

Oral Proficiency:

A Study of the Effects of Role Play Activities on English Oral Proficiency over One Semester

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1. INTRODUCTION

Role plays and other theatrical techniques have been widely used in second language education for decades. Their usefulness in the development of oral communication came into prominence in the late 1960's and early 70's, a result of the influences of theatre arts in language teaching and a movement to find a viable alternative to the audio lingual approach. The effectiveness of drama techniques has been assumed and many researchers seem to take this assumption as fact. Hines (1973) states in his introduction that "drama, particularly role playing, has long been recognised as a valuable means of mastering a language" (p.6). The benefits of drama and role play to language learning were seemingly unquestioned by many educators.

Likewise, role play has taken a central role in many of my teaching activities. I employ role play almost without question, partly because I found it was an effective way to keep a large number of people focused on a task. Many of my first university teaching assignments were large classes of students who were non majors of English and "appeared" to lack motivation. Secondly, my personal belief is that in order to effectively help students with learning a second language they need to be given the chance to use it as often as possible and in as authentically realistic situations as possible. Because of the large number of students in these classes, 50 on average, it was very difficult for me to be continually monitoring them and at the same time attend to questions and problems from students. Given the constraints of a classroom, I felt that role plays would provide such opportunities and also lend themselves to better classroom and task management.

One immediate observation I made of my early attempts at using role plays was an increase in the active participation of the students. Although no data is available to verify

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my assertions, the students seemed more attentive, spoke more in the target language, and generally asked more questions about tasks. Such responses have similarly been stated by many an educator. Via (1976) states that dramatic activities inspire students to want to learn another language and remedy the lagging interest often found in L2 classrooms. Certainly the appearance of a motivated class is a pleasing sight for any teacher. Yet, however enlightening the appearance of motivation is, it is still no guarantee that learning of the target language is taking place.

My own experience as a teacher lends itself to the benefits of action and of small changes, to the refreshment of doing as simple a thing as getting out of the desk to do a task. So much of learning has been in the confines of a desk, eyes occasionally ahead, listening to the “all-knowing” teacher at the front of the class. This is also effective, I believe, but it is not the only way learning can take place in a classroom. Therefore, my interest is in investigating whether my task structure was as effective in improving the oral proficiency of my students as I felt it had been as a class management technique. This study hopes to make an inquiry as to the benefits of role play, specifically to oral proficiency and motivation in a communicative language teaching classroom.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

My choice of role plays as a task structure points to my belief in the attainment of oral language for the purpose of communicating. When two people are given a situation (role play) and are expected to attain a goal, they need to communicate their intentions. This involves comprehension as well as production. In discussing communicative competence, Savignon (1983) states, “communicative competence is relative, not absolute and depends on the cooperation of all the participants involved” (p.9). In addition, before discussing role playing, she quotes Shakespeare’s ‘all the world’s a stage’ and says “As occasions for language use, role playing and the many related activities that constitute the Theatre Arts are likewise a natural component of L2 learning” (p.206). Because role play demands two-way exchanges and in most cases a purpose, that of solving a problem or completing a task, it appears to be ideal as a communicative language teaching technique.

In the introduction to her teachers’ resource book, *Drama*, Wessels (1987) cites a popular Chinese proverb supporting action such as drama techniques, “I hear and I forget, I listen and I remember, I do and I understand” (p.7). There can be little argument about the validity or wisdom in this quotation. Few of us would refute the value of experience and action or its benefits for learning. Furthermore, Wessels goes on to state four benefits of drama techniques: “the acquisition of meaningful fluent interaction in the target language; the

assimilation of a whole range of pronunciation and prosodic features in a fully contextualised and interactional manner; the fully contextualised acquisition of new vocabulary and structure; and an improved sense of confidence in the student in his or her ability to learn the target language" (p. 13). Likewise, Stern's (1980) study of drama techniques on certain psychological factors found improvements in communication and echoes Wessels findings. Stern found "heightened self-esteem, motivation and spontaneity, increased capacity for empathy, and lower sensitivity for rejection" (p. 222). Such qualities were also found by Via (1976) who observed that children seemed to naturally do playacting when immersed in an L2 situation and suggested that this internal ability is present in everyone and only needs to be found again. These studies reinforce the popular belief that learning through physical action such as drama techniques is one of the most effective methods available for language teachers.

My belief in education also echoes this logic of learning to do through action. Essentially, I feel that it is our responsibility as second language teachers to try to replicate language and situations which happen outside the classroom inside the classroom as best we can if we want our students to be able to function in the "real world". Yet how is one to recreate in the classroom a situation which mirrors what happens out of it? Basically, I believe it is impossible to authenticate such an act, but it is possible to let the learner try to replicate it as closely as they feel they can by using their own experience and knowledge. This I believe is how the role plays can help learners to acquire language, by replicating their own experiences in the classroom. In addition, text book dialogues are often based on a writer's idealistic conversations which are sometimes irrelevant to the learner. Role play activities, with the help of the teacher, can focus the language and situations which are more relevant to the learners needs and interests. As Rodriguez and White (1980) state, "effective ESL teaching must be based on helping students learn the language they need to function successfully in everyday situations and in future settings where they will be using English(p. 246). Certainly this has to be a goal of any ESL teacher who expects their students to actively be able to use what they have learned in classroom settings.

The benefits of theatrical techniques in the learning of languages has also been recognised by actor trainers. Smith (1984) states three parallel benefits of theatrical techniques for both actors and language learners, "they have to be able to decide what to communicate, ie., what is appropriate for the given situation; they must then decide how to communicate that message; they must have the flexibility to implement their decisions, or in other words, they must be able to perform with competence, ...perhaps the most difficult task" (p.2). There is no doubt that second language learners are constantly called on to make

quick decisions when confronted with a situation in their L2 as they are in their L1. As anyone who has learned a second language can attest, often new roles bring with them new habits, voicing and gestures, not to mention thinking patterns, all attributes available in drama techniques.

Language is, I believe, a reflection of the culture for which it is a part and consequently differs accordingly. One of the best ways to bridge these differences is to have students actively attempting to physically engage themselves in the language of another culture in a controlled environment such as a classroom. Maley and Duff (1988), state that “language + essential structures lie at the base of almost every foreign language syllabus. But language isn’t only an intellectual manner, our minds are attached to our bodies and our bodies to our minds. The intellect rarely functions without an emotional element. Drama techniques attempt to bridge the gap between the mind and the body, between knowing and doing”

(p. 7). Drama techniques can also simulate naturally occurring situations in the classroom setting to students in a meaningful manner. Such activities force attention towards meaning and away from scripted textbook replies, which often do not correlate with situations that students find themselves in. Because drama techniques are communicative, their primary focus is on meaning. Therefore, they are strongly recommended for language teachers who believe meaning should be an end in any communicative exchange and who feel motivation is the best way to achieve it

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Questions

My basic concern in this study is to examine the effects role play has on oral proficiency. Other factors which are of related concern are motivation and class activities. However, my two main research questions are as follows:

1. Do role plays promote higher oral proficiency in freshman university students who are not English majors over the course of one semester?
2. Do role play activities increase motivation?

3.2 Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at Chubu University, Kasugai City, Aichi Prefecture over a period of 14 weeks. An experimental design was used by examining two freshman classes, both non majors of English. The experimental class is made up of 15 students, all males in the engineering department. The control class consists of 17 students, 12 males and 5 females in the chemistry department. The academic levels of the students varied within each

group, but were approximate between groups. Although the English language portion of the university entrance test scores couldn't be attained, the entrance exam scores ranged between 20% -78%, mean 48.7% for the experimental group and 22%-78%, mean 50.47% for the control group.

The two classrooms were of approximate size. The control group had movable chairs and desks while the experimental group's classroom consisted of long tables which accommodated between two or three students per table. Each class, once a week, was 90 minutes with one semester term running 13 weeks. Two class days were used for each group for the oral proficiency interviews, one on the second class day and one on the last day . The attitudinal questionnaire was given on the day of the last interview, day 13.

3.3 Description of the Classes

The non major English course at Chubu is titled "Practical English" . All freshman non English majors use the same textbook, "Interchange 1", by Richards (1995). The only requirement from the Foreign Language Department was that the teacher use the book as the focus of content for the course. However, we were free to choose the content of any chapter and the technique for presentation and exams were optional. This gave me ample room to implement any modifications to conduct my study. Therefore, the two classes were exposed to the same material, the textbook and a workbook. The regular class followed the plans set by the textbook, with the exception of the listening and writing activities of each chapter which weren't covered. The workbook consisted of clozed exercises of which a page was assigned weekly and corrected at the beginning of the following class.

The two classes experienced the same lesson with the exception of the dialogue sections of each chapter (see Appendix A). The control group read the dialogues in pairs and then substituted their own information into the dialogue, replicating the situation. That is, they replicated the same speech act, but substituted in their own vocabulary. The experimental class used role plays, defined as gambit style situations. (See Appendix B). These were used as a replacement for the situational dialogues in the textbook. Students together with the teacher read the dialogues in the book so that the situation was understood. Then with books closed, the students were given 5-10 minutes to create their own dialogues based on a similar situation. The length of the role plays wasn't stressed, but they were instructed to complete certain tasks or ask for certain information. Depending on the task, the role plays lasted between 20 seconds to a few minutes each. During the first few weeks, this took some time because the activity was new to most students and therefore much explanation and examples were necessary. However, after the third week less time was needed to prepare and

most of my time was spent aiding individual or group queries. The course covered 13 weeks, 10 regular class weeks with one class each on the second day and on the last day for the interviews.

The study used an experimental model and was carefully designed so that the two classes would have the same experience, with the exception of the role plays for the experimental group. In other words, the lesson followed the textbook sequence of exercises (except for the written exercises which were not covered by either group). Any exercises that weren't covered by the experimental group were also not covered by the control group to ensure uniformity in the study. In the experimental group, students were only required to do the role plays at their desks with a partner for the first two weeks. However, from the third week onward they were required to dramatise at least one of them in front of the class. Generally, at least two role plays were done per lesson.

3.4 Data

Two types of data were used in this study. Firstly, to measure oral proficiency between the two groups, audio taped interviews were conducted and measured by using the the ETS/ACTFL, Educational Testing Service and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages scales. Audio taped interviews were used for a number of reasons. First, this preliminary study wanted to keep the focus on oral proficiency, rather than nonverbal or other kinds of communication that video can provide. Secondly, although a video recorder would have provided much more information, it may have overwhelmed the simple intent of this research. As well, cassette decks were much more manageable and available in the study environment.

The study's pre interviews were conducted on the second day of classes and the post interviews on the final day. (See Appendix C & D). The interviews were rated by 2 raters to provide for inter-rater reliability. Secondly, a 17 item attitudinal questionnaire (see p. 10) was distributed on the last class to check for the feelings and thoughts of the students about; 1) the benefits of role plays used in class, 2) motivation, measured by interest, and 3) what class activities they believe help them learn. The questionnaire was helpful in providing information about the second research question. All 17 items were given to the experimental group. However, items 12-17 were not given to the control group for they pertained to the experimental group's reaction and attitude about role plays.

The ETS/ACTFL oral interview scales are broken up into five groups, the first three with subheadings: Novice (0, Novice Low, Mid, High); Intermediate (Low, Mid, High); Advanced, (Advanced Plus); Superior; Native. Most of the subjects for this experiment fell

into the Novice and Intermediate Low and Mid category with a few entering the upper intermediate level. Interviews generally lasted no less than 10 minutes and no more than 15 minutes per student.

The ACTFL/ETS Functional Trisection of Oral Proficiency uses three aspects of language to measure the level of each student: function, context and accuracy. According to the guideline definition, the three aspects are described as the following: for novice speakers: function; "can enumerate, recycle, say learned words or phrases", context ; "learned material, numbers, dates, days, weather, time, foods, name of family members, etc.", accuracy; "sometimes intelligible". For the intermediate level, the descriptions were as follows: function; "can create with the language, ask and answer questions, participate in short conversations", context; "everyday survival topics and courtesy requirements", accuracy; "intelligible to native speakers, used to dealing with foreigners" (Liskin, p.158).

However, the vagueness of the trisectional descriptions was an obstacle. Therefore, to make the observations more refined for this study, each language aspect was modified. Thus, function was elaborated to include the length of pauses between answers whereby long pauses between questions were considered to be lower than more prompt replies. So, if a student pauses after a question for what is typically considered longer than normal (5 or more seconds) or doesn't reply after the question has been repeated or rephrased they would be marked lower than a student who replied immediately after the question was asked. As well, context was expanded to include whether or not the question asked was answered or if another answer unrelated to the question was given. Thus, if a student replied to the following question, "What do you plan to do with your money?", with the answer, "1,000 yen", they would be marked lower than a student who replied, "I want to buy a car." Thirdly, accuracy meant the quality of the replies, whether the replies were grammatically correct or could be acceptable to native speakers. Often, one or two word answers were acceptable such as a reply of "8 o'clock." to the question, "What time do you wake up." However, questionable accuracy to the following question, "Do you have a big family?" would be "No, four family." Higher accuracy would be a response such as, "No, there are only four people in my family".

As a result, the three sublevels included within the Novice and Intermediate levels were differentiated using the expanded version of the functional trisection. These expanded definitions enabled the raters to better observe and gauge the student interviews from the audiotapes. Thus, as was found with Student 1 in the experimental group, the ratio of questionable responses to ones that were considered acceptable by the raters in the pre interview versus post interview for each category were; Accuracy 14/8, Context 2/1,

Function 10/1. (See Appendix C and D). Student 1 illustrated a dramatic decrease in problems in accuracy 14-8 (broken sentences or word order) and function 10-1 (pauses or non responses) . Therefore the raters felt that his proficiency, although clearly still novice, had improved enough to be moved up one sublevel within a level; novice mid to novice high.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Oral Proficiency

The following table illustrates the results of the pre and post oral proficiency test for both the experimental and control group. The numbers on the far left of each list represent the students in order as they existed on the attendance sheet. The pretest interviews were done on the second class of the term and the post tests on the final day of class.

Table 1 ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW RESULTS BY GROUP

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP (N=15)			CONTROL GROUP (N=16)		
Student	Pretest	Post test	Student	Pretest	Post-test
1.	Novice M	Novice H	1.	Novice M	Novice H
2.	Interm. L	Interm. L	2.	Interm. L	Interm. L
3.	Interm. L	Interm. L	3.	Interm. L	Interm. L
4.	Interm. L	Interm. L	4.	Novice M	Novice H
5.	Novice M	Novice H	5.	Novice M	Novice H
6.	Novice M	Novice H	6.	Interm. M	Interm. M
7.	Novice H	Interm. L	7.	Novice M	Novice H
8.	Novice M	Novice H	8.	Novice M	Novice M
9.	Novice M	Novice M	9.	Novice H	Novice H
10.	Interm. L	Interm. L	10.	Novice H	Novice H
11.	Interm. M	Interm. M	11.	Novice M	Novice M
12.	Interm. L	Interm. L	12.	Novice H	Novice H
13.	Novice H	Novice H	13.	Novice M	Novice M
14.	Novice H	Novice H	14.	Novice H	Novice H
15.	Novice M	Novice M	15.	Novice H	Novice H
			16.	Novice H	Novice H
Novice Low, Mid, High- Novice L, M, H ; Intermediate Low, Mid, High-Inter. L, M, H.					

Table 2. EXPERIMENTAL GROUP ATTITUDINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. I can speak English better now than on the first day of class in October.	14	47	33	14	0
2. The class was interesting.	20	79	1	0	0
3. What helped me learn the most was reading.	14	33	53	1	0
4. What helped me learn the most was doing the writing exercises in the book.	0	33	53	14	0
5. What helped me learn the most was speaking with my classmates.	11	47	40	1	0
6. What helped me learn the most was listening to my teacher.	1	53	33	11	0
7. What helped me learn the most was speaking with my teacher.	0	47	47	1	0
8. What helped me learn the most was studying on my own.	0	14	53	33	0
9. Making a conversation with a classmate helped me to learn English.	11	47	42	0	0
10. I tried my best to study for the class.	33	53	11	1	0
11. I would take the same kind of English class again.	11	47	37	11	0
12. The role plays were enjoyable.	1	33	47	20	0
13. I felt anxious doing the role plays.	1	33	47	20	0
14. Role plays helped me learn idioms.	1	33	47	20	0
15. Role plays helped me learn vocabulary.	1	33	67	1	0
16. Role plays helped me become more confident.	11	42	42	11	0
17. The role plays helped me to speak English better.	0	53	46	1	0

SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; U-Undecided; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree Experimental Group: (N=15). Numbers in %.

As can be seen from the bold entries in the above table the results between the two groups are comparative. With inter-rater reliability at 81%, the experimental group registered a slightly greater success rate at 5 out of 15 students or 30% versus the control group with 4 out of 16 students or 25%. However, such a small increase cannot be considered significant and thus the use of role play as a substitution for the reading of the dialogues may have little or no effect on oral proficiency in this study.

The following are the results of the attitudinal questionnaire given to both groups. The first, Table 2, involves 17 items. Items 1-10 indicate results of questions pertaining to student motivation, characterized by interest, study habits and attitudes about what class activities help them learn. Items 12-17, given only to the experimental group, ask specific questions about their reaction to role plays.

Table 3 is the Control Group's replies to the questionnaire. Since they were not involved in the role plays, items 11-17 were not given to them.

Table 3. CONTROL GROUP ATTITUDINAL QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. I can speak English better now than on the first day in October.	0	31	44	25	0
2. The class was interesting.	44	31	20	0	0
3. What helped me to learn the most was reading.	10	44	31	20	0
4. What helped me to learn the most was doing the writing exercises in my book.	0	10	50	38	0
5. What helped me learn the most was speaking with my classmates.	20	25	38	20	0
6. What helped me learn the most was listening to my teacher.	20	63	20	0	0
7. What helped me to learn the most was speaking with my teacher.	0	56	31	13	0
8. What helped me to learn the most was studying on my own.	0	10	44	44	10
9. Making a conversation with a classmate helped me to learn English.	10	50	20	25	0
10. I tried my best to study for class.	13	63	20	10	0
11. I would take the same kind of English class again.	31	31	25	10	0

SA-Strongly Agree; A- Agree; U- Undecided; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree Numbers are % of responses; (N=16)

4.2 Attitudes about Oral Proficiency

Question 17 of the questionnaire from the experimental group shows 53% agreed their oral ability had improved because of the role plays with only 1 % disagreeing. Likewise, the 46% of students who were undecided may reflect the apparent anxiety that activities like role play often cause. Since role plays took up a significant amount of time in class, this result isn't surprising. In hindsight, it would have been interesting to have compared replies by asking a similar question to the Control group such as, "The dialogue practice in the textbook helped me to speak better?" . It is impossible to say how they would have responded, but it would have given us a better meter stick to compare the feeling of the students about the two variations of the dialogue activity.

From the results of Item 1, 61% of the experimental group agreed that their English is

better now than on the first day of class, double the 31% of the control group. However, there is no clear indication why the group felt the way they did. There are a few possible scenarios. First, a number of students may have been taking other English language classes in preparation for such tests as the TOIEC or STEP, popular among university students. Secondly, attendance in the experimental group was better than in the control group and fewer students were late. Thirdly, my enthusiasm for the role plays and stated belief that they would definitely help the students speak better may have influenced this result. Therefore, since the students didn't want to disappoint me, they answered affirmatively on the questionnaire. Lastly, since none of the students had experienced role plays before, they may have felt they did more "free talking" without the textbook and consequently "felt" they had improved.

Item 9 shows that 58% agreed that making a conversation with their partner helped them learn English. This is similar to the 60% of the control group who also agreed. Consequently, group work or at least pair work regardless of whether it be with a book or not appears to be a positive activity from the students' perspective.

However, one must take questionnaire results like these, administered one time on the last day of class, with skepticism. It is well known that students will respond to queries depending on how they think the teacher "wants" them to respond and not how they actually felt about what was being asked. Questions 6 and 7 can be interpreted as almost "loaded" questions in that respect since answering negatively may indicate that they are being ungrateful. Also, the students may have felt that the results may be reflected in their grades somehow and didn't want to jeopardise them regardless of my assurances to the contrary.

4.3 Class Activities

Items 3-8 asked students about specific aspects of class activities which they felt helped them learn English. Reading was given high percentages, 47% for the experimental and 54% for the control. However, half the experimental group were undecided versus 31% for the control. Since reading and speaking activities were combined in the control group, their high ratings aren't surprising.

Doing the workbook exercises was not felt to be very helpful in both groups. Only 33% of the experimental group felt it helped with 53% undecided. This corresponds to the control's 10% and 50% respectively. Obviously, homework is still not popularly embraced. One page assignments were given weekly as reinforcement exercises, however the results show the students didn't feel they were of benefit. Also, my observations were many students often came to class without having completed the workbook exercises. This result could

also question the students' responses in item 10 which asked if they tried their best to study for the class. A clear majority in both classes stated that they had, yet my observations of their workbook homework indicated that most did not do their homework regularly.

High percentages were found in both groups in regards to speaking to their classmates, slightly more in the experimental group with 58% than the 45% for the control. Also, listening to the teacher was valued for both groups; 54% for the experimental and 83% for the control group possibly echoing traditional class practices where the teacher is the main source of knowledge.

Speaking with the teacher was valued only slightly more in the control group at 56% than the 47% of the experimental. Interestingly, an equal number of the experimental group were undecided about the value of speaking with the teacher. In fact 11% more felt making a conversation with a partner helped them learn English. Since virtually all the speaking activities were done with a partner and not with the teacher, this isn't surprising and may illustrate that they felt much of the speaking time was spent talking with their classmates.

Studying on their own wasn't considered a benefit in both groups. Only 14% of the experiment and 10% of the control agreed that it was helpful, although virtually half in both groups were undecided. Possibly, they felt that learning on their own wasn't the "most beneficial", but a benefit none the less. Low scores on the value of the workbook may also be a reflection that little was done outside of class time.

4.4 Motivation and Interest

Perhaps one of the most interesting results of the questionnaire was the high response both groups gave to interest in the class. Virtually every student in the experimental group felt that the class was interesting and only marginally fewer in the control group agreed. Also, a majority in both groups stated that they would take the same class again. One possible reason for the high ratings in the experimental class may be the fact that role plays were something "new". Secondly, the students were more active, out of their desks more and into the front of the class. Thirdly, for both classes, having a teacher who is a native speaker of the language in study is almost always considered by students to be a more desirable class than one with a non native teacher. Although there are a number of JET (Japan Exchange Teachers) teaching in Japan at the junior high school and high school levels, many English language classes in Japan are still taught by Japanese teachers. Although it can't be verified here, often the student perception is that the native speakers are the most qualified to teach their native language and therefore would be the most desirable kind of teacher to have. Therefore, those students who hadn't had a native speaker as a teacher before may have

responded positively to interest in the class solely on that reason.

In the experimental group an expectedly small number 34% stated that the role plays were enjoyable with 47% undecided and 20% disagreeing. This correlated with the 34% who stated that they felt anxious doing them and 47% who were undecided. Given the fact that the students had never done role plays before and the nature of the activity, often one of anxiety, these numbers can be expected. However, most (53%) agreed that role plays helped them become more confident, possibly an added indication of the motivating factor of the activity. Many students thus illustrated that although the role plays weren't particularly enjoyable, they believed the activity helped them to become more confident. It appears that the anxiety could have acted as a positive motivator to do the exercise to which they agreed helped them to speak better.

4.5 Summary of The Results

Both the experimental and the control group felt that their speaking skills had improved over the duration of the course. Although fewer in the control group stated that their speaking skills had improved, it represented a majority in both groups. Thus, making any kind of claim that role plays "specifically" instilled confidence and motivation or resulted in any significant increases in oral proficiency is questionable.

The motivation and self confidence reported by the experimental group is an interesting factor in this study. It may partly be understood by the way the students progressed during the semester. Researchers such as Crookes and Schmidt (1989) have maintained that people seek out reasonable challenges and view uncertain situations as motivating. They maintain that once students find a challenge that has a possibility of being resolved, they will go after it. Therefore, it was important for me to be sure that the role plays were challenging and at the same time not overly difficult. The result was hesitation at the beginning, but later a greater willingness to participate in the role plays. During the first few sessions groups had to be called up, but after a few weeks, they were more willing to volunteer. However, this result could also be explained by the fact that as with any new activity, the students were getting used to doing role plays and felt more comfortable after a certain time of routinely doing them. Unfortunately, a similar question about "confidence" wasn't asked to the control group to see if they felt they were more confident about their English after the course was finished. Because I was concentrating on confidence in the role plays I didn't include it in the questionnaire. As well, I suspect I had preconceived positive results of the effects of the activity.

From my own experience, one shouldn't plan on having a group of ready, eager,

motivated students waiting to learn. This was no more true than with the civil engineering students in the experimental group who were taking this prerequisite English class. I assumed that they were neither motivated nor unmotivated and tried to plan lessons where they experienced success, and then “hoped” that motivation would follow as a result. As well, few researchers are willing to commit themselves and claim which precedes the other, motivation or successful learning. However, Ellis (1989) claims that “motivation is engendered by the learning process itself and the really important part of motivation lies in the pleasure of successful communication” (p.119). Therefore, it was imperative that the students experience success in the classroom, either as a result of motivation or because of it. The questionnaire results illustrate nothing conclusive, but suggest that role playing may be a motivating force in language learning.

Besides the role plays, the class activities which students felt helped them were comparable for both groups. Reading, speaking with classmates, listening to the teacher and speaking with the teacher were all considered to be helpful in learning. The fact that most high school English language classes are based on reading the text and listening to the teacher may be a reflection of these preferred learning activities. The experimental group felt speaking with classmates helped the most while the control group rated listening to the teacher as the most helpful. Although the study managed both groups so that there would be approximate amounts of speaking drills, the control group used their textbooks for speaking more, but the experimental group used their textbooks far less for the speaking drills. Thus, the experimental group may have felt that they were speaking more because they weren't using the textbook as often as they usually do. The control group on the other hand, may have felt like in most classes, the teacher is the main source of information.

For both groups, doing workbook exercises and studying on their own received the lowest importance in learning with an average of 12% and indicates the lack of importance they place on the exercise and possibly boredom with the activity. This illustrates a gap between my students beliefs and mine in learning, although one shouldn't expect homework to ever get high ratings. One of my beliefs is that the textbook exercises can be reinforced through the workbook and that these exercises should be done by the students on their own. Evidently, this is not the feeling of the students and needs to be reevaluated in my lesson plans.

Lastly, because this study used a one-time questionnaire given at the end of the course, it is important to keep in mind that any definite conclusions drawn from it are highly suspect. A more consistent way of collecting data, from journals or daily questionnaires at the end of each class may have resulted in different responses or would at the least have

shown more reliable data.

5. CONCLUSION

This study sought to find out if role playing, used as a task management in my classes was also helping my students' oral proficiency. The results are inconclusive, but there is some indication that it may have been helpful. As well, the students responses indicated that the role plays may have been a motivating activity, possibly instilling confidence and ultimately aiding the learning process. However, as was seen with Student 1 in the experimental group (a typical example for both groups) the categories which showed the largest differences between the pre and post interviews were accuracy 14-8 and function 10-1. The ratio between the pre and post interview for context was only 2-1 (see Appendix C and D) . Because this finding didn't change significantly for those whose level increased in both groups, it casts doubt on any definitive claim one may make as to the importance of role plays to oral proficiency. The biggest reason function was down so dramatically was the students in both groups paused much less during the second interview than the first. This could be partially explained by considering the fact that they may not have had an interview with a native speaker before. Also, they did not know me and thus probably felt nervous. Since the students knew me better and knew what to expect in the second interview, it may have resulted in fewer problems in the function category. Accuracy also fell by nearly half. Word order and use of the student's native language seemed to be the biggest problems students experienced in the first interview which was not as prevalent in the second. Whether this is a direct result of the learning process is difficult to claim, but may be one explanation.

The relationship between motivation, confidence and proficiency is inconclusive in this study, however there were some trends I observed in this study. Research has shown that motivated students excel in second language acquisition (Spada & Lightbown, 1995), whether it be of an intrinsic or extrinsic nature. However, research hasn't as yet been able to determine exactly how motivation affects learning, only that it has positive effects. It would be difficult to say what kind of motivation these students had. More likely than not, their motivation was driven from both types. My classroom observations showed that over the course of the semester, the students illustrated more motivation and confidence by being more creative with the role plays. During the first few lessons, the dialogues were often an exact replica of the examples from the textbook. However, in later lessons students began asking more questions about alternative phrases, questions and replies or would occasionally ask if they could change the situation so as to incorporate an idea. This was indeed encouraging and could illustrate added confidence from success in doing the exercise.

Clement (1986) cites confidence as one of the best predictors of language proficiency. On the other hand, another examination could be that few students knew each other at the beginning of the class. As well, the role plays were a “new” activity, therefore the students probably needed to get used to each other as well as the activity before they could feel secure enough to illustrate confidence. It may be quite natural then for the students to illustrate more confidence as the weeks progressed after they had practiced the activity in successive lessons and got familiar with their peers.

Despite the overall success I experienced with the role plays, there were a number of challenges which were observed. Therefore, I would like to make some comments for those interested in examining role play activities in the future. First, role plays often require imagination and assume that all students can produce spontaneous speech. Consequently, if the imagination wasn't forthcoming, it was sometimes difficult for students to try to visualise a scene or know what to say on their own. One problem was the low level of most students. So, during the first few weeks, role plays consumed more time than usual because of the frequent pauses between exchanges. Secondly, some role play situations forced students to act in situations they might not find themselves in. A scene where two strangers are talking on a bus or train is unlikely in Japan. Japanese who don't know each other very rarely speak to each other in public and don't ask personal questions about their jobs or family. Thus, what to say in such situations proved difficult because they had a hard time relating to them. Lastly, students occasionally tended to “tune out” of the role plays once their turn had finished and would talk in their first language with their partner or other students. These situations were not the norm. However, in hindsight, better class management may have improved the study conditions and therefore results.

Taking these observations into consideration, I would like to make some suggestions for future research in role plays. First, use as many simple and varied examples as possible in the early stages to demonstrate role playing. Showing a video of simple situations or using a colleague who can come to class to demonstrate with you would be very helpful. Because role plays are often new to students, I found the early going a bit slow. Such examples may help students get started more quickly and provide them with the needed input and lessen the anxiety they may demonstrate at the start. Secondly, be selective about the kind of role plays you are asking the students to do. Try to select those situations that are not “culturally bound” and therefore the students could conceivably find themselves in. Thirdly, plan something for the audience to do while their peers are doing role plays. One idea may be to have them make written comments about what they have done on that day and about the other groups they are watching. These comments, which could be in the form of a check

sheet or open comments or both, would provide the students with regular information about how their peers felt about their role plays. As well, this information would be very valuable to the researcher and could give them regular feedback about the students' feelings and attitudes. Also, provide students with as much creative freedom as you are able in the role plays. If the students have some choice in what they can do, I have found that they are more motivated in the task. Finally, try to create a comfortable non threatening environment for the students. Be patient and accepting of what they create and provide praise and constant feedback. Based on the observations I've made, its my opinion that these simple guides would aid in further study of role play or other drama activities.

The results of this study are inconclusive. As was observed, role playing versus reading increased the oral proficiency of the students in this study only slightly and therefore cannot be considered significant. Consequently, had the study been carried over a longer period, a year for example, it would be difficult to claim from our evidence that the degree of difference would have been greater between the the two groups. Neither the apparent motivating effects of the role plays nor the possible confidence it instilled, necessarily suggest continued proficiency increases. However, Liskin (1990) states that "significant" changes in oral proficiency require a year of study before they can be observed. Therefore, it would be of interest to observe two groups over a one year period to see if in fact a longer study would produce different results. Also, a longer study might tell us if role plays would still be motivating for the students, or if they would run their course and become a bore. Lastly, more preparation needs to be made for methodology, especially data collection. Relying totally on one-time questionnaires to measure the attitudes of students is somewhat suspect and unreliable. Daily forms or journals where students write down their thoughts would give questionnaires more support and make the results of a more extensive research more valid.

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APPENDIX A

Sample Dialog from Interchange 1, Unit 1, p.3.

(Control Group, Dialogue 1: Two people meet each other for the first time. In this dialogue they are at a fitness club. The students asked one extra question that wasn't in the book dialogue (What do you study?). The Control Group substituted the underlined parts with their own information. Words not underlined are as they appear in the textbook.

S1: Hi! My name is *Miyuki Yamada*. I am from *Gifu*. What is your name?

S2: I'm *Hiroki Hayashi*.

S1: And where are you from *Hiroki*?

S2: I'm from *Nisshin*.

S1: Oh, really? Nice to meet you.

S2: Nice to meet you too.

S1: By the way, what do you do?

S2: I'm a *student*. And how about you?

S1: I'm a *student too at Chubu University*.

S2: *What do you study?*

S1: *I study engineering. How about you?*

S2: *I study engineering too*. Hey, Miyuki. Can I join your class?

(Transcript of the same situation done by 2 students, gambit style, in the Experiment Group.

Situation 1; S1- Student 1 and S2-Student 2; Role Play Sample from Interchange Unit 1, p. 3)

S1: Hello! My name is Takuya Ishsibashi. I'm from Kasugai. What's your name?

S2: I'm Hiroki Banno.

S1: Where you from?

S2: I'm from Kariya.

S2: Nice to meet you.

S1: Nice to meet you too.

S2: What's your job?

S1: I'm a student. How about t you?

S2: I'm a student too..... Chubu University.

S1: Oh.... me too! Ah.... Ah, what do you study?

S2: Engineering. How about you?

S1: I study English.

APPENDIX B

Role Play Situations

Below is a list of all the situations used over the course of the study covering Units 1-3 in Interchange 1. Each situation was done twice with students changing roles.

Situation 1, Unit 1, p. 3.

Introductions

Student 1: Greet your partner and introduce yourself. Ask what your partner's name is, what they do and where they are from.

Student 2: Introduce yourself to your partner. Answer their questions and ask for the same information from them.

Situation 2, Unit 1, p. 4.

Two people are looking at pictures.

Student 1: Asks 3 questions about the person/people in the 5 pictures.

Student 2: Answers the questions about each person.

Situation 3, Unit 1, p. 6.

Two strangers meet on a bus.

Student 1 Ask for 3 things; where they are from, what they do and their name.

Student 2 Answer and then ask the same questions.

Situation 4, Unit 2, p. 8.

Greetings

Student 1. Its the morning. Greet your partner.

Student 2: Reply to your partners greetings.

Situation 5, Unit 2, p. 10.

Two people talk about their work.

Student 1: Imagine a job you'd like to do. Answer your partners questions about it.

Student 2: Ask what kind of job your partner has, then ask 3 questions about it.

Situation 6, Unit 2, p. 12.

Checking into a hotel.

Student 1: You are checking into a hotel. Answer the clerks questions.

Student 2: You are checking in a customer. Ask them their name, their address and telephone number and if they are paying by credit card.

Situation 7, Unit 2, p. 13.

Replying to an advertisement for a job.

Student 1: You wrote an advertisement for a job in the paper. Arrange an interview day and time for a caller who is interested.

Student 2: Reply to an advertisement. Agree to a day and time for an interview.

Situation 8, Unit 3, p. 16.

Shopping, asking for prices of goods.

Student 1: You are a customer. Comment on how much you like and item. Ask for the price of an item. Say if you want to buy it or not.

Student 2: You are a sales clerk. Answer the customers questions and ask them if they would like to buy the item.

Situation 9, Unit 3, p. 16.

Shopping, trying to get a bargain.

Student 1: You are a customer. You want to buy something, but you don't have enough

money. Try to get the sales clerk to give you a discount.

Student 2: You are a sales clerk. Decide how much, if any, of a discount to give.

Situation 10, Unit 3, p. 18.

Calling about goods at a garage sale.

Student 1: You are having a garage sale. Answer the callers questions.

Student 2: You are interested in an advertised item at the garage sale. Ask 3 questions about it and then ask for the address.

APPENDIX C

Transcriptions of the Pre Interview of Student 1, Experiment Group

The following are transcripts of first the pre-interview and following it the post interview of Student 1 of the experiment group. (I) denotes the Interviewer and (S) the Student. The words Function, Accuracy or Context appear next to those lines where the rater felt the response was questionable. Totals for each category follow the transcription.

I. What is your name?

S. My name is Hitoshi Matsuda.

I. And how are you today?

S. How are you?

(Accuracy)

I. Fine...Umm.. What time did you wake up this morning?

S. (pause)

(Function)

I. What time did you wake up this morning?

S. (pause)

(Function)

I. What time did you get out of bed this morning?

S. (pause)

(Function)

I. OK, Um.. did you eat breakfast this morning?

S. (pause)

(Function)

S. Did you eat breakfast?

I. (pause)

(Function)

S. Yes. Bread.....coffee.

(Accuracy)

I. OK. Do you take anything in your coffee?

S. (pause)

(Function)

I. Do you like your coffee only black?

S. Sugar and milk.

I. OK. Um, where do you live?

S. (pause)

(Function)

I. Where do you live?

S. Kasugai.

I. Oh, Kasugai!

S. Near.

(Accuracy)

I. Near here. How do you come to school?

- S. Car.
- I. What kind of car do you have?
- S.Toyota is Corolla. (Accuracy)
- I. Um, are you a good driver?
- S.Not driver. (Context)
- I. Have you ever gone on a trip with your car?
- S. Biwako, fishing.
- I. Did you catch any fish?
- S. Yes.
- I. How many?
- S. Two fish.
- I. OK. Um, do you have a big family?
- S. No, four family. (Accuracy)
- I. Who is in your family?
- S. Father, mother, sister. (Accuracy)
- I. OK. Um, what are your hobbies?
- S. (pause) (Function)
- I. Do you have any hobbies?
- S. Yes.
- I. What's your hobby?
- S. Food. Watch televi.
- I. What did you do during the summer holidays?
- S. Albeit. (Accuracy)
- I. OK. Ah, do you have a favourite TV show?
- S. Gotsu E-Kanji.
- I. Um, do you like sports.
- S. No.
- I. What do you like to do?
- S. Albeit, busy. (Accuracy)
- I. What's your part time job?
- S. CD Rental shop.
- I. Do you like your job?
- S. No.
- I. Why not?
- S. Money, little. (Accuracy)
- I. How much do you get?
- S. One hour, 680 yen.
- I. That's not much?
- S. No.
- I. How much does a good part time job pay?
- S. 100. (Accuracy)
- I. 100?
- S. 1,000.
- I. What kind of job would give you 1,000 yen?

- S. (pause) (Function)
- I. What kind of job pays 1,000 yen?
- S. Conveni store. (Accuracy)
- I. Do you want to work there?
- S. Yes.
- I. OK. Um, what are you going to do after this class.
- S. Going home. (Accuracy)
- I. What will you do?
- S. Albeit. (Accuracy)
- I. OK. Do you have a question for me?
- S. How old is he? (Accuracy) (Context)
- I. How old am I ? Well, I'm about 30.
- S. Where do you live?
- I. In Nagoya.
- S. Sakae?
- I. No, I live in Kita Ward, not far from here.
- S. (pause) (Function)

The following numbers indicate the number of times a response was questionable for each category:
Accuracy 14, Context 2, Function 10

APPENDIX D

Post Interview of Student 1, Experiment Group

Post Interview of Student 1 from the Experiment Group. (I) denotes the Interviewer and (S) the Student. The words Function, Accuracy or Context appear next to those lines where the rater felt the response was questionable. Totals for each category follow the transcription.

- I. Good morning.
- S. Good morning.
- I. How are you today.
- S. Fine and you?
- I. Fine. OK, what is your name please?
- S. My name is Hitoshi Matsuda.
- I. OK. Um, what time did you get up this morning?
- S. Eight o'clock.
- I. Is that the usual time you get up?
- S. Yes.
- I. What did you have for breakfast?
- S. Coffee and toast.
- I. OK. Um, what time do you get up on the weekend?

S. Twelve o'clock.

I. Twelve o'clock. OK. And what do you usually do on the weekend?

S. Part time job.

I. What's your part time job?

S. CD rental shop.

I. Do you like your job?

S. Yes.

I. Why?

S. Money is up, 800 yen. (Accuracy)

I. How much did you get before?

S. Seven hundred yen.

I. Ah, I see. What do you plan to do with your money?

S. 1,000 yen. (Context)

I. Umm, tell me about your family. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

S. Sister, 22 years. (Accuracy)

I. Is she a student?

S. No, job. (Accuracy)

I. She has a job?

S. Yes.

I. OK. Um, what kind of food do you like?

S. I like curry rice.

I. What kind of curry do you usually have?

S. What kind? (pause) (Function)

I. Do you have beef,pork curry or other kinds?

S. Katsu, beef curry and cheese. (Accuracy)

I. Do you sometimes go to a restaurant?

S. No. I eat home. (Accuracy)

I. What did you do for the New Years holiday?

S. I went to snow board.

I. Where? Where did you go?

S. I went to Gifu Gujo.

I. Oh. Are you good at snow boarding?

S. This year.... I went to snow board three times.

I. Did you go with your family?

S. No, my friends.

I. How did you get there?

S. This car.

(Accuracy)

I. With your car?

S. Yes, I bought a new car.

I. Oh, what kind of car?

S. Toyota Carina.

I. Are you a good driver?

S. Yes.

I. What are you going to do for your Spring holiday?

S. Study and part time job and snow board.

I. What will you study?

S. English.

I. Do you like English?

S. Yes.

I. OK. Um, do you have a question for me?

S. Yes. How long, how long speak Japanese?

(Accuracy)

I. Do I speak Japanese?

S. Yes.

I. A little, not very much. I 'm not studying Japanese. I'm studying English these days.

S. How long stayed in Japan?

(Accuracy)

I. I've been in Japan for ten years.

OK. We'll stop there. Thank you

The following numbers indicate the number of times a response was questionable for each category: *Accuracy* 8, *Context* 1, *Function* 1