

To the teacher

Among both practising language teachers and applied linguists there is an increasing awareness that successful second-language learning is far more a matter of unconscious acquisition than of conscious, systematic study. Stephen Krashen (*Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*, Pergamon 1981) goes so far as to say that ‘the major function of the second-language classroom is to provide intake for acquisition’.

It is our view that the ‘intake’ required to facilitate language acquisition will be very different from the materials currently provided in the classroom as part of systematic structural or notional courses. If unconscious processes are to be enlisted, then the whole person will need to be engaged: we shall no longer be able to rely on the learner’s general ‘motivation’ or on the intrinsic charms of the target language to sustain him or her through the years of monotonous drilling and bland role-play. Classroom activities will have to be structured to serve immediate rather than long-term needs, to promote rather than practise communication and expression.

This book is offered as a step in that direction. Within the frame of storytelling—that most ancient and compelling of human activities—we propose a wide range of classroom exercises and more than 70 story outlines (‘skeletons’) for you and your students to work from. The exercises range from introspective to highly interactive; from beginner to advanced; many are offered as communicative alternatives to traditional language-teaching activities; all, we hope, are engaging and rewarding in themselves.

‘I CAN’T TELL STORIES’ You could be right, but if so you’re in a small minority. In our experience very few teachers of English can *read aloud* adequately, but almost all have a hidden talent as storytellers. Section 1 suggests ways in which you can work from a bare outline to an adequate and even ‘magic’ telling.

LISTENING COMPREHENSION The quality of listening that takes place when you tell your class a story (provided you tell rather than read aloud) is radically different from that during conventional

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John Morgan and Mario Rinvoluceri

Excerpt

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listening comprehension from tape. The latter is always third-person listening, a kind of eavesdropping that is strangely un compelling. To be told a story by a live storyteller, on the contrary, involves one in 'I-thou' listening, where the listeners can directly influence the telling. Even if you are a non-native teacher of English, the communicative gain will more than outweigh the 'un-Englishness' you may hear in your telling.

FOLLOWING UP A STORY 'Comprehension questions' and paraphrase exercises are standard classroom follow-ups to listening work: after a story they at best dilute, at worst destroy, its effect on the listener. In Section 2 you will find a variety of alternative follow-up exercises. 2.1, for example, gives the student an opportunity to decide for himself or herself which questions (if any) he or she wants answered, and to hear the answers from a classmate. 2.4 uses role-assignment to explore the group's feelings towards characters in a story; 2.14 uses a drawing exercise to help students 'cap' one story with another. All the exercises encourage the recycling of new language.

RETELLING Being required to retell a story to someone who has just heard it is a pleasure few of us would willingly repeat: yet this is often what we force upon our students. Section 3 suggests activities in which retelling is both necessary and enjoyable.

STORIES AND GRAMMAR Many traditional stories abound in powerful repeated phrases (e.g. 'Who's been sleeping in MY bed?'). For elementary and intermediate students, such stories (suitably chosen) can be used as an almost subliminal grammar input. 4.1 gives some examples of this.

It is also a fairly simple matter to angle your telling and/or follow-up exercises in such a way that particular structures are demanded of the student: from common strong verbs to third conditionals.

In Section 8 you are introduced to the Silent Way reduction technique which has the students working intensively on grammar, syntax, intonation and meaning all at the same time. After 20 minutes intensive work the story they started out from has vanished!

FROM LISTENING TO ORAL PRODUCTION In Section 5 we suggest ways of collaborating with students in the production of stories: 5.2 shows a narrator plus Greek chorus technique; 5.8

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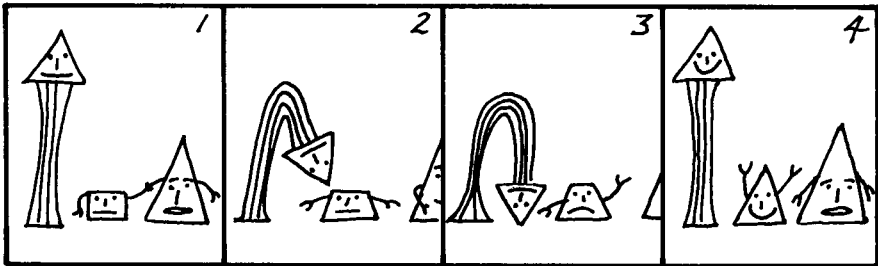
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shows the teacher modelling vocabulary from *within* a group; in 5.1 a use is found for the language laboratory.

ORAL PRODUCTION There are stories hidden inside everyone. Elementary students will bring them out in dramatic, excited half-sentences; advanced speakers will reach out for ever more vivid or exact expression. For all, adequate communication is an attainable miracle, if the teacher is prepared to allow it. Section 6 provides frames for the recall or creation of students' own stories; Section 7 goes a little deeper—into one's real or imaginary past.

PICTURE STORIES We are all familiar with the 'picture story' as a device for provoking narrative work. Unfortunately, anyone with normal eyesight produces much the same story, which robs the telling of any point. In 6.9 we provide symbolic pictures to provoke a wide range of different stories. Once they have created their own story, students are keen to tell them and to find out what others have made of the 'doodlestrip':



STORY POOL At the end of the book you will find twenty story outlines to supplement those scattered through the exercises. We have tried to make these as varied as possible, but recognise that we cannot span the range of tastes of all the possible readers of this book. If you find pleasure and profit in telling stories with your class, then we hope you will be able to add your own stories to the pool.

FAIRY STORIES We have consciously included a number of fairy stories in the book: we feel these are suitable for work with both very young learners and with adults, but they are perhaps not a good bet in most classes of adolescents. In this age group we suggest you concentrate on symbolic, literary, and problem stories.

There are, however, great advantages to working on fairy stories with older people. They are often familiar in outline (though seldom

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in detail) in the student's mother tongue; the language is simple yet the meanings are evocative and many-layered; and the stories bring back, often in a flood of excitement, memories of one's own childhood and that of one's children.

Section 1 Telling a story

One day, while testing material for this book, we decided to tell the same story in each of the two groups of students we were working with, and to record ourselves while doing so. The story, a Ghanaian folk tale, goes like this:

A hunchback girl protects her father's beans from wild animals
 In the fields, she is visited by fairies
 They ask her for bean soup
 She says she can't bend down to pick the beans, because of her hump
 The fairies remove the hump
 She picks the beans and cooks them
 The fairies eat, thank her
 They replace the hump and leave
 Her father tells her: 'You silly girl, you should have run away before they could replace the hump'
 Next day, the same thing. She runs off before they replace the hump
 She hides in the hut from the fairies
 A week later there is a dance in the village
 She can't resist—joins the dance
 While dancing, she feels a weight on her shoulders
 She turns, sees the fairies leaving the village

(from *Folk Tales and Fables*, ed. P. Itayemi & P. Gurrey)

In one room the students heard:

There was a farmer / in the north of the country / who was very poor / and he just had a couple of fields where he grew yams and beans and things / and he lived by himself with his daughter / and every day he would go out to his fields and dig / plant his yams / look after his farm / his daughter would go / out with him / but she had a hump on her back she was a hunchback and she couldn't do any real work she couldn't bend / and her job was to go to the more distant field and / just guard the beans from the monkeys /

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who would come down from the forest around / one day she went out to the field / and / while she was there some fairies came out of the wood / and asked her for / beans / they wanted her to cook them / and make them / a meal / she said she couldn't because she couldn't bend to pick the beans / so one of the fairies came up to her put his hand on her back and lifted the hump off her back / and said now you can pick beans / well she did this she picked the beans and she put them in a pot made a fire cooked the beans and gave them to the fairies / and they ate them thanked her for them / and turned to go and as they left they replaced the hump on her back / When she came back to the hut she told her father what had happened and her father said now if they come again / and they probably will / when they take the hump off your back / don't go and pick the beans run away and hide / then you'll grow up straight / like the other girls / so the next day she went out to the field and the fairies did come and asked her for beans / and took the hump off her back / and instead of going / out into the field to pick the beans / she turned and ran / as fast as she could / she rushed back to the village and hid in the hut / that evening when her father came home / he advised her to stay in the house / because the fairies now would be looking for her / but after a few weeks he thought they would go away / so she stayed in the house / for a week / and / then there was a festival in the village / and all the girls went out into the streets of the village / and they danced / and the girl looked / out of her window at the girls / in / their bright / costumes / dancing in the street / and she couldn't resist it / she'd always loved dancing and she'd never been able to dance and now she could / and out into the street she went / danced with the other girls / while she was dancing / she felt a weight / on her shoulders / turned round / and there she saw the fairies / quietly / going off / out of the village

In the other room the students heard:

Once upon a time there was a village / on the edge of a desert / in the village there lived a man who had seven sons he also had one daughter / his sons were straight and upright / but his daughter / well / she had a hump on her back / and she had to walk bent over / and this made the man very very unhappy / and it made the girl very very unhappy / she couldn't pick things up / she couldn't walk / properly / and she couldn't dance / the man

Telling a story

had a beanfield on the edge of the desert / and one of the daughter's jobs was to go and watch the beanfield / and make sure no animals or people stole beans from it / one evening she was there / as night was falling / in this part of the world night falls quickly / and as she was preparing to go home suddenly some fairies appeared on the edge of the beanfield / and they came over / and one of them said to her / we're hungry / pick us some beans and make us a bean soup / but the girl looked at them sadly / and said / I can't bend down to pick the beans / but the fairy / came close behind her and lifted / the hump from off her back / and she could stand upright and walk straight / she smiled / and began to pick beans / she made a fire / and she made the fairies a bean soup / which they ate greedily / and then disappeared / across the edge of the field back / into the desert / and the girl / ran home / but as she was running / suddenly / she felt the hump / coming back onto her shoulders / and by the time she got home she was stooped forward / and could only walk slowly / and she told her father everything that had happened / and her father said to her / you acted wrong my daughter / you should have run away as soon as the fairies took the hump off your back / they couldn't have found you to put it back on again / I'm sure they'll come back tomorrow / when it happens run away / before they can put the hump back on your shoulders / and so the next evening / the girl went to the beanfield again and sure enough the fairies / appeared over the edge of the field / and they asked her to make them a bean soup again / and a fairy lifted the hump from off her back / and quickly she ran out of the field and ran back home to the village / she hid in her father's house / and she could walk straight / and she realised that she could dance / for that evening there was going to be a dance / at the house of some neighbours where there was a wedding / and she / later on in the evening she crept out / and went to the house / to the neighbour's house / and joined the dancing / and then she saw / on the edge of the / dancing people / the fairies / suddenly / her hump was there on her back again / she stooped forward / she could dance no more

Telling not reading

The two versions not only differ from each other in both content and language, but also in pace; and both differ from a story *reading*

Telling a story

in numerous ways. One can readily imagine the wide range of factors that might go to producing such differences: the mood of the teller when he or she first encountered the story; his or her mood while telling; the background experiences that lead, for example, to one teller seeing forest where the other saw desert landscape; the number and seating of the audience; the teller's relationship to the audience; and so on and so on. And these differences are in turn reflected in the language: sometimes fluent, sometimes hesitant and uncertain, broken by irregular pauses, but always definitely *spoken* language, the language of personal communication that is so often absent from the foreign-language classroom.

In some ways telling is easier than reading aloud: the reader may be forced to interpret speech patterns and rhythms very different from his or her own; he or she is forced to become aware of things normally taken for granted, such as breathing; and these technical problems may become a barrier between him or her and the author just as the book he or she is holding may become a physical barrier between him or her and his or her audience. In telling, on the other hand, one can shape the story to one's own needs, and while this may require the development of certain, perhaps buried, skills, the advantages are very great. In the first place, one can address one's audience directly: one can make eye contact or not as and when one chooses, use gesture and mime freely, expand or modify the form of one's telling as the occasion demands, and in general establish and maintain a community of attention between teller and listener.

Again, from the learner's point of view, it is of immense benefit to witness the process of framing ideas in the target language without, as in conversation, constantly having to engage in that process oneself: forcing students always to hear polished speech (or, worse, the bland monotony of specially constructed oral texts) does them a great disservice.

Since first starting to work with stories, we have come to realise something of the extent to which narrative underlies our conversational encounters with others, and of the deep need that people have to tell and exchange stories. We have also learned something about the ways in which storytelling can take place in the foreign-language classroom.

Finding and choosing stories

Stories are everywhere: in selecting for this book we have drawn on traditional fairy stories, folk tale collections, newspaper reports, literary short stories, films and plays, personal anecdotes, rumours, stories from our own childhood and from the childhood of our friends, students and colleagues, and on our own imagination. We have learned stories from our children and their friends, and from professionals like Propp and Rodari.

In selecting stories for the classroom, we have been guided by two main criteria: is this a story that *we* would enjoy telling and is this a story *our students* might find entertaining or thought-provoking? We have seldom been influenced by purely linguistic considerations in our choice (though this does play a part—see 4.1), and we have never allowed the language of an original text to determine suitability—indeed, many of the stories we have used have been taken from originals in languages other than English.

Making skeletons

We found early on that a brief written outline ('skeleton') provided the best way for us to store material for storytelling. The skeleton should give, in minimal form, a plot outline, background information where necessary (e.g. cultural context if the plot is heavily dependent on this), and a certain amount of character detail. There is no obligation to produce a continuous text—indeed, this could be an obstacle to improvisation—or to observe the conventions of punctuation and 'complete sentences'. The aim should be to record all those elements that are essential to the story, but only these. (The decision about what is essential is entirely, and rightly, subjective: faithfulness to an original text or to a 'writer's intention' play no part in this work.)

All the stories presented in this book are given in the form of skeletons. These are printed exactly as we would use them ourselves, and we have not attempted to provide a 'standardised form'. We think they will be at least adequate as they stand, and are sure that teachers who wish to work from their own material, and thus produce their own story skeletons, will develop their own style and technique. It must be emphasised that the skeleton merely provides the bare frame of the story for the teller to work from, and must not be referred to *during* a telling.

Telling a story

Preparing to tell

In preparing to tell a story, we have worked directly from skeletons. This has the effect both of distancing the teller from the rhythms and forms of the source (whether oral or written) and of focussing on what is essential to memorise—the plot and development. Except where formulaic expressions are essential to the story (e.g. in fairy stories such repetitions as ‘What big..... you have, grandmother’) we have consciously avoided all memorisation or recording of *forms of words*, concentrating on plot line and pace, and on ‘getting the feel’ of the story. A dress rehearsal, for example, in front of the mirror, may at times be helpful, but can easily lead to loss of involvement, and thus, in the classroom, failure to communicate; one rehearsal technique which gets round this is to replay the story in one’s head while mumbling the rhythms of the story (but not the actual words of the telling) aloud. We have also found that a brief period of total relaxation before telling is of immense help.

Styles of storytelling

There are many ways of telling a story. One can unroll one’s mat under the nearest tree and call together a crowd; one can buttonhole a stranger in a railway carriage or bar; one can murmur in the ear of a sleepy child. These and many other traditional modes of telling can have their counterparts in the foreign-language classroom. Standing, or sitting on a raised chair in front of rows of students one can capture something of the one-man theatre show, and aim to fire emotions or entertain by pure acting skill. In total contrast to this, sitting with the students, in a tight circle, can conjure memories of childhood storytelling. By seeking and exchanging eye contact, one can draw the students into the story, and give a sense of participation in the process of telling; withholding eye contact, on the other hand, can be used to increase the mood of fantasy, and to encourage introspection. Body posture, voice level, and variation in the external environment (furniture, lighting, colour) can also be made to heighten particular effects. Particular stories, and particular groups of listeners, will call for different styles of telling, and the teller should be aware of the range of possibility open to him or her. A certain amount of deliberate experimentation is very helpful to anyone trying to develop his or her own styles: see what happens, for example, if stories are told from behind the listeners, or with the whole group lying down.