Exploring Cross-Cultural Moral Lessons and Cultural Retention through Classic Children’s Literature

Juhi Sarin
AAS 370
Advisor: Dr. Agnes He
Some classic children’s texts in English & Hindi
Overview of Methods

1. Ethnographic analysis via SPEAKING model | | Preparatory stage for 2.
   a. Comparing English & Hindi texts
      i. *Aesop’s Fables* (Lion and Mouse, Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing)
      ii. *Disney’s Storybook Collection* (Snow White, Peter Pan, Cinderella)
      iii. *Panchatantra* (Lion and Mouse, Clever Jackal, Donkey in Tiger’s Skin)
      iv. *Amar Chitra Katha* (Bheema and Hanuman, Rama)

2. Sociolinguistic survey
   a. Participants familiarity with classic English & Hindi texts
   b. Participants methods of connecting with culture alongside literature
Ethnographic Analysis

- Why are these texts taught? What are their themes & core lessons?

**SPEAKING Model example (ACK Bheema and Hanuman)**

**Setting** - Forest/Hanuman’s grove

**Participants** - Bheema and Hanuman (sons of Vayu, wind god)

**Ends/Goals** - Bheema wishes to find celestial flower for his wife Draupadi at all costs; Hanuman wishes to humble Bheema by interfering with his quest

**Act Sequence** - Bad behavior → Conflict → Good outcome

**Key/Tone** - Pedantic, entertaining

**Instrumentalities** - Read independently by children, then discussed

**Norms** - Shouldn’t misuse powers/strength; Bheema is guided by his brother Hanuman

**Genre** - Mythological short story/comic

(Hc 2024)
Ethnographic Analysis - Key Takeaways

Similar with…

❖ Instrumentalities
  ➢ Read by adults to children
  ➢ Read by children independently

❖ Norms
  ➢ Kindness is rewarded
  ➢ Mind over might
  ➢ Importance of creativity and resilience
  ➢ Think before you act

Differs with…

❖ Act Sequence
  ➢ Disney: good behavior → conflict → good outcome
  ➢ ACK: bad behavior → conflict → good outcome
Sociolinguistic Survey - Participant Demographics

- 14 South Asian American students (aged 19-22) surveyed
  ➢ Linguistic Diversity of South Asia
- Asked to rate on scale of 1-5
Familiarity of English and Hindi Classic Texts

1: *Aesop's Fables* - *The Lion and the Mouse*
2: *Aesop's Fables* - *The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*
3: *Disney Short Stories* - *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*
4: *Disney Short Stories* - *Peter Pan*
5: *Disney Short Stories* - *Cinderella*
6: *Panchatantra* - *The Lion and the Mouse*
7: *Panchatantra* - *The Clever Jackal*
8: *Panchatantra* - *Donkey in Tiger’s Skin*
9: *Amar Chitra Katha* - *Bheema and Hanuman*
10: *Amar Chitra Katha* - *Rama Retold from the Ramayana*
Methods of Connecting with Culture

Other methods:

- Friends
- Fashion
  - Makeup
  - Clothes
  - Jewelry
- Sports
“The way in which I stay connected with my culture has changed over the years”

57.2% participants agreed with a scale of 3 or more.
Discussion & Conclusion

- Literature has been an important avenue for instilling sociocultural lessons in education.
- While frequency of “reading” is comparatively low as a method over other categories like “food” and “movies”, Contemporary English and Classical Hindi texts have shown to be **iconically important**
- Having a source of reinforcement can help with retention
- This demographic is branching out with different forms (food, movies, etc.) that were seen to be about as popular as family (the likely “reinforcers”)
- Can tailor children’s cultural education and help foster a sense of community amongst those who connect with these shared experiences based on findings
- Future studies can be done investigating the nuances of specific South Asian origins, religious belief systems, and household circumstances and their effect on cultural retention.
Culture is dynamic

My culture means...

“Culture as ‘an evolving connected activity, not a thing’... culture was not a text to be read, because it gave a misleading impression that culture is static, closed and given” (Zhu 194)
References


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