

Storytelling as a Teaching Method in ESL Classrooms

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Abstract:

Until now, a lot of work has been done to explore methods for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). Considering the nature of human beings as storytellers, teachers can use storytelling as a teaching method in English classrooms. The aim with this study is to discuss the storytelling teaching method adopted in ESL Classroom. The study is based on class observations on three Internet lessons, namely lessons of English vocabulary, grammar and spoken English. Videos on the Internet are watched and the narrative parts in these lessons are recorded. Previous studies related to this subject is on narration in the field of rhetoric and on methods for second language teaching and learning. Some earlier studies concern about children's education and military training. The main focus of present study is to analyze stories told by the teacher in the three classes—what they consist of, what effects they would achieve, and how many types of stories are used. In a classroom setting, the teacher is the narrator, students are the audience. Five types of stories are used: stories that are made up by the teacher, cultural backgrounds, stories told with physical responses, personal experiences and everyday life experiences. Anyway, narration is helpful in making the teacher and students closer.

Hopefully with the help of present study on the selected lessons, one can find out how teachers use narration in general classroom settings.

Key words: narration, storytelling, ESL, teaching method, Internet lessons

1 Introduction

Telling stories or narrating is human being's nature. Traditionally, human beings are regarded as reasoning animals. When Fisher (1984) proposed an assumption that humans are also rhetorical beings, he did not disregard the traditional point of view, but believed that reasoning does not necessarily need to be in the form of argumentative prose or in clear-cut inferential or implicative structures. It can be in all kinds of symbolic action: both non-discursive and discursive (Fisher, 1984: 1). Narration is a tool used by human beings to express their ideas, persuade others to accept their ideas and to understand the world. In ancient times, people painted pictures on walls or on rocks to deliver information or express their adoration toward gods or goddesses. Nowadays, one can find various stories in literary works, advertisements, speeches and many other discourses.

The present study focuses on speeches made by teachers in classroom settings. To use narration as a tool to educate others is nothing new. In ancient China where small countries competed severely with each other, emperors of those countries were searching for ways to gain power and strength. Wise men and canvassers recorded what happened in the past that brought about the ruin or prosperity of a country. Or they would use allegories to persuade their emperors to be careful about their conducts. In Western countries, stories in the Bible are used to influence people's thought and educate Christians. Stories in Aesop's Fables teach children and adults alike about life. Narration has shed light on education of many fields. For example, researchers from universities, government, and corporate research organizations, with backgrounds in military training, education, law, aviation, and business have figured out four main types of storytelling techniques used for teaching (Andrews et al. 2009). Different types of stories are used to persuade the audience (in this case, students) and educate them. One the other hand, through narrating students can express their thoughts, sort out what they have already obtained, and explore new knowledge.

The concept of learning is often considered to be different from acquisition. Acquisition is a natural process. A child would begin the process of first language acquisition at very early age. He would get enough exposure from his living environment by listening consciously or unconsciously to what people say around him.

His tutors can be his parents, nurse, adults he communicates with, or children he plays with. What he has heard would be the input, and he would imitate and use them repeatedly to express his own feelings or wishes.

Learning process is deferent from acquisition. Children or adults are placed in classroom settings, following teachers' instructions. The teacher should consider about many aspects that would affect the process of students' learning a second language , for example, teaching environment, teaching method and materials, students' mentality, their ages and gender and so on. Teaching method is an important factor influencing the effectiveness of learning and teaching. Many researchers have proposed *natural* teaching method which is in accordance with the process of acquiring SL. Some brought up bottom-up and top-down teaching methods. On the top level, it is mainly the acquired system that works, while on the bottom level, the learned system. According to Krashen's monitor hypothesis, the acquired system is associated with ones spontaneous use of language, and the learned system acts as a monitor, polishing and making some changes to what is produced in the acquired one. (Lightbown and Spada, 2006: 37) In the "top-down" model, a teaching method of incidental focus on form can be applied. In this model, the teacher do not prepare what are going to teach in the class but spontaneously pointed at learner's output produced in the top level. The "bottom-up" model can be complementary to a "top-down" model. The teacher, according to what has been known about learner in previous class, makes his plan for next class. This model can solve the problem about testing the effectiveness of "incidental focus on form" and measure gains in leaner's ability. Meanwhile, it makes large-scale class effective and the teacher can focus on a point and discuss it in depth. No matter what method teachers adopt, the purpose is to improve the effectiveness of teaching and factors on the part of students should be taken into account.

1.1 Aim

The aim of the present investigation is to find out how the teacher uses storytelling as a teaching method in classes. Furthermore, the possible reasons of adopting such method are analyzed. What kinds of stories does the teacher prefer to tell in classes? Why does he use them? Does the teacher use this method more frequently at one type of class than

at another? With the help of the study on the selected lessons, one can find out how teachers use narration in general classroom settings.

1.2 Material

The primary material consists of three observations of Internet classes. One is a class teaching English vocabulary. One is teaching oral English. The last one is teaching English grammar. English are used in the whole teaching process. Students of these classes are ESL learners. They listen to the classes through the Internet instead of being at present.

1.2.1 Internet Classroom

The three classes studied on are taken from an Internet program called James ESL Free English Lessons. In the past, if students wanted to learn something, they had to go to school, sit with other students in a classroom, and participate in the lesson by face-to-face listening to the teacher. With the appearance of computers and popularity of the Internet, there are much more ways for students to get knowledge. Many websites and education programs provide students with free access to different kinds of lessons. Students can either read through important points of a lesson or watch a video lesson.

James ESL Free English Lessons is one of such programs. People who want to learn English can go to website like YouTube to watch James's English video lessons for free. The advantages of this kind of lessons are: firstly, students do not need to pay for the lessons, which is an important factor that popularizes the programs. Secondly, anyone can learn English at anytime. One doesn't have to be a student to learn English, and one can study whenever he/she is free or would like to. Any lesson in James's classroom does not last more than 20 minutes. As to someone who has to work and does not have much free time, it won't take long for him/her to learn something. Besides, students can choose what to learn. They can skip what they have been familiar with. If they did not hear some point clearly, they can turn back and replay that part. The disadvantage is that students can not interact with the teacher directly. If students do not understand some point, they can not ask the teacher at present. Although some students would leave

messages in commentary column, it's still not easy for the teacher to get direct feedbacks, thus he can not efficiently adjust teaching contents and methods. Thus it is important for the teacher to choose an appropriate teaching method.

1.2.2 Participants

James is the teacher of the English video lessons. As a Canadian from Toronto, James speaks English as his native language. He spent 12 years teaching in various capacities, including teaching martial arts to kids and developing a curriculum that was geared specifically to enhance their development.

His previous experience of many years of working for children's education made him quite experienced. In his Internet program, there are lessons for English grammar, vocabulary, idioms and many other perspectives. His belief in teaching is that one cannot put information into others' heads. A teacher should find a way to show students something, and they can use their own intelligence to learn. (Engvid, 2011/5/18)

Students of the Internet lessons are of different ages. They can be students at schools or those who have been working in companies or other fields. Anyone who wants to learn English as a second language can take this course. The basic requirement is that one can roughly understand spoken English, for all the instructions and explanations are given in English.

In the classroom setting, James is the teacher and people who watch and learn from the lessons are students. James is also the narrator who tells stories, and students are the audience. In Rhetoric, the good outcome of a narration is that the story is accepted and the audience is persuaded. In classroom setting, when narration is effectively used, students can learn something from it.

1.3 Method

The reason to choose Internet classroom is that it is a novel and uprising way to learn English. The three classes are teaching different contents. The first one is for English

vocabulary; the second one for speaking English and the last one is for English grammar. According to different contents and purposes, the teacher would choose different way to use narration. Lessons of each type are chosen randomly.

There are three class observations. Method used in class observation is the same in three classes. The lesson for English vocabulary lasts 16 minutes and 59 seconds. The lesson for spoken English lasts 18 minutes and 8 seconds. The lesson for English grammar lasts 19 minutes and 3 seconds. The author watches the Internet lessons to see how often the teacher uses narration in giving instructions and explanations. Students are neither shown in the video nor at present in classes. Therefore, the observations only focus on the teacher; however, the role of students as the audience is considered in the analysis. Stories told by the teacher are recorded. His actions in company with the stories are also included. Furthermore, the forms of stories the teacher used in classes are focused on. Questions about what type of story he prefers and what kind of effect stories achieve are also included in present investigation.

2. Theoretical Background

This part of study will introduce previous studies upon narration, especially the work done by Fisher who regards storytelling as human's nature. To shed light on the elements that shape a story would help getting a better understanding of what a story is. Then researchers' previous work on teaching method will be dealt with. The perspectives that should be considered while deciding a teaching method are under discussion. At last, the ways in which soldiers are taught will be discussed.

2.1 What Narration Is

Narration used to be a heated topic in the field of literature. Walter Fisher (1984) extended it to a much wider field which includes all forms of rhetoric actions. His *Narrative Paradigm* lays a foundation for narrative criticism in the field of Rhetoric. Discussion on his work will be helpful in understanding the concept of narration.

2.1.1 Fisher and Other Scholars' Studies on Narration

The concept of narration is not unfamiliar in the field of Literature Criticism. The study on narrations in the Bible is prominent in western world. However, narration is not a phenomenon only existing in works of literature. When Fisher (1984) proposes the concept of *Narrative Paradigm*, he provides his understanding of what narration is. He refers to narration as “a theory of symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (Fisher, 1984: 2).

In this concept, there are three points need to be discussed. One is that narration is a theory of symbolic actions. When the concept of symbol is mentioned by linguistics, it is probably referred to the linguistic sign, which has a bond with what the sign refers to. For example, a pair of scales is the symbol of justice. However, in the field of rhetoric, the meaning of symbol bears much wider range. The earliest forms of symbols may be those engraved in rocks or on walls to transfer some information to clansmen or descendants by our ancient ancestors. Symbols can be letters written on papers with meaning that could be understood by people living in the same community. It can also be actions, as Fisher told us, like gestures. The gesture with one's thumb up can have different meanings in different regions depending on what people are told about the gesture by their ancestors or others living around them. Symbolic action can be deeds. For example, a person holding his/her fist tightly, with face flushing, and eyes goggling may be showing his anger. What he is transferring to others is that he is angry about something. Such symbolic actions can often be observed when someone is doing his/her speech. The speaker should consider whether his/her action is appropriate in the setting or for a particular occurrence. Improper actions or gestures may transfer wrong information to the audience and make him/her untrustworthy by others and thus ruin the effect of speech. No matter what the form of the symbolic action is, the purpose of that action is to transfer the information which is intended by the person who acts. That is to say actions bearing no information are not symbolic actions.

The second point in the concept is that narration is not a chaos, which means the elements in a story are well arranged. And this well-organized whole has meaning to both the sender and the receiver of the action. Foss (2009) discussed the eight

dimensions of narrative when he was introducing the procedures of narrative analysis. The eight elements will be talked about in detail in the part 2.1.2. The meaning of narration counts on many aspects. Cultural and social background and individual experience will affect people's understanding of a narration, which is the same to other symbolic actions. A gesture which contains a friendly meaning to one group of people may be totally meaningless to another group of people or it may contain an opposite meaning which may be regarded unfriendly to people from other communities. Narration is the same. A narration about a severe war may induce a patriotism to some people, while for some others who have suffered from wars (maybe not the same one), a story of that being told will make them distressed. Maybe for some very young children who have never experienced or even been told about wars, they will not be able to understand those kinds of stories.

The last point in the concept of narration is about the narrator who creates the symbolic action and the audience who receives and interprets the narration. In the field of Rhetoric, the audience has occupied an important place ever since the times of the ancient Greeks. The requirement for orators to understand their audience can be traced back to as early as the 5th century BC. Plato emphasized the importance of understanding the audience's temperament and thought, though he did not regard rhetoric as an art. His student Aristotle criticized and developed his theory. In his book *Rhetoric*, Aristotle (2007) sorted speeches according to the kinds of audience. In the second volume, the audience's emotion was analyzed at length. The emotion of the audience would affect their judgment, which should be understood by the orator.

Chaim Perelman is a name often referred to in the twentieth-century rhetoric. Perelman's theory of treating rhetoric with argumentation is based on the idea that the audience's judgment toward matters of value is of the same essentiality as their judgment of facts and policies and on the realization of their incapability of judging value (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1991). It is his concern with argumentation that leads him to delve into the audience. In *The New Rhetoric*, he gives his own definition: the audience is "for the purpose of rhetoric, as the ensemble of those whom the speaker wishes to influence by his argumentation." (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1991:19) He claims the necessity of planning all argumentation in relation to an audience. Perelman also divides audience into universal audience and particular audience. The particular

audience may include an audience at present or not, reasonable or not, while the universal audience can be no one or the speaker himself. Furthermore, the concept of universal audience decides the speaker's choice of arguments. Different from the rhetoricians of ancient Greece who were mainly interested in discourse, modern rhetoricians care about the images of speaker and audience and the images by which they are presented in each other's mind, about strategies to identify form and content, and about the conditions in which their attitudes may change.

To sum up, the preference of the audience toward a certain story needs to be considered by the narrator. A story may be not necessarily true, which means that it does not need to be a historical event or something that has happened before, but it should be persuasive to the audience. If the narrator shares the same value or belief with the audience, the narrator and his/her narration will be more trustworthy to the audience. An audience will not passively receive whatever a narrator has said. Different groups of audience may have different understandings of a same story, and their attitude will affect the effectiveness of narrating.

Another important contribution Fisher (1984) made in his work is that he combined the traditional view of rhetoric as practical reasoning and the narrative form. He claimed that the narrative paradigm is a "dialectical synthesis of... the argumentative, persuasive theme and the literary, aesthetic theme" (Fisher, 1984:2). It is not that human communication must be an argumentative form. A clearly identifiable argumentative discourse is rational, and a narrative or other forms of rhetorical human communication can be rational as well. Furthermore, a story may not be true but should be rational to be persuasive. Fisher (1984) explained the relation of sense and narratives by introducing Goldberg's work in religious discourse, in which Goldberg believed that a theologian's statement about a community's convictions should be closely involved with the narratives, and it is from narratives that those convictions come into being and gain their sense. Fisher extended Goldberg's idea to ordinary experience and claimed that it is in a narrative context (such as history and biography) that validity, reason and truth are verified and determined. Goldberg also said that facts and experience in moral life are not waiting in forms of discrete fragments for principles to justify, but are bound by narrative so that abstract rules and principles can become concrete and thus be understood.

Human as narrative beings have inherent awareness of narrative probability and they will constantly test the fidelity of narratives. Thus, the question whether a narration is rational is determined by the reasoning of the individuals concerned. The extensive discussion about narrative rationality is to provide a reason for using narration as an instruction tool in class and the acceptance of a story by students.

2.1.2 Dimensions of a story

According to Foss (2009), there are eight elements constituting a story: setting, characters, narrator, events, temporal relations, causal relations, audience and theme. It should be noted that in Foss's discussion about narrative criticism, the artifact being analyzed should contain at least two events which are in sequence of time or cause, but a story used in class may be much shorter in length and less complex. However, it must contain some major elements.

The setting or scene is the details external to characters in the narrative. It may relate to the plot and characters and have prominence or it may be negligible. Sometimes there is change of setting. Characters are important elements in a story. It is often the main characters who make the process of events. Characters can be nonhuman or inanimate such as those in stories of *Aesop's Fables*. Some critics are interested in behaviors or mental traits of characters. Are characters flat or round? The mentality or traits of a flat character in a work of literature can often be easily obtained by readers, while a round one is more complex as far as its characteristics are concerned. It is often the complex characters who cause conflicts in a story.

No matter if a story is heard by the audience in a speech or read by readers from a literary work, there is usually a narrator who is telling the story. However, the narrative can also be presented directly to the audience, when it is in the form of action. In a classroom setting, a narration is usually presented by the teacher or students. Thus teachers and students are the narrators. Narrators' preference for certain vocabulary, sentence structure or length of speech will affect the narration. When a story is told orally, the narrator's pitch, tone of voice, gesture, pronunciation, emphasis and some other speech features will help in influencing the audience. There is often a direct

interaction between the speaker and the audience in the process of narrating. The narrator may choose to tell a story in a certain manner according to the response from the audience. Sometimes narrators and audience can be characters of stories. It is often the case when the narrator is telling his/her own experience or everyday life experience.

Foss (2009) claims that a narrative should contain at least two events: major events or *kernels* and minor events or *satellites*. The satellites do not affect the basic story line; they only have a rhetoric effect. Temporal and causal relations are about the relation between these events. Which events happen first and which follow them? Which event is the cause and which one is the effect or result? The theme is the last but not the least element of a story, which directs the general idea. The narrator should keep the major theme throughout the narration.

2.2 Didactics

In this part, previous research on methods of teaching will be discussed. To decide a teaching method, many factors, such as the purpose of teaching and students' type and their mentality, should be considered.

2.2.1 Teaching methods

Education is a process of continuous building of ideas and emotions (Joyce et al., 1999). The ultimate purpose of teaching is to help students acquire information, ideas, skills, values, ways of thinking and expressing themselves, and most importantly, to teach them how to learn. Joyce et al. (1999) refer to models of teaching as models of learning. The long-term outcome of teaching should be students' increased capability to learn more easily and efficiently in the future. By getting education, students not only acquire information and knowledge, but they will also be able to master the learning process so that they can apply what they have learned to study and to life in the future. This principle is applicable to various kinds of teaching environments, including language teaching, scientific education or teaching skills.

To make students to be aware of cooperation in study is of primary importance. It is

supposed that students will not know how to work efficiently with others. Based on this idea, the social theorists came up with the social model, which emphasizes the social nature of the human being and how social interaction can improve learning (Joyce et. al. 1999). They regarded school as a miniature society in which individuals interact and work together. Actually, students may be active in cooperation when they are given a task requiring them to work in pairs or in need of team work. However, they may not master the skill to work together efficiently and productively. Giving a task for students to work cooperatively is the simplest example of a social teaching model.

Thinking inductively is praised highly in the western world either in social life or in the academic and scientific fields. In the book *Models of Teaching* (1999), Hilda Taba's study is introduced. She paid much regard to inductive thinking and believed it is the inborn and lawful nature of human beings. In the late 1960s, her contribution to *teaching strategy* "formed the backbone of an entire social studies curriculum, enabling the design of courses, units of study, and lessons where the teaching of thinking was integrated with the study of content (Joyce et al., 1999: 130)." The inductive approach was based on three assumptions. One assumption is that thinking is an active transaction between the individual and the data. Many objects can act as data, such as vocabulary, grammar, and literature works. When students are presented with these data, they will organize the data into conceptual systems. Once these data are related to each other, students will generate the commonness between them, and then make inferences to hypothesize, predict, and explain the phenomena. The mental process cannot be taught directly by teachers. However, they can give assignments to students so that they have to practice this skill. The more skillful students become the less direct support teachers should give in doing tasks. Taba proposed three teaching strategies to develop inductive thinking skills: concept formation, interpretation of data and application of principles. The first strategy involves three stages. At first, students identify items that are relevant to the topic and collect them. Then, they categorize these items according to their common attributes. The last stage is to label these categories.

The overt activities of the second strategy (interpretation of data) are: identifying critical relationships that differentiate one category from another, exploring the relationships between one category and the other, and making inferences. The third task is applying principles to explain new phenomena.

Concept formation requires students to figure out the basis on which they build categories, whereas concept attainment is the search for and listing of attributes that can be used to distinguish exemplars from non-exemplars of various categories (Joyce et al., 1999). That is to say, the purpose of concept formation is to build categories. While in the process of concept formation, the category has been formed in another person's mind by comparing and contrasting exemplars that contain the attributes of the concept with examples that do not contain those attributes.

Methods introduced above can be adopted into many kinds of teaching situations. Second language teaching can be in accordance to the general teaching methodology, and at the same time takes other aspects into consideration.

2.2.2 Second Language Teaching Methods

Researchers in the field of didactics have been making efforts in exploring proper second language teaching methods. The traditional teaching method is an earlier example. It is a common method used by English teachers in many middle and high schools in China. The traditional teaching method includes the Grammar-Translation Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, the Cognitive Approach, etc. Among them, the Grammar-Translation Method is the representative. It originated in Europe at the end of the 18th century, and its main purpose was teaching grammar through translation exercises. It was in the 1980s that people began to criticize it as being neglecting the communication skills, especially speaking and listening (*Grammar Translation*, 2011/3/25). The Grammar-Translation Method, however, has advantages. First, this method helps the teacher to save time. In traditional classes, teachers are demanded to finish their teaching task in a limited time. They may fail to meet the requirement if they use other methods. Besides, in China, there are often more than fifty students attending one class. It may be impossible to get everyone involved. Doing exercises is a proper way for them to have a better understanding of grammar points and memorize them.

On the other hand, the disadvantages call for attention, too. First, language is taught in a single style during the whole class. Students' attention cannot be easily maintained. In the long run, this may affect their interests in the subject. Second, the class has little

connection with reality. This point has been criticized for years. When too much emphasis is on grammar, the lesson will become inhuman. Third, in the teacher-centered class, little opportunity is given for the communication between students and the teacher. Only a minority of students are asked to do exercises orally in front of the class. Some students possibly just skip what has not been fully understood, for they do not have the chance to express their questions to the teacher.

Being aware of similar problems, Chinese teachers have attempted to make an integration of the Grammar-Translation method and other teaching methods in English study. For example, some activities are produced in class. Students work either in pairs or in a group. Though the teacher's role as a controller remains, students are freer in doing activities. And the assignment given by the teacher can be done orally. Considering the Task-based teaching method, students can be encouraged to talk with their partners about their experience of private schooling, the effect and their own attitudes toward this kind of education.

Some theorists claimed that interlanguage development in classroom learners does not differ significantly from that in learners acquiring a second language in a natural way. The process in second language development is the same in both acquisition and learning context. Therefore, researchers on language teaching came up with natural language learning experiences for classroom learners, and the elimination of structural grading, a focus on form and error correction, even for adults. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) recorded Felix's finding of structural parallels between the Inter-language negation, interrogation, pronouns and sentence types of German high-school EFL students and naturalistic acquirers of ESL. He concluded:

...foreign language learning under classroom conditions seems to partially follow the same set of natural processes that characterize other types of language acquisition...there seems to be a universal and common set of principles which are flexible enough and adaptable to the large number of conditions under which language learning may take place. (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991: 301)

There are many second language teaching methods other than the Translation-

Grammar Teaching Method and Naturalism Teaching Method. It cannot be denied that any methodology can have advantages and disadvantages. Teachers can combine many methods in one class while teaching under the guidance of one particular teaching methodology in the whole process.

2.2.3. Storytelling as an Instructional Method

Because of children's characteristics, many educators have tried to adopt story-telling in the teaching of younger children, while some others also adopt it in classes for older learners and adults.

Ringo Ma is one of them. Ma (1994) believed that story-telling is an efficient teaching strategy for nonnative instructors in the U.S. higher education. Foreign teachers sometimes find it hard to build trust among native students. Emphasizing his or her teaching experience or scholar accomplishment in the subject does not work so well. From the rhetoric perspective, "the logos, ethos, and pathos derived from story-telling can make a nonnative instructor both meaningful and attractive to students" (Ma, 1994: 7). From an instructional perspective, Ma claimed that administrators and students at U.S. institutions of higher education lack pluralistic thinking. By telling students the teacher's multicultural experiences, pluralistic thinking is promoted, a multivocal system is built and the teacher's perceived status is changed from being a liability to an asset.

Andrews et al. (2009) identify four instructional methods that are related to storytelling: case-based, narrative-based, scenario-based and problem-based instruction. Each method presents learners with "a temporally ordered sequence of information and employs an attention-focusing mechanism" (Andrews et al., 2009:7). The four instructional methods are generally used in military training.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The primary materials to be analyzed and discussed are video classes on the Internet. Two classes are teaching English vocabulary, two for speaking English and two for

English grammar. In these settings, the teacher is James, who tells daily experience or his own experience in the past, or creates stories in his classes, and the audience consists of students who are watching the video-taped classes on the Internet instead of attending classes at present. The forms of stories narrated at each class will be recorded and discussed in this section. Which type of story is most frequently adopted by the teacher? At which kind of class would the teacher prefer to use narration to help students to understand and memorize the contents of classes? These questions are also to be answered.

3.1 Class for English Vocabulary

In the first lesson, the teacher (James) uses the vocabulary pyramid to show different words that are built from the root *-ject*. Words introduced are: *project*, *object*, *interject*, *inject*, *subject*, *dejected*, *ejected* and *reject*. (Ject, 2011/4/24) At first, James invented a story which contains these words and had it written on the blackboard:

Mr. E. wanted me to help with his latest *project*. When I began to lay out my plan, he began to *object*. Mr. E. would *interject* every time I would try to *inject* some fun into the *subject*. Finally he decided to *reject* my idea and *ejected* me from his room, and I left *dejected*.

Then James began to explain each of these words. He first separated words into prefixes and suffix, and provided the meaning of *-ject*. Then he explained the meaning of each prefix whenever he came to a word. Besides presenting meanings directly, the teacher also used examples to make words better understood. The following are the examples:

- (1) (interject) Example one: If Mr. E and I are talking...L. is a cat. L comes to talk... “(Sounds of clearing one’s throat), in my opinion...I would like to say...” ...and you are going to interject. You are coming between us. You’re throwing opinion between the two...

Example two: —I think your/ (unfinished and being interrupted)

—I would like to interject and say...

- (2) (inject) ...When you go to the doctor's, (sometimes you are sick)... and you need to get injections. (James was acting the scene while describing it.)You take a medicine, put it into the arm and push, and it goes inside your body. You inject it, throw it into your body.
- (3) (subject) Subject is the doer. Everything goes under subject, so it's the most important thing...
- (4) (reject) For example, I throw this pen to Mr. E., (James and his colleague were acting according to what James says) and he rejects it, so it comes back.
- (5) (ejected) ...if you're ejected from your party...they pick you up and throw you out of the door (acting while describing).

The goal of this lesson is to know meanings of these words and how to use them. Most importantly is to know the suffix *-ject*. More often than not, James uses informal language to teach students.

The teacher is placing similar words together so that students can figure out their similarity—they all have the same suffix. When they are observing the words, the transaction between the data and students begins. In their minds, words are transformed into concepts and the base on which this group of words are formed is found out. The teacher did not mention other words with the same suffix, however, when students encounter with them in future, they will try to put them into this group and guess their possible meanings through the suffix.

Forming words into a category is one point worth noticing. The other one is that James presented a story to put them all together into one context. The story is not a real event happened in the past. It is made up by James himself. However, one may experience one or two scenes in their daily life. The setting of the story is *his room*.

One can imagine that *his room* can be manager's office in a company or professor's office in a university. Students of the Internet class may have already worked or still study in schools. Event if they have never experienced the scenes before, they may have heard from others talking about their jobs or watched similar scenes from televisions. Therefore it is very easy for them to transfer the context into pictures. They can better understand the context and remember the scenes.

The characters of this story are Mr. E. and *I*—James himself. The characters also appear in (1) Example one and (4). Mr. E and the teacher himself are frequently used in James narrations. In the story, they are acting as colleagues or a professor and a student engaged in a discussion. The story is narrated by first person. The purpose is not telling students that it really happens but to bridge students and the teacher. It makes the story more acceptable and students are becoming more engaged in the story. The narrator is the teacher James himself. He wrote the story on the blackboard, read the whole text through at the first time and later discussed it sentence by sentence. The words used in the story are simple, so are sentence structures. It is the eight words that James was putting emphasis on not other words or complex sentence structure, so the story should be easy to understood. The speed of his speech when he was narrating is very fast. The story consists of one major event and four minor ones. In the first sentence, the narrator has indicated what the story is all about. The following is about what happened during the discussion. James told the story in a matter-of-fact way. There are very little telling emotions of the two characters. It is only in the last sentence the emotional word *dejected* is used. If the story was told at a literary class, the teacher may direct students' attention to what was behind the plot. The story may reveal the relation of the manger and the narrator. Or it tells the personalities of them—the manger is serious, and the narrator is lighthearted. If the teacher told the story with deep felling, it is possible that students may be attracted by what is behind words, which is obviously not the purpose at this lesson. That is the reason for James telling the story objectively with his steady pitch and tone of voice, so that students' focus is not on relationship or personalities but on verbs and actions.

The language he used is mainly informal, especially in examples (1) to (5). When he was explaining the words in detail, he would make the speed slower, and raised his voice and pitches when he came across some important points to catch students'

attention.

The change of his pitch and tone of voice mostly happened when he was narrating examples (1) to (5). In Example one, he cleared his throat as if he was at present in the conversation with Mr. E. In example (2), (4) and (5), he was acting while speaking. So that students will be impressed by the scenes. When they are trying to remember a certain verb, what comes out of their mind at first will be the gesture and action.

Examples (1) to (5) are separate stories. Characters in example (1) and (4) are the narrator and Mr. E. Example (2) and (5) are narrated in second person. James is talking directly to his students. Almost everyone has had the experience of getting injections, so they are quite familiar with the scenes. Parties are important activity in western life, but people living in other countries like China may not be as enthusiastic to it as westerners are. However, James described the word through two actions, and acted while speaking.

The story told at the beginning of the lesson is made up by James but the scenes are taken from familiar working places. Words are not explained separately but are connected by one context. Examples (1) to (5) are taken from daily life, and each has a word in a context. While students listen to stories, they do not only know meanings of words but also how to use them. When they encounter with one of similar scenes in their life they will be reminded of those words. This is similar to the process of a child acquiring his first language. He would listen to what people around him are talking about, imitate and use them when he comes to the same scenes.

In example (3), *characters* are abstract concepts, and the *events* happened between subject and other things can not be observed visually either. This may make the example less impressive than the others. The third person narration also makes narrator and students less integrated, though it is more objective to do so.

Another type of third person narration is recorded at a class teaching vocabulary about winter fun in Canada. Here is what James said when he was introducing *snow angels*:

...When people lying on the ground, sometimes lay their arms up

and down and they create snow angels... (*Winter Clothing*, 2011/5/11)

The narrator described the scenes in an omniscient way. They are scenes in people's life. Unlike example (2) and (5), the main character is *people* instead of *you*. The second person narration may shorten the distance between the teacher and students; however, not everyone from other countries has experienced these scenes before. To make this word impressive, James drew a picture to indicate what a *snow angel* looks like.

3.2 Class for Speaking English

The second lesson is to teach how to express directions in English (*Talking about Directions*, 2011/5/11). The teacher helped to solve the problem of explaining where a person comes from and understanding directions given in English, introducing *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west*, *northern*, *southern*, *eastern* and *western*. He also talked about how to express places in between any two of the four directions. At first he drew a miniature map of North America on the board and referred to that land as the example. James set Mr. E's going on his vacation as the main story and several minor ones when he was explaining in detail. Here are stories that he has narrated:

My friend Mr. E wants to go on vacation. He lives in the north, and he wants to go south...what happens if Mr. E has finished his vacation down here and he wants to go back up home? ...and he lives—believe it or not, it's cold and it's arctic. If you live in the north, for example, the top of Europe...

(6)...When I was a little boy, I used to...(Telling about how he was used to identifying directions when he was a five-year-old boy).

I have a problem for you. I know you can help me to solve this problem. Mr. E has to get somewhere not quite north, not quite east. What would you call in between the two? (7) We North Americans or people from the north—that would be people from England, France,

Germany, United States of America, Canadians—are very arrogance. The two more dominant sides are *North* and *South*. You are either from the north, or you are from the south...When we go directions in between north and east, you can only say one way. If you say another way, you actually confuse us. (8)...You cannot say east-northern. Just try. You go outside right now, find an English person and say: “I need to go east-northern of here.” They would look at you, look at the sky, give you a dollar and say: “Go to see a doctor and go away.”

(9) -ward

When I drop the pen, it goes downward. Mr. E looks skyward and his pen goes downward...

The theme of the lesson is directions. The goal is to teach how to express the direction where one lives and where he goes. The setting would be similar to what is said in the story. The teacher put words into a context and connected them by one story. On the one hand, students would receive these data and transfer them into concepts. When they encounter with similar circumstances after class, they can transfer these concepts into expressions. On the other hand, the story may confine students' inductive thinking. It is possible that students can only accept one kind of setting. When a student is put into another setting— for example, when someone is asking the student the directions in the road— the student may be unable to transfer what is in his concept. The lesson is about speaking English instead of vocabulary; therefore, there is a need for the teacher to set several kinds of circumstances. The reason for only one setting in the lesson may be the limitation on the time. Instead of writing the story onto the blackboard like he did at the vocabulary class, James drew a sketch map, for maps show directions more clearly than words do.

In the main story, Mr. E is still the protagonist. Unlike the main story at the first class which is told as a whole separately from other examples, in this story, example 6, 7 and 8 are placed into the main story. Characters in these examples are changed and the examples function differently.

The setting of the first story is North America. In James stories, Mr. E comes from

the same place with him— North America or Canada. Therefore, it is usually North America where the setting of stories is. The narrator is James. One can say James has many similarities with his character Mr. E, and may be Mr. E is another James. That is why he would say (of northern part of Canada) believe it or not, it's cold and it's arctic, and students will believe what he said because they know the teacher comes from that place.

The major event is Mr. E wants to go on a vacation. The minor ones include the place he lives in and he goes back home. The function of satellites is to complete the kernel and elaborate the kernel. In narrative criticism, satellites are not crucial to the narrative. They can be deleted without disturbing the basic story line of the narrative (Foss, 2009). However, when narration is used at class, satellites may not be just elaboration of the major event but contain important content. This difference may be due to different purposes of narration in public speeches and narration in classroom settings. Narration used in public speeches is to convince the audience, while this story is used as a context in which what the teacher was going to teach is included. In public speeches, the forms of minor events would affect the form of the narrative and the form's rhetorical effects. In this example, minor events are containers of teaching information.

In this way, one can say that the main story told in this lesson is the major one, and the examples 6, 7 and 8 are minor ones to the main story. Their themes are all about the four directions and the examples 6, 7 and 8 are explaining and elaborating the direction mentioned in the main story, though the characters are not the same. The example 9 is separated, because the setting is different. When a teacher uses stories as contexts of what he will teach at class, he should make sure that the theme remains the same. If the theme changes all the time, students may get confused and lose their focuses.

The example 6 tells the teacher's own experience of identifying directions when he was five years old. He was trying to tell his students the easiest way to identify directions on maps. The main character is the teacher himself. The example 7 is a description of people from northern part of the world. Their point of view explains the reason of example 8. As Fisher (1984) said, besides argumentative prose, all kinds of symbolic actions can hold good reasons. The narrator used *we* in describing that people

treat north and south as dominant sides. Because of the identification of the teacher, who is one of those people, his description is convincing to his students. The address *we North Americans* emphasized his identification.

As to students who are not from the northern part of the world or people who are from eastern countries, they may not be aware of this cultural phenomenon in western world. The knowledge about western culture can enlarge their horizon and make them more interested in it. Language is a mirror of the culture. To certain extent, the culture decides the formation and transformation of the language. Therefore, it is beneficial for teachers to insert cultural background of the western world into their lessons especially when their students are from the eastern world. The knowledge of cultural background can help students to learn the language.

Example 8 seems not as convincing as former ones, for it is just an assumption set by the teacher. However, the teacher's identification makes it more convincing, because James himself is one of the people whose first language is English. The assumption is less convincing if he didn't tell the cultural background beforehand.

The example 9 is similar to example 4 in form and function. The teacher's focus has turned from the four directions to the explanation of the suffix *-ward*. He was acting while uttering the words.

Castro (2010) shares the same point of view with Asher on the way adults learning a second language. He believes that before developing language skills, children would sense the world by activities like touching, sucking, pulling, listening and seeing. In a similar manner, when adults are learning a foreign language, "sensorimotor activities (activities involved with senses) involved in demonstrating an understanding of oral language should precede speaking that foreign language."(Castro, 2010:10) Before children can utter complete sentences, when they hear verbal command "look at the cat", they would actually turn their heads and look at the cat, which shows they have understood the command. Therefore, Asher comes up with a strategy which requires movement on the part of the students while teaching a foreign language. At class, students are taught to respond to verbal commands by actually doing those actions. The connection between sensorimotor activity and language acquisition is emphasized by

this strategy.

Similarly, there is also a connection between what James said and what he was doing. The action helps students to understand the two verbs and make them impressed. The action is an un-ignorable part in narration. To some extent, it has influence on the effect of utterance in the process of teaching.

3.3 Class for English Grammar

The goal of the third lesson is to teach how to ask questions properly and correctly. James as a teacher found that sometimes his students have trouble being understood when ask for useful information or help in English. The reason lies on that they do not know in English what the forms of correct question are. This lesson is not an English speaking lesson. The emphasis is on the forms of four types of questions not on how to ask questions on different occasions. The four forms are:

1. What does ____mean?
2. What do you mean...?
3. How do you pronounce ____?
4. What does ____mean?

Here is the record of James telling students his own experience as a teacher (*How to Ask Questions*, 2011/5/15):

In a classroom, often I end up repeating things students have asked for several times. One of the favorite questions students asked incorrectly is this: what means ____ teacher? My response is usually: could you repeat that? For example, what means table teacher? This is not the question form in English. In English the question form has to be: V+ S +?

(10) A lot of words in language especially in Latin language, they sometimes... (He is talking about the exceptions of question forms in other languages)

Sometimes students know this but they don't know other words that

go with these questions...That drives me crazy because I kept repeating stuff...A student asks: “How do you pronounce ____?” He knows what it is, but he doesn’t know how to read it. So I will not explain it. I will pronounce it.

(11) This is my favorite notebook. It’s not the same from English books. These are lessons from students’ mistakes...these information questions are from students’ common mistakes. They can make you improved and make you better.

There is another common mistake made by students. You are in school. You see the students for the first time, and you say to the students: “How long have you been here?” or “How long will you be stay?” Students usually get confused and say like: “Two weeks more.” (They would use the same answer to different questions.)

As usual, James used a main story throughout the class and inserted several others (examples 10 and 11) into the main story. James told students that these incorrect question forms were taken from common mistakes made by students. He recorded them, and presented the right forms of those questions. The main story is narrated from the first-person point of view; however, the main character is the group of students who made mistakes.

A comparison between Grammar Translation Method and storytelling method can be made. Although both of them targeted on grammar, there is great difference in teaching methodologies.

Grammar Translation Method (GT) was widely criticized because it was teacher-centered, unconcerned with students’ oral communication skills and it limited interaction and spontaneous creativity (Sapargul and Sartor, 2010). In the lesson where GT is used, the teacher would focus students’ attention on grammar and vocabulary. Usually, students are given a target language text, which is often from a text book. They need to read and translate the target language text into their native language. During the process of translating, students would exercise mentally examining grammatical

structures and deducing rules.

James used a different method at his class, which is much more like a top-down teaching method. In a lesson used top-down teaching method, students are at first set in a natural environment, in which students communicate with the teacher in target language. Students are taught to use English to express their ideas or complete a task assigned by the teacher. When a student is encountered with a problem or made a mistake (for example, he cannot make himself understood because of the wrong expression made by him), the teacher would make a record and bring it up afterward. According to the mistake made by the student, the teacher can target on the grammatical point and explain it in detail.

James used similar method. However, the point is that his students are not at present. The students whose mistakes are recorded are not at this class, and students who take this course are watching the video through Internet. They are even not the same group of students. However, as both groups are ESL learners, they have much in common. Mistakes recorded and listed by James can be made by any English learner. When a student uses the target language to ask for useful information, James recorded the mistake in his expression. Later he pointed out the grammatical point and presented the right form of questions, so that all his students listening to his class can pay attention to it and learn from the mistake.

The teacher as the narrator presented himself as an omniscient role—a teacher who spotted mistakes often made by students unconsciously. Narrating as an effective rhetorical approach can be evaluated from the three forms of proof, logos, ethos, and pathos. Logos demonstrate that a thing is so. The effectiveness of ethos depends on the believability of the speaker. Pathos denotes those proofs designed to sway a listener's feelings (Ma, 1994). In other words, logos concerns about the logic perspective of a narration, ethos is about the narrator, and pathos concerns about the emotions of the audience.

James's narration can also be viewed from the three proofs. Firstly, the mistakes may happen when students pay no attention to grammatical forms. Or when an ESL learner talks in English, it is possible that mentally he is interfered by his native

language, which results in the disorder of *V* and *S*, like saying “*what means ____ teacher*” instead of “*what does ____mean, teacher*”. Secondly, students are likely to empathize or sympathize with a teacher who they become to know as a real person when they hear his personal experience. James’s identity as a teacher and native English speaker makes him more trustful. Learners know that they would make mistakes unconsciously while using a second language. When those occasions happen, it would be beneficial that a teacher or English speaker can point it out. James also told them that he had recorded them in his notebook (in the example 11). These are real cases not made up by James himself, and they are worth attention. Thirdly, students’ awareness of the problem and their willingness to make improvement are pathos of the narration. James also emphasized the importance by reasoning that *they can make you improved and make you better*.

3.4 A Summing-up on Stories Used in Three Types of Lessons

Types of stories used as well as the frequency of using narration at the three classes are shown in the table below.

Table

	Type of story	Protagonist	The number of stories
English Vocabulary	Story made up by the teacher (twice)	Mr. E and I	6
		Mr. E and I	
	Everyday life experience (twice)	You	
		Subject (abstract)	
	Storytelling with physical response (twice)	Mr. E and I	
You			
Speaking English	Story made up by the teacher	Mr. E	5
	Personal experience	I	
	Cultural background	We	
	Everyday life experience	You	
	Storytelling with physical response	Mr. E and I	
English Grammar	Personal experience (twice)	Students and I	3
		I	
	Cultural background	Latin language	

It can be shown from the table that narration is used more frequently in lessons teaching English vocabulary and spoken English than in the lesson teaching English grammar. Stories told in classes are generally of five types, namely stories that are made up by the teacher, cultural backgrounds, stories told with physical responses, personal experiences and everyday life experiences. Among them, three stories are made up by the teacher, two of which are main stories. The protagonists of this type of stories are usually Mr. E and the narrator. Daily life experience is often taken as examples and it is used for three times. The second person description makes it easy to be understood and accepted. Storytelling with body movement is also used three times.

The effectiveness of physical response and storytelling explains why the teacher favors it. Background knowledge of language and culture is always an important part in second language learning, and it is used for twice. Telling personal experience can make the teacher more personal and acceptable to his students. James used it twice as examples and once as the main story.

4. Conclusion

Educators and scholars in the field of second language teaching and learning have been making great efforts in teaching methodology. There are many appropriate methods that can be used according to different teaching purposes, though each one of them may have both advantages and disadvantages. Storytelling is a novel teaching method. Educators have been trying to adopt it into classes for young children as well as soldiers in the army. Storytelling can be used in second language classroom too. According to Fisher (1984), storytelling is human nature. In the Internet class, for example, the teacher James used five types of stories, including story that are made up by the teacher, cultural background, storytelling with physical response, personal experience and everyday life experience. The teacher can decide on protagonists and on how these stories are connected. Compared to methods like Grammar Translation, it is much more like a combination of several teaching methods.

However, the specialties of Internet classroom also bring about some limitations. Firstly, on one hand, stories told by James bridges the distant between students and the teacher to some extent, and make his lessons attractive to some viewers (according to the feedbacks on the Internet). On the other hand, students of James's Internet classes do not have a direct interaction with the teacher, which means the teacher would hardly know whether a certain teaching method fits or not. Is he speaking too fast? Is his speech too colloquial? Can students really learn something from those stories? In a real classroom setting, these questions can be answered through students' reactions at class. Students may request the teacher to speak louder or slower, or they may chat with others when they are not attending or interested. In an internet classroom, a teacher can not observe students' status. Consequently, the effect of narrative teaching method is hardly included in present study, and it is not based upon class observations. Secondly,

the situation in a real classroom setting may be much more complicated, considering the longer teaching time, teaching goals, students' responses at class, the teacher's personal factors as well as external factors outside of the classroom. Those factors are absent in present study. The teacher in a real classroom setting may need to adjust teaching methods when any exigence occurs. Thirdly, primary materials of present study are recorded by watching videos and writing down narrative parts in the classes; therefore, it is possible that sometimes the author fails to do the record completely and correctly. Especially when the teacher's speech is colloquial and he speaks very fast, some words may be missed. However, the main part of any story is well recorded. Words that are missed do not deter students' understanding as well as the analysis on those stories.

Still another problem concerning this study is how to tell narratives from any kind of examples. According to Fisher's definition (1984), narratives include all kinds of words or/and deeds as long as they possess the three characteristics. The author has recorded narratives in James's classes referring to Fisher's definition. However, the teacher himself might not be aware that he was using narration when he was giving examples which were not normally considered to be *stories*. Besides, if narratives can be found everywhere, how can a teacher find out the particular importance of narratives which makes them different from other teaching methods? The study on storytelling as a teaching method should encourage teachers to adopt narratives consciously, and thus use them effectively.

To be concluded, storytelling as an ESL teaching method is still in need of further studies. Problems are expected to be solved in further exploration.

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