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WRITTEN RETELLING VS ORAL RETELLING: AN EVALUATION STRATEGY IN AN ESL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Written and oral retellings of stories appear to have potential for skill development inside English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. However, while they appear to have potential for skill development they have not been widely tested (Morrow, 1986), There are some evidences written and oral retellings as an instructional strategy enhance the development of various literacy skills (Golden 1984, and Whaley, 1981). Although there is support for the use of retellings as a strategy to enhance learner's literacy development, Morrow (1985) stated that the use of oral and written retellings was not widely practiced in schools since teachers viewed retellings as time consuming and difficult (Morrow, 1985). This mini research compares written and oral retellings and would like to prove that the skill of retelling aside from contributing to student's skill development is an effective instrument in measuring comprehension, thus enhances both oral and written skills of students. This research illustrates though oral and written retellings are different, it also shows how similar they are.

Keywords

Language Assesment, Reading Comprehension, Retelling, ESL classroom

1. Introduction

Retelling is defined as post reading or post listening recalls in which readers or listeners tell what they remember either orally or in writing or illustrations (Kalmbach, 1986). With regard to language learning, the benefits of retelling are numerous. Research suggests that oral retelling of what has been listened to or read results in increased comprehension and recall of discourse (Gambrell, et al., 1991; Gambrell, et al., 1985; Lipson & Wixson, 1997). As students reconstruct text, they develop language complexity through internalization of text features (Brown & Cambourne, 1987), and acquire a sense of story structure (Morrow, 1985), thereby providing the schema for comprehending, learning, and remembering the ideas in stories and texts (Anderson, 1994). Retellings add considerably to our understanding of students' comprehension because they provide a view of the quantity, quality, and organization of information constructed during reading or listening. And because text recall through retelling is natural for children, it does not necessarily bias them to process text in a particular way, as questions do (Lipson & Wixson, 1997). During the past few years, researchers have used story retelling as an assessment tool investigating developmental trends in comprehending stories (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979; Thorndyke, 1977). In the limited number of studies conducted using story retelling as a strategy for skill development, positive results were found for increased ability in comprehension, language development, and the inclusion of structural elements in learner's retold stories (Gambrell, et al., 1991; Gambrell, et al., 1985; Morrow, 1985). The researchers also concluded that skills gained from retelling stories were transferred to student's dictations or written retellings.

Written and oral retellings of stories appear to have potential for skill development but have not been widely tested (Morrow, 1986). However, there is some evidence that Golden (1984) and Whaley (1981) found that written and oral retellings as an instructional strategy also enhanced the development of various literacy skills. Although there is support for the use of retellings as a strategy to enhance learner's literacy development, Morrow (1985) stated that the use of oral and written retellings was not widely practiced in schools since teachers viewed retellings as time consuming and difficult (Morrow, 1985).

This mini research on comparing written and oral retellings would like to prove that the skill contributes to student's skill development. However, while they appear to have potential for skill development they have not been widely tested. According to Morrow (1986), additional

research is needed to determine the significance of written and oral retellings as an instructional strategy inside the classroom, thus this is an attempt to answer that.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The immediate concern of this research is what transpires inside the English for a Second Language (ESL) classroom when students are made to conduct written and spoken retelling of a narrative. Given the same goal or topic, the researcher would like to see how the two languages of students differ or be similar in some respects. How do students accomplish their task when they are made to narrate in written form and then narrate orally the same topic?

The overall objective of this paper is to show how written and spoken retelling narratives of students in an ESL classroom differ or don't differ as far as their language and strategies are concerned. Specifically the study aims to:

- Evaluate written and oral retelling narratives of students with the use of T-units to see their length and use points of evaluation adopted from other studies.
- Provide new angle to the study of spoken and written language and show how similar they actually are when used as an evaluation instrument inside an ESL classroom.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This mini classroom research attempts to compare written retelling and oral retelling as an evaluation strategy inside the English as a Second language (ESL) classroom. It makes use of the written and oral output as an assessment tool for comprehension. It is always assumed that written and spoken discourses are different. The immediate concern now is to look at how the two (2) languages of students as reflected in their output be similar in some respects. The researcher does not hope to see a dichotomy because of the inherent structure and goal of the materials for study.

If there will be differences it could be the length in T-units and statistically there will be no significance. The researcher would like to say that there should be no dichotomy or that there shouldn't be any difference between the two modes because they share the same goal and intent, that is to narrate the same event. Instead of dichotomy, the researcher would like to find similarities. This is the thrust of this paper.

2. Literature Studies

Jane Blackenship- in her article *A Linguistic Analysis of Oral and Writing Style* (1962) adopts the syntactic taxonomy of C.C. Fries and compares spoken and written style represented by sentential samples randomly selected from speeches and articles of four (4) public figures. She concludes that syntactic structure is determined by individual style rather than read/heard purpose. In her findings, it can also derive that syntactic features are partial indicators of oral/written style.

Milto Horowitz and John Newman's 1962 article, *Spoken and Written Expression: An Experimental Analysis*, features the results from the experiment done to test for differences between spoken and written expression. The study is controlled by limiting the time for preparation, for exposition and by limiting likewise the subjects to two balanced topics. This is conducted with the assumption that writing is more deliberate than speech, thus the time element for writing is longer.

The study forwards the hypotheses that if all major conditions affecting the mode of speaking and writing are controlled then;

- Spoken expressions should be more productive. There should be more ideas expressed and these ideas should be elaborated more fully.
- The spoken expression should produce greater proliferation of material other than ideas.
- The two modes should differ in form. The authors are able to prove the forwarded hypotheses.

The 1967 article, *Levels of Abstraction in Spoken and Written Language* authored by Joseph de Vito proves that oral language is significantly less abstract and it contains more finite verbs and less noun abstraction than written language.

Another article this time written by Roy O'donnell, *Syntactic Difference between Speech and Writing* (1974) analyze sample of speech from one adult male university graduate. The author outlines the syntactic difference derived from his evaluation and analysis.

Tannen's second article, *Oral and Literate strategies in Spoken and Written Narratives* (1982) gives a background of other researches on spoken and written narratives. She reiterates her arguments that what has been thought literate and literary is found also in spoken discourse.

Previous researches show the dichotomy between spoken and written language As Tannen asserts, researches often use a relatively informal spoken discourse and a formal written narrative. Thus, differences or (absence of it) may just be because of the material chosen for

study. His article analyzes spoken and written versions of the same narrative and it yielded two (2) main findings:

- Features that have been associated with oral discourse are found in written discourse as well, and
- The written versions of the narrative contain syntactic complexity expected in writing with features that create involvement expected in speaking.

She concludes that the difference between features of a language which distinguishes discourse types reflects not only and not mainly spoken vs. written mode but rather genre and related register, growing out of communicative goals and context.

The book *Spoken and Written Language Exploring Orality and Literacy*(1982) which was edited by Tannen contains articles that facilitate a deeper understanding of what the field of Orality and Literacy really is. The articles render insightful studies of the relation of spoken/written language and strategies.

2.1 The Race to the Tops

“Now writing of course is merely a record of speech”

(Bloomfield, 433)

This defensive and arrogant stance taken by L. Bloomfield was said at the height of the controversy between the primacy of spoken over written language. But as De Vito has written, „From Aristotle’s observation, that the style prose is not that of spoken oratory”. ..The distinction between spoken and written language has been asserted with great conviction. (Lovelis, 354).

We have always regarded the difference between spoken and written as truism. So as a researcher, it was surprising to note that way back early 19th century the controversy was one hot issue.

Ferdinand se Saussure, the father of Modern linguistics argued that “a language and its written form constitute two separate systems of signs. The sole reason for the existence of the latter is to represent the former”.

Woolbert in defense of writing, wrote “writing has very special responsibilities in the movement of civilization”. First, it makes for accuracy under repetition. Secondly, writing works by a process of nibbling or maybe attrition, overcoming opposition and ignorance by wearing it down. Writing will always be an advance agent of civilization (284:85)

Jack Goody (1987) in his book gave a comprehensive listing of the reasons why linguists have been arguing for the primacy of spoken language.

- Spoken language came first as the history of human race.

As Ong (1982), wrote “the basic orality of language is permanent.”

- Spoken language came first for individuals. “The fact that we learn to speak before learning to write is forgotten, and the natural relation between the two is reversed” (Saussure, 1983).
- Speech is biologically based and according to Chomsky, the capacity for learning language is innate.
- spoken language is highly resistant to language control.
- Spoken language comes first for individual societies.

According to Ong (1982), “language is overwhelmingly oral that of all thousands of languages spoken in the course of history only around 160 have ever committed to writing. Moreover, some languages have survived without the written tradition:

- Literacy as a widespread phenomenon is a very recent historical event;
- We speak more than we read or write and
- Spoken language is used in a much wider range of function than written language.

Saussure added that “a language (then) has an oral tradition, independent of writing and much more stable, but the prestige of written form prevent us from seeing this.”

Other linguists thought that this issue has dragged for so long that they are now trying to resolve the issue by compromise. Ong declared that “writing commitment of word to space enlarge the potentiality of language almost beyond measure”. Goody asserted that both modes have a lot of going for them.

Until now there has been no valid study that could put an end to the controversy. It has begun to resemble the argument of what came first, the chicken or the egg. “One thing that has become clear from such studies is that both writing and speaking are used in a variety of different ways for a variety of different purposes. (Int'l Enc, 258). Scholars from various disciplines began realizing the value of two modes and thought about researches designed to emphasize specific difference between the two modes.

2.2 Spoken and Written Modes

“Speaking and Writing are alike...and different: “

(Woolbert, 1922)

If the controversy on the primacy is not enough, here’s another one. “Spoken and Written language” were not considered any different from one another. “

In 1960's there was a renewed vigor to study the differences in spoken/written mode. Blackenship in her study applied the modified Fries system of syntactic analysis to the samples of oral and written discourse and concluded that though there were marked differences, the linguistic differences among the speakers-writers were more pronounced than:

- The general difference between oral-written discourse and
- The difference between the oral and written discourse of each of the speaker-writers.

Poole, (1976) discovered that "in relation to oral systems, written systems are more complex in structure." The study also revealed that in written mode there are more adjectival but less adverbial elaboration, show more complex verbal structures but contained fewer indices of personal reference.

What works orally does not work in print and vice versa. We know the reasons for this discrepancy at least in part: Oral communication works through assumption of immediacy and spontaneity; Writing on the other hand is planned organized and non-spontaneous.

To summarize the many points given by the researcher, especially Jack Goodie (1987), the differences between the modes and strategies are listed below.

- The tendency to use longer words.
- Greater variety of vocabulary (e.g. as in selection of adjectives, & etc).
- Fewer personal pronouns.
- Preferential uses of declaratives and subjunctives rather than imperatives, interrogatives and exclamations.
- Preferential use of elaborate syntactic and semantic structure.
- Preferential usage of passive than active verb voice or the simple past.
- Greater use of abstract terms.
- Greater explications.
- Greater elaboration.
- Greater formality.

3. Methodology

The researcher utilized second Year College of Education students taking up English 3, an oral communication subject in the school where she currently teaches during the first semester of school year 2013--2014. From a total of forty (40) students, a total of twelve (12) subjects were taken out using a simple random technique. The article "Appointment with Love" by S.

Kishor was the literary text and is the focus of attention of both written and oral mode. The evaluative points are word choice, syntactic structures and strategies used. The T- unit of analysis was also used to count the number of sentences (both main and subordinate clauses including the sentence fragments) of the students to compare their length.

After reading the story to the students of the Oral communication class, they were made to retell in writing the story Appointment with Love. The writing activity was given as a seatwork in the classroom. The students of the whole class were forty (40) that only twelve (12) subjects were taken out as samples for oral recitation for this mini research. After the writing activity, the selected 12 subjects were asked to report in the library during their vacant time. The twelve students were paired off and were conferred privately. They were made to narrate orally the same topic, Appointment with Love as a special task, to be recorded with a video cam in a natural conversational setting. They were told to narrate in a story like manner. The narratives then were transcribed and analyzed.

The evaluative points are word choice, syntactic structures and strategies used in narrating. The T-unit of analysis was also adopted to count the number of sentences and fragments to show the length of compositions and transcriptions and as basis of comparison between written narratives of students with that of their oral narratives.

Unit of Analysis: The T- Unit

In linguistics, the term T-unit was coined by Hunt in 1965. It is defined as the main clause plus all subordinate clauses and non-clausal structures attached to or embedded in it. Technically, a T-unit is a dominant clause and its dependent clauses:

T-units are often used in the analysis of written and spoken discourse, such as in studies on errors in second-language writing. The number of error-free T-units may be counted, or changes in accuracy per T-unit, over drafts of compositions may be measured (Sachs and Polio, 2007).

Example of analysis:

I don't like the taste. (1T – Unit)

Then, the rain falls and spring comes. (2 T-units)

I don't like what is left in the cup after you finished drinking. (3 T-units }

3.1 Framework of Analysis

The researcher wishes to validate Tannen's theory that "the difference between features of language which distinguishes discourse types reflects not only-and not-mainly spoken versus written mode but rather genre and related register growing out of communicative goals and context," which according to her is probably only a matter of choosing the material for study.

The written narrative of students here will be analyzed sharing or discussing the same story (Appointment with Love) with their oral narratives. Oral speeches are recorded and transcribed in order to see their structures and organization.

On the basis of points given by Goodie (1987) the written and oral narratives will be analyzed in terms of these guidelines and parameters:

- Word choice-such as abstract terms, longer words and greater variety of vocabulary.
- Syntactic structures-such as personal pronouns, preference for declaratives and preference for passive forms of the verb.
- Strategies- such as general structures with more ideas in spoken text, subordinate ideas or elaboration, greater repetition of words, and by inspection, greater repetition of phrases and large part of sentences, and communicative signals.

These guidelines and parameters for analysis are expected to reveal an interplay of the modes and strategies instead of differences unlike what other studies have shown.

3.1.1 Analysis

This portion shall be divided in three (3) parts:

- Discussion of written narratives
- Discussion of Oral narratives
- Evaluation of the narratives using the ten point guidelines.

3.2 The Written Narratives

The table below shows the length in T-units and fragments in the sentences of the students in the written mode. The title of the retelling narrative given as seatwork is "Appointment with Love" and they were asked to fill up just the front page of the one half crosswise of a yellow pad paper. Table 1 shows an interesting result.

Table 1: *T-Unit Analysis of Written Narratives of the Students*

Subjects by Name:	Length of Words in T-units	Fragments	Total No. of words (whole composition)
1. Elena Miana	20	2	181
2. Rhodafe corpus	25	1	180
3. Arlene de Leon	20	0	157
4. Rachel Anne Profogo	25	2	174
5. Norberto Tomas	25	2	170
6. Fealyn Salonga	20	1	118
7. Melody Dacanay	24	0	150
8. Abegail Palogan	15	3	119
9. Blessie Jane Ejandal	25	0	155
10. Ria Gequiñana	14	0	93
11. Ann Charina Peralta	19	1	153
12. Eufemia Laurean	16	1	104
Mean	20.67	1.08	146.17

The written narratives of the students have three parts. A brief introduction of the story. the main event which led to the solution of the problem up to its ending. The students were given a limit to fill up only the front page of their one half crosswise. To consider the length of the narratives, Table 1 shows the number of sentences by T- units against counting the number of words of the whole composition.

3.3 The Oral Narratives

Table 2: *No. of T-units in the Oral Narratives of students*

Subjects by Name:	Number of words in T-units	No. of Fragments	Total Number of words of whole narration.
1. Elena Miana	31	2	200
2. Rhodafe corpuz	26	6	186
3. Arlene de Leon	21	1	123
4. Rachel Anne Profogo	17	8	142
5. Norberto Tomas	16	5	112
6. Fealyn Salonga	34	11	221
7. Melody Dacanay	16	3	93
8. Abegail Palogan	13	0	99
9. Blessie Jane Ejandal	29	3	233
10. Ria Gequiñana	12	5	92
11. Ann Charina Peralta	18	7	161
12. Eufemia Laurean	17	3	127
Mean	20.8	3.73	149.0

Out of forty (40) students of the College of Education class, only twelve (12) subjects were taken out as samples for oral recitation. These students were paired off to take turns in camera recording. The special task was narrating orally and in a natural conversation setting the story Appointment with Love. The task is to record the scene in video camera and the conversation was transcribed in writing and was analyzed.

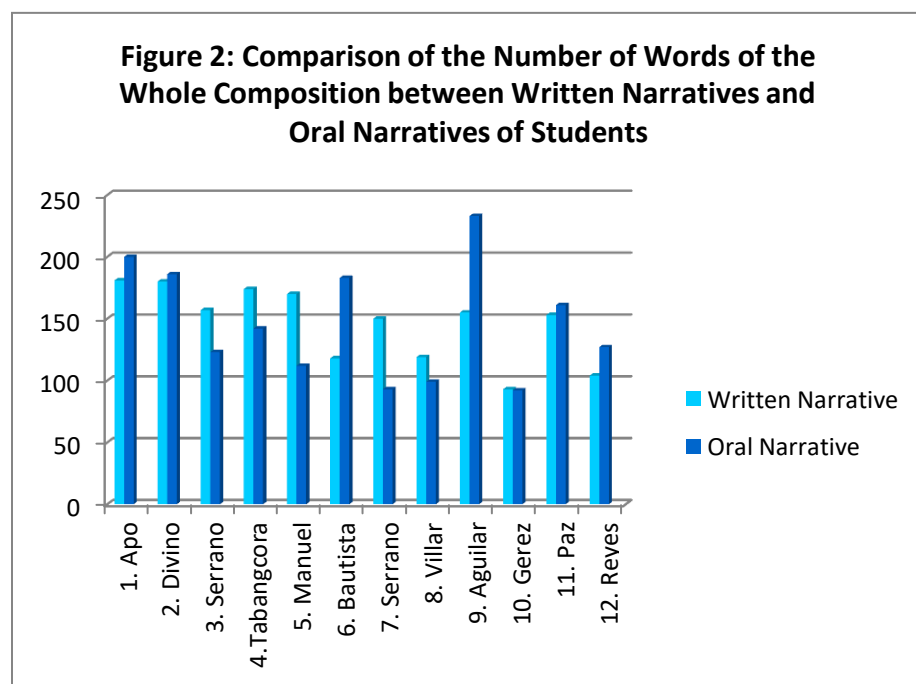
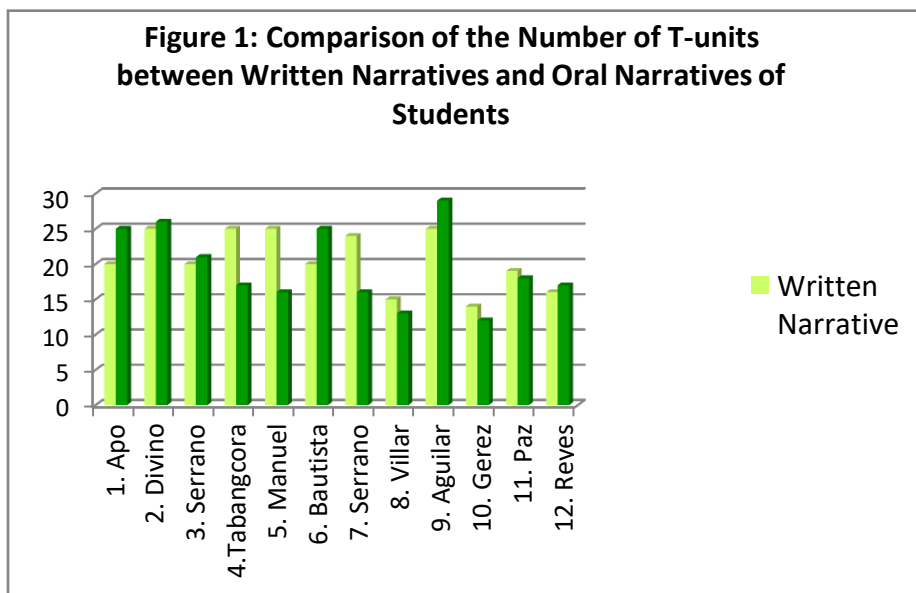


Figure 1 &2 in the preceding pages shows the plotted comparison between the numbers of T-units of the written narrative with that of the oral narrative. Not much difference is shown on the number of T-units.

With regard to the number of words, on the other hand, it seems that there is a fluctuation on the graph. The fluctuation may be explained by the fluency displayed by the student in trying to express himself in a conversational and a natural manner. The presence of stammering and repetition of phrase and clauses in order to convey meaning results to a more number of words in the transcription.

The mean T-units do not have much difference between written and oral narrative which is 20.67 and 20.8 respectively.

4. Results and Discussions

The following observations were revealed with the finished task of the students.

4.1 Easy to Understand Terms

The words of the students are simple. There was not much difference on the choice of words in both written and oral mode. Neither technical words utilized nor a need for a dictionary to find its meaning. The subjects have expressed their ideas well with their own supply of vocabulary.

4.2 Longer Words in Written Texts

The counting of the clauses by T-units shows the result of the narratives both in written and oral forms. The results show that there is not much difference between the two as shown in figure 1 (Comparison of T – units in written and oral mode). It was in the number of words in the oral mode that fluctuates because of some repetition and stammering in grasping for words to convey meaning.

4.3 Formal Words in Written Texts

While the students supply of vocabulary is limited, they were able to finish the task well by describing the event shortly. Formal words are used in written than in oral mode.

4.4 Personal Pronouns in Written Text

The pronouns are supposed to be fewer in written, but because the task is a recall, there is not much difference between the two. The personal point of view was utilized to make the narrative personal and more informal.

4.5 Preference for Declaratives

The narratives of the students both written and oral were generally declaratives.

4.6 Preference for Passive Voice

Students' narration used the simple past tense and not the passive voice in both written and oral modes.

4.7 General Structure

The organization of both written and oral modes contains introduction, body and an ending as its elements of structure. There was more of an elaboration in the body because of specific details in describing the event.

4.8 Repetition

There was more of repetition in spoken words, as the students grasp for words in a natural conversation setting. There was not much of fluency, but the meanings were understood. The written forms did not have repetition.

4.9 Linguistic Markers Evident In Written Mode

Transition markers show coherence in written modes. These can be seen in the right places. Linguistic markers are seldom observed in the oral mode, however because of its informality, the sentences are continuous and their meanings understood. are seldom observed but the sentences are continuous and meanings understood.

4.10 Greater Formality in Written

The written work of the students were organized and orderly but not really formal as they use simple words only. It was hard to be formal using simple sentences. The same way with the oral mode, since it is in a natural conversation setting, there was more familiarity not formality.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The preceding discussions showed proofs that there wasn't much difference when it comes to the strategies and style used by the students in their narration in both written and oral form. The mini classroom research has been a wonderful activity and though constrained with some factors such as time for more in depth analysis nevertheless, it somehow presented something on the way we are writing and speaking.

The researcher of this paper has in its little way prove the assertion that by following Tannen's theory, materials with the same structure and goal would not leave any more space for a difference in the spoken and written mode. The narratives were evaluated according to the points used in previous studies. This research worked to disprove the claim that because of the differences in the mode of narration, it would necessitate differences in thought content.

As Tannen would say, it was not the spoken and written modes per se, but the genre growing out of the communicative goals. This paper has shown that given the same goal, there was not much difference at all.

It is hoped that somehow through this mini research, a contribution was done to the growing field of written and oral discourse. As we can see as time goes by, the boundaries separating the two shall become slimmer because of the increased literacy of people and the ever changing pace of language use.

How people write and speak later on will tend to be more similar at any given circumstances, just like the students of this research.

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