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Effect of Alternative Reading Materials on the Communicative Competence of Freshmen

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive study aimed at finding out the effect of exposure to alternative reading materials on the communicative competence of college freshmen. Casual comparative method was employed in gathering the data for the alternative reading materials and a communicative competence test was administered to measure the effect of exposure to the materials. Samples of the study were 263 freshmen of four colleges of the University of Southeastern Philippines in its Obrero Campus. The objectives of the study were to find out the alternative reading materials college freshmen read, the features and content of those materials, the level of communicative competence of those who were more exposed less exposed to the reading materials, and to determine the significant difference in the level of communicative competence those readers. The researcher found out that the college freshmen read newspapers, magazines, journals, periodicals, pocketbooks, Bible, dictionary, comics, and pamphlets/booklets; on the average, college freshmen read the materials because of their content, language used, and layout. The three most interesting contents of the materials were adventure, fiction, and history; the level of communicative competence of those who were more exposed to the alternative reading materials was above average while that of the less exposed was average. It was also found that there was a significant difference in the level of communicative competence between those who were more exposed and less exposed to alternative reading materials.

KEYWORDS: Alternative reading materials, communicative competence, freshmen, USEP

INTRODUCTION

In this age of mass media, some printed materials have become rivals of textbooks. Newspapers/ tabloids, magazines, journals, periodicals, pocketbooks, Bible, dictionary, comics, and pamphlets/booklets sometimes take the place of textbooks when students read extensively. Because of this, their part in the lives of students cannot be understated. Aside from that fact, most of the language classrooms have never had enough books for a large number of students. Hence, teachers find it difficult to develop the learners' communicative competence.

Another problem is the waning interest of students on the contents of the textbooks which oftentimes do not bear a direct relationship to students' needs and interests because they are usually chosen randomly. They are selected because they exemplify the use of particular structure of a language or they contain ample vocabulary which the teachers think are fundamental for language learning. However, most of them are not meaningful to the students. One of the reasons, as revealed by Harvey in her article (date unknown), why students do not read is because the materials the teachers give them are not interesting and some are highly culture-bound. These and more, have made motivation extremely difficult for the teacher and the learning experience boring for the students. Teachers must remember that language learning takes place inside the learners. It is likely that many aspects of language learning can take place only through natural processes.

In a learner-centered curriculum, the content of a course is an important component. In such a curriculum, the learner is considered the heart of the learning process. Brindley (1984) believed that if programs are to be learner-centered, then, the learner's wishes should be canvassed and taken into account, even if they conflict with the wishes of the teacher. Those wishes will give guidance on the selection of materials and learning activities (Nunan, 1988). Moreover, Johnson and Morrow (1981) defined communicative language teaching (CLT) as an approach whose aim is communicative competence. It is the knowledge of the rules of use and appropriacy and includes linguistic competence (Nunan, 1988) but its main focus is the intuitive grasp of social and cultural rules and meanings that are carried by any utterance (Stern, 1983). In addition, it is the ability to communicate (Oxford, 1991); a set of general abilities that utilize all of the elements of language competence - and of psychomotor skills as well - in the process of negotiating meaning (Bachman, 1987). It is also competence in manipulating language in order to meet communicative goals (Brown, 1987). In

addition, Gebhard (1987:21) suggested three areas of concern in the selection of reading materials: the level of linguistic difficulty, the cultural context, and the interest it has for the students while Day (1994:20) recommended seven factors in selecting a reading selection. They are interest, exploitability, readability, topic, political appropriateness, cultural suitability, and appearance. Another set of factors to be noted are those which Griffith (1995:50-55) suggested that materials should match learner objectives, learner centered, interactive, socio-culturally appropriate, well-graded vocabulary and comprehensible, age-appropriate, interesting and visually attractive, relevant to real life, easy to use. Nutall (1982:29) who refers to interest as "suitability of content," claimed that having texts that interest learners is more critical than either the linguistic level of the text or its exploitability.

Furthermore, studies have shown that the overall reading level of daily newspapers is relatively low (Taylor, et al, 1995). Hence, nearly all students in the classroom can find an article, feature, or even a section that he can read.

This was further described by Pemagbi (1995) in his article where he stated that newspapers can be used in language learning because they teach formal and informal varieties of English. Specifically, editorials and feature articles can be used to teach summarizing and comprehension; various articles teach direct and reported speech for the study of grammar. Articles of various types of writing teach description, analysis, and synthesis, comparison and contrast, process description, and cause and effect. They can be utilized to model paragraphing, writing topic sentence, introductions, and conclusions. Words learned in comic books can be used to create pool of known words for vocabulary study (Taylor, et al., 1995). Students can learn writing by describing the setting, the character, and by summarizing the plot. Other than that, when cartoons are used properly, they have powerful informational and affective impact. Through images, readers can associate words with ideas minimizing the temptation to translate onto one's native tongue (Pint, 1981). Comics create enough atmosphere which makes words stick to the readers' mind because much more that memory is involved.

In the local scene, Diwa Learning Systems Inc., a publisher of various academic magazines, has proven that magazines are indeed attractive and have gained wide readership in both elementary and secondary schools. Some of their magazines used as supplements are: Bato Balani, Salaguinto, and Ating Agham for science and technology; Damayan for Social Studies or Filipino subjects; Alitaptap for civics and culture; and Buhawi for P.E., Health and Music (PEHM).

Further, Quinn (1982) shared his experience of using the Bible to teach figures of speech. He believed that by using figures of speech, it is possible that we can make language for almost anything we want. It is a good source of input because according to Life Magazine, the Bible is the most widely circulated and influential book in human history.

At the University of Southeastern Philippines, the informal reading inventory made by fourth year students of the Bachelor of Arts in English program revealed that the students also read materials other than textbooks. Hence, this study was conducted to find out if the materials affect the communicative competence of college freshmen.

Statement of the Problem. This study aimed to find out the effect of exposure to alternative reading materials on the communicative competence of college freshmen. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the alternative reading materials college freshmen read?
2. What are the features and content of those materials?
3. What is the level of communicative competence of those who are more exposed and less exposed to the alternative reading materials?
4. Is there a significant difference in the level of communicative competence between those who are more exposed and less exposed to the alternative?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework. This study was anchored on the Communicative Theory of Nuttal (1982). He claimed that communicative competence, the ability to use the language appropriately in a given context (Larsen-Freeman, 1986); can be developed by reading extensively and free reading of Krashen (2004). It was also grounded on the idea of reading experts Anderson, et al (1995). They found out that vocabulary learning for children who did much out-of-school reading (8 or more books) was over three times as great as for children who did some reading (3-7 books) and over seven times as great as for children who did little or no reading (0-2 books). Likewise, Littlewood (1981) also believed that a communicative activity (inside or outside the classroom), is an important part of the total learning process. Moreover, Taylor (1983), who based his claims on current research in applied linguistics, stated that most adult learners acquire a second language only to the extent that they are exposed to and actively involved in real meaningful communication in that language.

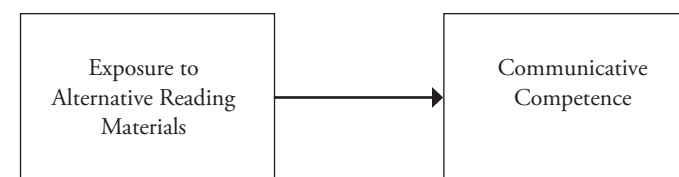


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of the study

Variables of the Study. The independent variable in this study was the exposure of college freshmen to alternative reading materials which are newspapers/tabloids, comics, and pamphlets/booklets. On the other hand, the dependent variable was the communicative competence of college freshmen. Communicative competence is the ability of the person to communicate appropriately in a given context. It can be divided into grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence focuses on sentence-level grammar, discourse and is concerned with intersentential relationships – the cohesiveness and the coherence of the discourse. Sociolinguistic competence requires an understanding of the social context in which the language is used – the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction. Strategic competence involves the use of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to compensate for gaps in the language user's knowledge of the code or for breakdown of communication for other reasons (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Significance of the Study. Building students' reading habit and developing their communicative competence are two of the most difficult tasks of a language teacher. This study could help redirect teachers' orientation – from traditionally selecting their students' reading materials to more real and meaningful ones. It could also encourage teachers to make their materials more learner-centered and more effective in developing their learners' communicative competence.

Scope and Limitation of the Study. The alternative reading materials in this study include the local and national newspapers/tabloids, magazines, periodicals, pocketbooks, the Bible, dictionaries, comics, and pamphlets/booklets containing topics interesting to and read by the college freshmen of the University of Southeastern Philippines at Obrero Campus in Davao City.

METHOD

Research Design. The study used the causal-comparative method of research.

Research Instrument. A survey questionnaire (see appendix) was given to the respondents to identify the alternative reading materials they are exposed to.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument. The questionnaire was validated against the Syllabus Specification Checklist (Yalden, 1986) before it was tried out to a sample of 30 students. This was done to determine the level of difficulty of the test. Those items which did not contribute significantly to the measurement function of the test were discarded.

Procedure in the conduct of the study. The respondents were selected by random sampling. The sample consisted of 263 college freshmen from USEP. The survey was conducted before the communicative test was administered by the researcher. Then, the alternative reading materials were listed and their frequencies were tabulated. The average of the frequency classified the students to either more exposed (5 to 3.5) or less exposed (3.49 to 0). The results of the test were plotted in a normal curve.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Alternative Reading Materials, Their Medium, and Their Frequency of Use

USEP college freshmen read newspapers, magazines, journals, comics, pocketbooks, the Bible, dictionaries, and pamphlets. On the average they read them sometimes.

Features and features of Alternative Reading Materials

Majority of the freshmen are attracted by the content, layout, and consider the author of the printed materials. The content of the alternative reading materials that interests college freshmen. The three most liked are adventure, fiction, and history. Majority of the freshmen are interested in adventure,

entertainment, religion and others as listed in the table while freshmen from the College of Education like adventure, fiction, and religion. Moreover, most freshmen are fond of reading adventure, fiction, and history.

Level of Communicative Competence, the mean, and standard deviation of students' communicative competence test scores

Table 1 shows the Alternative College Freshmen read and the mean, standard deviation, of their communicative competence test scores.

Table 1. The level of communicative competence, the mean, and standard deviation of students' communicative competence test scores

Alternative Reading Materials	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Newspaper	34.67	10.67	29.85	7.66
Magazines	33.6	8.4	30.57	9.04
Journals	33.89	7.57	30.59	9.21
Periodicals	32.67	4.68	31.25	9.48
Pocketbooks	34.6	8.23	29.26	8.8
Bible	33	9.56	29.91	10.5
Dictionary	31.64	9.53	31.21	8.66
Comics	37	9.8	29.87	8.13
Pamphlets	36.13	8.74	30.1	8.6

Those who were more exposed to newspapers have the highest mean of 34.67 or above average level and a standard deviation of 10.67 while those who were less exposed have a mean of 29.85 or average level and a standard deviation of 7.66. Those who were more exposed to journals have a mean of 33.89 or above average level and a standard deviation of 7.57 while the less exposed have 30.59 or average level and a standard deviation of 6.58.

Those who were more exposed to periodicals have a mean of 32.67 or average level and a standard deviation of 4.68 while the less exposed have 31.25 or average level and a standard deviation of 9.48. Those who were more exposed to the Bible have a mean of 33.0 or average level and a standard deviation of 4.68 while the less exposed have 31.25 or average level and a standard deviation of

9.48. Those who were more exposed to comics have the highest mean of 37 or above average level and a standard deviation of 9.8 those who were less exposed have a mean of 29.87 only or average level and a standard deviation of 8.13. Those who were more exposed to pamphlets have the mean of 36.13 or above average level and a standard deviation of 8.74 while those who were less exposed have 30.1 or average level and a standard deviation of 8.6. The overall mean is 31.62 with a standard deviation of 8.39.

Significant Difference in the Level of Communicative Competence between Those Who Are More Exposed and Those Who Are Less Exposed to Alternative Reading Materials

Table 2 shows the Significant Difference in the Level of Communicative Competence between Those Who Are More Exposed and Those Who Are Less Exposed to Alternative Reading Materials.

Table 2. Significant difference in the level of communicative competence between those who are more exposed and those who are less exposed to alternative reading materials

Alternative Reading Materials	Mean	S.D.	n	Mean	S.D.	Sig.
Newspaper	34.67	10.67	26	29.85	7.66	1.59*
Magazines	33.6	8.4	28	30.57	9.04	0.92*
Journals	33.89	7.57	29	30.59	9.21	0.97*
Periodicals	32.67	4.68	32	31.25	9.48	0.39ns
Pocketbooks	34.6	8.23	23	29.26	8.8	1.07*
Bible	33	9.56	33	29.91	10.5	0.62*
Dictionary	31.64	9.53	24	31.21	8.66	0.14ns
Comics	37	9.8	30	29.87	8.13	2.11*
Pamphlets	36.13	8.74	30	30.1	8.6	1.76*

*significant at =0.05

The table shows that those who were more exposed to newspapers/tabloids have a mean of 34.67 while those who are less exposed have a mean of 29.85. The test statistic is 1.59 which is significant at .05 level. This means that on the average, the mean score in communicative competence test of those who were more exposed to newspapers/tabloids was higher than that of the less exposed to newspapers/tabloids. Those who were more exposed to magazines had a mean of 33.6 while those who were less exposed have a mean 30.75. The test statistic is 0.92 which also yielded a significant result at .05 level. Those who were more exposed to journals had a mean of only 30.59. The test statistic is 0.97 which is also significant at .05 level. Those who were more exposed to periodicals have a mean of 31.25. The test statistics is 0.39 which is significant at .05 level. Those who were more exposed to pocketbooks have a mean of 34.6 while those who were less exposed have a mean of only 29.26. The test statistic is 1.07 which is likewise significant at .05 level. Those who were more exposed to Bible have a mean of 33 while those who were less exposed had a mean of 29.91. The test statistic is 0.62 which is significant at .05 level. Those who were more exposed to dictionary have a mean of 31.64 while those who were less exposed have a mean of 31.21. The test statistic is 0.14 which is significant at .05 level. Those who were more exposed to comics have a mean of 37 while those who were less exposed have a mean of 29.87 only. The test statistic is 2.11 which are significant at .05 level. This means that the communicative competence test scores of those who were more exposed to comics are significantly higher than that of the less exposed. Those who were more exposed to pamphlets/booklets have a mean of 36.13 while those who were less exposed have a mean of 30.1 only. The test statistic is 1.76 which is significant at .05 level.

Thus, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the level of communicative competence between those who are more exposed and those who are less exposed to alternative reading materials is rejected. This also means that the mean score of those who were more exposed to pamphlets/booklets was significantly higher than that of the less exposed.

SUMMARY

The findings in this study are the following:

1. The college freshmen read newspapers, magazines, journals, periodicals, pocketbooks, Bible, dictionary, comics, and pamphlets/booklets.
2. On the average, the frequency of use of those materials is sometimes and they read the materials because of their content, language used, and layout.
3. The level of communicative competence of those who are more exposed to alternative reading materials is above average while that of the less exposed is average.
4. There is a significant difference in the level of communicative competence between those who are more exposed and those who are less exposed to alternative reading materials.

Conclusion. College freshmen of the University of Southeastern Philippines are exposed to nine kinds of alternative materials namely, newspapers/tabloids, magazines, journals, periodicals, pocketbooks, Bible, dictionary, comics, and pamphlets/booklets. On the average, college freshmen read alternative reading materials occasionally. The alternative reading materials are socio-culturally appropriate, contain well-graded and comprehensible vocabulary, and visually attractive. Students who are more exposed to alternative reading materials have higher level of communicative competence than those who are less exposed. They have the high level of communicative competence.

Recommendation. Taking the findings and conclusions, the researcher recommend that, teachers of both language and content should use the alternative reading materials in their classrooms or supplement them especially with newspapers, journals, pamphlets/booklets, and comics which are found to have a significant effect on the communicative competence of college freshmen. In addition, the University library should increase its subscriptions to newspapers/tabloids, magazines, journals, periodicals, and comics and provide ample copies pocketbooks, Bible, dictionary, and pamphlets/booklets. Moreover, students may be encouraged to read the alternative reading materials always especially newspapers/tabloids, journals, pamphlets, and comics by using them as classroom materials. Also, teachers may consider the media of those materials in the selection. Likewise, students may be encouraged to read a lot of those materials by providing the classroom with enough copies. Further, the

features and content of those alternative reading materials which interest the students may be considered in the selection of the materials. On the other hand, those who are less exposed may be motivated to read the alternative reading materials to improve their level of communicative competence by setting up in every college a reading room where they can do the reading. Lastly, a similar study may be conducted covering all colleges of the university and possibly other universities to find out if alternative reading materials have a significant effect on the communicative competence of students.

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Language Choice Online: Identity of Overseas Tausug Workers

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ABSTRACT

Language choice is a vital sociolinguistic phenomenon in a multilingual society. It is a recognizable marker of the identity of the person. Deciding on what language to use in everyday communication such as in social media, someone needed to be keen in the language task especially if they lived in a foreign multilingual society. This paper aimed at examining the language choice in the virtual world of overseas Tausug workers in the Middle East. In this qualitative research, the Facebook wall posts from January-March 2015 of 10 overseas Tausug workers and speakers of Bahasa Sug were examined. Moreover, the participants were interviewed to solicit relevant corpora. Findings revealed that in the age of globalization, the overseas Tausug workers proudly use Bahasa Sug to maintain bonding and sense of solidarity, and Arabic language to exercise faith in the virtual world, a strong identity marker of being a Tausug and a Muslim, respectively. The language choice online of the overseas Tausug workers rests on their ethnicity and proficiency.

KEYWORDS: Arabic, Bahasa Sug, language choice, Tausug, virtual world