 「**foreground**」
5. Japan has already dispatched advance teams and three C-130 cargo planes to the region. The troops will purify water and carry out other humanitarian tasks in Iraq. 「**background**」
6. The deployment to Iraq is Japan's largest and riskiest since World War II. It has faced strong opposition at home amid fears for their safety with the insurgency in Iraq. 「**background**」
7. In Tokyo on Sunday, Japan's defense chief, Shigeru Ishiba, said the government wouldn't order its forces out of Iraq until they have completed their humanitarian mission, even if Japanese soldiers are killed in attacks. 「**background**」
8. The mission is the first time Japanese troops have gone to a combat zone since 1945. While Tokyo has sent soldiers on peacekeeping missions in the past, they have only gone to areas where fighting has subsided. 「**background**」
9. Japan's constitution, adopted in 1947 during the U.S. postwar occupation of the country, renounces the use of military force. 「**background**」
10. The Japanese troops in Iraq will be armed with pistols, rifles, machine guns and anti-tank guns to use in self defense only. 「**background**」
11. The decision by the government of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to deploy the troops despite widespread opposition reflects a shift in the government's attitude since the 1991 Gulf War, when Tokyo shouldered a portion of the financial burden but sent no soldiers. 「**background**」
12. Koizumi and his allies in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party have been eager to contribute Japanese troops to back the United States, its most important ally. 「**background**」

Appendix 2: Pre-test

| Clauses | Paragraph | Function | Temporal Framework | Correct tense |
|--|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. 豪雨/在二十四小時內/累積了十六公分的雨量, (Heavy rain /in the twenty-four hours /accumulate to /16 centimeters of /rainfall) | Lead | Description of the event | Foreground | Past tense |
| 2. 於臺北縣市/部分地區/造成/淹水及山崩/災情。 (In Taipei City and County/some areas/ cause/ flooding and landslides / disaster.) | Lead | Description of the event | Foreground | Past tense |
| 3. 臺北縣以五股、三重地區/積水將近一公尺最為嚴重。 (Taipei County/ Wugu and San Chong areas/ water accumulation /nearly a meter/be the most severe.) | Body | details | Foreground | Past tense |
| 4. 山崩/也迫使/臺北市一隧道關閉。 (Landslides /also force /the closure of a tunnel in Taipei.) | Body | details | Foreground | Past tense |
| 5. 目前/無人員傷亡/傳出, (now/no human casualties/ be reported), | Body | details | Foreground | Past tense |
| 6. 損失/情形/尚無法/估計。 (loss /situation / unable/ to estimate.) | Body | details | Foreground | Past tense |
| 7. 縣委員會發言人/Harry Zhang/ 表示 : (County Commission spokesman /Harry Zhang/ say) | Body | Quoted comments | Foreground | Past tense |
| 8. 「我們/今年的/颱風防範系統/已/徹底瓦解, 」 ("Our /this year's/ typhoon prevention system/already/ totally collapse,") | Body | Quoted comments | Foreground | Present tense |
| 9. 「上一次/颱風災後/重建工作/才完成/, 就又/再遭逢重創。 」 ("The last typhoon/ reconstruction work/ complete/, again hit by heavy losses.") | Body | Quoted comments | Foreground | Present tense |
| 10. 這整個地區今夏度過數十年來最嚴重的颱風季節, (the entire region/this summer/ through the decades/, be the worst typhoon season/ | Body/nut graph | Larger context | Background | Present tense |
| 11. 雖/不如日本及韓國嚴重, (though/ not as serious as Japan and Korea,) | Body/nut graph | Larger context | Background | Present tense |
| 12. 但是最近一次/發生於兩週前的納莉颱風期間, (But/ the most recent case /happened /two weeks ago/ the Nali typhoon,) | Body/nut graph | Larger context | Background/past time marker | Present tense / past tense |
| 13. 土石流/淹沒了/一整個村莊, (Mudslide/ bury/ an entire village) | Body/nut graph | Larger context | Background/past time marker | Present tense / past tense |
| 14. 奪走/近/20條人命。 (Claim/ nearly /20 lives.) | Body/nut graph | Larger context | Background/past time marker | Present tense / past tense |

Appendix 3: Post-test

| Clauses | Paragraph | Function | Temporal Framework | Correct tense |
|---|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. 豪雨/在二十四小時內/累積了十六公分的雨量，(Heavy rain /in the twenty-four hours /accumulate to /16 centimeters of /rainfall) | Lead | Description of the event | Foreground | Past tense |
| 2. 於臺北縣市/部分地區/造成/淹水及山崩/災情。(I n Taipei City and County/some areas/ cause/ flooding and landslides / disaster.) | Lead | Description of the event | Foreground | Past tense |
| 3. 臺北縣以五股、三重地區/積水將近一公尺最為嚴重。(Taipei County/ Wugu and San Chong areas/ water accumulation /nearly a meter/be the most severe.) | Body | details | Foreground | Past tense |
| 4. 山崩/也迫使/臺北市一隧道關閉。(Landslides /also force /the closure of a tunnel in Taipei.) | Body | details | Foreground | Past tense |
| 5. 目前/無人員傷亡/傳出，(now/no human casualties/ be reported), | Body | details | Foreground | Past tense |
| 6. 損失/情形/尚無法/估計。(loss /situation / unable/ to estimate.) | Body | details | Foreground | Past tense |
| 7. 縣委員會發言人/Harry Zhang/ 表示：(County Commission spokesman /Harry Zhang/ say) | Body | Quoted comments | Foreground | Past tense |
| 8. 「我們/今年的/颱風防範系統/已/徹底瓦解，」 ("Our /this year's/ typhoon prevention system/already/ totally collapse.") | Body | Quoted comments | Foreground | Present tense |
| 9. 「上一次/颱風災後/重建工作/才完成/，就又/再遭逢重創。」 ("The last typhoon/ reconstruction work/ complete/, again hit by heavy losses.") | Body | Quoted comments | Foreground | Present tense |
| 10. 這整個地區今夏度過數十年來最嚴重的颱風季節，(the entire region/this summer/ through the decades/, be the worst typhoon season/ | Body /nut graph | Larger context | Background | Present tense |
| 11. 雖/不如日本及韓國嚴重，(though/ not as serious as Japan and Korea,) | Body/nut graph | Larger context | Background | Present tense |
| 12. 但是最近一次/發生於兩週前的納莉颱風期間，(But/ the most recent case /happened /two weeks ago/ the Nali typhoon,) | Body/nut graph | Larger context | Background/past time marker | Present tense / past tense |
| 13. 土石流/淹沒了/一整個村莊，(Mudslide/ bury/ an entire village) | Body/nut graph | Larger context | Background/past time marker | Present tense / past tense |
| 14. 奪走/近/20條人命。(Claim/ nearly /20 lives.) | Body/nut graph | Larger context | Background/past time marker | Present tense / past tense |