

The Impact of Comic Stories on L2 Speaking

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Abstract

This paper attempts to highlight the use value of comic stories in L2 speaking. For this purpose, it makes use of interesting comic stories chosen from the point of view of ESL learners. Comic stories such as Kalia the Crow, Shikari Shambu, Tantri the Mantri, Champak, Tenali Raman, and Akbar & Birbal are used. These stories include spoken utterances and visual clues that are essential for comprehension and reproduction. The learners in the study are from Rajah Serfoji Government College, Thanjavur. Making use of these stories, the target group of students are given immersion practice in L2 speaking for 14 sessions. They are given a speaking task in which they are supposed to go through the comic stories and narrate them in their own language. The experiment, based on this structured speaking task proves to be effective in terms of

- i. their ability to expand or generate spoken utterances.
- ii. narration based on the prompt (comic stories).

iii. confidence level

Further, the evaluation of the scores for the speaking performance of the learners shows that there has been a significant improvement in terms of speaking in the second language.

Key words: L2 Speaking, evaluation, utterances, visual clues, immersion practice, use value, ESL learners,

1. Introduction:

Speaking in the second language has been given great attention for about five decades. Though there have been many approaches, methods, strategies and experiments that continue to contribute to the development of speaking skill, even today there are experiments being attempted to enhance the same skill. Because of the subtle complexity and inherent nature of acquisition, it presents a great challenge to the learners.

Some of the processing skills involved in speaking are very complex in nature. For instance, the generation of spoken utterances by the ESL learner comes after a linear thought process - conceptualization, formulation, articulation and self-monitoring (as referred to by Levelt, W. J. M. 1989). This paper attempts to give an immersion practice with the help of popular comic stories such as Kalia the Crow, Shikari Shambu, Tantri the Mantri, Champak, Tenali Raman, and Akbar & Birbal. Each comic story has a word limit of 300 to 500. The very reason why comic stories are chosen is that they are in the spoken format (unlike complete written sentences) which is essential for L2 speaking practice as well as comprehension.

Unlike the written language, spoken language / oral communication depends on spoken units and utterances (at the time of speaking). In other words, it is an online, or real time, process. People take no time to respond or reply in the middle of a conversation. Moreover, there is a lot of difference between spoken and written language. As said in *Key Differences*, 2023, “Oral communication is the process of conveying or receiving messages with the use of spoken words... This mode is highly used across the world because of rapid transmission of information and prompt reply. Written communication, on the other hand, is a formal means of communication, wherein the message is carefully drafted and formulated in written form. It is kept as a source of reference or legal record.”

Hence, this study attempts to give structured input and to see how this may affect the way learners process input and reproduce or regenerate what they have comprehended. As

comic stories offer an engaging and effective way to facilitate learning, a couple of tasks were designed after choosing six different comic stories. Their interesting and entertaining nature captures students' attention more easily than traditional texts. Comics present language through spoken utterances, closely resembling real-life conversations, which helps learners to develop their speaking and listening skills more naturally. Moreover, the use of visual elements, such as pictures and illustrations, supports comprehension by providing context clues and reducing the cognitive load. The simplicity of the language and the strong connection between text and visuals make comic stories especially suitable for learners who struggle with conventional reading materials.

2. Review of Literature

Aldaka, Susanto, and Suparman (2023) conducted a classroom action research study at SMP Negeri 1 Surabaya to evaluate the effectiveness of comic strips in enhancing English speaking skills among seventh-grade students. Through two instructional cycles involving comic-based dialogues, group presentations, and creative strip-making, the researchers observed a marked improvement in students' fluency, grammar, and pronunciation. The percentage of students achieving scores above the school's passing criterion (KKM) rose from 28.5% in the pre-cycle to 65.7% in cycle one and reached 85.7% in cycle two. The study concludes that comic strips not only foster a more engaging and confident learning environment but also significantly improve students' ability to express themselves orally in English.

Sriwahyuni, Wulansari, and Ramadhiyanti (2023) in their classroom action research titled "*Comics to Improve Speaking Skill*" explored the pedagogical impact of comic strips on enhancing speaking skills among ESL learners. The study revealed that the use of comic strips significantly improved students' ability to comprehend word meanings and express ideas with greater confidence. By creating meaningful and engaging situations during classroom interactions, the intervention fostered active participation and reduced anxiety among learners. The researchers emphasized that comic-based instruction not only facilitated better understanding but also encouraged students to present their thoughts more freely, thereby contributing to the development of communicative competence in a supportive learning environment.

Rojas Murillo (2022), in his thesis titled *Improving English Speaking Skills of Primary Students Through Comic Strips* at Greensboro College, investigated the pedagogical potential

of comic strips in enhancing oral proficiency among young EFL learners. The study introduced a website featuring ten Grimm's Fairy Tales adapted into comic strips, which were used to facilitate pre-speaking and speaking activities in the classroom. Through visual storytelling and character-based interaction, the intervention helped students improve vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence in expressing ideas. The research emphasized that comic strips created a stress-free, engaging environment that encouraged spontaneous speech, role-play, and peer collaboration, thereby supporting the development of communicative competence in a dynamic and learner-centered setting.

Sarma (2016), in the article *Visual Literacy and Language Learning: The Role of Comics in ESL Classrooms* published in *ELT Voices India*, examined how comics contribute to the development of speaking skills through multimodal learning. The study highlighted that comics, with their combination of text and imagery, support learners in interpreting meaning, organizing ideas, and expressing thoughts more effectively. By presenting relatable scenarios and emotional cues, comics helped reduce anxiety and encouraged active participation in speaking activities. Sarma concluded that comic-based instruction aligns with visual literacy principles and enhances oral communication by creating a learner-friendly space that promotes creativity and confidence in language use.

3. Significance of the study

This study primarily explores the use value of comic stories to enhance the speaking skills of students studying in government colleges. To date, no focused research has been conducted on this topic with reference to government college students in the district of Thanjavur. Speaking is a crucial macro skill, especially during interviews and for sustaining employment in various sectors. However, many students in government colleges come from financially underprivileged backgrounds and they need a lot of practice and teacher mediation to develop their speaking ability. Their limited exposure to English outside the classroom and lack of access to immersive linguistic environments underscore the need for innovative, culturally resonant teaching strategies. As stated earlier, this experiment aims to address the said issue by contributing to the improvement of their speaking skills through the integration of comic-based pedagogy in a task-based environment.

4. Students Profile

This study investigates the pedagogical impact of comic-based speaking task of twelve students selected from Rajah Serfoji Government College, Thanjavur. The participants were selected after their performance in the English language proficiency test, i.e. a base line / foundation test. The students who performed below average, namely who scored between 35% and 50 % in the baseline test were identified to participate in the study. In order to enhance their speaking / communicative ability, the study attempts to integrate comic narratives into speaking tasks. In this process, it provides scaffolding platform which is contextually-rich, interesting as well as engaging that mirrors authentic communicative situations. The intervention is designed not only to enhance linguistic competence but also to empower students with their own confidence level and expressive techniques necessary for academic and professional advancement.

5. Research Question

What is the impact of comic stories on L2 speaking skills among ESL students studying in government colleges in the Thanjavur district?

6. Methodology

At the outset, first year math students from Rajah Serfoji Government college were met and briefed about the purpose of the study. They were extrinsically motivated by highlighting the advantages of the study. After this, the students were given pre-task instructions about the task that they were going to perform. They were also motivated by the proposed benefits of this task. After this, volunteers alone were chosen to participate in the study. They were divided into two groups, namely control and experimental group. They were also informed about their class schedule. In the next contact hour, the experimental group of students were given comic stories (i.e. Kalia the Crow, Shikari Shambu, Tantri the Mantri, Champak, Tenali Raman, and Akbar-Birbal). A sufficient amount of time was given to them to go through the comic stories, which was followed by a discussion between the students and the researcher to ensure comprehension. They were free to choose the comic story of their choice and students who couldn't choose one were offered help. After choosing one story, they were supposed to retell the story as they have understood. In this way, they were made to reconstruct the narrative in English through their own language, and their speech was recorded. Certain difficult expressions (from the point of view of the learners) in the comics were simplified with the help

of defining vocabulary so that they can make use of it. Spoken utterances like phrasal verbs, idioms, useful phrases and so on were also given.

Likewise, the control group of students were also given the same stories but without illustrations (comics). All the other steps were similar to that of the experimental group (assistance for difficult expressions, utterances like phrasal verbs, idioms, useful phrases and so on). Their spoken performance was also analysed at the end by a formal achievement test. The results of the two groups showed that there was a significant difference between these two groups.

7. Criteria for evaluation

They were given marks according to the following criteria – fluency, coherence, accuracy, complexity, pronunciation, ability to expand idea and volume. In this context, fluency, (*Fluency can be described as the ability to process language receptively and productively at a reasonable speed.*” — Nation (2014). contact.teslontario.org) coherence and ability to expand ideas were given more marks comparatively. This is because the study attempts to enhance their overall ability to speak in the target language. Accuracy and complexity were given less weightage comparatively. (Steven Pinker: *“Syntax is complex, but the complexity is there for a reason. For our thoughts are surely even more complex, and we are limited by a mouth that can pronounce a single word at a time.”* — from *The Language Instinct*. This suggests that complexity in language reflects complexity of thought. [Goodreads](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/12189913-the-language-instinct))

As the students belong to an underprivileged background, an acceptable level of pronunciation was considered. This was because the accuracy in pronunciation was not the purpose of the study.

Levis (2005) – “Intelligibility, not nativeness, is the goal.”, “The appropriate goal for pronunciation teaching is intelligibility, not accent reduction or native-like pronunciation.” — *Levis, J. M. (2005). Changing contexts and shifting paradigms in pronunciation teaching. TESOL Quarterly, 39(3), 369–377.*

On the other hand, volume was analysed to know their confidence level. (i.e. high volume and facial expressions in speech shows one’s confidence)

8. Results

Table 1: Control Group

Roll No.	A Max:5	B Max:5	C Max:2	D Max:3	E Max:2	F Max:5	G Max:3	Total Max:25
23ME1803	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	10
23MT1724	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	9
24CS4126	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	9
23ME1816	2	3	1	1	1	1	3	12
23PZ04619	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	11
23ME1821	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	9
23ME0822	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	10
23MT1718	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	10
23MT1721	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	8
23MT1722	2	3	2	1	1	2	2	13

(A- Fluency, B – Coherence, C-Accuracy, D-Complexity, E-Pronunciation, F-Ability to expand idea, G-Volume)

Table 2: Experimental Group

Roll No.	A Max:5	B Max:5	C Max:2	D Max:3	E Max:2	F Max:5	G Max:3	Total Max:25
24ST3104	4	4	2	1	1	3	3	18
23PT1904	5	4	1	1	1	2	3	17
24ST3129	3	4	1	1	1	3	3	16
24ST3120	4	4	1	2	1	3	2	17
23ME1831	4	4	1	1	1	3	2	16
23ME1832	4	4	1	2	1	4	3	19
24ST3113	4	4	2	1	1	4	3	19
23ME1842	4	4	1	1	1	4	3	18
23MT1704	4	5	1	1	1	3	3	18
23MT1707	4	5	1	1	1	2	3	17

(A- Fluency, B – Coherence, C-Accuracy, D-Complexity, E-Pronunciation, F-Ability to expand idea, G-Volume)

9. Discussion

Overall, the results of the study showed that there is a significant difference between the control and experimental group. The experimental group of students have scored higher scores in their oral speaking task. The mean of their score is 17.5. Whereas, the control group of students performed poorly. Their mean is 10. This indicates that comic stories with illustrations not only helped them to comprehend the spoken utterances and the narrative structure of the story but it also has an impact on their subconscious mind. In fact, it has helped them to narrate the story confidently. In line with the theory of subconscious Language acquisition, these learners are able to narrate what they have grasped. Though the accuracy of their language is not too good, (marks range 1 - 2) their overall communication was effective.

On the other hand, the control group of students did not make much impact. A clear-cut reason is that they were not able to visualize the narrative structure in their mind, which in turn affected their comprehension. Hence, they could not retell the story in an effective way. They missed out certain significant parts of the narration. It can be inferred that the control group lacked the advantage of illustrations, which were provided to the experimental group students.

10. Limitations:

The study involved only 20 students, which limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population.

Less number of training or teacher intervention hours due to administrative constraints.

The research was confined to students from one government college and did not include learners from other institutions.

Assuming basic comprehension, all activities were conducted in English and did not offer L1 support.

The study limited its materials to comic stories as the main tool for speaking development, excluding other multimedia tools like videos or podcasts.

11. Conclusion

The results go on to show the impact of comic stories on language acquisition, particularly with reference to L2 speaking. The results indicate that visual representations studied along with spoken utterances assist the conceptualization process of the mind, which

is essential for formulation and articulation of L2 speech. The significant difference in the scores of the experimental group clearly highlights the value of comic stories particularly when it is being used in a task-based environment. Besides, the feedback (observed and noted in the researcher's diary at the end of each task) of the students about the task in which they have participated, is positive. Hence, it is recommended that future studies in the same field may be continued with reference to the impact of visual illustrations on other skills too. (i.e. reading, writing) Comic stories, YouTube videos, documentaries and so on may also be utilized to promote L2 speaking as well as other language skills.

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