



## A CASE STUDY: READING A STORY BOOK WITH YOUNG ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AT THE SILENT PERIOD

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### Abstract:

Reading a story book is considered as an effective way to promote language skills because it has been shown to foster enjoyment and pleasure in reading among language learners, however, there is still insufficient evidence about the effect of the reading on students' motivation during the silent period to learn a foreign second language. The purpose of this study is to investigate second language learners' reading motivation, and their language growth among interactions as reading a book during the silent period. Furthermore, this study has an implication to understand how reading a book affects young students when learning a foreign second language as English.

**Keywords:** reading, reading motivation, the silent period, young English language learners

### I. Introduction

Reading offers an opportunity for second language development in second language learners (Day & Bamford, 1998). Reading allows the learners to infer meanings of unknown words and thus learn the word's meaning in stories by increasing learners' encounters with new words in specific contexts of the reading materials (Krashen, 1989). Given the importance of reading, it is unfortunate that reading instruction in many language learning settings tends to emphasize achievement-driven language learning based on individuals' performance, rather than on letting students enjoy learning a new language despite the many findings which have emphasized the

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benefits of reading for pleasure (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). It is obvious that reading without enjoyment typically leads to less reading, low fluency and comprehension, which ensures that comprehension and fluency will remain low in the future (Nuttall, 2005).

The most widely cited factor used to explain the performance of language learners, strong or weak is motivation. As a key factor in language learning, motivation also plays an important role in the success of learning new languages. In Second Language Acquisition studies, intrinsic and extrinsic are the most important classifications of motivation. Intrinsic motivation indicates the motivation inside a person in cases where there is no reward except the activity itself, while extrinsic motivation refers to motivation derived from the outside of person, for example expected rewards (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010). Motivation and positive attitude in reading were shown to be the most influential factors in helping unwilling readers to become earnest readers (Mason and Krashen, 1997). It seems indispensable and highly significant that learners have motivation and experience pleasure during their language learning. Motivation and pleasure operate in conjunction with each other and must be built up together through practice over time. The development of strong reading motivation requires that low-proficiency learners, such as those new to a language during the silent period, to read as much as they can. The emphasis on motivation is essential for new language readers who lack motivation to read and find learning of new languages difficult.

## **II. Literature Review**

Brown (2007) stressed that the interpersonal context where a learner operates is significant in terms of the interaction between learners and others as the focus for observation and explanation of the language. Long (1981) stated that interaction through participation in conversation with native speakers makes it possible for learners to modify and negotiate the meaning and form of the language. Long (1981) also defined input as the linguistic forms used and interaction as the functions served by specific forms, such as expansion, clarification, and repetition. During the interaction, language learners have the opportunity to receive comprehensible input and to practice what they have learned as well as to interact with authentic use of the language. Modification occurs in an attempt to make the learners' output more comprehensible and to develop their abilities for discourse by making the discourse understandable. As for Input and L2 acquisition, Ellis (1991) stated that the comprehensible input of the target language facilitates L2 acquisition. Modifications to

input make it possible for learners to comprehend input and notice new features, and compare their own production as the process of negotiation causes communication problem.

### **Reading and oral language**

English language learners' (ELLs) development of oral language is significant to their language development. Especially low proficiency level young ELLs are not fully able to construct language by themselves and demand material which guides their oral language performance (Willis, 1996). Written material is a good resource for young language learners in that the texts of written materials facilitate their creation of oral language based on the texts. Snow and Golds (1983) viewed storybook reading as an opportunity for young children to learn language. One of the most popular storybook reading programs is the dialogic reading approach suggested by Whitehurst and his colleagues (Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Whitehurst, & Lonigan, 1998). Designed to provide rich environments, dialogic reading engages young language learners with oral language during the reading interaction. The dialogic reading environment encourages the children to form the language orally and involves the children in language production.

Questions related to the texts through the dialogic reading help young language learners to stimulate oral language related to the texts used in dialogic reading. For example, wh-questions (e.g., what is he cooking?, where does the event take place?) contribute to the children's use of language and oral performance when they address their expression with the questions. During the dialogic reading, ELLs' responses to questions derived from the texts facilitate their oral language performance. Hall (1987) found that oral language emerges in children when children construct language in their pursuit of meaning and comprehension of the world and print as related to themselves.

### **Reading a book for language learners**

Nuttall (2005) demonstrated that English Language Learners (ELLs) who already have challenges in reading while learning English have difficulty engaging in reading where there is not a balance between challenge and the capabilities of the ELLs. They may be confronted with more challenges in learning to reading in English while learning complex English concepts for an extended period of time. A number of researchers (Day & Bamford, 1998; Yamashita, 2008; Guo, 2012) claimed that reading a book plays an important role in language learners' language development and proficiency. Learners benefit from extensive reading in a range of language uses and language knowledge (Mason & Krashen, 1997). Many studies have emphasized the benefits of extensive

reading and its positive impact on reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, writing performance and grammatical competence (Cho & Krashen, 2001; Shen, 2008). In addition to these benefits, reading a story book has been shown to have a considerable effect on language learners' motivation to read (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Guo, 2012; Yamashita, 2013).

Reading materials also play a critical role in encouraging learners to read for pleasure. Motivating reading materials for students rather than more traditional textbook-oriented reading instruction are used (Day & Bamford, 1998). Reading material for extensive reading should be motivating for those learners whose goal is to approach native like reading competency. When authentic reading materials and online materials are used for extensive reading, a strongly positive relationship between extensive reading and reading activity on students' language proficiency, and students' attitudes toward the extensive reading activity was shown (Guo, 2012). However, if the text is too difficult, learners become frustrated and form negative opinions about reading. Therefore, reading must be pleasurable (Day & Bamford, 2002). For a concise explanation on reading for language learners, following ten outlined by Day and Bamford (2002) are good guidelines.

1. The reading material is easy.
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read as much as possible.
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
6. Reading is its own reward.
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
8. Reading is individual and silent.
9. Teachers orient and guide their students.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.

Reading a story book primarily allows individual readers to make their own choices in selecting reading materials and topics in order to encourage them to be engaged in reading and maintain reading practice. This is derived from ideas of enjoyable reading. No concrete criteria should be used to decide the amount of reading time or choose texts. Learners' choice of a reading material may influence learners to have more positive attitudes on extensive reading, as the findings of some studies among Japanese college students showed. These studies looked into the relationship between reading attitude and positive feeling toward extensive reading. In these studies, positive attitude toward extensive reading turned out to have the strongest

effect on reading attitude to determine the students' involvement in extensive reading practice (Guo, 2012; Yamashita, 2013).

The rationale for using reading a story book is to allow the reader to read without difficulty. Extensive reading is intended to develop good reading habits and to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage enjoyment of reading. When learners are involved in situation where reading is stress free, they look at reading as pleasurable which leads to increased motivation. To help students improve reading motivation and second language performance, numerous strategies have been tried for many years by teachers and professors in their reading classes.

Reading a story book language learners is a process through which readers absorb information and knowledge from different materials, then comprehend and analyze the language. It aims to facilitate the transmission of the information contained in a text, as constructed by the author through readers' analysis of the text. Additionally, extensive reading supports language learning since it typically involves large amounts of reading. As well as facilitating acquisition and learning of vocabulary, positive affective benefits of extensive reading have been reported. Yamashita (2013) found positive effects of reading a story book for positive attitude for reading practice and students' involvement in interactions during a story book reading.

Researchers acknowledge a teacher's role to help language learners to promote language learners' conversation skills. Asraf and Ashmed (2003) found that helping students understand texts by motivating them to read as extensively as possible was an effective method of reading instruction and thus reading a story book was an effective instructional method to help students develop their proficiency. Along with this was the fact that students who read extensively learned the language incidentally. Language learners motivated to engage in reading consistently increase proficiency levels (Krashen 2004). In relation to book engagement, reading materials for students who are willing to read may not be accessible (Ivey & Broaddau, 2001). They also pointed out that it is important to possess a sufficient volume of reading material in order to allow students to access reading materials at their own convenience.

### **Learners at the Silent Period**

Language learners go through some distinct stages in a process of achieving language skills. Haynes (1995) identified five stages of second language acquisition as initially espoused by claim of Krashen (1985) that ELLs at beginning levels will generally not speak until they have had enough comprehensible input. Each stage is described as the following:

- The first stage of Silent/receptive- This stage may last from several hours to several months, depending on the individual learner. Haynes (1995) stated that there are various factors related to the duration of the silent period. During this time, most of new language learners typically go through the silent period during which language is not typically produced by them. They may or may not start to learn vocabulary and practice pronouncing new words at this stage. They may point out items instead of expressing it orally when they engage in talk. They normally are not able to speak the language with fluency. This stage is controversial among language experts.
- The Second Stage of Early Production - This stage may last about six months in which language learners typically acquire up to 1,000 words. Language learners may also learn to pronounce some words and start to form short phrases which may not be grammatically correct.
- The Third Stage of Speech Emergence - At this stage, learners typically acquire avocabulary of up to 3,000 words and produce simple yes-no questions. They can communicate with short phrases and sentences even though structures of oral expression may not be grammatically correct. Learners' comprehension can be gained considerably and begin to read and write in their second language.
- The Fourth Stage of Intermediate Fluency - This stage may last for a year or more after speech emergence. Language learners of this stage typically have a vocabulary of as many as 6,000 words. They usually acquire the ability to communicate in writing and speaking with more complex sentences. This is an important stage as learners demonstrate more proficiency in speaking it with an ability to address what they think in their second language.
- The fifth Stage of Continued Language Development/Advanced Fluency - At least two years needs for most language learners to reach this stage to some degree of advanced fluency level, and then up to 10 years may be taken to achieve mastery of the second language. At this point on from the language development levels, target language learners are able to comprehend complexities of the target language. They need to engage in discussions and express themselves in their new language to retain their proficiency. They also should communicate with others in the target language on a regular basis in order to maintain their fluency and confidence.

The silent period is a time that most of language learners go through as they proceed to learn a language. Language learners in the silent period are unwilling or unable to communicate orally, even though they make sense of what is going on around them in a new language (Krashen, 1985). Silent learners should be embedded within a

friendly environment which allows them to feel comfortable and more confident in the learning environment before they are ready to participate actively in the learning of a new language (Haynes, 2005). Learners in the silent period are encouraged to engage in reading in order to facilitate their language acquisition in an enjoyable way. This is not only because they may not be comfortable learning of a new language when they are initially exposed, but also because they may be able to listen and make sense of language but are just not ready for speaking (Ellis, 1994). Ellis also found that when language learners begin speaking English, they will go through a developmental sequence of speaking through home-language use, a non-verbal period, telegraphic and formulaic use, and finally productive use. During the silent period, learners demonstrate understanding of language with gestures like pointing to pictures or items around them rather than using oral or written communication (Haynes, 2005). The possible development and use of private speech also occurs in the silent period (Saville-Troike, 1988). Saville-Troike asserted that some learners typically go through the silent period without making connections for communicative interactions with native speakers of the target language. They are more likely to speak silently to themselves and are inaudible to anyone present during the silent period, compared to other type of new language learners who learn target language through interpersonal interaction with target language people.

### **Purpose of the study**

This study aims to investigate reading motivation of second language learners during the silent period in the context of extensive reading. Given the importance of pleasurable reading in increasing learners' positive attitudes and motivation to read, this study hypothesizes that extensive reading's positive effects on silent learners' motivation and attitude toward reading will encourage them to become more productive language learners. Use of extensive reading also may shorten the duration of learners' silent period depending on how pleasurable their experience of extensive reading is with an assumption. Thus, second language learners as English may not be totally silent when they are at the first stage of second language learning or that they may want to break their silence to be capable of being a good communicator in the second language.

1. How do English Learners participate in story book reading? Do they extend their utterance related to story book?
2. How do teacher-child interactions occur during a storybook reading activity?

### **III. Methods**

#### **Participants**

The three participants in this pilot study were identified from among members of a Korean church in the Southeastern United States and the facilitator assessed their proficiency levels. The facilitator assigned the participants a storybook to read in advance of the interview(s) to enhance their understanding of the story. After reading the storybook, each participant met individually with the facilitator for an activity session related to the storybook. The facilitator asked participants to read the storybook silently again. Then she asked them to generate wh-questions, if they could not, the facilitator allowed them to create yes-no questions. The facilitator also asked questions of the participant in order to continue engaging them in dialog. During the activity, all of the participants' remarks and response were recorded.

#### **Participant One**

Her name is Jiwon and she is from South Korea. She is seven years old and has been stayed in the U.S. for 17 months. Her speaking proficiency exhibits the features of Novice Mid from ACFTL Proficiency guideline as following:

#### **Participant Two**

Her name is Taekyung at the age of 10 and she has been resided in the United States for 10 months since she moved from South Korea. Her prior background of learning English in South Korea focused on expansion of vocabulary and accuracy, which was reported by an interview with her and her parents. Her speaking proficiency exhibits the features of Novice Mid by ACTFL Proficiency guideline.

#### **Participant Three**

She is a 8 year-old girl whose name is Sohee. She moved to the United States from South Korea due to her mother's doctoral study in a college in the U.S. Based on the interview with her and her mother, Sohee's interest in English was low and she was not inclined to learn or study English as a subject during her school days in South Korea. Her speaking proficiency exhibits the features of Novice Mid by ACTFL Proficiency guideline.



## VI. Findings

In the first dialogic reading session with the book titled as *The Man, the Pan, and the Egg*, participants' interaction in the dialogic reading had them engaged in communication with the teacher.

### Unwillingness and Nonverbal response

In the first session, on the first day when requested to make a question about the storybook, *Participant One* expressed her refusal to participate by shaking her head. Her use of the target language in answering questions primarily relied on the texts and copied the words from the texts of the storybook. Her responses to the questions were favorable.

(Example 1)

F: Who can fix the egg?

Jiwon: Man

F: Who do you think the man is?

Jiwon: Cooking?

F: You mean a cook?

Jiwon: Yes...a cook

F: Would you make a question for me?

Jiwon: (silent)...(shaking her head to indicate refusal).

Her responses were rather simple but they were not ambiguous. Her understanding of the facilitator's questions was apparently good even though the time it took her to produce the response utterance was longer as compared to the other participants. This suggests that she was not confident about her oral language skills, and thus took more time to ensure her utterance was correct for the question. She was reluctant to form her own question when asked to by the facilitator.

*Participant Two*, Taekyung, was not able to make wh-questions during the first session for dialogic reading. It was not certain whether she had no skills to construct a question or whether she did not want to participate. Unlike her passiveness in making a question, she actively attempted to produce a verbal expression when answering a question asked by the facilitator. Taekyung and the facilitator interacted verbally by talking about the storybook contents as well as about topics beyond the storybook contents. Taekyung used a limited vocabulary when responding to the facilitator, but

involvement in dialogic reading session provided her an opportunity to share her thoughts and expressions about the storybook contents.

(Example 2)

F: Is he cooking?

Taekyung: Yes.

F: Look at the picture. What is he holding in his hand?

Taekyung: Spoon?

F: Good. Why do you think he is holding a spoon?

Taekyung: He is cooking?

F: Maybe he is. How about...Do you want to make a question?

Taekyung: No.

F: Do you want me to make a question?

Taekyung: Yes.

F: What is he looking for?

Taekyung: Egg? Wait... egg.

F: What does he need to fix the egg?

Taekyung: Pan.

F: How does the pan look?

Taekyung: Yellow and big.

F: What do you think it is hot or cold?

Taekyung: Cold

F: How do you know it's cold?

Taekyung: (silent).....

F: How do you know it is hot?

Taekyung: There is a fire.

F: How does the cook feel when he sees a fire? Is he sad? scared? angry?

Taekyung: Yes. He is scared.

F: What does he try to do with the pan?

Taekyung: Pan...the hot pan...Egg is black.

Some of Taekyung's oral language was not accurate but it was understandable since the utterances Taekyung and the facilitator had were contiguous to what the storybook was about. The frequency of dialog between the facilitator and Taekyung showed Taekyung's production of oral language expanded from a limited use of simple vocabularies to the use of simple sentences. Her familiarity with the texts from the storybook enabled a more meaningful oral production. Jiwon, for dialogic reading with

a storybook titled *Clifford's Word Book*. Jiwon still refused to formulate questions but her utterances when she engaged in generating dialog and in answering questions became lengthier and she was more engaged in the conversation with respect to generating answers.

(Example 3)

F: What's her name?

Jiwon; Emily

F: What is she introducing?

Jiwon; Clifford

F: What is Clifford?

Jiwon: It is dog name.

F: How big is Clifford?

Jiwon: Very big

F: How do you know it is very big?

Jiwon: Fat. Too big.

F: What does Clifford have?

Jiwon: Jump rope. No, yo-yo.

F: Do you have any favorite play?

Jiwon: (pointing to the storybook) this one, this one, this one.

F: What does Clifford like to do?

Jiwon: Rock...

F: What happened when Clifford walked down the street?

Jiwon: Every boy. No. Everybody know Clifford and like Clifford.

F: Where is Clifford now?

Jiwon: Ground

F: What is he doing now?

Jiwon: Clown.

F: Why is he acting like a clown?

Jiwon: Because he has ...

F: What does Clifford like?

Jiwon: Have a boat, helicopter. Clifford like race a car, sail a boat.

F: What does Emily say not to do?

Jiwon: Chase a car.

### **Initiation of making questions**

*Participant Two*, Taekyung, was able to make several wh-questions and express her feelings relating to the story. She could sometimes answer with her own thoughts without support of texts from the storybook. She corrected her utterances after indirect correction feedback. Questions Taekyung formed were not grammatically correct, but her enthusiasm in our dialogue was apparent from her more frequent attempts to engage in lengthy utterances and to ask a question. Interaction between Taekyung and the facilitator was consistent while taking turns asking a question about the stories from the book.

(Example 4)

Taekyung: What is the dog name?

F: The dog's name is Clifford.

F: Why does Clifford stay outside?

Taekyung: He cannot stay. No, Clifford is too big to room. What is your favorite toy?

F: My favorite toy is Jet. How about you? What is your favorite toy?

Taekyung: Yo-yo. Glider.

F: What is Clifford doing outside the classroom?

Taekyung: I can see him outside the window.

F: Why is Clifford doing there?

Taekyung: Girl in the school?

F: Yes. The girl is Clifford's friend so he is waiting for her friend. Where are they now?

Taekyung: They are playing in the park.

F: Do you like to play in the playground?

Taekyung: No.

F: What do you like to do?

Taekyung: Sleeping. I like sleeping.

The utterance Taekyung made in the beginning of the second dialogic reading session focused on the storybook contents. Taekyung extended utterances that initiated from talks associated with the storybook and then made a connection in relation to her personal events such as going for a walk and favorite things to do. The dialogic reading activities provided an environment that affords additional contextualized topics of personal events, which then provides more opportunities for language learners to engage in more verbal participation.

*Participant Three, Sohee, was able to produce yes-no questions and wh-questions based on the story. She could provide answers for inferential questions such as “How do you know?”*

(Example 5)

F: What’s her name?

Sohee: Her name is Emily Elizabeth. What is her dog’ Clifford?

F: Her big red dog is Clifford. What he can’t come to her room?

Sohee: Because he is too big for her room. What is Clifford favorite toy?

F: His favorite toys are all of them. Does her dog like walking?

Sohee: He likes to go for a walk. Is everyone like Clifford?

F: Everyone likes Clifford. What is Clifford doing when Emily is in the school?

Sohee: He is waiting for her while she is in school. Can she see a dog?

F: Yes, she can see him outside the window. What are they doing in the afternoon?

Sohee: They are doing in the park.

F: Is Clifford can swimming?

Sohee: He likes to sing. He is a good singer.

F: How do you know?

Sohee: Where does he live?

F: He lives in the dog house.

F: Elephant and Clifford, who is bigger?

Sohee: Clifford is bigger than the elephant.

### **Extended utterance about daily life event**

The facilitator extended the topic to the participants’ daily events in line with the topics from the storybook.

(Example 6)

F: What is Clifford’s favorite color?

Sohee: His favorite is red.

F: What is your favorite color?

Sohee: Red, too.

(Example 7)

F: What do you do in the afternoon after school?

Sohee: I golf and do homework.

F: Do you play golf? Is it fun?

Sohee: Yes, it's fun. I play every day.

From the extended questions, Sohee and the facilitator could converse more about the participant. Sohee likes to play golf and practices after school.

(Example 8)

Taekyung: What he like to go for a walk? Why?

F: He likes to go for a walk. How about you? Do you like to go for a walk?

Taekyung: No.

F: Why not?

Taekyung: Tired.

From the discourse above, the facilitator found that Taekyung was not fond of going for a walk. She told the facilitator that going for a walk was tiring.

## V. Discussion

Dialogic reading activities such as production of yes-no questions and wh-questions provides an opportunity for English language learners who are young and low in proficiency level to interact with printed materials which support them to produce oral language. Ur (1996) stated that materials to be utilized as motive to express themselves is necessary for language learners to say something. Young English language learners who have a limited expression are not able to express what they want due to the insufficient linguistic skills. Through dialogic reading activities, language learners are encouraged to participate in oral language production.

Given a setting to produce output for young learners, opportunities should be provided to facilitate oral production. At the same time, an optimal environment for children's language learning will be created dialogic reading provided by dialogic reading offers a natural opportunity for young children to facilitate their language. Dialogic reading also creates an optimal environment for children to practice and learn language. During reading activities, children are more likely to talk more under the facilitator's modelling on how to produce language verbally. The participants engaged in storybook reading activities actively attempted to generate their opinions about the storybook. Aligned with the dialogic reading activities, utterance attributed individuals' daily life events could be triggered during the dialogic reading activities.

The frequency of talks during the dialogic reading is significant for young learners' language acquisition and interaction through storybook reading provides opportunities for low proficiency English language learners for verbal participation by giving them the chance to produce output about the storybook topic. Moreover, extended discourse initiated from dialogic reading activities lead to more opportunities for discourses related to daily-based events between the interlocutors.

English language educators can utilize storybook activities like dialogic reading intervention to provide a setting for oral language production for low proficiency English learners. Low proficiency English learners need opportunities to interact in the target language in order to encourage verbal participation as Willis (1996) claimed that opportunities for language learners to say what they want are condition in a supportive and friendly setting with use of language they have heard or seen. Dialogic reading can engage low proficiency English language learners and provide an environment to allow them to interact with each other in ways that they are involved in a discourse about the storybook they read together.

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