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Magic, Group Interaction, and English Speaking Proficiency Development for Young Learners

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The current study explored a pedagogical possibility of utilizing magic as a source of communicative tasks for young learners in developing their English speaking proficiency. Fifteen primary school students participated in the study, which consisted of a 17-week period of task-based English instruction and data collection. The participants were instructed to accomplish various types of magic task through collaborative group interaction. The data collected for the study pertained to the students' linguistic outputs, interactions in group and attitudes to English learning. They were analyzed for how magic tasks affect the students' English proficiency developments and group interactions. The study results suggested the significant improvement in the students' English speaking proficiencies. They revealed that magic tasks contributed to a) enhancing the motivation to speak in English, b) stimulating the creative and problem-solving processes, and c) providing the sufficient opportunity to repeat and internalize the target expressions. The study results also indicated that the students' satisfaction with their group members and tasks seemed to have positive influences on their interactions in group and English proficiency development. Further discussion and pedagogical implications are provided as well as the study limitations.

[magic/task/interaction/English speaking proficiency/young learner]

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I. INTRODUCTION

A wealth of studies suggests the utility of task-based language teaching in yielding language learners' meaningful and active participations in authentic communication (Bygate, 1999; Ellis, 2003; Jeon, Cho, & Park, 2002; Jung, 2000; Nunan, 1989; Richards & Rodgers, 2005; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Skehan, 1998; Willis & Willis, 2007). As suggested by the notion of *task-based* language teaching, its success largely depends on the characteristics of a task being chosen. The task being chosen informs a teacher of a series of activities necessary for achieving the outcomes, types and order of input data to be presented to students, and types and timing of assistance that students will need from a teacher for performing the task. One most fundamental quality of a task, yet, is that the task itself should make students feel worthwhile working on it (Ellis, 2003; Nunn, 2000). This calls attention to the significance of planning and designing *adequate* tasks for various age groups of learners and instructional settings.

In this view, it would behoove language professionals to explore materials and sources that may turn out to be beneficial for language teaching. The current study intends to explore the pedagogical possibility of utilizing magic[1] as a source of communicative instructional tasks, particularly for young learners. Tarbell (2001, first published in 1920) is among those few that attended the pedagogical utility of magic. He suggests that magic may contribute to language learning in terms of a) increasing learners' interest in the tasks and motivation to speak, b) stimulating learners' creative thinking ability, and c) creating a context for adequate amount of speaking drills through task repetition. Tarbell's suggestion is supported by D.-K. Lee (2001) that utilized magic tasks in a physics class with primary school students. He observed that his students showed the increased concentration on the class subject. However, there is no study that examined the utility of magic for English teaching, as far as we know.

Along with the characteristics of a task, successful task-based language teaching also involves quantity and quality learner interaction. Group work can provide learners with increased opportunities to interact with their peers, which enhance their communicative competence (Jeon et al., 2002; Jung, 2000; S.-H. Lee, 2007). There are multiple factors that affect the learner-to-learner interaction, including group member composition, group leader, group cohesiveness, and group members' satisfactions with tasks and activities. (Bierhoff & Muller, 2005; Eskilson & Wiley, 1976; Mahenthiran & Rouse, 2000). Uncovering the influences of different combinations of these factors on group interaction can provide insight into planning and implementing a collaborative task-based instruction.

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[1] In the current study, the term of magic or magic performance refers to a magic trick employed as a pedagogical task for the teaching of English.

The current study aims to explore the pedagogical benefit of utilizing magic as a source of various communicative tasks for primary school students' English speaking proficiency development. Specifically, this study is intended to explain *how* the characteristics of magic, as suggested by Tarbell (2001), affect the students' English speaking proficiencies and interactions in group. It also aims to examine how the students' satisfactions with magic task and group members influence their interactions in group and English speaking proficiency development. The research questions for the current study are as follows.

- RQ1. Does using magic as a collaborative group task lead to an increase in primary school students' levels of English speaking proficiency?
- RQ2. Do the characteristics of magic stimulate primary school students' English speaking proficiency development and interactions in group, as suggested by Tarbell (2001)?
- RQ3. How do the students' satisfactions with group members and magic task stimulate primary school students' English speaking proficiency development and interactions in group?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Magic as a Communicative Task

Nunan (1989) defines a task as "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form (p. 10)". By this definition, he highlights the communicative process by which learners achieve a particular goal in performing a task. Similarly, Bachman and Palmer (1996) explain the notion of a task as "an activity that involves individuals in using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or outcome in a particular situation (p. 44)". The view of a task as a pedagogical activity in which learners use real language for real purposes is reiterated by numerous researchers (Bygate, 1999; Ellis, 2003; Jeon, 2005; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Skehan, 1998; Willis, 1996). Ellis (2003) states that a task "has a clearly defined communicative outcome (p. 9)". Samuda and Bygate (2008) also suggest that a task should have a non-linguistic outcome with the overall purpose of enhancing learners' target language proficiencies.

As noted earlier, the success of a task-based instruction largely depends on the task being chosen. Tarbell (2001) suggests three major characteristics of magic that may contribute to language learning. First of all, a magic task can stimulate learners' *motivation to speak*. Motivation is an essential affective factor in learning a second language. A

number of studies show that interesting tasks and activities stimulate self-motivation, which is an important contributor to successful language learning (Hedge, 2000; Oxford, 1997; Willis & Willis, 2007). Larsen-Freeman (2000) emphasizes the function of a task in improving learners' motivation, which promotes learning. Magic fascinates young learners with its interesting story and gestures. Particularly for language learning, a magic task can create the demand for speaking because if a magic performer does not say anything, the audience cannot understand what he or she is doing.

A task utilizing magic can also enhance learners' creative thinking and problem-solving abilities. Performing a magic trick requires learners to *plan* the sequenced moves and proper patters[2] constituting a magic task. Individual learners or groups make conscious effort to generate different patters to help their audience understand their magic performances. This stimulates learners' cognitive process, which leads them to produce more complex sequences of moves and refined patters (refer to Ellis, 2003 and Richard-Amato, 2003). Having themselves immersed into a magic task completion, learners are led to exert their creative and problem-solving abilities.

Lastly, a task of performing a magic trick provides learners the opportunity to repeat the same verbal practice, which promotes learners' internalization of the target language. Ellis (2003) suggests that repeating the same communicative task, along with providing planning time, brings positive effects to language learning. Lee (2007) also considers task repetition as an essential stage of learning a language. Through task repetition, what language learners acquired is strengthened and internalized into their language system. Even with a simple magic trick, learners need to master the moves and patters through a repeated practice to be able to perform the magic. As insufficient practice often results in a mediocre performance, learners are motivated to go on practicing until they can perform the trick perfectly and speak their patters more naturally. The task repetition is not merely a repetition of an exact, same imitation; it is rather multiple retrials that involve the moves and patters becoming more refined and more natural. Through the retrials, learners can internalize what they learned and retrieve them for other communicative situations. According to Lynch and Maclean (2000), task repetition may be done without teacher intervention. Peer feedback can also stimulate mutual task repetition.

As discussed so far, a magic task has potential for providing positive pedagogical effects on the teaching of English. Along with a task fitting for a given pedagogical purpose, quality and quantity learner interaction is essential for a successful task-based instruction. The next section discusses some important factors influencing the learner interaction.

2. Interaction in Group Work

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[2] Patter is referred to as "the line of talk given by [a] magician to his audience while performing a trick (Tarbell, 1920, p.29)."

Successful task-based language teaching involves quantity and quality learner interaction. Group work can provide learners with increased opportunities to interact with their peers, which enhance their communicative competence (Jeon, Cho, & Park, 2002; Jung, 2000; Lee, 2007). Interaction in group work is affected by multiple factors including the organization of group members, presence of a group leader, and group members' satisfactions with tasks and activities (Bierhoff & Muller, 2005; Eskilson & Wiley, 1976; Mahenthiran & Rouse, 2000).

1) Heterogeneous Group Formation

Individual group members' linguistic and personal backgrounds may cause different group performance. Ellis (2003) suggests that the group with low level learners often encounters a great difficulty in completing their task in a target language, and their group interactions are less effective for language learning. Aina (2001) maintains that learners with similar levels of language proficiency may compete with each other when they are in the same group. She suggests that the heterogeneous group formation better stimulates learning, providing learners with increased opportunities to develop interdependent relationships while helping each other with both linguistic and non-linguistic problems.

2) Presence of a Group Leader

Interactions in group work can be more effective when the group has a leader (Goldman & Fraas, 1965; Min & Kim, 2005; Morris & Seeman, 1950). Morris and Seeman (1950) define a leader as "an individual influencing group effectiveness (p.149)". According to them, a group leader plays an important role such as facilitating group morale, integration, or productivity and increasing each member's motivations, aspirations, and perceptions. In the study of Goldman and Fraas (1965), the group had the least trials to achieve the group task when no leader was appointed. On the other hand, the group had the best results when a group leader was selected based on the ability to perform the group task. Gladding (2003) cogently reports that members in a leaderless group are confused with what to do for accomplishing the task. Bierhoff and Muller (2005) further suggest that group leaders should have a leadership to enhance interdependent relationships among the group members and facilitate each member's contribution to the group work.

3) Group Members' Satisfactions with Group Members and Task Types

In collaborative group work, it is essential for group members to get along with each other to perform their group task effectively (Dornyei, 1997; Gladding, 2003; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993). According to Gladding (2003), selecting group members should be carefully decided because each member's satisfaction with their members affects group cohesiveness and individual learning outcomes. Dornyei (1997) also sees group cohesiveness as a strong mediator between cooperative language learning process and successful task outcomes. Group cohesiveness can be better achieved when group members are familiar with each other (Ellis, 2003; Robinson, 2001). According to Mahenthiran and Rouse (2000), the group consisting of close friends gained better group satisfaction with their group members and resulted in a higher group performance than the group whose members were randomly assigned.

As for the students' satisfactions with tasks, Nunn (2000) ascertains that task types and task familiarity affect task performance. This suggests that more various and dynamic tasks need to be designed, which help learners find the tasks they are satisfied with. Some of the typical types of pedagogical tasks include information-gap task, problem-solving task, creative task, and role-play. In an information-gap task, a group member holds information for a task which the other members do not know. In order to complete the task, other members ask questions of the member holding the information to get right information. In a problem-solving task, all the group members are needed to cooperatively solve a problem, explaining the nature of the problem and its solutions to each other (Willis & Willis, 2007). In a creative task, they create an activity with their group members based on what they learned. Lastly, in a role-play, participants act out specific roles based on a script.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

A total of 15 primary school students participated in the study. They were recruited through an advertisement offering a free after-school program of English and magic lessons at a private language school. The participants consisted of nine boys and six girls. None of them had studied abroad. The first author had many years of English teaching experience for various aged students from 4 to 37 at private institutions. Particularly, she had taught primary school aged students approximately for 7 years. Her class with the participants was carried out mostly in English, but the teacher used Korean when she felt it necessary for the students' understanding.

At the beginning of the study, the first author interviewed the participants in English to measure their initial levels of oral English proficiency (i.e., pre-test for English proficiency

level). The interviews were conducted in the classroom where the students would study English for 17 weeks. The interview questions were adopted from the English Speaking Proficiency Test for Junior Level 2 (ESPT, 2006)[3], which is originally a computer-based interactive test. Eight out of 15 students' ESPT scores were the same level of 4; four students at the level 3; and the rest students at the level 5. With the majority of the students being at the relatively similar levels of proficiency, the students were divided into four groups based on their familiarity with each other. Table 1 presents the participants' background information.

TABLE 1

Background Information from the Participants

Group	Name*	Sex**	Grade	Speaking Level (score)	Private Eng. Lesson*** (months)	Self-study (for a week)
A	David	M	6	3 (575.0)	72	1 hr.
	Joon	M	4	5 (200.0)	9	4 hrs.
	Beth	F	4	4 (275.0)	36	2 hrs.
	Jim	M	4	4 (275.0)	9	1 hr.
B	Iris	F	5	3 (425.0)	60	3 hrs.
	Meg	M	5	4 (300.0)	12	1 hr.
	Amy	F	3	5 (150.5)	4	3 hrs.
	Stew	M	1	5 (200.0)	12	3 hrs.
C	Jenny	F	5	3 (475.0)	60	1 hr.
	Ruby	F	5	4 (275.0)	12	3 hrs.
	Nadia	F	5	4 (325.0)	12	3 hrs.
D	Owen	M	4	3 (450.0)	48	1 hr.
	Tim	M	4	4 (375.0)	24	1 hr.
	Chris	M	4	4 (300.0)	60	2 hrs.
	Ross	M	5	4 (250.5)	6	1 hr.

Note. *Pseudonyms are used for all participants to ensure anonymity. ** M = male; F = female. *** Private Eng. Lesson = the number of months for each participant had taken English lessons at a private language school.

As shown in the Table 1, the participants had a wide range of learning experience at a private English institution from 4 to 72 months. Their grade levels ranged from 1st to 6th.

[3] The ESPT was approved by both the Ministry of Education and Science and Human Resources in 1994. The ESPT interview questions and scoring criteria for the student responses are provided in Appendices A and B, respectively.

The Group A (with 4th to 6th graders) and Group B (with 1st to 5th graders) were heterogeneous for gender. The Group C (with all 5th graders) and Group D (with 4th graders and 5th grader) were homogeneous for gender. The participants all reported having studied English more than one hour for a week. For their self-study of English, they did their homework such as listening to English tapes, memorizing some words, or reading English books. None of them reported having spent on English speaking practice outside the classroom.

2. Measurements and Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures included a) a background information survey; b) pre- and post-attitude surveys, along with supplementary interviews; c) pre- and post-tests for English speaking proficiency levels; d) the first author's observation and videotape-recording of the students' group interactions on various magic tasks. The overall procedures of data collection are summarized in the Table 2.

TABLE 2

The Overall Procedures for Data Collection

W1:	Pre-test	A background survey and an pre- attitude survey Pre-test for English oral proficiency level
W2: Lesson 1	Topic	Show your magic!
	Materials	6 animal-prediction cards
	Practice	Students practice the magic in pairs and show it to other students.
W3: Lesson 2	Topic	Make your own cards!
	Materials	6 blank cards
	Creative task	Each group makes its own 6 animal-prediction cards.
W4: Lesson 3	Topic	Make procedures for a magic!
	Materials	a ring, a chain
	Problem-solving task	Each group makes its own procedures for a magic trick.
W5: Lesson 4	Topic	Story-making!
	Materials	a ring, a chain
	Creative task	Each group makes up its own story using the materials.
W6: Lesson 5	Topic	Find the secret!
	Materials	ESP cards
	Problem-solving task	Each group finds the different spots of the back of the ESP cards.
W7: Lesson 6	Topic	Learn a magic from a group leader!
	Materials	Newspaper, a glue, a scissors

	Information-gap task	The group leaders instruct a magic trick to their members.
W8: Lesson 7	Topic	Re-order a story magic!
	Materials	Cards
	Creative task	Each group makes its own story by ordering the scrambled cards.
W9: Lesson 8	Topic	Find a magic trick!
	Materials	Cards
	Problem-solving task	Each group finds a magic trick by following the instruction.
W10~11	Review, post-attitude survey, & supplementary interviews	
W12~15	Preparations for group projects & group project performance	
W16~17	Post-test for English oral proficiency	

1) Week 1: Group Organization, Pre-Attitude Survey, and Pre-Test for English Proficiency

In the week 1, the participants were asked to respond to a survey that examines their attitudes to English speaking, a magic task, and group work. As the participants were primary school students, the teacher (the first author) assisted individual students with oral explanation about each question. Upon their completion of the survey, they were interviewed with the teacher to measure their initial levels of English speaking proficiency (i.e., pre-test for English proficiency level). The students were told that the interviews would be audiotape-recorded. All interviews were transcribed in verbatim. The students' proficiency levels were measured based on the ESPT evaluation criteria (ESPT, 2006; Appendix B). For the both pre- and post-tests for English proficiency levels, none of the students produced meaningful responses to the last two questions out of the original 17 ones of the ESPT for Junior Level 2. Thus, the students' responses to the first 15 questions were subjected to analysis in the current study. Along with the first author, a graduate student majoring in English education worked as an independent rater. The student's proficiency *levels,* based on the two raters' averaged scores, were again compared with the second author's judgments. No disagreement occurred in regard to deciding students' proficiency levels.

2) Weeks 2 to 9: Task Organization and Observation of Group Interaction

During the weeks 2 to 9, English lessons utilizing collaborative magic tasks were carried out for an hour once a week. Each task was developed by the first author based on Tarbell (2001) and magic lessons she took at a private magic school. The tasks for the study were modified for and adjusted to the participants' English proficiency levels and pedagogical purposes. The task for the week 3 is presented in Appendix C as an example. As for a

typical lesson, the participants observed a magic trick done by the teacher and then they were asked to work in group to accomplish the magic. During each lesson, they learned both some English expressions which might be needed for accomplishing the task. As part of the group work, the students completed a weekly sheet where they reviewed what they had learned in the previous lesson, and wrote what they thought they could say for the today's magic task. By doing this, the students were given time for planning and organizing their thoughts and then consulted with the sheet when practicing their patters. The teacher observed the group interactions and kept her observation notes. She also videotaped parts of student interactions in group when she had the chance. Strictly speaking, this videotaping was not conducted systematically, and thus this was used for the evaluation of student interaction only in conjunction with the teachers' observation-notes and informal interviews with students.

3) Weeks 10 & 11: Review and Post-Attitude Survey

In the week 10, the participants were asked to participate in a speed game in order to help them recall the 40 English expressions that they had learned for the previous eight weeks. In week 11, the participants responded to the post-attitude survey that asks the students' satisfactions with their group members and types of task (refer to Appendix D). The teacher also conducted an informal, supplementary interview with each participant regarding their experiences with magic tasks and group work.

3) Weeks 12 to 15: Preparation and Demonstration of Collaborative Group Projects

During the weeks 12 to 14, the participants in group were asked to prepare their group projects where they select one magic trick, organize the moves and patters, and demonstrate the magic performance to people outside the class on the week 15. The aim of the group magic performance was to provide the students with the opportunity to perform a magic trick through English outside the classroom, which would enhance their confidence in English speaking. For their group projects, each group could either select one out of the tricks introduced in the previous lessons or modify it creatively. The students in group collaboratively created the script based on what they had learned, and decided on who would be the magician.

4) Weeks 16 to 17: Post-test for English Speaking Proficiency

During the weeks 16 to 17, the teacher interviewed each student based on the ESPT questions to measure their levels of English speaking proficiency. With the four month interval, the participants were not expected to remember the questions. The evaluation

criteria and procedures were the same as those of the pre-test.

3. Data Analysis

The data sets submitted to analysis in the study were a) the pre- and post-tests for English speaking proficiency level; b) the pre- and post-attitude survey results; c) transcripts of the videotape-recorded student interactions in group, and d) the teacher's observation notes and informal, supplementary interviews. Initially, to assess the improvement in the students' levels of English speaking proficiency, their pre- and post-test results were compared in terms of their ESPT scores at the two time-points. Because we wanted to know more detailed information of the specific areas of improvement beyond the students' overall levels of proficiency, we further examined the students' interview data in terms of the changes in a) the number of syllabus, b) pause length, c) speech rate, and d) the number of '*I don't know.*' Table 3 presents the definition of each measurement area suggested by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005).

TABLE 3

Four Measurement Areas for English Speaking Proficiency

1 The number of syllables*	the total number of syllables of the responses
2 Pause length	the total length of silent time during the answer
3 Speech rate	the number of syllables divided by the total number of minutes the responses took to produce
4 The number of "I don't know"	the total number of answering that "I don't know."

Note. *In counting the number of syllabus, the simply repeated words, phrases, or clauses with no modification were excluded.

Subsequently, the transcripts of the videotape-recorded group interactions and the teacher's observation-notes were analyzed together to see the student-student interactions in groups. As for the coding scheme of group interactions, the following five criteria were adopted from the Target Language Observation Scheme (TALOS)[4] suggested by Ullman and Geva (1985): a) use of L1; b) use of L2; c) student talk time on task; d) participation; and e) student-to-student interaction on task. The TALOS scheme is a high-inference instrument, which requires the evaluator's judgment on an observed event. The first author evaluated the student interactions based on the video-recording as well as her own observation-notes. The second author independently examined the transcripts of the

[4] The original TALOS scheme for student behavior consists of nine criteria. The current study selected the five that were relevant to group interaction.

videotape-recording and compared the results with those of the first author's. Any disagreement was resolved through re-examination and discussion; yet because the transcript revealed only partial evidence for student interaction, the first author's judgment was weighed more highly.

Lastly, the results from the pre- and post-attitude surveys were compared in terms of the students' attitudes to English speaking, a magic task, and group work. From the post-attitude survey results about the students' satisfactions with their group members and types of task, their relationships with the students' interactions in groups and proficiency improvements were explored.

IV. RESULTS

1. Changes in the Students' Levels of English Speaking Proficiency

Table 4 presents the changes in the students' scores of English speaking proficiency between pre- and post-tests, measured by the ESPT evaluation criteria. The means of the students' scores from the pre- and post-tests were 323.40 and 413.53, respectively. The differences between the pre- and post- scores ranged from 50.0 to 175.0. The paired-samples t test indicated that the students' proficiency scores significantly improved, $t = 7.45, p < .00$.

TABLE 4

Changes in the Students' Scores of English Speaking Proficiency

Group	Name	English Proficiency	
		Pre-Interviews	Post-Interviews
A	David	3 (575.0)	2 (625.0)
	Joon	5 (200.0)	4 (250.0)
	Beth	4 (275.0)	4 (350.0)
	Jim	4 (275.0)	4 (325.0)
B	Iris	3 (425.0)	3 (575.0)
	Meg	4 (300.0)	4 (350.5)
	Amy	5 (150.5)	4 (225.5)
	Stew	5 (200.0)	4 (251.0)
C	Jenny	3 (475.0)	2 (650.0)
	Ruby	4 (275.0)	4 (400.0)
	Nadia	4 (325.0)	4 (425.0)

D	Owen	3 (450.0)	3 (600.0)
	Tim	4 (375.0)	3 (425.5)
	Chris	4 (300.0)	4 (350.5)
	Ross	4 (250.5)	4 (400.0)

The participants' responses to the pre- and post-tests were also evaluated for the four measurement areas of English speaking proficiency, the outcomes of which being presented in the Table 5. A Repeated Measures ANOVA was conducted to test the significance of the pre-post changes in the four related measurement areas. The result indicated the significant changes in the numbers of syllabus and 'I don't know,' $F(1, 14) = 26.77$, $p < .01$; $F(1, 14) = 30.62$, $p < .01$, respectively. The changes in the other two areas were not significant.

TABLE 5

Evaluations of the Four Areas in English Speaking Proficiency

Group	Name	Measures							
		Number of Syllabus		Pause length		Speech rate		Number of 'I don't know'	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
A	David	66	102	3	6	72.0	68.1	0	0
	Joon	27	57	36	18	30.0	44.1	6	3
	Beth	96	129	25	11	83.5	85.7	3	0
	Jim	32	57	19	35	42.7	44.3	4	1
B	Iris	84	265	45	54	58.0	91.3	1	0
	Meg	89	105	30	15	62.7	63.0	3	0
	Amy	34	99	24	51	46.3	68.2	7	6
	Stew	26	82	0	35	86.7	46	5	1
C	Jenny	104	195	31	19	64.2	67.2	2	1
	Ruby	53	154	68	45	47.6	56.4	3	0
	Nadia	81	179	56	34	46.7	76.1	4	1
D	Owen	110	283	49	31	63.4	66.7	1	0
	Tim	80	133	8	46	69.6	93.9	2	1
	Chris	87	97	7	25	88.5	51.7	7	0
	Ross	88	170	25	5	64.4	67.8	3	0

The Example 1 below further provides a qualitative evidence for the students' improvement in their English speaking proficiency. David, at his post-test, produced the

utterances with more complex syntactic structures such as subject-verb (*mom have; father is*), verb-objective (*giving me*) and conjunction (*because*) and more various words (*photographer, balloon*), than he did at the pre-test. Similar changes were also observed in the other students' linguistic outputs.

EXAMPLE 1

Changes in the Students' Responses to the ESPT Interviews

	Pre-interviews		Post-interviews
Teacher	*Tell me about your English teacher.*	Teacher	*Tell me about your English teacher.*
David	*My mother and school teacher.*	David	*Park, Bo-min.*
Teacher	*What's her name?*		
David	*Kim, So-young.*		
Teacher	*How's she?*	Teacher	*How's she?*
David	*Scary.*	David	*Cool, because [pause] my food and give me.*
Teacher	*Look at this picture. This is your mom and this is your dad. What are they doing?*	Teacher	*Look at this picture. This is your mom and this is your dad. What are they doing?*
David	*Looking for me.*	David	*Mom is [pause] mom is have a balloon and father is photographer.*

2. How Magic Affects English Speaking Proficiency and Group Interaction

Tarbell (2001) suggests the three beneficial factors of utilizing magic for language learning. The factors were a) enhancing the motivation to speak in English; b) stimulating creative thinking and problem-solving process; and c) providing the opportunity to consolidate their learning through repetition. We examined *how* these factors affected the students' improvement of oral English proficiency and interactions in groups in our study.

1) Increased Motivation to Speak in English and Collaborate with Peers

As the instructions progressed, it was observed that the students became more engaged in their group work and magic tasks. They enjoyed performing a magic trick in English in front of their group members, to the class, and to people outside the classroom. After the week 5, some of the students started to volunteer to demonstrate a magic trick in English to the class. Even when they failed in completing their tricks or forgot what to say in English,

they seemed neither frustrated nor discouraged. Their group members supported the students when they were in trouble and cheered for them when they completed the magic tricks successfully. As a result, as the time came near to the final week, most participants wanted to perform magic tricks to their peers.

The participants' increased motivation to speak in English was supported by the post-survey results and supplementary interviews. All of the 15 students responded to the survey question regarding their satisfaction with doing magic tasks as 'very satisfied' (Q5; Appendix D). They all also reported having performed some magic tricks through English in front of their friends and family members outside the classroom (Q10). Given that in the pre-attitude survey, none of them reported having practiced English speaking outside the classroom, the instructions with collaborative magic tasks most likely contributed to the students' increased motivation to speak in English. The supplementary interviews regarding the students' experience with their magic performance outside the class are presented in the Example 2.

EXAMPLE 2

The Students' Magic Performances outside the Class

Beth	*I like to show a magic trick in English to people who do not know the secret because they want to learn the magic from me.*
Iris	*When I performed a magic trick in English, they seemed to concentrate on my speaking to understand the magic. I really liked it.*
Jenny	*I showed a trick in English to my parents, and they loved it. I can do it better next time.*
Ross	*I want to learn more magic tricks, because I enjoy getting feedback from my audience such as, 'Wow, you are amazing.' or 'How did you do it? Please, let me know the secret.'*

The collaborative magic tasks seemed to contribute to the students' positive attitudes to group work as well. For example, each group member had a role as "a secret-sender" for their group work. In this lesson, the teacher demonstrated a magic trick and revealed its secret to the class. Then those students who understood it faster took the role of a secret-sender and taught the secret to the other members in group. In the post-survey, 13 out of the 15 participants reported that they preferred group work to individual work because they enjoyed teaching their group members what they figured out (Q1).

2) Stimulating Creative and Problem-Solving Thinking Process

In each lesson, the teacher demonstrated a magic trick, which would be later performed by the students in group. Based on their observations, the students were instructed to plan their moves and patters necessary for performing the trick. Each group was encouraged to

jot down first in Korean what they were going to say and in what orders, and then prepare a complete script written in English. They were given approximately 10 to 15 minutes for their planning and writing their scripts. In the lesson of week 4, the teacher performed her magic tricks *silently* and asked the students to prepare their magic performance. All the four groups performed their tricks through English *successfully* with a little assistance from the teacher.

EXAMPLE 3

Group B's Scripts Written in Korean and English for the Week 4

Korean Outline	English Transcript
1. 제가 이 두 개의 도구를 이용하여 놀라운 것을 보여 드리겠습니다.	*1. I'll use this tool. I'll show you a surprising magic.*
2. (떨어뜨리면서) 하나, 둘	*2. I'll drop it. One, two*
3. 마지막으로 하나, 둘, 셋!	*3. This time, you'll see something. One, two, three!*
4. 신기하지 않습니까?	*4. Isn't it amazing?*

The Example 3 above presents the scripts written by the Group B with Iris, Meg, Amy, and Stew. The accomplishment of magic tasks provided the context for the students to exert their creative and problem-solving abilities. They also reflected on the language that they would speak while planning and preparing the sequenced moves and patters.

3) Providing the Opportunity to Consolidate Their Learning through Repetition

As noted in the Data Collection Procedures, the students in group were instructed to write the English expressions that they had learned on a weekly sheet during the lessons from the weeks 2 to 10. For about 10 minutes, they discussed and wrote down the words, phrases, or sentences that they could recall from the previous lessons. Through this exercise, the students encountered the same expressions repeatedly, which led them to practice the expressions again for their subsequent magic performances. The Example 4 illustrates the students' meaning-negotiation process by which they created a story. To accomplish their task, the students repeatedly relied on the expression of 'how do you spell ~?' that they had learned in the previous week. It also suggests that one student's (Owen) repeated use of an expression also helped his peers (Ross) learn it.

EXAMPLE 4

The Students' Repeated Use of 'How Do You Spell~?'

Week 5: Story-Making

(Chris is writing a script in English for his group.)

Owen	*Teacher! **how do you spell** "chain"?*
Ross	*방금 그거 뭐였지?pull?*
Owen	*Teacher! **how do you spell** "군인"?*
Teacher	*군인? soldier.*
Ross	*soldier는 별로야, 군인이 뭐 사람보다 약해?*
Chris	*Al Kaeda*
Ross & Owen	*Teacher! **how do you spell** "포로"?*
Ross	***How spell** ... 잡는 거 뭐지?*
Owen	*Catch?*
Ross	*Teacher! **how do you spell** "catch"?*

Most of the students were observed to initiate or finish their magic performances with the repeated expressions sometime after the week 6. For instance, they could introduce the magic tools at the beginning of their magic performances by using the expressions, "I have~" or "This is~". They also completed their magic performance by saying, "Isn't it amazing?" or "Give us a hand!". In fact, the students' post-tests for speaking proficiency revealed that they successfully internalized some of the repeatedly used English expressions as well as the relevant syntactic structures. For example, at the pre-tests, multiple students (Meg, Amy, Stew, Iris, Ruby, Nadia, Owen, Chris) simply answered "green" for the question of "What color is this?" However, the same students answered "It's green" or "This is green" at their post-tests.

3. Group Satisfaction, Task Preference, English Speaking Proficiency and Group Interaction

In the post-survey, the students were asked to evaluate the degrees of their satisfaction with their group members and the tasks they had done (Q5 & Q7). The supplementary interviews further probed into their reasons for preference. Table 6 presents the results of their group satisfaction.

TABLE 6

The Students' Satisfaction with Their Group Members

(Group A)	David	Joon	Beth	Jim	Total (Mean)
Level of satisfaction	2	2	1	1	6 (1.5)
(Group B)	Iris	Meg	Amy	Stew	Total (Mean)
Level of satisfaction	2	3	3	3	11 (2.75)

(Group C)	Jenny	Ruby	Nadia		Total (Mean)
Level satisfaction	3	3	3		9 (3)
(Group D)	Owen	Tim	Chris	Ross	Total (Mean)
Level of satisfaction	3	3	3	3	12 (3)

Note. 0 = never satisfied; 1= little satisfied; 2 = a little satisfied; 3 = very satisfied.

The students of the groups C and D expressed the highest levels of satisfaction with their group members. On the other hand, in the group A, Beth and Jim reported being little satisfied with their group members. They both complained that they had had few chances to perform the group tasks because of a dominating member, David. In the Group B, Iris was one who was *a little satisfied* with her group members. She felt that the other members were not as much active in the group work as she expected. She reported, "I wished that my group members had more actively worked on the group task." However, Iris as a group leader felt the responsibility for her group and made effort to encourage the members, which yielded the successful accomplishment of group tasks for the most of the cases.

TABLE 7

Student Interactions in Group

Group	Name	Measures					
		Use of L1	Use of L2	S-S Interaction	S Talk Time	Participation	Total
A	David	2	3	4	1	4	14
	Joon	1	1	1	2	2	7
	Beth	3	2	2	2	3	12
	Jim	3	2	2	2	2	11
B	Iris	1	4	2	4	4	15
	Meg	3	1	3	2	3	12
	Amy	3	1	2	3	3	12
	Stew	2	2	2	2	2	10
C	Jenny	1	4	4	4	4	17
	Ruby	1	3	3	4	4	15
	Nadia	1	3	3	4	4	15
D	Owen	1	4	4	4	4	17
	Tim	2	2	2	2	2	10
	Chris	2	2	2	3	3	12
	Ross	2	3	4	4	4	17
Mean Score		1.87	2.47	2.67	2.87	3.20	13.07

Note. 0 = Extremely low; 1 = Low; 2 = Fair; 3 = High; 4 = Extremely high.

Each group's amount of interaction, measured by the TALOS (Ullman & Geva, 1985), is presented in the Table 7 above. The students' overall participation rate was 'high'; the amount of their use of L2, student-student interaction, and student talk time on task were 'fair' to 'high'; and their use of L1 rate was 'low' to 'fair'. Given their English speaking proficiencies not being so high, this low rate of L1 use seems to suggest the promise of utilizing magic tasks for English teaching. Table 8 presents the four groups' mean scores of their group satisfaction, group interaction, and changes in their ESPT scores. Despite no statistical test being allowed, it allows us the speculation that the group satisfaction, group interaction, and English speaking proficiency improvement were positively related to each other. The group A with the lowest level of member satisfaction showed the lowest amount of group interaction and the smallest changes in their ESPT scores; on the other hand, the groups C and D with the highest levels of group satisfaction demonstrated the relatively high group interaction and large score change in their ESPT scores.

TABLE 8

Group Satisfaction, Group Interaction, and English Speaking Proficiency Scores

Group	Group Satisfaction	Group Interaction	Changes in the ESPT
A	1.5	11.00	56.25
B	2.75	12.25	81.63
C	3	15.67	133.33
D	3	14.00	100.13

TABLE 9

The Students' Preferred Types of Task

		Info-Gap	Creative			Problem-Solving		
Group	Name	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Task 7
A	David	2	1	3	5	4	6	7
	Joon	7	1	2	3	4	6	5
	Beth	5	3	1	4	7	2	6
	Jim	7	2	1	5	3	4	6
B	Iris	6	3	2	4	5	7	1

	Meg	6	1	2	5	3	7	4
	Amy	6	4	2	5	7	3	1
	Stew	6	2	4	5	1	3	7
C	Jenny	7	2	4	5	1	6	3
	Ruby	5	1	4	3	7	2	6
	Nadia	7	4	3	5	2	6	1
D	Owen	6	2	7	1	3	4	5
	Tim	4	2	5	1	6	7	3
	Chris	7	3	4	2	6	1	5
	Ross	7	2	6	5	1	3	4
Mean		5.87	2.20	3.33	3.87	4	4.53	4.27
(Order)		(7th)	(1st)	(2nd)	(3rd)	(4th)	(6th)	(5th)

Note. Task 1= Learning a magic from a group leader; Task 2 = Story-making; Task 3 = Making your own cards; Task 4 = Re-ordering a story magic; Task 5 = Making the procedures for a magic; Task 6 = Finding a magic trick from the instruction; Task 7 = Finding the secret of a magic trick.

The post-survey also probed to identify the students' preferred types of task (Q9). It asked the students to hierarchically order their preferences of the seven tasks that they did weekly. As shown in the Table 9 above, the students overall preferred the creative types of task to the problem-solving types of tasks; they liked the information-gap task the least.

This result may appear contrary to that of Lee's (2005) study. In his study, learners had the most difficult time with a creative task such as writing a diary. Differentially from Lee's (2005) study, however, in the current study, the learners were given a concrete situation and structure for their writing. As shown by the Example 5, the teacher demonstrated a magic trick using a ring and a chain, and then, asked the student groups to create their own short stories collaboratively. The students understood that the magic had a basic story line: *one is running away and the other is trying to catch it*. While the group members were creating the story, the interactions in group were observed to be highly active both verbally and non-verbally.

EXAMPLE 5

Story-Making Task

Original Story	Group B	Group C
This is a thief, and this is a police officer.	Ring is student and chain is teacher.	Ring is son, chain is mom. Son school test zero.
The thief is running away. (x3)	Student is studying for a long	Mom is angry.
Catch the thief! (x3)	time in the class.	Son is out a house.

The police officer caught the thief.	Student is bored to study. Student is running away from the school. Teacher is angry and catches the student again.	The son is running away. Catch the son!

Regarding their least favorite task of learning a magic trick from the group leader, they reported having felt it difficult to undertake. In the task, only the group leaders learned the magic from the teacher. They returned to their group members to teach the procedures and reveal the secret. Each group leader felt much pressure to explain the magic trick in English. With the limited knowledge of English expressions, the groups A and B gave up accomplishing the task while the groups C and D managed to demonstrate the trick, yet only with little verbal explanation.

V. DISCUSSION

The results of the current study suggested that all of the 15 students demonstrated the significant improvement in their English speaking proficiency (RQ1). With one-hour class per week for 15 weeks (except the first and last research week), their degrees of improvement seemed substantial. Overall, the students enjoyed magic tasks and collaboration with their peers. This emphasizes the importance of presenting learners a task that stimulates their interest and enthusiasm. As Rivers (1983) suggests, teachers are advised to involve their students in the selection of tasks based on their personal preferences. Students' preferences could differentially affect their reaction to English learning.

The study results also supported Tarbell's (2001) suggestion that magic could contributed to a) enhancing the motivation to speak in English, b) stimulating the creative and problem-solving processes, and c) providing the opportunity to repeat the target expressions (RQ2). All of the 15 students reported that they had been 'very satisfied' with doing magic tasks. They not only volunteered to perform magic tricks in class but also sought the opportunities to perform some magic tricks in English for their friends and family members outside the classroom. Utilizing magic as various communicative tasks also stimulated the students to exert their creative and problem-solving thinking processes.

Allowing the students the planning-time and writing exercise was beneficial for stimulating their collaborative meaning-negotiation processes. Particularly with the writing exercise, the students could reflect on target English expressions and have the opportunity to repeatedly practice them, which led to their acquisition of the relevant syntactic

structures. This result is consistent with the suggestions made by Ellis (2003), Richard-Amato (2003), and Willis and Willis (2007), regarding the benefits of giving some planning time and writing exercises prior to the task performance. In the current study, the participants reported that they felt more confident when they spoke after the writing activity because they could refer to their written scripts.

Not being statistically tested, the speculation can be made that the students' satisfactions with their group members and tasks are positively related with their interactions in group and English proficiency development (RQ3). This suggests the necessity for a careful group composition and task design. To organize groups in the way that facilitates group cohesiveness, teachers should carefully consider the students' English proficiency levels, familiarity with each other, gender, and personality, as well. It also suggests the necessity for a task being presented with a concrete situation and linguistic structure, as supported by Mckay (2006).

As for the limitations of the current study, it should be noted that we failed to follow the typical task-based instructional procedure suggested by Willis (1996), setting the form-focused lesson aside. Form-focused activities, however, are suggested by literature as important and necessary for language learning. Given our emphasis on student interactions in group, a more careful consideration of learner errors and form acquisition should have been made. Richard-Amato (2003) also warns that the EFL or ESL learners at the beginning to intermediate levels may encounter early fossilization if collaborative group work is extensively applied to them. Another serious flaw in the methodological procedures is the failure of the regular and systematic videotaping of group interactions. This failure substantially limited the extent of our data analysis. With a more regular, systematic videotape-recorded data set, we could have uncovered the divergent influences of different types of task and group dynamics on the students' collaborative process and English proficiency development.

Despite these limitations, the results of the current study open a new possibility of utilizing magic as a source of various communicative tasks for young learners. The current study suggests that there are a variety of resources and materials that promote our teaching when we make enough effort to utilize them creatively. In addition, the instructional procedures and methods used in the current study would provide some useful guidelines for English teachers in designing a task-based instruction even when they utilize other resources than magic – such as drama, poetry, song, or game. Still more studies on utilizing magic for English teaching are called for to help English teachers devise concrete instructional plans and materials.

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APPENDIX A

The Interview Questions for English Speaking Proficiency Test

Part 1 Yes/No Question

1. Is your mother a teacher?
2. Is your father sick today?
3. Do you like pizza?

Part 2 Choice Question

4. Are these scissors or straws?
5. Is it 3 o'clock or 11 o'clock?
6. Is it sunny or rainy?

Part 3 Wh-/How Question

7. What are these?
8. Who is she?
9. What color is the table?

Part 4 Personal Information

10. Tell me about your teacher.
11. Do you have any brothers?
12. Do you want to be a doctor?

Part 5 Location

13. I can't find my pants and pajamas. Where are they?

Part 6 Picture Description

14. Look at the picture. What are mom and dad doing?

Part 7 Giving Directions

15. I am in front of the amusement park. How can I go home?

Part 8 Basic Survival Situation

16. You have to make a phone call, but you don't have enough change or a telephone card. Ask someone for change.
17. You are taking an English examination tomorrow. Ask your teacher what the exam will be like.

APPENDIX B

Criteria for English Speaking Proficiency (ESPT Testing Academy, 2006)

Level	Score	Features
5	0-100	Unable to communicate in English
	101-200	Able to respond to questions by using simple words with family or friends
4	201-300	Able to express their own idea to some extent at school or home
	301-400	Able to communicate with others in daily life or familiar situations
3	401-500	Able to make sentences based on what they learned in class and able to actively participate in class
	501-600	Able to communicate with others about a general topic and able to give directions to foreigners
2	601-700	Able to ask questions and respond to questions from a teacher and able to communicate with foreigners in daily life
	701-800	Able to actively communicate with others and able to effectively express their idea
1	801-900	Able to handle unexpected situations with fluent English proficiency
	901-1000	Able to communicate with the same level of native English speakers

APPENDIX C

Week 3 task: Make your own cards!

Purpose Students are able to create their own magic performance based on what they learned from the previous lesson.

Task Type Creative task

Procedures 1) Think of six dangerous animals.
2) Write the six animals on each six card.
(Students are allowed to use English dictionary.)
3) Demonstrate your magic trick to your group members with your cards.

APPENDIX D

Example Questions in the Post-Attitude Survey

1. 영어를 공부할 때, 그룹과 혼자, 어느 것이 더 좋은가요? 그 이유는?
① 그룹 (이유:) ② 혼자 (이유:)

(5~7) 여러분의 그룹 활동에 얼마나 만족하는지 아래에 표시하세요.
① 전혀 만족하지 않음 (0) ② 별로 만족하지 않음 (1)
② 조금 만족함 (2) ④ 매우 만족함 (3)

5. 그룹 활동내용 (영어마술)에 대해 어떻게 생각해요?

7. 자신이 속한 그룹 멤버들에 대해 어떻게 생각해요?

9. 지금까지 배워 본 영어 마술 활동 중 좋아하는 순서대로 번호를 쓰세요.
(가장 좋아하는 활동 1/ 가장 싫어하는 활동 7)
① 카드 다시 만들기 (동물카드) [ ]
② 이야기 만들기 (링 & 체인) [ ]
③ 영어 마술 순서 만들기 (드롭 링) [ ]
④ 그룹리더에게 마술 배우기 (신문지) [ ]
⑤ 이야기 마술 순서대로 배열하기 (카드 마술) [ ]
⑥ 영어로 쓰여 진 지시에 따라 마술의 결과 찾아내기 [ ]
(에이스 온 더 탑) [ ]
⑦ 마술의 비밀 찾아내기 (ESP 카드) [ ]

10. 지금까지 배운 과제(마술)를 다른 사람한테 영어로 보여 준 횟수는?
① 한 번도 안 해봤다 ② 1 ~ 5 ③ 6 ~ 10
11 ~ 15 ⑤ 15 번 이상

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Primary

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