

# Developing Oral Narrative Skills in the Classroom with Authentic Materials



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# 10 month, classroom-based quasi-experimental study

## **Control group (n = 31)**

- 2nd year university ss
- TOEFL 493 - 520
- Standard textbooks, commonly used in Japan
- Focus on developing ss' listening & speaking skills

## **Exp. group (n = 31)**

- 2nd year university ss
- TOEFL 503 - 567
- Authentic materials (films, documentaries, internet material, books)
- Focus on developing ss' listening & speaking skills through awareness-raising of common discourse features

# Assessment

- Quantitative measures: pre- & post-trial tests (listening, pronunciation, C' test, grammar, vocabulary, DCT, oral interviews, ss-ss role plays)
- Qualitative measures: student diaries, case-studies, transcription of classroom discourse

# Why teach oral narrative skills?

Text Type	Frequency
Storytelling	43.4%
Observation/Comment	19.75%
Opinion	16.8%
Gossip	13.8%
Joke-telling	6.3%

Frequency of genres in coffee break conversations at work  
(Eggins & Slade 1997: 265)

# Why teach oral narrative skills?

‘Storytelling is very common in casual conversation. It provides conversationalists with a resource for assessing and confirming affiliations with others... In stories we tell not just what happened, but also how we feel about it. Thus, in stories values, attitudes and ways of seeing the world are created and represented.’ (Eggins & Slade 1997: 229)

# Today's workshop will...

- Allow participants to experience one way of introducing oral narratives skills into the classroom with authentic materials.
- Report on the results of using these trial materials in the Japanese university context.

# Stages & aims of the lesson

Stage	Aims
1. Setting the context	Developing ss' schemas & scripts for police/driver dialogue, pre-teaching essential vocabulary, raising ss' interest in the topic.

# Stages & aims of the lesson

Stage	Aims
2. 1st role-play attempt	<p>Familiarising ss with the content of the authentic materials to aid listening comprehension.</p> <p>Creating baseline data for ss to compare with NS oral narrative.</p>



# Stages & aims of the lesson

Stage	Aims
3. Listening activity	<p>Exposing ss to authentic language through NS oral narrative model.</p> <p>Raising awareness of the gap between NSs' &amp; ss' oral narratives.</p>

# Stages & aims of the lesson

Stage	Aims
4. Post-listening activities	<p>Awareness-raising activities:</p> <p>Narrative structure (Labov 1972)</p> <p>Historic present to increase dramatic impact (Schiffrin 1981)</p> <p>Use of direct speech to heighten vividness (Longacre 1983)</p> <p>Use of ‘story voices’ to clarify vantage point (Polanyi 1985)</p> <p>NVC (Argyle 1988)</p> <p>Register</p>

# Stages & aims of the lesson

Stage	Aims
5. 2nd role-play attempt	<p>Allowing ss to review features of successful oral narratives &amp; incorporate these into their 2nd attempts of the role-play.</p> <p>Preparation for ‘freer’ practice activity where ss tell their own stories incorporating the target features.</p>

# Significant events in learner diaries

- Reactions to authentic materials.
- Challenging nature of 'real' English.
- Body language & intonation of NSs.
- Taboo language.
- Colloquial language.
- Cultural information.

# Reactions to authentic materials

**Reactions to authentic materials were generally very positive:**

‘To study Real English Yes or No? Yes!! I don’t get used to the way of studying. But I can feel to join the class. I like this positive way of studying.’

‘I want to be a good speaker in English someday. I like the style of this class, because I can listen to real English. We will acquire good knowledge of English in your class!!’

# Challenging nature of ‘real’ English.

**Students commented on the difficulty but it did not appear to affect motivation:**

‘Listening to the movie was difficult for me, so I could catch about only 60%, but as we watch again, I came to understand well. Today’s lesson was funny and interesting.’

‘After that we watched a video, and it was difficult to understand because they spoke very fast and used difficult words. With a script, however, I understood a little what they meant, using my eyes and ears at the same time. The script was very useful to me.’

# NVC & intonation

**Materials successfully raised students' awareness of these features:**

‘Today, I learned a communication how to transport more better. It is body languages, gesture, intonation etc., which I learned I talk with my friends in English. Usually, I talk too flat. So I thought, today's class was the most important class in my English problems.’

‘It is as much as most of Japanese, who are studying English, can do to make sentences in English. So they often forget about Intonation or Body Language. Me too...This kind of lecture tells us what conversation is!!! I like today's class!’

# Taboo language

**Predominant reaction was interest rather than offence:**

‘I think it interesting to exaggerate some words or add some foul words such as “fuckin” or “bitch”.’

‘We make policeman story more interesting. My group use many swearing words. That was bad. I decided to not to use them in my life.’

‘I felt that police man used “fuckin” many times. It is heard to be rowdy. Many native speakers often use “fuckin”.’



# Colloquial language

**Students displayed a very positive reaction to learning colloquial language:**

‘I don’t know slang so much so I spent a very interesting time I think that I want to know more slang in this class.’

‘Until now I learn formal (not casual) English but these words can use with foreign friends so I was delighted to learn it.’

# Cultural information

**Students are ‘noticing’ cultural differences & responding to them:**

‘The important point is how to tell stories with fun. I think that foreigners talk about various stories with fun very much. Compared with that, Japanese are poor at talking with fun. So it was very difficult for me to tell stories with fun.’

‘I think there are different thinking of interesting between Japanese and foreigners. Because when I feel so boring about foreigners talking, they seem very funny. It is very difficult for us to understand foreigners sense. But I would like to speak English like native speakers, I will do my best.’

# Sample post-task oral narratives

# Features from input included in post-task oral narratives:

- a) Increased gesturing
- b) Greater pitch variation
- c) More overt listener responses: “Oh, you’re tough”; “It’s dangerous”; “Amazing”; “Wow”
- d) Increased use of present historic & progressive forms to heighten drama
- e) Use of direct speech & story voices for dramatic effect: “Help, I don’t wanna freeze!”

# Features from input included in post-task oral narratives:

- f) Heightened detail at the stories climax: “The bar is going down, I’m moving on... baam”
- g) Generic structure closer to NS norms
- h) Use of exaggeration to heighten drama: “Not knowing that I’m almost dying”; “You nearly became ice cream”.
- i) Signaling topical coherence: “Talking about terrible stories”

# Conclusions

- Authentic materials have great potential in the classroom for motivating students & providing them with ‘rich input’ which they can use to develop their oral narrative skills.
- The challenging nature of authentic materials means that students need to be carefully prepared to tackle them (written transcripts are a useful resource for learners)
- Teachers need to be trained in ways to effectively exploit authentic materials.

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