

Chapter 5

Conclusion, Implications and Suggestions for further study

This chapter consists of summaries of findings regarding this study, discussions on the implications of the findings and suggestions for further study.

Summary of findings and conclusions

This study attempts to answer the two research questions, namely, what narrative patterns are preferred by students in conversational storytelling in relation to the generic elements in the narrative structure and the listeners' responses in the narratives.

Patterns in narrative structure

This study showed that there is a particular pattern in the narrative structure of the students' oral narrative. Overall the students' narratives have abstract, orientation, remarkable event, reaction and coda, the modified generic features of Labov's narrative model by Eggins and Slate. Resolution is also present in the students' narrative structure. Not all the students could use all the generic features of a narrative structure in a storytelling, but no single story can be expected to feature all but a small handful of the features. If too much emphasis is placed on the generic features than there would not be a conversational storytelling, it would be only story telling.

Basically, the students "noticed" the narrative structure in conversational storytelling and they could employ some of the generic features in their narrative patterns. By providing

evaluations and coda, the students have shown that they have the “mean-making” capability, which is important in second language acquisition. The common narrative pattern was the classic pattern, followed by leap-frogging pattern, chronological pattern, impoverished pattern, ending-at-the-high-point pattern and disoriented pattern. The miscellaneous narratives reflect little system in the narratives thus little can be said about these narratives except that the students who produced such narratives need more guidance in the use of conversational storytelling techniques. The use of the classic pattern, the basic pattern (ending-at-the-high-point), the primitive pattern (leap-frogging, impoverished and disoriented patterns) and the chronological pattern shows that the students employed different narrative patterns in their storytelling.

Language competency and the listeners too could play an important role in “helping” the narrators to use better narrative patterns. Maybe as the students get older and they are more competent in the second language they would be able to use better storytelling in conversation techniques. This study has demonstrated that the students as second language learners are aware of the existence of the generic features which are crucial in oral narrative and the use of these features also influences the narrative patterns of narratives.

Story recipients’ responses

With regards to the listeners’ responses, there were three types of responses: back-channel noises, requests and response stories but there were no sentence completions in the narratives. The use of back-channel responses in the storytelling showed that listeners attend to the interactional, relational aspects of the talk and to the transactional and propositional content. By using such feature the students seem to know the need “to keep

the channel open". The use of back-channel noises too show that the listeners are interested in the story and they encouraged the teller to continue with their story. In this study, the use of back-channel noises do not project other affective functions like sarcasm, surprise or disgust, since in the audio-recording the tone used was a softer voice which does not appear to have any interfering effect on the teller. Thus the use of back-channel noises increases the participation level of the listeners and improves the relation with the teller. By producing back-channel noises the listeners acknowledged that a story has been told by responding to it.

In this study the tellers and the listeners talk back and forth to one another, acknowledging, clarifying, seek information in a continuous exchange. Therefore, the interaction has the "feel" of a conversation. By providing occasional short answers ("uh huh") or request for information the listeners assure the tellers that the message is getting through and that it is alright for the teller to continue. Questions have informative content. The listeners indicated that they were listening to what was told and what it was about by eliciting relevant information regarding the story being told.

In this study, there are not many successive stories. The response stories are topically related and they are spurred in the course of the storytelling.

Teaching of conversational storytelling

In this study, the teaching of conversational storytelling using consciousness-raising activities has been successful in exposing the students to the techniques involved in conversational storytelling. In teaching the second language using consciousness-raising activities made the students notice or conscious of particular language features and this

had enabled them to take the risk in engaging in conversational storytelling with their friends. By taking the students through the steps of building the context, modelling and constructing text the students were able to independently producing their own texts (conversational storytelling).

The primary goal of teaching conversational storytelling techniques to the students was to raise the consciousness of the genre so that by examining the structure of storytelling in conversation, the students would yield greater awareness of the techniques involved in conversational storytelling. The use of generic features in their storytelling while attending to their roles as tellers and listeners, the students have shown that they have noticed and are aware of what constitutes a good storytelling in conversation. . Thus, by modelling the text structure as well as providing a guide for students, the students were able to produce similar text independently.

Implications of the study

It is hoped that the findings of this study would provide teachers with a better understanding about the use of conversational storytelling in teaching the speaking and listening skills to second language learners. The teaching of storytelling skills are not new in second language conversation courses but this field is still new in the teaching of the English Language in national schools in Malaysia. Too much emphasis on other skills especially reading and writing skills could be one of the contributing factors in the decline of the teaching of spoken language and listening skills. Moreover, since the students are more inclined towards obtaining high scores in the English papers in the national examinations it is difficult to teach these skills since the outcome or the product is not visible as in written exercises. Students are always eager to have something to read

for their examination rather than acquire the English Language which would be a life-long asset throughout their lives.

This research was undertaken by the researcher to get a better perspective on the use of conversational storytelling in teaching the students the speaking and listening skills. Perhaps with this knowledge, English Language teachers would be better able to plan more effective lessons to raise the students' consciousness in acquiring appropriate linguistic strategies to enable them to communicate effectively in every day natural situation.

Narrating stories are therapeutic. During storytelling, meaning is shared by telling someone one's personal experiences. Thus if teachers provide or model a narrative structure and the language features, students would be able to use these techniques whenever they have the opportunity. Moreover the narrative structure, with appropriate grammatical changes, would be useful in writing narratives. Swan (cited by Jones, 2001) noted that each learner brings his or her "vast private store of knowledge, opinions and experience" and these would be the most powerful resources at the teachers' disposal. Thus when the learners communicate their knowledge, their opinions and experiences to others, there are a strong potential for genuinely rich and productive language practice. Thus, one way of tapping this potential is by training learners in the skills of storytelling and then encouraging them to apply these skills to stories of their own life experiences.

This study was carried out with average ability students, maybe the same study can be replicated with more able students or students from different age groups to get a better understanding regarding the standard narrative structure and/or narrative patterns for certain age group students. The findings of such study would enable teachers teaching

English to base their teachings on the results when they are teaching certain age groups of students. The findings could also be useful to curriculum planners in the Education Ministry. The findings could accommodate existing curriculum specifications regarding the narrative structure and narrative patterns as well as the appropriate linguistic strategies employed by different age groups of students. Thus such curriculum specifications would portray a more realistic curriculum which would be more appropriate to the ability of the students at each level. This would have an impact on the teaching and learning as the teachers would be guided by a curriculum which is based on a realistic situation and the teachers would be able to plan lessons which are more relevant and more challenging to the students.

Finally it is hoped that this study would spur other teacher researchers to experiment on the vast types of teaching methods available in teaching the spoken language and listening skills, to second language learners since the language skills learnt would be a life-long asset once the examinations are over.

Suggestions for further studies

Further research in conversational storytelling could be undertaken to compare the findings with proficient and less able students. The findings can be contrasted with the findings of this present study so that insights can be drawn regarding the differences that may be found. This study concentrated only on verbal storytelling techniques employed by the samples. Due to constraints which could not be overcome, paralinguistic features used by the students were not recorded, thus further study that emphasizes on these features would give a holistic view regarding conversational storytelling.

A written narrative might differ from a spoken narrative. In writing narratives error corrections are available but in spoken language utterances cannot be corrected once they have been uttered. Thus a comparative study could be undertaken to find the implications of such findings. Such findings would give educators a better perspective by highlighting the differences between these two skills to enable them to better equip the students in both these skills.