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 English 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?