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Folk Narrative and EFL:
A Narrative Approach to Language Learning

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This paper aims to bridge folk narrative studies and literature on foreign language learning, by providing an overview of the applications of folk narratives—from fairy tales to contemporary legends—to EFL teaching and learning. It focuses on how the very nature of oral narratives, of which the English language has a particularly varied and rich tradition, can act on the acquisition of English as a foreign language from a linguistic and a cultural point of view.

Keywords: foreign language learning, folk narrative, folktales, culture, contemporary legends, conversational narratives, fairy tales

Introduction

Working with folk narrative[1] in the EFL classroom means providing our students with language in context, language that is relevant and meaningful, and language that they can use to describe their personal, social and professional lives.

Although we no longer gather in barns and kitchens in the evening to listen to expert storytellers telling long *hero tales*[2], our everyday life is still greatly reliant on oral narrative. Wherever there is human interaction, there are stories. Be it a *folktale*[3] or a *contemporary legend*[4], an anecdote told to back up our point of view or the fleeting piece of gossip we report among friends, we communicate through narratives all the time: narrative is a way of conferring order and sense upon daily events, discussing boundaries, social norms, standards, beliefs, and gender role models. Parents "make up" for their children stories that bear strong analogies with traditional folktales, teenagers exchange rumours that resemble legends collected more than sixty years ago, and primary school children on the Continent still tell jokes about an Englishman, a Frenchman and a German. Many of the concerns, fears and desires addressed by folk in the past persist, and traditional narrative motifs and themes keep

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[1] Folk narrative refers to stories without a precise author, passed on by word of mouth or via social media, which range from fictional genres such as fairy tales to jokes, legends or personal experience tales (see Masoni 2013 for an overview).

[2] Herotales are cycles of long narratives, which describe the life, deeds and exploits of mythological characters.

[3] Folktale is a general term for fictional narratives of the oral tradition, passed on by word of mouth. It includes fairy tales (stories with magical creatures and transformations), realistic tales, novellas and fables (animal stories).

[4] Contemporary legends, also known as urban legends, are short narratives told as true but not necessarily believed to be so. They usually happened to "a friend of a friend", and they make reference to real people and familiar places. Their content reflects the issues, fears, and anxieties of the time in which they are set (for example: terrorist attacks, natural disaster, food contamination, technology).

surfacing in film plots: Miyazaki's movies being a wonderful example of traditional fairy tales merging with contemporary issues, such as the threats humans pose to themselves.

The English language has a rich tradition of folk narrative. From tall tales particularly popular in the United States, to supernatural legends in Scotland and Ireland, folk narratives are rooted and defined by the cultures associated with the target language and as such, they represent invaluable windows into English speaking communities. New stories, albeit with old motifs, are being spun every second, shaped according to the needs and concerns of those who tell them, told and retold and often disseminated through the web. These stories constitute some of the most updated linguistic and cultural documents we have about the English language as used by those who speak it every day. For this reason, and for many others which will be described throughout this article, folk narratives can provide precious material for the EFL and ESL classroom.

Oral narratives are most suitable for improving students' oral skills, because they are by definition three-dimensional texts: that is to say they acquire their real meaning in the act of *performance*.

Although the word *performance* might be associated with the idea of dramatization, here I apply the term as used in folklore studies, which refers to the need to understand an item of folklore, be it a story or a dance, in its social context. The term p*erformance* "has been used to convey a dual sense of artistic action", which includes both the "artistic *event*", and the context or "performance situation, involving performer, art form, audience, and setting" (Bauman, 1975, p. 290).

Folk narrative texts "look" the way they do because they were conceived to be told aloud. The performance element is embedded in their structure, language and imagery; and conversely, all of these features exist in order to make the story *tellable*. Stories are performed in order to make their kaleidoscopic language resonate within us as we listen, and conjure up indelible mental images that we will use to retell that story in our minds, over and over again, in search of ever changing meanings. Narratives come alive and acquire meaning in performance, and when it comes to foreign language teaching, the performance element is a key to selecting, using and presenting narratives to the class.

It also means that a folklore text cannot be fully understood and appreciated until we consider its performative nature. In order to illustrate this point, consider the following story, an English version of a very well known international tale, of which folklorists keep collecting versions all over Europe, *The story of Chicken Licken:*

> As Chicken-Licken went one day to the wood, an acorn fell upon her poor bald pate, and she thought the sky had fallen. So she said she would go and tell the king that the sky had fallen. So Chicken-Licken turned back, and met Hen-Len.
>
> "Well, Hen-Len, where are you going?"
>
> And Hen-Len said, "I'm going to the wood for some meat."
>
> And Chicken-Licken said, "Oh! Hen-Len, don't go, for I was going, and the sky fell upon my poor bald pate, and I'm going to tell the king."
>
> So Hen-Len turned back with Chicken-Licken, and met Cock-Lock. "Oh! Cock-Lock, where are you going?"
>
> And Cock-Lock said, "I'm going to the wood for some meat." Then Hen-Len said, "Oh! Cock-Lock, don't go, for I was going, and I met Chicken-Licken, and Chicken-Licken had been at the wood, and the sky had fallen on her poor bald pate, and we are going to tell the king."

> So Cock-Lock turned back, and met Duck-Luck. "Well, Duck-Luck, where are you going?"
>
> And Duck-Luck said, "I'm going to the wood for some meat."
>
> Then Cock-Lock said, "Oh! Duck-Luck, don't go, for I was going, and I met Hen-Len, and Hen-Len met Chicken-Licken, and Chicken-Licken had been at the wood, and the sky had fallen on her poor bald pate, and we are going to tell the king."
>
> […]
>
> So Turkey-Lurkey turned back, and walked with Gander-Lander, Goose-Loose, Drake-Lake, Duck-Luck, Cock-Lock, Hen-Len, and Chicken-Licken. And as they were going along, they met Fox-lox.
>
> And Fox-Lox said, "Where are you going, my pretty maids?"
>
> And they said, "Chicken-Lickenwent to the wood, and the sky fell upon her poor bald pate, and we are going to tell the king."
>
> And Fox-Lox said, "Come along with me, and I will show you the way."
>
> But Fox-Lox took them into the fox's hole, and he and his young ones soon ate up poor Chicken-Licken, Hen-Len, Cock-Lock, Duck-Luck, Drake-Lake, Goose-Loose, Gander-Lander, and Turkey-Lurkey, and they never saw the king, to tell him that the sky had fallen! (Halliwell-Phillipps, 1849, pp. 29-31)

This kind of story is labelled *chain tale* or *cumulative tale* (Simonsen, 2013; Thompson, 1946), because, element by element, the story gradually grows into a recitation of a long sequence of names or actions. This is a typical example of a story that acquires meaning only in performance. For most, the process of reading *Chicken-Licken* is rather boring: in all probability we would find ourselves skipping the long chain of animal names after the second time we read it, as we can take them for granted. There is not much in terms of plot after all, and we would just need to jump from the first to the last line in order to know how the tale ends. But the very same textual feature that might lead us to skip a line in the written version becomes the main source of interest when we tell the story. Then we will relish the repeated recitation of the animal crowd, as "[m]ost of the enjoyment, both in the telling and listening to such tales, is in the successful manipulation of the ever-growing rigmarole" (Thompson, 1946, p. 230). The performance turns into a sort of competition between teller and audience, because of the dynamic tongue-twisting element created by the alliteration of the animals' names. Telling the long string of names is neither easy nor boring and it can produce a humorous effect that fires up learners' attention to words, pronunciation and word order, as if in a game. We appreciate this story only when it is told, because the text constitutes only half of an oral narrative, which becomes a whole only aurally.

The fundamentally oral and interactive nature of folk narrative is most apt for class activities: when we think about using stories to enhance comprehension and oral skills in the language classroom, it is to stories conceived for the purpose of performance that we should turn.

By definition these stories are variable, and adaptable, and have no standard versions, so they leave the teller free to shape them according to the audience (and indeed according to his/her language skills). Storytellers do not just repeat stories word by word: they are artists who interpret the needs of their audience and the general context, thus managing to change the story from one performance to the next.

The performance of a folk narrative is a dialogue between teller and audience, which presupposes the creation of a collaboration between them. The story is "activated" (Foley, 1995, p. 42) by the audience, who

recognises the main features of the genre, the elemental unchanging structure that makes stories recognizable to all, and the inner rules that characterise the genre; thus deciding whether or not it is necessary to suspend disbelief, and also assessing the teller and his performance, while at times prompting or correcting, or simply reacting in ways that guide the teller into the action of shaping his version. Somehow the meaning of a folktale is suspended in mid air, where the words of the storyteller meet the listener's mindset and imagination. Activating a story in a foreign language is not a simple task: it involves cultural translation as much as verbatim translation, it requires that the audience and listener develop and share verbal and nonverbal patterns of interaction to arrive at a common understanding.

Variation is one of the main characteristics of folk narrative, one that has both linguistic and cultural implications for the language classroom. Not only does it allow us to work with flexible texts, which can be crafted during the performances and adapted to any situation; it also provides us with an array of different versions of varied geographical and cultural provenance, which we can employ for comparative purposes in teaching. Most stories are international, and widespread in the western world: so rather than "English folktales", we have "English versions of international folktales". Also legends, gossip and jokes are common to different cultures. Through oral narratives we can introduce students to a great body of stories in English. Folklore collections and studies in the English language are extremely rich and advanced, and we can therefore have access to infinite material, which includes detailed explanations of the cultural context in which the narratives are exchanged.

Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Cornwall, the US, Australia, New Zealand: all of these countries have stories that resemble those of other countries, with often identical narrative structures and themes, and yet contain their own special cultural references, which can be revealing for the language student.

Take this passage from a version of *RashinCoatie*, the Scottish Cinderella:

> Once, a long time ago, there was a gentleman had two lassies. The oldest was ugly and ill natured, but the youngest was a bonnie lassie and good; but the ugly one was the favorite with her father and mother. So they ill used the youngest in every way, and they sent her into the woods to herd cattle, and all the food she got was a little porridge and whey. Well, amongst the cattle was a red calf, and one day it said to the lassie, "Gee that porridge and whey to the doggie, and come wi' me". So the lassie followed the calf through the wood, and they came to a bonnie hoosie, where there was a nice dinner ready for them; and after they had feasted on everything nice they went back to the herding. (Douglas, 1901, p. 17)

This is the case of a well-known tale where various elements change according to the culture in which it was collected: the magic helper is a calf, rather than a fairy or an old lady; the heroine is forced to eat a typically Scottish dish such as porridge, cooked with a rather untasty substance, whey; and throughout the text the storyteller employs Scots words such as "lassie", for "girl", "bonnie" for "beautiful", or "hoosie" for "house". Elements of the local language and corresponding culture permeate the story without changing its general structure, which can be readily associated with the more widely spread versions of Cinderella. Stories effortlessly present to the classroom endless cultural references that would be otherwise difficult to introduce and contextualise. Cultural fragments and dialect words always catch student's attention and set them thinking about similarities and differences in their own cultures, thus generating comparative thinking both about the language and its society. The common structure and motifs also have important cognitive implications for our multi-cultural classrooms: with properly chosen stories, students will recognise familiar structures they know

well and know what to expect from: such as tales of illtreated innocent girls, or fools that become kings. This pre-existing knowledge of structure can aid students in learning; because they are familiar with the general "syntax" of the story, they will find it easier to understand previously unknown vocabulary as new words will somehow appear as direct translation of words in their home language. The transcultural currency of certain story structures also carries significant implications in terms of text analysis and construction, allowing students to build new stories on solid common narrative ground.

Indeed, another fundamental reason for using folk narrative in the classroom lies in their strong community dimension. Not only are stories crafted in the act of performance in collaboration between teller and audience, they also reflect the values and standards of a community or group: as a result, they can be a good starting point for the discussion of classroom values. Often, collaborating at crafting a new tale on traditional models can be an ideal starting point for such discussions, as heroes' actions must be decided on the basis of the moral qualities that characterise them.

Some Important Stylistic Features of Folk Narrative

What follows is a brief overview of the most widely recognised features of oral narrative that make it suitable for the language classroom (Morgan & Rinvolucri, 1983; Taylor, 2000; Wajnryb, 2003). It is important to notice that, although these features appear to us as textual qualities, they actually constitute performance elements embedded in the text, which help the teller get the audience involved.

One of the main reasons why language teachers appreciate the use of oral folktales in the language classroom is **repetition**. Stories contain rhymes, refrains, riddles, and other artistic uses of words, which are repeated throughout the story. Heroes face difficult tasks, which often appear in the number of three; and chain narratives, such as *The story of Chicken Licken*, report ever-growing strings of names.

Repetition facilitates memorisation and constitutes a cognitive pause for the listener, who can rest, take time to concentrate on what comes next, and take in new content and language.

Repeated sections are not always identical in a story, so sometimes, new words are introduced from one section to the other, and this has important implications for a scaffolding approach to language. Not only does such incremental repetition allow speakers to revise old language, it also provides a meaningful, contextualised and gradual introduction to new words.

Other features include the frequent presence of **rhyme**, **alliteration**, **onomatopoeic language**, animal **sounds**; which engage the listener in a sort of game while concentrating his attention on sounds, pronunciation, speech rhythm, and sentence stress.

Tales often present concrete vocabulary. They typically avoid abstract terms, and this attitude is reflected also in the concreteness of the hero' mission, such as running away from the end of the world in *Chicken-Licken*, or setting off to kill the dragon, to save the princess, or to find a healing plant.

Stories often employ short and rather simple sentences; they follow a linear plot, easily recognisable as belonging to a particular genre, with no flash backs, and a cause-effect organization of events.

According to the students' ages and skills, the language teacher might deem it necessary to adapt the text and change tenses, or simplify some sentences, although simplification is not always necessary. Indeed we might take advantage of stories that enable us to introduce difficult grammar structures without seemingly doing so. For

example, we would not dream of introducing the *future in the past* to a group of five-year-olds, but we would be comfortable with the repetition of this sentence: "she said she would go and tell the king that the sky had fallen" (Halliwell-Phillipps, 1849, p. 29). Through stories we can safely introduce complex grammar implicitly without compromising its reception. In this sense, stories can function as *preemptive* or *proactive* strategies to introduce difficult forms which might be a concern of the learner at later stages (Ellis et al., 2001).

The Pictorial Language of Folktales

Structure and stylistic features also operate at a deeper level. They act upon imagination and emotion. During the performance, the teller with his artistry, his voice, and his gestures, reveals the world of a story to the audience, and gives body to its evocative images and metaphors, thus causing an emotional reaction in the audience. This connection between spoken images and emotions is most important for the language learner, because a foreign language and its sounds must affect us beyond meaning in order for us to perceive them as relevant to our lives.

Emotions, which have been long neglected in the language learning process, seem to be pivotal in the cognitive playoffs of learning (in general), since they mold both the outcome and the income of cognitive appraisals; it is known for instance that emotions, via the amygdala, shape the ways and extents to which we perceive and process the information our brains receive (Phelps, 2004). More recent theories of language learning strongly link cognition, emotion and motivation as part of a single mechanism, which dynamically propels learning.

The storyteller acts on our emotions by using a symbolic and metaphorical language that has the power to create powerful images in our minds, thus affecting our feelings and perception of the language used to convey them. In the case of oral storytelling, given the absence of illustrations, the formation of images in the listener's mind depends entirely on the words used to evoke them. It is precisely for this reason that, as Max Lüthi remarks, the storyteller has "an inner resistance to abridgement", which implies that he does "not find satisfaction in such phrases as 'Everything happened just as before'" (Lüthi, 1986, p. 51); rather he delights in repeating the episodes, such as the three tasks that appear in fairy tales, even when identical. In Lüthi's words, the objective of the storyteller when he delights in repeating sections

> is to conjure up an image, regardless of whether it is the same image used in the previous episode or a similar one. No allusion to previous episodes can accomplish this; only a full and complete narration will do, whether by exact repetition of the entire wording, or by variation through new words or through sentences of different construction. (Lüthi, 1986, p. 51)

Conjuring up images in the listeners' minds is what we all seek to do as storytellers, even when we are telling an anecdote. We describe setting, context and scene. Expert storytellers, particularly when narrating fictional genres such as fairy tales, take pleasure in long detailed descriptions of places and adventures. Oral narratives paint images with words. The fact that they cannot rely on illustrations means they have to do all the work with their words. As such, their language is particularly effective, rich, descriptive, and indeed concrete, but also very close to the context.

This close relationship between language and imagination is very significant for the language learner. The teller acts upon the imagination of his public through the images his words create in their minds. Folk narratives,

in particular fairy tales, rely on symbolic language. Highly pictorial descriptions of hazelnuts that turn into high mountains, little combs that turn into thick forests, mirrors that turn into lakes once thrown on the ground, thus protecting the heroes from the fury of vindictive kings: all these descriptions occupy our minds with magical transformations and leave powerful images which will hardly disappear and which are unique to each one of us. Through them language penetrates to a deeper level of our minds. By introducing stories with extremely pictorial language in the classroom, we provide strong contexts for words and facilitate their retrieval and that of other words associated with them. Folklorists have for a long time been interested in how storytellers rely on those images to remember the stories they tell (MacDonald, 1978). Here is what folklore scholar Carl Lindahl writes about Jane Muncy, who as a child learned traditional tales from her grandmother, and who became a psychologist and now retells the same tales to her patients:

> Her means of remembering stories was to memorize the internal images that came to her from [her grandmother's] tellings and, essentially, to describe these pictures anew when retelling the stories to others. Janie carried the stories within her primarily as otherwise unseen pictures rather than as internalized words.
>
> […..] Jane tries to induce her clients to "see" stories in just the same way [her grandmother] taught her to visualize: "When she told stories, I *saw* them, and I see them again when I tell them. I try to tell them in a way to get my clients to visualize. (Lindahl, 2010, p. 262)

Indeed there is a strong association between visual memory and linguistic memory: when learners are asked to look at images specifically designed for word acquisition, especially when images associated with words or expressions are bizarre and unconventional, they appear to be more successful at retaining words and their meanings (Campos et al., 2009; Duyck et al., 2003). Folk narratives, from fairy tales to hero tales and legends, abound with bizarre images, albeit created by words and not visible to the eye. What storytellers such as Jane Muncy say, however, suggests that the same association also exists between images portrayed by words and those very words, also because strong images in stories are often associated with formulaic language that requires being repeated almost verbatim, in order to conjure up the same image in the listener's mind. The concrete language of stories creates tight correspondences between images and words, thus facilitating the process of inferring and constructing the meaning of words in the target language and later on retrieval of the same.

Although the pictorial language of stories is rich and varied when it comes to descriptions of places, actions and events, so as to help with internalisation of the plot, the description of the hero is intentionally left scant, almost non-existent.

Heroes are neither psychologically nor physically described, apart from maybe a detail or two; this in order for us to imagine our own hero. This is how Jane Muncy described Merrywise, a character invented by her grandmother to serve as a role model for Jane; Jane seems to have unconsciously absorbed the narrator's intent because in her mind she drew a picture of a boy who looked just like herself:

> He was small, smaller than the other boys of course, maybe up to their shoulders. And he wore sort of knickers kind of clothing, like little boys would wear….And he had Freckles. I had freckles too. (Lindahl, 2010, p. 256)
>
> Imagining our own hero will allow us to identify with the characters and enter the world of the story. In terms of foreign language acquisition, stories that facilitate identification convey an extra layer of meaning to the language used to tell them. A foreign language ceases to be foreign when it portrays situations we identify with.

> As we grow up with stories and stories grow within us, our mental images of the heroes change, somehow as if they grew up with us; thus their wisdom and problem solving abilities continue to be relevant in our lives, and for this reason we can keep turning to them for advice.
>
> Jane Muncy was able to make Merrywise change and grow: she "would see Merrywise in her mind's eye, but she would also see him changing in ways that she herself was beginning to change". (Lindahl, 2010, p. 261)

The mental image we have of a character changes to continue to allow for identification, and relevance in our lives. In one way or another, powerful stories keep working within us, and the images they form in our mind become one with the language that describes them. As a result, the words used to convey these stories will linger in our memory more easily than all the words associated with less emotionally charged language vehicles.

Also, the language and structure of folktales provide the listener with a powerful context that makes inferring the meaning of unknown words much simpler.

Consider this story, by Duncan Williamson, one of the most gifted storytellers of the Travelling People of Scotland, which tells of a hunchback who is hopelessly in love with a swan that will not give him any consideration:

> Time passed by. It came summer again. The hunchback made his way back to the lake and he took some of his pieces and some food with him and cast all these bits of bread into the water. But the swan wouldn't come near him. ***Day out and day in*** *the robin would come and sit on his shoulder, the squirrel would come and sit on his knee, the dormouse, the rabbits and the rats, even the deer, would gather round him.* And he would pet them, give them his time. But in his heart he only lived for one thing, the Swan. *He admired* this Swan, *this most beautiful* Swan*—its long graceful neck and its wings and its feet as it sailed round the lake.* But it would never come near him! *Day out and day* in he ***pined*** for the Swan… *threw pieces in the water, cast them as far as he could,* see if he could ***entice*** it near him…*and he had the power upon all animals*! *But he had no power upon the Swan.* It seemed to ignore him completely, it never had any time for him.
>
> But this didn't stop him: ***day out and day in*** he cut his sticks, went to the village, sold his sticks to *the people, and they gave him just enough money so he could buy the things he needed in the shop, just enough to keep him alive. Then back he would come, home again, set sail and try, sit by the lakeside and cast his bread upon the water, see if he could feed the Swan—but no. In vain. Could he entice the Swan? No way could he entice it to come near him.* (Williamson, 1990, pp. 51-52)

The pace is fast. Williamson employs several short sentences, which catalogue the hunchback's actions, his attempts at enticing the swan and his efforts to make a living. His sentences create rhythm, expectation, and a contextualisation for the story's events. He conveys feelings through actions: for example, rather than simply saying "all the animals loved the hunchback, but the Swan", Williamson conveys this failure in detail and by contrast: "***Day out and day*** in ***the robin*** *would come and sit on his shoulder,* ***the squirrel*** *would come and sit on his knee,* ***the dormouse***, ***the rabbits*** *and* ***the rats***, ***even the deer****, would gather round him*…". His use of accumulation confers extra layers of meaning upon each moment of the story.

Williamson describes through action. The story continues with a growing pace, and longer and longer lists which, more than any adjective, convey to us how infinite and useless the hunchback's efforts to attract the Swan are. As the story progresses, Duncan Williamson is able to give us a most detailed and flourishing image of the forest, its animals, the changing seasons:

> The cold bite of the winter wind began to blow through the forest and all the little animals began to think the winter was coming in. The dormouse started to build up his little bit of stores…the hedgehog looked for a place to curl up and the deer began to grow their coats of long hair. (Williamson, 1990, p. 52)

The concrete language applies to our senses. Hearing a story in itself is an experience that invokes most of our senses. We can feel the wind's "cold bite", we can see the animals getting busy, finding shelter. All these actions, and this sense of adaptation to the changing circumstances, contrast with the statue-like immovability of the Swan.

The storyteller's relentless work of depiction also creates an infallible context for words. By the time words like "pined" and "entice" are introduced, the storyteller has so laboriously conveyed the physical context and the emotional disposition of the character, by accumulating action after action, that we can almost automatically infer what those verbs mean.

The teacher will have concrete support to explain otherwise fairly abstract words, which will acquire real meaning in the context of folk stories. Poignant narrative contexts somehow guide words into their allotted space of meaning within our mind: folk stories, with their fast pace and detailed descriptions, somehow corner words into precise meaning slots.

Analogies in folklore allow us to visualise things and fix the language that describes them. I sometimes see joy in students' eyes when they infer the precise meaning of an English word. The clear and detailed narrative structure of folktales, in addition to their pictorial but concrete language, empowers students by activating their own critical thinking process to fathom meanings in the target language.

Language learning begins with the concrete, but then spontaneously moves to a level of abstraction that coincides with higher proficiency. In a study that measured "L2 learners' depth of word knowledge" in their oral speech, by assessing "psycholinguistic values for concreteness, *imagability*, meaningfulness, and familiarity", it was found that

> learners' productive vocabularies become more abstract, less context dependent, and more tightly associated over time. This indicates a deeper knowledge of second language vocabulary and has important implications for how vocabulary knowledge can be measured in future studies of L2 lexical development. (Salsbury et al., 2011, p. 343)

The only way we can guide learners towards abstraction is by giving them concrete images on which they can build in creative and eventually figurative and abstract ways. The metaphorical and hyperbolic language of tales forces learners to reason on the connection between concrete words and their figurative meaning. Metaphors also vary from version to version of the same story, as they are influenced by the culture of the group in which they were collected. If, in Lakoff's and Johnson's words, "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (1980, p. 5), the essence of folk narrative is discussing one issue, one feeling, one fear in terms of another. Both fairy tales and parables work in this direction with their symbolic language. It comes as no surprise then that images embedded in the most popular tales often become metaphors used in daily speech, such as "being an ugly duckling", "being a Cinderella", etc. … and they become effective ways of conveying complex feelings. Explaining them would require telling the whole story.

Focusing on the meaning of tales' metaphorical images in the foreign language classroom can be a starting point for teachers looking to work on metaphor awareness with regards to all aspects of language (Boers, 2004): folk stories can be a valid contribution to the study of conceptual metaphors in the English language and, as a result, in the acquisition of idioms and idiomatic phrases, such as phrasal verbs (Yasuda, 2010).

Every stylistic feature in a story is conceived in order to help produce emotional responses in the audience, a bit like what happens in poetry. However, unlike poetry and most written literature, the language of oral narrative is an incredibly flexible vehicle, which can be adapted to contexts without losing any of its evocative power. This makes traditional oral narrative an ideal medium for the language classroom, where we need to adapt texts to the students' skills while at the same time striving to use evocative means to appeal to their emotions and interests.

Structure and Emotions

> Any one-sided interpretation of a folktale is arbitrary […]. The abstract figure, on the other hand, can be taken in by the mind in various ways. Since it is not charged with any particular content, it can convey the most diverse meanings. The weightless figures of the folktale have the property of not demanding a specific interpretation. (Lüthi, 1996, p. 95)

Even within the context of the same performance, the meaning of a story and the way it settles inside our minds will vary for each member of the audience.

Expert narrators do not explain the meaning of their tales, leaving everyone free to take away their own message. Each of us will learn a different lesson, and lessons will change over the course of our life, as we go back to the tale to quiz it for new meaning.

Emotional responses to a tale's content constitute a fundamental way of internalising it and acquiring language. Folk narratives stay with us because of their didactic nature; not just in terms of moral messages, but also in regard to the practical knowledge we gain from them: gender role models provided by main characters, social standards, values and coping strategies promoted in the actions and deeds that make up the plot. Stories teach us something we need, something that will come in handy, and we all find something useful in them: the content of stories somehow responds to our needs, answers our questions, helps us gaze within ourselves and organize reality in our heads.

The following quote by Jane Muncy is an example of how we seek to gain messages from our favourite stories, which we employ in order to interpret ourselves and our lives:

> When I look at the name Merrywise, you know, he was not only the hero who was the youngest, but he […] could figure out things that they couldn't figure out. And so, the message to me was, you can be little, and you can be frail, and you can be the youngest, and you can be alone, but you could also be the smartest. And the [name] Merrywise—"merry" meaning "happy" —you could be happy. You could be happy and you could be wise and you can overcome. And so I thought of myself as that overcomer. (Lindahl, 2010, pp. 260-261)

The idea of coping and finding strategies is a most valuable message in the school setting, and Jane Muncy beautifully explains what it means:

> Now Merrywise was an *overcomer*. I tell my clients there are two ways to be in the world. One way is to be a mastery person: you do everything right all the time. Things come easy. A mastery person doesn't know very well how to deal with failure. Or you can be a coping person. A coping person—and that's the way to be—*a coping person has a tool kit and when they come to an obstacle in their road, they will take out something from the tool kit, and use it to chop through, go over, walk around, dig under the obstacle, and get to the other side.*
>
> Well, Merrywise was very much a coping kind of guy. He was the youngest in his family. He had two brothers. Tom and Bill. And while they were older and stronger and had more experience and people trusted them sometimes, it was always Merrywise, with his smallness and his cunning and his ability to craft his way through his world, that got them all out of a big jam. (Lindahl, 2010, p. 261)

The “tool kit” analogy is powerful and highly significant. First of all, it refers to one of the most salient characteristics of folktales, and fairy tales in particular. The idea of coping and problem solving is embedded in their narrative structure: *initial problem, quest, difficult tasks and solution.*

The difficult ordeals, which come in threes, point to the ability to learn from one’s experience and mistakes; and to apply lateral thinking to every situation. Along his path, the hero is aided by a magical helper, which reminds us of the need to ask for and accept help in life. The fairy tale conveys most constructive values to the listener by presenting a structure that symbolically reflects the maturation of an individual (Masoni, 2013).

The coping and tool-kit gathering metaphor adapts very well to the language learner. Each language student, especially when highly motivated, will forge his or her own learning strategies for memorisation, meaning making, grammar processing and comprehension. The language learning process is individual and differs from one student to another, according to his or her own personal skills and mind set. Indeed it is a laborious process, full of tasks, trials, errors, and eventually successful solutions. And during the path the learner has to activate his lateral thinking and comparative skills, ask and make good use of help, but ultimately build on what is around him in order to create his own successful speaking practice. So the language learner is indeed a *coper* and an *overcomer* by definition. Beyond metaphors, in terms of foreign language acquisition, the structure of tales based on struggle, overcoming and coping has many advantages: it is logical, it is recognizable, and it is extremely easy to remember. Actions are bound to be followed by other logically related actions, which the reader can easily predict. As a result, the meaning and use of words inserted in such familiar structure are more readily understandable and retainable by the listener.

Given that the hero of folk and fairy tales must learn to cope and acquire new tools, he must not be perfect, but rather resourceful. Jack, the male hero appearing in many folktales of the Travelling People of Scotland (as he does in England and, especially, in the United States), very well reflects the idea of the imperfect hero. Consider the description of this character provided by Linda Williamson, in her introduction to Duncan Williamson’s book *Fireside Tales of the Travelling People*, where she explains the role of storytelling for traveller children:

> [A child], from the time he is about six, hears many stories where the hero is called Jack—tales of fortune and tales of cleverness. In these stories Jack may be lazy and appear daft, but he is not too greedy or cowardly or bad. A traveller child is taught to identify with Jack, to obey his parents, go his own way in the world and look for a living, not to expect too much, not to be a thief or murderer and not to be bad or the devil will get him. (Williamson, 1990, p. 17)

The “perfect” hero is the one who can navigate through life, and it is to him or her that we turn searching for answers and solutions. A traditional folktale has an extremely clear structure where everything is laid out as good or bad, right or wrong, in the service of progression and action. Characters have no psychological nuance, no shades of grey. Actions and choices are what help us tell the characters apart: if the hero makes the right decision he will progress in his journey of growth; otherwise he will not. When the stepsister acts out of greed and hatred, not only does she receive frogs and serpents instead of rubies and gold, but she will also see the end of her journey. She can no longer progress. Making the right choices equates with progressing and growing up. The hero might not be perfect, but he can make the right choices. The bad character is not so much a bad person as a symbol of negative behaviours.

Character roles are well defined: there is no space for redemption or change. In order for the tale to work as a grid of interpretation for our lives, it needs to lay out life in simple terms, in opposed pairs, such as young and

old, female and male, weak and powerful (Maranda & Köngas, 1971).

Characters were crafted in this way to allow everyone to identify with them. These scant and yet powerful descriptions represent a privileged track into the story for the language learner who can readily identify with the character, thus establishing an emotional relationship with the story, which will help comprehension of meaning and memorization of story images and words used to depict them.

A narrative structure that places action after action and links them through cause and effect, trial and error, thus building towards a solution, is a highly engaging structure which closely reflects daily experience. Stories set things out schematically, and their structure is universal. We will recognise the general plot of a story, and we would know more or less what to expect even if we approached it in a foreign language.

This background knowledge has two main implications for the language learner: on the other hand, the clear structure that sets out actions and character roles somehow guides the listener to the meaning of words, step by step, as if following a grid of interpretation. So the language learner exposed to fairy tales can rely on his narrative competence and concentrate on the language used to describe the action, rather than on understanding the plot. The structure of stories allows for language to penetrate at a more profound level.

On the other hand, the student is more likely to develop interest in a story which he realises he has the necessary knowledge to grasp and follow, thus decreasing the level of stress associated with tasks that introduce new language (the language is no longer perceived as a subject, but rather as a means to an end). Also, in terms of confidence and self-esteem, folk narrative differs greatly from literature. It is often the case that, when dealing with literary pieces, adults and young learners alike are somehow daunted by the task at hand, in the belief that they lack the level of education deemed necessary to understand and engage with a piece of literature. On the contrary, most of us feel at ease with folk narrative, mainly because we recognize stories of our own narrative background, and because these stories belong to us all, having no authors and no recognized literary record, thus making everyone feel equipped to deal with them, to understand them and discuss them. This positive and stress-free attitude reflects also on the language used to tell the stories, which appears more approachable and familiar to the listeners, as proved by student involvement in classroom storytelling activities based on folklore material (Gholson & Stumpf, 2005; Baynham, 1986).

To further facilitate the process of following a story and taking it in, tales employ references to reality. Going back to the tale of the hunchback and the swan, let us consider this passage: “he sold his sticks to *the people, and they gave him just enough money so he could buy the things he needed in the shop, just enough to keep him alive*”. The storyteller is very much describing the lives of the Travellers: the hero turns into one of them, one of the community. Without changing the general shape or nature of a story, the storyteller can insert references to his community’s reality, which help the audience visualise and understand the story. These references function as “building blocks” that “help the storyteller to build up the mental picture of a universe which resembles our own world, in order to ensure the illusion of “realism” and maintain the “voluntary suspension of disbelief” which is the basic covenant between an author and his audience” (Simonsen, 1993, p. 124). References to reality are cognitive milestones for the language learner, which can be used to organise and introduce language.

Also the universe of a foreign language needs to “resemble our own”, in the sense that it needs to provide a scene on which we can project ourselves. It cannot just be the universe of others. I suggest that language learners

who enter the world of a foreign language (learned in isolation) must also somehow suspend their disbelief; that is to say, they must try to convince themselves that they need another language in order to express themselves and experience a sense of self. Narratives that are relevant to our lives facilitate this process, and folktales give us an infinite number of contexts on which we can superimpose ourselves (Simonsen, 1993).

Tales contain references to situations that closely reflect life: they speak of family life, generational conflicts, abuse, love, poverty, power relationships, mental illness, infertility, experience of separation, loss of a parent and other traumatic events, such as homelessness, need for refuge, being forced to leave one's home and culture, the need for social support, hostility and power struggle.

The metaphors of folk narrative apply to all; students can find themselves in them, and this makes them relevant to their lives. Narratives that are perceived as relevant activate an inner dialogue in our minds. Consider this account of a teacher who stumbled upon folktale texts as a way of spurring his students to write:

> I never could get the students to write more than about a half a page of some sort of narrative about something like their favourite pet or their vacation time. But then I began reading stories to them, folktales... [...] and noticed an immediate change in attitude, change in attention... And then ... I would read one of these stories and ask them..., "Now, can you write that story? And I was very surprised to find that they could write and recapture that story almost word for word...And that would make a page or two of writing.... And they hadn't done [that] before, it was so much... So they learned how to feel, think and handle the language". (Lindahl, 2010, p. 253)

This account by Leonard Roberts, an American teacher and folk narrative collector, is about native speakers; however, it applies to language students too. Even with simple activities of *dictogloss* we see how differently students will respond to diverse narrative inputs. When stories are more relevant to them, they will tune in and seize the language they need in order to retell it (MacMahill, 2001). When there is connection with the narrative material, their ability to infer meanings of words from the context is enhanced and their awareness of the context is heightened; also, their ability to predict what happens in a story that follows a familiar structure will help them concentrate on the linguistic element in search of ways to describe the scenes they can visualise. As Roberts says, they *feel* the language, and this is because they engage with the content.

Research has proven that ability to build a coherent narrative in L1 depends, from a very early age, upon the reader's or listener's emotional involvement with the subject of the narrative (Miller & Sperry, 1988, p. 293), and the same seems to apply to foreign language learners. However, while temporary emotional involvement can also be brought about by what we read in a newspaper article, the production of language needs the support of mental structures that reflect the organisation of oral discourse; and folk narratives provide this support.

We often think that discussing emotions, ideas and worldview in another language can put too much strain on non-proficient learners. But if properly guided by teachers and with effective narrative supports, it might even prove easier to discuss certain fraught issues in a foreign language. At times, limited vocabulary and grammar structures force students to convey their thoughts in schematic ways, which somehow function as distancing devices, thus allowing the speakers to limit their exposure.

Again, this is another analogy between a foreign language and fairy tales; because tales also allow us to put some safe distance between us and the emotional situations they describe, by being voluntarily set in undefined worlds and by conveying issues through metaphors and hyperboles. These devices allow us to experience emotions connected with life situations that we would never be able to discuss openly. The foreign language

somehow represents a fictional setting: even our voice changes in an L2, and when we speak we sometimes feel we are experiencing another self, as if we were someone else (see also Kramsch, 2010).

Conversational Narratives and Dialogic Genres

With teenage students in particular, teachers can employ folk narratives that directly apply to the learners' everyday lives. Contemporary legends, tall tales, jokes, anecdotes, gossip, stories students tell about teachers and stories teachers tell about students: these are short narratives usually labelled as *conversational narratives*, because they emerge spontaneously during everyday conversations (Norrick, 2000). All of these stories play a part in our experiences beyond the classroom; they serve a number of purposes, from communicating gender roles and moral standards, to describing lived reality.

These stories lead us into the narrative exchanges of everyday life. We are no longer talking about narratives that pertain to our struggles and personal growth as universal human beings, such as fairy tales; rather we are now on the ground of group and community life, where we employ narratives to discuss common concerns, in one form or another.

We live on the transmission of stories; we interact through them. Some of these stories are presented as first-hand accounts of personal experiences, some happened to a friend of a friend. Be they "factual" or not, through them tellers and audiences negotiate their identity every day, and establish where they belong: a legend, for example, "fulfils a cognitive and moral function. Its purpose is to try and account for experience, to suggest norms of conduct and to warn against norm breaches" (Simonsen, 1993, p. 128). Through legends, anecdotes, gossip and other evaluative narratives, our students establish their identity, they create and disaggregate groups and alliances, and they strengthen community ties, while discussing and establishing their roles in society.

In order to make the foreign language relevant to the lives of the learners, we must give it a role in social life, albeit just that of the class community. In order for language to have a role in social life, it has to be suitable for describing and voicing realities that are significant to us. The language of folk narratives serves this purpose. If we start working with the stories students tell all the time, from the personal experience narratives small children tell, to the contemporary legends exchanged among high school students, we can provide learners with meaningful language.

As teachers, we should strive to become ethnographers, collect our students' stories, encourage them to become collectors and experts of their own narratives, have them bring their findings into the classroom, and help them compare them with equivalents told by their peers from other cultures, thus creating a web of classroom narratives and a way of communicating that can be fundamental for class interaction and for the development of oral skills.

Conversational narratives are collaborative by definition and as such they represent a most conducive form of community language learning. Through them, students can work together at shaping their language and oral skills. The collaborative approach to the construction of narratives and language is facilitated by genres that are democratic by nature, such as legends, work narratives, and school stories. "In conversational narratives, audience members are often accorded turns at talk, thus rendering narration coperformance" (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 70). "Coperformance" also refers to the fact that stories start off as one person's performance, but then members of the group might take over and express their views, add details, etc. Consider the following

observations by leading legend scholar Linda Dégh:

> Another characteristic which strikes the observer of legend-telling is the *participation* of the *audience* in it. […] I experienced on occasion, for instance at evening get-togethers, that if people are […] engaged in talking and gossiping, one of them might step over almost unaware into the domain of the supernatural. A person starts a story, and suddenly people display their interest (positive or negative) by adding to it or correcting according to their own information. Two stories might even run parallel; questions and comments accompany the telling. When the story is concluded, another is started immediately by someone who has had a like experience or knowledge. In a lively dialogue among active speakers, the stories follow in a long row without halt and with comments by all present. The silent observer can hardly notice who started and who ended the story, and it is even harder to separate the individual legends form each other, determining where one ends and the other begins, since there is no clear dividing line between them […]. The transcripts of my tapes containing legends recorded in social gatherings look like dramatic texts, separated into roles. (Dégh, 1995, p. 233)

The narrative collaboration brought about by genres such as legends and anecdotes has invaluable implications for the language classroom. Language is crafted over performance, and the questions and comments of the audience help the teller bring coherence and clarity to his narratives; even just in terms of who did what and when (which are often the most difficult things to convey). When constantly prompted by questions and clarifications, the teller's narrative will become clearer and clearer to the point of becoming effective. The performance of the story becomes a group effort to define thoughts and messages in a foreign language in the name of clarity and successful communication. Verbal art, such as folk narrative, "provides a central dynamic force in shaping linguistic structure" (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 59). Making ourselves understood is vital in performance and so we shape our language in that direction, spontaneously. The attention to the language used to define the narrative message is inevitably heightened during a session of contemporary legends for example. In the effort to communicate our views and side of the story, we also call upon non-verbal cues, such as gestures, use of voices and mimicry, thus making the performance more and more elaborate. We give life to an "artful way of speaking":

> In linguistic anthropology, performance is seen as a specially marked, artful way of speaking that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking is to be understood. Performance puts the act of speaking on display—objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience. Performance heightens awareness of the act of speaking and licenses the audience to evaluate the skill and effectiveness of the performer's accomplishment. (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 73)

Effectiveness is what the group works towards. And they do so by working on narratives that are not an object of study as such, but rather part of their daily life.

Too often nowadays we disregard students' practical and anecdotal knowledge. We ask them to stay at a level of abstraction deemed more suitable for school environments. On the contrary, by bringing the use of folk narrative into the classroom we choose to re-establish the importance of anecdotal knowledge:

> Students may come from homes in which narrative is an important way of communicating knowledge. They may take part in peer groups in which experience and insight is shared through exchanges of narrative ….]. [The teacher] can be an ethnographer of what is present in the classroom itself. Giving children turns at narrative may allow them to bring the outside culture inside. (Hymes, 1996, pp. 115-116)

Working with oral language means asking students to voice the stories they make use of on a daily basis: and indeed they are the experts in the genre, or in the narrative style that should be employed to present and exchange

these narratives. Folk narratives do not have a standard version that we are obliged to stick to. Variation is their beauty. Oral stories are virtual corridors we can explore as we wish: they can be shaped according to the storyteller's artistry and his interpretation of the context.

This allows for expressive freedom and creative collaboration. The live material of folk narrative can be particularly effective in our multicultural classrooms, where there will be students who are still experiencing the patterns of oral discourse in their homes, and who certainly experience them among their peer groups (Hymes, 1996, p. 115). Despite the incipient use of social networks, children and young people still communicate and discuss orally most of the ideas and questions that define their identity and process of growth. The act of encouraging students to bring such wealth of narrative material into the classroom, thus becoming "contributors of knowledge themselves" (Hymes, 1996, p. 20), ties in with the idea of *translanguaging pedagogies* "based on the multilingual learner's repertoire" (Cenoz, 2017, p. 1). In this case it is a narrative repertoire in particular, and one which mirrors life outside school and is therefore more likely to be carried by the home language rather than by the dominant school language, or by the instructed foreign language. Students' narrative repertoires should be accessed fully, also through their home languages. Also students' narrative abilities should be free to emerge in their home language and then only later translated for those who don't speak it. Storytelling is first of all an expressive means and it cannot be tied to language limitations. At the same time however, it allows students to craft new narratives through the new common language medium. Programs on bilingual storytelling have proved to be particularly successful in that they have brought to life a richness of narrative themes and skills which resulted in enhanced interest and collaboration at collective story writing among the students. Legends in particular are deeply rooted in the life experience of groups and communities, while at the same time being migratory by nature, and for this reason they can constitute ideal common grounds on which teachers and students can build effective storytelling practices.

In addition to benefits for language acquisition in terms of community language learning, this narrative collaboration also establishes a sense of community among students who can share their versions and points of views; and engage in defining their beliefs and standards together. Walking down university corridors sometimes, I almost feel I am walking along the transmission line. It sometimes feels as if all the different small groups of students, as mutually isolated as they look, are collaborating at crafting one big collective narrative. Nowadays, given the present economic crisis, it is one that speaks of lack of money, of how difficult it is to work and study at the same time, of how heartless some people with safe permanent jobs can be towards those who have an uncertain future. From group to group, I hear the same story unfold, but with different motifs. I hear it told and retold. Not only is the mode of the story's construction collective, but so is its ownership, because after all it voices common concerns.

Collective ownership, variation and teller-audience collaboration all contribute to making oral narratives the most cooperative and dialogic means of verbal interaction. Everyone has equal storytelling rights in a legend session, for example. The right to tell also implies the right to be listened to. Students will be natural attentive listeners, because they need to concentrate on each speaker's utterances in order to craft their own response. The exchange of stories naturally shapes social contexts into conducive listening environments. Teachers who introduce their students to these everyday narratives will find it much easier to ensure effective listening dispositions in the classroom.

A session on legends can engage teacher and students in a discussion about beliefs, worldview, what we mean by "true" and "false", how we adapt to change, how we react to fears. The audience judges the story believable—can it form a part of our system of beliefs? Is it appropriate, relevant, does it reflect our group identity? If so the story is picked up by someone and passed on, thus continuing along the line of transmission.

If, however, at some point along the line of transmission, the story ceases to be deemed relevant it will be dropped. Societies drop stories when they are no longer useful. AIDS legends for example have practically disappeared in Europe. They used to be very popular in the 80s, together with illegal organ transplant accounts. Once our contemporary society ceased to perceive these issues as threats, however, the stories were slowly dropped to make room for other stories that address more immediate concerns, such as the terrible effects of drastic diets, the poisonous ingredients we find in our food, the effects of immigration, global and environmental crises, terrorist attacks and disaster legends (Katrina, Tsunami, earthquakes around the world).

Other times the rejection coincides with a change of narrative genre, a semantic relocation of the narrative content: so for example what is told as a legend by one can then be passed on as a joke (with just a few changes), thus labelling as foolish what for others constitutes belief.

Considering how quickly stories can disappear, we can gather that the narratives that are being exchanged right now are particularly relevant to our community at this point in time. As such, we as teachers should capitalise on them, use them and bring them into the classroom to stimulate conversations in English.

All of the issues brought about by stories can also be explored in comparison with other cultures. Many of the narratives we exchange, in particular contemporary legends (which are by nature migratory) are global, albeit with meaningful differences. Thanks to the Internet and to abundant publications on contemporary legends (Brunvand, 1981[5]; 2012), teachers can expose students to a multitude of versions of the same story, from different parts of the world. Exposure to versions of the same story helps learners infer narrative structure. Structure reflects the functions and uses of narratives and it also enables students to draw comparisons, both linguistically and culturally. Such comparisons in turn enable learners to think about cultural differences and concerns; matching different contexts for telling with different narrative reactions to the same problems.

Through folk narrative we give students access to a body of narrative tradition in the target language, which reflects contemporary life. Students themselves can be guided to finding many of them on the Internet.

By comparing contemporary narrative material, they will learn about their peers in a way that is extremely relevant to them, and which makes them feel extremely close to their English-speaking counterparts. In turn, their own versions become part of a corpus of narrative they are collectors and experts of. Stories also give students access to the way people talk, the information people exchange, the contexts in which these stories are "swapped". Topics related to history, art and science can be introduced through local legends, and common anecdotes.

Just as folk narratives provide context for the introduction of the literature and history of the target language, so should we pay attention to contextualising the narratives we decide to introduce to the class. We sometimes tend to decontextualise texts, as interesting as they are, and tell stories in the classroom just because they are fun, or they contain narrative structures we need to revise or introduce for the first time. But narratives need a context

[5] Brunvand's first collection (1981) is an illustration of how quickly urban legends may change or disappear; most of the legends of 1981 are most often told simply as scary stories, if at all; tellers and audiences tend not to believe that the events they describe actually happened.

to thrive; it can change all the time, but there has to be a substratum that makes the story relevant, so that it can sink in and become an example in context, and not just a grammar activity.

We somehow need to prepare the grounds where the exchange of stories makes sense, where the story is particularly poignant. As a result, the story will stick, and with it, the language used to convey it.

Oral narratives provide an organic and holistic means of introducing language and language use to our students, and for this reason context is most important. We can rely on our students to provide that context, by enabling them to be the experts of their own stories.

Conclusion

From fairy tales to contemporary legends, folk narratives in the English language are steeped in the oral traditions of the people they voice. As such, they constitute invaluable material in the foreign language classroom, both in terms of language and in terms of cultural references. Everything in folk narrative—from the narrative structures, to the language employed and the themes developed—strives towards comprehension, visualization and memorization. Oral narratives are made to be remembered and passed on: they display language that is concrete and characterized by a level of artistry that makes it more poignant and allows it to penetrate to a deeper level in our minds. Their thematic appeal, together with the powerful messages they convey, fosters identification and opens up the way for positive affective responses that enhance the foreign language learning experience. From fairy tales to jokes and conversational narratives, folk narratives can provide invaluable linguistic material for the EFL classroom across various educational settings.

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