



Culturally Diverse Narratives for Oral Storytelling and Literacy

University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders

Pakou Vang, Alyssa Retzlaff, Kristen Diermeier and Marie Stadler, Ph. D., CCC-SLP



Lit Review:

Storytelling skills are strong predictors for children’s academic success (Paul & Smith, 1993), specifically literacy (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Tabors, Snow & Dickinson, 2001). Cultural background influences narrative development, where the development of children from diverse populations may not always match that of their teachers (Michaels, 1981). Because stories used in schools consist of traditional European North American narrative structure, children of diverse cultures may experience more literacy challenges (McCabe, 1997).

Significance:

Adapting stories from the Hmong and American Indian culture to include European North American story elements could increase children’s narrative skills further enhancing their academic success.

Research Questions:

1. What are the structural differences and similarities (linguistic complexity and cohesive devices) among the oral stories of European North American, Hmong, and American Indian?
2. What are the content differences and similarities (story grammar elements) among the oral stories of European North American, Hmong, and American Indian?

Storytellers:

Dr. Lawrence Martin is a member of the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa. He is an instructor at UW-Eau Claire in American Indian Studies and English.

Mee Moua is a member of the Hmong community in Waukesha, WI.

Structural Differences & Similarities

European North American (Standards for Linguistic Complexity)	Hmong Narratives		American Indian Narratives	
	<i>Vegetables Had Feet</i>	<i>The Tiger in the Village</i>	<i>Weneboozho and the Bear</i>	<i>Shut Eye Dance</i>
<i>Conjunctions</i> Coordinating, subordinating, and intersentential	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Elaborated Noun Phrases</i> More than two modifiers preceding a noun Ex. “the big, tall tree”	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Mental/Linguistic Verbs</i> Denote cognitive and linguistic processes Ex. “thought,” or “decided”	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Adverbs</i> Only –ly adverbs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001; Paul, 1995; Westby, 1999

European North American (Standards for Cohesive Devices)	Hmong Narratives		American Indian Narratives	
	<i>Vegetables Had Feet</i>	<i>The Tiger in the Village</i>	<i>Weneboozho and the Bear</i>	<i>Shut Eye Dance</i>
<i>Reference</i> Words that refer to prior person or thing (personal & demonstrative)	Inconsistent	Inconsistent	Inconsistent	Inconsistent
<i>Conjunctive</i> Words that connect meanings between communication units (additive, adversative, causal, temporal, continuative)	Inconsistent	Consistent	Inconsistent	Consistent
<i>Lexical</i> Words associated through vocabulary selection (repetition, synonymy, antonymy, part-whole, superordinate-subordinate)	Repetition and Synonymy	Repetition and Synonymy	Repetition	Repetition, Synonymy, and Superordinate -Subordinate
<i>Substitutions and Ellipsis</i> Words that replace noun/verb phrases or clauses	Absent	Absent	Inconsistent	Inconsistent

Halliday and Hasan, 1976

Content Differences & Similarities

European North American (Standards for Story Grammar Elements)	Hmong Narratives		American Indian Narratives	
	<i>Vegetables Had Feet</i>	<i>The Tiger in the Village</i>	<i>Weneboozho and the Bear</i>	<i>Shut Eye Dance</i>
<i>Setting*</i> Reference to time and place, usually including introduction of one or more characters	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Initiating Event (IE)</i> An event or complication that sets the events of the story in motion	No	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Problem (P)</i> A situation, choice, or action of the protagonist requiring a solution	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<i>Internal Response(IR)*</i> A statement of how a character feels in response to an IE or P	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Internal Plan (IP)*</i> A statement of an idea that might fix the problem	No	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Attempt (A)</i> An action taken by the protagonist that is meant to solve the problem	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Consequences (C)</i> An event following and causally linked to an A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Resolution or Reaction (R)</i> The final state or situation triggered by the IE or P	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Ending (E)*</i> A sentence or phrase that clearly states the story is over	No	No	No	No

* Optional story grammar elements
Stein and Glenn, 1979

Methods:

Student researchers contacted individuals who are Hmong or American Indian and collected oral narratives that were culturally significant. The stories were audiotaped, transcribed, then analyzed for linguistic complexity (Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001; Paul, 1995; Westby, 1999), cohesive devices, and story grammar elements and compared to data for European North American narratives (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Stein and Glenn, 1979). The stories were revised and adapted to include elements typical of European North American narratives.

Conclusions:

1. Structural analyses suggested adaptations to include consistent cohesive devices in all of the narratives to show consistency with European North American narratives.
2. Adaptations to the collected narratives were not made in content areas because story grammar elements were comparable to European North American narratives.

Implications:

Future studies should utilize the adapted stories from the Hmong and American Indian cultures in speech therapy settings or preschool classrooms to determine if they enhance literacy learning for individuals from culturally diverse populations.

Thank you: The authors acknowledge the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire Faculty/Student Research Collaboration Differential Tuition Grant Program for funding this research. Special thanks to Dr. Lawrence Martin and Mee Moua for their contributions.



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