

Studying Tense in Classroom Discourse on the Base of Hallidayian Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)

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Abstract

In functional approach to interpersonal metafunction, Halliday defines clause as a unit of exchange, with two main constituents called Mood and Residue. Mood is composed of Subject and Finite. Subject is invested with modal responsibility whereas finite realizes primary tense and modality. Residue includes predicator, complement and adjunct. Secondary tense is expressed throughout predicator while Complement and adjunct just add additional but unnecessary information to clause meaning. Derived from theoretical framework outlined above, present research tries its best to determine a kind of agreement between primary and secondary tenses in gender talk of ELT classrooms and its relation to bilingual language learners' proficiency in their foreign language learning. About twelve hours of oral conversation between students and teachers from eight randomly selected classrooms are recorded and transcribed, resulting to 3288 clauses. Our findings show that both genders use simple present tense as primary one in their talks with high frequency to refer to events happening in present. It is found out that simple present tense is used much more for holding an unmarked grammatical structure; whereas using other temporal structures desire much more grammatical competence and subsequently are used with low frequency. This may result into students' non-proficiency in grammar skill, making them use different and also wrong tenses in different given temporal situations in high levels of foreign language learning.

Key Words: Hallidayian Systemic Functional Grammar, Gender Talk, Finite, Predicator, Tense.

I. Introduction

Studying different kinds of communication in classroom discourse has always been noticed by most of researchers in history of new and even traditional language studies. These researchers have devoted a big part of their studies to determining different ways of meaning exchange between teacher and student while just a small part of these studies are related to studying language and its variants such as gender and tense in ELT classrooms of bilingual context of situation. For instance, Mir Ahmad (1383) studies Mood from perspective of interpersonal metafunction and the way through which clauses are related to one another. Having studied different works of famous Persian writers, he concludes that Mood of a clause consists of subject and tense. On the base of this research, mood may be divided into three kinds of declarative, imperative and integrative. As a conclusion, the most important element for communication process in Persian language is tense and no complete clause may have functional role excluding it. Another research is related to Wei (2009). Studying languages of report, discussion and information, he states that different people in different situational

contexts have different selections of past, present and future tenses in which speakers have more freedom to select different kinds of primary tenses making change of primary tenses to be much more common, while in other discourses such as description or narration, it's not so common. We may also refer to Peng (2009). According to Peng, tense is a grammatical category in Chinese, different from English. He states that tense may be divided into primary, secondary-primary, secondary and primary-secondary ones. He relates tense to modal verbs before or after verb or at the end of clause.

As it is found out, noticing gender variant, agreement between different tenses and its relation to bilingual language learners' proficiency in classroom discourse are neglected in most of these studies. Accordingly, in this research, different declarative, and integrative clausal structures used by males and females in classroom discourse of bilingual situational context are studied from perspective of interpersonal metafunction on the base of Hallidayan systemic functional grammar. Research data have been collected randomly from intermediate ELT classrooms in Tabriz. Tabriz city, located in the north west of East Azerbaijan Province, Iran, may be considered as bilingual context of situation since its people use Azeri as their mother tongue, Farsi and English as their second and foreign languages respectively.

On the base of systemic functional grammar, Halliday (1985:11) considers text analysis as discourse one. He states linguistic analysis may explain why one text is appropriate or inappropriate for some specific purpose. According to Christie (2002:21), text and specific combination of situational context is a condition of cultural context. Choices from language in relation to a given context are considered as selection from register and specific selection from register depends on specific selection from components of situational context. These components are field of activity, tenor and mode. According to Halliday (1985:12), each of these components relates to three functions of ideational, interpersonal and textual.

Relating to interpersonal metafunction, Eggins (2004:144) states, using language, one of the processes occurred in conversation is creating communication among people speaking or may speak in the next turn-taking process. According to Halliday (1985: 69), during conversation, speaker may give something to addressee or ask something from him. Subsequently he introduces two speech acts of giving and demanding. Having noticed nature of transferred material relating to two mentioned speech acts, he introduces four speech functions called offer, demand, information and question. Following Halliday, Lock (1996: 175) refers to minor function called Exclamation in which attitude of speaker on present condition is expressed.

TABLE 1
 SPEECH FUNCTIONS (HALLIDAY, 1985: 69)

Function in Exchange	Type of Exchange	
	A) Services and Objects	B) Information
A) Giving	Would you like this teapot? «Offer»	He is giving her the teapot. «Information»
B) Demanding	Give me that teapot. «Demand»	What is he giving her? «Question»

Speech functions each is reflected in different clausal structures. Information, question, demand and exclamation are expressed throughout Declaratives, Integratives, Imperatives and Exclamatives respectively (Halliday, 1985: 74), whereas According to Lock (1996:176), this is just offer which has no specific mood and as Halliday (2002:272) states, it may be expressed throughout different moods. Halliday (1985:71) states, in studying Declarative and Integrative clauses and different responses to them, interpersonal meaning is expressed throughout just a specific grammatical component in clause. He calls that part of clause Mood.

According to Lavid et al (2010:229), Mood is composed of elements by which different types of interaction is performed between interlocutors. According to Halliday (1985:72), Mood is composed of functional elements of subject and finite in which subject approves or disapproves argument whereas finite shows primary tense and modality.

Another part of clause is called residue, comprising three functional elements of predicator, complement and adjunct. According to Eggins (2004:155), predicator forms lexical and content part of verb phrase. Verb phrase consists of two functional elements. The first element is finite and the second one, providing information about the type of event is called predicator. Halliday (1985:78) defines four functions for predicator:

- A. Specifying time reference other than reference to the time of speech event (secondary tense).
- B. Specifying various other aspects and phases like seeming, trying and hoping.
- C. Specifying the voice: active or passive.
- D. Specifying the process (action, event, mental process, relation) that is predicated of the Subject.

Complement, holding potentiality to become subject, is mostly seen in form of noun or adjective phrases (except from subject and adjunct). Eggins (2004:157) defines complement as unnecessary element, affected by main argument of clause. Complement is to add new meaning to clause. According to Halliday (1985:19), adjunct may be recognized for its adverbial or prepositional forms in clause. According to Eggins (2004:157) like the complement, adjunct adds extra and meanwhile unnecessary information to clause. On the whole, finite in Mood on one hand and predicator in residue on the other hand determine tenses of clause. The primary tense may be expressed throughout finite; whereas secondary tense is reflected in predicator.

II. Materials and Method

In this research, two populations, each consisting of four classes of male and female students, are employed randomly. 15 to 25 year old language Learners are participating in intermediate level of English language teaching classrooms. Classes the whole are of the same duration (90 minutes for each class) and hold in the afternoon. Data used in this research is oral conversation between teachers and students. Conversations are recorded by a MP4 voice recorder from beginning of class to end of it without any change in them. Since

the duration of each class is 90 minutes, about 12 hours of conversation has been recorded. Having all the recorded conversation transcribed, 3288 clauses are obtained.

III. Results and Analysis

In this research, 3288 clauses used by males and females have been studied, among which 1868 clauses belong to male classes while 1420 ones are used in female classes. In this research, researcher tries to study tense on the base of Hallidayian systemic functional grammar. In Hallidayian discourse grammar, tense is divided into primary and secondary ones expressed through finite and predicator respectively.

According to Ahmadie Givi (1383: 72), tense may be of two kinds called calendar and grammatical tenses. Calendar tense is the basic tense, meaning pass of days and years while grammatical tense is the one by which different kinds of verb are determined. Contrary to calendar tense, grammatical tense is not definite and exact, relatively measured from a specific source. According to Golfam (1385:70), grammatical tense shows relation between two events in pass, present and future. accordingly, if something happens in time A and another one happens in time B, grammatical tense is used to show that A has happened before, after or simultaneous to B.

Comrie (1998:1) defines calendar tense as referential one, connecting tense of sentence to the tense to which it refers. According to different definitions of tense, a kind of relation maybe recognized between calendar and primary tenses on one hand and secondary and grammatical tense on the other hand, so that finite and predicator may be considered as bearing calendar and grammatical tenses of clause respectively.

In table below, different kinds of grammatical and calendar tenses used by males and females in classroom discourse of bilingual context of situation are shown (M=Male, F=Female).

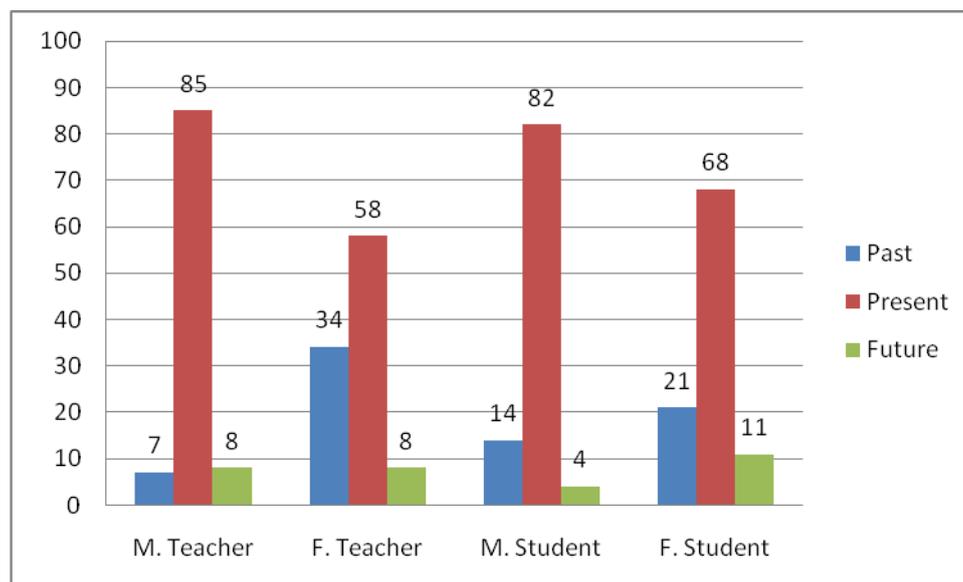


DIAGRAM 1
 FREQUENCY OF PRIMARY TENSE IN DECLARATIVES

As it is shown in above diagram, in male and female classes, interlocutors use present tense (primary tense) in there interaction using declaratives whereas future tense is used with low frequency.

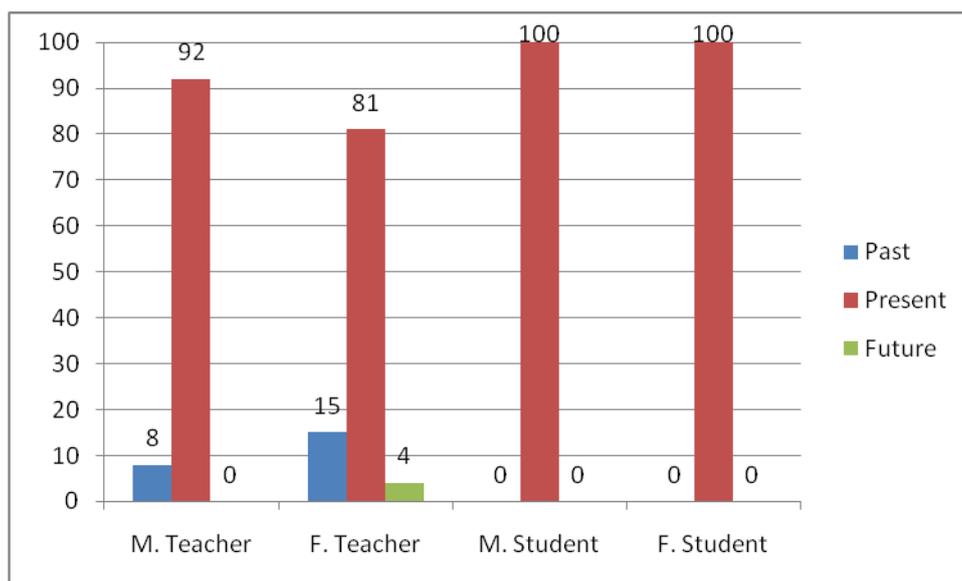


DIAGRAM 2
 FREQUENCY OF PRIMARY TENSE IN INTEGRATIVES

As shown in above diagram, in Integratives, both in male and female classes, interlocutors are inclined to use present primary tense (primary tense) while percentage of past and future is much more less. On the whole, both genders use present tense in their interactions, using declarative and integrative clauses.

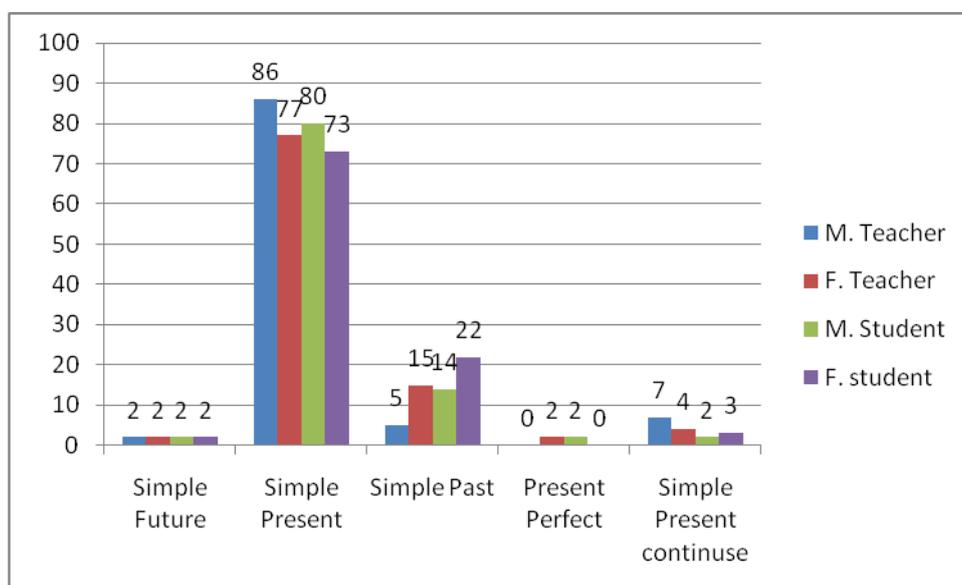


DIAGRAM 3

FREQUENCY OF SECONDARY TENSE IN DECLARATIVES

As it is show in above diagram, both in male and female classes, interlocutors use simple present tense (secondary tense) in their classroom interaction using declaratives.

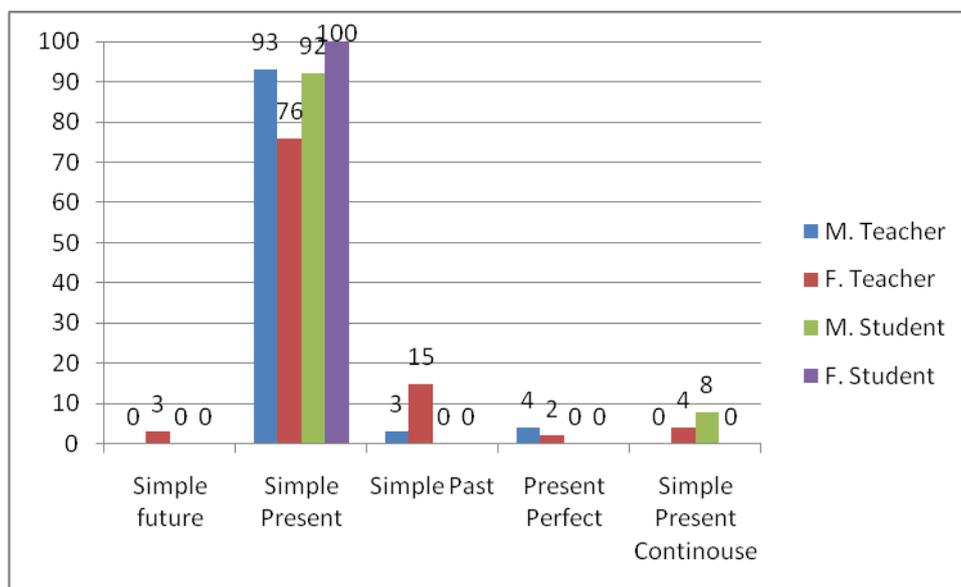


DIAGRAM 4

FREQUENCY OF SECONDARY TENSE IN INTEGRATIVES

As shown in above diagram, in integrative clauses, both genders are inclined to use simple present tense (grammatical tense) while percentage of using other tenses is much lower. On the whole both genders use simple present tense in their declarative and integrative clauses.

Comparing results drawn from all four diagrams shows a kind of agreement between primary (calendar) and secondary (grammatical) tenses. It may be stated that both genders as teacher and student in classroom discourse of bilingual situational context use simple present tense to refer to events happening in present. But the most important question is on the reason why other temporal constructions are not used more. This question is answered as the research conclusion

IV. Conclusion

Apart from social factors, the reason may be trace into their grammatical constructions. Simple present tense is used much more for holding an unmarked construction in both male and female classrooms; whereas using other temporal structures as marked ones desire much more grammatical competence and subsequently are used with low frequency. Accordingly students and teachers have great tendency toward using simple present tense as a fossilized structure and speak much more about things happening in present in comparison to speaking on things happening in past or future. According to Occam (or Ockham)'s Razor

(Katamba and Stonham, 2006: 33), simple present as a grammatical construction may be assumed as default or a kind of underlying structure, that is, the form selected unless there are explicit instructions to do otherwise. But what causes interlocutors to use underlying (unmarked) forms of temporal structures? To answer this, it's better to refer to grammar competence of language instructors. Most of teachers in bilingual contextual situations are unfamiliar with target language grammatical structures. These kinds of teachers have acquired just a kind of approximant system of the assumed target (foreign) language. They have great tendency to use simple structures. On time goes, these simple structures are fossilized in their minds and whenever they speak on a specific event in a given time other than present, they again use simple present. Using the wrong grammatical structures to refer to a specific tense is transferred in a negative light to students making student to acquire wrong grammatical knowledge and competence of foreign languages they are assumed to learn. This may result into students' non-proficiency in grammar skill, making them use different and also wrong tenses in different given temporal situations in high levels of language learning process.

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