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Storytelling Making Experiences to Improve Junior College Student's Oral Language Proficiency:
A Single Subject Experimental Case Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine whether storytelling can be an effective instructional activity in helping college students increase their oral language competence. Three junior college students participated in this study. All the oral productions and stories generated by the subjects were presented in T-unit format in order to determine whether storytelling helps college students produce longer oral productions and determine whether their oral language with more syntactic maturity when telling stories.

Key words: storytelling, oral language competence, syntactic maturity

說故事練口語

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摘　要

此研究的目的是決定是否說故事為有效的教學活動來練口語。這是一份個案研究報告。有三個五專二年級的學生參與此研究。他們被要以傳統的演講和說故事來練口語。最後比較她們所說的句子長度及結構來決定說故事是否為有效的教學活動。

Background of This Study

In recent years, Applied Foreign Language Student Enrollment in this college remains on the top. However, more and more students enroll in Applied Foreign Language Department without preparing well on their language competence. According to the observations of the researcher, there are several reasons that these students do not have higher language achievement which an Applied Foreign Language Department students suppose to have. First, students who have better language skills choose senior high school for a chance of going to university. Therefore, when students did not do well on the entrance examination of a high school, they choose junior college as their second choice. Compared to the students going to high schools, junior college students have relatively lower scores, including lower language competence. Second, since English has become international communication tool, many parents and family encourage their kids to study Applied Foreign language as their major, expecting their children master their language skills after 5-year study in order to find a better job. Which appears a problem, those students follow parents' advise to study foreign language are not interested in learning English. As a result, they neither have highly interesting in practicing language skills nor have good academic achievement in Foreign language department.

In order to help those students, no matter with higher or lower oral language skill, enhance their oral language competence, the researcher provide two kinds of practices for their oral language. First, give students a topic to develop an oral composition as traditionally many conversation teachers do. Second, give students to think about a story and tell the story to the researcher. Then, compare the sentence length of each task to determine whether storytelling can be more effective learning activities for junior college students to master their oral language competence.

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to examine whether storytelling can be an effective learning activity to enhance college students' oral language competence. The review of literature, focus on studies of storytelling in regard to oral language.

The Importance of Storytelling in ESL Learning

Hedberg and Westby (1993) claim that "Because of the relationship between narrative discourse skill and academic performance, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the narrative ability of school-age children" (p.10). Mata-Pistokache (1996) confirms that some researchers compared the results of storytelling ability to a reading comprehension test, finding a significant positive correlation between storytelling and reading comprehension. These studies therefore conclude that a good reader possesses good storytelling skills. Both reading stories and storytelling have value in children's language learning but storytelling has more power than reading stories alone because storytelling brings the speakers closer to the audience and receives an immediate response from the audience (Morrow, 1979). Therefore, storytelling has become one of the narrative discourse skills that are commonly emphasized in the lower elementary grades. Horkey (1990) and Stein (1986) note that

storytelling serves second language learners with a primary function, that is, developing language competence, especially oral language and communication skills.

Storytelling enhances oral language. A Brewer (1990) claim that oral language is considered the initial development of literacy since written language is an extension of spoken language. This consideration is applied to both native English and non-native learners. Nurss and Hough (1992) note that oral language competence is needed to participate in any literacy instruction because literacy instruction depends on using oral language to give directions, explain, and interact with activities. Also, Rosberg (1995) confirms that in elementary level education, oral language should be emphasized because speaking is the basic process in language development for young children. In addition, oral language is the requisite ability for learning to read and is also a major factor affecting reading achievement throughout the school years (Cooper, 1982). This is because the child responds to printed material through oral language, thus, oral language becomes an important indicator of the ability to learn to read. A number of studies (Anastasiow, 1979; Carter, Holland, Mladic, Sarviewski, & Sebastian, 1998; Coleman-Mitzner, 1980, 1981; Merritt & Liles, 1987; Nurss & Hough, 1985; Ollila & Mayfield, 1992) indicate that there is a positive correlation between children's oral language and academic progress. Moreover, oral language is a necessary base for competence in writing because writing is a way of recording speech (Cooper, 1982; Dyson, 1983). In sum, proficiency in oral language contributes to other language areas such as reading and writing.

It is especially necessary to emphasize the importance of oral language in ESL learning. Gamez (1979) states that "Reading has its roots in oral language proficiency" (p.665). The reason that many children whose first language is not English may have difficulty in reading English texts is that they are not ready to read orally in English. In addition, they lack a fluent oral language ability to share experiences with native-speaking peers. Therefore, these ESL children may have difficulty with academic learning in which English is used. In schools, ESL children are required to use a variety of language skills of the new language in order to follow directions and understand explanations successfully. ESL children who are unable to use language in an integrated manner are likely to experience academic difficulty. Therefore, providing ESL children with opportunities to use oral language and incorporate oral language with other language skills to learn both language and content knowledge is an important task.

Storytelling can be an effective way to help ESL children practice oral language. First, Greene (1994) suggests that storytelling provides ESL children opportunities to try out the new language orally in a classroom surrounded with the new language and experience. Second, storytelling offers ESL children opportunities to practice. integrated language skills. Once children can tell a story, they can read some storybooks, or write down their story, and them they can speak to an audience and listen to the audience questions carefully. In this activity, ESL children practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening simultaneously. Culatta, Page, and Ellis (1983) thus suggest that storytelling is one means to enable researchers to examine ESL children's language competence.

Storytelling promotes communication skills. The purpose of ESL learning is to foster communicative competence, which means ESL learners can use this new language to communicate for both academic and social

purposes.　Henry (1985) notes that communication competence has been a concern because many children fail to acquire communicative competence in a second language even after years of instruction.

　　Storytelling has been widely used in language classrooms to enhance ESL children's communication ability in a meaningful way.　As ESL children tell a story, they are engaging in a communication situation by which they express their thoughts orally to listeners and gain feedback from the listeners.　Rosen (1986) notes that "A story is a communication" (p.231).　This is because a story is told, involving speaker and listeners.　When the speaker tells a story, he is practicing to use the language to express his feeling and explain his thoughts; meanwhile, he also listens to the audience's reflection.　Gradually, the storyteller gets used to telling a story in the target language and can apply this communication competence to other social settings.　Therefore, a primary function of storytelling is to provide ESL children with the change to use their communication ability and subsequently to apply this competence to other areas.

　　In sum, storytelling activities contribute to ESL children's expanding language and sense of story.　IN addition, storytelling reflects children's language skills and the ability to use the new language to obtain and transmit information (Culatta, Page & Ellis, 1983).　Storytelling may also provide the researchers with more information about ESL children's language competence needed in an academic setting than a standardized test. Thus, it has become one method that teachers use to motivate ESL children's language learning and is also a strategy that researchers utilize to examine ESL children's integrated language competence and determine these children's sense of story.

Methodology

　　The literature review revealed that the storytelling task is an effective activity for ESL students to master their oral language competence.　Thus, the present study was designed to investigate whether storytelling task also work well for junior college students whose major is Applied Foreign Language Department.

Subjects

　　There were 4 subjects participating in this study.　There subjects are second graders who major at Applied Foreign Language of a junior college when the study was conducted.　The students were volunteers to take part in this study.　Originally, the researcher explained her study to the whole class and asked volunteers.　At the beginning, there were 10 students would like to take part in this study.　Yet, seven of them failed to complete tasks required for this study.　So, only three subjects' data were completed and used for this study.

The Design of This Study

　　This study was conducted under a single-subject experimental case study research.　According to McCormick (1990), the term single-subject design has often been misinterpreted as a one-subject case study. As a matter of fact, single-subject research can involve more than one subject within a study. Therefore, a single-subject design refers to the change of individual subject, only comparing her or his performance at the beginning of the study to the end of the study, rather than comparing the group means in a study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected from the students' oral speech and storytelling tasks.　All the tasks were held after class so it would not influence the subjects' regular class time.　Since this was a A-B-A-B single subject experimental study, the data collection procedures were divided into four phases: speech, storytelling, speech, and storytelling.　In phase 1, students were asked to make a speech based on a given topic.　They can choose the topic form a list of them.　In phase 2, students were asked to tell a story to the researcher.　In third phase, subjects were asked again to make a speech based on a given topic.　In phase 4, again, students were asked to tell a story.　All the tasks were recorded so that the researcher could write down what they said. The subjects were given as much time as they need and encouraged by the researcher to say as much as they can.　This procedure was used in order to exam whether storytelling activity helped subjects to say more sentences.

Results

All the oral productions were presented in T-unit format in order to exam its length and syntactic maturity.

Subject 1

Phase 1:

Title: My Best Friend

I have two best friends.

One is a girl

because she is so smart.

And she is so beautify.

She can play piano.

She wants go shopping.

She and me can go.

And then we can go watch movie.

Because we are very good friends.

And the two girl is a tall girl.

She is so smart too.

We can go play tennis.

We can go to school together.

We can go to restaurant.

We talk.

Because she is so funny.

I like them.

I need them.

Phase 2:

Story: Colors

Today have 5 colors.

Then I am talking.

The blue says I am so beautiful.

Because I am so bright.

Anyone must like me.

They red says no.

You are so ugly.

I am so beautiful.

I am hot.

I am very Summer.

I have smile.

Anyone likes me.

The white says I am bright.

Everyone likes me.

The black says I am so good.

Everyone likes me.

The yellow says No.

Everyone likes me.

Because I am funny friend.

But everyone have everyone beautify.

Everyone have everyone good.

Phase 3:

Title: My Favorite Cartoon Character

There is a star in the movie.

She is a cartoon star.

She is so happy.

She is so cute.

But she does not happy.

Because she wants to much.

One day, she loves the boy.

She loves the actor of the movie.

She talked to the boy on the movie.

She fall in love with the boy.

The boy said.

I don't like you.

I am so hated you.

Because you are made by the movie.

One day the boy met his real girl.

She is so sweet.

Phase 4:

Story: The Happy Frog.

Have a happy frog.

He is a smart man.

He doesn't like people worry.

He talks something his life never have.

One day, have one bird flied to the happy frog.

The bird says,

What do you want, frog.

The bird take the frog to everywhere.

The frog is in anyone's heart.

The bird says,

Can I help you?

The happy frog says,

Can you trust me.

One day, the frog was dead.

The bird does not happy anymore.

Subject 2

Phase 1:

Title: Taiwan

The island was called Formosa by other country.

I grow on the island.

So I have an emotion in the ground.

My country is in Pingdong.

That's a city near sea.

It is beautiful there.

When I was a children.

I rode bicycle every day.

Because there was a big road.

There are many trees and flowers.

The country is a nature.   I like it very much.

But I seldom come back now.

Now I always think of there.

Phase 2:

Story: The Wonderful World

Everyone grow on the world.

The world is a beautiful world.

Everyone wants to create a good environment.

But how do them create a world.

There are many computer software.

We can play computer games.

Phase 3:

Title: My Favorite Season

Which do you like?

My favorite season that you may be feel strange.

Because it doesn't like those people.

My favorite season is winter.

Why? Because I love cold feel.

And My favorite holiday is in the season too.

Which is Christmas.

Why?   In the holiday, I can make cards

and give them for my friends, and family and teachers.

In Taiwan, winter is not cold very much.

I like to try cold very much.

There is a custom in Finland.

A Christmas old man gives gifts to all children.

He is very friendly.

In Taiwan, it is no snow.

I love it very much.

Let me touch the snow.

Winter is interesting.

And which is my favorite season.

It is winter.

Phase 4:

Story: Santa

Have you ever see a Santa Claus.

It is not true.

But it gave happiness for children.

When I was a children.

I always think of Santa.

I hope he can give me for a gift.

Now I grow,

But I still have dream.

Santa Claus is from Finland not from the North.

I love Santa.

How do you feel about it.

Subject 4

Phase 1

Title: dream

I made a dream.

I will be a tour guide.

I take my boyfriend and her parents, and his sister and his grandmother go to Europe.

We take a trip.

And we going Rome.

We take the cable car.

And we eat noodle.

It is very delicious.

And then we go to France.

We see the flowers and the ships.

This ship is very huge.

We took a lot a lot pictures.

It's very beautiful.

And there is very bright.

We take a trip on river.

We buy some post cards and write something in the cards.

After that, we go to the hotel.

The hotel is very beautiful.

Their life has some colors, just like purple.

We go to eat lobster.

It is very delicious.

And we buy some flowers.

Flower is rose.

The rose is very big.

I am very happy to take them to go .to Europe.

Phase 2:

Story: My Own Story

I feel my life is a mistake.

Because my father is very serious.

And my mother don't talk to my mother.

When I was a child.

My father made me very important.

Because he gives me a lot to eat and clothes but no toy.

When I was teenager, he is very serious.

When holiday, I am very hope I am go out with my friends.

Because he never let me do that.

I very hope I can go out with friend, go shopping, or do a lot of things.

I very happy.

But I love him very much.

My mom do some wrong things.

And she never give up us.

She always gives me some money and eat.

But I don't want his money.

So in the morning, I work in breakfast store.

I have some salary.

I buy my clothe.

And I love CD and some books.

I use my money.

I don't want use his money.

Because my mom take a lot money go out.

So my father is very hate her.

But I think the things is over.

I feel the thing is so so.

I have a young sister.

She is very young.

Now she is in junior high school student.

Now she is seventeen years old.

She is a big trouble.

I feel very tired.

I am a very impatient girl.

I feel I and my sister is a mistake.

Because when she was born,

After my grandfather was dead.

So I think she is a mistake.

I am very sad.

I hope I be a tour guide.

Because I went to Europe.

And I want work in America there.

I don't want to stay in Taiwan.

I don't want many things.

So I feel I am a mistake.

Phase 3

Title: My favorite activity

I very love to watch TV.

I love to see a movie.

I love the exciting.

So the movies have to be vary exciting and some romance.

I have leave some money to see the movies with my friends.

I will buy a lot of food, for example, coca cola and pop corn.

Sometimes, I see a movie,

I will cry.

Just like Titanic I feel very sad.

Sometimes, I feel very happy.

Because some people let me feel funny.

And I very like the ghost movies.

I must scare the ghost.

Sometimes, I am very hate ghost movie.

It let me feel uncomfortable.

I like a movie.

The movie is Titanic.

The ship is very large.

The ship down to the sea.

And the man died in the sea.

So the woman is very sad.

I like a true story to be a movie.

Because it let me know history.

So I very like to see a movie.

Phrase 4

Story: A mirror

Mirror is a mirror.

Many old people think the mirror can let people become beautiful.

Because he mirror can see her face.

Bat I don't think so.

I think mirror not can be this

Mirror can let me make daydream.

Sometimes, I see the mirror.

I daydream.

The dream is to be a tour guide.

And I take my friend to go to Japan and Europe.

And the flight attendance.

I give people some coffee, tea and dessert.

I see people and some special things.

But when the dream wake up.

I feel it is not true.

I feel my heart is lot something.

I think,

When I wake up.

I can finish the things.

So I think I will do anything.

I will learn good language.

Now I learn English and Japanese.

So, I have to be a good student.

When I am adult,

I will dome something special.

Let people feel me a good girl.

Data analysis

This study was used T-unit to analyze sentence length and syntactic maturity of each oral production. T-unit contains Total T-unit (TTU), Total words (TW) and Words per T-unit (WTU).

Total T-unit (TTU). Using total T-units instead of the total number of sentences to present the length because ESL/EFL students are used to using 'and' to connect all the sentences. Hunt (1965) defines T-units as a minimal terminable unit with one main clause plus the subordinate clauses attached to or embedded within it. In addition, Hunt claims that using T-units provides an apparently more reliable measure of language maturity than using sentences.

Total words (TW). In this study, TTU and TW of each oral production were used to measure the length of each task and to decide whether storytelling helped junior college students improve oral language competence.

Average words per T-unit (WTU). Traditionally, average number of words per T-unit or T-unit length found by determining total words divided by total T-units is an index of syntactic maturity throughout the school grades (Hunt, 1966). According to Roos (1981), the greater number of words per T-unit, the more syntactic

maturity a student has. In this study, WTU was used to determine whether storytelling helped junior college students develop syntactic maturity.

Table 1: Subject 1's TW, TTU, WTU

Subject 1	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
TW	87	89	87	79
TTU	18	21	6	15
WTU	4.8	4.2	5.4	5.2

Table 2: Subject 2's TW, TTU, WTU

Subject 2	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
TW	78	35	122	62
TTU	13	6	20	11
WTU	6	5.8	6	5.4

Table 3: Subject 3's TW, TTU, WTU

Subject 3	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
TW	150	294	158	157
TTU	25	44	24	26
WTU	6	6.6	6.5	6.0

Data analysis for research question

The research question is "Can storytelling be an effective instruction activity to promote junior college student's oral language competence?"

Subject 1

From table 1, it indicated that there was no significant difference when making a speech or telling a story among TW, TTU, WTU.

Subject 2

From table 2, it showed that making an oral composition had longer sentence length with more syntactic maturity.

Subject 3

From subject 3, it indicated that no significant difference among TW, TTU, and WTU.

Conclusion and Suggestions

From data collection, the results revealed that storytelling did not work as well as many studies had been done.　　The possible reason is students in Taiwan are used to listening to stories told by their parents or teachers. Yet, they are not used to telling a story alone.　　In addition, the researcher observed when subjects were asked to tell a story, they started to feel uneasy.　　They told to the researcher that they did not know how to tell a story. They felt it is easier to say something based on a given topic.　　Moreover, when exam their stories, it was found that they did not have much sense of story. Which means the subjects did not know the basic structures of a story. In some studies, basic structures of a story were called story grammar that includes characters, setting, plot and results should all clearly appear in one story.

Some suggestions come from the research, including giving students a lesson about the sense of a story and providing more chance for students to tell a story.　　Although storytelling task seemed not work well for subjects in this study, it still a useful way for students to practice their oral language.　　Therefore, storytelling task should be encouraged to often use in the class because it can both enhance student's oral language skills and creative ability.

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