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*Smaragda Papadopoulou**

A Study of Formulaic Language in Traditional Greek Tales and Its Cultural Implications in Language Teaching

Abstract

In our study we examine teaching mother tongue through fairy and folk tales from the perspectives of recognizing clichés in fairy tales and myths, idiomatic phrases which work as morals, proverbs and very specific phrases of traditional tales'. We suggest that formulaic language can be involved in children's language games at school and become a methodological tool for innovative approaches in Language and Teaching especially at the primary education. We search the sources from Greek traditional tales that could serve as teaching material for this option of teaching formulaic language in mother tongue. Cultural and geographical implications of the examples applied are noted as a suggestion for further discussion.

Keywords: Mother tongue education, formulaic language, Greek tales, culture, clichés.

Introduction

In our study we examine formulaic language of Greek fairy tales (Megas 2010) and folk tales in five different geographic regions (Kyklades Islands [Aegean Sea, Venetoulas 2013], Seven Islands- Eptanisa [Ionian Sea, Sergi 2006], Thrace [North-Eastern Greece, Varvounis 2005], Crete [South Greece, Pitharopoulou, 2006] and Epirus [North-Western Greece, Sergi 2008]).

The reason of our choice in the genre of fairy/folktales is two fold: firstly, due to the rapid contemporary interest of Greeks to tales in an era of political, economic and social crisis and due to the superiority of tales in children's reading choices in primary education. Motif and rhyme in the grammar of traditional tales serve functional roles at the beginning and the end of the stories in formulaic words and phrases. These involve functionality as intrinsic to fairy tales' language: Its entire architecture is arranged along cultural context

* Associate Professor, Department of Primary Education, University of Ioannina, Greece.
E-mail: smpapado@gmail.com

lines. Comprehension depends on the participants' experience in this context. We can categorize tales in formulaic examples of:

- (1) The *Field* which serves as to what is going on in the plot,
- (2) The *Tenor*, which serves as to who is taking part in the plot through persuasive, polemic, explanatory or other language and
- (3) The *Modes*, which provides a tale with the role played by language as didactic, rhetorical, explicatory or explanatory.

Our hypothesis at this level is that identification of possible formulaic sequences can be taught systematically, they can provide experience of cultural issues in comprehending texts of folktales to inexperienced audiences and they can also define fairy tales and folk tales as a genre which may be the missing point of assessment in language acquisition. Moreover, there are many second language learners in Greek schools for the last two decades. Multicultural educational methods appear to have a preference in fairy tales and theatre education for the importance they play in language teaching through an artistic curriculum. Children work with tales in Greek schools lately. *Zone of innovation* in Primary education as a program of the Greek Ministry of Education and a new teaching subject of *Filanagnosia* is a term for "reading friendship" which is based on the idea of introducing a teaching subject to cultivate a friendship between children and the books. We also introduce a powerful component in the process of presentation of Fairy tales in films, videogames and TV productions as a vehicle of applied formulaic language in context at international educational settings. The relationship between *formulaicity* and *creative language* is not a new idea. Linguists presented fragments of a universal formulaic puzzle in meaning making in language and tales through connotations and collocations (Granger & Meunier 2008, Hoey 2005).

Activities which involve-recognizing clichés in fairy tales and myths, idiomatic phrases which work as morals, proverbs and very specific phrases of traditional tales' identity can be involved in children's language games at school. The guessing game of what a formulaic phrase (usually of a high frequency) could mean in its holistic context is another possibility of children's involvement in formulaic language acquisition. Children's observations during storytelling and reproduction of stories can provide language teaching new conclusions about what storytelling and creative writing can bring in class (Ellis 2008a, Wray 2002). The development of a linguistic criterion about the right schematic-idiomatic phrase at the right

time in dialogues is a matter of working with tales, as we observed in production and comprehension of language-in Greek primary schools for the last two years (2012-2014) in a Program of Multicultural Communication in which schools from all over the country participated. A role of communicative competence in the development of story maps implies the awareness of a fantasy land that everything starts with the phrase “*Once upon a time*” or “*Start of the tale, Good afternoon*”. Functions of fairy tales, as we observe, are strongly connected to formulaic language in certain categories that we identified: Beginning and end of narration, time in the narration, etc. (Speelman & Kirsner 2005, Ellis 2008b, 2008c).

Since it is not safe to define formulaic language from the high-frequency of phrases’ appearance in speech we will try to introduce the examples of discourse for the genre of tales which clearly showed that formulaic phrases are more popular in Kyklades fairy and folk tales, (about 40% of the text, Megas 2010). Fairy tales’ formulaic language is an important linguistic phenomenon in all Greek tales (20-24%) of the text. Information for second language learners of Greek are easy to be misunderstood when formulaic language is involved our study focused on formulaic examples at the beginning and at the end of stories only, for reasons of accurate examination of the data. From our point of view, formulaic language of traditional fairy tales is a serious issue of meaning making and language understanding for native—as well as non-native speakers. It is not rare in Greek traditional tales to find cultural clichés as phrases from another era which have survived through traditional storytelling and writing (Megas 2010),. These phrases often witness and mirror another cultural reality (f.e. horses as transportation) and primitive agricultural life. Corpus research of formulaic language in different languages reveals the shared schemata of the human mind and language (Butler 1997), Altenberg (1998a, 1998b).

In an attempt to define the term and prior to presenting stereotypical schemata of formulaic language in Greek tales (an anthology of the most familiar 300 tales from different places), we need to explain that by formulaic language we mean a sequence of stereotypical words which may be continuous or discontinuous in a sentence which is prefabricated (Sivanova-Chanturia, Conklin, & Schmitt (2011), Conklin & Schmitt (2008). These can be retrieved and stored as a whole from memory and are used in our everyday language. These patterns of ready-made semantic expressions are amalgams of creative imaginative thinking

and serve as frozen, stable and familiar expressions with specialized meaning in the cultural context of language education.

FIELD: Formulaic examples of language at the beginning of Greek traditional tales. Rhyme and language prosody in a formulaic memorization of stories (Megas 2010)

- Once upon a time. "Once upon a time" (instead of "upon" as dialectic varieties: for a/vola, time/time. In Greek: "Mia for a ki enan kairo")
- *Once upon a time, they say, ... (s)he says...*
- *Once here was a.... (name descriptive adjective or noun) of hero (boy, king, girl, frog...)*
- *Once upon a time when the animals could speak as we do, there was a (name of main character...)*
- Different versions at the beginning of a story in Epirus: *There was and there was not... (Itan kai den itan).*
- *"Fairy tales do not have salvation. They are a watermill which grinds nonstop. That's why after I tell the tale of the Red Rose Girl (Rodokokkini), I'll stop and I won't tell another tale".*
- *Beginning of the fairy tale, good afternoon.* (f.e. in the "Two Gkoyntrades" Syros island)
- Verse Schemata: *Red string tied to the reel spool/ give the kick to turn/ let the tale start and our good companion to say "good evening to our good companion"/ good evening to your lordship - good afternoon,* (tale "The priest and the crazy women" - Place: Ithaca-Seven Islands-Ionian Sea). In Greek /riming verse: *Kokkini klosti demeni stin anemi tiligmeni/ dostis klotso na girisei /Paramythi na arxinisei kai tin kali mas sintrofia na tin kalisperisei -kalispera tsi afentias sas-kali sas espera.*
- *Mythi mythi mithiako - tale taletaley*
Siko pano na sto po- get up so as I tell you
Mythi mythi mithiako - tale taletaley
Katse kato na sto po - sit down so as I tell you
 (Lefkada, Eptanisa: "The immortal woman". Beginning in rhyme)

FIELD: Formulaic examples of language at the ends of tales

- And they lived well and we lived even better than them (and they lived happily ever after) - *Kai zisane aftoi kala ki emeis kalitera.* After the end of this formulaic expression there are other sentences such as "*kai mou dosane koulouri kai mou to fage o skilos o Kountouris* - Free verse translation: *And they gave me a bagel and the dog, whose name was the Kountouregel, took it and ate it from me).*
- *And they passed their time life and chicken -zoi kai kota.*
- *Good end, everything good* - *Teloskala, olakala.*
- End of the category of "The why stories": *...and since then these animals have their tail short and their back white.*
- *End of the fairy tale, good evening....* (Epirus, Kyklades)
- And that's how the story ends.
- *"Money here and money there, but I didn't take a cent, because I wasn't there.* "Storyteller's third person- narrator (title: "The short man and the dragon", from Paxi island, Eptanisa)
- *Lies and truths, that's how the tales do* (Title: the miser priest" from Kefalonia island, Eptanisa)
- *And they lived fine and we lived bad and cold -aftoi zisane kala ki emeis kaka kai psyxra* (Title "the immortal girl", from Lefkada island, Eptanisa).

<p>-And they got married. And we were there and as we saw everything and listened and that's the way we told you all these (Thrace)</p> <p>-And I saw her when I passed from these places and she told me (Thrace)</p> <p>-Neither we were there nor you believe it – <i>miden ego imoun ekei miden eseis na to pistepsete</i>. (Title: "Ax ali mou", Tinos island -Kyklades)</p> <p>"...and I passed from there with a red underwear" - Kai perasaki ego apo ekei me ena kokkino vraki</p> <p>- Lies and truth that's the way that fairy tales go, too – Psemata ki alithia, etsi einai ta paramythia. (Kyklades)</p>
<p>FIELD: Formulaic phrases to express the change of a situation in the story plot in relation to time perception</p> <p>One day...(to describe that something new happened...)</p> <p>-The same time, at the moment...(hour...)</p> <p>-From day till night(all day long-duration)</p> <p>-He comes closer... at last (finally, after a long time). Paei konta, kamia fora...</p> <p>-Until you say "cumin" (it happened very fast: "The little ring", Mykonos island, Kyklades)</p> <p>-Road... he takes; road ...he leaves(to denote a long trip-duration)</p> <p>-In a moment here and it appears (Kai mia stigma nasou kai faneronetai)- formulaic syntax</p>
<p>TENOR/ MODE in rhetoric questions and explanatory formulaic phrases</p> <p>In a rhetoric question to note the change of a situation through an action, in terms of persuasive polemic, exhortatory function of language</p> <p>-Do you know what I think? (TURN from monologue/ to dialogue: <i>Xe is ti skeftika...</i>)</p> <p>-But what else could (the character), do....(third person narrator:<i>ti allo na kanei?</i>)</p> <p>-What else could the king say? (Instead of saying: the king could no do otherwise and he agreed). (Ti napei o vasilias?)</p> <p>-What to see. (Surprise) Ti na dei...(he saw something which when you hear it you'll be surprised (rhetoric question). Also in the fairy tale "Mrs sea"(Santorini Island).</p>
<p>Proverbs as morals in the tales-the didactic mode</p> <p>- Hatred was left to them (In Greek: "Tousemeine I kakia", The bull-tree, from Kithnos, Kyklades, (Venetoulas 2013)</p> <p>- The apple will fall under the apple tree (a child –takes after his parents)</p> <p>- "As the fate is written and what is written cannot get unwritten" proverbs.</p> <p>- In Thrace, tales with proverbs is common. They include what the main character should be (f.e. MrAndreas, takes but doesn't give). These morals are inspired from Aesop, too.</p> <p>- To learn an art not to be hungry. (Kyklades, (Venetoulas 2013)</p> <p>- When he heard it he flew with the north's clouds (as the proverb says: Kyklades)</p> <p>- "Run, look for him /her and you, Nicholas do wait. "Treha yireve kai Nikolo karterei". (When somebody leaves and we will never find him, no matter how much we try. What is gone is gone).</p>
<p>Other formulaic phrases in fairy/folk tales –Frequently used in the Greek Language</p> <p>- I pass life and chicken and nothing is missing in my life(Zoi kai kota tin perno kai tipota den mou livgetai from the tale <i>the two mice</i>, Sifnos island-Kyklades(Venetoulas 2013)</p>

- *This, as you say, (pou lete... So...as you would say)*
- *But don't you say to me? (Ma de mou les), It means "tell me something..."*
- *He told her the "kathecasta". (From an ancient-archaic word that passed in the modern Greek language as a formulaic expression "Tis eipe ta kathekasta" (The bronze castle, Milos island)*
- *To made someone of the salt... (ton kano tou alatiou...).* He argued with him and gave him a severe lesson.
- (to note "An abandoned area") *where even a bird doesn't fly: "mide pouli petameno"*
- *For The "good" that I want for you, (to kalo pou sou thelo), (threatening INDUCEMENT: do something so as I won't harm you)*
- *You'll see what I'll do to you... (negative meaning: threatening INDUCEMENT)*
- *this and this (Afto ki afto...:he told everything to the listener): REPETITION*
- *and not to talk a lot, (Kai na min ta polilogoume"*
- *He looks here, he looks there, (he is looking for something but he can't find it anywhere). (In Greek: Koitazei edo, koitazei ekei, pouthena den to vriskei): REPETITION-rhythm*

Formulaic language for "love" in Greek traditional tales

- *my son is crazy with her (Einai trelos mazi tis, tale): tale named: "H katsikoula", The little goat, Paros island.*
- *he'll fall down to die. If he doesn't marry her: (Tha pesei na pethanei, He 'll drop down dead).*
- *...And the bad sisters were left in the cold {water} of bath. (In Greek: "meinane sta kria tou loytrou". It means that ...They just waited for love, but in vain.*

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