

DEALING WITH NARRATIVE FROM MEANING TO USE

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Abstract

This article reports on a classroom-based study derived from the need to see more research into the link between the theories of second language acquisition and the teaching and learning of grammar, described by Ellis as “theoretical-pedagogical research” (1998, 57). The study is designed to find out to what extent forms targeted in the input are noticed by learners, and their attempts to use the language in written and spoken form. It illustrates a way to achieve a balance of form, meaning and use by using and re-using a text based on a true story. The article also provides a summary of the learners’ comments on how they perceived the task. An integrated skills-based approach is designed to increase learners’ awareness of how the target structures are used in context and at the same time involve them in meaning-focused interaction. The results of this study indicate that when the learners were asked to reconstruct the text as accurately as possible, there was some evidence of ‘uptake’ in the learners’ interlanguage. Furthermore, the task itself motivated the learners to focus on the meaning and form of the text and, equally importantly, the whole procedure maintained their interest.

Theoretical considerations

There are four key factors I took into consideration when deciding how to tackle this project. Firstly, the literature on focus on form and in particular the paradigm ‘noticing’; secondly, having selected the text, choosing which linguistic features within the text to focus on; thirdly, deciding on the process itself, and finally an analysis of the recount genre.

Focus on form

Much literature now discusses using a focus on form approach to teaching language, as distinct from using a formal structurally based syllabus. While definitions, terms, criteria and conditions are constantly being refined (e.g. Van Patten, 1990, Long 1991, 1996, Lyster & Ranta 1997, Long & Robinson 1998, Ellis 1999, Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen 2001a), it seems that the overriding research question is to find out the extent to which learners can pay attention to linguistic features when negotiating meaning and how to make the transition from form to use, or indeed meaning to form, more easily. As Doughty & Williams (1998, 11) state, “there is not, as yet, and probably never will be, any *single* solution to the intriguing problem of how to implement focus on form in communicative classrooms”. However, their view on focus on form (somewhat similar to what Ellis

(1995) terms *structured input*) includes “planned lessons, which are directed at teaching specific linguistic features, providing the features are taught in context through communicative activities” (in Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen 2001, 284). Doughty & Williams cite ample evidence to show that the acquisition of lexical items also benefits from form-focussed instruction (1998,212).

Noticing

The eclectic approach I have chosen to use with a text is further influenced by the work of Ellis (1995, 1997), Rutherford (1987) Batstone (1996) and Schmidt (1990), among many others, who talk about encouraging learners to ‘notice’ language features by exposing them to texts in context, interpreting the input and involving them in meaningful interaction, thereby raising their consciousness and level of awareness about certain grammatical features. This can be done in a variety of ways. Sharwood Smith, for example, (1991, 1993) talks about *input enhancement*, which includes “more readily verifiable creation of input” (in Long & Robinson 1998, 17). This can be done by highlighting, colouring or underlining target language features to make them more prominent. Schmidt and Frota (1986) argue that there is another kind of noticing that is necessary for acquisition to take place and that is comparing the forms available in the input, with those of their own output, or *noticing the gap*. Ellis makes a further distinction and replaces the term *notice the gap* with *cognitive comparison* (1995,90), to highlight the fact that the latter term also draws learners’ attention to their *interlanguage* (a term originally coined by Selinker (1972) to mean a learner’s unique linguistic system) that is the *same* as the input, as well as when it is *different* to the input. However, learners may notice a linguistic feature, but may not notice the gap, so in order to help them do this, Thornbury (1997) suggests that teachers provide not only corrective feedback but also strategies to help learners take advantage of these opportunities for noticing.

Thornbury further prescribes *reconstruction* activities, where the teacher provides a text, either in spoken or written form, and the learners later reconstruct it using their available linguistic resources and comparing their version with the text model, thus noticing the difference between the two. He argues that such activities are effective in promoting noticing and cognitive comparison, enabling learners to convert “input to intake, and then serves to restructure the learner’s developing linguistic competence” (1997,330). This process also lends itself to discussions of interpretation as learners are forced to look at the context in which the language occurs in order to justify its usage. Swain (1998) posits that this kind of reflection can develop learners’ understanding of their linguistic problems, thus contributing to awareness of forms and rules in an explicit manner. This, naturally,

promotes attention to *accurate* production, or reproduction, of language.

The choice of linguistic form

When designing tasks that primarily focus on meaning but need to have form attended to, the dilemma is often which linguistic items to focus on. According to Pienemann's Teachability Hypothesis (1985), language acquisition can be promoted if the structure to be learned is close to the learners' interlanguage. Conversely, focussing on linguistic features that the learner is not developmentally ready to learn, could interfere with, rather than enhance their progress (Pienemann, 1989). Classroom practitioners have likely witnessed learners' feelings of despondence when trying to process, or use, language that is simply too difficult. However, the pedagogic relevance of this theory, although widely supported, is limited, as it is difficult to know or find out exactly what learners have already been explicitly taught, and what they are ready to acquire, especially as they all learn at different paces, and as was the case in this study, the class was of mixed ability. As Lightbown acknowledges, "the heterogeneity of classes is a well-known reality, one that would make developmentally targeted teaching very difficult to organize" (1998, 179). Ellis (1995) identifies two criteria when choosing a linguistic feature to focus on: whether it is problematic for the learner and whether, as mentioned above, it is learnable.

As a result of their study, DeKeyser and Sokalski (1996) maintain that the effectiveness of the *uptake* in language instruction, that is, "what learners are able to report learning during or at the end of the lesson" (Allwright 1984, in Ellis et al 2001) depends partly on the morphosyntactic complexity of the presented structure. So a structure that is morphologically difficult could be easy to notice but difficult to produce, in contrast with a structure that is harder to notice but easier to produce. This evidence supports my study in which the learners are trying to use the third conditional; some are able to express the concept but due to the complexity of the structure, find it difficult to produce accurately. To conclude, there are a myriad of ways to decide on which forms to focus and, while the body of research demonstrates that forms are learned in predictable stages, Doughty and Williams (1998) warn against basing a decision for classroom application solely on research results.

Process of instruction

Tanaka (2001) describes comprehension practice as having learners' attention focused on a target structure while *processing* input. That is, they might listen to or read a text containing specific structures and indicate their understanding of it. Focussing on the meaning helps the learnability

problem and lessens the anxiety that Krashen (1982) suggests learners have when asked to produce structures that they find difficult. Studies have been undertaken to show that this type of instruction, rather than production-based instruction, is successful, (Van Patten and Cadierno 1993a, Cadierno 1995, Cheng 1995, Williams 1999), however, others (for example DeKeyser and Sokalski 1996) have obtained results to show the contrary.

Tanaka maintains that this dichotomy resides in the fact that comprehension and production practice are treated separately and proposes a case to show that their combined uses could be complementary, rather than mutually exclusive. His resulting study shows that out of three experimental groups, those of production practice, comprehension practice and a combination of comprehension and production-practice, the third group showed gains equal to that of both of the other groups, sustaining the practice effects over time. In an interesting study on classes of French immersion students, Swain (1998) argues that reflection on output can develop learners' metalingual understanding of their linguistic problems thus contributing to awareness of forms and rules in an explicit manner. This reflective process, also supported by sociocultural theorists, is stimulated when learners involved in collaborative tasks engage in metalinguistic talk ('metatalk') about a target form in the context of meaning-focused activity. Bygate (2001) conducted a useful study into the effects of task repetition on the structure and control of oral language, stating that output practice is necessary for learners to be able to interrelate form and meaning and integrate language knowledge into use. Therefore, providing learners are ready to produce target structures, before using these techniques, then learning should be successful.

Finally, according to Doughty & Williams in their comprehensive discussion on pedagogical choices of focus on form (1998), it seems that there are three key considerations: a flexible approach with a variety of task-techniques, the timing of attention to form, and, paramount to all the decision-making, the integration of form and meaning.

The study

This is principally a *descriptive* one, outlining a procedure for guiding learners through the understanding of a text via comprehension-based activities. Learners are asked to notice specific structures during the input-processing stage, notice the difference between their own language use and a native speaker version of the text, and to produce the language in meaningful, rather than communicative, controlled practice (Tanaka 2001,9).

Research questions

There are three parts to this study: **A)** a written text reconstruction, **B)** an oral reconstruction **C)** the learners' perceptions of the task and its success. There are three research questions, one for each part.

A *Written text reconstruction*

1. Which language features (lexis and grammatical forms) highlighted in class were (a) used accurately and appropriately in the learners' scripts, and (b) which forms were attempted but used inaccurately and/ or inappropriately?

B *Oral text reconstruction*

- 2 (a) Which lexical items and grammatical forms were learners able to recall and use accurately and appropriately after a week; (b) which were attempted, albeit inaccurately, *and* (c) what strategies were used to translate the written to the spoken in a communicative exercise?

C *Written feedback comments*

3. Did providing and exploiting a story motivate the learners to focus on form, and if so, what did they perceive they were learning?

Methodology

Participants and instructional context

The 38 learners who took part in this study were enrolled in a Diploma in English in a tertiary institution. This is a two-semester programme whose entry criteria is an IELTS band score of between 5.0 – 5.5 (or equivalent). Of the four courses offered on the Diploma, two are general English (Upper Intermediate and Advanced) and two are Academic or Business Studies courses. All learners studying in the programme are required to choose two of a series of elective courses for two hours a week, one of which is a Language Workshop elective. This study was undertaken on students from *two* different Language Workshop elective courses, comprising learners from all of the core classes. Due to the academic nature of the courses, students sometimes enter at a higher proficiency level than IELTS 5.5, therefore, we can conclude that the students' level was

somewhere between 5.0 – 6.5.

The two classes were made up of 25 permanent residents and 13 international students, varying in age from 20 – 45. There was an almost equal number of males and females; 25 were Mandarin or Cantonese speakers, six were Korean speakers and the remaining seven came from the Middle East (3), Bangladesh, (1) Thailand (2) and Ethiopia (1). The reason the learners had chosen this class (elective) was to improve their written and spoken grammatical accuracy. They had been canvassed at the beginning of the course as to what they perceived they needed to learn. All their responses concerned grammatical forms, specifically the present simple, third conditional, articles and participial clauses.

Prior to the study, the two classes had met for a total of three sessions during which they had focused on the meaning and form of the language from stories in different genres (none of which were the forms focused on in this study). The students, however, had been trained and encouraged in ‘noticing strategies’, by doing reconstruction tasks (as discussed above) and by matching grammatical forms they had chosen or used, with a native speaker version. Therefore, the learners were used to doing the types of tasks undertaken in this study. The study was conducted over two class sessions and formed the learners’ fourth and fifth sessions.

The text

The text is a story, adapted from various newspaper accounts, about a trumper who had got lost in the New Zealand bush. I collated the relevant information into a story of 275 words, which is lexically dense, but does not contain a complex sequence of events. The topic is culturally appropriate, as tramping in the bush is a popular New Zealand pastime, and the vocabulary in the text is likely to be encountered by learners again, as such tramping incidents are common. Because the text was not in itself authentic, but was especially written for learners, the structure and linguistic features were characteristic of the factual recount genre, defined by Derewianka as “the unfolding of a sequence of events over time {sic} using language to keep the past alive and help us to interpret experience” (1990, 15).

The Recount begins with an orientation, followed by a series of events in chronological order and finally, a personal comment (see Figure 1).

The Trouble with Harry

Orientation

Harry Smith, a 56 year-old postman from Nelson, decided to do an eight-day tramp around the Nelson Lakes. Soon after he set off he took a wrong turn and then fell 3 metres down a bank into a rocky ravine near Lewis Pass, *smashing* his right leg against a rock and breaking it at the hip. But he was an experienced trumper and remained optimistic, as he was carrying 7 days worth of food and had fallen near a stream. Too weak to put up his tent, he used it as a blanket and *rationed* his food – eating from pasta packets cooked on his gas cooker and *nibbling* on muesli and nuts. After lying on a rock for 2 weeks, he began to give up hope – his food was running out and although he had been listening to his radio it wasn't until the 15th day that they had begun searching for him. Then to his great relief, he was found the next morning by trampers on a walkway near the Ada Hut. The rescuers said Harry was calmly reading a book he had found in his pack. He said *he would have been dead if he had been out any longer.*

Events

Personal
comment

Classroom procedure, task types and treatment of forms (1)

Both classes were given exactly the same treatment, from the same tutor (myself), and in the same order.

Day One, Week One

The learners were asked to take no notes whatsoever from the day's session. Firstly, I discussed the generic structure of a Recount with the learners who were then introduced to the text by way of a vocabulary building exercise (which included the two target vocabulary items); from this, the learners tried to predict the content. They then listened *once* to a tape of the story which was recounted in a non-scripted conversational style, done by two colleagues. In groups, learners discussed the story and were given a series of sentences to order detailing the sequence of events (see Appendix A). Questions were answered on the content, and a discussion on the cultural context and relevance of the text ensued (see Appendix B). After working on matching some collocated lexical items from the text (see Appendix C), the learners were then presented with a form of the written text with a task where they were required to choose the correct verb form to complete the sentences (see Appendix D1). They discussed this task in pairs, making their choices from their

existing linguistic knowledge. The learners were then asked to answer some specific questions on the text which were designed to draw attention to (a) the vocabulary and (b) the target structures (see Appendix D2). The collocated lexical items were highlighted in bold in the text as an additional way of drawing attention to them. The learners then checked their answers from the original version, displayed on an overhead, and highlighted the differences between their texts and the original version. With both classes, *attention was explicitly drawn* to the use of the *third conditional* and the *past perfect* in this context. Their form and functions with examples were put on the board and the structures were drilled. In addition, at this stage, a great deal of clarification and quick board explanations were given, with questions being initiated by the learners themselves. For example, with one class, the use of the past continuous form in the sentence “the food was running out” was compared with the use of the past simple in “the food ran out”. These were all incidental ‘focus on form events’, (according to Long’s definition 1991, 4) – *but different items were clarified with both classes*. Finally, learners were instructed to explore a complex sentence that included a participial clause (one of two in the text), by ‘packing’ a sentence that had been ‘unpacked’ into single propositions, or units of meaning (see Appendix E). Again, this type of sentence building was a task familiar to the learners.

By the end of the session, and after much discussion, the learners were quite familiar with the storyline and relevant vocabulary and had also analysed some of the grammatical forms. All the material was collected. The homework task was for the students to reconstruct the story as closely as possible to the original version, and do it as soon as they could. The reason for this was because I wanted them to recall the story while it was fresh in their minds. The completion of the task was part of their formative assessment, so there was an added incentive to hand it in.

Day Two, Week Two

The learners were asked to take it in turns to re-tell the story from the previous week to a partner. I instructed them to imagine that none of them had heard the story before and to respond as appropriately and naturally as possible. This was a semi-authentic communicative task designed as a fluency activity (using memorized language) and aimed at the ‘process of automatisation’ (Thornbury 2000,4). This gave learners the opportunity to restructure what they were familiar with in order to make it more complex.

Data collection and analysis of written scripts

Of the 38 learners, 20 submitted their story within two days and 18 turned it in seven days later. The only significant difference between the texts of the two groups was that a few from the latter group elaborated the events with their language and tended to use less vocabulary from the original text. In addition, those who had confused the sequence of events were all from that second group.

Of the grammatical structures highlighted in class, I chose to test the use of both forms of the conditional, firstly, because I knew that they had initially targeted the form themselves as needing attention and secondly, because I had observed in previous sessions, that many had not been able to articulate the form when it was needed. I was also interested to find out how many were able to use the participial clause correctly, as this had been a highlighted item in the sentence reconstruction task, as well as being a form that they had identified as a problem. I was fairly sure that the two vocabulary items I chose, 'ration' and 'nibble', would not have been encountered previously, due to their relatively uncommon usage.

Below is a table indicating the learners' uptake of these forms as analysed in their scripts. I have also included several samples of learners' texts, in both written and spoken form, to illustrate the extent to which the learners were able to express the story in their own words.

<u>Linguistic feature</u>	Number of learners using this feature appropriately	Number of learners attempting this feature
1. 3 rd conditional (1)	4 (10%)	7 (18%)
2. 3 rd conditional (2)	10 (26%)	12 (31%)
3. present participial	15 (39%)	1 (2.6%)
4. ration	18 (47%)	10 (26%)
5. nibble	5 (13%)	6 (16%)

Table 1: Learner uptake of linguistic features in the written text

The findings show that the second example of the conditional (*he would not have survived if he had been tramping in winter*) was attempted by 57% of the learners, 27% correctly and 31% incorrectly, but that the first example was attempted by only 28%. The present participle, used in the participial clause (*smashing his leg*), was used correctly by 39% of the learners, although the

past simple (*and smashed*) would also have been an acceptable use in this sentence but was not tested. ‘*Ration*’ may have already been known by many of the students or maybe its use as a transitive verb was more simplistic than *nibble on something* (cf. *nibble at* or just *nibble*) and therefore easier to remember; I accepted the latter’s transitive or intransitive use providing it was appropriate in the context of the sentence. Overall, even though it is difficult to make generalizations about these results, it is nonetheless encouraging that more than half of the learners were using or attempting to use more than half of the tested features highlighted in class. Specific examples of how the language was used can be seen in Figure 2 below.

These are three written texts from learners of differing abilities, all of whom are in their second semester of fulltime study. The lexical items and verb forms highlighted in **bold** are those tested that have been used correctly in this context; those in *bold and italics* are attempts to use the lexis/structures, although perhaps inappropriately and/or incorrectly. The scripts have transcribed exactly as they were presented to me. While only a sample of the more problematic linguistic features were tested, comments have also been made on other linguistic features of interest, including vocabulary and the collocations, all of which had been discussed or mentioned in class to varying degrees during the noticing activities. In addition, as stated below, these texts were written between two to seven days after the learners had first encountered the story, so there was little time to process the language.

#1 Learner (Korean man)

Harry went to tramping to Nelson Lake. Soon after he **set off** he took a **wrong turn** and he fell into **ravine** then his right leg was broken at the hip. However, he **remained optimistic** because he was an **experienced tramper**, **was carrying** 7-days ration and a radio. He **nibbled** pasta, nuts and **muesli** and at night he covered himself a tent as a blanket because he couldn’t fix the tent.

When the food *was running out* and he couldn’t listen to the radio he began to be disappointed.

15 days later he was found by another **tramper** and rescued. *If he had tramped in winter he might have been dead.* The expert group recommend that you bring a 3-dollar *orange color* backpack, **high energy** foods and a **mountain radio** when you tramp.

This learner has used many of the collocations and lexical items appropriately for this context. My interpretation of appropriate is that it is so *in the context of the sentence*. He has applied the past continuous form accurately and appropriately (*was carrying*) in one instance and inappropriately in the second (*was running out*). It could be argued that this usage is correct, although *when his food*

(ran out)he began to be disappointed suggests it is the result of something having been completed, not continuing. It appeared to me that the student is recalling the form without perhaps understanding its use in context, but were these to be analysed in the original text, he might arrive at a better understanding. Furthermore, I suspect he may have been influenced by *He began to ...* from the original text and substituted *to be disappointed* for *give up hope*. (Personal observations indicate that Korean learners seem to have difficulty using *disappointed*, perhaps due to its translation from Korean to English.)

#2 Learner (Chinese woman)

The Trouble with Harry

A 56 years old postman went to Nelson lake to tramp. Soon he **put off** taking **wrong turn** he fell 13m down a bank of **rocky ravine** **smashing** his right leg against rock, **breaking** bone at his hip. he is an rich experience tramper as **opisticist**. He was laying bank near stream and **rationed** 8-days food . He used **gas cooker**, pase and had a **nible** of **musile** and nuts and listent the **mountain radio** to wait to rescue. While the rescuers found him he **was reading** book calmly until he had lost 15 days

The Safty Council xxx said. **It if had happed in winter, He would not have suvived.** He suggest: If people wanted to **tramper**, they might carry 3 things **orange-colour** plastic bag, **high energy** food and **mountain radio**, torch flashing at night.

Learner #2 would be at the lower end of the proficiency scale in this group of learners. Here, she has taken quite a few risks with the lexis and has made attempts to use it appropriately. Many of the collocations have been remembered and while articles, punctuation and spelling are clear problems here, she has used both the third conditional and the participial clause correctly. It is possible that this learner relied on memory to reproduce the text without an in-depth knowledge of how to grammaticalise it, exemplified by her use of *put off*, which she may have confused with *set off*. The judicious use of a comma after *set off* and an article in front of *wrong turn*, might have rectified the inappropriateness of usage. Again, it is apparent that there are difficulties in interpreting these results.

Learner #3 (Chinese man)

The Trouble with Harry

This story is about a **tramper** - Harry, who likes bushwalking. Once he went to Nelson Lakes by himself. After he **set off**, he took a **wrong turn** and felt 13m down a bank into **rocky ravin** near Lewis Pass, **smashing** his right leg against rock and **breaking** it at the hip. He put up his tent hardly.

He also **remained optimistic** as he *was taking* seven days food, pasta, **muesli** and nuts. He **nibbled** the food lasting 15 days. He **was reading** the book when the tramping group found him. He said to group that **he would have been dead if he *hadn't been stayed out any longer***.

The tramping club said, Harry was a lucky man, **if he had been tramping in winter, he wouldn't have survived**. They recommended trumper should take following things when they go tramping, **high energy** food, **mountain radio** and **locator beacon**.

Clearly, learner #3 already has a good knowledge of grammatical structures and has a better command of the generic structure of this kind of text than many of the students, although the text lacks overall cohesion. It is also likely that he already knows how to use the third conditional but needs to practice the form. His use of the collocated lexical items is appropriate.

An interesting flow-on effect from this exercise was the self-correction that occurred when I returned the learners' own unmarked texts to them a week later, *after* further focus on the forms 28 of the 36 learners present made corrections and 10 of those made a considerable number of changes. The 'notice the gap' type activities undertaken in class were perhaps in some way responsible for the willingness of so many learners to self-correct their work.

Data collection and analysis of oral transcripts (a week later)

After one week, learners were audio taped telling the same story to one other in pairs or groups of three. On listening to the tapes, it was apparent that many learners had recalled the storyline well and were using different strategies to communicate this to their partners. Most were totally involved in the activity which indicated a high level of motivation. Some were more creative than others, attempting to add an element of 'surprise', which was somewhat unrealistic as their listener already knew the story. Most took it in turns to tell the story as closely as possible to the written version, with their partner giving the odd signal to show they were listening. Others pretended that this was the first time they had heard the story, giving their partner a chance to tell it more authentically. Some made attempts to animate the story, coupled with interested responses from their partner to encourage the storyteller, illustrated in Transcript #1. One trio pooled their resources and helped each other fill in the gaps in the story by interjecting each time one speaker 'lost the plot'. Extracts from their interaction can be seen in Transcript #2.

The following transcripts have no punctuation and interjections by another student are indicated in parentheses [*in italics*]. Again, the lexis and verb forms highlighted in **bold** are those that were

highlighted in class and that have been used appropriately in this context; those in *bold and italics* are attempts to use the lexis/structures, although inappropriately in this context.

Transcript #1 (an Afghani man and a Chinese woman)

- A Did you hear about the 56 year-old postman go lost in the jungle last week?
- B No ...I heard a bit...tell me...
- A Yes I was reading yesterday newspaper...Harry a 56 year-old man he was a old postman...he went actually went **tramping** to the jungle to the Nelson, and yeah he took actually his food for 8 days but as soon as set out unfortunately he fell down and he actually went the **wrong way** to you know right turn into the wrong way fell down and he broke his leg [*Oh I am sorry for him*] yeh and then what happened you know he couldn't set up his tent during the night because because his broken leg and he use it as a cover during the night..covered himself under the knee..*[I think he was very clever]* ah he was actually [*and experience*] yeh he stayed there to 15 days they even know what happened to him after 15 days people start to find out what happened to Harry [*I don't believe it*] yeh am what's happened..... he **rationed** his 8 days' food to 15 days....*[ah I see]* and he **had been listening** to the radio but he didn't notice anybody looking for him [*oh no I feel sorry for him*] ..anyway after 15 days a group of children...a group of **rescuers** found him and suddenly they saw he was very relaxed and reading a book [*I don't believe it*] ah exactly...eh no that was the story about Harry I read in the newspaper...*[so what...umm...]* and they gave some suggestions in the next time if you go to the jungle camping gear how to ..take..some **plastic orange bag** ...or water or radio **mountain radio**and if.....

This learner has a fluent manner of speaking and utilises many discourse level features. Unfortunately, the transcript does not do justice to the animated way in which he told the story. While the story's sequence of events are a little confused, it is apparent the student is trying to concentrate on the details and the listener's responses seem to make him momentarily lose concentration (*em and then what happened and yeh am what's happened*). He employs some of the contextualised vocabulary (substituting 'jungle' for bush!) and uses the past simple consistently. The listener is employing active listening devices, constantly reacting to the speaker and clearly both are attempting authentic discourse.

Transcript #2a (A a Thai woman, B a Chinese man and C a Korean woman)

- A His name is Henry and.....
- B [*Miss Harry, 50 years old tramperman*]
- A [*54...or 50*]

- B Yes is **experienced trumper**
- A [*He is...yeh*] and he planned to go for tramping 8 days
- B [*8 days*]
- Aand as soon as he took off..**set off** and took a **wrong turn**
- B [*took a wrong turn and felling down 30 metres*]
- A And he fell..
- B [*fell down*]
- A 13 metres down a bank, into a **rocky ravine** into ayes

Transcript #2b (speakers A and B continue telling the story together until a gap when speaker C intervenes and takes up the story)

- B yeh as a blacket, blacket, blanket
- C And eh fortunately he has got some special food, is **high energy** food [*yes*] eh for **muesli** and some [*pasta*] nuts and some pasta [*yeh*] and he also boiled pasta
- B How does he cooking? Does he use **gas cooker**?
- C gas cooker, yeh, he boiled pasta

Transcript #2c

- B The group of people say that he was very lucky um
- A [*because*]
- B ...because *if he was out longer he maybe couldn't survive*
- A [*yeh and he good luck that he didn't tramping in winter*]
- B [*yeh yeh*]

Instances of self and peer correction are evident in these exchanges and learner A seems at times to be concentrating so intently that she ignores the interjections of the other speakers altogether. Learner B keeps the whole thing ticking along by clarifying and asking questions to bring out vocabulary (e.g. *How does he cooking? Does he use gas cooker?*), while student C takes a back seat until the two others need help with the next part of the story. This exchange is slightly different to the others as the students are concentrating on helping each other process the language in the story, by taking turns. Edwards & Middleton (1986) claims that these kinds of collaboratively told stories are notable in authentic spoken discourse, with 'an agreed version arrived at through alternating contributions' (in McCarthy 1991,138).

Data collection and summary of written feedback

At the end of the *first* session, learners were asked to fill in a short questionnaire and submit it along with their story. They were asked the following questions: 1) Did you enjoy this activity? 2) How helpful did you find it? Why? / Why not? 3) Which grammar points do you think you will remember? 4) Any other comments about this type of grammar learning? 28 out of the 38 in the

study responded.

When asked about the enjoyment of the activity, all 28 agreed they had. All found it helpful and six commented that they liked the fact that the task included all the language skills, with another eight commenting that it helped their listening skills. Using such an approach, five said it helped them remember the story, while one learner liked having the target structures highlighted to help him notice. When asked which grammar points they would remember, there was no consistent response. Six specified '*the conditional*', five the *past perfect*, five said they would recall the complex sentence using the *present participle*; three students remarked they would remember "the sentence structure more deeply" and three that they would remember nothing at all. Several were still confused with 'tense', while one student maintained s/he would pay attention to the targeted grammar forms much more after the event.

Of the more general remarks, eight wanted to listen to the story again on tape, after working on the content and language, while four preferred listening to rather than reading the story before doing the gapfill (in week two). Several students said they would remember the contextualised vocabulary and one commented that they would never forget not only the vocabulary, but the grammar used in the story. A couple of students observed the fact that they would have liked the mistakes highlighted on the overhead projector. There were some other individual comments about pacing: one wanted to have the procedure spread out over time, while another wanted me to slow down when talking about grammar and a third preferred to have more examples of the targetted language. Finally, one learner noted that they would now like to go tramping!

There was some evidence to show that the learners, in articulating their own uptake, did not feel confident enough to say that they would be able to use the language in another context. In that case, the transfer of the lexico-grammatical structures to other situations may be possible if the students were presented with a different story, within a similar context. Further studies in this area may be useful.

This kind of qualitative feedback is fairly subjective but gives valuable insights into students' stages of learning. As is evident from individual comments, consideration does need to be given to learning styles and time invested in finding this out is an important factor in teaching and learning. Although feedback is always useful, it is occasionally frustrating as some comments do need elaboration, and it is not always possible to ask learners to do this. More in-depth discussion with a

group of learners may perhaps be more insightful.

Teacher / researcher's comments and conclusions

The tenor of the qualitative feedback elicited after the study, and with subsequent story sessions, was overwhelmingly positive. Learners seemed motivated by the process and eagerly awaited the next story, whether it was presented as a taped listening or as a story told to them. Texts need to be carefully chosen for relevance and cultural appropriacy, and thought is needed to decide on the extent to which the story is adapted or whether to leave it in its original version. Length and complexity are also a consideration. This whole process tends to be time-consuming, as *up-to-date* authentic texts are naturally not found in commercially produced materials. Notwithstanding this fact, a teacher can get a considerable amount of mileage from one text. Using a narrative, or recount, does provide a context but it would be worthwhile reconsidering the length of the text, as 275 words was a long text to reconstruct. Maley, in his book "Short and sweet" (1994) recommends 150 words, especially if the purpose is to focus on form.

The results of this data show that explicit attention to specific language items in the context of a story may promote uptake, and learners can produce worthwhile texts using, or attempting to use, some of the lexico-grammatical structures. The process undertaken also encourages students to focus and reflect on the grammatical choices and draw on these as well as their own linguistic resources to write the text. Initially, the process is very controlled while learners are encouraged to explore and model the grammar within the original text, and then later attempt to notice the difference between the original input and their own output, accepting the fact that there may be other 'correct' versions.

Conclusion

More classroom-based studies are needed to provide evidence of how this process of cognitive comparison can lead to uptake. It would also be useful to pay further attention to how it can enhance lexical acquisition, in particular the role of collocating lexis in the processing stage.

In addition, the role of memory should not be ignored in this approach to text reconstruction, as learners are asked to reproduce what they remember of the text. Pienemann's research (1989) showed that form-focussed instruction can have an effect on acquisition and learners can increase their use of the language in communicative speech, but the effects are short-lived. The results in my study suggested that students who left a longer period of time between being introduced to the text

and writing their version, found it more difficult to reproduce the specific lexis, grammar and story sequence, than students who wrote the story within a couple of days. However, further research is needed to discuss how much recall there would be after a month or longer and whether, for example, the cognitive processing of the text at an early stage might help recall the content. Information of this kind would greatly inform tutors using this kind of approach to language pedagogy.

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Appendix A

Put these sentences into chronological order

- He went for a walk
- He fell down a ravine
- He rationed his food
- He lay on a rock for 15 days

- Someone found him
- He was reading a book
- He was lucky to be alive

Appendix B

Answer these questions about the content with a partner – don't write down the answers

1. How damaged was the trumper's leg?
2. Which leg was it?
3. Describe how he slept at night.
4. Find a verb that means 'make (his) food last'.
5. Find 3 types of food he took with him on the tramp.
6. Give an example of 'high energy' food.
7. In which season was he tramping? How do you know?

Discussion (groups)

1. Do you have the equivalent of the 'bush' in your own country? If so, is tramping a common hobby?
2. Have you ever been tramping in the New Zealand bush? Tell your group where you went and for how long.
3. How do New Zealanders feel about tramping?
4. What do you think are some of the dangers?
5. What precautions would you take before going on a long bush walk?

Appendix C

Vocabulary items B were cut up and learners collated them by matching them to the words in column A

A

rocky
set
ration
wrong
experienced
nibble
remain
gas
news
life and
mountain
locator
high
plastic

B

ravine
off
food
turn
trumper
on food
optimistic
cooker
broadcast
death
radio
beacon
energy
bag

Appendix D1

Read the text first and then choose the verb form that best fits the text

The Trouble with Harry

Harry Smith, a 56 year-old postman from Nelson, decided to do an eight-day tramp along the Nelson Lakes. Soon after he **set off** he 1. *took / had taken* a **wrong turn** and then fell 13 metres down a bank into a **rocky ravine** near Lewis Pass, smashing his right leg against a rock and breaking it at the hip. But he was an **experienced trumper** and 2. *remained / remaining* **optimistic** as he 3. *was carrying / carried* 7 days worth of food and 4. *has fallen / had fallen* near a stream. Too weak to put up his tent, he used it as a blanket and **rationed** his **food** – eating from pasta packets cooked on his **gas cooker** and nibbling on **muesli** and nuts. After 5. *lying / laid* on a rock for 2 weeks, he began to give up hope – his food 6. *was running / ran* out and although he 7. *has been listening / had been listening* to his radio it wasn't until the 15th day that they 8. *have begun searching / had begun searching* for him. Then to his great relief, he 9. *found / was found* the next morning by **trampers** on a walkway near the Ada Hut. The rescuers said Harry 10. *was calmly reading / calmly read* a book he had found in his pack. He said he 11. *would have been / would be* dead if he'd been out there any longer.

The New Zealand Mountain Safety Council said he was very lucky to be alive and would not have survived if 12. *he was tramping / he'd been tramping* in winter. They recommend several things you can take with you on a bush tramp that 13. *might / will* make the difference between life and death: a \$3 orange-coloured plastic bag, a mountain radio with a locator beacon, a good supply of high-energy food and a torch to shine at night.

Appendix D2

- Find 3 examples of compound adjectives (that is, 2 adjectives joined together)
- Highlight** or **underline** all the nouns that you would associate with tramping e.g. tramp / trumper / gas cooker.
- Which of these happened first:

He remained optimistic. He fell near a stream.

Look at the form of the verb of the first action. What do you notice?

- Which of these happened first:

He was reading a book. He found a book in his pack.

Look at the form of the verb in this action in the text. What do you notice?

- Did he die? What language does he use to express the situation that may have happened.

Write the sentence here....If _____ he _____

Did he survive? What language does the NZ Mountain Safety Council use to express the situation?

Write the sentence here....If _____ he _____

Appendix E

Pack this sentence into one sentence

Unpacked sentence

He set off

It was soon after

He took a turn

The turn was wrong

He fell 13 metres

He fell down a bank

He fell into a rocky ravine

The ravine was near Lewis Pass

He smashed his leg

It was his right leg

It was smashed against a rock

He broke it at the hip

Packed sentence

Soon after he set off he took a wrong turn and then fell 13 metres down a bank into a rocky ravine near Lewis Pass, smashing his right leg against a rock and breaking it at the hip.