

DRAW ME A PROVERB: ENHANCING WRITING SKILLS THROUGH WISDOM

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Abstract

Proverbs are believed to have an important role in language teaching as a part of obtaining cultural knowledge, metaphorical understanding, and communicative competence. They have been considered an important part of the fostering of pupils, as they prompt moral values and present common behavior. In 2013 curriculum enacted for senior high school students in Indonesia, the proverb is one of the main materials studied in English subject. This paper aims at presenting how transforming proverbs to pictures and paragraph provides alternative method to help the students understand the meaning as well as to enhance their writing skills. To do this aim, three general phases were applied, namely before the instruction phase, during the instruction phase, and after the instruction phase. The result shows that transforming proverbs to pictures and paragraphs helps the students to convey the culture and wisdom. Moreover, it provides students with a rich source of vocabulary. It also gives them an opportunity of making comparisons between their own proverbs and the English ones, thus broadening their knowledge of the world. Finally, it helps students to write in English in a more natural, native-like way using the fixed expression.

Keywords: picture, proverbs, wisdom, writing skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a language means learning a culture. Proverbs are a part of every language as well as every culture. Proverbs have been used to spread knowledge, wisdom and truths about life from ancient times up until now. They have been considered an important part of the fostering of children, as they signal moral values and exhort common behavior (Hanzén, 2007). When it comes to foreign language learning, proverbs play a role in the teaching as a part of cultural and metaphorical learning. Use of proverbs as part of formulaic language, can enable fluent and natural language production and therefore, teaching proverbs can help to produce language more fluently and naturally which can in turn increase motivation (Porto, 1998 in Niasti & Shahmoradi, 2016).

Byrne (2005) mentions three main functions for proverbs. Firstly, they transmit wisdom and cultural values from one generation to another. Secondly, they advise and warn children about proper and dangerous behavior, i.e. a burnt child fears the fire. Thirdly, many proverbs have a playful and provocative tendency; they embellish speech and cap arguments. All these make proverbs easy to remember and use. Likewise, Mac Dougall (2004) believes that idioms and proverbs can provide a snapshot of other cultures, hence allowing for a more thorough understanding of both language and culture. Given the needs of language learners, their proficiency level, the context of study, and the purpose for language learning, Akbarian (2010) recommends that language teachers introduce proverbs in conjunction with other activities around the topic.

In the national curriculum for senior high school student of Indonesia in General English subject, proverb, along with riddle is included into one of the learning materials need to be taught and mastered as the basic competence for the 10th graders. The fact generates the idea that the curriculum and policy makers are

already aware of the proverbs important position in foreign language learning. Unfortunately, problems occur when teachers are reluctant to teach proverbs for some reasons; (1) proverbs are considered old-fashioned and out-dated, (2) teachers have to choose what to teach within limited time and therefore exclude proverbs in favor of other expressions and phrases, (3) students are not familiar with Indonesian proverbs, let alone English proverbs that doubles the teaching burden. In order to present a solution to some problems previously stated, this best practice introduces the alternative of teaching proverbs through transforming them into pictures and paragraph.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation (Mieder, 2004). Furthermore, Wolfgang Mieder (2004) added that proverbs have been used and should be used in teaching as didactic tools because of their content of educational wisdom. When it comes to foreign language learning, proverbs play a role in the teaching as a part of cultural and metaphorical learning. Linguists also claim that the use of proverbs in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language is important for the learners' ability to communicate effectively.

Some scholars propose the use of proverbs in a range of areas within language teaching: grammar and syntax, phonetics, vocabulary development, culture, reading, speaking and writing. They state that proverbs, besides being an important part of culture, also are an important tool for effective communication and for the comprehension of different spoken and written discourses. It is considered that both the structure and the content of proverbs are useful in ESL teaching especially when it comes to teaching and understanding of culture, as proverbs conveys the values and metaphors shared by a culture. Proverbs are also useful in teaching the differences between spoken and written language, something that often confuses language learners; they use conversational style when they write. Proverbs are one way to help the students to clarify the distinction between oral and written English.

Čermák (1998) distinguished prototypical and non-prototypical use of proverbs in corpus: proverbs used prototypically occur in the beginning or in the ending of a text summarizing a situation or providing a moral, while non-prototypical application of proverbs is considered to be their use in titles, advertisements and written quizzes. Blatná (1998) points out that newspapers, television and radio programmes usually have a tendency to employ only a part of the proverb in the title with a belief that the hearer will recognize it or the full utterance may also be provided further in the text of an article. Furthermore, the practical value of proverbs can be evident from slogans, caricatures, comic books, greeting cards and they also are often used in songs, from traditional folksongs to modern rock (Mieder, 2004).

Work with proverbs and sayings at the lessons not only helps to diversify educational process but also to make it brighter and interesting. Moreover it helps to solve a number of very important educational problems: proverbs in the classroom can improve students' learning experiences, their language skills, and their understanding of themselves and the world. This happens because:

- a. Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to be knowledgeable experts as well as learners.

- b. Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to learn about each other and their shared values.
- c. Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to gain insight as they discuss their experiences and work out their understanding of proverb meanings.
- d. Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to use their home culture as a stepping stone into school culture.
- e. Proverbs provide an opportunity to improve thinking and writing as students both provide and receive information.

3. METHODS

The participants in this study were 40 10-th grade students (i.e., first-year senior high school student) in one class in SMAN 1 Cirebon West Java. There were nine elective English classes in the 10-th grade at the school and the chosen class (10 MIPA 7) was the slowest when it comes to writing activities..

The study was conducted for two weeks in the middle-end of semester 2. The students were given time to answer the questionnaire on their anxiety of writing in English before the instruction phase. They were also given sufficient explanation on the teaching goals and on guidelines about what to accomplished in two weeks, the students participated in 3P (Proverbs-Picture-Paragraph) learning method.

The first period was provided to introduce Proverbs in terms of purpose and existence in language learning as well as comparing the English and Indonesian proverbs. As the first activity, the teacher asked students to find the equivalents of some proverbs in their mother tongue; 1) *Time is money*, 2) *When in Rome do as the Romans do*, 3) *Early bird catches the worms*. The number of proverbs in this activity was kept minimum to give room for more exploration in the next activity.

The second meeting was dedicated to give a brief introduction on how to visualize the proverbs and generate the meaning of it by writing a paragraph. The students submitted the 3P by doing display of their visualized proverbs and paragraph in the form of gallery walk.

In this teaching method, the students were not encouraged to translate the proverbs; they rather asked to understand the meaning of the proverbs. In case that there was/were similar proverbs in Bahasa Indonesia, they might use it as reference. The students were also asked to analyze whether the function of the chosen proverbs were similar in context of different language. It is believed that finding equivalents for proverbs keeps the language learners active and in contact with the languages (Akbarian, 2010). Proverbs carry a lot in terms of worldview, culture, and wisdom of a nation. As Mac Dougall (2004) observes, students “better understand their own language and culture” when they comparatively analyze proverbs.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Writing Anxiety

From the distributed writing anxiety questionnaire that was adapted from Cheng (2004), there are three main points can be highlighted; 1) Anxiety categories, 2) Difficulties during writing process, 3) Factors generating anxiety. In relation to anxiety categories, from 40 students, only 9 students have high anxiety, 24 have fair anxiety, while the other 7 students have low anxiety. For difficulties during writing process, the students mentioned five factors, namely a) inability to organize ones thoughts, b) inability to produce any ideas, c) poor vocabulary, d) poor grammar, e) thinking in Bahasa Indonesia (L1). Furthermore, for factors

generating anxiety, there are four main factors such as teacher, time limit, topic, and peer effect.

The proposed learning activities in this paper is expected to be able to overcome some if not all writing anxiety possessed by the students.

4.2 Proverb to Picture

Visualizing the proverbs help students to overcome their writing anxiety. Pictures generated from the proverbs enabled the students to produce ideas and used the appropriate vocabularies. Furthermore, in the activities, the students were given more time and were able to work in group, so the pressure of time limit and peer effect were minimized. Students were also given the opportunity to choose their own desire proverbs to be transformed into picture. The visual is believed to organize the thoughts and reveal the essence of ones ideas. Rich visual presentation helps the visual thinkers to see more relationship between verbal and visual. Just like what one proverb says, *a picture worth a thousand words*.



Figure 1: Example of visualized proverb

4.3 Proverb to Paragraph

Writing a paragraph based on visualized proverbs is believed to organize the thoughts and reveal the essence of one's ideas. Rich visual presentation helps the visual thinkers to see more relationship between verbal and visual. It is like *killing two birds with one stone*, when students are able to overcome both their poor vocabulary and inability to produce any ideas as well as to organize ones thoughts.

One of the paragraphs created by the students is as follows,

My friend has just moved to Bandung from Papua. She has adapted successfully to Sundanese culture. What she does reminds me of the proverb says, when in Rome do as the Romans do. We need to adapt ourselves to the place where we live so that we can live in peace.

From the above paragraph, it is clear that transforming proverbs to pictures and paragraphs helps the students to convey the culture and wisdom. The paragraph talks about the wisdom of how a person should be able to adapt to the new culture of the place where he/she lives. Moreover, it provides students with a rich source of vocabulary. It also gives them an opportunity of making comparisons between their own proverbs and the English one (Lauhakangas et al., 2010). The proverb chosen

also has its equivalent in Bahasa Indonesia that is, *di mana langit dijunjung, di situ bumi dipijak*, thus broadening their knowledge of the world. Finally, it helps students to write in English in a more natural, native-like way using the fixed expression.

5. CONCLUSION

Teaching proverbs to learners in modern context was seen to be a burden due to very limited creativity of teaching method a teacher had and the perspective that proverbs are difficult to understand. On the other hand, proverbs plays important role in language teaching as a part of obtaining cultural knowledge, metaphorical understanding, and communicative competence. They have been considered an important part of the fostering of pupils, as they prompt moral values and present common behavior. It is expected that the form of teaching method illustrated here will raise language teachers' awareness of the options available. This alternative method is hoped to encourage teachers to experiment with alternative approaches, and take an active role in their own teaching, especially of proverbial expressions. The proverb users have ready-made opinions about urgent questions which they seem to strengthen with suitable proverbs. But in any case the attention of listeners focuses on creditability of the proverb mentioned (Lauhakangas, 2012). The word creativity is very much related to options. Once equipped with options, teachers can confidently take steps towards raising the consciousness of the learners in this aspect.

6. REFERENCES

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