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Oral Stories and Storytelling for Language Teaching

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Oral Stories and Storytelling for Language Teaching

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1. Introduction

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of oral arts. The conditions and purposes of storytelling may have changed with time but it has been revived in various new forms in many parts of the world. Its role has also been expanded from fulfilling the needs for entertainment to serving as an effective communicative tool in many institutions and professional fields such as organizational management, advertising, marketing, medicine and law. However, in the field of language teaching, the richness and potential of oral stories and storytelling have been under-utilized in today's language classes. Stories, when used in either first (L1) or second (L2) language classrooms, are often in the written form and meant to be read silently or aloud from a book by the teacher or the learner. Despite their similarities, there are several crucial differences between the process of story reading and that of storytelling. Major differences include (i) greater levels of eye contact for the storyteller with the audience, (ii) more use of voice modulation as well as elaborate gestures and facial expressions by the storyteller, and (iii) more opportunities for the audience to have spontaneous interaction with the storyteller and to participate in the process of unfolding the narrative (Huang, 2006; Isbell et al. 2004).

An oral storyteller primarily relies on the tone of voice, gestures, postures and facial expressions to create moods and images, or to evoke responses, typically without the aid of pictures or illustrations from a book. As Isbell et al. (2004) put it,

[w]hen a story is read, the primary reference for the communication event is the text, as fixed upon the page. In a storytelling event, the words are not memorized, but are created through spontaneous, energetic performance, assisted by audience participation and interaction. (p. 158)

Although both story reading and storytelling can be useful for language teaching, there has been much more information on story reading and its positive effects. It is not difficult for teachers to find studies that offer ways to use story reading or listening to stories read-aloud in language classes. For example, Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002),

Elley (1988) and Kindle (2009) are just a few examples among many which offer suggestions for using story reading to help learners' vocabulary development.

On the other hand, studies which focus on oral storytelling (in its original and purest sense of the word "telling") to help learners develop their various language skills, are relatively rare. Even in such contexts as Singapore, where efforts have been made to include oral storytelling and its related activities (e.g. Show and Tell, Role Play, Hot Seating) in their English language syllabus, the use of oral storytelling is rather limited. It is used mostly for the development of oral presentation skills as part of the speaking development, e.g. for speaking with clear diction, use of appropriate volume, pitch, etc. While the effectiveness of storytelling as a pedagogical strategy seems to be increasingly recognized, the potential of oral stories and storytelling may not have been fully utilized.

In order to leverage on its potential, teachers need to have a good understanding of the fundamental characteristics of oral stories as well as the rich features of storytelling discourse. Therefore, in this chapter I will discuss what makes oral stories and storytelling useful for language teaching. First, since the tradition of oral stories is said to have its origin in the folkloristic type of storytelling (Pellowski, 1990), I will introduce folktales as oral literary texts. Then I will discuss the richness of oral storytelling from a discourse analytic perspective, highlighting some key verbal, vocal and visual features which are commonly and strategically used by oral storytellers when telling stories for an audience. Based on the understanding of folktales as oral literary texts and various multimodal meaning-making features of oral storytelling discourse, I will offer some pedagogical suggestions for using oral stories and storytelling in language classes.

2. Folktales as oral literary texts

Folktales in general are part of folk literature, which is more widely referred to as folklore. Simply put, a folktale is a traditional story that has been passed on by words of mouth before writing systems were developed. They include fables (i.e. tales with animals as the main characters and an explicit moral lesson), fairy tales (i.e. tales with some magical elements), myths (i.e. tales which are considered sacred), among many other sub-types (Taylor, 2000). Like other forms of literature, folktales call for the audience to have a certain degree of suspension of disbelief about their fictitious characters and events. Folktales also have the characteristic of literary creativity. Defined at the level of language, literary creativity involves manipulation of sounds,

words, phrases or overall linguistic form of the text (Maybin & Pearce, 2006). Folktales typically include such linguistic features as novel words, onomatopoeic sounds, and repeated or paralleled phonological or grammatical patterns that create interesting rhythms. For example, see Excerpt 1 (from an Indian folktale *The King with Dirty Feet* told by a librarian storyteller).

Excerpt 1

Verbal (see Appendix for transcription conventions)

S: so everybody got their pails,
 they filled the pails with water,
 and one two three they all started to pour.
SPLASH SPLASH SPLASH can you say that?

S + A(w): SPLASH SPLASH SPLASH
SPLASH SPLASH SPLASH

S: the water stated to fill the land
 the water was up to their ankles
 then it went up to their KNEES
THEN UP TO THEIR WAIST
AND UP TO THEIR CHEST

In the excerpt, repetition of the same word “splash” and a parallel phrase structure “up to their ___” create a memorable rhythm which helps to keep the audience interested, especially when these features of language are accompanied by the progressively louder volume and higher pitch in the storyteller’s voice.

With the development of writing systems and other forms of technology, oral tales from various cultures have been transformed into written forms (e.g. the series in *Folk Tales of the World* published by Sterling Publishing). Some have become part of the canon of children’s literature (e.g. Carpenter & Prichard, 1984). Along with the writing down of folktales which has led to a fixed choice of words for child audience and using them as a way to introduce children to literature, there has been a misperception that these tales are only for the child audience. Indeed, oral tales do appeal to children due to their relatively simple forms of language and a storyline with proper beginning, middle and end.

However, despite the outwardly simple appearance, folktales address themes and issues that are profound for all humanity. It touches on such psychologically significant themes of honesty, kindness, generosity, jealousy, arrogance, greed, and so forth. The themes and issues raised in oral tales can be significant for all ages and all humanity, making them suitable for language learners of all age groups (Taylor, 2000). Although

the writing down of these tales may have made their language more elaborate, folktales as conceptually oral stories still have features of oral language which make them most suitable (compared with other forms of literary texts such as novels or short stories) for a storyteller to tell them orally and face-to-face with an audience.

McKay (2001) uses two short stories to illustrate how literary texts can be incorporated in English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classes, and argues that there are three major benefits in using literature as content in L2 classrooms – (i) demonstrating for learners the importance of language form to accomplish specific communicative purposes, (ii) providing an ideal basis for integrating different language skills, and (iii) raising students’ and teachers’ cross-cultural awareness. If the use of written literary texts such as short stories and novels is recommended for language teaching and their benefits for language learners attested, is there also a place for oral literary texts such as folktales and the telling of these oral tales in language classes? What could be the benefits and ways in which they can be used? Let us explore these questions.

2.1 Using folktales in language classes

Studies of narrative and its structures have made a distinction between the narrative content (often referred to as “what” or story elements such as a basic description of the main events making up the storyline or plot, characters, time and location), and the varying manner in which the narrative is actually told (referred to as “how” or discourse features such as the actual words and grammatical patterns used by a particular storyteller to present the story) (Chatman, 1978). The “what” or story elements such as a basic description of the major events are said to have the possibility of “total transfer” from one medium to another and from one language to another, whereas the “how” or discourse features used in an actual presentation of the story will vary (Toolan, 1988).

Take a well-known oral-derived tale *Cinderella* as an example. There exist the French, European, Native American, Japanese, etc. versions of *Cinderella*. The story of *Cinderella* can also be in the form of an oral storytelling performance, a picture book or a movie. However, all these versions share more or less the same fundamental event sequence.

The reward/punishment storyline found in folktales from different cultures is another example (Lwin, 2009). In this type of tales, one of the two characters was good-natured, performed the tasks or tests on humility, honesty, etc. successfully, and

was rewarded. The other character was bad-tempered, failed in the similar tasks or tests, and was punished. The fundamental event sequence or the contrastive narrative structure in this type of tales can be summarized as follows:

Protagonist A: Task → Success → Reward

Protagonist B: Task → Failure → Punishment

This contrastive narrative structure is found in Myanmar folktales, e.g. *The Golden Crow* (Lwin, 2010a); Korean folktales, e.g. *Hungbu and Nolbu* (Grayson, 2002); medieval Arabic folktales, e.g. *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (Drory, 1977); among others. What these examples show is that different cultures may use different tasks or tests for the characters; nevertheless, the underlying message of what is morally or ethically right, what is wrong and the consequences of actions, and the use of contrastive narrative structure to render such messages prove to be the same (Lwin, 2010a).

According to Bean (1999), this characteristic of universality or similarity of the fundamental event sequence in folktales from various cultures makes these tales “one of the most accessible vehicles for language learning” (p. 58). In English language classes, such tales from any culture translated into English can be useful for beginning learners to learn simple grammatical features, such as simple past and present tenses, coordinating connectors “and” “but” etc. Being closest to the oral tradition, the language of folktales will be less complex than the language of academic writing. For example, folktales rarely include phrases like “notwithstanding the fact that” (Taylor, 2000, p. 13). The somewhat simple grammar in folktales makes them useful for the beginning learners as they will find such texts easier to process.

Familiar themes of honesty, kindness, jealousy, greed, etc. and familiar narrative structures (such as the reward/punishment storyline) in these tales can also motivate the beginning learners to listen or read with confidence (Taylor, 2000). Familiarity with the underlying narrative structure and messages in such tales allows beginning ESL/EFL learners to use more cognitive space to pay attention to the language features. This in turn could facilitate their understanding of how specific vocabulary and grammatical patterns of English can be used to realize meanings which are familiar to them. Hence, like other forms of literary texts, folktales can be useful to demonstrate for the beginning learners the importance of language form to create a particular effect in meaning and achieve a particular communicative purpose.

For more advanced learners, folktales can be used as a pedagogical springboard to help them develop skills in using the target language to make critical or imaginative responses, and to explore language and culture simultaneously (Bean, 1999; Taylor, 2001). Tales with familiar themes or similar types of characters and events from other cultures can motivate learners to make comparisons, highlight similarities and differences, provide critical responses and justify opinions. Trickster tales, i.e. tales in which, characters try to deceive each other using trickery (often to overcome a stronger opponent), are useful materials to motivate learners to provide critical responses and justify them. *The Hare and the Tortoise* from Aesop's fables, *Why the Snail's Muscles Never Ache* from Myanmar folktales or similar trickster tales from other cultures are good examples.

Learners from different cultures tend to have different beliefs, attitudes and experiences about trickery, wits and wisdom, and thus are likely to respond differently to the rivalry and fairness of action taken by the characters in a trickster tale. Using language to analyze, evaluate, justify, etc. is a skill closely associated with academic discourse, and it is often one of the important aims of language learning. When done orally in the target language, folktales can serve as a springboard for such task-based talk among learners, which in turn can support their acquisition of the language. Learners can also be given opportunities to compare, analyze, evaluate and justify their responses in writing and bring these skills to their writing development.

When the focus of the lesson is on understanding the structure or organization of English texts, after listening to a popular tale like *Little Red Riding Hood*, learners can be asked to rewrite it as a news story. Such activities are useful to draw learners' attention to the typical structural components characterizing different text types.

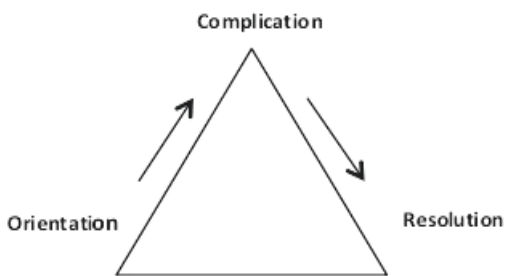


Figure 1 Narrative Pyramid

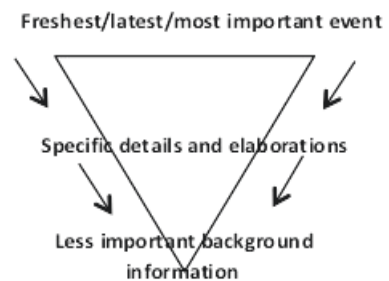


Figure 2 Inverted Pyramid

The typical organization of an oral tale has the so-called narrative pyramid structure (see Figure 1) and follows the sequence of orientation (background about characters, time and place) > complication (problems, obstacles or main action) > resolution (how complication is resolved). On the other hand, a news story typically has the freshest/latest or most important event on the top, with specific details and less important background information about the characters arranged progressively. The organization of a news story can, therefore, be illustrated as an “inverted pyramid” structure (White & Thomson, 2008) (see Figure 2).

Little Red Riding Hood as a fairy tale typically begins with the orientation: “There was once a sweet little girl who lived with her parents in a little cottage at the edge of a wood”. A rewrite of *Little Red Riding Hood* as a news story will, however, start: “Brave woodcutter honored after saving a little girl from being mauled by the wild wolf” or “Little girl saved from being attacked by the wild wolf.” Such activities can be useful to raise learners’ structural awareness and help them understand the lexico-grammatical patterns characterizing different text types.

The chapter thus far has looked at how folktales as oral literary texts can be helpful for teaching various language skills to different levels of learners. According to Taylor (2001), folktales fit well with communicative approaches that focus on teaching language for communicating meaning. When folktales of the target language are used, the cultural elements of folktales also help to bridge common ground between cultures and at the same time bring out differences between them (Taylor, 2001). That is to say, folktales are useful for language learners to develop cultural awareness and understand the people who speak the language. Referring to the three main benefits of using literary texts such as novels in ESL/EFL classrooms (McKay, 2001), it can be argued that the use of oral literary texts such as folktales provides similar benefits – i.e. demonstrating for learners the importance of language form to achieve specific communicative purpose, providing a useful basis for developing the four skills, and raising learners’ cross-cultural awareness.

What is unique about these oral literary texts is that they are brief and their storylines straightforward enough to be told face-to-face for learners during a lesson, giving learners opportunities to appreciate the discourse or actual presentations of the story with all its verbal and non-verbal features, and even to participate in the storytelling processes. Therefore, to understand the full potential of oral stories for language teaching, it is important for teachers to also understand the multimodal discourse features strategically used by oral storytellers during an actual storytelling processes.

3. Storytelling discourse and its multimodal features

Traditional approaches to studies of oral tales, which focus on the collection and preserving of tales in their written forms, often leave aside the ways a particular story is actually told. Only with a performance-focused perspective on oral storytelling, is attention called to verbal as well as non-verbal features used by storytellers during an actual storytelling process. Swann (2006) argues that “what had seemed like fairly simple forms (with trite plots and limited characterization)” are “highly complex and creative performances” realized through the interplay of verbal and nonverbal elements (p.158). Similarly, Lwin (2010b) shows how aesthetic and communicative effectiveness of oral storytelling is achieved through the interplay among the verbal features (i.e. language), vocal features (i.e. voice modulation such as pitch, pace and volume), and visual features (i.e. gestures and facial expressions) emanating from the storyteller during the storytelling process. Apparently, spoken words and the storyteller’s voice are the primary means of communication. At the same time, other features of oral language such as tone of voice, gestures, postures and facial expressions are important aspects of the storytelling discourse as they help to create moods and images and to evoke responses from the audience. Oral storytelling involves more than one sensory level. Each of these levels represents a dimension of communication, and all these dimensions in combination lead to a characteristic called multimodality.

Verbal features used by a storyteller can include those related to a specific form of language, such as expressive elaborations (e.g. words that give detailed descriptions of a character), quotations from dialogues/monologues, repeated or parallel grammatical structure. Vocal features, on the other hand, denote manipulations of voice by a storyteller during a storytelling process, such as:

- pitch – relatively high or low note of voice;
- pace – relatively fast or slow speed of delivery;
- volume – relative loudness or softness
- pause – cessation or suspension of speech;
- inflection – sliding (glide) of voice up or down;
- tone – emotional connotations attached to vocal features; and
- emphatic stress – a syllable or word said with greater emphasis and made more prominent than the other through a mix of the above features

As regards features from the visual aspect, the most fundamental features which are inseparably linked to the presence of the storyteller are their spontaneous and synchronized gestures and facial expressions. The most prominently used gestures are:

- Mimic gestures: Movements of the hands and arms (and the rest of the body) that bear a close form to the meaning of speech (e.g. when the storyteller represents different characters by enacting or imitating their actions);
- Metaphoric or propositional gestures: Like mimic gestures but corresponding to an abstract idea, or gestures made to measure a particular space or size (e.g. gesture used by the storyteller when saying, “The bag is about this big”.);
- Deictic gestures: Pointing (to indicate actual objects/people around the teller, or abstract pointing, i.e. pointing to imaginary objects/people)

(For more discussion of multimodal features in oral storytelling, see Lwin, 2010b).

4. Using storytelling for language teaching

Firstly, engaging learners in oral storytelling gives them opportunities to develop oral presentation skills, such as speaking with clear diction, appropriate volume, pitch, etc. Retelling of a story is said to have benefits such as helping learners become confident language users (Grugeon & Gardner, 2000). However, retelling a story in a second/foreign language is a much more demanding task than in the first language, and the experience can be difficult and even demotivating for learners. Therefore, other communicative activities such as, acting roles using sections of dialogues, or using a story told by the teacher or a professional storyteller as a basis for learners to tell what could happen to the characters after the story ends or pretended interview with the characters, could provide opportunities for learners to develop skills in oral discourse (Cameron, 2001).

Secondly, storytelling especially by a professional storyteller is highly engaging, and thus can be useful for language learners to develop attentive and purpose listening skills, i.e. actively seeking meaning to follow the storyline that is being unfolded, and holding in mind the meaning for an extended piece of spoken discourse (Cameron, 2001). Storytellers or teachers as storytellers can adjust the language and pace as well as the setting, characters, their action, etc. to suit the levels, needs and responses from a particular class. Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1983) claim that the quality of listening to someone tell a story live is significant better than that during listening comprehension from a tape which, according to them, can be less or non-compelling. They argue that with direct and immediate engagement between the storyteller and the listener, which

allows the storyteller to adjust their telling depending on the situation and moment, the quality of listening to storytelling is radically different.

In addition, with the awareness of multimodal features in the storytelling discourse, teachers can also explore the possibilities of using storytelling for learners' vocabulary development and composition process, the two areas, which are relatively less explored. Studies of vocabulary development have claimed that when learners encounter words, incidentally or otherwise, which are new or unfamiliar to them, they make inferences or initial connections between these vocabulary items and their meanings, and that such inferring could result in vocabulary acquisition because the process of inferring enhances the learners' association of words and their meanings (Gass, 1999). In this respect, the vocal and visual features accompanying the verbal features in the storytelling discourse provide abundant contextual clues for learners to infer and make association of words and their meanings. See Excerpt 2 (from a Malaysian folktale *Why Crocodile Doesn't Eat Chicken* told by a professional storyteller Roger Jenkins):

Excerpt 2

<i>Verbal</i>	<i>Vocal/ Visual</i>
S: now <u>one</u> day, <u>crocodile</u> ... she was just <u>sitting</u> there in the water when <u>suddenly</u> , down the <u>far</u> bank of the river, <u>she</u> saw a <u>nice plump little</u> <u>chicken</u> , come <u>waddling</u> down to the river bank <i>/titi titi titi titi/</i> <i>/titi titi titi titi/</i>	Mimic gesture, two hands placed just below the eyes miming the action of sitting in the water. Abstract pointing. Propositional gesture, hands depicting roundedness for 'plump'. Mimic gesture, the upper body miming waddling. Non-linguistic sounds. Rhythmic pace and up-down inflection.

In representing the two characters by their respective characteristic action (i.e. the crocodile's action of sitting in the water and waiting with only their eyes seen above the water to prey on other animal, and the chicken's waddling), words such as "plump" and "waddling" are less likely to be familiar to the young ESL learners, the audience of this particular storytelling event. The storyteller's propositional gesture depicting the shape

of roundness for “plump” and mimic gestures enacting the characters’ action of “waddling” (complemented with rhythmic pace and corresponding up and down inflection for non-linguistic sounds) serve as contextual clues for the learner to draw inferences about the meanings of these unfamiliar vocabulary items. Through well-coordinated verbal, vocal and visual features, the storyteller can evoke clear images of the character and its action for the audience to help them grasp the meanings associated with unfamiliar words used in such descriptions. In Excerpt 2, the propositional gesture, mimic gesture and corresponding voice modulation accompanying the words are thus seen as important visual and vocal clues that facilitate learners in connecting the new words they encounter with their respective meanings.

The words in oral tales may be simple, but they are well-chosen in order to achieve one of the main functions of storytelling, i.e. to entertain. In order to keep the audience interested, words are chosen with particular care to provide onomatopoeic sounds or memorable rhythms (as seen in Excerpts 1 and 2). Learners tend to pick up words that they enjoy or words that appear alongside representation of memorable action or dialogues of characters (Cameron, 2011). Moreover, as shown earlier, oral stories characteristically have repetitions or parallel phrase and sentence structures, which make them excellent for reinforcing new vocabulary and grammatical patterns for learners. When used in a language class, this feature of repetitions and parallelism provide learners opportunities to join in the storytelling process verbally (by saying out the words), vocally (by producing the same manipulation of voice), visually (by producing the same kind of gestures and facial expressions) or in all three dimensions (see Excerpt 1 and also Excerpt 3).

As noted in Excerpt 3, after inviting the children to join in, the storyteller omits the verbal component (i.e. no words were spoken) for the repeated representations of characters’ action for “the next day”. Instead, the repeated actions and events in the storyline are represented only through the storyteller’s vocal and visual performance features. Children following the story development by making similar gestures and voice modulation suggest that their initial connection of the vocabulary items (such as “waddling” and “plump”) with their respective meanings (made during their first encounter with these words in the earlier representation of the same or similar sequence of events) is reinforced through their participation in the representation of the subsequent repeated or paralleled sequences of events. In order to participate in these repeated or paralleled sequences of events, it is important for them to be able to make out the vocal and visual features emanating from the storyteller which are closely

related to the meanings of vocabulary items used earlier. Hence, multimodal features in the storytelling discourse provide rich contextual clues for making such inferences and connections between the vocabulary items and their meanings, making storytelling a valuable support for vocabulary development especially by beginning language learners.

Excerpt 3

<i>Verbal</i>	<i>Vocal/ Visual</i>
S: <u>so</u> ... the <u>next</u> day <u>day three</u> ... <u>day three</u>	
S+ A(w): [Omission of verbal component – i.e. no words spoken throughout]	Children follow the storyteller’s mimic gesture, two hands placed below the eyes miming the action of sitting in the water. Children follow the storyteller and do abstract pointing. Children follow the storyteller’s propositional gesture, two hands depicting roundedness for ‘plump’.
S+ A(w): /titi titi titi titi/	Children follow the storyteller’s mimic gesture, the upper body miming waddling. Non-linguistic sounds. Rhythmic pace and up-down inflection.

For more advanced learners, understanding how various verbal, vocal and visual features are strategically used by an oral storyteller to keep the audience engaged throughout a storytelling process can help them become aware of various discursive strategies and resources that they can draw on in their narrative writing. Since the move from orientation to complication/main action is presumably the most important for engaging the audience by progressively building up the suspense and audience’s excitement, I will use an excerpt (Excerpt 4 from a Chinese folktale *Dog Barks and Rooster Crows* told by a professional storyteller Linda Fang) to highlight the multimodal features used by the storyteller to keep the audience “harnessed” to the narrative at this point of storytelling.

As seen in the transcript, when the event sequence is leading towards the complication/main action, the storyteller begins with a lower pitch and softer volume. Also by dragging out the character’s action of approaching a well-guarded warehouse, representation of the events becomes more elaborate and the pace becomes slower.

Excerpt 4

<i>Verbal</i>	<i>Vocal/ Visual</i>
S: ~ (while they were <u>talking</u> ,) (dog barks <u>quietly</u> left the tavern,) (he <u>found</u> his way to the <u>palace warehouse</u> ,) (and when he got there,) he put on his piece of <u>dog's</u> skin, and he began to <u>bark</u> like a dog <i>/woof woof/ /woof woof/</i> a <u>dog</u> came out of the <u>warehouse</u> and started to <u>bark</u> at him <i>/woof woof/</i> A(w): <i>/woof woof/</i> S: <i>another dog came out and</i> <i>barked at him</i> A(w): <i>/woof woof/</i> S: <i>ANOTHER DOG</i> A(w): <i>/WOOF WOOF/</i> S: <i>ANOTHER DOG</i> S+A(w): <i>/WOOF WOOF WOOF WOOF</i> <i>WOOF/</i> S: they <u>barked</u> at him he <u>barked</u> at them they <u>fought</u> with him he <u>fought</u> with them	Mimic gesture miming someone leaving quietly Progressively faster pace, louder volume and higher pitch for the subsequent lines Mimic gesture miming a dog barking Onomatopoeic sounds, Deictic gesture: abstract pointing Audience follow the storyteller in making the sound Deictic gesture: abstract pointing Audience follow the storyteller in making the sound Deictic gesture: abstract pointing Audience follow the storyteller in making the sound Deictic gesture: abstract pointing Audience follow the storyteller in making the sound Deictic gesture: abstract pointing Mimic gesture miming a dog barking Deictic gesture: abstract pointing Mimic gesture miming someone fighting

Elaborate details in her words are complemented by mimic gestures miming the character's step-by-step action. This appears to enhance the audience's expectation of what is to come next. Then the pitch becomes progressively higher, volume progressively louder and pace progressively quicker, with the audience joining in to produce onomatopoeic sounds such as "woof woof". The effects created through the interplay of all these verbal, vocal and visual features at this point of storytelling help to build up the suspense and audience's excitement.

Using such examples of oral storytelling discourse, learners can be explicitly taught how similar effects for moment-by-moment development in the storyline can be

created to make the narrative they write more engaging. Although not all features in oral storytelling will be easily translatable to the written mode, learners can be taught certain linguistic and orthographic devices that can be used in their written narrative. For example, pace is something that can be controlled through sentence length and syntactic variation (Lwin & Teo, 2011). The use of monosyllabic action verbs in short, simple sentences in quick succession (e.g. *The dog barked. The man jumped. Then the soldiers came out.*) can imply a faster pace. On the other hand, longer sentences with complex structures tend to slow down the pace. Representation of the character's action can be slowed down by the multiple clauses and punctuation, e.g. *Thinking about which way to go, the man fumbled in his heavy bag before he pulled out ... a knife with its edge shining in the sunlight.* The transcription in Excerpt 4 also shows how orthographic devices such as capitalization and italics can be used to cue the progressive shifts in volume and pitch, and to build up a sense of intensity and excitement when writing a story. Fundamentally, oral storytelling can be useful to develop learners' understanding of the crucial roles played by multimodal features during a composing process, and consequently to help them improve their meaning-making abilities for their own narrative writing.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how oral stories and storytelling can be used for helping learners develop various competencies in language. My discussion emphasizes the importance of understanding the characteristics of story elements such as underlying narrative structures, as well as the multimodal features of actual storytelling discourse. I have highlighted key theoretical principles and offered some practical suggestions for how folktales as oral literary texts and oral storytelling can be used as pedagogical resources in language classes. How they are actually used in a particular language class depends on a range of factors – e.g. learners' profiles and proficiency levels, learning objectives, and teachers' knowledge as well as personal interests in folktales and oral storytelling. Nevertheless, having a good understanding of the fundamental characteristics of oral stories and storytelling discourse can be helpful for teachers to start exploring the possibilities of including them as pedagogical resources in their language classes.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

S: Storyteller

A(w): almost the whole audience (in chorus)

<i>Descriptions</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Meanings</i>
Three dots within a line	a ... pause	Noticeable pause between words
Word(s) in all capitals	LOUD	Loud volume
Word(s) in single brackets	(soft)	Soft volume
Word(s) in square brackets	[line omitted]	Transcriber's notes
Word(s) in italics	<i>high</i>	High pitch
~ in front of a word	~low	Low pitch
Underlined syllable/word	<u>stress</u>	Emphatic stress
Word(s) within two slashes	/ti ti/	Non-linguistic sounds