Story Writing as An Additional Phase of Future Mining to Elaborate on a Future Language

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1. Introduction

In order to adapt to this fast-changing society, it has been necessary to come up with new, creative and innovative ideas in a quite short period of time. We, Iba Lab, have been trying to address such need of the society by developing a *Future Language* method (Iba, 2015).

Future Language is a method proposed by Iba Lab, which enables people to talk about their own visions of a desired future, by creating new vocabularies. Future Language therefore consists of different *Future Words*, which are the smallest unit of ideas about how organizations and communities should behave to realize their goal. Through the process of creating future words, which is called as *Future Mining*, three important aspects of every single idea are made clear to be shared; *what is ideal*, *why it is important*, and *how it can be achieved*.

In our projects, such as renovating a workplace and designing a new café restraint in Japan, future mining was conducted in a workshop style (*Future Mining Workshops*) (Iba et al. 2016). For instance, in the case of renovating a workplace, 50 executives and employees of the client company participated in a four-hour-workshop, and made their individual future visions into 170 future words through the dialogues (Iba et al. 2016). In the café project, out of 211 future words created during the workshop, 15 words were actually applied to the final design of the café (Iba et al. 2016). Because of its high productivity and its scale of collaboration, in which the users of the de-

sign participate in the design process, this workshop-style of Future Mining has proved to be effective in our practices, and has become our standard method for creating a future language.

On the other hand, however, little attention has been given to the *quality* of future words created through the workshops. Quality here means how precisely each future word describes the nature of the proposer's future vision. It is very important, especially when the created future words are actually used in a real designing process by people outside of the workshop. If the future word had not captured its essence well, it would lead a future which is different from what the author actually desired to happen. In the process of creating a Future Language, therefore, it would be worth to mention the quality of future words in order to deliberate upon the individual future visions and elaborate on the ideas once created, before they are actually shared and put into practice.

To explore effective ways to elaborate on the future words, we, Iba Lab, have conducted a new design project called "Creative Residence Project" —designing a creative life in a student residence at Shonandai in Japan. This project was performed in a non-workshop style, spending a month to brush-up the original set of future words created. Based on the analysis on the change in future words during the project, this paper presents a *Story Writing* as an effective way to elaborate on the future words, and discusses the significance of this revising process as an additional phase of creating a Future Language.

2. Story Writing as a way to elaborate on the ideas generated

Pattern Language and its Revising Process

In the field of *Pattern Language* (1977), invented by *Christopher Alexander* to describe good practices for designing buildings, *quality* of patterns is always a very important subject for pattern writers. Future Language is very similar to this

method in the sense that they both try to enable a good collaboration by creating new vocabularies to share a clear vision of the design. According to "*A Pattern Language* (1977)" written by Alexander, a quality of patterns refers to how successfully they describe the nature of things in the environment (Grabow, 1983). He also describes clearly about how patterns should be improved after they are once created by a pattern writer;

> "We hope, of course, that many of the people who read, and use this language, will try to improve these patterns -will put their energy to work, in this task of finding more true, more profound invariants -and we hope that gradually these more true patterns, which are slowly discovered, as time goes on, will enter a common language, which all of us can share." (Alexander, 1977)

So, the process of improving patterns written by the individual authors is very simple and collaborative. PLoP (Pattern Language of Programs) Conference, for example, provides opportunities for pattern writers to have their pattern languages critically reviewed by fellow authors (Manns, Rising 2005). In the workshop, known as "*writers' workshop*", they improve their patterns by sharing their own experiences related to the patterns to bring the deeper insights and recapture the essence of the practices.

On the other hand, however, because Future Language is a method to generate new ideas based on the individual future visions, it would be difficult in essence to open up the discussion and ask others for the collaborative revision of the ideas. In other words, the authors of future words have to ask themselves what they truly desire for the future.

2.2 Role of Story Writing

In order to promote this introspection of the authors, the method of *Story Writing* would be effective. The concept of writing a story has been brought to attention in the field of *Design Thinking* (Rowe, 1987) as a method to predict the uncertain future, prototype the vision and evaluate the value of each idea generated. For instance, "*The Design Fiction* (Ster-

ling, 2005)" [1] is an approach to explore and critique future possibilities by writing a story in which there are some futuristic ideas that do not exist today (Sterling, 2009; Bosch, 2012). "*Scenario Planning* (Schwartz, 1996)" is a method to develop the skills of organizations to solve any problems in the future, to adapt to this fast-changing society (Heijden et al. 2002). In other words, writing a story has been recognized as an effective process to prototype, evaluate and elaborate on the new ideas generated, by embodying the whole picture of the vision and ensuring its consistency with the ideas. Hence, it would be successfully applied to the revision of future words, and its experiment will be described in the next section.

3. Overview of Creative Residence Project

Creative Residence Project is a new design project conducted by four members of Iba Lab in 2016. Our goal in this project was to make a student life there *creative*,
by making future words and sharing them with the designers, owners and all the potential residents in this dorm. This building is now under construction and will be completed by an urban design company in Japan, UDS Ltd, in the spring of 2018.

This project went through two main phases; idea generation and brush-up. The process of creating future words was based on the original Future Language Workshop method (Iba et al. 2016). First of all, each of us independently brainstormed and roughly drew a future vision of a "creative life" in the student residence as a potential user of this design. Then we brainstormed about current problems or obstructions which avoid us to be *creative*, came up with ideas to solve these problems, and named them as *Seeds of Future Words*. In this stage, as a result, 40 seeds of future words were generated (Fig. 1). Each seed was then briefly described in a specific format of Future Language to be easily shared with others; what it is, why it is im-

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[1]
http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2012/03/02/bruce_sterling_on_design_fictions_.html

portant, and how it can be achieved (Fig. 2).

    The next phase was about improving these seeds of the future words, by writing a story about the desired future with the created words embedded. Based on what was perceived while writing a story and discussing with others about it, future words were revised by the authors. 37 future words remained in the end of this project will be introduced to the new community in the residence in the next spring.

Seeds of Future Word

A
· Multipurpose room
· Meal mission
· Our stage
· Welcome party
· Publish
· Diary
· Big brother

B
· Idea board
· Birthday presentation
· Cafe space
· Joint study
· Big table
· Marketing
· Modern technology

C
· Legal of home
· Policy base ecosystem
· Principle of home
· Legal gradation
· Class change
· Community designer
· Marketing model
· Business match
· Experiment equipment
· Marketing record
· Value Of chain
· 30years project
· See the connection

D
· Get original menu lady
· Central fire
· House school
· Begin from the rest
· Noise-cancelled room
· Rhythm record
· Creative check up
· Clear wall
· Dissect menu
· Seat reservation cafe
· Hello!!
· Becomes a biography
· The zero period

Fig. 1 List of 40 seeds of future words translated into English from Japanese

Fig. 2 An Example of Future Word – "*Self-design of Welcome Party* "

Self-Design of Welcome Party

<what> New students plan a Welcome Party by themselves

<how> Existing students have to follow the plan suggested by the new students, and make their ideal party into a reality.

<why>Students can get to know each other well very soon. It will also break the hierarchical culture in Japan, and thus, allow them to get used to the new life and the community there.

4. Writing a Future Story in Creative Residence Project

In order to polish up the seeds of Future Words once created, each of our team members worked independently to write a story, based on the seeds of future words we created and shared it in the team. This is what we call a *Future Story*. Future words embedded in the story is emphasized with the bold letters and brackets.

"(~) When I woke up on Saturday morning, it was already half past nine. I had to be at my part time job by 10 am. As I run though the first floor, someone called out to me. It was the **〈Big Brother〉**. "There you are!" he said with a smile and tossed me the **〈Morning Bag〉**. "Overslept? Good luck at work!". On the way to the station, I opened the 〈Morning Bag〉, and found a message beside the warm sandwich. "Good luck at work, sleepy head!" It seemed like the rest of the day would be nice as always. "
("Saturday Morning in the Residence" by Shuichiro Ando)

"This residence is a place to grow new creative leaders who can lead the creative society coming in the future, from different perspectives. Here is not the place to get lectured by someone else, but the place to develop yourself. (~) People who are known as creative know well about their own strengths, abilities and roles. Students in this residence therefore get many opportunities to know about themselves through the

<Dialogue by Extremes>, <Mixed with different colors> and <Seat-reserved Cafe>. (˜) In a nutshell, this residence is a prototype of an educational system in future, which supports students to become active-lifelong-learners who can develop their abilities by themselves and have confidence in their qualitative works. (˜) "
("Student Residence from the perspective of education in future" by Konomi Munakata)

Although its process is very complex which involves both the inductive and deductive ways of thinking, here is a simplified method to write a Future Story.

1. Set the point of view of story
2. Choose some future words from the list
3. Start writing a story in an inductive way, by plotting what you chose in (2)
4. See the whole picture of story
5. Choose some more relative future words from the list
6. Place (5) into the most suitable position in the current framework of (4) and develop a story in a deductive way
7. Review the whole story, and make sure it describes your ideal Future as a whole

Because no restriction about the characters, situation nor length of the story was set, characteristics of our stories totally differed from each other. For example, one has created a story about how the life in this Student Residence could be like from his point of view, whereas one did it from the perspective of the possible future society. Such variety of characteristics of stories implies how people draw their own future visions in different ways. That would be the reason why it is difficult to give feedbacks on the seeds of future words created by other members of the team.

5. Change in Future Words in Creative Residence Project

Figure 3 shows a change in the seeds of future words created in the beginning of this project. Future words have dynamically changed during and after writing future stories by integrating

a few words together and introducing some new words. For example, "*Rhythm record*" and "*To be list*" were integrated, because they both have a similar function in the whole picture of the future story. Although "*Rhythm record*" had a higher level of abstractness, these two words are both about suggesting people to list up what makes them themselves in the most comfortable way, and designing the daily life in accordance with the list. Moreover, some new ideas such as "*Extreme dialogues*" and "*Small window*" were also found and generated as new seeds of future words while writing a future story. What it means here is that writing a story enabled us to prototype the ideas in the whole picture of the desired future by embedding the independent future words created, while elaborating on the future vision at the same time, by looking at the "*whole*" and "*individual* ideas" alternately. Therefore, we could recognize the existence of overlapped ideas and the necessity of new ideas lacking, based on the top-down view.
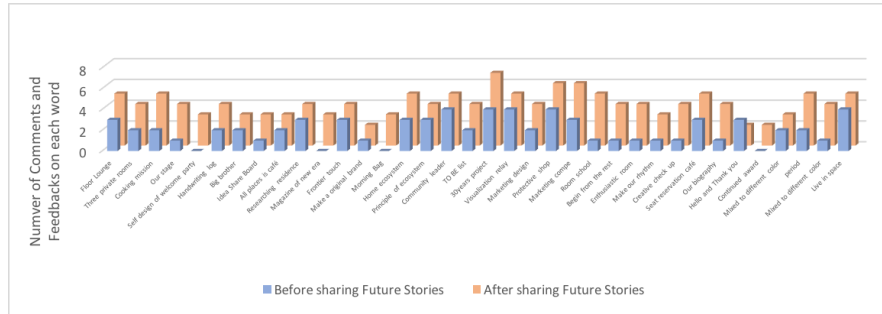
In addition, future story writing also allowed us to work collaboratively to revise the future words written by other authors. As mentioned already, authors of future words have to ask themselves what they truly desire in future, and it is in fact very difficult to give feedbacks or comments on the seeds of future words written by others, which are based on their own future visions. "Even though we were in the same team, working on the same project, I was sort of feeling that it is not on my business to polish up someone's ideas". This is an actual reflection from one of the project members about the first stage of revising process. However, as shown in figure 4, the number of comments and feedbacks from the other members significantly increased after sharing the future story. Hence, the dynamic change in the future words in the last stage on figure 3 implies that the individual authors of future words perceived many hints to improve them, through the dialogue with others. Therefore, although it is difficult to elaborate on the future words in the same way as Pattern Language which is very open to be improved by other people as a team work, showing the clear connection between the whole picture of author's future vision and each future word by writing a future story, enables an indirect participation of other people in the individual revising

process of ideas.

Fig. 3 Change in the set of Future Words before and after writing Future Stories

Fig. 4. Number of comments and feedbacks on each Future Word before and after writing Future Stories

Conclusion

This paper proposed a Future Story Writing as an additional phase of Future Mining to elaborate on future words once created. It has proved to be effective in the way that it promotes the authors to deliberate their own future vision, recapture the nature of what they truly want and ensure its consistency with each idea generated. Although it has not yet studied that how this revision of future words would actually affect the final design of the student residence, it is still very important to inquire into the nature of a desired vision through the revising process. This paper, therefore, is an introduction to develop the future language method to elaborate on the future words for a realization of a desired future. Even though we are in a sort of pressure to come up with new ideas in a very short period of time, it is necessary to keep in mind that it is not that easy to describe the whole picture of what we truly desire and capture the nature of it, without gaining a deep insight into yourself.

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