

A Glance at Selected Folktale Theories

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Abstract: *The objectives of this article are to identify, define and describe the selected folktale theories that are prevalent in the narrative prose analysis. They are suitable in the analysis of myths, fables, legends, fairy and tall tales. This is a form of narrative that is regarded as a fiction. Folktale provides an opportunity for artistic creativity and actualisation of plot structure, images and dramatic delivery. The variation, innovation and imagination on the part of the performers are evident. The morphological analysis based on Propp's model, identifies functions and sequences. The structural analysis of Dundes' model, emphasizes motifs and their variation all motifs. The semantic analysis of Scheub's model identifies refrains, core-images and linking techniques. The thematic analysis of Levi-Strauss concentrates on the syntagmatic opposition to reveal structure and meaning. Lastly, the Thwala's model of plot structure or phrasal demarcation highlights six phases and their content. The descriptive and explanation researches are adopted for this research work.*

Keywords: *Allomotifs, Folk narrative, Folkloric theories, Morphological analysis, Plot Structure, Structural analysis.*

I. Introduction

Theories are bringing up a broader understanding of folktales. They complement the social functions and educational value of the folktale. Tales are the mirror of society, which are *ticinisekimasiko* (validation of cultures), *bulingisimdlalo* (dramatic performance) and *likhonobulandzi* (narrative techniques). Folktale forms part in oral traditions and oral literature. Oral literature is a communal act that involves the performer and an audience. It is compulsory to start and close folktale performance with the fixed formula, which is the following: *Kwesukasukela* (once upon the time). Audiences: *Cosi! Cosi!* (Bit by bit!). The closing formula is the following: *Iyaphela-ke* (it is finished); *Siyabonga* (thank you). The sacredness of the performance was accompanied by song and dance. Folktales need an acknowledgement as one of the oral literature part perspective that is educational and culture-bound. During folktale performances, culture and communication are evident (Martin and Nakayama 2013). The tone of the voice, facial expressions and gestures all influence the dimensions of verbal and nonverbal communications.

II. Research methodology and theoretical underpinning

The research methodologies that are specifically adopted for these theories study are descriptive and explanatory analysis. Various selected theories are described from their introduction to their conclusion. Their content and applicability in the folktales are evident. Explanatory analysis helps to define, interpret and outline the fundamental terminologies of theories (Fourie 2012). The terms, that need the operational definitions are the following: prose, narrative and tradition. Shipley and others (1968:252) in their dictionary give a very short definition of prose. They define it as follows:

Ordinary speech or writing, distinguished from verse to poetry.

They further maintain that the usual patterns of prose progression are narrative, description, commentary and dialogue. To this definition, the interior monologue with its various mono-syntactic devices should be added.

Shipley and others (1968:208) further define a narrative as follows:

The general term for recital of events. It is a spoken or written account of connected events, experience and details whether true or fictitious.

Webster (1950:208) in his dictionary agrees with Shipley in the definition of this term when he says:

It is the part of a document containing the recitals, or something that is narrated as the account of a series of event.

Shipley and others (1968:252) say that tradition in its broadest sense denotes:

.....all the convections, literary devices and habits of expression handed on to a writer from the past. It is the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation.

Webster (1950:2422) in his dictionary, concurs with Shipley and says tradition is:

...the process of handing down the information, opinions, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example. It is also a transmission of knowledge and institutions through successive generation without written instruction....

For any folktale analysis, it is suggested that one or two theories need to be selected and adopted for scientific explication.

III. The Theory of Vladimir Propp

The Russian folklorist, Vladimir Propp, is among the well-known structuralists in the study of folklore. His theory concentrated on the syntagmatic organisation of the folktale called the morphology of the folktale. As can be deduced from the title, he seeks to analyse the folktale according to its component parts. He divides this into variables, the latter called functions. His analysis involves the identification of these components and the establishment of their relationships. He defines a function as an act of a character seen from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action (Propp 1958:21). He insists that functions in a body of folktales remain constant. The variables on the other hand are non-constant. What he classifies as variables are characters and their attributes. He draws a distinction between the variables and the invariables thus:

The name of the *dramatis personae* change (as well as the attributes of each). But neither, their actions nor functions change. From this we can draw inferences that a tale often attributes identical actions to various personages. Propp maintains that function is the basic structural unit. From many Russian fairy tales that Propp analysed, the conclusion he arrived at was that the number of functions known to a folktale is 31. However, this does not necessarily mean that all 31 must occur in a single folktale. According to Propp, the concept of invariables has four important consequences for the structure of folktale.

IV. The Theory of Alan Dundes

Alan Dundes is an American folklorist. Dundes admits that his theory is a combination of Propp's morphological framework plus some of the terminology and theory of Kenneth Pike (Dundes, 1965:208). Firstly, he found that Propp's theory is applicable even to Indo-European folktales. Secondly, he realises that although the theory was very useful model it had some shortcomings. Firstly, Propp ignores context in his study of the linear structure of a folktale. Secondly, although he has a term for incidents and events, which he calls functions, he has no specific term for the contents of his functions. Moreover, Pike had also suggested that, his theory which had proved useful in linguistics could be useful to other disciplines. In the face of these shortcomings in the Propp model, Dundes then evolved his theory. This theory has three main aspects. In the first place, Dundes maintains that a folktale must not be isolated; it must be studied in its social and cultural context. In the second place, he uses the last portion of phonetic and phonemic to coin the terms *etic* and *emic*. An *emic* unit is structural unit in a folktale and an *etic* unit is a unit of content. The *emic* unit or emic motif is then called a motifeme and it is equivalent to Propp's function. Dundes' motifeme consist of three modes, trimodal structuring borrowed from Pike.

The first featured mode and defines the action of the characters in a folktale. Then follows the manifestation mode which is parallel to the etic motif and covers the elements which fulfil the action. Thirdly, there is a distribution mode which is concerned with the special setting of the featured mode within the story line. The

various manifestation modes for one feature mode are known as allomotifs, to correspond with allophones and allomorphs in linguistics.

Thus Dundes has taken a term motif in the sense that Thompson uses it in his motif-index and has made it more meaningful (Dundes, 1965:54-53). In third aspect, Dundes theory is that he observed that motifemes have a tendency to group themselves into clusters. He called each cluster a motifeme sequence. Propp has also noticed the tendency but limited it to pairs such as lack- lack liquidated; struggle- victory; escape- pursuit.

V. The Theory of Axel Olrik

Axel Olrik (3 July 1864-17 February 1917) was a Danish folklorist and scholar of mediaeval historiography and a pioneer in methodical study of oral narrative.

According to Olrik's laws (Olrik 1908 in Dundes 1965:129), a tale has a beginning (law of opening), a middle or body, which presents the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist, and the ending or resolution (law of closing) in which conflict is resolved and harmony is re-established. There are three stages of Olrik's structure that can be expressed in greater detail stage-by-stage description of the phases of conflict. Olrik's beginning: (Initial situation)

1stPhase of Conflict. Dynamic stability: there is harmony between the protagonist and antagonist and their followers. There is, however, some hint of possible conflict. The situation may change and explode at any moment.

2nd Phase of Disturbing event. Disturbing event: something happens to disturb the initial harmony. This event courses the opposition of the leading characters to be revealed. The initial situation does not only presents the main character of the story as opposed to each other, but it also gives some indications of the time and place that is setting, of social situation and of the possibility of conflict.

Olrik's body; the major section of the story in which the conflict situation develops up to its climax.

3rdPhase of Rising action. This intensifies conflict, to make it sound like a serious one. Friction and tension develop and strengthen. The conflict widens. This stage is often characterised by people taking sides, by preparation of battle plans, and also by speeches in which the opposing parties expose their motives, their points of view and encourage also the spectators to take sides.

4th Phase of Crisis. A decisive event takes place. The audience gains some insight about the probable winner.

5th Phase of Climax. Fortunes is favouring one of the parties. Either the protagonist or the antagonist becomes the winner or the villain when the two main characters meet. A skill is matched against a skill.

Olrik's end: after climax the action subsides and the situation slowly returns to normality.

6th Phase of the Denouement or Falling action. Events fall into place. Conflict begins to diminish. Anti-climax. **7th Phase of Conclusion.** Conflict is resolved. Initial harmony is re-established. There appears a permanent change in the relationship of the two parties.

VI. The Theory of Claude Levi-Strauss

Claude Levi-Strauss 28 November 1908-3October 2009 was a French anthropologist and ethnologist, born in Belgium to French-Jewish parents. He was a key in the development of the theory of structuralism and structural anthropology.

Like Propp and Dundes, Levi-Strauss is a structuralist. The former concentrates in the syntagmatic structure of the tale. Levi-Strauss focuses on the paradigmatic structure. This approach is strongly influenced by the linguistics, hence his use of the sequential and latent structures and also his use of binary oppositions. The views of Hegel in his thesis, antithesis and synthesis are used. Dorson (1972:36) summarises Levi-Strauss approach in the following terms:

The system of Levi-Strauss relies on a sorting out and arrangement of the narrative features in the myth to reveal the inherent structure, while that of Propp follows the story line. These are two basic kinds of the

structural analysis for which Dundes proposes the terms paradigmatic and syntagmatic, since Levi-Strauss aims at a paradigm or conceptual framework behind the myth while Propp considers the syntax, so to speak, of the tale .

Before this system of paradigms is considered, two points must first be cleared: firstly, that Levi-Strauss uses the term, myth, as a blanket term for all prose-narratives. Secondly, Levi-Strauss makes clear distinction between the two types of structures, namely, the sequence and the schemata. The sequences form the chronological ordering or syntax of the tale (i.e. its surface structure) whereas the schemata form its latent (or deep structure) which is much more abstract. Levi-Strauss feels that the schemata are of primary importance and the sequence play only the second role.

This implies that the thought processes of people throughout the world are organised in a similar manner. According to Levi-Strauss approach is an attempt to demonstrate the psychic unity of a man kind. However, it must be noted that while the binary oppositions are the same, the input into each paradigm will differ from society to society since this is determined by the cultural context in each case.

VII. The Theory of Harold Scheub

Harold Scheub (26 August 1931 to 16 October 2019) was an American Africanist at University of Wisconsin Madison. He recorded and compiled oral literature across southern African.

The Scheubean approach on folktale is much broader. It analyses not only the structure, but also the theme, setting, characterisation, and style (mainly the use of repetition and ideophones). It also focuses on the oral nature of the folktales. His analysis of character portrayal and theme is commendable. He distinguishes between the stock characters who are mostly allegoric and complex. He outlines the parallel between the fantasy world of ogres and the cannibals and the real world which forms the setting for the folktales.

His starting point is that the core-image is the basic structural element. He does not show how these core-images are brought together into a sequence of pattern to form a story line. It would appear that the core-images are manifestation of structure rather than the element of structure. The core-image main role is to flesh out the structure. To use Dundes' term, a core image is more like an *etic* unit. It can be abstracted from the structure and analysed independently. Scheub admits that there is a repertoire of core-images which gives the artist a variety of choices in the construction of a folktale (Scheub, 1975:96).

Scheub insists that this core images, whose core-cliche is a song, a chant or a saying, is a structural unit because during performance it is expanded to create a tension of conflict and resolution. Further, the repetition of the core-cliches helps to inch the plot forward and to heighten suspense and tension. The broadness of the Scheub's theory covers the plot structure from exposition, rising action, climax and denouement to an end as well as the repetition techniques that are evident in a literary and linguistic discourse.

VIII. The Theory of Jozi Joseph Thwala

Thwala is a Siswati folklorist, who was born on the 22 April 1959 and grew up in two South Africa's Provinces, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal. His tertiary studies were pursued at University of Zululand and University of South Africa. He is currently a Senior Lecturer at University of Mpumalanga in South Africa. The folklorist argues that African people were previously known as people without literature and culture. However, through the intellectuals of Africa, this has proved to be the incorrect assertion. African people did have culture, but there were no written records of literature. They narrated events and stories out of memory. The absence of written records compelled the African people to be excellent in their memory. African narrative prose was studied by most African authors and some started their studies of the subject by expressing their views on this aspect of the cultural life of the people of Africa.

Thwala expresses that most folktales have five *tigaba* (phases). Each folktale has its own plot-structure theory. Phase theory element which is significant and logic in the whole folktale. The phases are divided as follows:

Initial situation phase (*sigabanchanti*)

The characters are introduced, background is sketched, relationships between the characters are introduced and elements which contributes to the central conflict are suggested. This phase depicts the following:

- The direct representation of characters.
- Scenic, graphic or panoramic representation.
- The historical, figurative, *spatial* or temporal setting.
- The unstable condition from which the complication will develop.

Ascending phase (*sigabalwenyuko*)

In this phase, the development occurs due to rising action. This series of course and effect moves from lower plains to greater heights as things hot up. The same early series, a conflict might be presented. This conflict builds in intensity as the progress, even the reader will feel the tension as it builds together with the escalation of the conflict. This phase depicts the following:

- The series of events are in chronological order.
- Vivid and staring imagination are accompanied by cause and effect.

Turning point phase (*sigabalugucuko*)

It is the climax of the folktale. The events and actions build up to an explosive scene in which a crucial event occurs. It is the highest point of tension that marks the culmination of the course of action. The crisis is evident from the beginning of the conflict. It reaches a breaking point and an outburst at this point.

Descending phase (*sigabamewukela*)

It is a denouement of the folktale. This indicates the untying or unravelling of the plot. It's the resolution of problems and difficulties, and indicates the restoration of order. The following action is evident in this phase.

Terminative phase (*sigabasiphetfo*)

The chain of events stop. The end shows coherence and consistency. The phase is characterised by comprehensibility, acceptability and stability.

IX. Conclusion

It is, however, noted that theories are fundamental requirements to any literary survey. They are apparently a back-up plan to make a study definable, interpreted and explicated. It is a task of any researcher to choose a relevant theory for a comprehensive and credible study. Each theory covers its own linguistics or literary sections as it is noted in semantics and morphological theories. There are other theories on macro linguistics aspects such as neurolinguistics and psycholinguistic that need to be explored.

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