

# The Effects of Storytelling on Adult English Learning

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the influence of instruction using English storytelling on the performance of adult English learners. Seventy-eight participants were randomly assigned to two different English classes for one semester in this study. Both reading comprehension tests and recall writings of the participants were administered for the purpose of comparison between groups. The findings indicate that storytelling instruction elicits increased student interaction; facilitates EFL reading and story-recall writings; and changes the nature of classroom discourse, providing for more scaffolding interaction. With regard to language development, there were statistically demonstrable differences favoring the storytelling group in terms of comprehending reading material and employing story structures in writing.

Key Words: storytelling, scaffolding interaction, classroom participation

## INTRODUCTION

The focus in this study is to examine the influence of instruction using English storytelling on the performance of adult English learners. Stories have been widely used for literacy development in English-speaking countries, and are claimed to have many benefits in language development (Elley, 1989; Garvie, 1990; Wright, 1997), such as increasing motivation, stimulating imagination, and developing fluency in language skills. However, in Taiwan and many Asian countries, grammar-focused games and pattern drills are the dominant teaching techniques in English classrooms. Teaching English through stories is not yet a popular approach in Taiwan's English learning setting, especially for adult education. The following study explores the efficacy of storytelling as a method that could contribute positively to promoting interaction in English classrooms in Taiwan, as well as in other contexts where communicative language teaching has not been widely integrated into common practices, and demonstrates its advantages as an innovation with potential for wider acceptance.

The research questions in the present study are as follows: (1) Does storytelling instruction change the nature of the classroom discourse? (2) Does storytelling instruction facilitate student interaction, reading comprehension and story recalls?

The following sections provide a brief overview of the related studies in storytelling and classroom interaction.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **Storytelling and Language Learning**

Storytelling in this study refers to an animated and dramatized presentation of content. In the storytelling process, the responses of the listeners influence the telling of the story. “In fact, storytelling emerges from the interaction and cooperative, coordinated efforts of teller and audience” (National Storytelling Network, 2010). It has been proven that storytelling is beneficial to not only native language learners but also ESL learners. Storytelling makes information more memorable by involving the reader in the actions and intentions of characters in the story, thus inviting active meaning making. Cooper (1989, p. 8) claimed that storytelling is “an ideal method of influencing a child to associate listening with pleasure, of increasing a child’s attention span and retention capacity, of broadening a child’s vocabulary, and of introducing a child to the symbolic use of language.” In addition, Zobairi and Gulley (1989, p. 8) pointed out that when hearing stories, children learn “that language can be manipulated and organized, and that experiences—the raw material of story—can be molded into a particular form for presentation.” As indicated in recent research in second language acquisition, foreign language learners, regardless of age, need significant amounts of appropriate practice in listening comprehension, and interacting (Gass, 2004; Lightbown, 2000; Van Patten, 2003) in the target language. It is thus important for English language teachers to provide substantial input through listening practice in the foreign language classroom, and to check to see that some portion of it has been comprehended.

Storytelling can best provide English learners with this kind of input (Chen, 2008; Chou, 2006; Verdugo & Belmonte, 2007; Wang, 2008).

Current studies about storytelling in Taiwan have also provided support to the benefits of storytelling on English learning. In addition to the aforementioned research in support of enhanced listening comprehension, several other studies have also indicated the effects of storytelling instruction on reading comprehension (Huang, 2006), vocabulary (Hsieh, 2006), and learning attitude or motivation (Hsueh, 2007; Tsou, Wang, & Tzeng, 2006; Yau, 2003).

Besides its beneficial effects on learners of different learning environments (L1 vs. L2), storytelling instruction can also have a great influence on language learners of all ages. Although storytelling is frequently examined in the context of teaching younger learners, Horner (1983) confirmed that young adults also found storytelling appealing. Furthermore, Rossiter (2002) agreed that the use of stories is also effective in adult education practice. Stories and narrative “bring to the surface aspects of human activity, including second language acquisition that cannot be captured in the more traditional approach to research” (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 159), thus, using stories to teach has always been part of the practice of adult educators (Clark & Rossiter, 2008). In short, storytelling is widely employed as a powerful medium of teaching and learning, not just for children, but also for adult learners.

Although both storytelling and story reading have proved to be effective in language learning, there is a difference with regard to their related audience participation. Students can benefit more from storytelling in terms of their language development. As Morrow (1979, p. 237) described in her study:

Certainly both reading and telling stories have value. Has storytelling any power that reading a story does not? The answer is yes. Telling stories frees the storyteller to use creative techniques. It also has the advantage of keeping one close to the audience. Telling a story produces an immediate response from the audience and is one of the surest ways to establish a rapport between the listeners and the storyteller. There is a personal relationship set up between individuals involved, since the storyteller establishes direct eye contact with the group.

Children who have many experiences with different styles of literature often become fluent storytellers. Story reading is beneficial mostly in students' reading and writing, while storytelling enhances the four language skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading. According to Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, and Lowrance (2004, p. 158), in storytelling, learners are "encouraged to join in repetitive phrases or refrains." This form of two-way communication between the teller and audience is the main difference between storytelling and story reading. Because of the interactive nature of storytelling, many studies also provide evidence of its superior learning effects compared to other forms of story presentation such as in oral language ability, story comprehension, reading and vocabulary knowledge (Isbell et al., 2004; Myers, 1990; Trostle & Hicks, 1998; Walker, 2001).

### **Classroom Interaction and Storytelling Instruction**

Generally speaking, the most widely used model of classroom discourse is the teaching cycle or IRF (Initiation, Response, and Feedback) exchange model described by Van Lier (1996). This model

consists of the teacher initiating talk (via a question), the student responding, and the teacher evaluating the response (providing feedback). More recent work, such as Bearne (1999), confirms this general pattern, indicating that classrooms are still dominated by teacher control of questioning, although there is some evidence of intercultural variation (Alexander, 2000; Mercer, 1995).

In addition to the IRF model, scaffolding interaction in the classroom between teacher and student is another important focus. Scaffolding interaction refers to temporary assistance which helps the learners accomplish a task beyond their actual level. As proposed by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), this kind of assistance provided by the teacher can be classified into six scaffolding functions: (1) recruiting the learner's interest, (2) reducing degrees of freedom, (3) maintaining direction, (4) marking critical features, (5) controlling frustration, and (6) demonstrating. According to Van Lier (1996), these features are very similar to the features involved in the storytelling process. He identified a number of scaffolding features in the storytelling process. First, there are repeated occurrences of learning and the activity is structured so as to create a safe environment. Next, the emphasis is on mutual engagement and intersubjectivity of attention. Each learner is watched for opportunities to hand over parts of the action as soon as the learner shows signs of being ready. Finally, the actions of participants are jointly orchestrated or synchronized in rhythmic terms.

During the storytelling process, the teacher can provide adequate scaffolding by adjusting his or her speech, or giving extra-linguistic clues to link language to the learners' prior knowledge. These clues can serve as a stimulus for speaking, because

they encourage pupils to express their feelings after listening to the story. In addition, the storytelling environment is a warm and enjoyable one, wherein participants are encouraged to join the process whenever they feel comfortable or ready. In the storytelling process, for better rapport and interaction between the teller and listeners, the teller often structures the process to “provide a scaffold to assure that the child’s ineptitudes can be rescued or rectified by appropriate intervention and then removes the scaffold part by part as the reciprocal structure can stand on its own” (Bruner, 1983, p. 60). As the story proceeds, participants are jointly orchestrated in the rhythmic language of the story “so that the interaction flows in a natural way” (Van Lier, 1996, p. 195). These similar features of storytelling and scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development provide the justification for applying storytelling instruction in the language classroom.

### **Observing Classroom Interaction**

A comparison of recent observation instruments reveals that different aspects of classroom interaction have been considered as research foci. A variety of discourse analytical units have been adopted for comparative analysis. Among these, the number and length of speakers’ conversational turns have been commonly used as quantitative data in various studies (Day, 1984; Ellis, 1993; Stivers et al., 2009; Tsou, 2005; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). Conversational turns are defined by Chaudron (1988, p. 45) as “any speaker’s sequence of utterances bounded by another speaker’s speech.” Conversational turns are considered as an important indicator of language proficiency. A student who can better handle

turn taking gets more opportunities to interact in the target language and to practice target language skills. Therefore, as in many previous studies, the number of turns and their length were chosen as the quantitative data for this study. In the current study, the conversational turns between the teacher and students, as well as among students themselves, in the teacher-fronted discussions were calculated based on classroom observation data. Since students' voluntary turns (initiations of conversation) have a significant positive correlation with their L2 skills (Strong, 1983), learners' voluntary turns in class, and not teacher-selected ones, were chosen as the quantitative data in the study.

In sum, storytelling has been investigated by many studies for its language learning effect. Nevertheless, in addition to language skills, the current study connected the storytelling effect with scaffolding theory and investigated the effect on adult second language learning. Previous studies have only dealt with storytelling pedagogy in children or for language development. Therefore, the results of the current study can contribute greatly to the further understanding of storytelling effects through scaffolding interaction for adult second language learners.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This article explores the benefits of storytelling in encouraging richer participation in classroom interaction on the part of Taiwanese English learners. Given what we know about storytelling increasing interaction in both L1 and L2 leaning contexts, it seems that it might be able to motivate reticent Taiwanese students to participate orally in



their English classes. By examining the effects of storytelling on classroom discourse, this study hopes to better understand the effects of storytelling on foreign language learning in contexts where access to input is limited to the classroom.

In order to examine the potential of storytelling to increase the quantity and quality of interaction in the foreign language classroom, this study was designed to address the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Storytelling changes the nature of the classroom discourse and facilitates interaction.

Hypothesis 2: Storytelling instruction facilitates reading comprehension and story-recalls.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The participants in the study were from one university in mid-southern Taiwan. Seventy-eight freshmen from the department of Early Childhood Education were randomly assigned to two classes (thirty-eight and forty students, respectively). The two English language classes met on the same day of the week (one in the morning and one in the afternoon) and were taught by the same English instructor. Most of the students who participated in the study had studied English formally in school for six or seven years, with no more than five percent of the students having had overseas learning experiences. According to their reports on English learning, fewer than ten percent of these students had ever had conversations with foreigners in English. In addition, their English scores on a listening test administered by the university at the beginning of their freshmen

year indicated no significant differences between groups in terms of their English listening ability.

In this study, the students' English abilities and class interaction were examined. To make sure that the groups were comparable, a preliminary listening and reading comprehension test which was similar to the paper-based TOEFL test was also administered. The results of these preliminary tests (Table 1) indicate that there was no significant difference between groups in terms of their English ability upon entering the program, as measured by the listening test ( $t(76) = -0.73, p > .05$ ) and the reading comprehension pre-test ( $t(76) = -1.89, p > .05$ ).

**Table 1**  
**Results of the Tests Between Groups**

Group	<i>N</i>	Listening <i>M(SD)</i>	Reading pre-test <i>M(SD)</i>	Reading post-test <i>M(SD)</i>
Storytelling	38	50.05(10.86)	35.68(6.35)	40.81(7.21)
Control	40	51.78(10.35)	37.05(5.81)	38.57(7.62)

*Note.* The effect size for the reading test is Cohen's  $d = 0.77$ .

In preparing to conduct this study, the English instructor worked closely with the researcher to organize materials and to design activities for the participating English language classes in order to make sure that students in different classes were receiving comparable amounts of English instruction, regardless of the specific treatments used.

Finally, one research assistant was present in each class to record and observe the class interaction. The observer, the researcher

and the instructor were also responsible for the coding of the classroom interaction sampled in the two classrooms.

### **Instruments**

The reading comprehension test was administered before and after the treatment to both classes to compare any possible changes between the groups. The reading test designed for the current study was a paper-based TOEFL-like reading comprehension test, i.e., after reading a short passage students had to answer multiple-choice questions. There were fifty items in the reading test, and the discourse genres of these reading passages were both story and expository.

In addition to reading comprehension scores, the researcher also collected students' story-recalls. The recall writing was administered after each story presentation in class for the purpose of comparison between groups. Forty minutes were allotted for writing each story-recall. The recalls would then be evaluated according to the elements of the story (setting, theme, plot episodes, resolution, and sequential order) and the number of words in each recall. As indicated in Figure 1, the elements in the scoring sheet for each story were different due to the different content of the stories. One point was assigned to each of the items recalled. The scoring sheet of the story "*After the Rain*" was presented in Figure 1 as an example. The full score for each story was adjusted to 100 for the purpose of comparison. Two English teachers who were blind to the study design were hired and trained to grade the story structure for all the participants in this study. The inter-rater reliability for these two raters was 0.90.

<i>Story: After the Rain</i>		
Setting	Time	Long, long ago
	Characters	Mkunga bullock village chieftain
Theme	Mkunga was the god of thunder. Mkunga didn't bring rain to the villagers for a long time.	
Plot episodes	<p>The village chieftain taught people how to prepare.</p> <p>The villagers shouted together, "Mkunga, bring us rain, please."</p> <p>Finally, Mkunga came with his bullock.</p> <p>Mkunga made a lot of rain for the villagers, and all people were very happy.</p> <p>Mkunga wanted to make the villagers happier, so he made more rain.</p> <p>It rained for many days. Fields were flooded and huts were soaked.</p> <p>The villagers shouted together, "Mkunga, it's enough."</p> <p>Mkunga and his bullock stopped and walked away.</p> <p>Mkunga dropped his robe.</p>	
Resolution	Sometimes people can see the hem of Mkunga's robe in the sky, after the rain.	
Sequence		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mkunga was the god of thunder.</li> <li>2. Mkunga didn't bring rain to the villagers for a long time.</li> <li>3. The village chieftain taught people how to prepare.</li> <li>4. The villagers shouted together.</li> <li>5. Finally, Mkunga came with his bullock.</li> <li>6. Mkunga made a lot of rain to the villagers, and all people were very happy.</li> <li>7. Mkunga wanted to make the villagers happier, so he made more rain.</li> <li>8. It rained for many days. Fields were flooded and huts were soaked.</li> <li>9. The villagers shouted together.</li> <li>10. Mkunga and his bullock stopped and walked away.</li> <li>11. Mkunga dropped his robe.</li> <li>12. Sometimes people can see the hem of Mkunga's robe in the sky, after the rain.</li> </ol>		
Total		

**Introduction:** One point was assigned for recalling one of the listed items. The elements in the scoring sheet for each story were different due to the different content of the stories. The full score for each story was adjusted to 100 for the purpose of comparison.

**Figure 1**  
**A Sample of the Scoring Sheet for Story Recalls**

## **Treatments**

Six stories were used during the experimental period (six weeks). These six stories were all folktales coming from the following two books: *Tales of the Shimmering Sky* and *The Tree that Reached the Sky*. These six stories were similar in language difficulty and length, with an average of 815 words. In addition, they all had well-developed story structures with delineated characters, definite settings, clear themes, and resolutions. The titles of these six stories were: *After the Rain*, *The Division of Day and Night*, *The Shepherd Who Understood the Language of Animals*, *The Boastful Star*, *Three Wishes*, and *The Whirling Wind*.

In the control group, regular English reading instruction was implemented using the following instructional sequence: (1) pre-teach the vocabulary and language structures used in the story; (2) story reading with the enlarged version of the storybook while integrating language instruction (grammar, vocabulary, story structure, and writing tips); and (3) check students' comprehension and revisit unclear parts of the reading. In contrast, in the storytelling group, the instructor introduced the topic, activated the necessary background knowledge, and asked the students to predict the story content and create story expectations collaboratively. During the storytelling time, the teacher encouraged student participation, such as giving personal feelings or opinions to maintain two-way communication.

For both groups, the instructor spent the first 50 minutes presenting the story. After a ten-minute break, students wrote their story-recalls for approximately 40 minutes. Finally, the instructor used the last 50 minutes to conduct language practice activities (such as games or worksheets) related to the story in the control group, and

story retelling activities in the storytelling group. Generally, the differences between the two groups existed in the first and last parts of the treatment. The second (writing recall) part of the class was similar. A detailed comparison of the classroom procedures between groups is presented in Table 2.

During the treatment period, one research assistant was present in each class to perform non-participant observations and to record the number, words and content of student utterances. Techniques such as field-note-taking and audiotape-recording were also used during the course of observations in all classroom settings. All audiotapes were transcribed. Finally, an open-ended interview with the instructor was conducted to gather her observations regarding the two classes.

**Table 2**  
**Classroom Procedures Between Groups**

Control group	Storytelling group
1. Story reading (50 minutes)	1. Storytelling (50 minutes)
● Pre-teach vocabulary and structures	● Introduce the topic, activate background knowledge about the topic
● Read the story together with students and provide teaching for unfamiliar words or sentence structures	● Require students to predict the story content
● Comprehension checks and revisits to the unclear parts of the story	● Create story expectations collaboratively
	● Encourage student participation to maintain two-way communication
2. 10-minute break	2. 10-minute break
3. Writing story-recalls (50 minutes)	3. Writing story-recalls (50 minutes)
4. Activities for four skill practice (50 minutes)	4. Story retelling activities (group, pair, individual) (50 minutes)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the following section, the two hypotheses will be examined using both quantitative and qualitative data.

### **Frequency and Length of Student Classroom Interaction**

As mentioned earlier, the quantity of students' classroom interaction was measured by the number of voluntary turns in class as recorded by the classroom observer. When the researcher divided the total voluntary interaction turns by the number of class sessions, the students in the storytelling group on average participated 34.54 turns per class. Although there were repeated turns coming from the same individuals, at least 10 students contributed participating turns in each class. Using the same calculation, the students in the control group had only 8.38 turns per class. When dividing turns per class by the number of students, the reader can see that in the storytelling group, each student on average participated at least once per class ( $M = 1.14$ ,  $SD = 2.11$ ); however, students in the control group on average only participated 0.29 turns per class ( $M = 0.28$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) (Table 3). On these measures of interaction, the results of the  $t$ -test indicated a significant difference between groups ( $t(76) = 2.06$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In addition to the number of voluntary turns, the length of each turn (words per turn, w/t) was also examined. Since the teacher required the students to use English as much as they could in their interactions, most of their turns were in English. Chinese words were thus ignored in the counts and only the number of English words was compared. In the case of length per turn, students in both groups had almost equal turn lengths (storytelling: 4.53 vs. control: 4.38), and the difference

did not reach significance ( $t(76) = 0.08, p > .05$ ). In sum, the students in the storytelling group participated significantly more often than the students in the control group, but the length of each turn was, on the average, about equal.

Lastly, using the classroom recordings, the research assistant was able to verify the number of turns and words per turn, and measure the average wait time for each turn. According to the measurement, students in the control group on average had a longer wait time per turn (5.2 seconds) than the students in the storytelling group (2.1 seconds). The results of the  $t$ -test show that this is significant at the  $p < .05$  level. These results can provide additional support for the difference in participating behaviors between groups.

**Table 3**  
**Results of Classroom Interaction Between Groups**

Group	<i>N</i>	Interaction turns <i>M(SD)</i>	Words per turn <i>M(SD)</i>
Storytelling	38	1.14(2.11)	4.53(3.20)
Control	40	0.28(0.78)	4.38(1.66)

*Note.* a. The effect size for interaction turns is Cohen's  $d = 0.55$ .

b. The effect size for words per turn is Cohen's  $d = 0.06$ .

### Results of the Reading Test

The pre- and post-test scores on the reading test showed that there were significant differences between the two groups in the post-test. As illustrated in Table 1, before the treatment, the scores of the two groups were not significantly different ( $t(76) = -1.89, p > .05$ ), but after the treatment, students in the storytelling group significantly outperformed the students in the control group in the reading post-test



( $t(76) = 2.49, p < .05$ ). The effect size of this statistical test is Cohen's  $d = 0.77$ , indicating a large treatment effect. It thus seems that storytelling instruction did lead to a significant improvement in reading comprehension, as measured by this test.

### **Results of the Story-Recall Writings**

As the measurement of interaction turns in this study, the scores for story-recalls were the average of the six stories taught during the experimental period. The results are presented in Table 4. With regard to story structure, the students in the storytelling group consistently outperformed the students in the control group. Specifically, the differences between groups in story structure ( $t(76) = -11.20, p < .00$ ) and the number of words ( $t(76) = -2.24, p < .03$ ) were statistically significant. These results suggest that students in the storytelling group acquired the English story structure better and developed the ability to write more in English.

When the content of the recall writings between groups was compared, more detailed descriptions of the characters and settings were produced by the storytelling group. More importantly, personal comments and criticisms about the story content were also present in the recalls. In contrast, the recalls from the control group were mainly about the events in the stories, and they seldom provided personal opinions or remarks about the content. This difference might also have contributed to the longer recalls of the storytelling group. Furthermore, according to Kalmbach (1986), recalls not only reveal the point(s) students see in the story but also the way they organized the elements of a story. The additional details and personal comments

indicated that the students in the storytelling group perceived more and had a higher level of comprehension.

**Table 4**  
**Results of Story-Recall Between Groups**

Group	<i>N</i>	Structure <i>M(SD)</i>	Words <i>M(SD)</i>
Storytelling	38	9.18(1.45)	79.10(4.44)
Control	40	8.64(1.53)	69.62(8.40)

*Note.* a. The effect size for number of words is Cohen's  $d = 0.36$ .

b. The effect size for story structure is Cohen's  $d = 1.40$ .

### **Comparison of Interaction in the Two Classes**

Interaction in the storytelling group was different from the interaction in the control group. The following excerpts taking from the second storytelling (*The Division of Day and Night*) demonstrate the differences between these two types of interaction. This story was about how daytime and nighttime animals finally agreed to divide each day in equal portions so that the sun ruled the sky half of each day and the night reigned the other half. These two excerpts are representative of the interaction in the control and experimental groups. The reason for using the input is because with the experience with the first story, students in both groups could be comfortable and be more familiar with the class routines.

Superficially, both excerpts had the same IRF (initiation, response, feedback) teaching cycle, but the teacher's moves in the storytelling interaction served different functions. In storytelling interaction, the IRF sequence broke more frequently to continue building on earlier responses and to insert the instructor's scaffolding

moves. When there were more responses coming from the students, more interruptions occurred and the IRF circle was often broken. Consequently, the teacher simply did not have much time or opportunity to provide feedback. In the story-reading interaction, however, students were more reserved in responding, as they often were in all classrooms. The teacher was thus forced to initiate turns and reply to students' short responses to maintain the interaction.

Based on the classification of Wood et al. (1976), the scaffolding moves of the classroom interaction were categorized and counted. In the flowing two excerpts, the reader can see that during the same amount of class time, the teacher used more scaffolding moves (13 times, six different types) in the storytelling interaction, and while there was some scaffolding in the control group, there was significantly less (seven times, four different types). Although IRF cycle existed in both classes, the pattern broke easily in the storytelling class. There were a series of student contributions in Excerpt 1 (Lines 9-10, 22-24, 36-38). Sometimes it was an IRI (Lines 19-27) cycle and there was very little evaluative feedback from the teacher. Since students also initiated turns, there was also an Initiate-Response-Maintain-Initiate cycle (Lines 34-38).

Although the teacher was trained to elicit student responses and invite participation, from the excerpts the reader can see that her efforts were not as successful in the story-reading group. In order to invite student responses, very often the question needed to be reformulated. Even with such efforts, the teacher often could only elicit one-word responses or "yes/no" answers (Excerpt 2, Lines 10-12, 20-21). Sometimes the teacher had to abandon the question and

continue the reading to avoid embarrassment or frustration due to a lack of responses (Excerpt 2, Lines 33-34, 35-41).

#### Excerpt 1. Storytelling Interaction

(tran. = translation, T = teacher, L = learner, LL = several learners, *italic* = scaffolding move)

1. T (**Initiate, Recruit**): The story is about the division of day and
2. night. Is the division of day and night clear to us? What happens
3. when there is
4. a division?
5. L1: (**Respond**) Different things happen at day day ... at different
6. times?
7. T (**Feedback, Reduce degree of freedom**): Yes, different things
8. happen and people usually do different things at day and night,
9. right? What
10. kind of different things do people do during daytime and
11. nighttime?
12. L2: (**Respond**) Study at day and sleep at night.
13. L3: (**Respond**) I don't believe you. Teacher, he sleeps at day too.
14. LL: (Students laugh and talk at the same time.)
15. T (**Feedback, Maintain direction**): So Jack sleeps during the
16. day
17. time also. He cannot tell the division between the day and night.
18. LL (**Respond**): Yeah.
19. T (**Initiate, Mark critical feature**): Okay ... so who can tell me
20. the
21. meaning of the word "division?"
22. L2: (**Respond**) "break?"

18. T (**Feedback, Demonstrate**): Right. Like there is a clear distinction between
19. day and night. (**Initiate, Maintain direction**): Well, in fact, this story tells us
20. that in the old times, there used to be only daytime or only nighttime in one
21. day.
22. LL (**Respond**): Really? So strange?
23. L3 (**Initiate**): People can work longer in their field.
24. L4 (**Initiate**): People can sleep all day.
25. T (**Maintain direction**): Well, in fact, in this story, there were no people, only
26. animals.
27. LL (**Initiate**): Animals? What animals?
28. T (**Respond**): I know that sounds a bit odd. (**Initiate**) Where were people?
29. L5 (**Respond**): Maybe people did not exist at the time. Animals rul
30. rull uh ... cha cha uh controlled the world.
31. T (**Control frustration & demonstrate**): You want to say that animals ruled
32. the world? The animals were in charge of making day and night?
33. L6 (**Respond**): Yes. Animals were in charge.
34. T (**Initiate, Demonstrate, Maintain direction**): Yes. Animals were in charge
35. of making day and night.
36. L7 (**Respond**): The animals were in charge of making day and night.

37. L8 (**Maintain**): What animals were in charge of making day and night?
38. L9 (**Initiate**): Monkeys. They are smart.
39. LL: (Many students respond to what animals were in charge.)
40. T (**Maintain direction & demonstrate**): So many possibilities. Well, let's see
41. what animals were in charge of making day and night. Long, long ago, when
42. the earth was new, the animals were in charge of making day and night ....

#### Excerpt 2. Story-Reading Interaction

1. T (**Initiate**): Let's look at the cover. (**Recruit**) What's the title of the
2. story?
3. LL (**Respond**): The division of day and night.
4. T (**Feedback**): Good.
5. T (**Initiate, Marking critical features**): Do you know the meaning of the
6. word "division?"
7. LL (**Respond**): 分隔 (tran.: break)
8. T (**Feedback**): Good. Something that divides daytime and
9. nighttime.
10. T (**Initiate**): What are the differences between daytime and nighttime? (A few
11. seconds later) Do you think people do different things during daytime and
12. nighttime?

13. LL (**Respond**): Yes.
14. T (**Feedback**): Exactly. So the story today is about the division of day and night.
15. (Reading the story) At the beginning of time, there was only ... and the animals
16. were in charge of making day and night.
17. T (**Initiate**): Animals were in charge of making day and night. Can you guess
18. why animals were in charge at the time?
19. LL : (silent)
20. T (**Reinitiate, Controlling frustration**): I mean, why were animals in charge and
21. not human beings? Do you think humans existed at that time?
22. L1 (**Respond**): Maybe.
23. T (**Feedback, Demonstrate**): Maybe, maybe not. Good. It is possible that human
24. beings did not exist at the time, so the animals were in charge of making day and
25. night. (**Initiate**) What kind of animals were in charge?
26. LL: (Silent)
27. T (**Reinitiate, Controlling frustration**): What kind of animals do you think were
28. in charge of making day and night?
29. L2 (**Respond**): Dinosaurs
30. LL: (Laugh)
31. T (**Feedback**): Dinosaurs? Maybe. What else?
32. LL: (Silent)

33. T (**Reinitiate, Controlling frustration**): What animals were in charge of making
34. day and night? Can you take a guess? (After a few seconds) Well, let's read the story and find out.
35. T (**Initiate, Mark critical features**): (After a short reading) Interesting. So there
36. were daytime animals and nighttime animals. Can you give me an example
37. of a daytime animal?
38. LL: (Silent)
39. T (**Maintain**): What about nighttime animals?
40. LL: (silent)
41. T (**Initiate**): No? OK! Why don't we continue reading the story and find out?

After analyzing the above two excerpts, the researcher found that despite the teacher's efforts in providing scaffolding moves, students' decisions whether or not to participate decided the type of classroom interaction. As indicated by Bruner (1983), in storytelling the teller often structures the process to provide a scaffold to ensure that the listeners' ineptitudes can be rescued or rectified by appropriate intervention. With the teacher's scaffolds, student participation became easier, and the more students that participated, the more scaffolding moves the teacher could provide to promote their language learning. As a result, the teacher did not need to restructure or reformulate her questions into yes-no ones to elicit student responses as she did with the control group, and thus "the interaction flows in a natural way" (Van Lier, 1996, p. 195).



One thing needs to be mentioned is the limitation of the recording technique. One might notice that there were many overlapping turns in the storytelling group, since many students responded at the same time on many occasions. The actual number of turns might in fact be higher if all the overlapping turns could be observed and recorded.

### **Perspectives from the Teacher**

In addition to the above test results and the comparisons of the excerpts from the classes, support for the hypotheses could also be found from the reactions of the teacher. In the open-ended teacher interview, the English teacher mentioned that the nature of storytelling affected the classroom interaction and considerably changed the classroom atmosphere and students' motivation to participate. In order to understand whether the instructor was in any way biased toward one way of teaching, which might influence the results of the study, the interview questions asked her to compare her teaching in the different classrooms. In general, she mentioned that although she liked storytelling and had learned the techniques needed to carry it out, she was more confident in teaching story reading in the control group, and enjoyed this teaching very much. When asked to compare the two groups, she was able to clearly describe the differences.

Specifically, the teacher mentioned that the students in the storytelling group often repeated or chanted with the teacher during the storytelling process or mouthed words or sentences during their recall writings. The latter of these occurrences, an example of "private speech" from Vygotsky's perspective, indicates that the learners were

engaged in the process of learning (Hall, 2001). On the other hand, the students in the control group were not as ready to vocalize during class, and there was little evidence of engagement in private speech during their recall writings. The teacher believed that students in the storytelling group were more active, because the nature of storytelling involved interactions between the teller and the listeners.

Likewise, the teacher indicated that in writing recalls the students in the storytelling group usually wrote up to the last minute, but many students in the control group finished long before the allotted time was over. Without storytelling instruction, she further commented, the students in the control group could not achieve the same degree of interaction in spite of many attempts on the part of the teacher to encourage them. Without the listener-hearer involvement in the storytelling process, it is not easy to trigger voluntary student interaction. The teacher also added that students in Taiwan are very used to lectures and worksheets. Thus, the teacher believed that such difference might have also contributed to the longer recalls of the storytelling group.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study examined whether storytelling instruction can improve both the quantity and the quality of interaction in a teacher-centered English language classroom and facilitate learning. The findings indicate that storytelling instruction significantly increased the number, if not the length, of student turns. A closer examination of the type of interaction that occurred in the storytelling classroom shows that the teacher tended to use more open-ended questioning

techniques, maintained direction more often, and used less feedback that simply consisted of making a qualitative judgment on the content of student responses. Overall, the discourse in the storytelling class created more opportunities for scaffolding, and thus supported student interaction in the Zone of Proximal Development. With regard to language development, there were statistically demonstrable differences favoring the storytelling group in terms of comprehending reading material and employing story structures in writing.

The teacher thought that the two-way communication of storytelling naturally nurtured meaningful interactions between the teller and the listeners, and also motivated learners to participate orally in class. In this way, the art of storytelling smoothly transformed a written text into oral presentation and provided excellent examples to help language learners link these two forms of language. In addition, linking the oral and written forms of language probably helped students whose preparation had been largely based on the written word to participate more fully in oral interaction, and to make connections between the written and spoken language.

The positive influence of storytelling on this particular large, teacher-centered English language class in terms of increasing the amount of interaction, improving its quality, and encouraging increased language development, suggests that storytelling could be a fruitful technique to use in similar contexts. Perhaps the notion that not having enough access to oral language to be able to learn to communicate in that mode can be dispelled, and learners can greatly benefit by improving in English and other foreign languages.

In conclusion, the researcher would like to suggest that storytelling could be a persuasive vehicle for helping teachers

accustomed to a teacher-centered classroom to elicit more frequent and effective student oral participation. Research indicates that educational innovations are most likely to be accepted when they align with current teacher beliefs or when those beliefs can be slightly modified to accept them (Ambrose 2004; Errington 2004), although such modifications are slow, incremental, and tied to broader personal, social and historical contexts (Stephens, Gaffney, Weinzierl, Shelton, & Clark, 1993). As discussed above, the changes made in the implementation of the storytelling approach were not a dramatic departure from standard practice, but the resulting differences in classroom interaction were both qualitatively and quantitatively significant, and students showed marked improvements in other skills compared to the control group. Hence, the researcher concludes that storytelling is an approach that should be explored and promoted in the Taiwanese and similar contexts.

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## 說故事教學對成人英語學習之效益研究

### 摘要

本文欲探討說故事英語教學是否能夠增進成人英語的學習。78 位參與者被隨機分配於實驗及控制兩組教學長達一學期。研究者收集與比較參與者的閱讀理解度、故事覆述寫作以及課堂參與表現。研究結果支持本研究的假設，言名說故事教學可以改變課堂溝通之本質，顯示出以鷹架式協助互動的學習方式來提升課堂參與度、故事理解及故事覆述寫作等能力，說故事教學對於外語學習情境下的成人英語學習，有顯著的效益。

關鍵詞：說故事 鷹架式協助互動 課堂參與