Using folktales in JSL classrooms: Focus on its micro-structures

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In his JSL classrooms, the author introduced Japanese and Korean folktales and encouraged students to write folktales based on their own countries. The micro-analysis of students' writings reveals that folktales have higher occurrence rates of causality expressions than everyday narratives and suggests that folktales are better for learning materials than other genres in order that students master causality expression.

著者は、JSLの教室において日本と韓国の民話を紹介し、学生に自国の民話を書くように促した。学生の作文のミクロ分析は、民話が日常的ナラティブよりも因果性に関連した表現を多く含むことを明らかにするとともに、学生が因果性の表現を習得するには民話が他のジャンルよりも優れた教材であると示唆する。

Many educators have introduced folktales into their classes. In the U.S., the Hispanic minority children narrate folktales from their own culture in classes (Ada, 2003) and Japanese college students narrate Japanese Folktales in English, using *Kamishibai* (Japanese storytelling box) cards (Rowe, 1997).

In terms of pedagogy of language, this type of educational activity is based on the Language Experience Approach (LEA) which, "assumes that students learn most effectively when they are working with materials they are attached to and interested in, and that they are most attached to and interested in materials that are about their own lives or that they have composed themselves – that is, some form of self-expression" (Taylor, 2000, p.79). This type of practice creates an "information gap" situation, where students know folktales from their own cultures, but not from other cultures, and where teachers do not know folktales of

students' home countries. In this way, cultural differences can be positively used in an information gap situation.

Looking at not only cultural differences but also cultural similarities, the author assumes that seemingly different cultures have underlying universal structures. In his JSL classrooms, students narrate Japanese folktales and of students' home countries (Korea, China, Taiwan, and Hong-Kong).

In this paper, the author attempts to answer a question: are folktales better suited to teaching certain discourse structures than texts from other genres? The analysis will be conducted on macro- and micro-levels, by comparing folktales and everyday narratives both of which are written by students. The purpose of this paper is to show teachers exactly what kind of structures students are using.

Literature review

Mythology has reveled that the Japanese folktale Kachikachi-yama repeats the plot-level structure "bad deed–devising a trick–punishment" (Ikegami, 1982, p.299). In the first part of the story, a raccoon dog conducts a bad deed, that is, steals a vegetable. The grandpa devises a trick to make raccoon dog soup, and punishes the raccoon dog by binding him to a stake. In the latter part, the raccoon dog's first bad deed is that he cheats and kills the grandma who saved his life. Hearing this, the rabbit gets angry and devises a trick to kill the raccoon dog. The rabbit causes the raccoon dog physical pain and then throws him into the sea. In this part, the raccoon dog conducts a bad deed and is punished, just as he did in the first part.

Cognitive linguists view this type of structure as a key to human understanding of stories. To them, a story has a setting, which gives an episode-triggering situation. The initiating event causes a status change of the hero/heroine and sets up a goal for the hero/heroine. He or she does some attempts towards this goal. If the goal is completed in the outcome of his/her attempts, a reaction closes the story. If not completed, a sub-goal is set up (van de Broek, 1989, as cited in Miyaura, 2002).

In EFL settings, many educators have done activities which make students aware of the abovementioned structures. Some use sheets with a focus on structures, such as chronological order, problem (or conflict) and solution, and cause and effect (Taylor 2000). In another case, students complete story guides which include semantic map/table, problem (conflict) and solution, goals, events, and outcome (Ada, 2000).

If narrating folktales is related to top-down processing using abovementioned universal structure, then how about bottom-up processing, which activates knowledge based on the sentences? This question is raised because the author assumes that top-down and bottom-up processing are connected in narrating stories.

On the micro-level, folktales repeat grammatical items (Taylor, 2000). If so, what kind of grammatical items are repeated? In the following discussion, the author will focus on temporality and causality. This is because, as we have already seen, in the macro structures of a story, chronological orders and cause-effect relationships are the most prominent.

Method

Participants

The classes of Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong-Kong students at a Japanese language school in Japan participated in the study. The students are in a JSL setting, which means they use the Japanese language every day. The classes are made up of some 20 students at the intermediate level and taught by the author.

Materials

The textbook used in the classes was Tanoshiku kiko II [Let's listen enjoyably II] (Bunka Gaikokugo Senmongakko, 1992, pp.42-45), which features a sample Japanese folktale Kachikachi-yama as a listening material.

The Korean picture book used in the class was *Tokkebi no konbo* [Tokkebi's Stick] (John, Han, & Fujimoto, 2002). Note that the picture book has a special art of bookmaking, which reflects the two-folded narrative structure, that comprises the story of a good old man and a bad old man; the first story starts from the front cover and the second, from the back cover.

Procedures

The classroom activities consist of three parts:

1. Students listen to the first part of the story and sort pictures (a kind of jigsaw task) and then guess what will happen in the next part of the story;

2. Students tell the story based on their memories while looking at the Korean picture book *Tokkebi no konbo* (this is in preparation for the next writing step); and

3. Students write folktales of their home countries (approx. 45 min.; 200 to 400 characters).

Results

Students' writings are used as data. Four pieces are written by students from Chinese speaking countries and seven pieces, from Korea. In this paper, only Korean students' writings are discussed, so that any interference from their mother languages is not considered.

Furthermore, four pieces of Korean students' writings (one is written by male students and three, female) are selected, because they can be checked with original stories. The objective of this selection is to discuss occurrence rates of expressions in terms of language development.

The titles of the four pieces are: Kongi and Potgi, A grandpa with a lump, Faithful magpie, Stupid Ondal, and Princess Pyongkang. Of these four writings, Faithful magpie and Stupid Ondal are incomplete, but the other writings are complete. The incomplete two have about 200 characters and the complete two have about 300 characters.

The author also uses four pieces of students' writings entitled "My unforgettable memory" in order to compare this type of everyday written narratives and folktales and reveal what is special in folktale writings.

For comparison, the author selected the four pieces, which have about 200 characters, from the everyday

narratives written by his Korean students in the same school. The everyday narrative group and the folktale group are considered to have similar proficiency in Japanese, since they are both in the intermediate level.

Discussion

Macro-analysis

Both in part 1 and part 2 of the classroom activities, students tell the stories fairly well. As for part 2, this possibly means that they remember and recall the stories well, which they learned from their family or at school. It is not so surprising that folktales learned as a child were impressive and that they have been vividly retained in memory.

It is interesting, however, that in part 1 students guessed the latter part of a Japanese folktales Kachikachi-yama fairly well, even though they actually did not know the story. This "predictability" can be attributed to two aspects of folktales: "the repetitions of main events and ideas, and the moral or ethical quality that lies behind many folktales" (Taylor, 2000, p.11). The repetition of main events is rephrased as a universal structure, underlying seemingly different cultures, in this case, Korean and Japanese cultures.

The main plot of the stories written by students in part 3 of classroom activity is almost the same as the original stories, except for one: Kongi and Potgi, a Korean version of Cinderella in which a pitiful girl Kongi is bullied by her stepmother and stepsister. The stepmother forces Kongi to do different tasks, depending on the version. The student's story presents a task that Kongi must dispose only rotten grains of rice in the jar.

The students' everyday narratives also have some event-chain structures similar to those in folktales, which represent their personal experiences. However, everyday narratives have a peculiar portion, which reviews past events from the perspective of the present. Typical sentence structures of this portion are as follows:

> *Ima ni natte omoidashite mireba sukoshi hazukashii desu kedo, ... [Now that I think about it, it's a little bit embarrassing, ...]*

> *Ima demo sono koto o omoidasu to jibun mo shiranai uchi ni egao ni narimasu. [Even now, when I think about it, I start to smile without realizing.]*

This portion has a function to add an outer frame to the core story or to evaluate it from the perspective of one's current situation.

Micro-analysis: temporality

The students' folktales contain a wide variety of time expressions. Time expressions for sentence connection include nouns (*mukashi mukashi [once upon a time]*, *aru hi [one day]*, *mainichi [every day]*, *saigo ni [finally]*) and conjunctions (*mazu [first of all]*). Those for clause connection include *made ni [by the time]*, *nagara [while]*, *toki [when]*, *ato [after]*, *aida ni [while]*, and *te [and]*. Some expressions (*made ni [by the time]*, *mae ni [before]*, etc) require reversed temporal order, but do not have special characteristics in its occurrence rate.

Sample sentences in students' writings are as follows:

> *made ni*: *"Potgi to haha wa dekakeru kara kaeru made ni kome no naka de kusatta kome dake erabinasai!" to itte dete ikimashita.* [they went out, saying, "Potgi and I (the mother) will go out, so pick up only rotten grains of rice in the jar by the time we go home!"]

> *aida ni*: *Koko de yasunde iru aida ni kasasagi no kinpaku shite iru oto ga kikoete kimashita.* [He heard a strained tone of sounds from a magpie while taking a rest there.] / *Takigi o nesshin ni atsumete iru aida ni yoru ni narimashita.* [The day turned to night while he was busily gathering firewood.]

Students' everyday narratives have similarly diverse types of time expression: *aru hi [one day]*, *ano hi [on that day]*, for sentence connection and *toki [when]*, *koro [around the time when]*, *nagara [while]*, *uchi ni [while]*, *tara [after completion of]*, *te [and]*, for clause connection. Among these expressions, the most prominent one is *ta/no toki [when]*. In many cases, a clause or phrase beginning with this expression such as *koko ninensei no toki [when I was in the second grade at high school]*, *kodomo no toki [as a child]* has an important function to mark a past time when a core story starts and to separate the core frame from outer frame, as discussed in this paper's macro-analysis.

Micro-analysis: causality

The causality is generally understood as a relationship between cause and effect. In this paper, the author extends this to a broader notion, including causative constructions in which someone forces other(s) to do something. In this sense, causality is closely connected with the notion of transitivity (Ohori, 2004). In Japanese grammar, the most prominent expressions of transitivity are *ukemi [passive voice]*, *koi no juju [benefactive expressions]*, and *shieki [causative expressions]*.

The analysis has revealed that students' folktales have higher occurrence rates of these causality-related expressions than their everyday narratives: Though passive voices are used in both writings (folktales 3 times, everyday 2 times), benefactive expressions are only used in folktales (folktales 2 times, everyday 0 times) and causatives are only used in folktales (folktales 2 times, everyday 0 times). This suggests that JSL learners have fewer opportunities to use benefactive and causative expressions in their everyday narratives. Another point is that some students use passive / benefactive / causative expressions well, but others do not. For example, one of the students used five different types of expressions, the other one used only one type. In fact, the textbook encourages students to practice examples of passive voice (*to yobarete imasu [is called]* / *shimedasare mashita [was locked out]*), benefactive expressions (*tasukete agemasu [help]* / *kobu o totte moraimashita [have the lump removed]*), as a pre-task for listening.

The conjunction *dakara [since]* is used as much as three times in Kongi and Potgi but never in other writings. In addition to *dakara*, Kongi and Potgi uses *soshite [then]*, *tokorode [by the way]*, and *shikashi [however]*. Other writings contain only *demo [but]* and *soshite [then]*. The use of conjunction particles (*node [so]* and *kara [because]*)

do not have so obvious differences between two groups. It should be also noted that *node* is used twice in Kongi and Potgi and *kara* is used twice in "A Granpa with a lump." Sample sentences in students' writings are as follows:

> *node: Kongi wa yasashikatta node, haha ga saseru koto o zenbu shimashita. [Kongi was so gentle that she did all her stepmother ordered.] / Kome no ryo ga totemo okatta node, hitori de wa muri deshita. [The amount of rice was tremendous, so she could not do it alone.]*

> *kara: Sono otosan wa kowai desu kara, akiya de uta o utaimashita. [Because the grandpa was scared, he sang a song in the vacant house.] / Tomodachi mo kobu ga kirai desu kara, hanashi o kikarete yama ni itte akiya ni hairimashita. [Because the friend didn't like his lump, he also went to the vacant house in the mountain after hearing the story.] / Kono tomodachi wa kobu ga aru kara, uta ga jozu desu yo to hanashimashita. [The friend said that he is good at singing because he has a lump.]*

Students' everyday narratives contain fewer conjunctions than their folktales in terms of quantity. In addition, everyday narratives have conjunctions, such as *soshite [and]* and *sokode [then]*, which are different from those in students' folktales. Everyday narratives also have different types of conjunction particles for clause connection, such as *kedo [although]* and *ga [but]*.

Conclusion

As the micro-analysis in this paper points out, though students' folktales and everyday narratives show a similar variety of temporary expressions, folktales have higher occurrence rates of causality expressions than everyday narratives. This means that folktales are better for learning materials so that students master one of the most fundamental elements of language learning: causality expression.

In terms of language pedagogy, the analysis also suggests that a peer review among students as a follow-up activity is effective for learning expressions of causality, since it is observed that different learners have different strategies for connection of causality. In other words, each student tries to connect sentences or clauses using his or her limited ways of connection. This means, for example, he or she only uses a limited amount of conjunctive particles two or three times repeatedly. So it seems to be effective that students read other students' writings and become aware of other types of connective strategy in a follow-up activity.

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