

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the use of conversational storytelling techniques to develop narrative structure. Storytelling in conversations in the form of anecdotes and personal narratives are frequently heard in every day human interactions. Therefore it would be appropriate that the teaching of storytelling skills should feature in second language learning and teaching (Jones, 2001). In this chapter the description of the subjects, the procedure, the instruments used, data collection and the data analysis processes used, have been stated.

#### **Aims of the study and research questions**

The aim of this study is to investigate the type of narrative patterns preferred by students in the narrative structure of storytelling in conversation. This research would also study the strategies employed by the listeners in storytelling in conversation. Thus this research hopes to answer these following research questions:

- a. What narrative patterns are preferred by students in conversational storytelling?
- b. How do listeners respond in conversational storytelling?
- c. What conversational storytelling techniques are useful in helping to develop students spoken or listening skills?

## **Research Methodology**

This is an experimental research. Thus two groups, one experimental group, which was taught conversational storytelling techniques and one controlled group that was not exposed to this method was used in the study. The findings were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to answer the three research questions. A questionnaire and group interview was also carried out to triangulate the findings.

### **Procedure**

The objective of this study is to encourage students to tell stories in the target language. According to Willis and Willis (cited by Jones, 2001), language is “so vast and varied that we can never provide learners with a viable and comprehensive description of the language as a whole”. Jones advocates consciousness-raising activities to teach the English Language as a second language. In this study consciousness-raising language features were provided to the learners to encourage them to think about samples of language and to draw their own conclusions about how language works (Willis and Willis, cited by Jones, 2001). The lessons were solely carried out in the classroom.

The first lesson was a consciousness-raising lesson suggested by Jones (2001). During the lesson the outline of generic features of a frequently heard story type was given with a picture story and story transcript (cited by Jones, 2001). These were designed to raise learner awareness of some of the linguistic realizations of conversational storytelling. The objective of the lesson was to expose the students to techniques of making their story “tellable”. In the second lesson, students examined a “strange but true” newspaper article, “Man marries grandmother” (“The Star”, March 2004). Then the students

discussed how they might retell the story and at the same time evoke interest in their friends to hear the story. In the third lesson, the teacher told a story and discussed the five basic elements of a story, the introduction, beginning, story, ending and the moral of the story (Beare, 2000-2004, from the internet). Next the students arranged a text in correct sequence according to the structure given.

In the fourth lesson, students would answer some comprehension questions which would lead them to the “topics” that they could use in order to make ordinary things that happen in their lives into interesting narratives (Dubrovir, 1995). These “topics” or ordinary things could be turned into exciting adventures. In the final lesson, the students were given the generic features of conversational storytelling with examples of expressions for each feature (Bradwell, 2000-2004, from the internet). A sample discourse which features conversational storytelling strategies was given. Later, the students stated other examples of phrases that can be used in each element. A sample discourse which featured conversational storytelling strategies was also provided to the students.

The students were taught conversational storytelling techniques for approximately one month (400 minutes) by the researcher (Refer to Appendix A for lesson outlines). At the end of the experiment the students engaged in conversational storytelling in pairs or in groups. The students were given some time to prepare and practice in pairs or in groups before they recorded their “stories”. The recording was done in front of the researcher.

The aim of the research is to enable the students to develop the ability to tell stories naturally in every day circumstances thus the researcher did not at any time involve herself with the students’ narration. The students’ narrations were recorded using an audio-cassette recorder. Audio recording was preferred to video recording so that the

students would not be conscious of their appearances and because the main objective of the research is to investigate the verbal features of language use and not non-verbal elements of production. The narrations which were recorded on audio-cassette were later transcribed and analyzed (Refer to the representative transcriptions in Appendix B).

### **Subjects**

The population for this study consists of 42 Form One average (ability in the second language) students, based on their UPSR (Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah) result. They are between 12 to 13 years old. Out of the 42 students, 17% are Malay students, 19% are Indian students and 64% are Chinese students. The Malay students received their primary education in national schools while the Chinese and Indian students received their primary education in vernacular schools. All the students in this class were samples in this study.

The controlled group also consists of 42 students. These students were matched with the experimental students based on the PPSMI (Peperiksaan Penilaian Sains, Matematik dan Bahasa Inggeris) - English Language examination result. These students were not taught any conversational storytelling techniques. They were also given time as the experimental group to prepare their storytelling in conversation. After that, their storytelling in conversation was recorded and transcribed (Refer to the representative transcriptions in Appendix C).

### **School**

The school consists of approximately 1100 students from Remove to Form Five. The majority of students are Chinese students followed by Indian, Malay and Punjabi

students. Although the school is situated less than four kilometres from the nearest town (Lukut) or city (Port Dickson), most of the students' parents are not highly educated. Most of them are low income earners who work as contractors and farmers. Thus the English Language is not a common language in their homes.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected were in the form of transcriptions of conversational storytelling from the audio-recording and the group interview. The questionnaire was standardized open-ended questions. The findings from the questionnaire and the interview will be used to triangulate the data collected from the audio-recording.

#### ***Transcription convention used***

The samples were given the option of selecting their partners or groups, with whom they would like to tell their “stories”. The 17 narrations from the samples were transcribed using normal orthographic conventions. The following conventions were also used in the transcripts:

**Table 3.1: Conventions used in the transcription**

Conventions	Meaning
...	a short pause of about 1 second
(Pause)	for long pause
.	for sentence-final intonation
[~]	unintelligible
{ }	to enclose researchers remarks

### *Model of Narrative Structure*

The study of personal narratives was pioneered by Labov. Many researchers still base their finding on Labov's method of "recapitulating past experiences by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which actually occurred" (cited by Peterson and McCabe, 1983). Consequently, Labov's model of narrative structure has been modified by researchers to suit their research methodology. In this study Labov's modified model by Eggins and Slade (cited by Jones, 2001) was used to classify the narrative structures.

The generic features and examples of phrases in conversational storytelling are shown in the table below:

**Table 3.2: Generic features of conversational storytelling**

Features	Characteristics	Examples of phrases
1. Abstract (optional)	Opening, at the beginning,  Summarizes for listener what  the story is about.	I'll always remember the time...  You'll never guess what happened yesterday...
2. Orientation	Near beginning of story to tell the listener(s) about people involved,  time, place.	You know that secretary in out office, well, last week...
3. Remarkable Event	Temporally ordered actions, outlining a remarkable event which the narrator wants to share his reaction to.	Then you'll never guess what happened...  And then, suddenly...
4. Reaction	How the characters in the story or the	So I...

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	listener(s) react to the events related. Typical reactions include expressions of anger, fear, amusement etc	I couldn't believe my eyes!
5. Coda (optional)	Its function is to round off the story by building a bridge between the story world and moment of telling. It may focus on progress of one of the characters or the lasting effect of one of the incidents in the story.	So, there we are. And that was it, really.
6. Evaluation	Occurs throughout the story, to maintain interest and make the story worth telling.	It was funny. I felt humiliated.

(Bradwell, from the internet:

[http://www.developingteachers.com/plans/videolppf\\_sandra.htm](http://www.developingteachers.com/plans/videolppf_sandra.htm))

### ***Structural patterns of narratives***

Labov and Waletzky posit the “classic” pattern as a prototypical narrative structure. In this classic pattern, the events leading up to the high point or crisis are recapitulated in a well-ordered series. At the high point the action would be suspended and the high point is dwelled on. Then, the events which evolved the high point are successively related. The occurrence of an orientation section at the beginning or a coda at the end does not alter this basic pattern. There are other variants of this prototypical narrative structure which was developed by Peterson and McCabe (1983).

The second basic pattern is “ending-at-the-high-point” pattern. The other primitive patterns are “leap-frogging” pattern, simple “chronological” pattern, “impoverished”

pattern and “disoriented” pattern. Any narrative that could not be classified in any of these patterns is classified as miscellaneous. These structural patterns of narratives will be used to analyse the students’ narratives in this study. The seven structural patterns of narrative and their characteristics are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3.3: Structural Patterns of Narratives**

1. Classic pattern	The narrative builds up to a high point, evaluative dwells on it, and then resolves it.
2. Ending-at-the-high-point pattern	The narrative builds up to a high point and then ends, there is no resolution.
3. Leap-frogging pattern	The narrative jumps from one event to another within an integrated experience, leaving out major events that must be inferred by the listener.
4. Chronological pattern	The narrative is a simple description of successive events.
5. Impoverished pattern	The narrative consists of too few sentences for any high point pattern to be recognised, or the narrative extensively reiterates and evaluates only two events.
6. Disoriented pattern	The narrative is too confused or disoriented for the listener to understand.
7. Miscellaneous pattern	Any narrative that does not fit into one of the above categories is classified as miscellaneous.

(Peterson and McCabe, 1983, Page 37)

The findings of the generic features and the narrative patterns will be tabulated using bar graphs and the mean will be analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 11.0 to determine if there is any significant difference between the number of



generic features used by the experimental group and the controlled group in their narrative structure.

### ***Recipients Response to Storytelling***

Spoken language analysis usually focuses on what speakers do but those whose main role in the discourse is to listen to and support current speakers are often neglected. The role of listeners in conversational storytelling is a good context to conduct such analysis since the listeners in this field are not expected to remain passive and silent throughout the discourse (McCarthy, 1998). In oral narrative listeners act verbally and attend to the ongoing interaction, thus to neglect the listener and to focus only on the main speaker, according to Schegloff, would lead to a tendency to consider a discourse as “a single speaker’s, and a single mind’s, product” (cited by McCarthy, 2003).

In this study, the listeners’ response to storytelling will be analysed based on their responses which includes back-channel responses, sentence completions, requests and response stories (Duncan, cited by Coulthard, 1977). These features according to Sacks constitute complete turns (cited by Coulthard, 1977). Back-channel responses, sentence completions, requests and response stories are considered relevant to the study of “good listenership” since it covers a broad spectrum of behaviour present in the sample’s narratives. The listeners’ responses were categorised into these categories to enable the researcher to better assess their function in the storytelling in conversation. Due to unforeseen circumstances initial false starts, cut-offs and restarts which are only present in story openings have not been analysed since the interest of the researcher is on the overall responses of the listeners.

### ***Conversational Storytelling Techniques***

The central challenge for language teaching is to develop learners' communicative language ability through pedagogic intervention (Bygate, 2001). As such different kinds of learning activities may help to develop a learner's ability to use the language. In teaching the conversational storytelling techniques, first some of the main features of conversational storytelling will be identified. Since in conversational storytelling there would normally be a teller and one or many listeners, two types of features – one for the teller and the other for the listeners would be identified. Model conversational storytelling transcripts would be given to enable the students to observe the use of such features in context. Using the list of features and the model transcripts, the students will be asked to practise and engage in conversational storytelling.

### **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire was administered to all the subjects. The questionnaire consists of 18 questions (Appendix 4). The categories of questions are listed below:

**Table 3.4: Classification of questions**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Questions</b>
1. Behaviour/Experience	6,7,8
2. Opinion/Values	11,12,13,14
3. Feelings	14,17,18
4. Knowledge	9,10,15,16
5. Demographics/Background	1,2,3,4,5

(Fraenkel and Wallen, 1996)

The questionnaire was completed by the samples in their classroom. The researcher administered the questionnaire and translated the questions into Bahasa Melayu whenever appropriate to enable the students to better understand the questions.

### **Interview**

Interview was employed to get a better perspective regarding the research topic. The type of interview conducted in this study was the standardized open-ended interview. Due to time constraint only two groups of students were selected for the interview. The two groups were selected at random. Face-to-face interview was carried out in an informal manner with occasional use of Bahasa Melayu to enable the students to better understand the questions. Students were encouraged to use Bahasa Melayu if they were more comfortable with the language rather than the target Language. The students did not know the questions prior to the interview. The interview was completed in thirty minutes. Later the audio-taped interview was transcribed after appropriate translation into the English Language was done for further analysis.