

How Picture Books Work:

A Study of Theoretical Approaches on Language-Image Interplay Towards Pedagogical Content Knowledge for Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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1. Introduction: Why Picture Books for Education Field?

Announced commencement of English classes as a subject at public elementary schools in Japan in 2020 forward, wide-ranging augment topics of English education to young learners are activated domestically in every region. The topics extend from central to far reaching peripheral fields of pedagogical theories, educational policy and they contain from considerable practical techniques to profound linguistic theories or principles of language acquisition, cognitive perception, psychological motivation, and so forth. Furthermore, augments local governments have adopted accelerated implement of new Curriculum Guidelines, albeit with controversial subject matters to be considered. Among others, practical researches having directly bearing on teaching materials of immediate use and pedagogy content knowledge (PCK), the framework built by Lee Shulman (1986), comprehensive knowledge of the subject materials with technology of teaching are of the utmost importance, because they are two indispensable resource in any tutorial circumstances.

In academic year of 2015, the political announcement of empirical usage of English picture books as supplementary materials was made by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). In the consequence of this announcement, a practical manual on teaching techniques of English picture books in English classes at public elementary schools. However, concerning the present circumstances, pedagogical usage of English picture books in English classes are yet farther to be effectually employed. Admitting various causes are considered in this insufficient utilization, the deficiency of fundamental knowledge of “How picture books work” affects adversely.

This paper will analyze the operation of English picture books in meaning making process in the system of the second language acquisition, and further draw Sipe (1998) to elucidate the semiotic theory of making-meaning process with language-image interplay, or synergy, suggesting the significance of comprehensive process of picture books in view of developing literary and literacy ability. Provided opportunities of probing into language and pictures, with the critical thinking process through objective language and meta-language, children would learn effectively as Arizpe (2016) has affirmed.

2. Proceeding Theories

2.1 Some theories on Second Language Acquisition

2.1.1 The Input Hypothesis

In this section, some linguistic theories in the stream of Input Hypothesis by Stephen Krashen developed in 1970s and 1980in. Krashen originally formulated five processes in second language acquisition including the input-hypothesis, the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis and the effective filter hypothesis. The input hypothesis is the most important one with only which children acquire their mother language without formal learning. Input should be assured to have adequate quantity to trigger the acquisition and to be just above learner’s ability, similar to ‘zone of proximal development’ by Vygotsky, to stimulate the learning instinct where the learners manages to understand with

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a certain kind of support. This concept of comprehensible input (CI) has been influential especially in the field of pedagogy. Although the indispensability of language input in the process of acquisition has been approved among researchers, in the point of exclusion of other process, Krashen was exposed to the opposition from other researchers.

2.2 Other Theories Modified from the Input Hypothesis

2.2.1 The Output Hypothesis:

In the stream of counter argument to Krashen's Input hypothesis, some modification are added to the Input Hypothesis, which generate other theories. Among leading hypothesis, the output hypothesis, the input-output hypothesis, the input-interaction hypothesis and focus on form have been renowned. The output hypothesis conceive the output of the targeted language, typically a speaking skill or a writing skill, as a language learning process of a correction and automation of generating proerate. Input-Output Hypothesis has included output as a language learning process. Researchers who have adopted this theory, believe that the output process is indispensable as a testing his or her knowledge and that the errors made would be corrected by the audience.

2.2.2 The Interaction Hypothesis

In the process of input and output, the interaction of linguistic messages would be back and forth between the learner who utters a linguistic message to be an output, and a correction or some other responses from the audience would be another input for the learner, and this interaction continues for a while. The researchers of the interaction hypothesis consider this interaction process to be an essential process of language acquisition. Among considerable researchers considerable theorists have promoted input-output-interaction process on the bases of the input hypothesis by Krashen. Among, Michael Long (1998) has been a pivotal researcher above all.

In addition to the importance of interaction, the significant notification is contained in the this hypothesis. is indicated that the target language would have been well-acquired in the negotiable situation. If a learner is in the situation of negotiating something, he or she will manage to be himself/herself understood in the process of interaction. So the interaction should be meaningful interchange.

2.3 The Input Hypothesis and Picture Books

The appropriate level of the input is critically important as in the argument above, the explicit target of the interaction process is also important as well. In this respect reading picture books might be one of the effective measures which promote second language acquisition, In the light of level of input, teachers could invariably adopt appropriate books on every occasion. Eventhough students don't understand the meaning of language in the picture books, they could infer from the picture which would function as the information. And in a viewpoint of the meaningful interaction, the target of learning explicitly indicated while reading books, that is to understand the story.

As a consequent of the announcement of MEXT, reading picture books is introduced to the more schools than before. On condition htat the function of reading books as the appropriate input and as prolific interaction process in the unlimited process of language acquisition have recognized, reading picture books would be more properly operate.

3. Interpretation of Picture Books

3.1 Toward Understanding Picture Books

As discerned in the above, the appropriateness and effectiveness of reading picture books would be uncontentious in the viewpoint of the second language acquisition. Although, the procedure of reading and interpreting picture books does not seem to have been elucidated, "the literacy and literary pedagogy can no longer confined to the realm of language alone, and conceptualizing literacy and literary education needs to account for the role of images." (Unworth 2006)

In the end of twenty century, some masterpiece researches have extensively elucidated aesthetic phase of picture books

from words and pictures. The pictures in picture books changed to be interpreted as visual text, in the year of 1982 when picture books were started from the Swedish scholar, Kristin Halberg,: words and pictures interplay. The stream represented the maturity of picture book culture especially in Europe, however, the new media including online videos, internet movies and TV phone “Skype”. All these radical alterations requires visual literacy and literature as we. Unworth (2006) explained us, “It is now widely accepted that the literacy and literacy pedagogy can no longer be confirmed to the realm of language alone, and that reconceptualizing literacy and literacy education needs to account for the role of images (as well as other modes of meaning-making) in paper (hard copy) and electronic media tesxts.” (Unworth 2006)

The movement of interpreting visual information as visual texts, and of making meta-language or theory to analyze the visual texts also in the field of children’s picture books. As Doonan (1993) points out:

How much help d children need to realize the possibilities of pictures? Certainly the respond to the expressive dimension and can talk about their impressions, but to move to the stage of relating impressions to the possible reasons for them, knowledge is needed: immersion is not enough. There is an important stage in person’s aesthetic development that depends upon having insights about the ways in which pictures may be interpreted. (Doonan 1993)

Even for children, watching and feeling the aesthetic impression is not enough, they have to interpret and explain how they should understand the visual text and verbal text as well. We move on the practice of interpreting the text of picture books from next chapter. Two of the practice would be introduced as follows.

4. Moving on Intepretation of the Picture Books

4.1 Interpretation of Animate or Inanimate: “Ken and Amy Visits Grandma” (Kon to Aki)

In several of her works, Japanese picture book author, Akiko Hayashi, creates a unique storyworld whose narrative employs a unique use of animals. A vivid example can be found in “Amy and Ken Visit Grandma”. I will and analyze this story from the viewpoint of the relationship between the main character and her toy fox. The story is about Amy, the heroine, and Ken, her toy fox, made and sent to Amy before her birth by Amy’s grandmother. In the story, the fox symbolizes a guardian sent to protect Amy, and a bosom friend with whom Amy would grow up. The two would work together towards certain goals and objectives in order to achieve maturity. I will analyze the specific reasons why Hayashi chose to use a toy fox in the story, thereby creating a new and innovative way of using the animal in children’s literature.

The hypotheses put primary importance on the comprehensible input (CI) that language learners are exposed to. Understanding spoken and written language input is seen as the only mechanism that results in the increase of underlying linguistic competence, and language output is not seen as having any effect on learners’ ability.

Furthermore, Krashen claimed that linguistic competence is only advanced when language is subconsciously acquired, and that conscious learning cannot be used as a source of spontaneous language production. Finally, learning is seen to be heavily dependent on the mood of the learner, with learning being impaired if the learner is under stress or does not want to learn the language.

4.2 Two Contrastive Description Styles

In another picture book, Akiko Hayashi, creates a unique story world whose narrative employs effective descriptions of houses, which play an important role in allowing readers to understand and immerse themselves in the stories. Effective, though different examples of styles can be found in “Miki’s First Errand” and “Amy and Ken Visit Grandma”. I will analyze these descriptive styles from the perspective of visual literacy, which helps the reader to recognize the house as an “extension of the real world” (Bang, 2016).

One style, adopted in “Miki’s First Errand”, is a minutely detailed description, which conveys plentiful information about the protagonist’s house and neighborhood. This is illustrated from a bird’s-eye view to depict it in the style of a 3D film, in

which the readers feel as if they belong in a common space-time. Readers would embrace the same atmosphere of the home and would experience a synchronized emotional state of mind with the protagonist.

On the other hand, in “Amy and Ken Visit Grandma”, the description of the house does not infer much information. Only a vacant baby crib by the window skillfully creates an atmosphere in the reader’s mind. Though the style of these illustrations seem simple at first glance, they skillfully depict the house as the secure world of the protagonist.

In both stories, each house symbolizes a secure world that safeguards our young and vulnerable protagonists, and a place from where they begin their journey towards maturity.

5. Synergy of Words and Pictures

In this paper, I will analyze the specific techniques picture books adopted and offer rationales to explain why they chose the respective styles. This principle aim of this analysis is to encourage the reader to engage deeply with picture books to “critical thinking and meaningful learning.” (Arizpe and Styles, 2016) “However, current research indicates that articulating discrete discrete visual and verbal grammars is not sufficient to account for meanings made at the intersection of language and image.”

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