

Hausa Folktale: A Veritable Tool for Linguistic and Moral Development

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Abstract

The practice of folktales exists in time and place, and they are also influenced by the nature of society and by the language and contacts made by the people. In every Hausa society, folktales are created and developed over a period of time. Using a contextual analysis, this paper discusses the role of folktales in linguistic and literary development in the Hausa community. Specifically, this paper explores the contributions of the Hausa folktale in promoting communicative competence, listening skills cultural and moral development in the Hausa community. In addition, the paper explains that the Hausa folktale deals with almost every aspect of human endeavors, such as politics, economic, socio-cultural, and traditional life of the Hausa people. Samples of Hausa tales are presented, analyzed, and discussed. The paper concludes that the importance of folktales to educational development and societal reconstruction along with moral, ethical, spiritual, social, economic, and political implications, is yet to be given much-needed consideration.

Introduction

Folktales are verbal stories that can give people of a given society a way to communicate with one another about their society, their hope, and how the world around them should be understood and appreciated. They also provide the audience the opportunity to think critically in assessing every situation. Morally, folktales guide a generation of people with virtuous lessons so as to behave well, learn how to protect themselves and their environment, as well as equipping them with economic information in order to be self-reliant. Folktales, therefore, are vehicles for the capacity building of a society. It is not only a means to express stories leisurely, but they always moderate the way people behave and think. Folktales are also characterized by a kind of moral development that is based on the characters in a story, that is, conflict and action. The nature of the characters influences the

audience because the audiences are brought rapidly into the actions and identify themselves with the characters.

Folktales as Listening and Speaking Skills

Listening and talking usually occur together in any social or school situation. It is difficult to assess either one in isolation from the other. When parents observe their children's listening strategies and abilities, it is likely to be as a result of folktales they are engaged in, a reader response group, a drama activity, a conversation with members of the family, etc. Those are the same contexts in which they will also learn to develop their linguistic abilities.

Hausa Folktales help in the development of oral language skills such as the following:

- retelling scenes from historical events
- predictions about what will come next
- reciting poems
- asking questions in conversation
- saying something in a different way to make it more precise, and;
- maintaining audience interest during storytelling

Features of Oral Language

- Using a range of vocabulary related to a particular topic,
- maintaining a receptive body stance in conversation, and;
- Speaking in a way that conveys feelings (while keeping emotions under control). In addition, there are five areas in which folktales contribute to communicative competence.
 1. **Affective behaviours:** Those aspects of communication that reveal attitudes and values.
 2. **Listening comprehension:** This pertains to children's abilities to construct meaning from what they hear.
 3. **Speech Communication:** This is the assessment of how successful children are in accomplishing the objectives of their speech. How much support do they need in order to accomplish their speech goals? Do they attempt to expand their repertoire of speaking strategies by experimenting with new ideas?
 4. **Critical/evaluative behaviour:** This deals with children's abilities to monitor their own speech and the messages they receive from others. Are

they aware of whether their message has been understood? Are they able to question and clarify messages received from others?

5. *Interpersonal strategies.* This pertains behaviours that allow children to create relationships with others. Children learn how to do this through their play and storytelling. Interpersonal strategies include conversing, solving problems, sharing stories, and participating in drama activities.

Oral language skills are those aspects of language that allow us to communicate effectively with different people in different situations. Children learn a wide repertoire of language codes as they participate in relationships with a diverse group of people – grandparents, parents, friends, teachers, salespeople, and so on. Children learn to be aware of their audience, the content to be communicated, and the most appropriate ways to communicate their thoughts and feelings.

Traditional Hausa Folktale

The Hausa folktale is a regular activity in Hausa communities. The practice of folktales exists in time and place, and they are also affected by the nature of society and by the language and contacts of the people. In every Hausa society, people produced their folktales; there are prominent similarities among the folktales of different people. But there is no wonder if the folktales vary from person to person or place to place. It is a result of the contents of folktales, which are driven by peoples' literature and culture.

Folktales express the adventures of the human world, animal world, and trickster characters and at the same time, restrain common narratives style. A Hausa folktale does not begin without opening, begin with the most important issues, or end without closing formulae as expected. There is a laid-back introduction that is the opening and the tale proceeds beyond the climax to a point of rest. Recurrence is almost everywhere in Hausa folktale.

The setting is another important element of Hausa folktales as it is in so much literature. Setting refers to place and time that facilitate the audience to understand the cultures of the folk environment and share what a story characters value action. Place refers to the physical environment where the events of the tale took place. These include towns, villages, palaces, bushes, jungles, etc. While time specified the term 'when' the tale took place, that is, the period of seasons, rainy, dry, and harmattan seasons, etc, which are vital for a tale to be appropriate.

The most predominant characters in Hausa folktales are Gizo (spider) and koki (mantis), which people conceded as insects, but they are not insects, they represent the characters of people in the Hausa community. They always play the role of husband and wife. Gizo represents Hausa married men, while koki symbolizes Hausa married women. In many Hausa folktales, complementary characters encounter other characters and scoundrels good and bad. If other characters appear in the same part of the tale, the strongest stands out to be the hero and the weak character or vice-versa. In another part of such stories, there are twin characters as heroes, but even then, one must be a central character. The weakest among the characters or the worst in a Hausa folktale will not turn out to be the best. But the trickster always remains the hero and always victorious (The paragraph is not clearly stated. Rewrite it, pls.)

Hausa folktale deals with almost every aspect of human endeavors, such as politics, economics, socio-cultural, geography, and traditional life of people, etc. It involves the idea of reward and punishment. The reward for any action and saying is based on morally sound behaviours, and punishment is incurred on contrary behaviours. This showcases the universal characteristics of folktales.

Hausa folktale contains and reflects the traditional values of the societies, the action and punishment develop the highest human hope about moral and material achievements. Each society responds to similar ethics and beliefs. Like in any other community, Folktales in Hausa land centre on moral values, communication, instruction, leadership, and transformation. The learning processes of any society are the courage centre of its adaptive capability, which allows it to learn much from the past, engage the present and imagine what the future may likely be. Folktale constitutes an important and valuable resource for understanding people's religious, cultural, societal, and traditional values. It is also significant by scrutinizing the contents of the folktales, the way they are organized, and know how they contain global influence.

Equally important, folktales provide a ground for learning how to relate well, especially in a gathering. This is because in the process of narrating a tale, there is a rule that must be observed and whoever violates that rule must be punished. Children should learn how to respect the laws of the community when they grow up. And whenever people respect laws and order, there is bound to be harmony, which leads to integration.

We come to know about so many publications of scholars such as the late Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya, Sa'idu Gusau, Frank Edger, and Bukar Usman¹. These collections have mainly covered the Hausa folktales from almost all angles in Northern Nigerian Hausa folktales.

Community Integration

The major problems confronting our communities are a poor sense of community consciousness. This is because issues related to politics, socio-economic development, and security, but a few are things that directly influence community integration. Therefore, an individual needs to be developed psychologically in order to be a good representative of his community. Children need to be honest because child development is an important and reliable source for societal change and integration. Hausa folktale serves not only as an entertaining device but is equally valuable in teaching the youths to imbibe the value of maintaining unity in a speedy way in ensuring progress and development. The following tales demonstrate some examples of community integration as a way forward to end any act that will bring a societal breakdown.

Samples of Hausa Tales

The tale of wicked Waziri (who is a leper) and a Malam;

There was a town that no one ever visited due to the evil conspiracy of one wicked Waziri, who was a leper (who was the senior courtier to the Emir). On hearing the arrival of any visitor the wicked Waziri would conspire and order the visitor to be killed. On hearing the news of that town, one Malam, who lived in another town, became annoyed and said, "There is a town I

¹ Frank Edger, *Litafi Na Tatsuniyoyi Na Hausa* (Erskine Mayne, 1913), Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya, 'The style and Content of a Hausa Tale', *Harsunan Nijeriya*, ix, (1971), Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya, 'The style and Content of a Hausa Tale', *Harsunan Nijeriya*, ix, (1971), Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya, *Labarun Gargajiya 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), Bichi, AbduYahaya, 'Cultural Reflection in Hausa Folklore', In *Harsunan Nijeriya*, Yahaya Ibrahim, Y.Y. (eds), Vol. IX (Kano: Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages, Bayero University, Nigeria, 1979), Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya, *Hausa a Rubuce* (Kaduna: NNPC, 1988), Ahmad, Sai'du Babura, *Narrator as Interpreter: Stability and Variation in Hausa Tales* (Germany : Rudiger koppe Verlag Koln, 1998), Bichi, Abdu Yahaya, 'Hausa Folk genres: A Preliminary Survey' (Paper Presented at the Fourth International Conference on Hausa Language, Literature and Culture, held at Bayero University, Kano 20th -24th, 1987), and Bukar Usman, *Taskar tatsuniyoyi: Littafi na daya zuwa na goma sha huɗu a hade* (Kano: Gidan Dabino Publishers, 2012).

have heard no one ever visits, that is where I will go, so as to break the famous jinx...". As soon as he left home for his dangerous journey, he met with a tortoise. The tortoise asked him; "where are you up to Malam?" The man responded, "I am going to the town that nobody ever visits". Tortoise asked further, "Can you take me along so that I can keep you company?" Malam replied, "Why not, of course, I can take you along". After a short journey, they met with a monkey...after that, he met with a crown bird and finally a snake.... And so they continued on their way until they reached the town. They finally arrived at the mischievous Waziri's house. The Leper Waziri asked them to proceed to the Emir's court and pay homage. Waziri informed the emir in utmost secrecy that our visitors had arrived and lodgings had been provided for them. And he went further that "I should now go back and tell him (Malam) that there is a big tree in the middle of the lake, which is located at the center of this town. There isn't any other tree like it in the whole country and the water in the lake is infested with crocodiles, hippopotami, and all kinds of dangerous man-eating aquatic animals. The rule is that the visitor must climb that tree and get its leaves. Then, the Emir replied with a nod of approval. The Waziri then, went and communicated after the examinations, what is to be done with the Malam. Whatever Malam was asked to bring, he did succeed in fulfilling them with the aid of those animals that accompanied him!"

The tortoise replied, "I can swim, but I cannot climb, "The monkey said, "I can climb, but I cannot swim," when they arrived, the tortoise jumped in with a splash, the tortoise said, "well, monkey, let's go to the tree. He then lay down, while the monkey mounted his hardback, and they swam to the base of the tree. The monkey climbed up, breaking off the leaves they wanted from the tree... .." The crown birds flew off, until they came to where it was raining, while the millet was ripened and was being harvested. They were given some millet to roast and as soon as the crown birds had brought the millet, they said, "Malam, here is the millet". He replied, Thank you!" The snake then went to the back of the emir's house and entered into it through a small hole. He found the emir's son, his favorite, and bit him. The son fell down into a coma. Whatever medicine he was given had no effect. The Malam said to the snake, "Well snake, what do you say? "The snake replied, the boy is not going to die. When you go before the emir, and you are asked to give your cure, you must ask for a leper's liver (which is the cure for the poisonous venom) to give to the boy. There is no other leper in the whole of the town except the Waziri...Malam was asked and replied

“The medicine cannot be made effective without a leper’s liver, as soon as he takes it, he will be rid of the poison!.....The emir shouted, “Where is the Chief Hangman ?” Yes, Your Highness!” “Bring back the leper’s liver we need it now!” The leper was slaughtered and when his liver was brought, it was put in water and given to the boy to drink, immediately he became well again. In the end, Malam was made the Waziri of the town...².

The tale showcases the unity and trust built between Malam and his companions. They walked together and shared all they got during the exercise and they finally achieved success. The young ones should imbibe the lesson derived from the tale, such as respecting all despite their weaknesses and differences. They should try to tolerate and understand each other. Tortoise, by its nature, is a very slow creature; the monkey is a clever and jumpy creature; the crown bird flies, and the snake crawls. By our nature as people of one country, we have differences in our social life such as religion, culture, tradition, history, and even language, yet, we should understand those differences and tolerate, as well as respect each other’s differences so as to attain unity. Whenever there is solidarity, cooperation, and commitment from each and every member of a given community, people will be ready to face any difficult situation head-on. It is often said that ‘two good heads are better than one’ and a single tree cannot make a forest.

Another important lesson to learn from the above tale is that whenever people know that someone or a group of people is/are doing something evil in any community, let some people within that community feel bold enough to judiciously face them in order to challenge them. This is what is called courage. Courage is one of the important virtuous or moral qualities that help the youth to be productive. It takes courage to be a soldier, a policeman, a teacher, a farmer, a businessman, a hero, etc. Therefore, teaching the youths in a systematic way to be courageous will help them in protecting themselves, their people, and the community at large. Malam’s courage, as demonstrated in the above tale, is worth emulating by all in eradicating all kinds of evil bedeviling our social co-existence.

Dishonesty and its Consequence

The consequence of being a dishonest person, who believes in cheating and doing all sorts of immoral acts is vividly captured in the following tale. The tale of Na-Goma teaches the younger ones an important role of moral values:

² Ahmad Said Babura, ‘Narrator as Interpreter...’, 6-7.

There was a hunter who had ten children, one day, the man missed one of his birds. He suspected his children and asked them: "Who amongst you took my bird?" All of them answered in the negative. The father was not convinced and decided to place them on an Oath in the river. The father asked them to step in the river while taking the Oath. The first boy stepped in and said: "If I were the one that ate the bird, the river should drown me and nothing happened to him. They all took the same oath and nothing happened to them except for the tenth child, who happens to be the last born and called Na-Goma. He stepped into the river and said: "If I were the one that ate the bird, the river should drown me". Suddenly, Na-Goma was drowned³.

Telling the truth is among the factors that promote good living conditions in any circumstance. So, it is used as a tool for training the upcoming generation and all hands are on deck to direct the youths to adhere to it. For instance, the drowning of Na-Goma would have been avoided had Na-Goma spoken the truth when he was asked to. This would have saved him from a lot of trouble. However, Na-Goma willingly chose to hide the truth, which ultimately led to his downfall. Therefore, this will serve as a lesson for moral training and character development for the younger ones.

Another noticing lesson that can be 'derived' from the above tale is the philosophy of respecting one another. We can see from the tale how the family oath began with the eldest son and it followed the sequence of the family chronologically. Obedient and respectful for all, be it a ruler, a teacher, an in-law, a parent an elder brother or sister, etc. are one of the tools that help any society to reduce the spread of criminal activities from the source since each and every member of a family will be his/her brothers or sisters' keeper, hence, peace will reign and finally, the society will flourish and develop.

Conclusion

Hausa folktales are not new in Nigeria, Africa, and the world over. Their importance to the educational development and societal reconstruction along moral, ethical, spiritual, social, economic, political, and what have you, is yet to be known.

³ Tahir Rabi Muhammad, Kwatancin Habarcen Nijeriya da Nijer: Tsokaci a akan Tatsuniya' (Zariya: Digirin koli, Sashen Harsunan da Al'adun Afirka Jami'ar Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 2018).

The paper provides a brief explanation of the traditional values transmitted by our folktales and the functions served by Hausa folktales. Therefore, Folktales are creative expressions that can be analyzed in terms of plot, character development, and structure so as to serve as a mirror of the society that exposes the individual to the customs, norms, and values of their community. Language and folktales are also related in two respects: language is a mirror of folktales and is also an integral part of folktales. It is pointed out that the fact that language reflects the folktale and culture of the people is better understood with reference to that culture.

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