CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary

The main objective of the study is to investigate what effects of the narrative task repetition have on the English oral language performance of Thai Undergraduate students. However, since there was planning-time allotted for the participants to prepare and work together in their small groups, the co-construction process during their planning time and the knowledge they gained from this co-construction process were also explored. For the investigation of the English oral language performance, the data gained from the study has been both quantified and qualified. The quantification of the data was to analyze their English oral language improvement in the dimensions of fluency, accuracy, and lexical complexity using the T-unit. Additionally, the qualifications of the data was to compare both of their new narrative and repeated narrative performances and investigate the qualities of these performances on the language aspects of syntactic complexity, accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, thematic development, and coherence and cohesion. Additionally, based on the Social Constructivism perspective, it was also interesting to look into the language learners themselves as to how they reacted to each others during their planning time to co-construct their knowledge in order to accomplish the task as well as what other participants in a group gained from this co-construction process.

The participants in this study were twenty third-year English major students studying in the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University. The study was conducted in an authentic classroom under the course named "Effective English Speaking". Within this course, the participants were required to perform the new and repeated narratives for ten consecutive weeks. The repetition of the narrative task was done the week after they had performed the new task. The lesson plans of the narrative tasks had been planned under five topics which were Snack Attack, Shopping, Free Time, Travel, and Study Time. They were pretested on the first week when the semester started in order to divide into three levels of English oral

proficiency, that is, low, medium, and high levels of scores. After that, they were randomly assigned to 4 groups consisting of two Low, two Medium, and one High score achievers per group. Within the groups, the participants were given fifteen-minute planning time to work collaboratively for their narrative performances.

One out of these four groups was selected to be the focus group for the exploration of the co-construction process. The observations were made by the researcher and the trained researcher's assistant. The discussion of each group during the planning-time was audio-taped except for the focus group which was both video-taped and audio-taped to make sure that the researcher gets as much data as possible. The performances of the narratives were also both video-taped and audio-taped. The participants were asked to fill in the Student's Report Form after the class. Moreover, some of them were also interviewed on how and what they did during the planning time as well as what they thought they had gained from working with their peers. After that, the researcher transcribed their performances recorded in the cassette and VDO tapes in order to analyze their English oral performance of new narratives and narrative repetitions. The audio and video recordings of the focus group's discussions were also transcribed, and the data from the observations, Student's Report Forms including the interviews were analyzed to explore for the process and products resulted from their co-construction.

It was found that the English oral language performances of the participants improved because of the narrative task and its repetition. The scores of the Posttest were significantly different from those of the Pretest. For the language learning aspects, it was also found that the narrative task repetition could help in the fluency and accuracy of all levels of participants. For the lexical complexity aspect, there was a significant difference between the frequencies in the number of words of Low and High levels of score achievers, but not the Medium level. Furthermore, the performances of both new and repeated narratives were analyzed to see their qualities using the descriptors and the researcher's observations. The language production of all participants performing the narrative task repetition smoothly flowed with fewer pauses and fillers. For the Low score achievers, if the participants narrated the same theme as their new narratives, they could provide more descriptions of the characters and events and pronounce the words more correctly. For the Medium score achievers, some of their performances of the recurring tasks were more grammatically accurate, and they could develop a clear description by expanding their main points with

relevant supporting details. They also used a technique of narration from the first-person perspective as well as the articulation of voice. For the High score achievers, they used many techniques of public speaking in their narrative task repetition such as the articulation, pause, and stretching of voice. Some of them used singing and acting to make their repeated narratives more lively and entertaining.

Since to perform the English oral narrative tasks could not be done spontaneously, it needed time to prepare and organize the ideas for the story not mentioning the target language grammar and vocabulary. With this consideration, the participants were given fifteen minutes to plan for their narratives together with their peers in groups. This social interaction was then observed to see how they co-constructed their narratives and what they gained from that co-construction process. It was found that there was always assistance or support from the other peer members when it was needed. They learned about the composition or framework of the narratives, the technique of delivering a narrative speech, some English vocabulary, and grammar when they were working together.

However, the above findings are only the snapshots which need to be discussed in more details.

5.2. Discussions

5.2.1. Language improvement

For the language improvement of the participants, the following questions should be raised:

5.2.1.1. Why was there a significant difference between the scores of the Posttest and those of the Pretest after they had been practicing the narrative task repetition?

The Posttest scores were significantly different from those of the Pretest after they had been practicing the narrative task repetition. This might be due to the following reasons:

1) Test task familiarity. The participants might get familiar with the test task because they had had an experience of performing the test task in the Pretest. Therefore, they might gain the skills from their first experience. The familiarity of task type could make a task more predictable as opposed to the unfamiliarity of task type which made a task less predictable and less susceptible to previously developed communication

strategies (Skehan, 1998: 100). This reason is supported by a result of the study on the task content familiarity and task type (Revesz & Han, 2006) which showed that there were significant main effects for the task content familiarity and task type.

2) Memory retention of the test format and pictures. A single form of Oral Proficiency Test, developed for this study, was used as the Pretest and Posttest. Though it had been reshuffled when it was posttested with the participants, they might still remember the test format. The duration of fourteen weeks between the Pretest and Posttest might not be long enough to avoid the memory retention of the test format and the pictures used in the test to elicit their English production. If the participants could recall what the test and the pictures were about, they would have more time to process the output information.

3) The practice of English oral performance from the narrative tasks and their repetitions. The participants had opportunities to practice English speaking skills and learn both bad and good examples of English speaking from their peers. They might transfer the skills and knowledge that they had learned from the class to be used when they took the Posttest. According to the study of Shimojima (1977), he indicated that story-telling could refine the oral or speaking competency of the learners. They could speak clearly and expressively through appropriate articulation, pronunciation, volume, rate, and intonation. They could organize messages to be more understandable, and clarify and support ideas with necessary details.

5.2.1.2. Why were there significant differences between the frequencies of pauses of new narrative task and narrative task repetition in all levels of the participants?

5.2.1.3. Why were there significant differences between the frequencies of grammatical errors of new narrative task and narrative task repetition in all levels of the participants?

The frequencies of pauses between the new narrative task and narrative task repetition were significantly different which meant that the fluency of the participants' English oral language performances improved when they repeated the tasks. There were fewer pauses and fillers in their recurring performances. Following are the example extracts which showed that when the participants repeated their narratives, their pauses which indicated by a sign of + were decreased.

Extract 39: (Taken from L2, GIII)

New narrative	Today + I will told er I will tell you about + myself and someone who make me realize something. Er I I like shopping very much…. Er he is my grandfather. + Er now he is seventy years old, but he's still healthy…Er + he is a wise shopper…Er + + he is a good man 'cause he's always on queue….
Repeated narrative	I'll tell you about "The Last Supper". This is Mr. Smith. He is a good he is a good man…. He's a family man. He + er he is so rich. He has many er many huge heritage. Today is the thirtieth of his anniversary.

Extract 40: (Taken from M1, GIV)

New narrative	…That was a ah a grandfather + + the grandfather named Trirat. He had an idea to take his grandchildren to travel in the summer so + + + he thought that the great place that he he wanted to take his grandchildren to go to was Khao Yai National Park.
Repeated narrative	…One lovely spring day, Uncle Macdonald who was American invited little Mack to his neighborhood to travel to Khao Yai National Park in Thailand.

Additionally, the frequencies of the grammatical errors between the new narrative task and narrative repetition were also significantly different. The number of grammatical errors in their repeated narratives reduced substantially when comparing with their new narratives. Following are some of the examples from their performances:

Extract 41: (Taken from M1, GIV)

New narrative	Today I want to talk about free time in Thailand from American family who came here that has a ah a grandfather named Trirat he had an idea to take grandchildren to travel in the summer so he think that the the great place that he he wants to take their grandchildren to go to is Khao Yai National Park it has many things that they can do so he tell he tell their chidren…
Repeated narrative	One lovely spring day Uncle Macdonald who was American invited little Mac to his neighborhood to travel to Khao Yai National Park in Thailand Uncle Macdonald was a single man he was an author he paid everything for children who came with him…

Extract 42: (Taken from L2, GI)

New narrative	...one early morning he go shopping alone he go shopping himself instead of his wife she's vegetarian he pay attention to what he eat he's wise consumer he spend much of time to select the best thing ...
Repeated narrative	...one day he goes to the supermarket alone as usual choosing the best quality food for his wife he has to be careful to choose a thing because...he spends most of his time to choose the best thing...

The improved fluency and accuracy in the oral narrative repetitions of the participants might be due to the following reasons:

1) There was a fifteen-minute planning provided for the participants to work together with their peers in a group in order to prepare for the narratives. The participants might use this planning-time to not only prepare, but also rehearse their narratives. Therefore, they might be less nervous and be well-prepared for their recurring task in term of producing more fluent and accurate English language. This indication has been supported by a study of Yuan and Ellis (2003) on the effects of three types of planning conditions (pretask planning, unpressured on-line planning, and no planning). One of the results showed that pretask planning resulted in greater fluency and greater syntactic variety. Another support came for the study of Foster (1996), which reported that giving learners the opportunity to plan resulted in greater fluency. Moreover, the study of Foster and Skehan (1997, cited in Skehan, 2003: 131) indicated that planning led to greater accuracy on the personal and narrative tasks, but not on the decision-making task.

2) The participants had an opportunity to repeat the task. When the participants had a second chance to re-perform their narratives, their cognitive load might be decreased which resulted in better information-processing. Therefore, when they repeated their narrative, their performances flowed more smoothly, and they might be able to switch the attention to more appropriate language structures. This reason was supported by the study of Lynch and McLean (2001) when they asked the medical students to prepare a poster presentation. The students who stood by their posters would be visited by other members and asked the same questions over and over. One of the findings was that the output of the students' performances resulted from the recycling task improved in both fluency and accuracy.

3) The participants received feedbacks and reflections from the class and teachers during the Post-task stage. After the participants had finished narrating the stories, there was a time when the class and teacher would give them feedbacks on any errors that the class could notice as well as reflections of what they liked or did not like about that particular narrative. Some of the feedbacks would be on the grammatical errors of subject-verb agreement, the abrupt change of tenses without the time markers, and so on. Additionally, some of the reflections from the class would be on long pauses and many uses of fillers. However, this was done in a friendly atmosphere rather than an embarrassing one. The participants might benefit from those feedbacks and reflections as Brown (2001: 67) had mentioned that successful interlanguage development was partially a result of utilizing feedback from others. This had been confirmed by the interviews with some participants of this study. One of them said that she tried not to use so many fillers when she repeated her narrative. Another one reported that the feedback she got from her friends made her more aware of the subject-verb agreement. Particularly on the accuracy aspect, a study on a corrective feedback on foreign language learning (Chen, 1996) with American students learning Chinese classifiers showed that there was a positive effect of correct feedback on learner accuracy.

5.2.1.4. Why were there significant differences between the frequencies of the number of grammatically correct words of new narrative task and narrative task repetition in the Low and High levels of participants, but not the Medium levels of participants?

The numbers of grammatically correct words counted in each T-unit of the narrative indicated the complexity aspect of the participants' performances. Interestingly, there was improvement in the complexity aspect of the participants' production of Low and High levels. For the participants of Medium level, there was no significant difference between the numbers of words used in the new narratives and the repeated ones. Besides the frequencies of the grammatically numbers of words per levels show in Figure 4.5 and 4.6, one example of each Low and High level of participant was provided below:

Extract 43: (Taken from L2, GII)

New narrative	He doesn't want to buy some low quality food, so he chooses it for a long time.
Repeated narrative	He thinks that he has a lot of time, so he rushes to the supermarket and chooses the food. First, he stops at the vegetable stand. He picks up some bananas, oranges, onions, and some kinds of vegetables that he wants for the barbeque party.

Extract 44: (Taken from H, GIII)

New narrative	I don't know why people call me nerd... I don't like work. I don't like school. I don't like assignment...
Repeated narrative	....he has lot of work to do. He has to study tonight. Well, the point is he went to the pub with Janice last night. He feels so sleepy right now... He seems to be a nice boy, so an angel from the above gives him this. It's a universal remote control that he can change on his life menu...

As for the complexity, a study on narrative task repetition (Bygate, 2001a) with NNS students showed that the second performances of the learners manifested greater fluency and complexity. The study on task repetition on linguistic output (Gass et al., 1999) also showed that the lexical complexity was found when the learners repeated the task. These studies corresponded with one of the findings of the present study that the participants of Low and High levels improved their complexity.

However, the focus of the previous studies (Gasss & Varonis, 1985; Gass et al, 1999; Bygate, 2001a; Lynch & Maclean, 2001) was primarily on the effects caused by the task repetition. Most of them did not classify the subjects of their studies into levels of English oral proficiency as the present study. Therefore, the question is what was happening with the participants in the Medium level.

This might result from the attitudes toward the task repetition. To ask the learners to repeat the task may cause positive and negative attitudes towards the task. In the present study, the Low and High levels of participants might feel that to re-narrate their stories in the following week to the class was a challenge for them. They might want to make their stories better than the last time in whatever they could. On the contrary, the participants who were in the Medium level might feel that narrative task repetition was boring and unchallenging.

5.2.2. Co-construction process.

Concerning the co-construction process, the following questions should be asked:

5.2.2.1. What promoted co-construction process? And why was the co-construction process helpful to the participants in performing the oral narrative task and its repetition?

Before the participants were assigned a narrative task to work on, they were randomly put into small groups of mixed-abilities in term of the English oral proficiency in order to plan for the task. They contributed their ideas to co-build the story together. The question was what promoted this co-construction process. It might be due to the following reasons:

1) There was a clear goal and objective of the task requirement. Therefore, the participants knew what the teacher's expectation was. They knew what they were requested to do, so they could start working with their peer members to fulfill the goal and objective of the task instead of wasting their time arguing what the task's requirement was. They had been harmoniously attached to each other from the beginning because of the intention to reach the task's goal.

2) They were put in small groups with specific roles to be responsible and social interaction was allowed. With a feeling of responsibility for the group's success, they might try to interact with each other to share and contribute their ideas. They helped solving the problems together through negotiation of meaning/content, initiation of suggestions/comments, and confirmation or clarification checks. This assumption was supported by a study of Long and Porter (1985) on group work, interlanguage talk, and second language acquisition. One of the interesting findings was that group work could create richer and more accommodating set of relationships among its members. This small-group interaction promoted a positive affective climate which in turn allowed for the development of the kind of personalized and creative talk for which most aural-oral classes were trying to prepare learners (Long & Porter, 1985: 212). Therefore, the group members who were Low level of English proficiency did not feel too intimidated to speak up.

3) There was a collaborative team work among the participants. From the observations, the participants showed a good team-work spirit. They contributed and shared their ideas which had a strong impact on the success of teamwork development. There was no evidence of "social loafing" (Michaelson, Knight &

Fink, 2004) which obstructed the group's success. According to Michaelson, Knight, and Fink (2004), the factors that seriously affect the development of teamwork are the feeling of shyness of some members in a group while others dominate the discussion, the feeling of having inadequate knowledge of the subject matter being discussed, the feeling of indifferent to the success of the group, or the task being unsuitable for that group work. The participants in the focus group had been studying together in the same major and the same faculty for three years, and most of them lived in the same dormitory. They were so closed to each other that the feeling of shyness or domination did not prevail. All of them were hard-working students. Therefore, the success of the group work was important for them in term of academic excellence. On the other hand, the topics of narrative task had been obtained by assessing their needs before developing the lesson plans. This could make them be involved in the discussion of the particular subject matter. Finally, the task type in this study which was the narrative task and its repetition was also suitable for them to work in a group because it was a contextualized activity in which every group member could take part in sharing her/his world view and knowledge.

If the above reasons were to promote the co-construction process, the question was why the co-construction process was helpful to the participants in performing the oral narrative task and its repetition.

To narrate a story in public can cause nervousness or stage fright to the speakers, and this feeling can be even worse if the speakers have to use any other languages besides their mother-tongue. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991, cited in Oxford, 1999: 59) indicated that language anxiety was fear or apprehension that language learners had when they performed in the second or foreign language. The co-construction process might play a major role in helping the participants in performing their oral narratives because of the following reasons:

1) Their language anxiety was decreased. From the interviews with the participants, 90% of them had various degrees of negative anxiety when they knew that they had to perform their narrative tasks, and most of them reported that interacting with their peers in their small groups during the planning-time could help them manage their fear and accomplish the task. The social interaction that the participants were talking about was the process which they co-constructed their narratives together. This co-construction process might provide an opportunity for the participants to socialize

with their peers in meaningful context of language learning while slowly and indirectly decreasing their language anxiety.

2) The intersubjectivity and scaffolding were created. According to Vygotsky (1978), intersubjectivity was the process whereby two participants who began a task with different understandings or abilities arrived at a shared understanding. In other words, learning was considered as a social process where learners started their learning from others. As in the case of language learning, it should also be considered as a social process and the teacher's role was the facilitator of students (Freeman, 1992). Teachers should provide assistance by encouraging social interaction, asking questions including giving feedback, encouragement and praise. While the participants in the present study were co-constructing their narratives, this process helped moving them into the zone of proximal development where everyone was helping and learning from each other which was like a scaffolding for them to step forward in their language learning.

5.3. Recommendations and implications

From the findings of the present study, the use of narrative task and its repetition combining with the opportunity for social interaction among the learners in their small group work are recommended as the English speaking activities for Thai students. Theoretically, the narrative task can be a vehicle for the meaningful learning of the target language and the narrative task repetition is an additional practice for the learners to improve their fluency, accuracy, and/or complexity. On the other hand, the social interaction among the learners should be encouraged because the co-construction process that takes place from this social interaction can promote the language development among the students. The modified new and repeated narrative task frameworks used in this study are also recommended for the teachers because it will facilitate the teachers' lesson planning by following each stage of the frameworks, particularly, in the Post-task stage where the discussion on forms and reflection are focused. This can fulfill a missing gap of using the Task-based Language Learning and Teaching since its primary assumption is focused on the exchange of meaning. However, it implies more future studies especially the longitudinal ones to confirm the effects of narrative task repetition on the English oral language performance of Thai undergraduate students.

For the pedagogical recommendations, the narrative task and its repetition are useful pedagogical interventions for Thai students provided that they are modified to suit the particular levels of the students. The activities that are used during the Pre-task stage should focus on the current situations. The stimulus materials should be in various forms including films, music, and so on. The thematic contents or topics for learning should focus around the students' interests and the current situation. Additionally, the assessment of the students' progress should include both quantitative and qualitative methods. This implies a consideration of the learners in order to modify the task, activities, and thematic content to suit their interests. It also implies that the alternative assessments should be used to assess their progress.

The practical recommendation from the findings is that Thai students should be trained on the use of communication strategies. Additionally, they should also be encouraged to use these strategies in order to get the meaning across rather than keeping silence. This will enable the students to express their ideas extensively. From the study, when one participant had an idea to contribute but had a difficulty to express in English, she either switched to her mother tongue or was silent. It implies that to train and encourage the students to use the communication strategies might solve the students' problem of having a difficulty of getting a meaning across to their interlocutors.