

The Effects of Dramatization on the Acquisition of Saying Verbs

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Abstract

We observed through students' writing and verbal communication that the use of saying verbs tended to be mundane, or altogether incorrect. Very often, there was a repetitive overuse of these verbs – said, told, asked, shouted, etc. We perceived the use of these words as mundane because they did not add life to the writing in terms of emotions, context, etc. Without utilizing appropriate saying verbs, of which there are many of varying degrees of suitability to particular contexts, students are unable to effectively show the purpose of using the particular saying verb. Thus, the writing is less interesting and the reader is unable to see vivid images of the story. We hypothesized that this could be due to the students having a limited range of vocabulary related to saying verbs, and hence they do not understand the meaning and how to use the saying verbs appropriately in the right context. A contributing factor to this problem may be in the delivery of saying verb lessons and how these saying verbs are taught to the students. The traditional and perhaps rather antiquated method of teaching vocabulary, basically through the introduction of the word and its meaning, has simply not proven to work. Therefore, we seek to explore the teaching of saying verbs through dramatization in order to immerse the student in the learning of the saying verbs. Our objective in doing so is to clarify the meaning of various saying verbs through dramatization, by getting the students to act them out within scenarios, and to see if this will have an effect on the pupils' acquisition and application of the saying verbs.

Introduction

Literature Review

Wessels (1987) stated that drama is doing, drama is being and also that students learn through direct experience. Drama induces the active involvement of learners and, thus, the learners' experience of using a language in the classroom becomes similar to real-life experience. This in turn improves their application knowledge as well as boosts their ability to retain what they have learnt. This is an area that has been explored with regard to vocabulary acquisition as well as motivation to learn. However, not much has been done to study the effects of dramatization particularly on saying verbs, an area we explored in our research study.

Children need to use the relevant words in different social contexts in order to learn the meanings of the words. This helps establish the words' relationship to other words so that a vocabulary

network is built up. Duffelmeyer and Duffelmeyer (1979) point out that the way words are learned is important in that it affects how well they are really understood. They asserted that it is often the case that the knowledge gained by the learner is only the surface meaning of the word and the essential meaning of the word is missing. One way to avoid this difficulty is to use a method which ties the words to be learned directly to student experiences. Furthermore, according to Holden (1985), role plays and dramatizations are activities that students enjoy a lot because they like to dress up in different ways, make faces and imagine that they are different people.

Demircioğlu (2010) also highlights that learners need to be actively involved in the learning of words. This may be difficult in the confines of the classroom but he explains that an effective classroom method is creative drama. Motivating students to learn vocabulary can be done by simply making working with words enjoyable. Thornbury (2002) advocates the creation of a classroom atmosphere in which words are fun and encourages playing with words as this can be a powerful antidote to the very natural fear of making mistakes that can so easily inhibit learning. Playing with words helps the students step away from their inhibitions and allays the dread that they have of making mistakes in class. Like Wessels (1987), Schejbal (2006) mentions that drama encourages the active involvement of learners. Dramatization ensures that the learners' experience of using a language in the classroom becomes similar to real-life experience. Based on the views discussed above, it can be concluded that drama, when brought into the learning process, is the means to enhance language acquisition.

According to Stewig & Buege (1994), the acquisition of vocabulary can be enhanced through movement and freedom from confinement to one specified area. In addition, they emphasise that involvement and pantomime are excellent components to develop vocabulary since the children can experience the feeling and meaning of the words. Hence, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs will be better understood by children when they act them out. We hope to integrate dramatization into the teaching of saying verbs so that the students can come to understand them better.

Our research questions were:

1. What effect does students' use of dramatization have on their acquisition of saying verbs?
2. What effect does students' use of dramatization have on their application of the saying verbs taught?

Methodology

Samples

The study comprised a control and an experimental group with similar or equivalent entry marks for the English Semester 2 assessments from the previous year (2015).

The participants were from two high progress classes, comprising 38 participants in the experimental group and 37 participants in the control group. Each group was taught by a different teacher, and both teachers were experienced English Language teachers.

Intervention

After the selection process, the students in both the experimental and control groups took a pre-test on saying verbs to help us determine a baseline score for their understanding and application of saying verbs.

After the pre-test, the control group also went through six lessons of an hour per lesson using the introduction and practice method of learning saying verbs, in which a new word was introduced to them with definitions and examples and they practised using them in sentences, etc. Both

groups were introduced to the same set of words.

The experimental group went through the intervention which we designed. The intervention included the use of noticing as an explicit instruction strategy to teach the saying verbs. The intervention required the experimental group to undergo six lessons, with an hour per lesson. The pupils were given a script with saying verbs and had to read each line with the tone suggested by the saying verb. Later they wrote their own scripts using the same saying verbs. They also wrote scripts, as well as prepared and participated in a Readers’ Theatre performance focussing on saying verbs. (Please see Appendices 1 to 6 for details of the intervention.)

Both the control and experimental groups underwent six one-hour sessions which were conducted by teachers with comparable years of experience. The saying verbs introduced in the various lessons were the same for both groups.

The experimental group’s intervention differed in that the lessons focused on dramatizing and Readers’ Theatre activities. The lesson implementation details can be found in Appendix 1.

After the lessons were completed, a post-test was administered to both classes. An analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores was done to compare the effects of each method on the students’ acquisition of saying verbs.

Pre-Test and Post-Test

Both the pre- and post-tests consisted of a gap-filling cloze with 10 blanks that needed to be filled with a saying verb based on the context of the sentence provided. The scores for the responses varied from a range of one to three marks, depending on how precise the saying verbs used were in relation to the contexts given based on a fixed categorization. For instance, a more frequently used saying verb such as ‘shout’ was classified as a Category 1 word and awarded one mark while a less frequently used saying verb like ‘yell’ was placed in Category 2 and scored two marks, while an even more infrequently used saying verb like ‘bellow’ was placed in Category 3 and scored three marks. Hence, a student could score up to 30 marks for the pre- and post-tests.

Table 1
Categorization of Saying Verbs

Cat 1 Saying Verbs (1 Mark)	Cat 2 Saying Verbs (2 Marks)		Cat 3 Saying Verbs (3 Marks)
Said	Begged	Suggested	Bellowed
Told	Exclaimed	Roared	Gasped
Cried	Explained	Demanded	Moaned
Asked	Nagged	Shrieked	Screeched
Scolded	Questioned	Answered	Stammered
Shouted	Screamed	Murmured	Teased
Replied	Snapped	Pleaded	Bargained
	Whispered	Promised	Boasted
	Yelled	Advised	Chided
	Giggled	Protested	Mumbled
	Ordered	Bargained	Snarled
	Commanded	Responded	Reprimanded
	Sighed	Complained	Vowed
	Insisted	Muttered	Hollered
	Apologised		Wailed
			Reassured / Assured

In Table 1 is a list of saying verbs and the categorization that our team members placed them in. The saying verbs were categorized in terms of frequency of occurrence. Category 1 saying verbs appeared in students' writing across both the experimental and control groups more frequently than Category 2 saying verbs which appeared less frequently and Category 3 saying verbs which were classified to be the saying verbs used most infrequently.

Data collection

The data collected were the pre-test and post-test results. Each student's pre- and post-test scores were analysed to compare and study any differences at the post-intervention stage. First, the pupils' responses were marked and their scores were tabulated into four categories: wrong response, one mark, two marks, and three marks based on the categories that were determined earlier.

Results & Discussion

Once the tabulation was done, the results of the number in each category were compared between the control group and experimental group. For both the experimental and control group, it was observed that more than 70% of the correct answers fell under Category 1. (Please see Tables 2 and 3 below.) This indicated that the majority of correct answers came in the form of more frequently used saying verbs such as said, told, shouted, asked, etc. There was some use of Category 2 saying verbs and only some sporadic instances of the use of Category 3 saying verbs at the pre-test phase. The figures are tabulated in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2
Experimental Group Pre-Test scores

Question \ Category	1	2	3	Wrong Answer	Total
1	27	5	0	6	38
2	28	0	0	10	38
3	20	9	0	9	38
4	0	4	0	34	38
5	21	3	0	14	38
6	18	0	8	12	38
7	20	13	0	5	38
8	29	6	0	3	38
9	23	2	0	13	38
10	36	2	0	0	38
Total	222	44	8	106	
% of correct (274)	81%	16%	3%	NA	NA

Table 3
Control Group Pre-Test scores

Question \ Category	1	2	3	Wrong Answer	Total
1	26	8	0	3	37
2	29	2	0	6	37
3	20	7	1	9	37
4	0	10	0	27	37
5	19	3	0	15	37
6	26	0	5	6	37
7	19	10	0	8	37
8	22	9	0	6	37
9	16	6	0	15	37
10	31	3	0	3	37
Total	208	58	6	98	
% of correct (272)	76%	21%	2%	NA	NA

The post-test was administered two weeks after the intervention for the experimental group and the lessons for the control group had been completed. The post-test analysis of the tabulated test scores for saying verb categories showed that, for the experimental group, there were fewer instances of Category 1 saying verbs being used and more Category 2 saying verbs being used. In addition, there was a much higher use of Category 3 saying verbs by students in the experimental group. There was also evidence of fewer wrong answers as well. In comparison, the control group largely maintained their reliance on Category 1 saying verbs with some using Category 2 saying verbs, which was observed before the intervention took place, although in comparison to their pre-test scores, the control group showed a slight improvement in the number of pupils using Category 2 and Category 3 saying verbs.

Based on the results of the experimental group, it was evident that pupils were using more of the saying verbs that were once unfamiliar to them and used less frequently in student texts generally. With explicit teaching and exposure to the less frequently used saying verbs, it seemed the pupils were now able to use these verbs more appropriately and frequently.

As seen in the results shown in Table 4, the pupils in the experimental group showed a big shift from using many Category 1 saying verbs to the saying verbs in Categories+ 2 and 3. For all questions attempted during the pre-test, most of the pupils chose saying verbs belonging to Category 1. However, in the post-test, the use of saying verbs from Category 1 decreased. Pupils in the intervention group were using more saying verbs belonging to Categories 2 and 3 to fill in their answers. The rise in the use of saying verbs in Category 2 showed the largest increase in the post-test results.

This improvement in results seems likely to be due to the greater exposure, allowing pupils to internalize the newly acquired saying verbs which were taught explicitly through dramatization, and through the Readers' Theatre activities specifically. The drama lessons provided the pupils with more practical practice of the newly acquired saying verbs which resulted in pupils using these less frequently used saying verbs as opposed to the more common ones such as 'said' and 'told'.

Table 4
Experimental Group Post-Test

Category Question	1	2	3	Wrong Answer	Total
1	5	30	0	3	38
2	1	33	0	4	38
3	7	27	0	4	38
4	12	4	19	3	38
5	3	19	2	14	38
6	1	34	0	3	38
7	3	7	0	28	38
8	0	0	30	8	38
9	13	16	1	8	38
10	0	0	26	12	38

Table 5
Control Group Post-Test

Category Question	1	2	3	Wrong Answer	Total
1	16	16	0	5	37
2	30	2	0	5	37
3	15	7	0	15	37
4	9	7	1	20	37
5	23	2	0	12	37
6	14	2	0	21	37
7	24	0	0	13	37
8	0	0	12	25	37
9	9	14	0	14	37
10	0	0	8	29	37

This comparison between the various test scores of the experimental and control groups indicated that the students in the experimental group, through the intervention, had better acquired the less frequently used saying verbs and their application. In the process of grading the post-tests, it was observed that although the control group pupils were more likely to use the less common saying words, the accuracy of their use was still not up to the mark. This was probably due to the need for more internalization of the newly acquired saying verbs in contrast to the students in the experimental group who had had more applicative practice due to dramatizing the newly acquired saying verbs.

Chi-Square Data Analysis

The post-test and pre-test category distributions were put through the chi-square test to compare

the distribution of responses from the two groups (experimental and control) for both pre- and post-tests. The results showed there were highly significant differences at the specified .05 level – $\chi^2(7) = 170.87, p < .001$. This indicated that there were some significant differences in the four sets of results.

In the next step, the pre-test results for the intervention and control groups were compared using chi-square. The results showed that any differences in the two groups at the pre-test stage were not statistically significant at the specified .05 level with a high possibility of them occurring by chance – $\chi^2(3) = 2.84, p = .42$.

A chi-square analysis of the post-tests of the two groups, however, showed that there were highly significant differences at the specified .05 level in the distribution of saying verb categories, with the experimental group outperforming the control group – $\chi^2(3) = 168.03, p < .001$.

When the results of the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group were compared, a highly significant difference at the specified level of 0.05 was found – $\chi^2(3) = 250.37, p < .001$ – with the experimental group performing much better in the post-test than in the pre-test.

In the final step, the pre- and post-test results of the control group were compared using chi-square. Again, the differences between the two sets of results were found to be highly significant at the specified level of .05 – $\chi^2(3) = 36.69, p < .001$ – indicating that the group's performance had also improved. However, the significance level was not as high as for the experimental group. This suggested that students in the control group who had undergone the conventional teaching method for saying verbs acquisition demonstrated improved achievement although not as significantly as the experimental group.

Conclusion

This study seemed to indicate that dramatization had a positive effect on students' ability to acquire saying verbs. The students who went through the dramatization intervention showed great improvement in the post-test scores as compared to the control pupils who predominantly maintained their test scores and, although it was observed that these students attempted to use Category 3 saying verbs, they did not manage to do so with the same level of success that students from the experimental group did. It was also evident that the students from the experimental group were better able to internalize the newly introduced and acquired saying verbs than the students in the control group. This was evident in the post-test scores which showed that these students were better able to apply the saying verbs they had acquired in the correct context and were less reliant on frequently used saying verbs.

In conclusion, though we cannot say that the conventional method of teaching saying verbs is ineffective, we can, however, say that the learning approach using dramatization does indeed appear to help with not only the acquisition of saying verbs but also the application of those saying verbs.

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Appendix 1: Lesson 1 (Notice and Act)

Students were given two texts, Text 1 with mundane saying verbs and Text 2 with saying verbs that were intended to be taught in the lesson: boasted, teased, bellowed, bargained, questioned, explained. They were then told to read both texts and to notice and compare the differences between them.

Once students had identified the difference as being the saying verbs (not necessarily using the precise term), the teacher asked the students which was better, Text 1 or Text 2.

The teacher proceeded to ask the students to read out loud each of the sentences with the saying verbs (dialogue) one by one. As they read them out, they read the dialogue with the intended saying verb dictating the way they read out the dialogue. For example, if the saying verb said 'bellowed', the pupils attempted to bellow out the dialogue.

The other students then discussed whether the student reading the text had used the correct tone in reading out that dialogue with the saying verb 'bellowed' attached to it. If they disagreed then this would facilitate discussion and then another student would model how he/she thought it should be said.

Once all six saying verbs in the text had been discussed and dramatized as above in the class, the teacher wrapped up the discussion by stating the importance of utilizing the correct saying verb in a dialogue and how, when used correctly, the verb conveyed the emotion of the characters more appropriately than a mundane saying verb.

As a follow-up, the students got into groups of five and then divided the dialogues in Text 2 among the group members, with one of them acting as the narrator who read the non-dialogue lines. The others, when it was their turn, read out the line of the dialogue with the correct tone and emotion, dramatizing the role of the speaker of the dialogue. For example, the student who read the following line from the dialogue only read out the part in bold and then the narrator read the rest.

'Stop! Don't do that!' Mark ordered Peter in a commanding voice.

Appendix 2: Lesson 2 (Readers' Theatre Introductory Activity 1)

As a tuning-in activity, students were asked to pick up a card from a set of cards containing the saying verbs learnt in the previous lesson. They then acted out the chosen saying verbs in pairs/groups and let the class guess the saying verb being acted out.

Since this would be the first lesson using the Readers' Theatre scripts that were given to them, pupils watched a video that showcased some Readers' Theatre tips.

The teacher showed the class the saying verbs that were selected for that lesson and taught them the meanings of the verbs, where necessary: ordered, answered, muttered, whispered and snapped.

The teacher grouped the students into groups of four and distributed the Readers' Theatre scripts to the group. They worked in groups and filled in the blanks on all six scripts with the correct saying verb.

The teacher went through the scripts with the class to ensure that the correct verbs had been entered. The teacher went around and facilitated as the students proceeded and rendered assistance as and when needed.

The students chose a script to rehearse and practised for 15 minutes. They were reminded that emphasis was to be placed on the tone, volume or expression when reading their lines. Once the 15 minutes were up, they took turns to present to the class.

As a follow-up, the students were asked to choose three of the saying verbs and create a short paragraph with a minimum of three sentences for each of the verbs. The rationale behind this was to give them a chance to put the saying verbs learnt into use to consolidate their learning.

Appendix 3: Lesson 3 (Readers' Theatre Activity 1)

Lesson 3 was similar to Lesson 2 except for the introduction of six new saying verbs and the fact that they took home their scripts to prepare for the presentations to be presented in Lesson 4, since the script was more substantial and they needed more time to prepare for the presentations. Everything else was similar to Lesson 2. At the end of this lesson, students were quite familiar with the expectations of Readers' Theatre, the process of learning new saying verbs and how they were to be presented as well as becoming less inhibited when presenting in front of their classmates.

Appendix 4: Lesson 4 (Readers' Theatre Activity 2)

In this lesson, the pupils presented their scripts in their groups in the form of a Readers' Theatre. After the pupils had presented their scripts, the teacher facilitated a discussion with the class with regard to how the line with the saying verb had been read by the group(s).

Questions such as, 'Do you think that the group has read the lines out in the correct manner? Was the tone/expression appropriate?' were asked.

After the presentations and discussion, to gauge if the students were able to use the saying verbs introduced appropriately, they were asked to choose three of the saying verbs learnt and create a short paragraph with a minimum of three sentences for each of the verbs.

When they had completed their task, some students were selected to share the paragraph they had created putting emphasis on the saying verb with the correct tone, volume, etc. with the class.

Appendix 5: Lesson 5 (Readers' Theatre Activity 3 – Creating their own scripts)

The teacher did a quick recap of all the 18 saying verbs. The teacher got two to four pupils to act out/dramatize one saying verb each based on their understanding.

The teacher instructed the students to work in groups of four and come up with a one-page story based on a given theme from the list below. They had to make use of at least five saying verbs that they had learned.

1. An Accident
2. A Quarrel
3. A Mistake

Before beginning, the teacher went through the stages of writing – pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing.

As they worked on the story, they were to take note of the following:

- 1) Select one theme
- 2) Use a modified version of a fable or a story they had previously worked on in Lesson 2 to 4, or a totally new story
- 3) Decide on five saying verbs from the list
- 4) Identify the types of roles, involve three characters and one narrator
- 5) Read through their story, identify the roles, and divide the roles among themselves
- 6) Decide who was to read what with each underlining his or her own speaking parts
- 7) Place emphasis on the saying verbs as they rehearsed

As part of the facilitation, the teacher questioned the students as to how the character(s) involved would react and feel based on the saying verbs. She asked how they would read out the sentences with the targeted emotions.

The teacher provided one-to-one group feedback, when the teacher conversed and checked on the work of the group and advised if any changes or improvements were required, and pupils made the necessary change(s) where applicable before moving on to practising their lines for their presentation in the next lesson.

Appendix 6: Lesson 6 (Readers' Theatre Activity 4 – Dramatizing their scripts)

Prior to the students starting their presentations, the teacher provided pointers on good presentation skills in the form of a set of rubrics. Emphasis was placed on good eye contact, voice projection and fluency and expression, etc. This was done to set expectations for the upcoming presentations.

The groups then took turns to use the microphone and present their Readers' Theatre scripts to their classmates. They were told to dress the way they saw their characters dressing and so some of the pupils were in costume and were able to immerse themselves into the characters they were portraying.

Data collection

The data gathered were from the pre-test and post-test results, conducted before and after the intervention respectively. The data gathered came in the form of various scores and a breakdown of the number of pupils who scored within each of the particular predefined categories of saying verbs from both the pre-test and post-test. Additionally, each students' pre- and post-tests' scores were analysed to compare and study any differences at the post-intervention stage.