



Storytelling and ELT: A Brief Survey

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Abstract

Telling stories or narrating is human being's nature. No one nation or group of people can lay claim to having invented storytelling. The old literature of several cultures has references to storytelling occurrences. Though story and storytelling are quite common experiences even to lay-man, the researcher throws more light on these concepts in this paper as different forms of storytelling have been used from ancient times to manipulate human experience. Also, an attempt has been made to look at use of storytelling method in teaching English language.

Keywords: Storytelling, ELT, Teaching methods, Second language learning

Introduction

Telling stories or narrating is human being's nature. Humans have historically been thought of as animals capable of reasoning. Fisher (1984) did not reject the conventional viewpoint when he advanced the idea that humans are also rhetorical beings, but he did think that reasoning does not always have to take the shape of argumentative prose or intelligible inferential or implicative frameworks. It may take many different forms of symbolic action, both discursive and non-discursive (p. 1). Humans utilise narration as a tool to explain their ideas, convince others to accept them, and to comprehend the universe. In the past, people painted images on walls or rocks to convey messages or to show their reverence for gods or goddesses.

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Storytelling In Different Parts Of The World

The present-day storyteller joins the extensive network of storytellers that stretches into the past and into the future. No one nation or group of people can lay claim to having invented storytelling. The old literature of several cultures has references to storytelling occurrences. According to Pellowski (1977), the Westcar papyrus, a piece of Egyptian writing produced sometime between the twelfth and eighteenth dynasties, contains the first recorded description of an action that at least somewhat resembles storytelling (2000-1300 B.C.). It talks about a meeting between Khufu and his sons.

The earliest evidence of Indian storytelling is recorded in 'Rigveda' (approx. 6000 B. C.), one of the four ancient Indian scriptures (Gadgil, 1986). For Aryans, 'Yajna' i. e., sacrifice was the major occasion for huge social gathering and there are numerous references of 'Sut' and 'Magadh' religious storytellers, entertaining and enlightening the hosts and masses by telling religious tales (Joshi, 1968). The 'Tripitaka' sacred scriptures of Buddhism contain passages in which a storytelling device is used to make a point. Early Greek writings make frequent references to the art of telling stories either through implication or by actually describing when and by whom it was done. In the Old Testament, there are few descriptions of actual storytelling. Jotham used a story in Judges 9.7 to persuade the citizens of Shechem of the horrific things their tyrant Abimelech had done.

The storytellers known by different names in different countries represent their culture and tradition. An eighth century storyteller from Ireland told a different tale each night from Somain to Baltane. In the U.K., it was considered polite to repay hospitality with a story. There have been family of storytellers in Japan and the tradition is handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. In Scandinavia, the storytellers rode with king even to the battlefield to sing about his valour, occupied a privileged position and could expect to receive harp from the king and ring from the queen.

Pellowski (1977) after widely travelling all over the world for storytelling collected voluminous information about different forms and situations of storytelling. These could be briefly described as under:

Bardic storytelling: The term 'bard' is of Celtic origin. Although this word was originally used to describe storytelling practiced in Ireland, Wales, Scotland and parts of Brittany, today 'bard' is a commonly accepted English word for a storyteller who is a poet/singer/performer. Bards are called Minstrels in France. 'Sut' and 'Magadh' referred

to in Sanskrit literature are also kind of bards. Sometimes, bardic performances are accompanied by musical instruments, either self-played or played by others. It is difficult to separate bardic performance from religious storytelling. There are two broad types of bardic storytelling. Chronicler historian generally narrates the oral epic or historical ballad. The praise singer recounts and glorifies the names and deeds of one or more persons, living or dead and associated with the group from which the praise singer comes. There are some bards who recite or perform existing texts without changing them. While there are some others who compose anew each time a recital or performance takes place. The praise singers are observed in different parts of Africa even today. Indian 'Bhat' and 'Charan' can also be included amongst the praise singers. Not all types of bards can be called as storytellers, but quite a many of them are.

Folk storytelling: There is written evidence to show that storytelling was common in homes during communal or group work and at social gatherings and in streets and marketplaces. According to Sawyer (1944), storytelling as a folk art has grown out of the primal urge to give tongue to what has been seen, heard, experienced. The storytellers have been stimulated by folk emotions, imagination and folk wisdom. It is obvious that folk storytellers are not restricted to any particular educational level or social class. Storytelling at home is one of the most universal human experiences, it is a sad affair that due to many rival demands on the leisure of adults and children, storytelling at home is slowly on decline, but even today, African people assign high priority to family storytelling.

Religious storytelling: Early Indian works are mostly related to religious storytelling. In fact, there is hardly any religion in the world which has not made use of storytelling to promulgate religious principles and beliefs.

Other situations of storytelling - Storytelling also developed as a part of theatrical entertainment in Japan, Germany, U. S. S. R., U. S. A., Indonesia, and many other countries. Good storytellers were always placed at the end of the programme. This was done to maintain the interest of the audience till the end. Sometimes, storytelling programmes were interspersed with other acts like jugglers, magicians, and singers. Recreational storytelling of the organised type has its beginnings in the neighbourhood and settlement houses of heavily populated urban areas, in municipal parks and playgrounds, in camps run by scouting groups, and in boys clubs.

Indians made storytelling also as a part of their religious rituals. It has been a tradition amongst Indian women to read a 'Kahani', i.e., a story carrying certain ethical and religious principles and showing the ways to practice them, through certain rituals. Stories were also portrayed in some instances as having emotions like human beings (Mangalwedhekar, 1985).

Epic period is characterized by two great epics, viz., *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*. Eighteen 'Puranas' of Maharishi Vyas are nothing short of small and big religious stories. In addition, many Sanskrit works like the *Panchatantra*, *Kathasaritsagara*, *Shukabahattari*, bear a typical Indian storytelling tradition. In India, storytelling has mostly developed as a folk art. The oral tradition of Indian folk artists has been discussed in detail by Dhere (1964) and Joshi (1968). The most prominent forms of folk storytelling in India have been 'Kirtan' and 'Powada'.

'Powada' is another kind of storytelling in verse which is accompanied by simple rhythmic instruments. In 'Powada', a king or any national hero is praised for his heroic deeds. It has been known by different names in U. P. and Rajasthan States. Maharashtra State enjoyed a good tradition of 'Powada' during the regimes of Shivaji the Great and Peshwas. There are many other folk artists like 'Bahurupi', i.e., 'a man in disguise', 'Gondhali', i.e., devotees of Goddess, 'Vasudeo', i.e., devotees of Lord Krishna, Puppet shows, who occasionally make use of stories in their folk arts. There is also a community called 'Chitrakathi', i.e., picture storytellers, which is found mostly in Maharashtra State and Rajasthan in which stories from *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are presented with the help of picture sheets known as 'Pabujikapat' in Rajasthan state. According to Dhere (1964), these folk artists have done a wonderful job of carrying Indian culture to the unlettered and downtrodden communities of the society.

Many educators have sought to employ storytelling in the instruction of younger children due to the qualities of youngsters, and some others have also used it in classes for older students and adults. Among them is Ringo Ma (1994), who considers sharing stories as a successful teaching method for foreign instructors in American higher education.

In order to captivate an audience, storytelling is defined as the skill of telling stories through the use of words and actions (Soleimani & Akbari, 2013). Due to the multiple

advantages stories include, it is among the greatest strategies to assist students in learning the four skills in both their original and second language. It also improves students' communication abilities. It is an effective method of instruction for fostering language growth and examining the significance of experiences (Woodhouse, 2007). Miller and Pennycuff (2008) found that presenting stories to reluctant students often helps to encourage them.

Fisher's (1984) definition states that any words or/and deeds that meet the three criteria are considered narratives. James' courses have discussed Fisher's definition in stories that the author has recordings of. However, when he was providing instances that weren't often thought of as stories, the teacher himself might not have been aware that he was utilising narration. Furthermore, how can a teacher determine the unique value of narratives that sets them apart from other teaching strategies if they may be found everywhere? The study on storytelling as a teaching strategy should motivate instructors to consciously acquire narratives and apply them in their lessons. There is still the need for more research on the effectiveness of storytelling as an ESL teaching strategy.

Conclusion

The evolution of storytelling from the birth of the human race to the modern times suggests that although storytelling was practiced as some kind of art at different times and at different places, it was never totally devoid of pedagogical use. The strong proponents of the “arts for the art’s sake” are averse to attaching any utilitarian purpose to storytelling. The evidence of the history is that the storytellers of all kinds have at one time or the other put this art to serve some practical purposes, sometimes indirectly and at other times even directly. In conclusion, it may be said that more research is still needed on the effectiveness of storytelling as an ESL teaching strategy. It is anticipated that issues will be resolved after future investigation.

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