Research paper

Comparing Languages Through the Process of Story Making. The Reception of Linguistic Structures from Teacher's Training Students in Spain		**Linguistics**
		Keywords: Stories, Fairy tales, Teaching of Language and Literature, Story making methodology, Intercultural Education.

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Abstract

The article will consider the role that fairy tales may have in the background of future Preschool and Primary teachers as language learning promoters. By increasing their knowledge on fairy tales and providing them, with suitable contact with different languages we are promoting an Intercultural character of Education and at the same time, we are demonstrating that, taking as a reference a fairy tale, we can work with different linguistic structures.

The text will present an experience with more than one hundred future teachers in which we tried to demonstrate that they can start their learning of new languages using a story. The Story making methodology will support this language learning, once we know that it is possible for students to identify the key parts of the texts.

1. Children´S Literature, Fairy Tales and Linguistics

Children's literature continues to be one of the most rapidly expanding and exciting interdisciplinary academic studies, and being of enormous interest to anyone concerned with literature, education, internationalism, childhood, or culture in general. One of the most important topics in schools is the story. This is a suitable resource either for teachers, librarians or educators and in it we can find values and contents which are relevant to broad educational matters. Our aim in this article is to deal with stories and Fairy tales which constitute the material we have used to demonstrate the importance of these resources in the process of teaching/learning languages.

As Zipes states (1983: 1) the fairy tale may be the most important cultural and social event in most children's lives. Fairy tales for children as universal, ageless therapeutic, miraculous, and beautiful, are how they have come down to us throughout History. These characteristics allow us to include them in our syllabus and, its transversal dimension implies that the levels in which we can use stories and fairy tales may be different; as going from Preschool level to Higher Education.

Although fairy tales are, still arguably, the most powerfully formative tales of childhood and permeate mass media for children and adults, it is not unusual to find them deemed of marginal cultural importance and dismissed as unworthy of critical attention. Yet the staying power of these stories and their widespread and enduring popularity, suggests that they might be addressing issues

which have a significant social function –whether critical, conservative, compensatory, or therapeutic (Tatar, 1999: 11).

1.1. The importance of stories

Stories are our most primitive, and enduring, means of human communication. People telling stories about themselves and other people, and the day-to-day things that they care about. Shannon (1995:11) writes: "...stories are important to people, politics, and education. Stories are how people make sense of themselves and their worlds. In young children's spontaneous stories that they act out as they play, we can see how they believe people relate to one another, who they hope to become, and how they will behave. We can see adolescents play roles in their own and other people's stories in order to figure out where they fit into their ever-expanding worlds. As adults, the true and imaginary stories we wish to tell and believe suggest what we value most in this world. In a real sense, stories make people". We do agree with him and we bear in mind his thought in this text.

But, what do we mean by 'stories'? Wright (2000) uses the word stories with an extensive meaning; any description of a series of events whether true or untrue. Stories, for him, include: myths, legends, fairy stories and fables which originated in the oral form. But stories also include written fiction and especially short stories, also theatre and film. Furthermore, for him the word 'story' includes our own personal anecdotes, descriptions of the development of a firm or a nation.

As we can see, stories have a crucial role in our society and are in present in its roots. This reason encourages us to bear in mind that stories are fundamental in Education and specifically in teaching languages.

1.2. Language education and the use of stories

Wright (2000) points out that the main reason for language teachers to take the use of stories in very seriously their teaching for all kinds of students; from children to adults and from beginners to advanced, regards that we are the stories we hear and make. He explains that all teachers do affect the personal growth of students, particularly young students. Because of this, stories play a central part in our society at the adult level as well as for children. Stories are certainly not only for little children.

There are several fields in which we can use stories. It is not usual to find professionals from economics or business using tales and the techniques associated to them to improve their skills and become better workers. In this article we will deal with the concept of Story making. This is a term borrowed from Harvey and Martin (1995) that refers to the construction, recall, comprehension and telling of stories.

One of the dimensions of the teacher training regards being an actor, and storyteller (Bradshaw, 2004). This is because the audience of a teacher expects performances which include knowledge but, at the same time, non verbal communication and above all, motivation. Stories have a fun and

educative dimension and this is the reason why we must encourage teachers to read again the stories and to tell them to their students. In our case, the stories help the language learning process and try to bring different cultures together.

1.3. Stories and Linguistics

The selected material is important but the user should be trained in this field in order to use it properly. In our case our mission is to train teachers (either Preschool or Primary teachers). These teachers must be facilitators and at the same time leaders in the classroom. An effective leader must be a competent storyteller who can use oral communication skills to create a vivid and passionate narrative. This is the perfect combination for Children's Education: a good fairy tale and a good storyteller. Since ancient times, sharing stories and unified metaphors has created commonality in our seemingly separate yet interpenetrating realities. Through stories, the chaos of experience is put into a simple linear form by the storyteller. Ironically, real life is not linear. A multiple story reality with conflicting plotlines is closer to the truth of human interaction (Boje, 2001).

One of the aspects in which we are interested is the story's structure. The beggining and the ending are relevant to identifying this type of text. Moreover, we will see that using the Story making methodology we will be able to include other key aspects such as triple functions. These techniques applied to verbs, allow the new learners of a language to see which are the words which have the same function as in their own language. Obviously, we have to be careful with transference because the possibility of errors and mistakes always remains.

Since the 1930's, we have known the theory of the Prague school, in which we can identify the interest of researchers in Syntax. The two key topics related to this issue are Theme and Rhyme. In functional grammar, these are two parallel and interrelated systems of analysis that concern the structure of the clause. The first is the information structure, which is in essence listener-oriented. The present section will deal with the second, called thematic structure, which is speaker-oriented. The constituents involved in the information structure are labelled Given (information) and New (information), and those in the thematic structure are labelled Theme and Rhyme.

On repeated occasions, throughout his many studies on thematic issues, Halliday (1994: 52) states that the theme of a sentence extends from its beginning up to the first element that fulfils a function in transitivity and that this thematic constituent mainly, if it is a participant, tends to be topical. Thus, in every story we can find a similar Theme reflected in the sentences: Once upon a time, A long time ago, and so on. The rhyme will be the content that follows these structures (Thompson, 1996).

Both Fairy tales and the mentioned linguistic topic will be the basis of our study. In the following section we are going to describe the Story making methodology that, as we have stated, will serve as the next step in the process of learning languages.

2. The Story Making Methodology and its Implications for our Study

In this section, we have to mention the project entitle PALLPS (Parents as Language Leaning Partners). This project was funded by the European Union within the Lifelong Learning Programme (Grundvigt). We have considered the role that adults and parents could play as language learning partners. By increasing adults and parents' knowledge of an innovative second language learning methodology they were going to be provided with access to adult learning opportunities, so that they would be able to understand how they could support their children's learning process. The project has been developed From 2007 to 2009 and the partners involved were: The International Learning and Research Centre (UK), Prosper-ASE Language Centre (Romania) and the University of Murcia (Spain).

2.1. Defining the stages

Corbett (2009) explains that the ability to tell a story arises out of building up and drawing upon a bank of well-known tales. The best writers in a class are always avid reader, strugglers may are unfamiliar with the language patterns.

Story making is a three stage methodology which aims to develop the linguistic and personal skills of children by using stories either from folklore or from classic fairy tales. In the process we can define the three stages in this way: Imitation, Innovation and Invention. In the first, the tasks required are to learn, to remember and to be able to repeat. In the second, the steps are the same: to learn and to remember but in the third action using and adapting this learning. Finally, the invention part consists of applying the internalised knowledge of structures and creating new texts.

Corbett (2009) specifies these stages, indicating that in the imitation the most important aspect is getting to know the story through – storytelling or rereading, make it memorable (drawing it) and try to spell it. In the second phase (innovation), we are going to re-use a well-known text and we will substitute, add or make an alteration on it. Finally, in the invention stage we will make the text up, building up a story: drawing, drama, images, video and so on.

2.2. Benefits from the Story making methodology

The PALLPS Project aimed the learning challenge inherent in better understanding the link between speaking and writing, in order to raise standards and improve the quality of children's literacy. The following improvements in children's language skills and language are consequence of the mentioned methodology: oral language, explaining thought processes orally, the evident understanding of developments and implications in a story; how to use voice, expression, intonation and learning to make meaning from this. Regarding written language, enjoyment, motivation and determination to be a writer are key findings of the project.

The project methodology has had a positive impact on language skills development and motivation. Emerging models of practice provided interesting case study material with findings that would in time be transferable across different settings. The diversity of practice in relation to different approaches and project beneficiaries was adding richness to the project.

On the other hand, we have had the opportunity of remembering and working with classic tales such as Peter and the Wolf, Billy Goats Gruff, Princess and the Pea or Red Riding Hood and above all, in order to explore the resemblances and differences between cultures. Working along with people from diverse countries it is possible to compare the classic stories and to identify elements shared by Intercultural Education.

2.3. Implication for our study/experience

To develop the mentioned stages we consider a suitable framework and some assumptions such as spoken language as the first and the most important resource that children as writers have. Because of this, there is a need to build enriching learning experiences in children's spoken language. To do this there is the neccesity of increasing the linguistic 'bank' that children draw from their writing.

Previously, we have stated that the storyteller has to have particular skills in order to improve the perception of the story that children have. This is the reason why we need key teaching strategies which help children to internalise the patterns of language. Some of these useful strategies for teachers and librarians in their role as storytellers are: emphasis on pattern; emphasis on rhythm; sounds and actions; experimentation; and emphasis on sentence structure.

Regarding the design of our study, we have to select stories which have specific characteristics in order to be adapted to Story making. Because of this, the rule of three related to the triple function has been very important in testing whether the students were able to identify the key linguistic structures. Besides, opportunities for role play are also important. Cumulative must be an important dimension because allows the learner to understand better the new language and its contents.

This is the methodology that is a consequence of this study. Once we know that children and teachers are able to identify the linguistic structures they can be trained in the methodology and then they can use it in their future practice.

3. The Study/Experience

We thought that it would be interesting to know if future teachers could identify linguistic structures from other languages by using one story adapted to the story making methodology. If they are able to do this, we think that they will be ready to try this with Children (of course, they have to be trained in the mentioned methodology).

3.1. Objectives and Hypothesis of this study

There was one main objective and several secondary ones in planning this study, although all were intended to help reach a conclusion concerning the reception of linguistic structures by future teachers.

Main Objective: To ascertain the reception of linguistic structures by future teachers using fairy tales in foreign languages.

Objective number one: To ascertain whether future teachers are able to identify the key aspects of a story that will allow them to learn a new language. This first objective will help us to attain the main objective since we attempt to find out whether teachers can use the story to learn aspects of a new language.

Objective number two: To search for a starting point that will be followed by training in Story making methodology.

Through stories we try to obtain evidence concerning teachers' capacity to learn languages and to transmit them to Children using the Story making methodology.

With these objectives, we put forward some hypotheses that will help us understand academic reality in order to design possible changes which will also affect social reality.

Hypothesis: future teachers are able to identify key linguistic structures in stories written in a foreign language. Because of this, it is possible to apply the stories in schools using the Story making methodology with Children in order to promote language learning.

With this objective and hypothesis we are ready to know more information about the sample and the procedure we used in this study.

3.2. Sample

As a sample body, we have decided to use future Preschool and Primary teachers because they are in contact with stories, and these resources will be keys in their future practice. Three different groups were selected. A first one from the Nursery level with seventy three students, a second one from the Primary level (speciality foreign languages: French) with seventeen students; and the last one from the Primary level (speciality foreign languages: English) with twenty two students.

The overall sample was one hundred and twelve students.

Total (French speciality)	17/17 100%
Total (English speciality)	22/22 100%
Total (Nursery speciality)	73/73 100%
Total	112/112 100%

Table number 1: sample

We considered that it was not necessary to take into account the gender variable because in these classes the ninety percent of the students are female.

3.3. Procedure

Our study has been designed taking as a reference one story adapted to the Story making process "Little Jack". We have the translations of this story in several languages: Romanian, French, English, German, and Spanish. Our objective was to demonstrate that the students (future Preschool and Primary teachers) were able to identify key structures of the texts in each of the aforementioned languages. To do this, it is very important to bear in mind the concepts of Theme (A fost odata, Il était une fois, Once upon a time, Es gab einmal, Érase una vez) or the rule of three (triple function), because readers can find the verb three times in the same paragraph.

We presented the following stories to students taking into account that paragraphs were not in order. They had to find the right place for each paragraph for all the versions of the story (four languages). They could read the correct Spanish version. In addition, they have different question in order to complete the activity:

- To identify the beginning of the story (theme)

- What is the name of the main character?

- To identify the different cases of triple function

In one session they completed the requested activity. There were different versions of Little Jack (Spanish, French, German and Romanian) –see appendix-.

3.4. Analysis of results

By analysing the answers from students we can see that our study was successful and we can accept our hypothesis. If we organise the results in a table we can see the following data:

	English	French	German	Romanian	Other aspects
Total (French speciality)	17/17 100%	16/17 94%	14/17 82%	16/17 94%	9/17 52%
Total (English speciality)	22/22 100%	22/22 100%	22/22 100%	22/22 100%	4/22 18%
Total (Nursery speciality)	73/73 100%	71/73 97%	64/73 87%	71/73 97%	20/73 27%
Total	112/112 100%	109/112 97%	100/112 89%	109/112 97%	33/112 29%

Table number 2: results

We have divided the aforementioned data into the three different lines of study (Nursery, French and English students) and its correspondence to the columns in which we have included the different languages in which the story was translated. The first one was English in which we notice that there are no errors regarding the activity of giving the right order to each paragraph, the

question related to the beginning of the story (linguistic structure), the activity of identifying the name of the main character and the last question concerning the triple function. Neither student had problems with this language, this is normal because it is the second language that they learn in academic training. In the second case, the French language, the percentage was also high. Only three students had problems with this language. German was the language in which we could find most errors, above all when we ask the students to identify the theme (beginning of the story). Finally, regarding the Romanian language the situation is the same as in French.

We have to mention that the task was easy for the students but we thought that it would be important to include a column with those errors that show us that they do not know completely what they were doing. Thus, although in many cases they gave the right answers when asked about the theme (beginning of the story); we found that they gave too much information. For example, "Once upon a time there was" It is not necessary to mention "there was". The same situation was found with the other languages. If we take this into account the percentage related to the students that completed all the activities perfectly is reduced to 29%. The French group was the best of three because the half of students answered all the questions perfectly. The other two groups have low percentages. This data gives us a new perspective of the experience, because it was not as successful as we thought. However, we must think of the short time of the study and keep the good impression that the overall results left.

4. Conclusions

The results suggest that it was possible to think of training future teachers in developing the Story making methodology because they were able to identify the key elements of the story in different languages. Although the results of the study have not been excellent due to the fact that they did not have complete dominance of linguistic structures and languages, it is possible to affirm that they have the potential to work with foreign languages and the most important conclusion is that they can transmit it to children.

Without any doubt, teaching of languages is a great challenge in our contemporary society, and the mentioned PALLPS project is a good opportunity to search for new ways of innovation and impact in society and more concretely, in Education. In the language and literature Classroom, we can go for an education based on knowledge building and the inner approach to that knowledge by reflecting on the different contents considering –mainly – the linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and oral interaction. Following this trend, we think that the Story making methodology fulfils this aim, and this is the reason why we have designed this study: to demonstrate the possibilities of the project in teacher training and then in schools.

This educational scheme means that teachers should have new challenges, a chance to improve, and an opportunity for social improvement. Due to the importance of the way in which language is used, in this contribution we have attempted to expose some key points related to the teaching of language and literature and to link them to the Story making methodology.

The main conclusion of this study were the possibilities given by the methodology and materials used in PALLPS were quite important, and this assures that its use in the classroom or in other educational contexts would contribute to the field of teaching languages and cultures.

5. References

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