

## Second Language Acquisition during Early Childhood through TPR Story Telling Method

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### Abstract

The present study aims at analysing the effects of TPR- story telling method on kids at an early preoperational stage. According to Piaget, this stage (age 2-7) is when children's language makes rapid progress. Story telling as a pedagogical tool in EFL/ESL has been successfully tried, applied and tested in several classrooms around the globe. The urge to listen to stories is an inborn trait of human beings. It is always a source of inspiration and attracts people despite their age, gender and ethnicity. Stories supply context to hold the listeners attention. This study is based on an attempt by the author of this article, applying TPRS with children at the age of 4 and 3 respectively. The result of the study showed the effectiveness of storytelling in enhancing fluency, vocabulary usages and use of basic grammar, especially tense among children.

**Keywords:** Children, Attention, Oral fluency, Acquisition, Story

### Introduction

Down the years there has been a gradual progression and transition in the methods and approaches of teaching a second/ foreign language. Unlike the 1950, today oral proficiency has gained prominence in assessing the competency of a language learner. "Changes in language teaching methods throughout history have reflected recognition of changes in the

kind of proficiency learners need, such as a move towards oral proficiency”(Richards, 2001). Factors that determines the quality of oral proficiency in children ranges from the choice of vocabulary, grammar and usages. Stories as a tool to enhance language proficiency activate not only their imagination but also are a source of information that interests them and meets their emotional and psychological needs. A shift from learning to acquisition takes place through story telling as the children learn the vocabulary in a playful way, with the context it is being used. TRPS as a method for teaching/learning a foreign language was invented by Blaine Ray, a Spanish teacher. The method combines the distinctive features of Natural approach by Stephen Krashen and James Asher’s Total Physical Response. Natural approach opines that the major language development in an individual happens through the comprehensible input received. To be more specific, input that contains structures that are a little bit beyond the learner’s current level of competence. Story telling method to enhance language proficiency among children can be considered as an offshoot of Natural Approach; not that it provides input to the learner, but it also can be understood as a method that correlates with the three affective filters identified by Stephen Krashen “The affective filter Hypothesis states that acquirers with a low affective filter seek and receive more input, interact with confidence, and are more receptive to the input they receive” (Richards, 2001) There is scope for high motivation, self-confidence and also low anxiety in storytelling. The images that supports the story makes acquisition more interesting to kids.

### **Bilingualism in Children**

Children who are bilingual by being exposed to two languages from the stage of infancy is known to achieve mastery in both the languages. “Structural brain studies indicate that bilingual adults have greater brain tissue density in areas related to language, memory and attention, with the highest levels of tissue density among those who were exposed to two languages before the age of five years” (Naja, 2016). Unlike in the early days when researchers were under the impression that bilingualism or multilingualism can affect language learning, today cognitive studies on language learning clearly proves and supports the claim that multilingualism is a boon in language acquisition and that the areas in the brain responsible for any number of language processing are the same. Moreover code switching and code mixing at the initial stages are not a negative sign but is to be considered an advantage that the young speaker knows vocabulary in both the languages and is processing language in the brain. Supportive ambience and encouragement to practice language for

bilingual children by interacting with native speakers of the languages can expose them to real life conversation and can bring about quality in both the languages or even in a third language.

### **Hypothesis**

Children's literature can enhance language acquisition among children in a natural way. It enhances their receptive language in an entertaining manner and make them learn words and phrases which they can apply in their day to day real life conversations.

Stories provide opportunity for children to build strong emotional bond with the story teller and it also supports the creative skill of the listener.

### **Language Learning as a Cognitive Process**

Piaget believed that children construct their own mental structures, the building blocks of cognition and intelligence through their constant and active series of interactions with their environment. (Galotti, 2004). Cognitive development can be referred to as intellectual development in the growth and development of a child. It is a gradual growth in cognitive abilities (ability to attend, perceive, discover, recognize, imagine, judge, conceptualize, remember, learn and to indulge in meaningful speech) and also to consequent growth in knowledge and adjustment to the environment. Cognitive development is influenced by nutritional, emotional and social factors. In turn the cognitive development affects emotional and social development of the child.

Many psychologists who study cognitive development appreciate the keen observations that Piaget reported but not to accept his interpretation of their underlying causes. In particular, many believe that cognitive development does not proceed through a series of qualitatively different stages or periods and the qualitatively different intellectual structures underlie cognition at different periods. Instead, these investigators assert that cognitive skills and abilities emerge or are acquired gradually.

Other psychologists focus on physiological and other innate factors that contribute to cognitive development. These psychologists begin with the premise that young infants do not have "blank slates" for minds but instead bring to their cognitive life certain mental structures that are present from birth. (Galotti, 2004). Not surprisingly, these psychologists investigate the cognitive competencies of young infants and toddlers who presumably have had relatively little opportunity for learning cognitive skills.

The infant's first intellectual response is to stimuli from within and gradually as powers of perceiving and attending to develop, it begins to take in stimuli from the outside world. It is intellectual activities broaden as its powers of imagery grow and power of retention of past sensory experiences and their recall develop. Imagination gets expressed through play activities by about the age of 3 and it also serves as a means of intellectual development. Language, particularly mother tongue helps in preserving as well as fostering intellectual growth which continues to accelerate as children develop the ability to judge, to reason and to solve problems, starting from the concrete level to abstract level. (Nagarajan et al, 2002). It can be premonished that the inherent capacity of predicting language varieties and the usages in actual context may invariably be known as cognitive development in Second Language Acquisition.

### **Description of the Topic**

Early childhood, roughly between 3-6 years is the period when a child gains clarity in speech. It is said that children experience a language explosion during this period, and its talk will be frequently around 'why' and 'what'. "By three the vocabulary has grown to hundreds of words and pronunciation has become closer to the form of adult language. At this point, it is worth considering what kind of influence the adults have in the development of the child's speech." (Yule 2006) The difference in the tenses with the right use of past, present and future evolves during this period. At this stage they evolve as confident communicators by gaining better clarity in the use of pronouns. At this stage an activity like storytelling supplies them with more number of words to add to their vocabulary bank. The use of narrative comic books makes learners of this age to easily acquire the rules of grammar. Additional benefits are the lessons of values, beliefs and the bond that is created between the adult/the teller and the listener. Volition always comes from the listener during storytelling to an extent that they sometimes ask for the same/favourite story repeatedly without loss of interest. This repetition process further strengthens their vocabulary and usage. The present day advancement in technology supplies gadgets that promotes digital story telling with apps, websites, CD's and DVD's. Positive listener Responses like seeking clarity, glancing at the storybook, pointing/touching at the image during narration and seeking explanation in mothertongue in between to add clarity at the initial stages of narration happens only during narrating story via a book.

## Methodology

Two bilingual children at the age of three and four respectively were chosen for the study. Both the subjects (children) used for the study are the children of the author 1. The merit in conducting a study of this kind in one's own children is that the behaviour of the child during and after the process can be easily monitored. Moreover the background knowledge of the child in terms of vocabulary, grammar, usages and sentence structure in English is very much known to the author. The children are bilingual; the elder one X can understand and speak two languages; Tamil and Malayalam. The younger one Y, understands both the above languages and speaks in tamil and very rarely in Malayalam (one word answers). The children are capable of responding to orders and questions in English. X is capable of making short utterances. Their vocabulary in English is limited. They have been seen using new vocabulary and attempting to utter meaningful sentences in English while playing with kids older than them; with kids at the age of 7 and 8. Their volition to reply in the target language is taken as a sign of intrinsic motivation.

These kids were exposed to carefully handpicked storybooks for a period of two months. The stories in the books were read along with proper voice modulation to suit the emotional state of the characters in the story. The narrator also used body language to enact certain characters in the story. The reading happened on most of the days before bedtime. After the stipulated period of two months, when comprehensible input in English in the form of stories were given to the children, the impact it created on the target language of the learners were assessed. Development in the use of vocabulary, usages, sentence structures and collocations which are mere reflections of the input they received were carefully recorded during and after the period of two months of the study.

## Tools Used

The following story books were the only tools used:

Table:1

Sl No	Books	Publications
1	The Ugly Duckling: Read Aloud Books	Wonder House Books
2	Cinderella: Read Aloud Books	Wonder House Books
3	Leo Tolstoy Stories for Children	Mel Books
4	Safe in the Arc and Other Bible Stories	Orion Children's Books
5	Tinkle Digest, #328	Amar Chitra Katha

6	Tinkle Digest, #322	Amar Chitra Katha
7	Tinkle Origins Vol:2	Amar Chitra Katha
8	The Adventures of Kalia	Amar Chitra Katha
9	Stories for Children	Star Publications
10	Kalia the Crow	Amar Chitra Katha

### Motivation through TPRS

Apart from enhancing language proficiency, the motivational drive in children is seen to be vibrant during listening to stories. Gardner (1985) defines motivation to learn an L2 as the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity. Motivation here is not only limited in knowing the content in most of the stories but it also reverberates in the process of knowing it in the target language. “Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguished two kinds of motivation: integrative, which is connected with a positive attitude to the target language group and a desire to become its member, and instrumental, which is connected with utilitarian goals for language learning” (Dakowska 2005). Even though linguists claim today that the source of motivation or the type of motivation does not matter, it is the target which is to be achieved which matters. Intrinsic motivation or integrative motivation is always highly acclaimed for, as it is all about the learners’ pleasure in knowing new things, their interest in accomplishing a task and the pleasure that the learners experience when they do a task

Behaviour in the learner that expressed signs of motivation

Table2:

Child “X”	Child “Y”
Asking the reader to repeat favourite stories	Asking the reader to point at the particular pic. at that point of narration in a comic book
Guessing and shouting the upcoming dialogue in the comic by looking at the image	Skimming and scanning the images of the previous day narrated comic episodes.
Seeking meaning in mother tongue for certain words in a story when narrating for the first time	Raising Wh questions on the behaviour of the characters in the story
Taking initiative to start the storytelling	Taking initiative to start the storytelling

process by the same time the next day	process by the same time the next day
Asking for moral at the end of a story	Imitating onomatopoeia words in the story aloud (eg: the cry of a cat)

### Result and discussion

The study investigated if using story telling as a tool can bring about positive changes in the second language acquisition process of children during their early childhood. The act of narrating stories enriched them with the necessary comprehensible input needed for language acquisition. Animal stories seemed to be interesting to the particular age group, as a result the books 'Kalia the Crow' and 'The adventures of Kalia' were later included to the list.

One of the major disadvantages found during the study is that the learners were too young to understand the cunningness of certain characters in the stories of 'Kalia the crow'. Since language is an interactive process, the comics of Kalia and others in Tinkle digest series provided them the necessary input to interact in a particular context/situation using right vocabulary and structures.

A happy ending in the stories is another feature that attracted kids. Ninety percentage of the chosen children's literature had happy endings. For certain stories which had a bit of complexity in plot, mother tongue was used to narrate during the first reading. Learner Y on several occasions demanded the meanings of certain words in mother tongue. Comparatively, comic books interested the reader more than mere narrative story books.

The impact created after exposing students to story books for a period of two months were highly positive. The language of the kids during playtime, including self talk and during their interaction with the elders were carefully monitored. Some of the positive outcomes included: the child doing roleplay, assuming to be the character of a story and also referring to pet animals with the names of animals of the story.

The below table illustrates the overall addition of new words and phrases to their cognition which were purely the impact of storytelling.

Table-3

Vocabulary	Expressions	Identified in Books
Quick Of course Rascal	Let's play hide and seek.	The Adventures of Kalia
Royal Ball	Why are you crying my child?	Cinderella: Read Aloud Books



	Come back before midnight.	
Escape Kakama (for addressing crow)	What's the matter? Take him to my castle. It's raining heavily. It's the only place left. What's that sound?	Tinkle Origins Vol:2
Hunter		The Ugly Duckling
Lookout	I found you. Naught naughty granny.	Tinkle Digest, #322
Scared Screamed	There you are!	Leo Tolstoy Stories for Children
Awesome Unless (X Specifically asked for the meaning)		
	That's good.	Safe in the Arc and Other Bible Stories

Some of the phrases in the above table were not exactly reproduced by the kids, instead they used these structures to create new sentences according to their needs. Their understanding of past, present and future also increased tremendously as they were clearly able to refer to a happening in the past and list out plans for the future.

### Limitations of the Study

- Though the study shows signs of improvement in the target kids second language vocabulary and sentence construction, there is less clarity on whether the continuous use of the same method can make them more language proficient
- The story books meant for the study are randomly picked based on the availability in bookstore
- Certain stories were not appealing to 'Y' as he is too young to comprehend the information

### Conclusion

Stories never fail to attract the curiosity of children. Storytelling, the most powerful way to put ideas in to the world can also be used as a tool for language enhancement. It is also a folk art. It originated even before human beings started dealing with the written form of language.



Stories carry values, messages and they also can enlighten and inspire the listeners. Stories can work on language proficiency for any group, provided the story book should be chosen considering the age group and competence of the learners.

The hypothesis that children's literature can enhance language acquisition in a natural way is proved as the vocabulary use and sentence construction of the target students have improved after listening to stories. They have also started applying the learned vocabulary and usage in to practice. Since the stories they were told will be stored in the long-term memory of the listener, the vocabularies also finds a place there to be used later and can be recalled whenever necessary. The bond between the storyteller and the listener also improved multifold during the process. TPRS as a method if applied to a large group of learners; say a conventional classroom of children can bring about great transformation in the second language acquisition process.

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