Using Scripted Role-play to Improve Oral English Performance: A Study of Grade
Six Students at Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School, Songkhla

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts
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I hereby certify that this work has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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ชื่อวิทยานิพนธ์	การใช้กิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติแบบมีบทพูดในการพัฒนาด้านการพูด ภาษาอังกฤษ: กรณีศึกษานักเรียนระดับชั้นประถมศึกษาปีที่ 6 โรงเรียน จริยธรรมศึกษามูลนิธิ สงขลา
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สาขาวิชา	การสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษานานาชาติ
ปีการศึกษา	2556

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษ าพัฒนาการด้านการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนไทยระดับประถมศึกษาที่ได้รับการสอนด้วยการฝึกกิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติแบบมีบทพูด โดยมุ่งตอบคำถามวิจัยต่อไปนี้ 1) การใช้กิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติแบบมีบทพูดสามารถพัฒนาความสามารถด้านการพูดของนักเรียนระดับประถมศึกษาได้หรือไม่ 2) มีลักษณะการพูดใดบ้างที่พัฒนาขึ้นด้วยการใช้กิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติแบบมีบทพูดและ 3) นักเรียนสามารถรักษาระดับความสามารถด้านการพูดที่ดีขึ้นได้หรือไม่หลังจากที่ไม่ได้รับการฝึกด้วยการใช้กิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติแบบมีบทพูดเป็นระยะเวลาหนึ่งเดือนกลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ศึกษาประกอบด้วยนักเรียนประถมศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 6 ปีการศึกษา 2555 จากโรงเรียนจริยธรรมศึกษามูลนิธิ อำเภอจะนะ จังหวัดสงขลา จำนวน 20 คน โดยกลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้งหมดผ่านการสัมภาษณ์โดยครูต่างชาติที่สอนภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อวัดระดับความสามารถด้านการพูดของแต่ละคนก่อนที่จะมีการสอนและกลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้งหมดจะถูกสัมภาษณ์โดยครูต่างชาติคนเดิมหลังการสอนอีกครั้งเพื่อเปรียบเทียบความแตกต่างเกี่ยวกับพัฒนาการด้านการพูดของนักเรียนและหลังจากที่นักเรียนว่างเว้นจากการฝึกฝนกิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติเป็นระยะเวลา 1 เดือน กลุ่มตัวอย่างทุกคนจะถูกสัมภาษณ์อีกครั้งเพื่อวัดการรักษาระดับความสามารถในการพูดที่ดีขึ้นในด้านต่างๆ โดยทุกครั้งที่มีการทดสอบด้วยวิธีการสัมภาษณ์จะมีการบันทึกและถอดเทปเสียงบทสนทนาเพื่อการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลตามหลัก Conversation Analysis (CA) และให้คะแนนโดยพิจารณาคุณลักษณะต่อไปนี้ ด้านการออกเสียง ด้านการเน้นเสียงหนักเบา ด้านการใช้คำศัพท์ ด้านความคล่องแคล่ว ด้านความเข้าใจและด้านการโต้ตอบ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในงานวิจัยครั้งนี้ประกอบด้วย 1) เอกสารประกอบการสอน 2) แผนการสอน3) กิจกรรมการสื่อสารด้วยการพูดซึ่งประกอบด้วยการทดสอบการพูดก่อนฝึก กิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติแบบ ไม่มีบทพูด การทดสอบการพูดหลังฝึกและการทดสอบความคงทน

ผลการวิจัยจากการวิเคราะห์เชิงสถิติและการวิเคราะห์บทสนทนาตามแนว   CA
พบว่าการใช้กิจกรรมบทบาทสมมติแบบมีบทพูดสามารถพัฒนาการพูดในด้านต่างๆของนักเรียน
ระดับประถมศึกษาทุกคนที่ศึกษาให้ดีขึ้นได้โดยนักเรียนสามารถพัฒนาการพูดด้านการโต้ตอบ
(response)   กับคู่สนทนาได้ดีที่สุด และพบว่าด้านการเน้นเสียงหนักเบา   (speech   melody)   มี
พัฒนาการที่ดีขึ้นน้อยที่สุดในบรรดาความสามารถในการพูดด้านต่างๆที่ได้ศึกษาเนื่องจากปัญหา
การแทรกแซงของภาษาแม่ การทดสอบภายหลังจากที่นักเรียนไม่ได้รับการฝึกฝนเป็นเวลา   1 เดือน
ยืนยันว่านักเรียนยังคงรักษาระดับความสามารถในการพูดที่ดีขึ้นได้ในทุกด้าน แต่ทว่าพัฒนาการที่ดี
ขึ้นในบางด้านนั้นมีการถดถอยลงจากเดิม โดยเฉพาะด้านการออกเสียง ด้านการเน้นเสียงหนักเบา
และด้านการโต้ตอบ ฉะนั้นใน 3   ด้านที่ได้กล่าวมาข้างต้นนี้ครูผู้สอนควรดูแลเน้นให้นักเรียนได้
ฝึกฝนบ่อยกว่าด้านอื่นๆ เพื่อให้นักเรียนสามารถใช้ภาษาในการพูดสื่อสารได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ
แบบยั่งยืนยิ่งขึ้น

Thesis Title   Using Scripted Role-play to Improve Oral English Performance: A Study of Grade Six Students at Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School, Songkhla

Author   Mr. Ardae Makeh

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study in using scripted role-play activities are to improve Thai primary-level students' oral English performance. The study attempted to determine: a) whether scripted role-play can enhance primary-level students' oral performance; b) which features of the students' talks can be improved through the use of scripted role-play; and c) whether the features improved can be retained in their talks after one month of no practice. The participants in this study were 20 Grade six students from Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School in Chana, Songkhla, in academic year 2012. They were individually interviewed to assess their oral English performance before the treatment and after ten weeks of scripted role-play practice. The students' interviews and role-play conversations were video-recorded for close analysis following Conversation Analysis (CA) principles and rated in the following features: pronunciation, speech melody, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and response. The research instruments employed in this study were 1) teaching materials; 2) lesson plans used in teaching; and 3) oral communication tasks, namely, the pre-test, the role-play activities, the post-test, and the delay test.

The research findings based on statistical and CA analysis showed that the students' oral English performance considerably improved through the use of scripted role-play activities. Frequently being engaged in role-play conversations, the students improved most on the promptness of their response to preceding turns, while speech melody appeared to be the most challenging feature to enhance due to pervasive mother-tongue interference. The findings additionally confirmed the performance improvement of every target speech feature after a period of one month. However, the degree of the performance improvement significantly decreased in three

features, i.e., pronunciation, speech melody, and response. It was suggested that pronunciation, speech melody, and prompt responses require more frequent guided practice than other speech features for more sustainably effective oral communication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This thesis is based on the following papers:

I.   Makeh, A., &Sinwongsuwat, K. (2013). *Using scripted role-play to improve oral English performance: A study of Grade six students at Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School, Songkhla. The 11*[th] *International conference on Developing Real-Life Learning Experience: Learning Innovation for ASEAN.* May 3rd , 2013. Faculty of Industrial Education, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Proceedings, Ladkrabang, Bangkok, Thailand, P17-1.

II.   Makeh, A., &Sinwongsuwat, K., (2013). Improving oral English performance with scripted role-play: A study of Thai primary school students.

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ArdaeMakeh
Graduate students, Faculty of Liberal of Arts,
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Dear Mr. Makeh

On behalf of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, we are pleased to inform you that your paper on **USING SCRIPTED ROLE-PLAY TO IMPROVE ORAL PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF PRATHOM SIX STUDENTS AT CHARIYATHAMSUKSA FOUNDATION SCHOOL, SONGKHLA** has been accepted. We would like to invite you to present your paper at **the 11th International Conference on Developing Real-Life Learning Experiences: Learning Innovation for ASEAN (DRLE2013) that will be held in Bangkok, Thailand on the 3rd of May, 2013.**

We are looking forward to seeing you in Bangkok. Your participation in this event is cordially appreciated. Please contact the Secretariat of the Conference for registration at Email: drle2013inter@gmail.com or Tel +668-5260-7966, Fax +66-2329-8435

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Yours Sincerely,
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Thank you for submitting the manuscript which is entitled **"Improving oral English performance with scripted role-play: A study of Thai primary school students"** **International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature.** The paper is received and it is going to be sent to reviewers soon. You will be notified regarding the review result within four to five weeks approximately. **Your manuscript ID. isIJALEL 14-03-01-19.**Please always quote your Paper ID in all the future inquiries or communications.

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SYMBOLS

Transcription convention adapted from Seedhouse (2004) and Schegloff (2007)

[	Point of overlap onset
]	Point of overlap termination
=	(a) Turn continues below, at the next identical symbol
	(b) if inserted at the end of one speaker's adjacent turn, indicates that there is no gap at all between the two turns
	(c) Indicates that there is no interval between adjacent utterances
(0.5)	Numbers in parentheses indicate silence, represented in tenths of a second; what is given here indicates 0.5 second of silence
(.)	Very short untimed pause; ordinarily less than 0.2 second
word	Speaker emphasis
-	A hyphen after a word or part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption
?	Rising intonation, not necessarily a question
.	Low rising intonation, or final, not necessarily the end of a sentence
( )	A stretch of unclear or unintelligible speech
Wo:rd	Colons show that speaker has stretched the preceding sound
°word°	Material between "degree signs" is quieter than the surrounding talk

((word))   Transcriber's comments

[gibee]   In the case of inaccurate pronunciation of an English word, an approximation of the sound is given in square brackets

Ja ((tr.:yes))   Non-English words are italicized and followed by an English translation in double parentheses

→   Marks features of special interest

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, English has become the primary language for international communication; it plays recognizable roles in almost every society, whether large or small, across the globe. Today, everyone needs to know English in order to get connected with world communities and to exploit their knowledge resources. Indeed, the use of English has been increasing throughout the world. English language competence, especially the ability to communicate in English, has, therefore, become a primary concern of teaching programs launched at any education level in countries trying to advance and develop more knowledgeable citizens, particularly leaders of the modern world. Although ones' opportunities to communicate in English are apparently increasing (Okada, 2009) and extending across the globe, success in the endeavor has proven not to be achievable simply by the government's policy reinforcement, especially in countries in which English traditionally serves as a foreign language such as Thailand.

The country has in fact given the highest priority to English language learning at all levels of education and the Thai formal educational system even requires all the students to learn English for approximately ten years or more from primary to university levels (Ministry of Education, 1996). Nevertheless, the majorities of Thai students still have low oral English proficiency and are unable to use English effectively. This is due, in part, to their English education since early primary level in which the students were mostly taught in rigid grammar- and teacher-dominated classrooms. In fact, very often in an English language classroom in Thailand, the target language is also translated into their L1. Moreover, a typical primary-level language class in the country usually provided so little opportunity for the learners to communicate meaningfully and develop even basic communication skills. The students were therefore inclined to be passive learners, primarily listening to the teacher (Kunlaya, 1991).This problem does not seem to fade away easily, given the persistence of such teaching approaches.

However, as the shift of language teaching goals has been towards communicative proficiency rather than merely the mastery of language structures since 1996, the Thai curriculum apparently is serving the students' needs of English

for communication in the globalized world better. For English teachers in the revised curriculum, it is therefore undoubtedly essential to find appropriate ways to engage the learners in more talk from the beginning level so that they can develop basic oral skills necessary for real-life communication. The language classroom should accordingly be shifted from form-based towards task-based teaching and learning, with emphasis on promoting language development in a learner-centered context (Kim, 2009), as well as towards communicative language teaching with the focus on promoting communication skills through more loosely structured communicative activities (Marques, 1998). Today's language classrooms are thus mostly aimed at providing opportunities for learners to interact in the target language in the pedagogical process.

Many English teachers have in fact come to realize that by employing the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, they can make language learning more active and teaching more effective since this approach focuses on giving students opportunities to use the target language to communicate meaningfully (Yoon, 2004). In a CLT classroom, students are involved in a wide range of communicative activities, yet the most popular one to enhance their oral communication skills appears to be role-play. In fact, role-play activities have long been recognized by teachers and trainers not only within but across disciplines as a powerful technique for skills and attitude development in the face-to-face environment (Carroll, 1995; Craig, 1987; Eitington, 1989; Gredler, 1994; Ladousse, 1987; McGill & Beaty, 1995; Shaw, Corsini, Blake, & Mouton, 1980). For instance, for pharmacy students, role-play has been used as a means of helping them to develop skills in communication, consultation, and medication history-taking (Rao, 2011). In business education, it has been used to promote learning especially of skills valuable to sales and teamwork (Loe, Selden, & Widmier, 2007). In a communication classroom, role-play activities have also been shown to be effective in helping improve students' speaking ability (Alwahibee, 2004; Ding & Liu, 2009; Klanrit, 2007; Ments, 1999). In short, role-play has been considered an effective approach in a communicative classroom to developing skills in active listening, problem-solving, working as a team, and communicating effectively, among others (Rao, 2011).

The role-play activities typically used in a second language classroom can be classified into two types: scripted and non-scripted role-plays. In scripted role-play, the students have to act out through the script given on assigned situations by using the target language in pairs or in small groups. In non-scripted role-play, on the other hand, they are asked to act out a conversation in front of the class without preparing or writing the script in advance (Byrne, 1986). When doing the scripted role-play, the students have time to prepare the scripts and rehearse them to achieve the ability to speak smoothly. Students, especially with low English proficiency, often find scripted role-plays easier to handle, thus being a more popular choice in English conversation classrooms (Chotirat, 2010). Non-scripted role-plays, on the other hand, seem to be far too complicated, given the fact that students have limited knowledge of the target language and little opportunity to prepare for it.

Scripted role-play therefore seems to be a more appropriate choice of activity to promote meaningful communication in a low-level language classroom. Nevertheless, there have been few studies that examined the implementation of this role-play type in primary-school students in Thai contexts. This study, therefore, tried to fill the gap by determining whether and how scripted role-plays can help improve oral English performance of Thai primary-school students and whether the improvement is really sustainable.

1.1 Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this study are:

1.   To investigate whether scripted role-plays can improve primary school students' oral English performance.

2.   To examine the features of students' talk that improve through the use of the scripted role-play.

3.   To examine the performance sustainability of the features that improved in the students' talk after one month of no scripted role-play practice.

1.2 Research questions

1. Can scripted role-play improve primary-school students' oral English performance?

2. If so, which features of the students' talk are enhanced through the use of scripted role play?

3. Can the improved features be sustained in their talk after one month of no scripted role-play practice?

1.3 Definition of terms

The following are the important terms used in this study:

1. **Role-play** is the classroom communicative activity that provides students the opportunity to act out the given role in specific situations by using the target language.

2. **Scripted role plays** are the role play activities that allow students to rehearse before acting out the roles in the scripts given.

3. **Performance sustainability test** is the test to measure the students' oral English performance after one month of no role-play teaching or training.

4. **Oral English performance** is the ability of the students to speak English in a particular context.

5. **Oral assessment rubric** is the tool used to evaluate students' oral performance in pre- and post- tests as well as scripted role-play activities. Adapted from Tsang & Wong (2002), it contains six features of talks, each of which is accompanied by 5 performance-level descriptors (see Appendix B).

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

According to Brown (2001), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to teaching in both second and foreign languages that emphasizes simulating real-life communication in the classroom. Originating from the changes in the British Situational Language Teaching approach dating from the late 1960s, in which language was taught by practicing basic structures in meaningful situation-based activities (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), CLT stemmed from the socio-cognitive perspective of the socio-linguistic theory, with an emphasis on meaning and communication, and a goal to develop learners' *communicative competence*.

Referring to both the processes and goals in L2 classroom learning and teaching, CLT is considered an approach rather than a method given the fact that despite theoretical consistency pertaining to language and learning, when it comes to teaching design and procedure, there is much greater room for individual interpretation and variation than permitted by most method (Richard & Rodgers,1987). Since the concept of *communicative competence*, which encompasses both social and cultural knowledge of the target language as well as the ability to put it into use in communication, was first introduced by Hymes in the mid-1960s, many researchers have helped develop theories and practices of the CLT approach (Brown, 1987; Hymes, 1971; Littlewood, 1981; Nunan, 1987 & 1989; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Widdowson, 1978). CLT has in fact replaced the previous grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods in most L2 classrooms.

CLT classrooms are generally focused on all language components with the aim of developing grammatical, functional and sociolinguistic competence. Since knowledge and learning are viewed as socially constructed through meaning negotiation, another important dimension of CLT is learner-centred and experience-based. In other words, learners in a CLT classroom are seen as active participants, rather than passive recipients of information provided, where as the teachers play different roles such as a communication facilitator, an independent participant, a needs analyst, and a group process manager (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) to create enriching learning experiences for the learners.

2.2   Role-play: A communicative activity in a CLT classroom

According to the Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995), role is defined as the person whom an actor represents in a film or play, while role play is a method of acting out particular ways of behaving or pretending to be other people who deal with new situations. It is used in training courses in language learning and psychotherapy. Ladousse (1987) illustrated that when students assume a role, they play a part (either their own or somebody else) in a specific situation. 'Play' means the role is taken on in a safe environment in which students are as inventive and playful as possible. Via role-play activities, learners will get various experiences; in other words, they can learn language structures and functions, and have opportunity to practice speaking in various forms or situations. Moreover, they can learn to work in groups, have more chances to practice speaking and interact with others in appropriate situations, as well as build self-esteem and self-confidence while using the target language.

According to Crookal & Oxford (1990), there is little consensus on the terms used in the literature on role play and simulation. A few of the terms often used interchangeably in the literature are simulation, games, role play, simulation games, role-play simulation, and role-playing games. For a language classroom, the term *role play* is often used to refer to an activity which gives the students the opportunity to practice the target language they may need outside the classroom (Livingstone, 1983). It is a speaking activity which improves communicative competence and provides practice in contexts which simulate real-life experience.

In role-playing, each student is representing and experiencing a character known in everyday life. The students can either be themselves or another person in a particular situation (Ments, 1999). The role-play is a technique that affords language learners an opportunity to practice a new structure in the context of natural communicative usage (Al-Mutawa & Kailani, 1989).While dealing with personal concerns, problems, and behavior actively in the role-play, students are allowed to improve their interpersonal and communication skills. According to Lucantoni (2002), role play can be very enjoyable for learners and can provide excellent opportunities for using language in real-life situations. It is a communicative activity

allowing the learner to use spontaneous language. It also helps learners to develop real life speaking skills. Ments (1999) and Livingstone (1983) contend that role play increases learners' motivation and involvement in the learning process. It lends itself well to mixed ability groups and provides learners with opportunities to practice and develop communication strategies. Role play also requires the learners to use their imagination, background knowledge and communication skills. Larsen-Freeman (1986) points out that role plays, whether structured or less structured, are important in the communicative approach because they give learners an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles.

2.3 Related studies on role-play activities in language classrooms

Many studies have been carried out to investigate the improvement of the oral performance of EFL students with different levels of English proficiency via communicative activities used in the classroom. Among the popular choice of communicative tasks is role-play. There are many studies investigating the effects of role-play activities used in language classrooms on EFL students' oral proficiency. For instance, Alwahibee (2004) studied the results of using role-play activities for improving the speaking ability of Arab students in a period of eight weeks. The results revealed that speaking proficiency of the students in the experimental group who studied the target language before performing role-play in pairs improved since the role-play activities provided them opportunities to use the target language and create a collaborative classroom learning atmosphere.

Klanrit (2007) compared the effectiveness of role-play and information-gap activities in improving students' oral abilities. The results showed that both types of activities in the experiment supported the improvement of the students' speaking abilities in different ways. The students improved little in new elements of the target language, especially new vocabulary and useful expressions in role-play activities. Thus, role-play may not help improve students' language use much.

Chotirat (2010) studied repair organization in English conversations of 26 Thai college students practicing scripted and non-scripted role-plays. Data of videotaped role-play conversations were analyzed primarily according to Conversation Analysis (CA) principles. The findings showed that both types of role-play activity differently affected the frequency of and the students' behavior in organizing repair to deal with problematic turns in conversation. In non-scripted role-plays, repair was found more frequently and organized differently, approximating features of talk found in naturally-occurring conversation. On the other hand, repair in scripted role-plays was often related to students' attempts to adhere to the original scripts prepared in advance, for instance by fixing turns misplaced and deviant from the script. Non-scripted role-play was thus recommended as a choice in improving students' oral proficiency, especially to help them fulfill the ultimate goals of meaningful, naturally-occurring conversation.

Rodpradit (2012) investigated the impact of using scripted and non-scripted role-play activities with twelve engineering staff members of a hotel in Phuket. An actual interaction was used as a pre- and post- test to evaluate students' oral English performance at the beginning and the end of the study. The results showed that both scripted and non-scripted role-play activities helped to improve their oral performance, indicated by post-test scores significantly higher than pre-test ones. However, the students' oral performance improved more among the students trained with non-scripted role-plays especially in terms of accent and comprehension, while the students practicing scripted ones got better only in vocabulary. It was suggested that the non-scripted role-play activity better contributed to the development of oral English performance of Thai adult learners than the scripted one.

To conclude, role-play is an achievable way to improve students' speaking proficiency as it not only helps create a collaborative learning atmosphere but also provides the students a platform to communicate and solve problems that likely occur in their real-life situations. Previous studies have proven the effectiveness of using role-play in enhancing adult learners' oral English performance. Few studies have however investigated the use of role-play in very young learners. Additionally, while constant role-play practice especially of the non-scripted type may be an

effective means of developing the oral proficiency of adult learners, scripted role-plays will likely suit very young learners better, given their limited language competence.

2.4 Conversation Analysis (CA)

Conversation Analysis (CA) is an approach to studying natural conversation by embracing both verbal and non-verbal conduct in social action in interaction. CA was originally developed principally by Harvey Sack, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson in the mid1960s (Sinwongsuwat, 2007). It focused primarily on investigating social order constructed in everyday social interaction between people. CA studies yield descriptions of recurrent structures and practices of all social interactions such as turn taking or sequence structure, as well as those more specific and having to do with particular actions such as asking questions or making complaints. They have come to focus not only on ordinary conversation but institutional talk, attempting to illuminate basic aspects of human sociality that reside in and operate through talk and the ways in which specific social institutions are invoked in talk.

Some CA studies have as their topics the organization of actions, while many conversational analytical studies focus on fundamental aspects of conversational organization that make any action possible. These include turn-taking, repair (i.e., the ways of dealing with problems of hearing, speaking, or understanding), the general ways in which sequences of action are built, and the ways in which the participants of interaction manage their relation to the utterances through gaze and body posture. Sacks et al. (1974), for instance, outlined the rules of turn taking in conversation. That is, the speaker is initially entitled to one *turn constructional unit.* The participants in interaction orient to the completion of such a unit as a *transition-relevance place*, where speaker change may occur. Simply put, one speaker is talking and then stops and another speaker is talking and stops and so on. The explication of these rules has massive consequences for the analysis of social

interaction and many institutional settings involve specific applications of these rules (Drew & Heritage, 1992b).

Single acts are parts of larger, structurally organized entities that are called sequences (Schegloff, 2006) and the most important sequence is known as *adjacency pair* which consists of two actions the first of which ("first pair part") is typically performed by one participant and the second ("second pair part") by another participant. Examples of adjacency pairs are question-answer, greeting-greeting, request-grant/refusal, and invitation acceptance/declination. The relations between the first and second pair parts is strict; if the second pair part does not come forth, the first speaker can repeat the first action, or seek explanations for the fact that the second is missing. The different functions of adjacency pairs include, for example, starting and closing conversations, making moves in conversations, and constructing remedial exchanges. For many adjacency pairs, there are alternative second pair-parts (Seedhouse, 2004), which do not show the same significance, thus the concept of *preference organization*. For example, responsive actions which agree with, or accept, positions taken by a first action tend to be performed more straightforwardly and faster than actions that disagrees with, or declines, those positions (Pomerantz, 1984). One consequence of this is that agreement and acceptance are promoted over their alternatives, and are more likely to be the outcome of the sequence. Pre-sequences are also a component of preference organization and contribute to this outcome (Schegloff, 2007).

The repair organization is another type of interactional organization which CA studies focus on, dealing with how parties in conversation deal with problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding (Seedhouse, 2004; Sinwongsuwat, 2007). Repair segments are often classified by who initiates repair (self or other), by who resolves the problem (self or other), and by how it unfolds within a turn or a sequence of turns. The repair organization is also a self-righting mechanism in social interaction. Participants in conversation seek to correct the trouble source by initiating self repair and exhibit a preference for repair by the speaker of the trouble source over other repair.

2.5 Oral proficiency assessment

Oral proficiency assessment is an assessment of overall ability to communicate in a second language in both professional and social settings often with the aim of determining learners' readiness to begin a language course in an institution (May, 2000). This assessment is often carried out on recorded conversation for reliability and record-keeping purposes. It focuses particularly on learners' ability to fulfill communicative tasks or functions in L2 conversation, as well as the linguistic accuracy and fluency of their language use in given conversational contexts.

According to National Standards in Foreign Language Education (1999), communicative second language teaching at every level focuses on the development of language proficiency in four distinct skills: written language, reading proficiency, listening comprehension, and oral language production. Normally, the first three skills are evaluated in the language classroom through formal assessment, whereas spoken language is often assessed less formally. In oral performance assessment, teachers need not only useful and flexible rubrics for scoring (Foster, Tonkyn, & Wigglesworth, 2000) but also more time for individual learner assessment (Flewelling, 2002).

For English language proficiency assessment, there are two types of rubrics often used to assess spoken language, namely, generic and task-specific rubrics. Generic rubrics provide criteria to rate students' oral performance on features of language production such as comprehensibility, accuracy, and vocabulary. If the generic rubric does not work well, instructors can create a task-specific rubric or checklist that covers features of language use related to the fulfillment of a certain task. In carrying out communicative tasks such as role-play, the scoring rubric may include initiating and responding to turns, performing particular actions, using voice and the like. In this research, the rubric used was adapted from that of Tsang & Wong (2002), combining features of both generic and task-specific rubrics. Speech melody, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension were judged on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 being unacceptable to 5 excellent. Pronunciation and response to turns were the two

features added in order to make the rubric more task-specific and relevant to speech features produced by the learners.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This part discusses the research methodology employed in this study. Firstly, there is an explanation of research participants involved in the study. Then the research instruments and data analysis are described respectively.

3.1 Participants

The research participants were 20 Grade six students at Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School. They were taking English as a core course of a foreign language required for primary-level students. The ages of the students ranged from 11-13.They were selected by the purposive sampling method for the treatment. All of the participants had been interviewed face-to-face by a foreign teacher in order to determine their oral English proficiency before role-play training.

In this study, the 20 students were given the role-play treatment by the researcher as their course teacher with the aim of improving their oral skills. Each week in the first two sessions, the students were given lessons according to the teaching plans prepared, and they were engaged in role-play activity in the third session. In the role-play training, they had to act out the conversation following the weekly script given by the teacher. Each week, they were taught a different topic and given a different role-play situation to practice in class, and their role-play performances were video-recorded for subsequent assessment by their teachers.

3.2 Instruments

There were three sets of instruments used in this study: teaching materials, lesson plans and oral communication tasks.

3.2.1 Teaching materials

The teaching material used in the class consisted of two commercial books. One of the books, *Say Hello 6,* was provided by the school's academic department and another one *Conversation in Daily Life* was selected by researcher. These two textbooks were selected and used in creating situation cards and designing the role-play activities. The school textbook consisted of ten units, five of which were selected to design role-play activities together with some chapters from the commercial book with matching content. The situation cards for scripted role-plays were prepared by the researcher for the role-play training based on the content of the units taught each week. The researcher made sure that the topics chosen and the situations designed fit local and cultural contexts in which the students lived.

3.2.2 Lesson plans

Ten lesson plans altogether were designed by the researcher for teaching throughout the semester. Each lesson plan had a duration of three hours. Each week, apart from regular teaching the subjects would be engaged for one hour in the scripted role-play activity. The lesson plans were constructed according to the objectives of each unit and each teaching plan described teaching methods covering the common three stages of teaching: presentation, practice, and production (see Appendix A). All lesson plans were commented on by the researcher's supervisory committee for accuracy and appropriateness before being applied to the class.

3.2.3 Oral communication tasks

In this study, there were four oral communication tasks in which the students were engaged, namely, a pre-test, role-play treatment, a post-test, and a delay test. The students' oral English performance in each of these activities was recorded and later assessed using the same oral assessment rubric adapted from the checklist of conversation performance proposed in Tsang & Wong (2002).The evaluation form

with scoring criteria was provided for two teacher raters, i.e., the researcher and a foreign teacher, for rating six speech features(See Appendix B): speech melody (suprasegmentals/stress and intonation), vocabulary (use of words and expression), fluency (speech flow), comprehension (accuracy and comprehensibility of language use), pronunciation (segmental or individual sounds), and response (promptness of turn initiation). Each feature was scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very poor/unacceptable), 2 (poor), 3 (average), 4 (good) to 5 (excellent). The comments from the teacher to students on each topic would be written on the whiteboard in the third hour of weekly wrap-up after the role-play practice so that all the students could notice which areas to improve in their subsequent role-play performances.

The students' talks elicited through these oral activities were not only videotaped for subsequent assessment but also transcribed for close analysis to verify performance differences.

3.2.3.1 Pre-test

Before the training began, a pre-test was conducted in which the conversation between the student and a foreign teacher was elicited to measure an individual student's oral English performance. In the pre-test conversation, all the student participants were asked about their personal information and the conversations were recorded not only for subsequent assessment but also for later transcription and analysis primarily following Conversation Analysis (CA) principles. The scores of each student from the pre-test given by two raters, i.e., the foreign teacher and the researcher, were averaged out and compared with those average scores from the post-test in order to determine whether the student's oral English performance was improved after being trained in the scripted role-play activity throughout the semester. The pre-test score was rated by the researcher and a foreign English teacher and then scores from both raters were combined to find the average score of the performance.

3.2.3.2 Role-play treatments

In this study, the role-play treatment was used for improving the students' oral performance. Throughout the semester, the participants were required to perform ten scripted role-play conversations in different situations based on the weekly content taught in the third hour. The participants performed the role-play in pairs after being taught all necessary vocabulary and related content. The conversations covered ten different topics, namely, asking information, meeting new friends, asking about favorite things, at the supermarket, at a restaurant, at a sports complex, at a clinic, at the zoo, going for a picnic, and going to the park. Each scripted role-play conversation was videotaped for subsequent scoring and close analysis based primarily on CA principles by two raters to see the students' oral performance improvement while practicing.

3.2.3.3 Post-test

Once the students completed ten lessons with role-play training, each was required to talk with the same foreign teacher again in the post-test to see individual improvement. The same assessment method was used to assess their performance; the scores were given by the same two raters using the same rubric. The videotaped conversations were also transcribed for close analysis.

3.2.3.4 Delay test

After a one-month period of no role-play training, the delay test was conducted to measure the students' performance sustainability. As in the pre- and post- test, each student was required to have a conversation with the same foreign teacher using similar questions. Their performance was recorded and scored the same way by two raters to determine whether the improved speech features could really be sustained. Subsequently, the scores were compared with those from the post-test to see performance improvement sustainability of each speech feature assessed.

3.3 Data analysis

To answer Research Question 1, 2 and 3 not only the *t*-test was used to determine the differences between the mean scores from the pre- and post-tests, and the post- and delay tests of each participant, but close analysis of the students' video-recorded conversations was also undertaken to identify which conversation features had improved primarily based on Conversation Analysis principles.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Effectiveness of scripted role-plays in enhancing learners' oral English performance

The video-recorded role-play activities, the pre- and post-tests scores obtained from face-to-face conversations between each participant and a foreign English teacher showed that the scripted role-play activity can really improve the participants' oral performance.

As shown in Table 1, regarding the first research question concerning the ability to improve the students' oral English performance, the results indicated that scripted role-play activities could significantly enhance the oral English performance of the participants at the level of 0.01 (*t*=28.86), indicated by the comparison between the total of the pre-test and post-test mean scores, i.e., 1.61 and 3.80 respectively.

Table 1 *Comparison between the pre-test and the post-test scores from face-to-face interviews*

	Features	Pre-test		Post-test		*t* Value		Sig. (2-tailed)
		X	SD.	X	SD.			
1	Speech melody	**1.63**	0.63	**3.63**	1.01	-12.65	**	0.00
2	Vocabulary	1.55	0.72	3.78	1.15	-10.02	**	0.00
3	Fluency	**1.45**	0.69	**3.75**	1.16	-11.50	**	0.00
4	Comprehension	1.68	0.69	3.80	1.14	-11.75	**	0.00
5	Pronunciation	1.73	0.66	3.90	0.99	-13.00	**	0.00
6	Response	**1.63**	0.74	**3.93**	1.03	-11.90	**	0.00
7	Total	**1.61**	0.68	**3.80**	1.07	-28.86	**	0.00

** significant at 0.01 level

4.2 Distinct features of participants' oral performance enhanced through scripted role-play

As far as the distinct features of the oral performance are concerned, the statistical results also showed that the significant improvement at the level of 0.01 could be observed in all the features assessed. However, indicated by the pre- and post-test score differences, the degree of improvement varied among the features; speech melody appeared to be the most challenging to improve, whereas fluency and responses to turns were more readily enhanceable through the scripted role-play practice.

It was not at all surprising that the participants faced most difficulty in mastering speech melody, which concerns suprasegmental features or distinctive

patterns of vocal melody such as pitch, stress and intonation (Cruttenden, 1997; Crystal, 1991). Just like the pronunciation of L2 vowel and consonant sounds, these features seem to be more resistant to acquisition due to not only their limited exposure to the target language but also the influence of the dominant language in the learners' repertoire. And especially for young learners at this level, these suprasegmental sounds are even more difficult to master given the immaturity of their articulatory organs.

Both fluency and response to turn, on the other hand, were much easier for the young learners to improve, indicated by the biggest pre- and post-test score differences. Through the regular rehearsal of the role-plays with their peers, the learners became more fluent and could respond to turns more promptly. In line with, e.g., Freed (1995), Segalowitz and Freed (2004), this indicates that the more frequently the learners are engaged in meaningful conversation practice, the better their language flow and their interaction will become. Additionally, it was also noticeable that the students with better reading fluency memorized the script with ease and performed better in a role-play. Initial reading proficiency, therefore, seems to also affect the level of improvement in the oral performance of each student (Simoes, 1996).

4.3 Sustainability of the performance features improved

Regarding the sustainability of the features improved, as seen in the statistical results shown in Table 2 below, all the aspects of the learners' speaking performance remained significantly better than in the pre-test, even though after a period of one month of no role-play practice, the overall performance significantly dropped, indicated by the significant score difference between the post- and the delay test at the level of 0.01 ($t = 6.21$). The degree of improvement sustainability, particularly in features such as response, speech melody, and pronunciation considerably decreased.

Table 2 *Comparison between the post-test and delay test scores from face-to-face interviews*

	Features	Post		Retention		*t* Value		Sig. (2-tailed)
		X	SD.	X	SD.			
1	Speech melody	3.63	1.01	3.40	1.15	2.93	**	0.01
2	Vocabulary	3.78	1.15	3.65	1.19	1.75		0.10
3	Fluency	3.75	1.16	3.60	1.28	2.04		0.06
4	Comprehension	3.80	1.14	3.68	1.22	2.03		0.06
5	Pronunciation	3.90	0.99	3.70	1.03	2.63	*	0.02
6	Response	3.93	1.03	3.68	1.18	3.68	**	0.00
7	Total	3.80	1.07	3.62	1.16	6.21	**	0.00

* significant at 0.05 level

** significant at 0.01 level

As shown in the table, the learners' speech melody score of 3.63 in the post test was lowered to 3.40 in the delay test and response scores of 3.93 in the post test dropped to 3.68 in the delay test. Accordingly, the students' performance in these features significantly declined after one month of no practice. Unsurprisingly, it could be seen that promptness in responding to turns is unsustainable without regular interaction. Similarly, more complex and more resistant to acquisition, speech melody requires not only frequent but more focused training, whereas the production of individual sounds seems to be a little easier to retain once mastered, indicated by the decrease in learners' pronunciation scores from 3.90 in the post-test to 3.70 in the delay test at the significant level of 0.05.

Unlike speech melody, pronunciation, and response to turns, the students' performance in terms of fluency and comprehension however continued to hold as long as the learners could understand and still remember the conversations practiced. Apparently, the feature the improvement of which was most retainable was vocabulary. Via frequent role-play practice with explicit instruction of words and their meanings in context, the learners could most easily maintain their lexical knowledge.

Additionally, there seemed to be gender differences in performance improvement and retention of the features previously discussed. Girls outperformed boys in all the features. The latter unsurprisingly could not maintain their improved performance as they would never practice conversing after finishing their in-class role-play activity and simply read the English textbook in preparation for the speaking tests. Boy students were thus often assigned to the lower-proficiency group than girls.

4.4. Performance improvement based on close conversation analysis

Close analysis of the video-recorded conversations in the pre- and post-tests additionally affirmed that the young learners trained in communicative activities such as scripted role-plays were obviously better-developed in their conversation skills. The students' improvement was observable in such speech features as higher voice volume, the absence of a pause or a smile characteristic of dispreferred responses prior to the answering second pair-part turn, the use of fillers as a delay device in lieu of the pause or smile, sequence opening, extending and closing, turn size, overlap, and repair initiation, which are illustrated in the following excerpts taken from the pre- and post-conversation tests with a foreign teacher.

In Excerpt 1, Bun interacted with her foreign teacher Sulaiman before she received the lessons and practiced scripted role-play. After opening the dialogue with greeting, the teacher asked a number of general questions and allowed Bun mainly to respond to the questions, obviously playing the dominant role in opening, directing and closing the conversation.

(1) [Pre-test: Foreign teacher-Student]

1	T:		Hello what is your name?
2	Bun:		=My name is Buntharika
3	T:		Buntharika where do you live Buntharika?
4→	Bun:	◦	I live in Khaonoy◦
5	T:		again
6→	Bun:	◦	I live in Khaonoy◦
7	T:		I live in Khaonoy.
8	Bun:		I live in Khaonoy
9	T:		Where is Khaonoy I don't know what class are you?
10→	Bun:		◦Six◦
11	T:		what class are you?
12→	Bun:		◦Six slash one◦
13	T:		six slash one very good what is your teacher's name?
14→	Bun:		((Smile))
15→	T:		again speak louder <u>what</u> is your teacher's name?
16	Bun:		Teacher Sulaiman
17	T:		Teacher Sulaiman teaches what language?
18→	Bun:		(.)
19→	T:		<u>Teacher Sulaiman teaches what language</u>? *Teacher*
20			*Sulaiman sorn arai, sornwichaarai?*
21→	Bun:		Subject English
22	T:		Subject English very good sit down

As shown in the excerpt, particularly in lines 4, 6, 10 and 12, Bun mostly responded to the teacher in a low voice. The latter, therefore, had to get his student to deliver the answers again more loudly. In another sequence in which the teacher asked her the name of her classroom teacher, the student first just smiled in response to the question, prompting the teacher to repeat the question again, shown in lines 14 and 15 respectively. And when the teacher asked her the subject the classroom teacher taught, the student failed to respond, creating a micro pause in line 18 and prompting another question repetition by the teacher, to which the student delivered the answer, *subject English,* in Thai word order.

In contrast, in the post-interview, shown in Excerpt 2, the same student noticeably became more fluent. She could promptly deliver appropriate responses to the foreign teacher, indicated by the latching turns in lines 24, 26, 28, 34 and 36. The student produced neither pauses nor unclear answers, and made use of fillers such as *uhm,* as in line 32, as a turn-holding, delay device rather than merely a pause.

(2) **[Post-test: Foreign teacher-Student]**

23	T:	Hello what is your name?
24→	Bun:	= hi, my name is Buntharika
25	T:	where do you live Buntharika?
26→	Bun:	=I live in Khaonoy
27	T:	what class are you?
28→	Bun:	=Six slash one
29	T:	six slash one very good what is your class teacher's name?
30	Bun:	((Smile)) Teacher Sainee
31	T:	teacher Sainee teaches what subject?
32→	Bun:	Uhm: Arabic

33	T:	do you have best friends?
34→	Bun:	=yes, I have.
35	T:	What is your best friend's name?
36→	Bun:	=Soyfaa
37	T:	ok thank you

The improvement can also be observed when peer interactions in the first and the final weeks were compared. Excerpts 3 and 4 respectively illustrate the conversation performance of the low- and high-proficiency students during the first week of role-play training. As can be observed, the interaction between low-proficiency students is characterized by several pauses, found in lines 44, 45, 47 and 49, as well as repair, as in lines 38, 44, 45, 48, and 50.Both low-proficiency parties also mispronounced words in almost every turn as shown in the square brackets. The students also resorted to their first language in lines 38, 45, and 50 when they tried to verbatim recall the original script. Additionally, they failed to close the sequence and it took them a long while to finish the conversation.

(3) [1st week's peer interaction: Male-male]

38→	Hilmi:	Hi hello or ((*mai chai*)) Hello
39		"no"
40	Wasil:	=Hi.
41→	Hilmi:	What [is] your name?
42	Wasil:	My name is Wassil.
43→	Hilmi:	What your [address]
44→	Wasil:	My [address] (.) my [address] in (.) my [address is] 148

45→	Hilmi:	[What] (.) ((*araileah*)) [what's] your number?
46		"what"
47→	Wasil:	My (.)
48→	Hilmi:	[phone] number
49→	Wasil:	my [phone] number [is] (0.5) 0 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8
50→	Hilmi:	Where I come [from?] ((*Mai nah*)) where are you come
51		[from?]
52→	Wasil:	I come [from] in Kokyang

(4) [1st week's peer interaction: Female-female]

53	Soifa:	What is your name?
54	Bun:	=My name is Buntharika
55	Soifa:	What is your address?
56	Bun:	138 T. Sakom A. Thepa Ch. Songkhla
57	Soifa:	What is your phone number?
58→	Bun:	=I don't have phone number
59	Soifa:	Where are you (come) from?
60	Bun:	=I come from Khaonoy

The more proficient female pair, on the other hand, performed better in peer interaction and even produced turns different from the script, shown in line 58. Although also unable to close the conversation through a closing sequence, they used less time to finish their conversation. It was additionally confirmed that overall female students outperformed males in most terms as discussed in the previous section.

In the final week of their scripted role-play training, the improvement could be observed in both groups in such features as sequence closing, repair organization and fluency, as shown in Excerpts 5 and 6.

(5) [Final week's peer interaction: Male-male]

61	Wasil:	Hello, Hilmee How are you?
62	Hilmi:	Hi, Wasil. I'm fine, and you?
63	Wasil:	Yeah, very good.
64→	Hilmee:	I [think] you look very happy today. What (.)whatdi what di what
65		[did] you [do on] weekend?
66→	Wasil:	Em…I [went] to the park [on] weekend.
67	Hilmee:	Really?
68	Wasil:	Yeah, I went with my family And you?
69→	Hilmee:	Em..last weekend I went to the (.) cinema with my friends. So, how
70		was [your] weekend at the park?
71→	Wasil:	In the park, there [were] many people, children. Also many (.) trees
72		andflowers. And many signs, too.
73→	Hilmee:	[Sound Great!]
74	Wasil:	And you, howwas the cinema?
75→	Hilmee:	yeah, It is (.) very (0.5) [terrible]
76→	Wasil:	[Why didn't] you go to the waterfall?
77	Hilmee:	I plan to go next time.
78→	Wasil:	[Maybe] we can (to) can go to [together]

79→	Hilmee:	[Very nice idea]
80→	Wasil:	yes Ok, we can [talk] later. Let's go to class.
81→	Hilmee:	Ar::Ar:; [Alright] Bye.
82→	Wasil:	Bye.

Obviously, getting into the 10th week of training, the students were able to conduct a more elaborate conversation with not only an opening sequence but a closing sequence, seen from lines 80-82. Additionally, other-initiated repair as seen in line 48 in Excerpt 3 was not found at all.

Such improvements were also observable in the female interaction in the last week. However, unlike the male pair seen in Excerpt 5, high-proficiency female students were able to interact more promptly and converse more smoothly, indicated by latching turns and the absence of pauses. Mispronunciations were hardly found; only one instance was seen in Excerpt 6, at line 93. It was thus confirmed that the harder and the more frequently the students practice conversing, the better improvement they get even though those with higher proficiency apparently had the edge over lower proficient ones.

(6) [Final week's peer interaction: Female-female]

83	Soifa:	Hello, Bun How are you?
84	Bun:	=Hi, Soy. I'm fine, and you?
85	Soifa:	Yeah, very good
86	Bun:	=I think, you look very happy today. What did you do on weekend,
87	Soifa:	Em…I went to the park on weekend
88	Bun:	=Really,
89	Soifa:	Yeah, I went with my family. And you?
90	Bun:	=Em..last weekend I went to the cinema with my friends. So, how
91		was your weekend at the park,

92	Soifa:	In the park, there were many people, children. Also many trees and
93→		flowers. And many [sigs], too
94	Bun:	=Sound Great!
95	Soifa:	And you, (0.3) how was the cinema?
96	Bun:	yeah, It is very terrible.
97	Soifa:	=Why didn't you go to the <u>waterfall?</u>
98	Bun:	I plan to go next time
99	Soifa:	=Maybe we can go together.
100	Bun:	Very nice idea
101	Soifa:	=yes. Ok, we can talk later, Let's go to class
102	Bun:	Alright. Bye.
103	Soifa:	Bye.

While the non-scripted role-play training was able to help improve the Thai primary-school students' oral English performance, regular practice was essential for maintaining most of the aspects of the speaking performance improved, especially those that were more resistant to acquisition and more interactional in nature such as melody and turn responding. Indicated by the scores obtained from the role-play practices over the course of the research and in the delay test, little improvement in the young learners' speaking performance was observed after a period of no training due to intensive extracurricular activities and the school break. When class activity resumed after these two periods of no practice, a decline in the improvement was already observable in some of the students.

In the delay-interview, shown in Excerpt 7, the same student still noticeably talked fluently and delivered appropriate responses to the foreign teacher, indicated by the smooth turn responding in lines 105, 107, 109, 113 and 115 although her responses were short. The student produced clear answers and made no pause, and

made use of fillers such as *uhm*, as in line 111, as a turn-holding, delay device rather than merely a pause.

(7) [Delay test: Teacher-female student]

104	T:	Hello what's your name?
105→	Bun:	= hi, my name is Buntharika
106	T:	where do you live?
107→	Bun:	=I live in Khaonoy
108	T:	what class are you now?
109→	Bun:	=Six slash one
110	T:	six slash one and who is your class teacher?
111→	Bun:	Uhm. Teacher Sainee
112	T:	teacher Sainee ok do you have best friends?
113→	Bun:	=yes
114	T:	Who is your best friend?
115→	Bun:	=Soyfaa
116	T:	ok thank you

According to the observation and the interview data from students, those performing well in the post-training tests also reportedly spent time practicing the role-play with their peers outside the classroom and attempted to figure out the problem of turn-holding of conversation, while the less successful ones did not. They reported that they did not perform well because of their reading skills that created difficulty for them in following the scripts. In line with Juan-Garau & Perez-Vidal (2006, 2007), after a few months any success achieved in developing learners' oral performance may be unstable; without regular practice, learners may revert to their previous behavior.

Furthermore, to make the role-play training more effective and to enhance their speaking performance better, teachers should focus more on teaching essential vocabulary and grammar in context and make sure that the students understand the role-play script that they practice. In fact, the students who found the script manageable were reportedly more motivated to do their best in the tests than those finding it too difficult. The lexical and grammatical knowledge provided will not only make the script more comprehensible to the students, but will also allow them to construct their turns with less reliance on script memorization, making them more related to what they say and to sound more natural in their conversation.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATION

This study investigated the effectiveness of scripted role-play activity in enhancing primary-school students' oral performance. The performance was assessed with the oral assessment rubric containing six distinct features of students' talk; namely, speech melody, vocabulary, fluency, comprehensibility, pronunciation, and response. The results of this study confirmed that scripted role-play activities can really help improve Thai primary-school students' speaking performance in all the speech features. However, the students' improved performance in every target speech feature dropped after a period of no practice with the degree of improvement of some features declining faster than others, thus requiring more frequent practice.

The findings could suggest to English teachers that in order to successfully develop young learners' English speaking skills, they should engage them in peer interactions and regularly provide them a platform to practice meaningful conversation especially in the classroom. Speech features such as speech melody and sound pronunciation may need more regularly focused training. The teacher can always squeeze in these aspects of oral performance into their classes, provide opportunities for communicative practice such as role-play, which allows them to use vocabulary and grammar in context, and give encouragement to the learners as they work towards intelligibility of language use, enabling them to develop not only

linguistic but interactional competence for actual non-pedagogical interaction (Morley, 1991).

This study has been designed not only to improve the young learners' oral performance but also to particularly inform primary-school teachers of the appropriate choice of communicative activities to use in the classroom. It has attempted to raise awareness of the importance of regular training with a particular focus on those speech features more challenging for the young learners to improve. While some students may need teacher supervision more than others, without frequent focused practice, learners' ability to converse naturally and comprehensibly in the target language proves not to be easy to develop and maintain.

Further studies examining role-play activities should consider investigating young learners with different levels of proficiency and the type of role-play appropriate for them. The rubric used for assessing students' performance should also be made more interaction-oriented, incorporating features relevant to naturally-occurring conversation. Additionally, more closely-supervised training and more motivation-building strategies may be needed for particular groups of learners.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Sample Lesson Plan and Role-play Situation Card

Sample

Lesson Plan

Subject: English Course   Time: 3 periods / 135 minutes

Topic: Asking for information

Pronunciation   : -

Vocabulary	**:**	occupation, student, hometown, color of hair, color of eyes
Structure	**:**	What is your occupation?
		My occupation is ....
Function	**:**	Asking for information
Oral skill	**:**	Interview and asking for information

Terminal Objective

1. To write and give information to the close person by using short information correctly.

Enabling Objectives

1. To understand the main idea from the story
2. To read and pronounce accurately.
3. To ask personal information from your friends based on structure have learned.
4. To present the information from interview by using short message accurately.

Sequence

Presentation

1. Teacher ask students to do conversation in group of 5 by using the sentence of "What's your name?" and "Where are you from?" and vice versa. Students have to remember friends' name based on the answer of the questions.

2. Students will be asked to do activity 2A by looking at the picture of John and his ID, then students study John's information.

    2A. Look. Listen and repeat.

Name	:	John Simon
Occupation	:	Student
Age	:	11
Nationality	:	Thai
Hometown	:	Bangkok
Color of hair	:	Black
Color of eyes	:	Black

3. Students answer the questions about John.

Practice

1. Teacher divided students into 4 groups of 5 and practice to ask and answer John's information with friends within group.
2. Students practice reading in John's ID.
3. Students practice writing John's information by doing activity 2B.
4. Students will do an exercise 2. Find the words in work book.

Production (Doing scripted role-play activity)

1. The pairs are matched and asked to prepare a conversation on the topic of "asking personal information".
2. The action will be recorded.
3. The pairs will perform freely with appropriate time.

Materials: 1) Student's Book 6   2) Work book   3) CD

Evaluation: 1) Observation   2) Participation   3) Assignment and result from interview

Role-play Situation Card: Asking information

Student A and B are classmates. Student A wants to know more about his friend, student B. Student A asks student B in conversation below;

A: Hello. How are you?

B: I' m fine. Very good.

A: What is your name, please?

B: My name's ……………

A: May I ask you more questions?

B: Yes, sure.

A: What is your occupation?

B: I'm student. And you?

A: I'm student, too. What is your nationality?

B: My nationality is ………….

A: Where is your hometown?

B: My hometown is Bangkok. And you?

A: Songkhla. Emm, nice to talk to you and thank you for your information.

B: Nice to talk to you, too. You're welcome.

APPENDIX B

Score Sheet and Scoring Criteria

Score Sheet

Student's Name_____**Rater**_____**Date**_____

Topics	Proficiency Scales				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Speech melody					
Vocabulary					
Fluency					
Comprehension					
Pronunciation					
Response					

Scoring criteria (Tsang & Wong, 2002)

1. **Speech melody**

   1.1 Pronunciation frequently unintelligible.

   1.2 Frequent gross errors and a very heavy accent make understanding difficult, require frequent repetition.

   1.3 'Foreign accent' requires concentrated listening and mispronunciation leads to occasional misunderstanding and apparent error in grammar vocabulary.

   1.4 'Make foreign accent and occasional mispronunciation that do not interfere with understanding.

   1.5 No conspicuous mispronunciation, but would not be taken for a native speaker.

2. **Vocabulary**

   2.1 Vocabulary limited to minimum courtesy requirements.

   2.2 Vocabulary limited to basic personal areas and very familiar topic(auto bibliographic information, personal experiences, etc.)

   2.3 Choice of word sometimes inaccurate, limitation of vocabulary prevents discussion or some common familiar topics.

   2.4 Vocabulary adequate to discuss special interest and special nontechnical subject with some circumlocution.

   2.5 Vocabulary broad, precision and adequate to cope with complex practical problem and varied topic of general interest (current event, as well as work, family, time food, transportation).

3. **Fluency**

   3.1 Speech is so halting and fragmentary that conversation is virtually impossible.

   3.2 Speech is very slow and uneven, except for short or routine sentences; frequently punctuated by silence or long pauses.

   3.3 Speech is frequently hesitant and jerky; sentence may be left uncompleted.

   3.4 Speech is occasional hesitant, with some unevenness caused by rephrasing and grouping for word.

3.5   Speech is effortless and smooth, but perceptibly nonnative in speed and evenness.

4.   Comprehension

4.1   Understands too little to respond to conversation initiation or topic nominations.

4.2   Understands only slow, very simple speech on topics of general interest; requires constant repetition and rephrasing.

4.3   Understands careful, somewhat simplified speech directed to him or her, with considerable repetition and rephrasing.

4.4   Understands quite well normal educated speech directed to him or her, but requires occasional repetition or rephrasing.

4.5   Understands everything in normal educated conversation, except for vary colloquial or low-frequency item or exceptionally rapid or slurred speech.

5.   Pronunciation

5.1   Mispronunciation and unable to speak coherently at times.

5.2   Lacks confidence. Speech is monotonous and unclear.

5.3   Speak slowly and show some signs of nervousness and hence speech becomes fairly monotonous but clear.

5.4   Speak quite confidently and able to pronounce correctly and show emotion appropriately at times**.**

5.5   Speak confidently and pronounce correctly with proper tone and intonation to show feelings**.**

6.   Response

6.1   Mostly used many pauses to respond and take long time to response the answer.

6.2   Responds very quickly then got paused after turns.

6.3   Responds fairly well to some turns and slow to continue the talk.

6.4   Responds well to most of the questions asked. Continue the turn appropriately to the context.

6.5   Responds excellently to all questions asked and continue the turn smoothly with confidence and appropriate to the content**.**

APPENDIX C

Oral Communication Test Questions

Oral Communication Test Questions

1. How are you? / What is your name?

2. How old are you?

3. Where are you from? / Where is your hometown? / Where do you live?

3. Where are you studying? / What school do you study?

4. What level are you? / What grade are you?

5. What subject do you like most? / What subject do you like to study?

6. What subject do you dislike? / What subject do you hate?

7. What is your interest? / What do you prefer most in your life?

8. Do you have hobby? What? / What do you like to do in your free time?

9. What sport do you like to play most? / Do you like to play football/volleyball?

10. What is your favorite food and drink? / What do you like to eat and drink?

11. Where do you like to go on your holiday? / Where do you spend your time for holiday?

12. How many members in your family? / Who do you live with?

13. What is your mother's name? / What is your father's name?

14. Who is your homeroom teacher? / Who is your class teacher?

15. What do you want to be when you grow up? / What do you want to be in the future?

16. How long have you been studying here? / How long have you studied English?

17. What is your favorite book? / What book do you like to read?

18. What time do you always go to bed? / What time do you sleep?

19. Who is your favorite singer? / Who is your superstar?

20. Do you have pet? What? / Do you like pet?

PAPER I

Using Scripted Role-play to Improve Oral performance: A Study of Prathom Six Students at

Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School, Songkhla

Using Scripted Role-play to Improve Oral performance: A Study of Prathom Six Students at

Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School, Songkhla

USING SCRIPTED ROLE-PLAY TO IMPROVE ORAL PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF PRATHOM SIX STUDENTS AT CHARIYATHAMSUKSA FOUNDATION SCHOOL, SONGKHLA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated using scripted role-play to improve Thai primary-level students' oral performance. It attempted to determine: a) whether scripted role-play can enhance primary level students' overall oral performance; b) which features of students' talk get improved through the use of scripted role-play; and c) whether the features improved can be retained in their talk a period of time after the role-play practice. The participants were 20 Prathom six students from Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School in Songkhla. They were individually interviewed to determine their oral proficiency before and after the ten weeks of scripted role-play practice. The students' interviews and role-play conversations were videotaped and rated for the following features: pronunciation, speech melody, vocabulary, fluency, comprehensibility, and response. The results from statistical analysis showed that the students' overall oral proficiency was considerably improved through the scripted role-play activities. Frequently being engaged in role-play conversations, the students improved most on the promptness of their response to preceding turns while speech melody appeared to be the most challenging feature to enhance due to pervasive mother-tongue interference. The findings additionally confirmed the improvement retention of every target speech feature after a period of one month. However, the degree of improvement in three features, i.e., pronunciation, speech melody, and response, significantly decreased. It was suggested that pronunciation, speech melody, and prompt responses require more frequent practice than other speech features.

Keywords: Scripted role-play, oral English performance, Thai primary school students, speech features, improvement retention

INTRODUCTION

In globalization era, English has become the primary language for international communication. The use of English has been increasing throughout the world and especially in countries trying to develop more knowledgeable citizens. In welcoming the promulgation of ASEAN community in 2015, Thailand has, in particular, given the highest priority to English language learning at all levels of education. The Thai formal educational system, in fact, requires all students to learn English for approximately over ten years from primary to university level. Nevertheless, the majorities of Thai students still has low oral English proficiency and are unable to use English effectively in communication. This is due, in part, to their English education since the early primary level in which they are mostly taught in rigid grammar- and teacher-dominated classrooms. A typical primary-level language class in Thailand often provides so little opportunity for the learners to communicate meaningfully and develop even basic communication skills. The students are therefore inclined to be passive learners, primarily listening to the teacher.

As English teachers, it is essential to find appropriate ways to engage the learners in more talks so that they can develop basic oral skill for effective communication. Many English teachers have come to realize that by employing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) they can make learning more active and teaching more effective since this method focuses on giving students opportunities to use the target language to communicate meaningfully. In a CLT classroom, many activities are introduced to enhance students' basic oral ability and the most popular one appears to be role-play. Widely used in communicative class, role-play activities have been shown to be effective in helping improve students' speaking ability (Alwahibee, 2004; Ding & Liu, 2009; Klanrit, 2007; Ments, 1999).

The role-play activities often used in a second language classroom can be classified into two types: scripted role-play and non-scripted role-play. In scripted role-play, the students have to act out assigned situations through dialogues in the target language in pairs or in small groups. In non-scripted role-play, the students are, on the other hand, asked to act out a conversation in front of the class without preparing or writing the script in advance (Byrne, 1986).

A number of studies have apparently shown that scripted role-plays are a more popular choice among teachers to improve the oral performance of students in communicative classes. When doing the role-play of this type, the students have time to prepare the scripts and rehearse them to achieve smooth speaking. Students, especially with low English proficiency, often find scripted role-play easier to handle. Non scripted role-play, on the contrary, seems to be far too complicated given the fact that they have limited knowledge of the target language and little opportunity to prepare for it.

Apparently, scripted role-play seems to be a more appropriate choice of activity to promote meaningful communication in a low-level language classroom. However, there have been few studies that examined the implementation of this role-play type in primary-school students. This study, therefore, tries to determine whether scripted role-plays can really help improve the overall oral performance of primary school students, which features of the students' talk appear to improve most through the use of this role-play type, and whether the improvement can be retained over a certain period of time after the role-play practice.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objectives of this study are to investigate whether scripted role plays can improve primary school students' overall oral performance, to examine the features of students' talk that get improved through the use of scripted role-plays, and to examine the retention of the features improved in the students' talk after practicing the role play. The research questions are:

1. Whether scripted role-plays can improve primary school students' overall oral performance?
2. Which features of the students' talk get improved through the use of the scripted role-play?
3. Whether the features improved can be retained in their talk after one month of the role-play practice?

METHODOLOGY

This study started in the first semester of academic year 2012. Before the semester began, the researcher designed lesson plans matching the purposes of the research. The participants of this study were 20 Grade six students from Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School who studied an English course at the primary level. The ages of the students ranged from 11-13 years old. Selected by the purposive sampling method, the students were given the role-play treatment by the researcher after the first two hours of teaching. The participants were orally interviewed in a pre-test to determine their oral English proficiency and taught for ten weeks, followed by a post-oral-interview test. One month afterwards, a delay interview test was administered to investigate the retention of the students' oral performance after the treatment.

The teaching materials used included two commercial books. One was provided by the school's academic department and the other was selected by the researcher. Situation cards were created based on the contents taught each week. The 10 lesson plans with role-play practice were prepared for 10 weeks of teaching by the researcher. Each lesson plan had the duration of three hours. Each week after being taught, all necessary vocabulary and related content, the subjects were engaged in one hour of the scripted role-play activity.

The students' talks obtained from the face-to-face interviews with a foreign English teacher in the pre- and post-tests as well as in the delay test were assessed to determine their oral performance in the following features: speech melody (suprasegmentals/stress and intonation), vocabulary (use of words and expression), fluency (speech flow), comprehensibility (accuracy and comprehensibility of language use), pronunciation (segmental or individual sounds), and response (promptness of turn initiation). The scoring rubric was adapted from the checklist of conversation performance proposed in Tsang and Wong (2002) (see Appendix). The students' talk weekly elicited from the role-play activities in the third hour of the lesson were also videotaped and later transcribed for subsequent assessments.

DATA ANALYSIS

To answer Research Questions 1 and 2, *t*-test was used to determine the differences between the mean scores from the pre and post oral tests of each participant. To answer Research

Question 3, one month after the post test, a delay test was administered to the subjects in order to test their retention rate. The scores were then compared with those obtained from the post-test conducted one month earlier to determine the improvement retention rate of each feature of the oral performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As shown in Table 1, regarding the first research question concerning the ability to improve students' overall oral performance, the results indicated that scripted role-play activities could significantly enhance the oral performance of the primary-school students at the level of 0.01 (t=28.86), indicated by the difference between the overall pre-test and post-test mean scores, i.e., 1.61 and 3.80 respectively.

Table 1 Differences between pre- and post-test scores obtained from face-to-face interviews

	Features	Pre-test		Post-test		t Value		Sig. (2-tailed)
		X	SD.	X	SD.			
1	Speech melody	1.63	0.63	3.63	1.01	-12.65	**	0.00
2	Vocabulary	1.55	0.72	3.78	1.15	-10.02	**	0.00
3	Fluency	1.45	0.69	3.75	1.16	-11.50	**	0.00
4	Comprehensibility	1.68	0.69	3.80	1.14	-11.75	**	0.00
5	Pronunciation	1.73	0.66	3.90	0.99	-13.00	**	0.00
6	Response	1.63	0.74	3.93	1.03	-11.90	**	0.00
7	Overall	1.61	0.68	3.80	1.07	-28.86	**	0.00

As far as the discrete features of oral performance are concerned, the results also showed that the significant improvement at the level of 0.01 could be observed in all the features assessed. However, indicated by the pre-post test score differences, the degree of improvement varied among the features; speech melody appeared to be the most challenging to improve, whereas fluency as well as responses to turns was more readily enhanceable through the scripted role-play practice.

Concerning the retention of the features improved, based on the statistical results shown in Table 2 below, all the aspects of the learners' speaking performance remained significantly better than in the pre-test even though after a period of one month of no role-play practice, the overall performance significantly dropped, indicated by the significant score difference between the post- and the retention test at the level of 0.01 ($t = 6.21$). The degree of improvement particularly in features such as response and speech melody considerably decreased.

Just like the pronunciation of L2 vowel and consonant sounds, speech melody such as pitch, stress and intonation seems to be resistant to acquisition due to L1 interference, especially the influence of the dominant language in the learners' repertoire. For young learners, these suprasegmental speech sounds are even more difficult to master given the immaturity of their articulatory organs, limited exposure to the target language, lack of training in a typical English classroom focusing on vocabulary teaching, and irregular practice.

Table 2 Differences between post-test and delay test scores obtained from face-to-face interviews

	Features	Post		Retention		t	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		X	SD.	X	SD.	Value		
1	Speech melody	3.63	1.01	3.40	1.15	2.93	**	0.01
2	Vocabulary	3.78	1.15	3.65	1.19	1.75		0.10
3	Fluency	3.75	1.16	3.60	1.28	2.04		0.06
4	Comprehensibility	3.80	1.14	3.68	1.22	2.03		0.06
5	Pronunciation	3.90	0.99	3.70	1.03	2.63	*	0.02
6	Response	3.93	1.03	3.68	1.18	3.68	**	0.00
7	Overall	3.80	1.07	3.62	1.16	6.21	**	0.00

Features such as fluency and response to turn, on the other hand, exhibited greater improvement through the role-play practice, indicated by the biggest pre-post test score differences. Therefore, the more chances the students have to perform or make meaningful conversation in the target language, the more fluent and interactive/responsive they become (cf. Freed, 1995; Freed et al., 2004; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004). Apparently, the young learners trained in communicative activities such as scripted role-play possess better-developed conversation skills than those focused on plain reading-aloud and rote learning of featured vocabulary and grammar. However, to make the role-play practice more effective and to enhance learners' speaking performance, the teacher should focus more on teaching essential vocabulary and grammar in context since such knowledge will allow them to construct their turns with less reliance on memorization of the script and make them more comprehensible to their partners.

Additionally, regular practice is essential for maintaining most of the aspects of the speaking performance improved, especially those that are more resistant to acquisition and more interactional in nature such as melody and turn responding. Indicated by the scores obtained from the role-play practices over the course of the research and in the retention test, little improvement in the young learners' speaking performance was observed after a period of no training due to intensive extracurricular activities and the school break. In line with Juan-Garau and Pe´rez-Vidal (2006, 2007), any success achieved in developing learners' oral performance may be unstable after a few months since without practice learners may revert to their previous behaviors.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

The results of this study showed that the scripted role-play activity can really improve Thai primary-school students' speaking performance. The improvement of every target speech feature can also be retained after a period of no practice even though the degree of improvement of some features dropped faster than others, thus requiring more frequent practice. Teachers should focus more on teaching speech melody and sound pronunciation (cf. Fraser, 2000) with emphasis on the importance of comprehensible and meaningful communication. They can always squeeze these aspects of oral performance into their classes, provide opportunities for communicative practice, and give encouragement to learners as they work towards intelligibility for use in actual non-pedagogical interaction, enabling them to develop not only linguistic but communicative competence (Morley, 1991).

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PAPER II

Improving Oral English Performance with Scripted Role-play: A Study of Thai Primary

School Students

IMPROVING ORAL ENGLISH PERFORMANCE WITH SCRIPTED ROLE-PLAY: A STUDY OF THAI PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Investigating the use of scripted role-play to improve Thai primary-level students' oral English performance, this study attempted to determine: a) whether the role-play of this type can really enhance the students' overall oral English performance; b) which features of the students' talk get improved through the role-play; and c) whether the features improved can be retained in the delay test. The participants were 20 Grade six students from a school in southern Thailand individually interviewed to determine their oral proficiency before and after ten weeks of scripted role-play practice. The interview and role-play conversations were videotaped and rated for the following features: pronunciation, speech melody, vocabulary, fluency, comprehensibility, and response. The statistical results showed that the students' overall oral proficiency considerably improved through the role-play practice. Frequently engaged in role-play conversations, the students improved most on the promptness of their response to preceding turns, while speech melody apparently was the most challenging feature to enhance due to mother-tongue interference. The improvement of every target feature was also retainable although the degree of improvement in such features as pronunciation, speech melody, and response significantly decreased, suggesting more frequent practice was required. Close comparative analysis of videotaped conversations additionally affirmed positive development in the learners' talk through regular training.

Keywords: Scripted role-play, oral English performance, Thai primary school students, speech features, improvement retention

INTRODUCTION

In globalization era, English has become the primary language for international communication; it plays recognizable roles in almost every society whether large or small across the globe. Today, everyone needs to know English in order to get connected with the world communities and exploit their knowledge resources. English language competence, especially ability to communicate in English, has therefore become a primary concern of teaching programs launched at any education level in countries trying to advance and develop more knowledgeable citizens. However, success in the endeavor has proven not to be achievable simply by the government reinforcement especially in countries in which English traditionally serves as a foreign language such as Thailand.

The country has in fact given the highest priority to English language learning at all levels of education and the Thai formal educational system even requires all the students to learn English for approximately over ten years from primary to university level. Nevertheless, the majorities of Thai students still have low oral English proficiency and are unable to use English effectively in communication. This is due, in part, to their English education since the

early primary level in which the students were mostly taught in rigid grammar- and teacher-dominated classrooms. A typical primary-level language class in Thailand often provided so little opportunity for the learners to communicate meaningfully and develop even basic communication skills. The students were therefore inclined to be passive learners, primarily listening to the teacher (Kunlaya, 1991).

However, since the shift of the language teaching goal towards communicative proficiency rather than merely the mastery of language structures in 1996, the Thai curriculum apparently serves the students' needs of English for communication in the globalized world better. As English teachers in the revised curriculum, it is therefore undoubtedly essential to find appropriate ways to engage the learners in more talks from the beginning level so that they can develop basic oral skills necessary for real-life communication. The language classroom should be shifted from form-based towards task-based teaching and learning, with emphasis on promoting language development in a learner-centered context (Kim, 2009),as well as towards communicative language teaching with the focus on promoting communication skills through more loosely structured communicative activities (Marques, 1998).Today's language classroom has thus been mostly aimed at providing opportunities for learners to interact in the target language in the pedagogical process.

Many English teachers have in fact come to realize that by employing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches, they can make language learning more active and teaching more effective(Yoon, 2004). In a CLT classroom, students are involved in a wide range of communicative activities, yet the most popular one to enhance their oral communication skills appears to be role-play. In fact, role-play activities have long been recognized by teachers and trainers not only within but across disciplines as a powerful technique for skills and attitude development in the face-to-face environment. For instance, in pharmacy (Rao, 2011), role-play has been used as a means of helping students develop skills in communication, consultation, and medication history-taking. In a communication classroom, role-play activities have also been shown to be effective in helping improve students' speaking ability (Ding & Liu, 2009). In short, role-play has been considered an effective approach in a communicative classroom to developing skills in active listening, problem-solving, working as a team, and communicating effectively, among others (Rao, 2011).

The role-play activities typically used in a second language classroom can be classified into two types: scripted and non-scripted role-play. In scripted role-play, the students have to act out assigned situations through dialogues in the target language in pairs or in small groups. In non-scripted role-play, on the other hand, they are asked to act out a conversation in front of the class without preparing or writing the script in advance (Byrne, 1986). When doing the role-play of this type, the students have time to prepare the scripts and rehearse them to achieve smooth speaking. Students, especially with low English proficiency, often find scripted role-play easier to handle, thus being a more popular choice in English conversation classrooms (Chotirat, 2010). Non-scripted role-play, on the contrary, seems to be far too complicated given the fact that they have limited knowledge of the target language and little opportunity to prepare for it.

Scripted role-play therefore seems to be a more appropriate choice of activity to promote meaningful communication in a low-level language classroom. Nevertheless, there have been few studies that examined the implementation of this role-play type in primary-school students in Thai contexts. This study, therefore, tried to fill the gap by determining whether and how scripted role-plays can help improve oral English performance of Thai primary-school students and whether the improvement is really sustainable.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objectives of this study particularly are to investigate whether scripted role plays can improve primary school students' overall oral performance, to examine the features of students' talk that get improved through the use of scripted role-plays, and to examine the retention of the features improved in the students' talk after practicing the role play. The research questions accordingly are:

1. Can scripted role-plays improve primary-school students' overall oral English performance?
2. Which features of the students' talk are enhanced through the use of the scripted role-play?
3. Can the features improved be retained in their talk after one month of the role-play practice?

METHODS

The participants of this study were 20 Grade six students from Chariyathamsuksa Foundation School who studied an English course at the primary level in the first semester of the academic year 2012. The ages of the students ranged from 11-13 years old. Purposively sampled, the students were each orally interviewed in a pre-test face-to-face conversation with a foreign English teacher to determine their oral English proficiency. Each week teaching, the students were given the role-play treatment by the researcher after finishing the first two hours. Ten weeks after the lessons with scripted role-play training, each participant was orally assessed again in a post-test. One month later, a delay test was then administered to investigate the retention of the students' improved oral performance.

The students' talks obtained from the face-to-face interviews with a foreign English teacher in the pre- and post-tests as well as in the delay test were assessed to determine their oral performance in the following features: speech melody (suprasegmentals/stress and intonation),vocabulary (use of words and expression), fluency (speech flow), comprehensibility (accuracy and comprehensibility of language use), pronunciation (segmental or individual sounds), and response (promptness of turn initiation). The scoring rubric had been adapted from the checklist of conversation performance proposed in Tsang and Wong (2002) (see Appendix). The students' talks weekly elicited through the role-play activities were also videotaped and transcribed for subsequent assessments and close analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

To answer Research Questions 1 and 2, not only was *t*-test used to determine the differences between the mean scores from the pre and post oral tests of each participant, but close analysis of the students' video-recorded conversation was also undertaken to identify the conversation features improved. As for Research Question 3, one month after the post test, a delay test was additionally administered to the participants in order to test their retention rate. The scores were then compared with those obtained from the post-test conducted one month earlier to determine the retention rate of the improvement of each feature of the oral performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, regarding the first research question concerning the ability to improve the students' overall English oral performance, the results indicated that scripted role-play activities could significantly enhance the oral English performance of the Thai primary-school students at the level of 0.01 (t=28.86), indicated by the difference between the overall pre-test and post-test mean scores, i.e., 1.61 and 3.80 respectively.

Table 1: *Differences between pre- and post-test scores obtained from face-to-face interviews*

	Features	Pre-test		Post-test		*t* Value		Sig. (2-tailed)
		X	SD.	X	SD.			
1	Speech melody	**<u>1.63</u>**	0.63	**<u>3.63</u>**	1.01	-12.65	**	0.00
2	Vocabulary	1.55	0.72	3.78	1.15	-10.02	**	0.00
3	Fluency	**<u>1.45</u>**	0.69	**<u>3.75</u>**	1.16	-11.50	**	0.00
4	Comprehension	1.68	0.69	3.80	1.14	-11.75	**	0.00
5	Pronunciation	1.73	0.66	3.90	0.99	-13.00	**	0.00
6	Response	**<u>1.63</u>**	0.74	**<u>3.93</u>**	1.03	-11.90	**	0.00
7	Overall	**<u>1.61</u>**	0.68	**<u>3.80</u>**	1.07	-28.86	**	0.00

** significant at 0.01 level

As far as the discrete features of the oral performance are concerned, the statistical results also showed that the significant improvement at the level of 0.01 could be observed in all the features assessed. However, indicated by the pre-post test score differences, the degree of improvement varied among the features; speech melody appeared to be the most challenging to improve, whereas fluency and responses to turns were more readily enhanceable through the scripted role-play practice.

It was not at all surprising that the primary students faced most difficulty in mastering speech melody, which concerns suprasegmental features or distinctive patterns of vocal melody such as pitch, stress and intonation (Cruttenden, 1997). Just like the pronunciation of L2 vowel and consonant sounds, these features seem to be more resistant to acquisition due to not only their limited exposure to the target language but also the influence of the dominant language in the learners' repertoire. And especially for young learners at this level, these suprasegmental sounds are even more difficult to master given the immaturity of their articulatory organs.

Both fluency and response to turn, on the other hand, were much easier for the young learners to improve, indicated by the biggest pre-post test score differences. Through the regular rehearsal of the role-play with their peers, the learners became more fluent and could respond to turns more promptly. In line with, e.g., Segalowitz and Freed (2004), this indicates that the more frequently the learners are engaged in the meaningful conversation practice, the better their language flow and their interaction will become. Additionally, it was also noticeable that the students with better reading fluency memorized the script with ease and performed better in the role-play. Initial reading proficiency therefore seems to also affect the level of improvement in the oral performance of each student (Simo˜es, 1996).

Concerning the retention of the features improved, based on the statistical results shown in Table 2 below, all the aspects of the learners' speaking performance remained significantly better than in the pre-test even though after a period of one month of no role-play practice, the overall performance significantly dropped, indicated by the significant score difference between the post- and the retention test at the level of 0.01 ($t = 6.21$). The degree of improvement particularly in features such as response, speech melody, and pronunciation considerably decreased.

Table 2: *Differences between post-test and delay test scores obtained from face-to-face interviews*

	Features	Post		Retention		*t* Value		Sig. (2-tailed)
		X	SD.	X	SD.			
1	Speech melody	<u>3.63</u>	1.01	<u>3.40</u>	1.15	2.93	**	0.01
2	Vocabulary	3.78	1.15	3.65	1.19	1.75		0.10
3	Fluency	3.75	1.16	3.60	1.28	2.04		0.06
4	Comprehension	3.80	1.14	3.68	1.22	2.03		0.06
5	Pronunciation	3.90	0.99	3.70	1.03	2.63	*	0.02
6	Response	<u>3.93</u>	1.03	<u>3.68</u>	1.18	3.68	**	0.00
7	Overall	<u>3.80</u>	1.07	<u>3.62</u>	1.16	<u>6.21</u>	**	0.00

* significant at 0.05 level

** significant at 0.01 level

As can be seen in the table, the learners' speech melody and response scores dropped significantly in the retention test. It was unsurprisingly shown that promptness in responding to turns is unsustainable without regular interaction. Similarly, more complex and more resistant to acquisition, speech melody requires not only frequent but more focused training, whereas the production of individual sounds seems to be a little bit easier to retain once mastered. Fluency and comprehensibility apparently continue to hold as long as the learners can understand and still remember the conversations practiced. Last, via frequent role-play practice with explicit instruction of vocabulary and its meaning in context, the learners apparently can most easily retain their knowledge of vocabulary in its context of use.

Close analysis of the videotaped conversations in the pre- and post-tests additionally affirmed that the young learners trained in communicative activities such as scripted role-play were obviously better-developed in their conversation skills. The students' improvement was observable in such talk features as higher voice volume, the absence of a pause or a smile characteristic of dispreferred responses prior to the answering second pair-part turn, the use of fillers as a delay device in lieu of the pause or smile, fluency, sequence opening, closing, and repair organization, which are illustrated in the following excerpts taken from the pre- and post-conversation tests with a foreign teacher.

(1)Pre-interview

1	T:	Hello what is your name?
2	Bun:	=My name is Buntharika
3	T:	Buntharika where do you live Buntharika?
4→	Bun:	∘I live in Khaonoy∘
5	T:	again
6→	Bun:	∘I live in Khaonoy∘
7	T:	I live in Khaonoy.
8	Bun:	I live in Khaonoy
9	T:	Where is Khaonoy I don't know what class are you?
10→	Bun:	∘Six∘
11	T:	what class are you?
12→	Bun:	∘Six slash one ∘
13	T:	six slash one very good what is your teacher's name?
14→	Bun:	((Smile))
15→	T:	again speak louder <u>what</u> is your teacher's name?
16	Bun:	Teacher Sulaiman
17	T:	Teacher Sulaiman teaches what language?
18→	Bun:	(.)
19→	T:	<u>Teacher Sulaiman teaches what language</u>? *Teacher Sulaimansornarai, sornwichaarai?*
20→	Bun:	Subject English
21	T:	Subject English very good sit down

As shown in the conversation from the pre-test above, the student responded to the teacher mostly in low voice volume, indicated by the turns in lines 4, 6, 10 and 12. The latter therefore tried to get her to deliver the answers again in louder voice .In another sequence in which the teacher asked her the name of her classroom teacher, the student first just smiled in response to the question, prompting the teacher to repeat the question again, shown in lines 14 and 15 respectively. And when the teacher asked her the subject the classroom teacher teaches, the student failed to respond, creating a micro pause in line 18 and prompting another question repetition by the teacher, to which the student delivered the answer, *"subject English",* in Thai word order.

In contrast, in the post-interview, shown in Excerpt 2, the same student noticeably became more fluent. She could promptly deliver appropriate responses to the foreign teacher,

indicated by the latching turns in lines 23, 25, 27, 33 and 35. The student produced neither pauses nor unclear answers, and made use of fillers such as *uhm*, as in line 31, as a turn-holding, delay device rather than merely a pause.

(2) Post- interview

22	T:	Hello what is your name?
23→	Bun:	= hi, my name is Buntharika
24	T:	where do you live Buntharika?
25→	Bun:	=I live in Khaonoy
26	T:	what class are you?
27→	Bun:	=Six slash one
28	T:	six slash one very good what is your class teacher's name?
29	Bun:	((Smile)) Teacher Sainee
30	T:	teacher Sainee teaches what subject?
31→	Bun:	Uhm: Arabic
32	T:	do you have best friends?
33→	Bun:	=yes, I have.
34	T:	What is your best friend's name?
35→	Bun:	=Soyfaa
36	T:	ok thank you

The improvement can also be observed when peer interactions in the first and the final weeks were compared. Excerpts 3 and 4 respectively illustrate the conversation performance of the low- and high-proficiency students during the first week of role-play training. As can be observed, the interaction between low-proficiency students is characterized by several pauses, found in lines 42, 43, 44 and 46, as well as repair, as in lines 37, 42, 43, 45, and 47. Both low-proficiency parties also mispronounced words in almost every turn as shown in the brackets. The students also resorted to their first language in line 37 and 43 when they could not remember what they were going to say. Additionally, they failed to close the sequence and it took them a long while to finish the conversation.

(3) Male pair (week 1)

37→	Hilmi:	Hi hello or ((*mai chai*)) Hello
		"no"
38	Wasil:	=Hi.
39→	Hilmi:	What [is] your name?
40	Wasil:	My name is Wassil.
41→	Hilmi:	What your [address]

42→	Wasil:	My [address] (.) my [address] in (.) my [address is] 148
43→	Hilmi:	[What] (.) ((*araileah*)) [what's] your number?
		"what"
44	Wasil:	My (.)
45→	Hilmi	[phone] number
46→	Wasil	my [phone] number [is] (0.5) 0 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8
47→	Hilmi:	Where I come [from?] ((*Mai nah*)) where are you come [from?]
48→	Wasil:	I come [from] in Kokyang

(4) female pair (week 1)

49	Soifa:	What is your name?
50	Bun:	=My name is Buntharika
51	Soifa:	What is your address?
52	Bun:	138 T. Sakom A. Thepa Ch. Songkhla
53	Soifa:	What is your phone number?
54 →	Bun:	=I don't have phone number
55	Soifa:	Where are you (come) from?
56	Bun:	=I come from Khaonoy

The more proficient female pair, on the other hand, performed better in peer interaction and even produced turns different from the script, shown in line 54. Although also unable to close the conversation through a closing sequence, they used less time to finish their conversation. It was interesting to additionally note that overall female students outperformed males in most terms.

In the final week of their scripted role-play training, the improvement can be observed in both groups in such features as sequence closing, repair organization and fluency, as shown in Excerpts 5 and 6.

(5) Male pair (week 10)

57	Wasil:	Hello, Hilmee How are you?
58	Hilmi:	Hi, Wasil. I'm fine, and you?
59	Wasil:	Yeah, very good.
60→	Hilmee:	I [think] you look very happy today. What (.)what di what di
		what [did] you [do on] weekend?
61→	Wasil:	Em…I [went] to the park [on] weekend.
62	Hilmee:	Really?

63	Wasil:	Yeah, I went with my familyAnd you?
64→	Hilmee:	Em..last weekend I went to the (.) cinema with my friends. So,
		how was [your] weekend at the park?
65→	Wasil:	In the park, there [were] many people, children. Also many (.)
		trees and flowers. And many signs, too.
66→	Hilmee:	[Sound Great!]
67	Wasil:	And you, how was the cinema?
68→	Hilmee:	yeah, It is (.) very (0.5) [terrible]
69→	Wasil:	[Why didn't] you go to the waterfall?
70	Hilmee:	I plan to go next time.
71→	Wasil:	[Maybe] we can (to) can go to [together]
72→	Hilmee:	[Very nice idea]
73→	Wasil:	yes Ok, we can [talk] later. Let's go to class.
74→	Hilmee:	Ar::Ar:;[Alright] Bye.
75	Wasil:	Bye.

Obviously, getting into the 10ᵗʰ week of training, the students were able to conduct a more elaborate conversation with not only an opening sequence but a closing sequence, seen from lines 73-75. Additionally, other-initiated repair as seen in line 45 in Excerpt 3 was not found at all.

Such improvements are also observable in the female interaction in the last week. However, unlike the male pair seen in Excerpt 5, high-proficiency female students were able to interact more promptly and converse more smoothly, indicated by latching turns and the absence of pauses. They interacted particularly well and produced only minor mistakes which did not hinder the progress of the conversation, such as the mispronunciation in line 84.

(6) Female pair (week 10)

76	Soifa:	Hello, Bun How are you?
77	Bun:	=Hi, Soy. I'm fine, and you?
78	Soifa:	Yeah, very good
79	Bun:	=I think, you look very happy today. What did you do on
		weekend,
80	Soifa:	Em…I went to the park on weekend
81	Bun:	=Really,
82	Soifa:	Yeah, I went with my family. And you?
83	Bun:	=Em..last weekend I went to the cinema with my friends. So,

		how was your weekend at the park,
84→	Soifa:	In the park, there were many people, children. Also many trees and flowers. And many[signs], too
85	Bun:	=Sound Great!
86	Soifa:	And you, (0.3) howwas the cinema?
87	Bun:	yeah, It is very terrible.
88	Soifa:	=Why didn't you go to the waterfall?
89	Bun:	I plan to go next time
90	Soifa:	=Maybe we can go together.
91	Bun:	Very nice idea
92	Soifa:	=yes. Ok, we can talk later, Let's go to class
93	Bun:	Alright. Bye.
94	Soifa:	Bye.

While the scripted role-play training is able to help improve the Thai primary-school students' oral English performance, regular practice is essential for maintaining most of the aspects of the speaking performance improved, especially those that are more resistant to acquisition and more interactional in nature such as melody and turn responding. Indicated by the scores obtained from the role-play practices over the course of the research and in the retention test, little improvement in the young learners' speaking performance was observed after a period of no training due to intensive extracurricular activities and the school break. When the class activity resumed after these two periods of no practice, a decline in the improvement was already observable in some of the students.

In fact, based on the observation and the interview with the students, those performing well in the post-training tests also reportedly spent time practicing the role-play with their peers outside the classroom, while the less successful ones did not. In line with Juan-Garau &Pe´rez-Vidal (2007), after a few months any success achieved in developing learners' oral performance may be unstable; without regular practice, learners may revert to their previous behavior.

Furthermore, to make the role-play training more effective and to enhance their speaking performance better, teachers should focus more on teaching essential vocabulary and grammar in context and make sure that the students understand the role-play script that they practice. In fact, the students who found the script manageable were reportedly more motivated to do their best in the tests than those finding it too difficult. The lexical and grammatical knowledge provided will not only make the script more comprehensible to the students, but also allow them to construct their turns with less reliance on script memorization, making them more related to what they say and sound more natural in their conversation.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

The results of this study confirmed that the scripted role-play activity can really improve Thai primary-school students' speaking performance. The improvement of every target speech feature can also be retained after a period of no practice even though the degree of improvement of some features dropped faster than others, thus requiring more frequent practice. Teachers of English speaking should also focus more on teaching speech melody, sound pronunciation (cf. Fraser, 2000), as well as vocabulary and grammar in context with emphasis on the importance of comprehensible and meaningful communication. They can always squeeze in these aspects of oral performance into their classes, provide opportunities for communicative practice, and give encouragement to learners as they work towards intelligibility of language use, enabling them to develop not only linguistic but interactional competence for actual non-pedagogical interaction (Morley, 1991).

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