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A Comparison of *Robinson Crusoe* with an Adapted Version

Regarding Language Acquisition

David Penner June 2006

Introduction

Daniel Defoe's original 1719 edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, considered by some to be "the first English novel," was published before standardized grammar became widespread (Topf 630). Although integral as a cultural learning tool, the archaic vocabulary and sentence structures prohibit modern English learners from easily comprehending the story. In Stephen Feinstein's 1999 adaptation, however, the broad changes and differences in lexicon, morphology, and syntax help students understand and review standard vocabulary and structures. By comparing sample sections of the same part from both stories, a deeper understanding of how the adaptation can increase the comprehension of English learners becomes possible.

Broad Changes

Broad changes include differences in the books' objectives, themes, and narrative order. While Defoe's version adds much detail to the plot, Feinstein uses simple sentence structures that mainly focus on outlining the plot. By reducing Kellogg Hunt's "Words per T-Unit" from 23.26 to 10.81, Feinstein exchanges delightful and educational imagery for readability (cited in Malmstrom & Weaver 1976). He bypasses mature themes, as

well, such as the suggestions of “fresh... grief” in T-Unit 10 of the original version (o-10), providence (o-16), and a “large dram” of rum (o-27). Much of the missing detail refers to Crusoe’s hardships, such as the change from “the weather was hot to extremity, and [I] took the water” in the original version (o-13), to, “It was an easy swim out to the ship” in T-Unit 9 of the adapted version (a-9); the change from, “I swam round her twice, and the second time I spied a small piece of a rope... [and] with great difficulty I got hold of [it]” (o-16-17), to, “I swam around to the other side of the ship. There I saw a rope hanging down from the deck, and I climbed up” (a-12-13); and the change from, “It was in vain to sit still... I resolved to fall to work... with a great deal of labor and pains” (o-29-37), to, “I quickly went to work... In less than two hours, I had my raft!” (a-29-31). These changes in nuance have the effect of turning Crusoe’s tale from one of survival over hardship to one of adventure. Considering the adaptation’s purpose of teaching standard English vocabulary and forms, this change proves fitting. The order of the narratives also changes. While the original explains Crusoe’s provision gathering, raft construction, and then more provision gathering, the adaptation describes the entire initial provision gathering before the raft construction. This helps English learners stay focused by providing a clearly separated order of events. These broad changes do much to help the reader understand.

Word Choice

Word Choice		
Original Version	Adapted Version	Comment on Adaptation
Verbs - waked, rage, swell, surprised, lifted off, lay x 5, swelling, driven, mentioned, bruised, dashing, stand, wished, have, came down, looked,	Verbs - awoke, gazed, saw x 2, drifted, see, damaged, thought, stowed, save, said, know, climb, swam, hanging, climbed x 2, kept, found x 3, ate, looked x 2,	Compared to the original version, the adaptation uses very simple verbs that are probably known to readers before they attempt reading. The knowledge of these

found x 6, tossed, walked, got, came back, getting, hoped, ebb, come, renewing, saw, kept, say, got, forced, resolved, pulled, took x 2, came, know, get, swam, spied, wondered, see, hang down, got hold, got up, had, lifted, search, see, eat, went x 4, filled, ate, lose, need, spirit, wanted, furnish, foresaw, sit, wish, had x 2, roused, resolved, fall to, flung, manage, tying, drive away, pulling, tied, laying, walk, bear x 2, cut, added, hope, furnishing, encouraged, go beyond, done, load, preserve, laid x 2, considering, get, having considered, wanted, got, broken open, emptied, lowered, filled	need x 2, gathered, figure out, carry, build, solve, needed, gazing, came, going, went, sawing, tied, had, lowered, loaded, coming, carried, rowed, unloaded	verbs facilitates comprehension of entire sentences.
Waked (1)	Awoke (1)	Modernization of archaism
The tide <i>ebbed</i> so far out (9)	The tide was <i>low</i> (8).	More common description
Spied (17)	Saw (12)	Generalization to an easier concept
Fore-chains (17)	Deck (12)	Generalization to an easier concept
Large spars of wood (31)	Some wood (25)	Generalization to an easier concept
Top-mast (31)	Masts (30)	Generalization to an easier concept
Get on board (14)	Climb aboard (10)	More common phrasal verb
Bulged (18)	Damaged (4)	Generalization to an easier concept
Terminology as misunderstood by my wife, a Korean advanced learner of English		
broad day, abated, rage, swell, bruised, dashing, tossed, neck (body of water), inlet, subsistence, ebb, destitute, she (as vehicle), bulged, provisions, roused, top-mast, flung	drifted, stowed on board, deck, chest (trunk), powder horns, shot (bullets), masts, lowered, inlet	Interestingly, the original version did not pose that much more of a challenge. A more in depth analysis would consider the comprehension level of an beginning and intermediate learner, as well.

The lexical content of the adapted version is much easier to understand, as it uses short, familiar verbs and descriptive nouns in place of archaisms and specialized terminology. As with many adaptations designed to teach vocabulary, the text pairs low frequency words with high frequency words or descriptions, so that readers gain exposure to new words. Examples include, “I gazed,” paired with, “I saw” (a-3), “within a mile” paired with, “at this distance” (a-3, a-4), and, “the supplies,” paired with, “those things” (a-5, a-6). The adapted text also replaces obscure words with modern terminology: “waked” (o-1), to, “awoke” (a-1), and, “round” (o-16), to, “around” (a-11); and nautical terminology with standard vocabulary: “ebbed” (o-9), to, “low (tide)” (a-8), and “fore-chains” (o-17) to, “deck” (a-12). As specialized vocabulary may be too advanced for English learners, generalizations, such as, “some wood” (a-25), instead of “large spars of wood” (o-31), and, “damaged” (a-4), instead of, “bulged” (o-18), allow for greater comprehension. Also, rather than explain or replace some difficult vocabulary, the adaptation avoids terms, such as “subsistence” (o-8), “destitute” (o-10), and, “furnished” (o-28). As evidence of simplification, only two percent of the sample text’s open class lexicon contains more than two syllables: “beautiful” (a-2), “miracle” (a-14), “carpenter’s” (a-19), “gunpowder” (a-20), “together” (a-21), “suddenly” (a-26), “fortunately” (a-34), and “unloaded” (a-37). All of these word changes help readers understand the story and to cultivate a natural, standard lexicon.

Morphology

Morphology		
Original Version	Adapted Version	Comment on Adaptation
Almost as far as (2). Came down (5). The first thing I (6). As far as I (7). Come	The next day (1). High in the sky (1). Gazed out (3). Within a mile of (3). Even	Use of clearer descriptions and a higher percentage of common collocations

within (9).	at this (4). I thought about (5). Maybe I can (6). The other side of (11). Hanging down (12). As soon as I (15). There was also some (16).	
The ship... was driven up (2). All her quarter was free (21).	The ship had drifted (3). The part of the ship... had kept dry (14).	Frequent alteration of simple past grammatical morphemes to past perfect
Within <i>about</i> a mile <i>from</i> the shore (3).	Within a mile of the shore (3).	Elimination of adjective, and the addition of a common word pair, <i>mile of</i>
looked about (5), driven within (2), resolved to (32)	gazed out (3), drifted to (3), swim out (9), swam around (11), figure out (22)	Use of more common phrasal verbs promote easier understanding
I pulled off my clothes... and took the water. But when I came to the ship... (13-14)	<i>It</i> was an easy swim out to the ship (9)	Elimination of idiom by using a cleft sentence consisting of <i>it</i> , the verb <i>be</i> and a NP.
Broad day (1), the sea did not rage (1), she lay (2), the tide... dashing me (2), the ship... to stand upright (3), the sea had tossed her (6), the sea very calm (9), time to lose (26), to spirit me (27), sit still (29), drive away (32)		Much fewer idioms that require memorization and are difficult to interpret.
Hang (17)	Hanging (12)	Simple present tense to a clearer present participle
Carpenter's saw (37)	Saw in the carpenter's chest (28)	Semantic shift from type of saw to the location of saw
Overboard (32)	Over the side of the ship (32)	Change from idiomatic expression to split features that explain the action

Regarding morphology, the adaptation includes more frequent usage of common collocations and phrasal verbs, more easily understandable grammatical patterns and common inflections, and fewer idiomatic expressions. Common lexical collocations, such as, “damaged beyond repair (a-4), “climb aboard” (a-10), and “hanging down” (a-11),

facilitate easy understanding and help readers to remember lexical items as sets rather than as separate terms. The more frequent use of phrasal verbs with accompanying descriptions, such as, “I *swam around to the other side*” (a-11 – all italics are mine), help readers to learn vital action words that may not be understandable outside of context. The adaptation also changes passive and simple past constructions to the past perfect verb tense. Instead of “the ship was lifted off in the night” (o-2), the adaptation states that, “the ship had drifted” (a-3), instead of “the ship was bulged” (o-18), Feinstein writes, “the ship had been damaged” (a-4), and instead of “all her quarter was free, and all that was in that part was dry” (o-22), he chooses, “the part of the ship where the food was stored had kept dry” (a-14). The elimination of idiomatic expressions, such as, “the sea did not rage” (o-1), “the sea had tossed her up” (o-6), and, “took the water” (o-13), also aids understanding, as readers avoid trying to decipher the idioms’ noncompositionality. By using periphrases, the change in description from the one who uses the saw, “carpenter’s saw” (o-36), to where the saw is generally found, “a saw in the carpenter’s chest” (a-28), helps readers to more easily visualize the object. However, my wife still had trouble with the added word, “chest” (a-28). Using split features, “over the side of the ship” (a-32), and, “the part of the ship where the food was stored” (a-14), to explain, “overboard,” and, “breadroom” (o-32, o-25) also helps readers. Feinstein’s morphological changes to unambiguous and standard structures do much to aid readability.

Syntax

Syntax		
Original Version	Adapted Version	Comment on Adaptation
The weather clear... the storm abated... the sea did not rage and swell as before (1).	It was a beautiful day (2).	More concise, but with a change in nuance.

I wished myself on board, that, at least, I might have some necessary things for my use (3-4).	“Maybe I can save some of those things,” I said to myself (6).	Less abstract addition of quotation, but with a change in nuance.
I found the sea very calm (9).	The sea was calm (7).	Change from personal deixis to textual deixis.
I spied a small piece of a rope, which I wondered I did not see at first, hang down by the fore-chains so low, as that with great difficulty I got hold of it, and by the help of that rope got up into the fore-castle of the ship (17-18).	There I saw a rope hanging down from the deck, and I climbed up (12-13).	Much less detail, no use of appositives, and a consequent change in nuance.
At first I found that all the ship’s provisions were dry and untouched by the water (24).	The part of the ship where the food was stored had kept dry (14).	Change from a tautological description to a more concise past perfect construction.
Being very well disposed to eat, I... filled my pockets with biscuit, and ate it as I went about other things (25).	As soon as I found the bread, I ate half a loaf (15).	Change of information, but the nuance stays the same.
Having considered well what I most wanted, I first got three of the seamen’s chests which I had broken open and emptied, and lowered them down upon my raft (43).	I found the carpenter’s chest – a most useful prize – which was full of tools I would need on shore (18-19).	Appositives and relative clauses, the few that there are, are separated by easy to see dashes, rather than commas.
	I thought about all the supplies... Maybe I can save some of those things (5-6). There was a saw... After sawing (28-30). I lowered the raft... then I climbed down onto it (32-33).	Frequent use of anaphora creates cohesion and easier understanding.

Syntactical changes make the adaptation easier to understand than the original, as there are fewer descriptions, more repeated, easy to understand sentence structures, and more unique comprehension devices. Although the simple sentence, “the ship had drifted to within a mile of the shore” (a-3), is not as visually appealing as the compound-

complex sentence, “The ship was lifted off in the night from the sand where she lay, by the swelling of the tide, and was driven up almost as far as the rock which I first mentioned” (o-2), it is much easier for English learners to understand, partly because there are fewer clauses. The adaptation takes away Defoe’s original intention of providing highly detailed descriptions, and leaves behind only Defoe’s interesting storyline. Although Saddleback Publishing advertises that, “each novel has been painstakingly adapted to retain the integrity of the original work,” there are a number of cases where Feinstein changes the nuance to keep the storyline, or he changes the story to keep the nuance (U.S. ISBN Agency). For example, the sentence, “I wished myself on board, that, at least, I might have some necessary things for my use” (o-3-4), is much different than, “‘Maybe I can save some of those things,’ I said to myself” (a-6). The adapted sentence is more direct, as it separates Crusoe’s thoughts with quotations, and avoids the use of modals, reflexive pronouns, and polysyllabic terms. There is also a change in nuance from the line, “The weather clear... the storm abated... the sea did not rage and swell as before” (o-1), to, “It was a beautiful day” (a-2). The adapted line gives no hint of Crusoe’s pessimism, that the weather might have been worse. Another way that Feinstein changes the original is that he opts for a nonstandard grammatical structure to increase comprehension: “I found the carpenter’s chest – a most useful prize – which was full of tools I would need on shore” (a-18-19). The use of dashes to separate an appositive is not standard practice, but his way of using them to isolate a thought from the main clause effectively increases comprehension, as students avoid becoming confused by an inundation of commas. More predictably, Feinstein omits Defoe’s archaic use of semi-colons, such as in the heavily embedded sentence, “This forced tears from

my eyes again; but as there was little relief in that, I resolved, if possible, to get to the ship; so I pulled off my clothes, for the weather was hot to extremity, and took the water” (a-9-11). The adapted version also contains many sentences with similar phrase structures – “When I awoke the next day, the sun was already high in the sky” (a-1), “Even at this distance, I could see that the ship had been beyond repair” (a-4), and, “In less than two hours, I had my raft” (a-31). Consistently placing subordinate clauses before main clauses helps readers to grasp meaning, since they do not have to contend with unanticipated sentence patterns. Interestingly, no matter how difficult the syntax is in the original version, my wife has little difficulty understanding the sentences. Again, this analysis should be compared with the comprehension levels of beginning and intermediate English learners. Through syntactical changes, although some descriptions and integrity are sacrificed, *Robinson Crusoe* becomes an easily understandable story and learning tool.

Conclusion

Although the less expressive imagery in the adaptation takes away from what makes this story such an endearing classic, it ensures that readers do not lose interest by becoming bogged down in lengthy descriptions. There is just enough detail, however, to provide a sense of Defoe’s style and an understanding of some of the novel’s themes – the autonomous individual, human innovation and triumph over adversity. Simple changes in terminology save readers from countless trips to the dictionary. Changes in morphology and syntax, as well, reinforce readers’ knowledge of standard collocations, grammatical structures and sentence patterns. My wife notes that while the adapted version is uncomplicated and provides “quick images that do not require thinking,” the

original version “stimulates” her with detail and allows her to feel, “the beauty of English” (C. Penner, personal interview, May 22, 2006). Indeed, if after reading Feinstein’s adaptation, English learners develop a deeper interest in early English literature that motivates them to read the original, then the publication, regardless of its omissions and changes in nuance, is a success.

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