Discourse functions of the connective sorede and its variants in Japanese oral narrative

This study investigates the use of the Japanese connective sorede and its variants in oral personal narratives of war time experiences produced by 30 native speakers of Japanese. Sorede and its variants have been known as one of the most frequently used connectives in conversational discourse. Nevertheless, little of its discourse functions have been investigated. Adopting the narrative structural analysis framework by Labov (1997), the study analyzes sorede and its variants relative to the position of narrative and non-narrative clauses. In narrative, clauses that the narrator produces can be categorized as those that describe action sequences and those that provide background information. The former, narrative clauses, drive the story forward and are considered to be the backbones of storytelling; the latter, non-narrative clauses, add detail to the story and help the audience understand the story's main points. It was found that the connective sorede and its variants were mostly inserted in front of narrative clauses, suggesting that their primary discourse function is to signal the beginning of action sequences. Furthermore, these connectives most frequently appeared at scene boundaries where one series of descriptions ends and another starts, which were indicated by (1) sentence subject change, (2) presence of a time adverb, (3) description of a new location, and (4) use of the modal auxiliaries noda and teshimau that segment the story into parts. These findings suggest that the use of sorde and its variants seem to signal the audience that the storytelling has not ended and that the next segment of the story will present a crucial description that relates to the understanding of the story's main point. Consequently, this appears to contribute to maintaining the floor so that the narrator can extend the current turn to continue his/her story.