

On the Introduction of an English Puppet Play into Foreign Language Activities and Its Effects

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Abstract

When observing pupils actually engaged in foreign language activities, I noticed that they exhibited two different patterns. Those accustomed to English actively speak English and take part in activities, but those lacking confidence take a passive stance toward the classes. This caused me to wonder what strategies might be employed to aid those pupils who feel some resistance to foreign language. I belong to my university's puppet play group and utilize the puppets to foster communication with the pupils. At times, very shy pupil who struggle to converse open up and converse when faced with a puppet. Based on that experience, I formulated the hypothesis that utilizing puppets in an English puppet play would reduce pupil's resistance to foreign language, foster in them an affinity for it, and yield benefits for the acquisition of the foreign language. I thereby proceeded to undertake this research to test that hypothesis.

(Keywords: Puppet Play, Learning of vocabulary words, Familiar with English)

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this research are twofold: 1) considering the validity of English puppet play and its use in the context of elementary school-level foreign language activities and 2) conducting a course and surveying and analyzing pupil's reactions and responses to an English puppet play. Specifically, it attempts to achieve the following:

1. Elucidate whether seeing an English puppet play improves learning of vocabulary words used therein;
2. Elucidate, through post survey data and free description, the attitudinal changes pupils underwent after the performance;

3. Elucidate, through the results of pupil's vocabulary retention and attitudinal changes, the validity of an English puppet play in the context of elementary school foreign language activities.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 The Study on Theater Education

Tomita (1993) defines theater education as the act of “education through theater,” which aims to foster pupil's development by having them spectate and participate in theater, and as the act of “theatrically-informed pedagogy” that enriches the educational process by employing techniques that are not theater proper but theater-like. Tomita description theater education as, like music and art, not being treated as a standalone curriculum, but as a tool that can be used to stimulate pupils to develop towards the overarching trajectory of the education.

1.2.2 The Study on Puppet Play

Matsuzaki (2008) remarks on puppet play that, “Puppet play involves small puppets performing in a small world that is the stage. Pupils are able to readily interpret that ‘small stage,’ that is, its entire worldview, and make sense of it. Pupils learn about the stance and viewpoint of other people, something they do not have the opportunity to do in their everyday lives. The experience of rethinking themselves, the world, and the issues around them through this new vantage point promotes decentering of the ego and stimulates psychological development.”

Moreover, pupils have a respectively different stance when it comes to theater performed by human versus puppet actors. When pupils view theater performed by humans, they experience the world of the stage through the eyes of an actor or role which appears most familiar to them. Pupils can become fixated on points immaterial to the overarching plot, failing to apprehend the entirety of the story, or see the performance based on their like or dislike of a certain actor. However, with puppets, the standardized format of the dolls enables pupil to place distance between themselves and the characters, seeing the plot and context in its entirety. For this reason, puppet-based theater is more effective at promoting decentering of the ego in pupil. In addition, unlike theater performed by human, which involves adults, physically larger in stature than pupils, puppet play involves characters smaller than the children, so they obtain a feeling of superiority that promotes calm and allows them to see the performance free of tension.

In this section, we have primarily dealt with learning outcomes and important points to note for performers of English puppet play. We took these points into consideration during our performances in this study. In the following section we will go into detail about what kind of learning outcomes are produced for pupils seeing English puppet play.

2. Research: Verification of Effectiveness of English Puppet Play

2.1 The Purposes of this Research

The first purpose of this study is to elucidate whether seeing an English puppet play improves the learning of the vocabulary words used therein. The second purpose of this study is to elucidate, through post survey data and free description, the attitudinal changes pupils underwent after the performance. The third purpose of this study is to elucidate, through the results of pupil’s vocabulary retention and attitudinal changes, the validity of English puppet play in the context of elementary school foreign language activities.

2.2 Method of the Research

2.2.1 Period and Participants of the Research

This research took place on December 17th at Elementary School J. The participants consisted of 65 sixth graders. The pupils took part in a pre-listening comprehension test before seeing the play, followed by a questionnaire after seeing it.

Table 1. *Overview of the research in elementary School J*

date	class	time	participants
12/17	6-1	10:40-11:25	34
12/17	6-2	9:35-10:25	31

2.2.2 Materials

The material used was “The Turnip.” This would represent the pupil’s first time experiencing an English puppet play, so I surmised that they would have difficulty following the story. For this reason, I selected a story that all of the pupil had encountered before, with a comparatively easy-to-follow plotline and many repeated phrases. The main puppets used in the English puppet play are shown below.

2.2.3 Contents of the Research

Pupils saw the English puppet play and their listening comprehension of vocabulary words was tested using a multiple choice (five choices) format, both before and after the play. The listening comprehension test was composed of 8 questions involving words that appeared in the play, and 4 questions involving words that did not—12 questions in total. Properly speaking, I should have used an equal number of words that appeared in the play and words that did not, and then compared the two groups of words. However, I was unable to do so in the planning stage of this experiment, and as such I instead analyzed the words appearing in the play and the words that did not separately. Pupils were surveyed on their feelings after the

class, with a free description section included. Pupils were also surveyed on their feelings on the course as a whole, with a free description section included.



Figure 1. The main puppets used in the English puppet play

2.2.4 Method of the Analysis

The listening comprehension tests are analyzed using a paired *t* - test. The reflection card is also analyzed for each question using a paired *t* - test. The reflection card of the course as a whole is analyzed using a paired *t* - test and correlation analysis. The free descriptions are analyzed by way of text mining.

2.3 Results and Discussion

2.3.1 The Results and Discussion of the Research at Elementary School J

Table 2. *Listening comprehension test's descriptive statistics of six graders in elementary School J*

<i>Times</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
<i>Pre</i>	65	3.89	1.697
<i>Post</i>	65	6.31	1.145

$t(64) = -14.36, p < .01, r = 0.87$

Table 3. The correlation coefficient of the listening comprehension test

<i>Times</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Pre-Post</i>	65	.605	.000

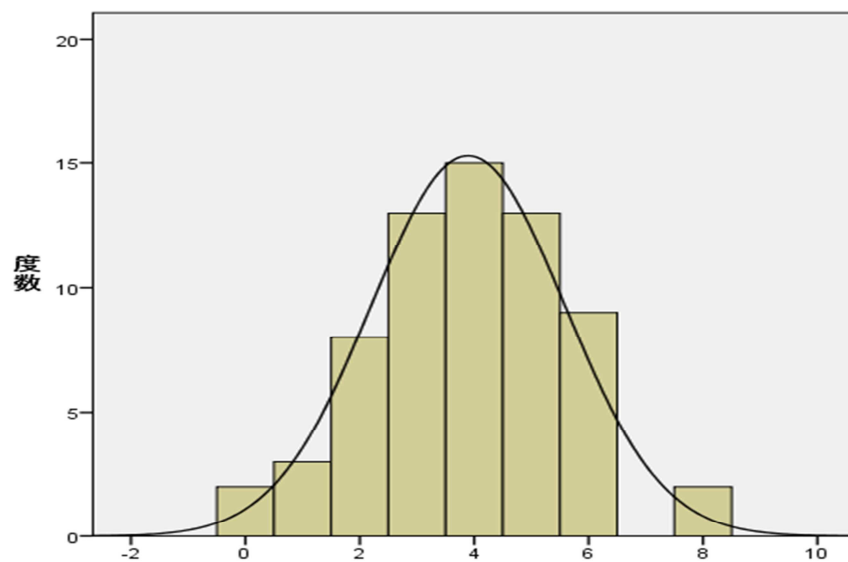


Figure 2. Histogram of scores of the pre-listening comprehension test

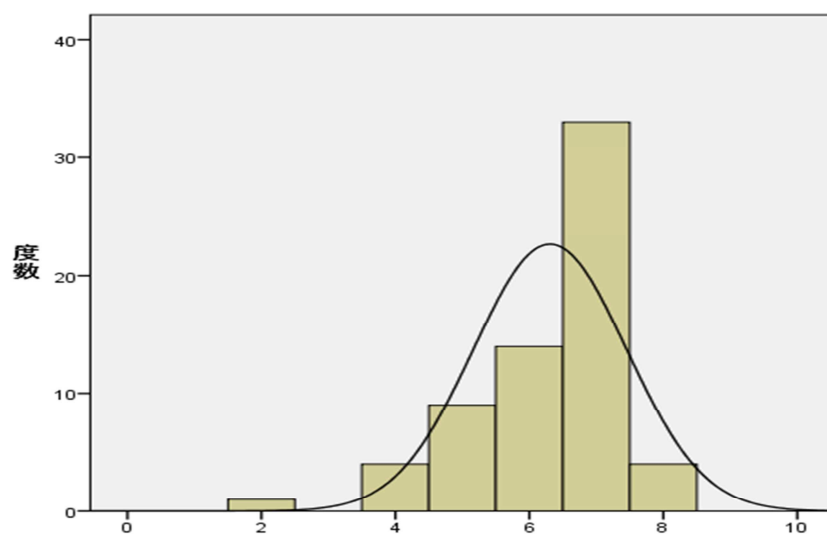


Figure 3. Histogram of scores of the post-listening comprehension test

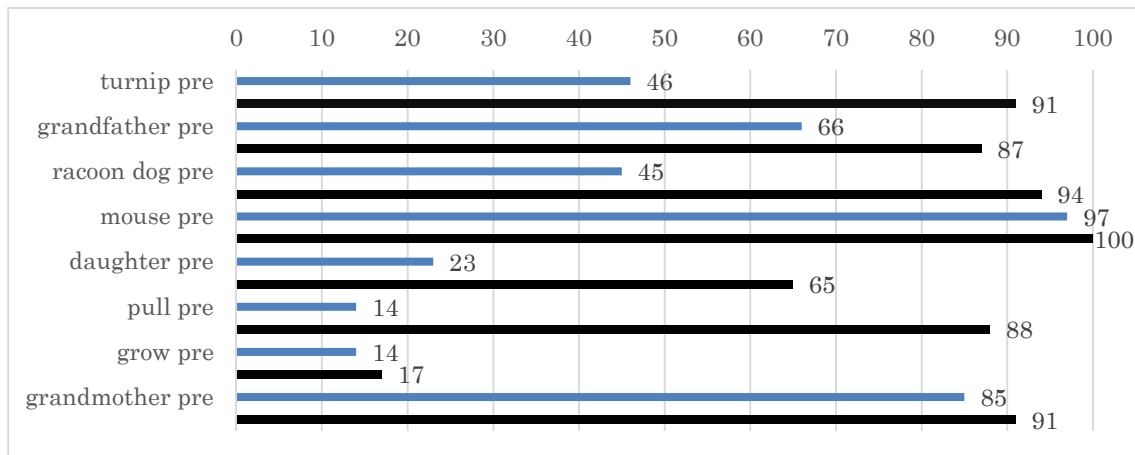


Figure 4. The percentage of correct answers of words used in the English puppet play of the listening comprehension test in elementary School J

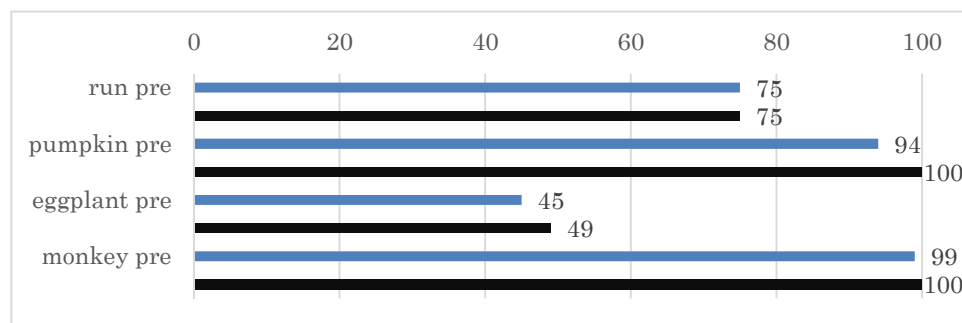


Figure 5. The percentage of correct answers of words unused in the English puppet play of the listening comprehension test in elementary School J

On December 17th we conducted two listening comprehension tests at Elementary School J, with 65 pupils as subjects: once before they saw the play, and once after. The difference between the means was analyzed with a paired *t*-test. The Pre-listening comprehension test's Cronbach α is .620 and the post- listening comprehension test's Cronbach α is .415.

The scores achieved in the post-listening comprehension test were significantly higher than the pre-listening comprehension test ($t(64) = -14.36, p < .01$), and additionally, the effect size of $r = 0.87$ makes it clear that the effects were large. Table 3 shows the correlation coefficient of the listening comprehension test carried out with 6th graders in elementary School J. According to the table 3, at a 1% confidence interval, there was a considerable correlation between the pre-listening comprehension test and the post-listening comprehension test. ($r = .605, p < .01$) Figure 2 is a histogram of the points scored in the pre-listening comprehension test, and Figure 3 is a histogram of the points scored in the post-listening comprehension test. The pupils' basic scores in the pre-listening comprehension

test are distributed between 8 points at the highest and 0 points at the lowest. In the post-listening comprehension test, the pupils' basic scores ranged from 8 at the highest to 2 at the lowest. Figure 4 shows the percentage of correct answers on the listening comprehension test for the words used in the English puppet play of listening comprehension test in elementary school J. Figure 5 shows the percentage of correct answers on the listening comprehension test for words unused in the English puppet play. The words that were used in the play showed a significant difference in the tests before and after the event, but there was no significant difference before and after the event for the words that did not appear in the play. From the results of this investigation, we have found that the English puppet play had an effect on Elementary School J's sixth graders' learning of English words.

Table 4. *Reflection card of the course as a whole's average points and standard deviation of six graders in elementary School J*

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
Q1. Was it fun to see the English puppet play?	65	4.72	.545
Q2. Did you attend to classes positively?	65	4.58	.659
Q3. Was it easy to see the English puppet play?	65	3.92	1.203
Q4. Did you understand the English puppet play?	65	4.58	.727
Q5. Did you understand the meaning of the words used in the English puppet play?	65	3.95	.856

Table 5. *Reflection card of the course as a whole's correlation coefficient of 6th graders in elementary School J (N=65)*

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Q1					
Q2	-.11				
Q3	.11	.08			
Q4	.14	.22	.34**		
Q5	.17	.27	.48**	.55**	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

On December 17th, we conducted a reflection card of the course as a whole in Elementary School J with a total of 65 sixth graders. A correlation analysis of the results was carried out. According to the analytical results in table 19, at a 1% confidence interval, there

was a considerable correlation between items 3 and 4 ($r = .338, p < .01$), items 3 and 5 ($r = .482, p < .01$), and items 4 and 5 ($r = .547, p < .01$).

2.3.2 The Results and Discussion of Text-Mining

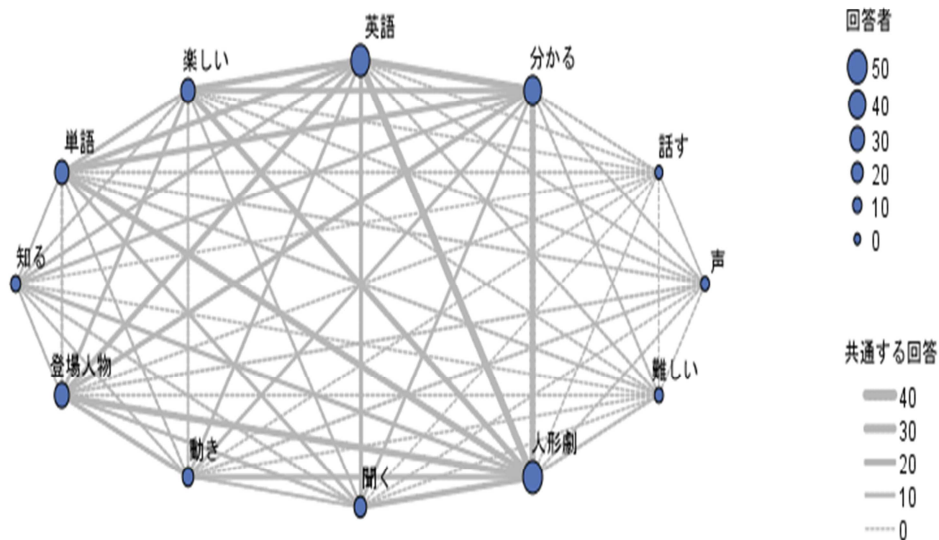


Figure 6. Relation of the categories in free descriptions at elementary School J

Figure 6 displays an analysis of the relatedness of the free descriptions (their thoughts about watching the English puppet play) of pupils at Elementary School J acquired after pupils saw the English puppet play. The analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys Ver. 4.0.1, and the results were categorized.

Figure 6 shows how each of the categories appearing more than 10 times in the pupils' responses are related. Upon consideration of the relatedness of the categories in Figure 16, it can be understood that the pupils found the English puppet play interesting and could understand the characters' words due to the fact that their voices were accompanied by movement.

On the other hand, it was also made clear that a considerable number of the pupils found it "difficult." Consequently, we realized that there is a need for teachers to have forethought to their pupils' actual levels of understanding and the words dealt with in English puppet plays.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Possibility of Using English Puppet Plays

This study has discussed the elucidation of the validity of English puppet play in the context of elementary school foreign language activities. The research on English Puppet Play was conducted for 6th graders in an elementary school. Listening comprehension tests and questionnaires were carried out before and after activities to clarify the influence on pupils' attitudinal changes and listening abilities.

As a result of the questionnaire, a significant difference was observed. It was found that most of the pupils feel that English puppet play is fun and easy. According to the free descriptions, the statements, such as "Though I did not see the English puppet play, I was glad to see it this time.", "I was glad to know new vocabulary" or "I want to see another story in English" are included. However, free description also included negative opinions, such as "It was difficult" or "I could not understand what the characters said". It is considered that teachers should choose words carefully.

The results of the listening comprehension test were positive. This indicates that English puppet play could have a positive influence on English Learning. It was also found that pupils could learn vocabulary words through English puppet play. Learning vocabulary through English puppet play is a good alternative to just drills and it is fun for pupils. Following these reasons, it is concluded that using English puppet play could be one of the effective methods to familiarize with English in foreign language activities.

3.2 Future Issues

This research has investigated the effectiveness of using English puppet play in foreign language activities for pupils' familiar with English. Although some affirmative results are obtained, the limitations include the short duration of this research. It is required to continue researching on English puppet play. According to the free description, some statements about seeing as well as performing English puppet play were also included, such as "I want to see a lot of English Puppet Plays", "I want to try to perform an English puppet play" or "I want not only to see but also to perform an English Puppet Play". Judging from the pupils' responses, we can ascertain that they have a great deal of interest in and desire to take part in English puppet plays, and their performance of puppet plays of their own is expected to be highly effective in terms of learning outcomes. I would like to continue studying activities including English puppet play.

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