The Effects of Storytelling on
Adult English Language Learners*

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Kim, Mi-Ryoung. 2010. The Effects of Storytelling on Adult English Language Learners. *Linguistic Research* 27(3), 447-473. This study investigates the effects of storytelling on adult English language learners. It also examines adult learners’ attitudes toward storytelling. Participants attended a six-week long training session in a classroom setting. Research data included questionnaires, oral interviews, storytelling, and the researcher’s field notes. Data were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. The findings of this study revealed that participants, who carried positive attitudes toward storytelling, made significant progress in improving their skills. It also suggested that the storytelling task in the classroom can be useful for even adult L2 learners to improve their English if it is appropriately designed according to proficiency levels. Since this is a pilot study, a further study is necessary. (Korea Cyber University)

**Key Words**  Effects of Storytelling, adult L2 English1) classroom, L2 proficiency, attitude toward storytelling, pronunciation, listening, and speaking

1. Introduction

English is in increasing demand worldwide as a global language. Its use has remarkably increased in various fields such as international conferences, business, industry, and education. In many countries, English has been chosen as a second or foreign language, i.e., ESL or EFL. In order to teach English effectively, various principles and techniques have been introduced and applied in ESL classrooms (Brown 2007, Celce-Murcia 2001, Richards and Renandya 2002).

In recent years, one of the widely accepted principles in the field is Communicative Language Teaching (hereafter, CLT). The goal of the CLT

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1) L2 (i.e., English in this study) is generally used as a cover term to refer to a target, foreign, or second language.
approach is to instill communicative competence (Brown 2007). Students in a communicative class ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts outside the language classroom. Part of this challenge is creating interesting activities to increase students’ motivation. However, from many ESL teachers’ descriptions of their oral English classrooms, a considerable number of students are not responding actively in speaking exercises. How to motivate the students in ESL speaking classrooms has long been a main concern among language instructors.

Despite the fact that non-native speaker students have studied English for many years both in and out of school, they still have a lot of difficulty in describing an event or telling a story. One of the significant reasons might be that many ESL students are not exposed to a productive environment. They do not have much chance to tell stories or describe episodes in their own words. The lack of opportunity for ‘telling’ delays their fluency. For example, in South Korea, students in the English classroom are mainly asked to memorize vocabulary and sentences and to practice stereotyped drills. It is hard for them to understand a long story or, conversely, to tell a story. In English language learning classrooms, students need to be taught how to generate their own sentences. Storytelling can be a useful tool to accomplish the task.

Since people began to communicate with each other, “Tell me a story” has been a request of both children and adults. Storytelling is one person telling others of something. The story can be a real event or it can be made up. Storytelling is often a part of our everyday conversation. Storytelling can be useful to improve language skills. This study aims to investigate whether storytelling can help adult English language learners develop spontaneous and autonomous sentences. The research questions to be answered in this study are:

1. Do adult language learners carry a positive attitude toward storytelling on improving their L2 English?
2. Can adult language learners improve their L2 English skills through storytelling?
2. Literature Review

2.1 Story Reading versus Storytelling

How does story reading differ from storytelling? Although essentially similar in content, the two terms differ in audience participation, language development and the development of listeners' imaginations. The term 'storytelling' is very popular in ESL/EFL environments. In many Asian countries, including Korea, storytelling is often equated with story reading. Storybook readers are called storytellers. Both story reading and storytelling use stories as a means to develop language acquisition and literacy. Furthermore, storytelling and story reading must be understood differently in order to be effectively used in the context of language learning (Isbell et al. 2004, Trostle and Hicks 1998). Suppose that L2 learners are exposed to either story reading or storytelling, what language skills can be obtained from each? In story reading, learners passively read or listen to stories. In general, there is no 'telling' activity in a reading event. In storytelling, however, learners actively participate in listening to stories and retelling them in their own words. In the process of preparing to recant or retell a story to peers students can improve all four skills simultaneously (see section 2.2). Unlike story reading, storytelling can be an integrated tool to improve all four skills at the same time. Peck (1989) reported that telling stories in the classroom furthers oral and written language development, as well as furthering comprehension for reading and listening. Trostle and Hicks (1998) compared the effects of storytelling versus story reading on the comprehension and vocabulary development of 32 British primary school children. They found that children who witnessed the storytelling of a selected title scored significantly higher on measures of comprehension and vocabulary than did children who listened to story book reading.

In this paper, the two terms are used as follows: Story reading literally refers to “reading stories based on storybooks” whereas storytelling refers to “telling stories aloud to someone without a book.” Broadly speaking, anyone can be a storyteller anytime, anywhere. However, its definition is narrowed and specified once storytelling has been performed on a public stage as follows: “at its core, storytelling is the art of using language, vocalization, and/or physical movement and gesture to reveal elements and images of a story to a specific live audience (www.storytellingcenter.net).” According to Evans (1990), in addition to the
actual telling of a story to an audience, many activities such as role playing, creative drama, and pantomime can take the form of storytelling.

2.2 The Effects of Storytelling on Language Development

Numerous researchers and teachers have discussed storytelling as one of the most effective ways for children to improve both first and second language development (Peck 1989, Evans 1990, Collins and Cooper 2005, Isbell et al. 2004, Watts 2006, Wright 1995). Mallan (1997) argued that storytelling should be included in the school curriculum. Roney (1996) described storytelling as co-creative and a form of two-way communication. Ellis (1997) reported that, when using storytelling in the classroom, teachers can fulfill many requirements at once. She described that storytelling is useful because it is flexible and can appeal to a variety of learning styles.

According to Garvie (1990), stories are a powerful means of language teaching. He stated that a skillful teacher can use stories to develop more efficient listening, more fluent speaking and the ability to read and write easily and competently. Colon-Vila (1997, 58) emphasizes that “It makes sense to acquire language and to develop students’ oral skills using storytelling rather than boring repetitious drills.”

In his book *Storytelling with Children*, Wright (1995, 4) states “Stories, which rely so much on words, offer a major and constant source of language experience for children. Stories are motivating, rich in language experience, and inexpensive! Stories should be a central part of the work of all primary teachers whether they are teaching the mother tongue or a foreign language.”

While there have been many studies of storytelling to young children, storytelling with adult L2 learners, especially in a classroom setting, has received little research attention. Colon-Vila (1997) commented that storytelling helps L2 English learners become more confident in expressing themselves spontaneously and creatively. Wright (1995) described that one of the best ways of improving fluency in L2 English is to learn stories to internalize a ten-minute flow of English. There is a widely held misperception in education, academe and in the general public that storytelling is only for children and not for adults. This study examines whether the effects of storytelling can be applicable to adult L2 learners.

Storytelling can be an integrated tool to improve L2 English since it involves
all four language learning skills (see also Collins and Cooper 2005, Wright 1995). Storytelling involves actively listening and giving full attention to a ten-minute story in order to get the full breadth of the story from beginning to end. Ellis (1997) suggested that storytelling is the most effective way to develop listening skills. Storytelling also provides an opportunity to experience the difference between listening quietly and listening actively by participating in the process. In a storytelling event, there is a lot of involvement between listener and storyteller. Active listening helps improve listening skills. Conversely, telling a 10- to 15-minute story to the public involves systematic and comprehensive preparation. A story appropriate for the target audience must be carefully chosen and pre-read out of several storybooks. This pre-reading activity enhances reading skills and enlarges vocabulary. For the actual storytelling, simply reading or re-telling the story in its original written form is incorrect in terms of delivery. Reading a story involves reading directly from the text. However, telling a story uses a spoken style similar to that used when telling a story to someone. This means that the story must be rewritten and paraphrased in a spoken or ‘telling’ style. A storytelling script might be revised several times after practicing telling it aloud. This rewriting activity enhances writing as well as speaking skills. Next, the storytelling must be practiced without the aid of a script. Practice might involve standing up, looking in a mirror, recording and/or pretending to tell the story out loud to others. Practicing reading and telling it out loud several times enhances pronunciation and speaking skills. In order to deliver a story well, clear articulation as well as correct grammar must be attained. In the beginning stages of practice, memorization might be heavily relied upon. As the practice progresses words and sentences will be creatively and naturally generated. This definitely enhances speaking skills as well as oral fluency. Once the plot has been committed to memory, the story is ready to be told. While telling the story, spontaneous and unscripted sentences will likely arise. In addition, words and sentences that are made through story telling will become part of the internal lexicon. Confidence is another benefit of storytelling. After getting over the initial fear of telling a 5 to 10 minute story in front of others the fear of communicating with native English speakers will likely diminish. Colon-Vila (1997) commented that storytelling helps L2 English learners become more confident in expressing themselves spontaneously and creatively. As a result, storytelling activities naturally enhance all four language skills in a comprehensive way. In addition, learners’ vocabulary skills are further enhanced. Furthermore, confidence in
communicating in a foreign or second language will be gained.

Although the power of storytelling in the language classroom has long been discussed, few studies have tested it in actual classroom settings for adult L2 learners. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether adult learners are interested in storytelling and whether storytelling benefits can be achieved in the ESL setting.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

Participants consisted of international L2 learners who took an ESL class at a university in the United States. The course was required and originally designed for improving listening, speaking and pronunciation skills. Five learners, undergraduate and graduate, participated in the storytelling treatments. Participants were in the USA to study as exchange or international students. Their mean age was 20. Participants were Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Korean nationals herein named HM from China, MS and TF from Japan, KM from India and HS from Korea2). Participants’ majors varied: business, biology, music, marketing, and political science. All participants had been in the USA less than a year at the time of the project. With respect to oral fluency in L2 English, all participants, but one, were deemed communicatively competent by the researcher. Among the five participants, the Chinese female participant HM was slightly more advanced in terms of fluency than the others and the Japanese male participant TM was rated as having the lowest level in L2 English fluency.

3.2 Data Collection and Procedure

Data were collected from questionnaires, oral interviews, and storytelling twice before and after the treatment period (i.e., pre- and post-). As presented in the questionnaire (see Appendix A), it provided information about the participants’ biographies (Part A), their language background for self-rating proficiency in L2 English (Part B), their attitude toward storytelling, and the

2) HM, MS, TM, KM, and HS are the initials of participants. I would like to thank all participants for their participation in the storytelling project over a six week period.
effect of storytelling (Part C). The post-questionnaire was omitted because of its similarity to the pre-questionnaire.

Spontaneous speech samples were collected from oral interviews before and after the treatment. Interview questions consisted of the elicitation of personal information (e.g., Tell me about yourself, your family, and your language background etc.) and storytelling (e.g., Have you heard or told stories before? etc.). The interview was about 5 to 10 minutes long. Depending on the participants’ replies, however, question types were slightly different so as to lead to a natural conversation. All the interview materials were recorded under participants’ permission and transcribed for analysis.

Right after each interview, participants were requested to tell stories. Two folktales were selected for storytelling. The story before the treatment was *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (Marshall 1998) and the story after the treatment was *The Three Little Pigs* (Galdone 1984). The storybooks had well-developed story structures with delineated characters, definite settings, clear themes (a character with a problem or goal), plot episodes that led to the attainment of the main character’s goal and a resolution. For storytelling, a story book was provided with a brief explanation about retelling the story. Participants were asked to read the story aloud and retell it right after reading without a book. They were asked to tell the story as if telling it to a friend who had not heard it before. Each storytelling episode was approximately 5 to 10 minutes long. Like the oral interviews, the storytelling sessions were also recorded and transcribed for analysis.

### 3.3 Storytelling Treatments

Participants partook in a six-week long training session that met twice a week; Tuesdays and Thursdays. Participants attended the session in a group on Tuesdays but individually on Thursdays. Each session lasted one hour. Participants were mainly exposed to listening to stories, telling stories, and various classroom activities related to stories they had heard. In the first week of the session, the researcher was introduced as a secondary instructor to the students\(^3\). The storytelling project and the power of storytelling were briefly

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\(^3\) The primary instructor was a Swahili-English bilingual. I would like to thank Dr. Naholi, the instructor of the classroom for allowing me to teach English using storytelling in his classroom and to conduct the storytelling project during the semester.
introduced. Stories were told by either an instructor or invited storytellers from a university\(^4\). Participants were also encouraged to tell stories. Stories they heard varied from folktales to personal stories (see Appendix B).

Each Tuesday session, participants were asked to sit in a circle and do warm-up activities by sharing personal anecdotes prior to listening to the story of the day. They were encouraged to describe what happened to them on certain days such as Halloween and Thanksgiving Day. After the warm-up activity, the source of the story to be heard that day was introduced. During storytelling, no illustrations or visual aids were provided. Tellers used various vocal and body gestures while telling stories. Students were encouraged to enhance their imagination and visualization while listening to the stories. It has been suggested that imaginative development is a key benefit of stories being told (Ellis 1997). After storytelling, story reflection activities were conducted in either oral or written form. Oral reflection activities consisted of asking \textit{Wh}-questions about the details of the story including the plot (e.g., Who are the characters in the story?), retelling part of the story (e.g., Tell us about the birth of the two sisters), and telling their own episodes (e.g., Telling a story about a trip to New York during the holidays). Written reflection activities were given to students to answer the questions about the story they heard (e.g., Story synopsis along with various \textit{Wh}-questions). Oral reflection questions were changed from story to story but written reflection questions were the same for every story. Other related classroom events included listening to Donald Davis’ story of \textit{That’s What Mamas do} on DVD (2002), listening to stories from native English speaker storytellers, and listening to stories from their peers.

Each Thursday, participants attended the treatment session individually and were encouraged to describe or tell something. In this session, the role was changed. Students were tellers and the researcher was a listener. In the beginner, there were warm-up conversations between the researcher and a participant about his or her routine (e.g., Tell me about your daily life, classes you’re taking or what happened to you yesterday \textit{etc.}). After the warm-up activity, each participant was individually encouraged to retell the

\(^4\) I would like to especially thank professional storytellers Dr. Sobol, David Claunch, and Hugh Webb for the storytelling program in the East Tennessee State University for telling their stories in the classroom.
story they heard from the class. He or she was not interrupted during the telling. The researcher gave feedback after the storytelling. After the stories were retold, participants were asked to read a new story aloud at least twice and then to retell it. Participants were requested to bring in their own personal storybooks. New stories that they had to tell were very short and simple. Many of them were from Aesop Fables and well-known folktales such as The Sun and the Wind, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack’s First Job etc. Some stories had illustrations but some did not. Feedback differed depending on participants’ errors. All participants were instructed to avoid grammatical errors and to use a spoken style rather than a written style during the treatments. While participants were telling stories, their errors and omissions were recorded. After retelling the stories, participants self-monitored their storytelling and received feedback about their errors. For example, if participants made verb tense mistakes, the correct verb tense was provided. Participants were encouraged to use the past tense for the story but the present tense in quoted dialogues. Participants were encouraged to stand up and retell the story pretending that there was an audience in front of them. In fact, most participants told stories in front of the researcher.

3.4 Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, questionnaire, interview, and storytelling, data were analyzed based on two different perspectives including participants’ interest toward storytelling and their language improvements. With regard to data analysis procedures, the researcher first established a database by editing the responses of the questionnaire and interview and storytelling transcripts. According to the responses, participants’ self-rated proficiency levels were analyzed. For the effects of storytelling, the responses of the questionnaire before and after the treatment were quantitatively compared to see whether there was a change in attitude toward storytelling. For the improvement part, the interview and storytelling transcripts were qualitatively analyzed to see what kinds of errors had been relatively reduced.
4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Attitudes toward Storytelling

Participants self-assessed their proficiency through a questionnaire before the storytelling treatment (see Appendix A.Part B). Participants responded to five scales ranging from very good, good, so-so, poor, to very poor for all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. None of the participants responded to having either very good or good listening, speaking, or writing skills. Two of the participants responded “so-so” and the rest responded “poor” for listening skills. With respect to speaking skills, only one, the Chinese participant HM, responded “so-so” and the rest either “poor” or “very poor”. For reading skills, only one participant, the Indian participant KM, responded that his reading skills were “very good.” Two participants responded “so-so’ and the rest responded “poor”. With respect to writing skills, two participants responded “so-so” and the rest responded either “poor” or “very poor”. Based on the results of the questionnaire for their proficiency level, participants were not fluent in L2 English. Among the five participants, the Chinese participant HM and the Indian participant KM could communicate with the researcher smoothly and could describe things they wanted although their speech was occasionally hesitant, with some unevenness caused by rephrasing and grouping words. However, the other three participants were considered to be real beginners because they had problems in making and answering questions as well as describing what they wanted to say. Their speech was very slow and uneven, except for short or routine sentences, frequently punctuated by silence or long pauses. In particular, the Japanese male participant TF marked all skills “very poor” indicating that he had a very low fluency in English, compared with the other participants. TF could hardly make questions or answer them. His speech was so halting and fragmentary that conversation was virtually impossible. In the questionnaire on “What skills do you want to improve in the class?” all of the participants responded that they wanted to improve their speaking.

In the questionnaire, participants were asked about whether they had knowledge about storytelling and storytellers prior to exposure to the storytelling sessions. Three participants were acquainted with the term ‘storytelling’ and only one student knew about storytellers. When participants were orally asked to define ‘storytelling’ and ‘storyteller’, however, they incorrectly defined
storytelling in terms of ‘reading the story aloud’ instead of ‘telling stories.’ In addition, a couple of participants thought that storytelling was an activity done mainly for children, not for adults.

In terms of how participants responded to the effects of storytelling before and after the treatment, before the treatment participants were asked about whether they were interested in storytelling and/or listening to and telling stories. Each skill was assessed separately (see Appendix A. Part C). Four out of five participants responded that they were interested in listening to stories. Only one participant, the Indian student KM, showed an interest in telling stories. This indicates that, among L2 learners who are not fluent in English, telling stories is considered a more challenging task than listening to stories. The number of responses changed slightly when asked in a different way. To the questionnaire on “whether they were interested in listening and telling stories,” four out of five respondents stated that they were interested in both listening and telling stories. Except for one, the Japanese male student TF, who stated that he was not interested in storytelling, all participants showed a positive attitude toward storytelling.

After the 6-week treatment was over, similar questionnaires on their attitude toward storytelling as well as the effects of storytelling were given. To the questionnaire on “I like the use of storytelling in the classroom,” three participants HM, MS, and KM marked “agree” and two participants, HS and TF, marked “disagree. For the questionnaire on whether they enjoyed listening to stories in class, three respondents said “Yes” but two said “No.” Among the five participants, three participants HM (Chinese), MS (Japanese), and KM (Indian) showed positive attitudes toward storytelling for both questionnaires. They showed a strong interest in storytelling and made sincere efforts during the whole treatment period. However, two participants’ attitudes toward storytelling were negative. The Japanese male participant TF had a negative attitude toward storytelling even before the treatment and his attitude was not changed after the treatment. The Korean female participant HS changed her attitude. HS was positive before the treatment but turned negative after the treatment.

With respect to the negative attitude from certain participants, some factors must be taken into consideration. First, fluency in L2 needs to be considered for the use of storytelling in class. Telling tasks might not be appropriate for real beginners who have problems in basic communication. In each treatment, the
researcher told stories and asked participants to retell stories. During the treatment, these participants, especially the real beginners HS and TF, stated that telling stories was very stressful and depressing because they could not do it at all. Telling stories for 5 to 10 minutes was a challenging task for these participants. Listening to stories for 10 to 15 minute was also hard for them because they could not fully understand the content. Both listening and telling tasks were too advanced for them. As a result, these participants reported feeling stress at the request of telling stories. This resulted in a negative attitude at the end of the treatment. This indicates that using storytelling in the classroom must be appropriately designed by considering learners' proficiency levels. Second, there were individual tastes toward stories and storytelling. Two participants, HS and TF, responded that stories were for children and not for adults. Since they held this opinion, using folktales did not appeal to them as adult L2 language learners. In order to motivate learners that think folktales are for children something else is clearly needed. The final factor might lie in the reliability of the instructor. The instructor was neither a professional storyteller nor a native speaker of English. This fact might reflect the Korean participant HS’s negative attitude toward storytelling over the treatment period. Although the instructor was a Korean-English bilingual, HS may not have been comfortable speaking English to a Korean instructor. If the instructor had been a native speaker of English, HS’s attitude might not have changed from positive to negative.

During the six-week treatment, participants' attitudes on how much improvement was made and how much enthusiasm they showed were carefully examined. Their efforts were congruent with their attitude toward storytelling. The three participants HM, MS, and KM, who were positive to the effects of storytelling, were also enthusiastic and actively participated in every activity (e.g., retelling or making up stories) that was requested during the treatment. They all had a strong motivation to learn and a genuine interest in storytelling. Their positive attitudes played a significant role in doing their retelling practices of stories they heard in the classroom. Although they were not fluent, they did not hesitate to retell the stories that they had heard from the class instructor and were willing to tell their own experiences or stories. They made good efforts and were well-prepared. They truly enjoyed the storytelling training sessions and stated that they wanted to continue it even after the treatment was over. They thought that ‘telling' helped markedly improve their listening, speaking and
pronunciation skills. Their achievements are discussed in section 4.2.

In contrast, two participants, TF and HS, who reported to hold slightly negative views of storytelling, were very passive in any instructed activity. During the training sessions, they claimed that telling stories was very stressful and tough to do. Note that they were less fluent than the other three. In particular, the Japanese male student TF, who was a real beginner, stated “I would like to give it up. Storytelling is very tough. I would like to stop attending the training.” The Korean female student HS expressed after the training that “In the beginning, I was interested in storytelling. When I was asked to tell the story, however, I was very stressful and ashamed of not producing sentences properly and making mistakes.” HS also did not want to continue the training. The researcher took this to mean that HS was ashamed of his poor fluency especially because the instructor was a fellow Korean. The cultural implications of this observation are beyond the scope of this paper and will not be addressed. In fact, their levels of task success were lower than the other three because of their poor fluency. They were often asked to describe pictures in a few sentences and to retell a very short story from a reading. It was hard to change their negative attitude during the treatment. Both TF and HS reported that they thought storytelling was childish and that telling stories was stressful and neither showed any outward enthusiasm while attending the training. This strongly suggests that storytelling techniques must be appropriately designed toward learners’ proficiency levels as well as their attitudes. In order to create a stress-free storytelling learning environment a better strategy for beginners is needed. Stories and storytelling must be enjoyable and useful. Otherwise, it is useless and meaningless as a tool in the L2 classroom.

4.2 Evaluation of the Effects of Storytelling

Participants’ achievements were mainly evaluated from the results of questionnaires as well as storytelling excerpts. The responses of the pre and post questionnaires were presented in Figure 1 to show how participants’ expectations of the effects of storytelling had changed over the treatment.
In the pre-questionnaire, “storytelling helps to improve listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, and vocabulary (see Appendix A. Part C. 8-15),” five participants responded that storytelling might help to improve listening, speaking, and vocabulary, four to pronunciation, three to reading, and two to writing. Almost all, participants showed a positive attitude toward the effects of storytelling on every skill. Participants strongly believed that they could improve their listening and speaking skills. After the treatment, however, this high expectation had slightly decreased for some skills as seen Figure 1. In Figure 1, the number of participants’ expectations on the effects of storytelling is slightly reduced for almost all skills but writing and pronunciation. Four participants responded that storytelling enhanced their pronunciation and vocabulary. Since the main concern of the study was on listening and speaking a detailed discussion of the other skills has been omitted.

With respect to listening skills, three participants HM, MS, and KM responded that their listening skills improved. For example, in the post-interview, the Chinese female student HM said “Listening is my weakness part. I think I improve my listening a lot and I really enjoy listening to stories in class.” HM stated that in the beginning it was very hard to understand the whole story. HM noted that failure to understand a few words in the story
caused her to stop listening. After HM was provided further exposure to listening to stories she found that she was able to understand the story better and maintain her attention although she missed a few words. Two other participants, HM and MS, reported similar experiences. In addition to improving their listening skills, they reported that they enjoyed listening to stories in class. Participants paid due attention to the storyteller during storytelling. Their high degree of attention and enjoyment enhanced their listening skills in an efficient way.

With respect to speaking skills, two participants, HM and KM, responded that storytelling helped them to improve their speaking skills. The Indian male participant KM and the Chinese female participant HM actively attended every storytelling treatment. Participant MS, who actively attended the treatment, was not sure whether she improved her speaking skill by responding with “no opinion.” Since the treatment period was comparatively short (6-weeks), it seemed natural to show some skepticism. Participants HS and TF, who passively attended the training sessions, responded that they did not improve their listening and speaking skills. As a result, their negative attitude overall resulted in a diminished effect of storytelling for those skills. Yet participants HM and KM reported that they made progress in improving their listening and speaking skills (see also Yang 2008 for the effect of storytelling). The pre- and post-interviews and storytelling offer insight into the effects on listening and speaking skills.

From the interviews, no distinguishable changes were observed before and after the treatment in terms of oral fluency. However, some participants produced sentences better at the post-interview. An example is taken from the beginning parts of HM’s pre- and post interviews:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Example sentences of HM’s pre–and post–interview</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-interview</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My name is Hanbo Ma. I’m <del>I’m from China. Anda. I’m eighteen years old. Anda I’m the first year student here. (exchange student?) hm. Anda. Not exchange</del>just I have college in china one years and then go to here transfer and not sophomore but freshman here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HM interviewed better in the post-interview in three aspects. First, she showed less oral hesitation. At the pre-interview HM often hesitated by using *anda* as seen in Table 1. With this unnecessary phrasing, her speech was frequently hesitant and jerky. However, at the post-interview, HM removed this phrasing and produced sentences smoothly and confidently. Second, her speech speed was much faster at the post-interview, compared with the pre-interview. Third, she produced more grammatical sentences at the post-interview.

The following excerpt in Table 2 is from the first and second storytelling from MS. The story was *Goldilocks and the Three Bears.* The first telling was told before the treatment and the second telling after the treatment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2, Example sentences of MS's 1st and 2nd storytelling</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once upon a time there three bears.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father is a big bear mother is a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle-size bear baby bear is a little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bear. They lived in the house near of wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wood uh one day they make the breakfast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father bear pour (?) in the bowl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father bowl is big mother bowl is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle baby bowl is little.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when they ate it but they can’t eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because it’s too hot. They walk outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waiting breakfast cold. A girl come to the house.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were about nine sentences in the stories. With respect to the use of tense, MS incorrectly used the present tense in the first telling but made corrections in the second telling (12 vs. 1). When MS paid attention to verb tense errors were greatly reduced. With respect to the use of prepositions, MS often omitted articles before nouns in the first telling but appropriately used them in the second telling (8 vs. 1). The same can be found for other grammatical elements such as plurals, pronouns, possessives, and conjunctions. Another noticeable change was how the story, in terms of plot, was delivered. In the first telling, “the girl” did not appear until the ninth sentence. The story was not structured well. Mention of “the girl” appeared in the sixth sentence in the second telling. The second telling of the story more accurately followed the original plot and
was better structured. Finally, her speech in the first telling was very fragmentary and was hard to follow, compared with the second telling. Although MS’s speech was frequently hesitant and jerky, it was coherent enough to understand. Furthermore, important story elements were logically ordered. In the beginning of the treatment, their stories were not well-structured. The structure of the stories became better once participants practiced storytelling.

By comparing the transcripts of storytelling before and after the treatment a discussion of the progress can be made. First, a number of grammatical errors were noticeably reduced for some participants. For example, participants made lots of tense errors in the beginning of the treatment. Every time participants were told stories, they were instructed to use the past tense to retell the stories but the present tense to play a character’s role in the story. As a result, the number of tense errors was remarkably reduced. In particular, when participants told the same stories twice, the number of errors was radically reduced.

Although there were not many noticeable changes, some progress can be observed when comparing the pre- and post-storytelling. Examples of error reduction and appropriate dialogue style can be found in Table 3. The example is from Chinese female participant HM’s pre- and post-storytelling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Example sentences of HM’s pre-and post-storytelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-storytelling</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in the wood there lives family of bears. Anda. Bear’s father is biggest bear there had a middle sized bear called it is bear’s mother. Anda little bear. There three size of bowls. One day morning bear’s father poured porridge into the bowl. Anda. Want them to drink them. But it is too hot. So they walked offside? Wait for the porridge cool down. And When they walked aside little girl goldilocks come to their house. Anda she walked into the little house. Found there were three bowls of porridge. She tasted papa bear’s porridge. It was too hot.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HM reduced a couple of tense errors (6 vs. 3). At the pre-storytelling, HM did not use any dialogue style at all, although there were some in the story. However, in the post-storytelling HM pretended to be a character in the story. HM delivered the story more vividly by using a dialogue style. This marks a big difference in storytelling progress. Comparing the 2nd telling in Table 2 with the post-storytelling in Table 3, however, the second telling was delivered better than the post-storytelling in terms of error reduction. This indicated that without practice it was hard to reduce errors. Furthermore, their oral fluency was not noticeably changed within a short period of time. When participants encountered a new story several practice times were needed for better delivery.

Second, participants’ pronunciations remarkably improved. As seen in Figure 1, almost all the participants felt that they had improved their pronunciation throughout the storytelling treatments. While they were requested to tell it aloud as clearly as they could, pronunciation improved along with intonation. A representative example can be found from Indian participant KM. In the beginning, his speech was hard to understand because of his murmured pronunciation. Although he could speak English well, he had trouble being understood by the researcher who was more attuned to a North American English accent. In addition, his murmured speech was very hard to understand. With respect to oral fluency, his speech was effortless and smooth, but perceptibly hard to understand (Richards and Renandya 2002: 221-223). He was mainly instructed to produce sentences as clear as he could while he was telling stories during the treatment. He carried a strong positive attitude toward the effects of storytelling. He was very enthusiastic to attend every storytelling treatment. After the treatment was over, he reported that storytelling helped him improve his pronunciation. Once he told stories aloud, he could articulate sounds better. This forced him to focus on pronunciation. In the post-questionnaire, KM responded that storytelling was useful and enjoyable in the classroom. KM also remarked that he really liked the use of storytelling in the classroom. For this participant, storytelling seemed to play an important role in improving his English.

Third, participants were not afraid of telling stories in front of people. Before the treatment, they stated that they could not tell a story at all. Once they kept practicing, participants became confident enough to tell stories in front of other people. In other words, participants gained sufficient confidence in telling a
10-minute story in L2 English. Kim (2004) reported that students in the storytelling group gained confidence in English learning. These achievements are very important for L2 English learners. For example, Japanese participant MS was eager to improve her English. She was very poor at English. Her speech was very slow and uneven, except for short or routine sentences. MS’s speech was frequently punctuated by silence or long pauses (Richards and Renandya 2002: 221-223). Although she was a real beginner, she had a strong desire to speak English well enough to enter a graduate school in the USA. In addition, MS had a positive attitude toward the effects of storytelling. With her strong efforts, enthusiasm and motivation, MS actively attended storytelling training sessions. As a result, she felt that she made some progress. MS responded that storytelling helped her improve her listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary. In addition she felt she gained some confidence. It was noticeable that her frequent errors using incorrect tenses were gradually reduced and her sentences were structured better while she was exposed to retelling stories.

In contrast to the three active participants HM, KM, and MS described above, the two participants HS and TM were very passive attendees during storytelling treatments. The Korean female participant HS came to the university as a graduate student. Her speech was similar to MS in terms of oral proficiency. HS’s speech was frequently hesitant and jerky. Her sentences were often left incomplete. In the pre-questionnaire, she positively responded to the effects of storytelling. She responded that storytelling might help her improve each skill but writing. Although she was eager to attend the training sessions, she could not attend often because of her course load. She wanted to quit the training in the middle of the session because she was very busy with her own work. Although it was hard to schedule, she was obliged to attend the training because she had signed up. In addition, it seemed unnatural and uncomfortable for HS to use English with a Korean instructor. For these reasons, HS did not exert herself. She lost interest in storytelling and acquired a negative attitude toward storytelling. Furthermore, she felt very stressed and depressed when she was requested to retell stories she had heard in class. As a real beginner, telling a story seemed to be a very challenging task for her. As a result, she negatively responded that storytelling had not helped to improve any of her English skills. Unlike other participants, she brought complicated factors along with her negative attitude to the sessions. One question arose whether a positive attitude
might have been retained if the English instructor had been a native English speaker, instead of a Korean-English bilingual. It is well-known that native speakers of English are preferred as instructors among L2 English learners.

Unlike HS, the Japanese male participant TM had a negative attitude toward storytelling even before the treatment. TM came to the university as an exchange student. However, TM reported having problems in communicating in English. His speech was so halting and fragmentary that conversation was virtually impossible. He was the lowest in terms of fluency among the five participants. Although TM regularly attended storytelling treatments, he was very passive and not enthusiastic, compared with the other participants. In the pre-questionnaire, he responded that storytelling might help listening and speaking skills but not reading, writing, and vocabulary. TM was requested to describe pictures instead of telling stories because of the lack of proficiency. During the treatments, he wanted to quit because he could not do ‘telling’ well. He told the instructor that “storytelling is tough to me. I can’t understand your stories. I can’t retell stories.” Various efforts were made for him to practice storytelling better. In the post-questionnaire, however, he negatively responded to the effects of storytelling toward listening, speaking, and reading. For this participant, storytelling itself seems to have been a burdensome task.

In summation, like other teaching methodologies, storytelling seems to work well when participants are positive, active, and enthusiastic. Telling tasks fit well for L2 learners who can communicate well. Storytelling is tough for beginners who struggle with basic communication. This study reported that real beginners found retelling stories stressful and depressing with the result that storytelling was avoided. The results suggested that different strategies in the use of storytelling in the classroom are necessary for the real beginners.

5. Some Issues About Using Storytelling for Adult L2 Learners

As discussed in the results section, the use of storytelling in the adult language classroom might be useful in improving listening and speaking abilities. However, a number of issues arise when an L2 instructor wants to use storytelling in an adult classroom. The first issue is whether adult L2 learners are interested in using stories in their classroom, i.e., the attitude toward storytelling. The results of the present study indicated that some adult learners showed a
negative attitude toward the use of storytelling in the classroom. The attitude toward storytelling needs to be taken into consideration before application.

The second issue is whether ready-to-use textbooks or secondary story materials are available for a language instructor to use. In order for a language teacher to use storytelling in their classes, there must be ready-to-use storytelling materials. Otherwise, it is not very useful and convenient for language teachers to use storytelling in the classroom. Many L2 English teachers rely heavily on textbooks in the classroom out of convenience, habit or speed. In most cases textbooks are the required materials. Without ready-to-use materials, using storytelling in the actual classroom could be a burden for language instructors.

The last and third issue is whether the storytelling technique is useful for non-native speakers (i.e., NNS) of English teachers to apply to their classroom. In other words, are they qualified in telling or performing a 10-minute story in L2 English? In order for students to tell their personal stories, a language teacher must be a model of storytelling in a classroom. The question is whether language teachers are capable of retelling folktales or telling their own personal stories. In addition to teaching English, telling stories is another task that must be professionally acquired. It would be hard, even for a native language teacher, to tell without any storytelling training. Using storytelling implies that a teacher must be at least qualified to tell a 10-minute story in English like a storyteller. Since this is another burden, it does not seem to be useful from the NNS teachers' point of view. Because of this reason, storytelling in the classroom might be avoided by teachers and administrators.

Despite the fact that there are many issues involved, storytelling can be a fascinating tool for teachers to teach L2 English and for L2 learners to improve their language skills. The use of storytelling can be useful and applicable not only for children but also for adults. In order to use storytelling in the adult L2 English classroom, however, the issues raised above must be somehow resolved in order for language teachers to use storytelling to teach a language in their classrooms. Here are some suggestions. First, surveys of college students' and teachers' attitudes toward storytelling must be done prior to applying storytelling to the adult classroom. If students have a positive attitude toward the use of storytelling to teach English, they will surely show an active participation toward classroom activities. Second, storytelling books and activity materials for the language classrooms must be appropriately developed. Many textbooks that use
stories are for children and not for adults. Storytelling books appropriate for the adult learner must be available. Third, a curriculum of storytelling and training programs for language teachers must be designed. Using storytelling in the classroom implies that teachers have an understanding of the application of storytelling and possess the ability to tell stories. To develop this ability, there must be well-organized storytelling communities as in the US (www.storytellingcenter.com). However, in many parts of the world, for example South Korea, there are no organized storytelling communities where somebody can practice L2 English storytelling to the public. In order to utilize storytelling in the classroom, storytelling communities, festivals, and conferences must be developed among language teachers or people who are interested in storytelling. Without solving these issues, it is difficult to apply storytelling to the adult language learning classroom. Furthermore, it is still not clear whether storytelling truly has the positive effect of improving language skills for adult L2 language learners, compared with other techniques. In order to pursue the usefulness of storytelling even in the adult language learning classroom, more research about the effects of storytelling should be carried out.

6. Conclusion

The attitudes toward storytelling and the progress made in the adult English classroom were investigated. The findings of this study showed a close relationship between attitude and achievement toward storytelling. Participants, who carried a positive attitude, made progress along with active, enthusiastic, and sincere efforts during storytelling treatments. They reported that their listening, speaking, and pronunciation greatly improved over the storytelling treatments. In addition, they enjoyed using storytelling in the classroom. After the treatment, they were able to deliver a 10-minute story in their own words, fix their grammar mistakes during the telling, make a perceptible articulation with focus, and gain confidence in speaking. Progress relied heavily on attitudes toward storytelling and the amount of effort made in the practice of storytelling. A positive attitude played a significant role in making noticeable progress. However, students with negative attitudes toward storytelling made little progress. Their responses indicated that storytelling could be stressful, burdensome, and not enjoyable for some adult L2 English learners, especially
real beginners. Therefore, using storytelling in the adult L2 English classroom must be carefully designed by considering their proficiency level as well as their attitudes toward storytelling. This study was designed as a pilot study ahead of quantitative research. Given the fact that this study collected data from only a few participants, it is difficult for the researcher to claim that the results from this study can be applied equally to other adult L2 language learning situations. Further research is necessary to generalize the findings of the present study.

References


Websites

http://www.storytellingcenter.com

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APPENDIX A

PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE

Part A. Biographical information
1. Gender: Male Female
2. What is your age?
   between 18-20 between 21-30 31-40 above 40
3. What is your nationality?
4. What is your native language?
   (if you grew up with more than one language, please specify)
5. What is your status here in college?
   Undergraduate Exchange student Please specify _____

Part B. English Background information
1. Rate yourself according to the following categories VG G OK P VP

   Your overall comprehension ability in English 1 2 3 4 5
   Your overall speaking ability in English: 1 2 3 4 5
   Your overall reading ability in English: 1 2 3 4 5
   Your overall writing ability in English: 1 2 3 4 5

2. What skills do you want to improve in the class?
Part C. Storytelling in English
1. Please decide whether you strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), strongly disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Have No Opinion (No) about the following statements. There is no correct answer but all you have to do is give a sincere response. Place an (X) in the box that shows your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I knew about storytelling before class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I knew about storytellers before class.</td>
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<td>3. I am interested in storytelling.</td>
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<td>4. I am interested in listening to stories.</td>
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<td>5. I am interested in telling stories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I am interested in listening and telling stories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Storytelling helps to improve listening.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Storytelling helps to improve speaking.</td>
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<td>9. Storytelling helps to improve reading.</td>
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<td>10. Storytelling helps to improve writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Storytelling helps to improve pronunciation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Storytelling helps to improve accent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Storytelling helps to improve vocabulary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Storytelling must be taught in a language classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. I am confident to tell a 10-minute story.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Do you have any comments on your language or storytelling background which you think are important but which you were not asked about in this questionnaire?
## APPENDIX B

### STORIES IN THE CLASSROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Titles</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Who tells stories?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Wenny Old Man</td>
<td>Korean folktale</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Herdsman and the Weaver</td>
<td>Korean folktale</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stories of a Cat and Dog</td>
<td>Personal stories</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Red Cat</td>
<td>Japanese folktale</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Cat in a Shopping Bag</td>
<td>American scary tale</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Two Sisters</td>
<td>Korean folktale</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Foolish Fishermen</td>
<td>French folktale</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy Jack</td>
<td>England folktale</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian Jack</td>
<td>Appalachian folktale</td>
<td>Invited storyteller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel to Bhutan</td>
<td>Personal story</td>
<td>Invited storyteller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Grateful Crane</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Invited storyteller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halloween Party</td>
<td>Personal story</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat Race</td>
<td>Personal story</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Johnson City</td>
<td>Personal story</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf Tour</td>
<td>Personal story</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip to New York</td>
<td>Personal story</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>