

The Effect of Story-Grammar Instruction on Poor College Students' Achievement of Narrative Texts' Theme Identification.

Asst.Prof. Shatha Al Saadi*
Mahdi**

Asst.Lecturer Shaima

Abstract

The problem of this study arises from the fact that most students are not quite able to identify theme in narrative texts.

Poor students need more explanation in how they can identify theme, therefore the researchers proposed teaching the story grammar by using related key words (because, as a result, since, then, after, before, next, same as, as compared, different from, unlike, but,...etc.) for facilitating theme identification.

In order to find out the results, the following null hypothesis has been posed:

There are no differences between the achievement of the good students and the poor students after teaching the latter the story- grammar to identify the narrative theme.

In the experimental group, the poor students have been taught the elements of story grammar and how they can use the fore mentioned key words in theme identification. After that both the experimental group and control group sat for a test of theme identification to find the differences between them.

The findings of this study indicate that there are no differences between the two groups, in other words the teaching of story grammar helps the poor students to become better in theme identification.

In the light of the findings of the present study, several conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further study have been made.

Introduction

1.1. Problem and its importance

Reading is an interaction process made between the student and the text. It requires that the reader understands the structure of the text.

Texts fall into two main types: The first is narrative; whereas the second is expository. Each kind has its own purpose and classification. Narrative texts are considered the easiest and near fetched for college students.

The students can understand the whole story but they cannot express the ideas clearly. A narrative text has a beginning, a middle and an end, but at the same time it has characters, a plot or a conflict, and a setting (Livingston, 2004:1) and (Fitisgerald and Spiegel, 1983:1).

Through the years of teaching at the College of Education for Women, the researchers* think that the fundamental problem of the students is their failure to understand what they read.

* Department Of English - College of Education for women – Baghdad University

** Department Of Education and Psychology- College of Education for women – Baghdad University

* Asst. Prof. Shatha Al saadi taught Short Stories (narrative text) and she is still teaching Comprehension at the Department of English.

*Asst. Lecturer. Shaima Mahdi taught Systems of Psychology and Theories of Motivation (expository texts) at the Department of Education and Psychology.

The difficulty is crystallized into a definite statement suggested by Williams (2005:58)"Their lack of sensitivity to text structure." Hence, college students' problem is that they are unable to classify the characters or follow up the plot and the biggest one is their inability to identify the theme.

Students as readers must be aware of the structure of the text. Armbruster(2004)as cited in Barrow(2009:1)considers that the organization of the text is the method of arranging ideas and the relationships among the ideas.

Dymock (2007:161) has aptly stated that" Narrative texts are more than simple lists of sentences or ideas."

The researchers agree with the point of view of Dymock(2007:162) who suggests that "comprehension of a narrative text is better when the text is organized to a well-known story grammar."

Amer(1992:713)stated that: "Direct instruction in story grammar involves helping students to learn to recognize the elements of narrative texts and use these elements to improve their comprehension of the story".

There are many techniques that help the reader to discover themes .Some of them are: Compare and contrast, transitions and connectors. These afore mentioned techniques will be highlighted when teaching the experimental group.

1.2. The Aim

This study aims at investigating the effect of story-grammar instruction on identifying a narrative theme by poor students.

1.3. The hypothesis

For conducting this study, the following null hypothesis is posed:

There are no differences between the achievements of the good students and the poor students after teaching the latter the story- grammar to identify the narrative theme.

1.4. The limits of the study

The scope of this study is the following:

1. Second year college students at College of Education for Women / University of Baghdad.
2. The textbook to be studied as a narrative text is *The Old Man and the Sea**.This text is used and recommended by the Council of the Universities.
3. The experiment period is six weeks beginning from second semester of the academic year (2008-2009).

1.5. The Procedures

The following steps are followed:

1. Two second year classes are selected as a sample of the study.
2. One of the two classes, the poor one, comprises the experimental group as the researchers made a comparison between them. Mann-Whitney (U-test) was used as statistical means to distinguish the poor from the good.
3. One of the researchers teaches the experimental group, whereas their regular instructor teaches the control group.

*In second year syllabus, the students study Collected Short Stories in the first semester and The Old Man and the Sea in the second semester.

4. The experimental group is taught to select thematic sentences by using key words which are decided according to the element of the story grammar.
5. The control group is taught according to their traditional method.
6. After teaching half of the story, the two sections sit for the exam, and they are asked to unstudied passages, and discuss sentence(s).
7. The answer sheets are corrected by a neutral rater who does not know to whom the test papers belong.
6. The results are analyzed.

1.6. Definition of Basic Terms

1.6.1. A story grammar. is the system of rules used for describing the consistent features found in narrative texts. These rules describe the story parts, arrangement of the parts, and how the parts are related, i.e. the internal structure of the story (Mandler 1984) cited by (Amer,1992:712).

1.6.2. Narrative text. depicts events, actions, emotions, or situations that people in a culture experience. The depictions of events are organized so that the audience can eventually anticipate them (Dickson, et al,200 5:11).

1.6.3. Theme. is the central message of a work of literature that readers can apply to life – some works have stated theme, which is expressed directly, more works have an implied theme which is revealed gradually through events, dialogue, or description. A literary work may have more than one theme (Chin, et al, 2003:R17).

1.6.4.A Poor student. A student who gets bad marks (Amer, 1992:711).

Theoretical Background and Previous Studies

2.1. Theoretical Background

2.1.1 Historical Background of Story Grammar

During the 1970s, emphasis began to shift from defining language in terms of form(syntax) , phonology and content(semantic) to defining language in terms of its use (Pfeiffer and Boles,2009:1).

In 1977, the underlying structure of well-formed stories was examined in hope of exposing common elements and deriving generalizations about structure from traditional folktales (Mandler and Johnson,1977:56).

Stein and Glenn(1979:89) believe that narratives that are understood and created by children are made up of specific consistently order story elements which make up story grammar.

Several researchers have demonstrated that direct instruction of story grammar can improve reading comprehension and recall of story(Gordon and Braun 1983; Carine and Kinder 1985; Morrow1985;Varnhagen and Goldman 1986)cited in(Amer,1992:712)

In 1989, story grammarians have developed formal procedures for identifying the elements (e.g., setting, initiating events) of a story and developed sequences, as well as their causal and chronological relations.(Pfeiffer and Boles,2009:1)

In 1990, A story grammar is defined as "involving expression of character's problem or conflict, a description of attempts to solve the problem and analysis of the chain of events that lead to resolution". Ibid

Amer (1992:713) has shown that asking questions that focus on the story line leads to improve student's comprehension of the story.

Anderson and Evan (1996:31) has developed a canonical story grammar model (CSGM) for beginning reader computer stories.

And Dymock (2007:163) considers story grammar what the student should be taught.

Finally, Pfeiffer and Boles (2009:7) state that the classroom teacher needs to be made aware of the elements involved in canonical story grammar in order to develop students' understanding of story grammar.

2.2.1. Introductory Background of Story grammar

"The basic parts of a story are identified by story grammar and show how these parts tie together to form a well constructed story" (Dymock, 2007:162).

Shaywitz and Ehri (2004:51) distinguish between story elements and story structure by stating that: Story elements: "the critical parts of a story include character, setting, plot, problem, solution change to conflict and resolution". and they define the story structure as "The pattern of organization in narration that characterizes a particular type of story".

"Story grammar provides an overall structure for teaching narrative text structure" (Dymock, 2007:162).

Story grammar is represented as follows:

1. Characters and their relations to each other
2. setting-where and when.
3. Plot-initiating event, Problem and resolution.
4. Theme/Author's purpose/ Morale. What underlies the story is its theme. Hence, the message of the story explains the "motives of the characters or the comments on social relationships or society in general. Theme is the message that underlies the story and it is left to the reader to interpret (Dymock, 2007:163).

(Dymock, 2007:163) and (Chin, et al, 2003:R89) show certain signals that are of relevant to the analysis of narrative text structure. They are as follows:

1. Chronological order or sequence often uses words like first, then, after, later, and finally.

Langan (2001:199) has focused on the importance of the narrative text and mentioned that it tells a story which is developed in "chronological order from what happened first to what happened next, and so on."

The correlation between chronological order and plot is clarified through the definition of Reuben (2008:2) who defines the latter as "the sequence of events or incidents of which the story is composed."

The plot consists of four elements. They are background, conflict, climax and resolution.

Gillie, et al (1997:112) have efficiently stated that "each event then builds on the preceding events and leads to the following events while presenting a problem that must be resolved."

2. Cause and effect can include words like therefore, because, or as a result of. Langan (2005:249) stated that "many actions do not occur without causes...and a given action can have a series of effects good or bad."

3. Comparison-contrast order may use words like similarly, in contrast, likewise, or on the other hand. Langan(2005:264) has clearly defined it: " When we compare two things, we show how they are similar; when we contrast things we show how they are different." Hence, the purpose is to understand the two compared or contrasted things to make judgments.

4. Description : This includes main idea and detail. (Chin, et al ,2003:153) and (Livingston ,2004:1)

2.2 Previous Studies

2.2.1. Bui ,Yvonne Nguyen 2002 Using story-grammar instruction and picture books to increase reading comprehension

This study investigated the effects of story-grammar instruction on the reading comprehension of a narrative text by 26 first-grade students (six with disabilities) in general education classes. The instruction consisted of two different approaches: 1) basic story-grammar instruction, and 2) story grammar integrated with the students' personal experiences. The narrative texts used were 20 popular children's picture books. A comparison-group design (n=13) was utilized. Results indicated improvement of the experimental subjects' abilities to retell stories, recall and retain information from the stories, and answer story-grammar questions.

2.2.2. Amer, Ali A. 1992

The effect of story Grammar Instruction on EFL Students' Comprehension of Narrative Text

This study indicated that direct instruction of story grammar could improve reading comprehension of a narrative text. Hence, the purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of story grammar on EFL, sixth grade students' comprehension of narrative text. Seventy students participated in the study. The experimental group received instruction in story grammar. Two tests Were used as dependent measures: a multiple-choice test and a story frame test. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on both tests. The findings indicated that direct instruction in story grammar seems to help EFL students abstract the metastructure of the story.

2.2.3. Discussion of the previous studies

Both of the previous studies aim at investigating the effects of story-grammar instruction on reading comprehension of narrative text, while the present one aims at investigating the effect of story grammar instruction on students' theme identification of a narrative text.

The sample is different in each study; one sample of the previous studies is seventy of sixth grade students, while the second sample is 26 first grade students(six with disabilities) in general education classes. The sample of the present study is 30 students of second year classes at Department of English, College of Education for Women.

Amer's study and the present one compare between a control group and an experimental ones, on the other hand the third study compares between a control group and two experimental groups.

All the three studies share the same result that the story grammar instruction has a positive effect on students' achievement.

Procedures

3.1. Population

Second college students from Department of English, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, are chosen as the population of the present study.

3.2. Sample

Two of the second year classes are selected as a sample of the study. Their total number is (30) students, (15) in each class.

U-test is used to find the differences between the two groups in their first semester marks of short stories, as long as both of them are taught according to the traditional method.

U-test result shows that there is a difference between them in favor of one of them, who show high ability in identifying narrative theme since the lower U-test value of the two groups is (59.4) which is smaller than (64) at $P < 0.05$ with $N_1 = 15$ and $N_2 = 15$.

Table(1) sample selection

U1	U2	Tabulated value
156.2	59.4	64

$P < 0.05$, $N_1 = 15$, $N_2 = 15$

The researchers have selected the poor students whose U1 represents their level as an experimental group in order to find out if the experimental method improves their ability to identify the thematic sentences, and the good one as a control group.

3.3. The Method

The experimental students are taught how they can use single words, such as first, later, then, finally, because, as a result, after, before, when, where, comparative and superlative adjectives...etc., to identify thematic sentences and how they can discuss them according to story grammar.

Whereas in the traditional method, as the students' original instructor and other literature instructors describe it, the teacher provides the students with the definitions and explanations of the story elements, then asks them to read part of the story at home and discuss it in the classroom.

One of the researchers* taught the experimental group according to experimental method, and the original instructor taught the control group according to their traditional method.

Both of the two groups study the **The Old Man and The Sea** as a narrative text. After six weeks of studying and analyzing of the text, both the experimental and control groups have been submitted to the test of identifying the themes in unstudied passages selected randomly from the text.

3.4. Validity

After designing the plan for teaching the story grammar to identify the theme and the final test, they have been showed to jury members to construct their face validity.

Bergman (1981:150) defines validity as a "reflection of how well it measures what it is designed to measure".

The jury members are:

Abbas, Nawal Fadhil (A.M) Department of English. College of Education for Women. University of Baghdad.

Al Shamari, Alyaa A.N. (A.M) Department of English. College of Education for Women. University of Baghdad.

Subhi, Enas (A.M) Department of English. College of Education for Women. University of Baghdad.

*Asst. Lecturer. Shaima Mahdi

3.5. *The Reliability*

"Reliability is measured by a correlation between the scores of the same set of students on two consecutive administrations of the test . This is known as the test – retest coefficient of reliability".

The reliability of this study was constructed according to test –retest method.

The same test has been given to the same sample twice and then the answers of first test have been compared with the answer of the second test .

The same test was given after three days from the first test. The correlation coefficient is (0.89)

3.6. *Statistical Method*

To achieve the objective of the study, the following statistical measures have been adopted:

1. Pearson's formula for correlation coefficient is used to measure reliability of the test.
2. The U-test is used to determine if there is a difference between control group and experimental group in their first semester marks and in the post test.
3. The variances of the two groups indicate the individual differences between them.

Result Analysis

4.1. *U-test results*

On finishing the period of teaching, the control group according to their traditional method of identifying narrative themes, and teaching the experimental group by using the story grammar to identify the narrative theme, the results of the study are dealt with statistically.

U-test(Mann-Whitney)is used to verify the null hypothesis, which reads:

There are no differences between the achievements of the good and the poor students after teaching the latter the story- grammar to identify the narrative theme.

The results of U-test show that there are no differences between the achievement of the two groups. The lower U-test value of the two groups is (107) which is bigger than (64) at $P < 0.05$ with $N_1 = 15$, $N_2 = 15$.

Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table (2) Post test results

Tabulated value	Control group U2	Experimental group U1
64	118	107

$P < 0.05$, $N_1 = 15$, $N_2 = 15$.

The results show that after teaching the poor students how to identify the theme by using the story grammar with help of key words such as since, after, before, because, as a result, then, ...etc, the poor students have been provided with certain devices that enable them to find out and identify the thematic sentences.

The students of the experimental group are considered poor students as shown in table(1) .

There are no differences between the two groups, as shown in table(2), which indicate that the achievement of the experimental group has been improved by the end of experimental period.

Therefore, it can be concluded that teaching of story grammar can be done by using key words that help the poor students to become better in theme identification.

4.2. The Variance of the Two Groups

The variances of the students' marks in the first semester are nearly the same; However, in the post-test, the variance of the students' marks in the control group is higher than that of the experimental group, in spite of the equal means.

Table (3) variances of the students' marks

Control	Experimental	Groups
8.4	8.6	First semester
11	5	Post-test

Students' marks of the control and experimental groups in the first semester show individual differences. After the experiment, the results of the students' marks in experimental group show less individual differences than those of the first semester.

Zero mark disappears in the result of the experimental group as the students can pinpoint the thematic sentence(s) even if they do not discuss these themes.

4.3. Conclusions

In the light of the findings, a number of conclusions concerning the students' achievement can be drawn.

One of these conclusions is that teaching the story grammar makes the poor students' achievement better in theme identification.

A second conclusion is that the individual differences become less and zero mark disappears in the results of the experimental group.

Suggestions and Recommendations

5.1. Suggestions

1. Training the college students to select connectors,(the cause /effect, consequences, contrast) words , and use them in writing thematic essays , for improving their writing ability.

2. Training the college students to use the story grammar for identifying the plot, characters and setting, in order to strengthen students' comprehension.

5.2. Recommendations

1. Methodology lecturers may ask their students to analyze the intermediate text – structure to develop their comprehension and acquire skills in teaching them.

2. Iraqi EFL college students could be trained to use story grammar for analyzing a novel, a story, poetry and drama texts for improving their reading comprehension and essay writing.

Bibliography

Amer,Aly A.(1992), The Effect of Story Grammar Instruction On EFL Students' Comprehension of Narrative Text.
<http://nflrc.Hawaii.Edu/rfl/passtIssues/Rfl82amer.pdf>

Anderson, k., C. Evans (1996), The development of the Canonical story grammar model and its use in the

Analysis of beginning reading computer stories.
Reading Improvement. New York: Modern Language Association.

- Barrow, Clark.(2009), Perceiving Text structure.(Expository And Narrative).
<http://red747.pbworks.Com/Perceiving+Text+tructure>
- Bui, Yvonne Nguyen.(2002), Using story-grammar instruction and picture books to increase reading comprehension.
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_2_6/ai_n28932384/
- Chin, Beverly Ann, et al.(2003), Glencoe Literature the Readers Choice, Mc Graw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Dickson, Shirley, et al.(2005), Text Organization and Its Relation to Reading Comrehension:A Synthesis of Research.
<http://idea.uoregon.edu/~ncite/documents/techrep/tech17.html>
- Dymock, Susan.(2007), Comprehension Strategy Instruction: Teaching Narrative Text-Structure Awareness. The Reading Teacher. Vol.61, No.2.
http://www.sun.ed/~.bashford/305_PDF/305_FinalProj/Teaching_Narrative_Structure_Awareness_RT_Oct2007.pdf
- Fitzgerald and Spiegel.(1983), Teaching Text-Structure Effectively.
http://www.coe.usn.edu/ecc/images/pdf/presentations/teach_text.pdf
- Gillie, Jeri Wyn, et al.(1997)Read to Write, McGraw-Hill companies, Inc.
- Langan, John.(2001). College Writing Skills With Reading, McGraw Hill companies, Inc.
_____(2005), College Writing Skills, McGraw Hill companies, Inc.
- Livingston, Nancy.(2004), Teaching Expository Text-Structure.
<http://www.homepage.dsu.edu/venekaml/lewis%20and%20clark/ExpositoRY%20EXT%20STRUCTURE.htm>
- Mandler, J. and N. Johnson (1977), Remembrance of things parsed: Story Structure and Recall. Cognitive Psychology. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.
- Pfieffer, Suzanne and Cynthia Boles,(2009), Story Grammar.
<http://red67.pbworks.com/Story-Grammar>.
- Reuben, Paul P.(2008), PAL Perspectives in American Literature: A Research and Reference Guide An Ongoing Project: Elements of Fiction
[URL:http://web.csustan.edu/English/reuben/pal_append/axg.html](http://web.csustan.edu/English/reuben/pal_append/axg.html)
- Ryan, Gery W. and H. Russell Bernard.(2009), Techniques to Identify Themes in Qualitative Data.
<http://fm.sagepub.com/cgi/content/15/1/85>
- Shywits, Sally and Linnea Ehri. (2008), Reading K-10 Grade level Expectations:A New Level of Specificity. http://www.k12.wa.us/Curriculum/Instruct/reading/pubdocs/Reading/pubdorc/Reading_EALR_GLE.pdf
- Stein, n. and C. Glenn(1979), An analysis of Story Comprehension in elementary School Children. In R. Freedle(Ed.) New Directions in Discourse Processing. Norwood, n. J: Ablex.
- Williams, Joanna P.(2005), At-Risk Second Graders Can Improve Their Comprehension of Compare/ Contrast Text.
http://www.dldcec.org/pdf/teaching_how_tos/OSEP_37-3pdf

أثر تدريس نحو القصة في أنجاز طلبة الكليات الضعفاء في التوصل لمغزى النص الروائي

المدرس المساعد شيماء مهدي**

الأستاذ المساعد شذى السعدي*

* قسم اللغة الأنكليزية – كلية التربية للبنات – جامعة بغداد
** قسم التربية وعلم النفس – كلية التربية للبنات – جامعة بغداد

الخلاصة:

تكمن مشكلة هذه الدراسة من الحقيقة التي مفادها أن معظم طلبة الكليات ليس لديهم القدر الكافي على التوصل الى مغزى النص القصصي. لذلك أقرحتا الباحثتان تدريس نحو القصة وأستعمال الكلمات المفتاحية (بسبب، لأن، كنتيجة، بعد ذلك، بعد، قبل، التالي، يشبه، يختلف... الخ) لتسهيل التوصل للمغزى. ولغرض التوصل للنتائج تم وضع نظريه صفريه تنص على عدم وجود فروق بين أنجاز الطالبات الجيدات والطالبات الضعيفات بعد تدريس الضعيفات نحو القصة لاجل التوصل لمغزى القصة. وعليه تم اختيار عينه مكونه من ثلاثين طالبه (خمسة عشر طالبه جيده وخمسة عشر طالبه ضعيفه) من قسم اللغة الانكليزية، كلية التربية للبنات، جامعة بغداد.

درسن الطالبات الضعيفات في المجموعه التجريبيه عناصر نحو القصة و كيفية أستعمال الكلمات المفتاحيه للتوصل لمغزى القصة. بعد ذلك تم اختبار قدرة كلتا المجموعتين لايجاد الفروق بينهما. وبعد اكمال مدة الدراسة أشارة النتائج الى عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة أحصائية بين انجاز طالبات المجموعتين مما يدل على تحسن ادا الطالبات الضعيفات. وفي ضوء هذه النتائج تم وضع عدد من التوصيات و المقترحات.