Chapter 8
The Storytellers: Oral Retelling of Bilingual Children Struggling to Read in English

Viniti Vaish

Abstract This chapter analyzes the outcomes of our Proof of Concept. Specifically I focus on whether amount of talk, lexical density, and episodic structure improves when bilingual children, who are struggling to read in English, are given the opportunity to retell stories in English. 22 oral retellings by 8 Singaporean students (6–7 years old) in the Learning Support Program (LSP) in two schools were analyzed. The eight bilingual students were part of a study in which their home language was used as a scaffold to teach vocabulary and enhance comprehension in English. Each child presented oral retellings in English of stories based on four books taught in class. The books used were those in the curriculum of the schools. No attempt was made by the research team to change the books in the curriculum. The 22 oral narratives were qualitatively analyzed for amount of talk, vocabulary density, and episodic structure. The task had a within-subject design in that we measured the multiple stories told by each child for improvement in narrative skills. The extremely variable results, which could be because of the diversity in types of texts used in both schools, emphasize the importance of case-based approach in qualitatively coding the oral retelling of young learners. The chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the oral retellings of one student who benefited most from translanguaging pedagogy and produced excellent oral narratives.

Keywords Bilingual children · Singapore · Oral retelling · Struggling readers

Introduction

Oral language is one of the 11 variables which, according to the National Institute for Literacy (2008), consistently, though moderately, predicts later reading achievement. One way of creating a classroom rich in oracy is to encourage children to tell

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stories from either their own experiences or from texts that they are reading in class. Story telling is a decontextualized literacy practice which emphasizes the continuum between language and literacy. According to Snow (1983), "literacy and oral language are very similar and closely related skills which are acquired in much the same way" (p. 166). At the same time, one of the differences between the two is that in literacy children are expected to communicate in a decontextualized way which is a skill taught mainly in the formal context of school. Thus telling a story in school is not only a different skill from telling one at home but also one that has to be learned because in school children are expected to tell the story much like they would write it in well-developed paragraphs.

Background

Oral Retelling and Monolingual Children

The literacy practice of oral retelling has been used as a measure of comprehension for students who are fluent decoders but weak comprehenders by Applegate, Applegate, and Modla (2009). The focus of the authors was the link between fluency and comprehension in a sample of 171 children ranging from grades 2 to 10 in different types of schools. All 171 children were considered to be fluent readers by their teachers. Oral retelling was one component of the comprehension test used by Applegate et al. (2009) in which they measured both story grammar/episodic structure and personal response. The authors found that all the children identified as struggling comprehenders had the lowest scores for oral retelling.

The coupling between narrative and argumentative discourse was discussed by Shrubshall (1997) in a study comparing the narratives of monolingual vs bilingual 5–10 year olds. He wrote: "Stories have argumentative functions and can contain typically argumentative characteristics; for example, evaluation, judgment, question, and reflection" (p. 403). This relationship between narrative and argument is used by teachers during literacy practices like "show and tell" to teach children how to speak as if they were reading a well-written essay. Shrubshall analyzed the narratives of 18 children as they retold a story which was represented first by pictures and thereafter without pictures. The author's focus was episodic structure and the way the narrator evaluated the events/actions. He found that monolingual children produced more evaluative stories with better episodic structure than stories produced by bilingual children.

The study by Ukrainetz et al. (2005) was based on a fictional story shown to the subjects in the form of pictures. In a huge sample size of 293 children ranging from ages 5 to 12, Ukrainetz et al. documented the development of expressive elaboration. They defined expressive elaboration as consisting of 13 components organized into 3 broad categories: appendages, orientation, and evaluation. One of the limitations of Ukrainetz et al. was that the three broad categories were not discrete.

Furthermore, the analysis was across subjects of different ages performing the same narrative; thus the development could be due to factors like IQ, socioeconomic status, dominant home language, etc. Finally, the results of this study were obvious: the older children narrated better stories. In contrast to Ukrainetz et al. I have decided to focus on comparing multiple oral retellings by the same child on different books rather than on comparisons between children.

Oral Retelling and Bilingual Children

In the literature on oral retelling skills of bilingual children, usually narratives in both languages are measured. For instance, Gutierrez-Clellen (2002) analyzed the narrative performances of thirty-three 7–8-year-old Spanish-English bilingual children using story-recall and comprehension tasks. The story was first read aloud to the students; thereafter they were expected to retell the story one time in English and one time in Spanish without any modeling or props. Finally, comprehension questions were asked for each story. The key findings from Gutierrez-Clellen's study were that the children displayed equivalent ability in uttering grammatically correct sentences in Spanish and English. In one of the two stories that the children retold, they showed equivalent ability in producing temporal and causal sequences in both Spanish and English. At the same time most of the children in the sample exhibited better narrative recall and story comprehension in English than in Spanish.

Similarly Otwinowska et al. (2018) tested the narrative skills of 75 Polish-English bilingual 5 year olds raised in the UK. The researchers had two broad measures: macrostructure, which included story structure and comprehension questions, and microstructure, which included a calculation of lexical density through type token ratio and MLU. In our study, the measurement of story grammar is very much like macrostructure in Otwinowska et al.'s study though we asked comprehension questions before the child performed the oral retelling (See Chap. 3 for a table of literacy activities in the Proof of Concept). Also, in our Proof of Concept, the comprehension questions were part of translanguaging pedagogy so as to make sure the child understood the story before he/she provided an oral recall. Our measurement of content words and amount of talk are similar, though not exactly the same, as the measurement of Otwinowska et al.'s microstructure. Details of our coding procedures are provided in the section on methodology for this chapter. Another important similarity between Otwinowski et al.'s study and ours is the use of an adult model demonstration before the child gave his/her oral performance. In our Proof of Concept, this adult model was provided at the behest of the teachers because they did not think the children would know how to do an oral recall. However, in Otwinowski et al.'s study, the adult model is a unit of measurement as they measured the narratives of their subjects in Polish and English with and without an adult model. Their findings were that after modeling by an adult, macrostructure improved in both languages but microstructure did not improve in either language.

In our study, only narratives in English were measured because that is the language we were attempting to improve through translanguaging pedagogy. In a similar study on narratives, Hipfner-Boucher et al. (2015) also measured oral narratives in English, which was the medium of instruction in school, for bilingual students. Hipfner-Boucher et al. (2015) compared narrative competence among three groups of children: monolingual English speakers, English-dominant bilinguals, and bilinguals who heard English at home less than 50% of the time. The last group was called English minority children. 25 children in each group were measured on narrative macrostructure (story grammar) and microstructure (number of utterances, MLU [for words only], and number of grammatically correct sentences). Though the three groups performed similarly in macrostructure, the ELL minority groups had the lowest scores in all the components of microstructure.

Unlike the study by Gutierrez-Clellen (2002), Fiestas and Pena (2004) compared the performance of bilingual Spanish-English-speaking children across tasks. The researchers compared the narrative skills of children in both their languages across two different contexts and across two different elicitation stimuli. In one elicitation task, the researchers used a wordless picture book as stimulus and in the other a picture of a birthday party. For each stimulus, the 12 children in this study (4–6 year olds) produced 2 stories: 1 in Spanish and 1 in English. In terms of story grammar, or what Labov and Waletzky (1997) called episodic structure, the students included more initiating events in their Spanish stories, whereas they included more consequences in their English stories. Thus, the language in which the story was narrated did have an effect on the discourse complexity of the narratives.

As mentioned earlier, there are no standardized tests in either of the two research projects described in the present book; rather, an organic attempt to elicit oral narratives in English from the children is our measure of whether translanguaging pedagogy worked for children who have weak reading skills in English. According to Fiestas and Pena (2004), assessing the narrative production of children with language impairment and learning disabilities is becoming prevalent as compared with the use of standardized tests. One of the reasons for this prevalence is that the narratives that children produce show their ability to plan discourse at an extended level. In comparison, most standardized language tests evaluate children at the level of utterance. For instance, the well-known test DIBELS is not considered to be a test that can accurately measure comprehension (Reidel 2007). Thus, the detection of higher-level discourse abilities and disabilities might go unnoticed. After an extensive meta-analysis of 54 quantitative studies on oral retelling, Reed and Vaughn (2012) commented similarly on the value of oral retelling as a measure of comprehension. They point out that despite weak inter-rater reliabilities, retell tasks are an appealing complement to standardized tests because of their active reconstruction of text and relevancy to comprehension instruction.

Given this background, I explore the following research questions:

1. Did our translanguaging pedagogy work for the children in the LSP?
2. Were they able to demonstrate better comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar after 1 month of using their home language to access content in English?

Methodology

In Chap. 3, Table 3.2c, the second half of the table describes the activities in Raise the BAR. I will briefly summarize the main components of this program. Raise the BAR, which stands for Bilingual Approach to Reading, is the title of the translanguaging pedagogy implemented in three schools in Singapore in 2014. Implemented in Learning Support Classes, which consist of children who have weak reading skills in English, Raise the BAR was a new approach in which the teacher judiciously and systematically used the child's home language, in this case Malay and Chinese, to teach vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension in English.

The present chapter is about the last event in Chap. 3, Table 3.2c: the oral retelling by students, which typically occurred on Fridays. Every week a book was started on Monday. All the books were familiar to the students. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the teacher used translanguaging pedagogy to teach difficult vocabulary, specific grammatical rules (e.g., possessives), and comprehension. On each Thursday, the Principal Investigator and author of this book performed an oral retelling of the book in English as a model. And finally, on Fridays the children were supposed to volunteer to perform an oral retelling by themselves. On Thursdays and Fridays, the pages of each of the books were flashed on a PowerPoint though all the prose had been deleted. On some of these pages, we inserted the new vocabulary that the children had been taught. The children could refer to the PowerPoint to retell the story for the class.

Before going on to the findings, I want to emphasize the organic, bottom-up nature of this Proof of Concept. We tried our best not to disrupt anything except the pedagogy and the distribution of languages in the classroom. For this reason the books being used in class remained exactly what was prescribed in the curriculum. No doubt this presented a problem in measurement, especially in School C, where the books differed in number of pages, words, and difficulty. Our Proof of Concept unlike a formal intervention has no controls as it is like a preliminary study which could lead to a formal intervention. For instance, in the intervention studies by Otwinowska et al. (2018) and Hipfner-Boucher et al. (2015), the children selected for the study were grouped according to similarities in their IQ, home language background, and age. This kind of grouping was not possible for us in the super-diverse classes of the Learning Support Program. If, for instance, we had tried to group the children in the LSP according to home language background, we would have had very few children in each group due to the super-diverse nature of the class. Even in terms of age, the LSP is extremely diverse as the children are between 6 and 7 years of age. Also the high level of absenteeism made it difficult to group the children. In the tables below, all names are pseudonyms.

Tables 8.1 and 8.2 show the total number of oral retellings in the data set. The shaded cells denote non-performances: these children refused to perform the specific narrative because they were either having a shy moment or just did not feel like doing the task. Though the teachers and author encouraged the children to perform, they were not forced. In some cases two or three children decided to do a narrative

Table 8.1 School F

Pseudo name	1st Oral Retell	2nd Oral Retell	3rd Oral Retell
Shahirah	✓	✓	✓
Nicholas	✓		✓
Allen	✓	✓	✓(some inaudible audio)
Waylon	✓	✓	✓(some inaudible audio)
Shue Lee	✓		✓

Table 8.2 School C

Pseudo name	1st Oral Retell	2nd Oral Retell	3rd Oral Retell	4th Oral Retell
Brenna	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mike		✓	✓	✓
Adlyne			✓	✓

performance together; however, this was not included in the data set as it did not represent individual performance. There were 13 narratives in School F and 9 in School C, yielding a total of 22.

Coding Procedures

The 22 narratives have been coded for amount of talk, number of content words, and number of story elements or story grammar. Amount of talk refers to the total number of words in one narrative. There were a few reasons why we decided not to calculate the MLU of the utterances in the narrative as has been done by Hipfner-Boucher et al. (2015). Throughout this book, MLU has been calculated for naturally occurring speech in the classroom. However, the oral narrative is a speech event that was the outcome after some coaching and even an oral demonstration by the author. Also, MLU is a measure mainly of the morphemes and grammar that children have acquired and can display spontaneously. In the case of the oral narrative, we were checking to see if the children produce the specific vocabulary and grammatical forms that they had been learning that week. For these reasons, we decided to focus on content words and specifically watch out for new words that the children had been taught.

Content words were calculated by counting all the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in the oral narrative of the student. Each word was counted only once. Prepositions and pronouns were not counted. Thus the “amount of words” produced by each child was a larger number than the “content words” that she/he produced. We take content words to be a measure of lexical density.

Story grammar or episodic structure has been called macrostructure by Hipfner-Boucher et al. (2015) and Otwinowska et al. (2018). Despite the different terminology in all the studies, these terms refer to the components of a story in the Western tradition like setting, climax, problem, motivations of characters, etc. We coded for five elements of story grammar in narrative texts: setting, description of action, problem, motivations of characters, and solution. For the one expository text used in School C, we coded for two elements: description of action and articulating the sequence of events. The books used in Schools F and C are shown in Appendix A.

Findings and Discussion

Amount of Talk

In School F, there was an overall increase in amount of talk as students performed the narrative task multiple times, except for Waylon. Waylon’s second oral retelling had more words than his first one, but the third one was considerably shorter than the first one. The other three children, Nicholas, Allen, and Shue Lee, showed a similar trend in that their final oral retelling had more words than their first one. In this school, Shahirah was an outlier in that her narratives showed an exponential increase in amount of talk (Fig. 8.1).

While looking at these results, it is important to keep in mind that, as shown in Appendix A under School F, each of the 3 books that the children were taught had

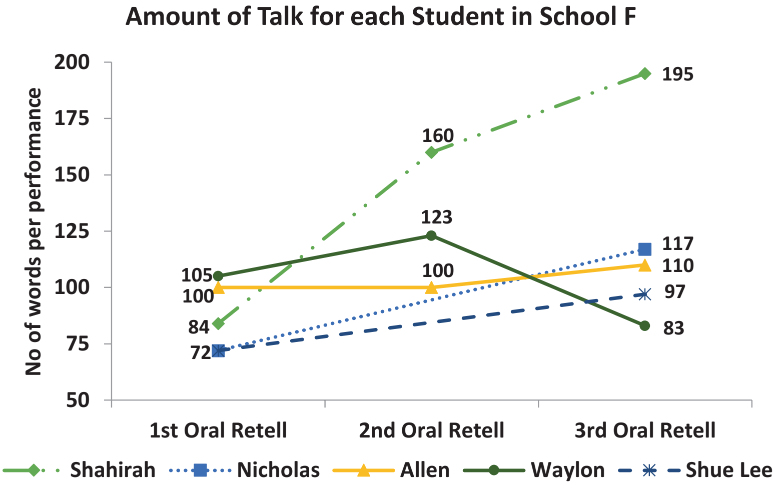

Fig. 8.1 Amount of Talk in School F

exactly 16 pages and were Ginn readers from level 2. Though the number of words in each of the books varied, the stimulus for the children was a PowerPoint presentation in which each of the pages was digitally represented without the prose text. Thus, the number of pages in the book was a more important aspect of the stimulus than the number of words in the book.

Figure 8.2 shows the number of words the children produced for each oral retelling. Clearly, in School C, the amount of talk went down with each oral retelling. If we follow the four oral retellings by Brenna, she actually decreased the number of words she uttered in the third and fourth oral retelling. Though she uttered 398 words in the first performance and increased this to 460 in the second one, her output went down to 329 words in the third performance and finally to 324 in the final oral retelling. Similarly, the number of words uttered by Mike and Adlyne in their second performance went down compared to their first performance.

It is possible that the amount of words produced by students in School C depended on the number of pages in each book (Appendix A, School C). The second book, *Big Hungry Bear*, had 31 pages compared with 16 in *Chicken Rice*. This could be one reason for increase in Brenna's output. In the third oral retelling, the book had 28 pages which could be one reason for the drop in Brenna and Mike's output as compared to their second oral retelling. The last oral retelling was based on a 16-page book. Though this could explain the drop in output for Brenna and Adlyne, it does not explain why Mike increased his output from the third to the fourth oral retelling.

Thus, a simple link between amount of talk and number of pages is not sustained by the performances of the children in School C or F. In the case of School F, all the books had 16 pages, and yet most of the children increased their output.

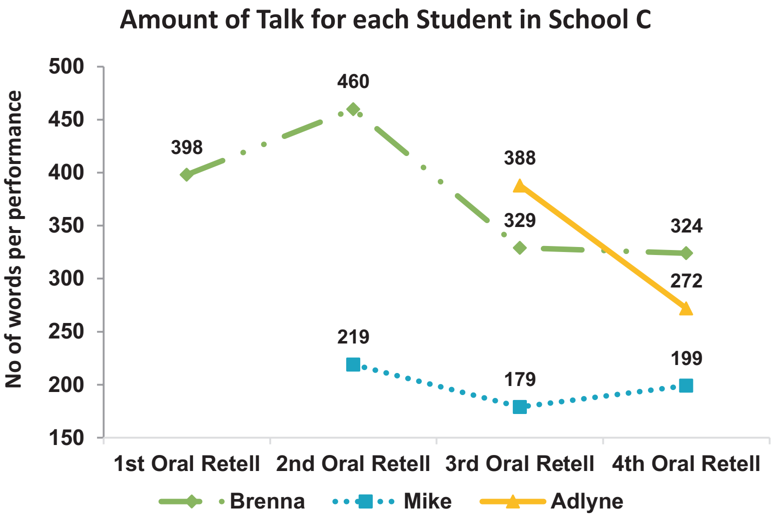

Fig. 8.2 Amount of Talk in School C

Lexical Density

Figure 8.3 shows that for most students in School F, the number of content words increased with each oral retelling. For instance, Shahirah had 22 content words in her first performance, which more than doubled to 49 in her second performance. In her third performance, the number of content words remained steady at 48. Nicholas and Shue Lee also increased their use of content words in their second performance though their increase was not as exponential as Shahirah's. The only student whose content words went down was Waylon: from 29 to 31 and then finally to 28.

In School C, multiple oral retelling did not increase the use of content words produced by the children, as depicted in Fig. 8.4. In the case of Brenna, though she increased her content words from 54 to 71 in her second oral retelling, this came down in the third and fourth oral performances. Adlyne's performance also showed a decrease in content words from 62 to 55. Finally, Mike's content words remained roughly the same with a slight dip in the second performance.

Both Schools F and C were given translanguaging pedagogy, and in both schools children were provided with a model of the oral recall; however, content words only increased in School F and not in School C. One difference between the two schools is the curriculum: whereas in School F the teachers were using the highly controlled Ginn readers, in School C the teachers preferred to experiment with different books as they thought that the students found the Ginn readers boring. It is possible that narrative competence is easier to measure when the texts being used are highly controlled in terms of number and quality of words and pages.

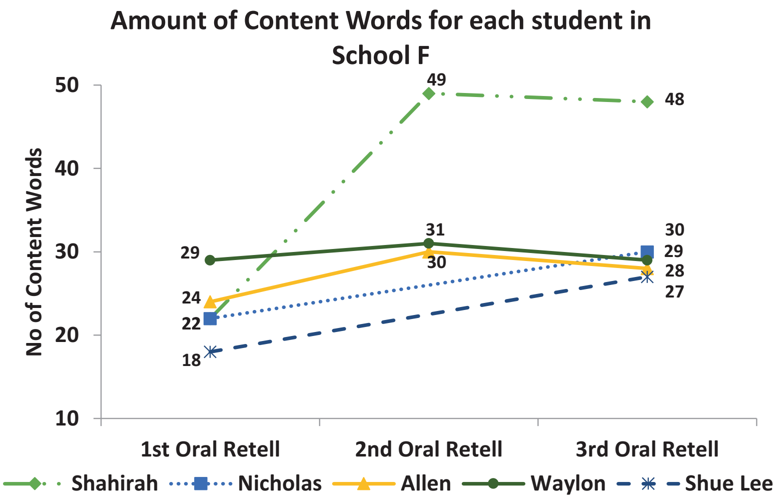

Fig. 8.3 Lexical Density in School F

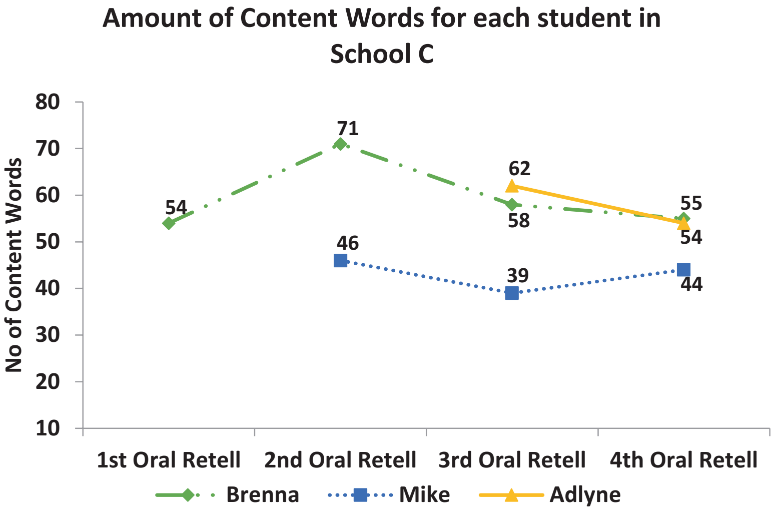

Fig. 8.4 Lexical Density in School C

Episodic Structure

As mentioned in Chap. 2, we coded for the following elements of story grammar: setting, description of action, identification of problem, resolution, and finally, the motivation and reaction of characters. For the fourth book, *A Butterfly is Born*, we coded only for two elements: description of action and articulation of sequence of events. The expository book was only taught in School C and not in School F.

Table 8.3 shows that some of the children in School F used more elements of story grammar with repeated oral retellings. Out of five students, Shahirah, Nicholas, and Allen used more elements in their second and third performances. On the other hand, Waylon and Shue Lee displayed the same number of story elements in each performance.

In School C only Mike showed a slight increase in sensitivity to episodic structure: in his second performance, he had three story elements compared to two in his first performance, as shown in Table 8.4. This came down to two story elements in his final performance; however there were only two elements in the expository book. Adlyne's story elements remained the same. Brenna showed a different trend in that her story elements dropped from four to two in the second performance and remained at two.

I now turn to an in-depth analysis of all the narratives produced by Shahirah as, according to her teacher, Ms. A felt that students like Shahirah benefit the most from translanguaging pedagogy. Shahirah, who came from a Malay-dominant home, was an articulate, vivacious child who actively participated in class. As documented in the previous sections, not only did amount of talk increase exponentially for Shahirah across her three performances, with each performance Shahirah displayed better understanding of the elements of story grammar and had more content words (Table 8.5).

Table 8.3 Number of Story Elements per performance in School F

Pseudo name	1st Oral Retell	2nd Oral Retell	3rd Oral Retell
Shahirah	2	5	5
Nicholas	3		5
Allen	3	4	5
Waylon	3	3	3
Shue Lee	2		2

Table 8.4 Number of Story Elements per performance in School C

Pseudo name	1st Oral Retell	2nd Oral Retell	3rd Oral Retell	4th Oral Retell
Brenna	4	2	2	2
Mike		2	3	2
Adlyne			2	2

Case 1: Shahirah's Stories

Shahirah's First Performance

She started with two elements in her first story: description of action and identification of problem. Lengthy descriptions of action, i.e., what is happening in the story, were the element with which children in the LSP were most comfortable. Shahirah, on the other hand, after going through the lessons for the second story and watching the demonstration by the author, understood that the oral retelling required a more structured performance on the students' part.

Shahirah's Second Performance

The second time Shahirah started with the setting: "Liz, Ben and Digger is going to gardening. Mum is mowing and Dad is weeding. And Liz is taking out the weed." Though in the first sentence Shahirah used an incorrect verb tense, she set the scene well in terms of the location of the action: the garden where the whole family is busy gardening. Shahirah then proceeded to describe the action of the story as enacted by the main characters: Liz (a girl), Ben (her brother), Digger (their dog, who is also the main protagonist), and the parents.

In her second attempt, Shahirah tried to use new vocabulary. Appendix A under School F lists eight new vocabulary items that were being taught through the text: *Can We Help*. In the second oral retelling, Shahirah used all the new vocabulary that had been taught, though she misused the word "twisted." She said "Liz got wet and

Table 8.5 Transcript of oral retellings by Shahirah

Shahirah's Oral Recall
1st (Day 5):
Liz can run fast. Liz and Digger went back home. Liz ask her Dad "Where can we run, Dad?" Dad tell Liz and Digger "You can run here." Liz and Digger can run fast together. [a][Liz trip over the roots. Liz ask Digger to look at her leg.] Liz ask Digger to run back home. Mum and Father tell "Where is Liz?" Mum and Dad follow Digger to Liz. Mum and Dad help Liz up to the hospital. Liz ask Digger to come here.
2nd (Day 12):
[b][Liz, Ben and Digger is going to gardening. Mum is mowing and Dad is weeding. And Liz is taking out the weed.] Ben ask Digger to stop digging the bed of flowers. Dad ask Ben to set up the hose. Liz is angry. Liz ask Digger to go back home. Dad thought that Ben is ready. But Ben is, was not ready. [a][Suddenly, Digger bite the hose and splash water to Mum. Liz ask Mum to move beside. Digger bite the hose again and Dad and Ben get wet. Dad stumbled and fall down.] [c][Liz is very rude. Liz is laughing at the side.] Liz, it's not funny. Liz also get wet and twisted. She al, almost going to stumble. Dad already fall down and Ben laugh at Liz. Ben and Liz get twisted. Digger go and splash Mum again and Dad run and get to save Mum. [d][Suddenly there was a postman helping the family to close the tap.]
3rd (Day 16):
[b][Once upon a time, Ben is hiding in the curtain. Ben ask Liz "Let's play hide and seek." Liz's friend is joining them and Liz's friend said to Ben "Can Digger join our game?" Ben is hiding in the bathroom.] Ben tell Dad "Can I hide in here? Because they want to catch me." Dad said "No, you can't hide in here." Ben is hiding on the laundry basket. Ben is going to Mother's room. [c][Ben tell Mum "Can I hide in here? Because they want to catch me." Mum said "No, you can't hide in here." Because Mum thought that Ben will mess up the Mother's room. Ben got a idea. Ben take the chair from the kitchen and bring outside. Ben step on the chair and Ben climb up the tree.] Liz tell Ben that "Are you ready Ben? We will look for you." [a][Finally Digger find Ben and Digger push the chair to another side. And Ben said Liz and Liz's friend that he can't go down. Digger thought that Ben is tall.] [d][Finally, Liz and Liz's friend take the chair up and put under the tree and Ben can go down.]

Note: [a][…] points out the element for description of action and identification of problem; [b][…] points out the element for setting; [c][…] points out the element for explicating the motivations and reactions of the characters; [d][…] points out the element for resolution of story

twisted." What she meant was that the hose pipe was twisted around Liz. Yet, Shahirah's miscue indicates that she indeed understood the meaning of the word.

With the strategic use of the word "suddenly," Shahirah moved to a new episode in her story: the problem. She said "Suddenly, Digger bite the hose and splash water to Mum. Liz ask Mum to move beside. Digger bite the hose again and Dad and Ben get wet. Dad stumbled and fall down." What Shahirah meant was that Digger had grabbed the hose pipe in his mouth and the dog's frantic movements were causing the whole family to get doused in the spray. The problem that Shahirah was narrating to the class occurred on pages 9–15 of the book "Can We Help." Only high-frequency words like "Look out Mum!" are printed on each of the pages. Thus, Shahirah was interpreting the pictures and situating the actions of the characters within the setting she had contextualized in the beginning.

Thereafter, Shahirah attempted yet another element of story grammar: explicating the motivations and reactions of the characters. In a brief comment, Shahirah said: “Liz is very rude. Liz is laughing at the side. Liz, it’s not funny.” The sentence “Liz, it’s not funny” is not in the book. Here Shahirah was adding dialogue of her own and recreating the moment by assuming that Liz’s mother could have said that. Her interpretation of Liz’s behavior was that Liz was being rude and her mother told her off.

Shahirah’s Third Performance

In the third performance, Shahirah had five elements of story grammar. She started with the setting by describing the place and naming the people in the story. Going on to description of action, Shahirah articulated what Ben did with the chair. That brought her to the problem: “he can’t go down.” In other words, Ben could not get down from the tree because his chair had been taken away. In the sentence starting with “finally,” Shahirah articulated the solution and the end of the story.

In this performance, Shahirah tried to use new vocabulary and attempted to apply a new grammatical rule that had been taught to the class. In the lessons leading up to the final narration of the book *I Can Hide*, the students were taught “possessives.” The concept that possessives in English are formed by adding an extra sound was explained to Shahirah’s group (the Malay-English bilingual group) by the Malay research assistant. This rule was explicitly taught during translanguaging classes. The research assistant also explained that the rules for possessives are different in Malay and English. Whereas in Malay the possessive is understood, in English there is an “s” that indicates the possessive. Shahirah used possessives in her third performance 3 times. Twice she used the phrase “Liz’s friend.” The double consonant at the end of the proper noun “Liz” was challenging for the students, but Shahirah articulated the word with gusto.

Figure 8.5 shows the percentage of time that Shahirah spent on each component of episodic structure. Of the five elements of story grammar documented in this chapter, “description of action” is the easiest, and thus most of the children spent a large amount of talk time and words on this episode. In her first oral retelling, 84.5% or most of the story that Shahirah told was a description of action. The rest of the first oral retelling was identifying the problem. However, Shahirah did not display any other element of story grammar in her first performance.

In the second performance, Shahirah did not overuse “description of action.” On the contrary, this element of story grammar dropped to 52.5%. At the same time, Shahirah added other components of story grammar to her performance: she described the setting in 6.3% of her narrative and spent an equivalent amount of time on explaining the motivations of the characters in the story. In 13.8% of her narrative, she tried to identify the problem. Thus, Shahirah’s second oral performance had many more elements of decontextualized literacy practices than her first.

Finally in her third oral retelling, “description of action” dropped to 24.6%. By this time, Shahirah had internalized the idea that this element of story grammar was not as crucial to the narrative as other elements. She spent a little more time on the motivations and reactions of characters: 29.7%. In each of the other elements of

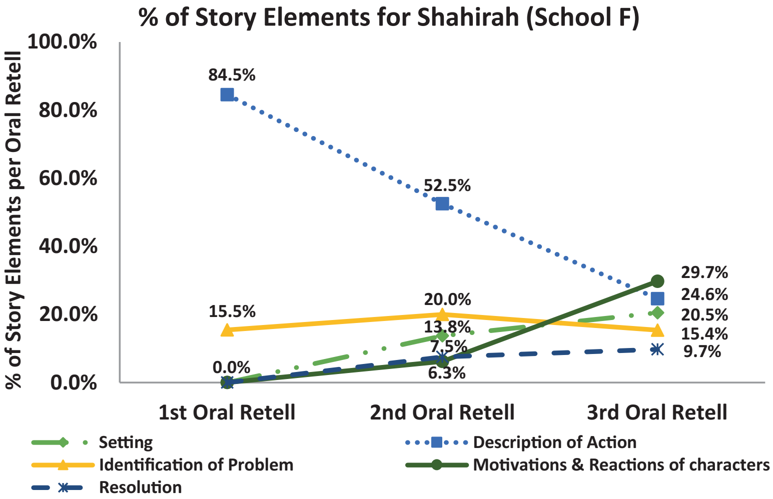

Fig. 8.5 Percentage of story elements in Shahirah's oral retellings

story grammar, setting, identification of problem, and resolution, Shahirah spent more time than she did in her second performance. The trajectory from first to third oral retelling described above shows that Shahirah understood the decontextualized nature of the literacy practice she was undertaking and she was deliberately trying to make her performance more like a written essay rather than a story told for private consumption.

However, as mentioned earlier, Shahirah is an outlier for who the translanguaging pedagogy worked extremely well. The others in the class did not show the same exponential development in their understanding of episodic structure. Their graphs were extremely variable meaning that though some elements of story grammar went up, others came down and there was no discernable trend.

Conclusions and Implications

This chapter was about the outcomes of Raise the BAR. Did this Proof of Concept improve English language acquisition for the children in the LSP? In School F, there was a discernable increase in amount of talk and some improvement in lexical density for most students. This is despite the fact that the students from School F came from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Only Shahirah in School F, according to the teacher, came from a highly Malay-dominant home. The three boys Nicholas, Allen, and Waylon came from homes where more English is spoken. Only Shahirah exhibited discernable improvement in story grammar. As the teacher in School F pointed out, Raise the BAR is an excellent pedagogy for students like Shahirah.

In School C, there was no improvement in amount of talk, lexical density, or story grammar. One of the reasons for the diversity of outcomes could be the diversity in the nature and length of books used in both the schools. As mentioned earlier, no attempt was made to change the curriculum of the schools, and our research team worked with the books the teachers thought were best for their students. The highly controlled vocabulary and content of Ginn readers created a homogenous set of materials for School F. This was not the case for School C where the curriculum consisted of a diversity of books. Also, it is possible that many of the children in School C come from English-dominant or rather Singlish-dominant environments. For these children, the use of their Mother Tongue, which is actually their weaker language, might pose further problems in comprehension. Though translanguaging does not essentialize directionality of transfer between the languages of a bilingual, and transfer could happen from the weaker to the stronger language, it is still important to find the correct pedagogy that will facilitate this transfer. More importantly the findings in this chapter point to the design of translanguaging pedagogy and the fact that this pedagogy should be finely customized for learners with different language backgrounds.

List of Books Used in Both Schools

Title of book	Key vocabulary words	Number of pages	Number of words in book
School F			
Liz and Digger	–	16	69
Can We Help	Gardening Mowing Weeding Bed of flowers Hose Stumble Twisted Postman	16	82
I Can Hide	Curtain Hide and seek Liz's friend Bucket Painting Laundry basket Mother's room Computer Climbing up Garden Branch Problem Under	16	105

Title of book	Key vocabulary words	Number of pages	Number of words in book
School C			
Chicken Rice	Hate Like Than Tasty Friend Terrified Terrible	16	242
Big Hungry Bear	Ladder Strawberry Pick Trembling with fear Hidden Nails Locked Disguised Hidden under the blanket Half The problem was Mouse had picked Was coming Ate The solution was	31	148
Nightmare in My Closet	Used to be Before Always Sometimes Decided As soon as Foot of the bed Quickly Was Took Tucked Closed	28	153
A Butterfly is Born	Flower Beautiful Nectar Hatches In a few days Eggshell Caterpillar Branch Pupa Crumpled In a few hours	16	162

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