

**Intercultural differences in the structure of Cinderella:
A Proppian and storygraph analysis of Russian, Scottish
and Hungarian fairy tales**

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Abstract

Some fairy tales are known worldwide, but in a variety of forms. This study attempts to seek intercultural differences in the structure and in the narrative of fairy tales, through the analysis of the Cinderella fairy tale versions from Scotland, Russia and Hungary. The structural analysis applies the Proppian method (1995). This morphological analysis proves the theory of Propp regarding the structural unity of the folktales, despite their differences in content and idiom. At the same time, some definitions of the functions as basic elements of the structural schema appear to be arguable. The rhetorical analysis of the tales is performed by the storygraph method of Söter (1988) to discover cultural influence on the narratives. Although, some differences were detected, in general all investigated fairy tales of this study resemble the Western rhetorical style. Overall, the results suggest that the influence of the cultural context are more traceable in the rhetorical patterns of the narratives than in their morphological structure.

Keywords

Propp, morphology, Söter, storygraph-analysis, narrative, rhetorical style

Introduction

Fairy tales convey much more value than just being a bedtime story for children. They were important tools of communication in the societies of preceding generations during many centuries, and conveyed information about the cultural context and an impression of history and sociology at their time of origin. Therefore, widely known fairy tales are ideal subjects to investigate how cultural differences influence their structure.

In order to investigate the cross-cultural impact in fairy tales, Cinderella varieties had been selected from Scotland, Russia and Hungary. Cinderella is one of the oldest and most widespread fairy tales worldwide since it was first recorded in around 7 BC in Greece. In Europe it appeared again in the 17th century. Nowadays this story has several hundreds of variations existing in various cultures around the world (Heiner 1999).

For the purpose of the structural analysis and comparison of the fairy tales, the theory of Propp (1995), and for the rhetorical analysis, the method of Söter (1988) were applied to detect cross-cultural impact on the set-up of these fairy tales from different nations. In order to

extend the investigation and comparison to Hungarian circumstances in the third part of the study, an analysis of Hungarian students' writing of their Cinderella fairy tale is included.

Structural analysis of fairy tales (Propp)

Vladimir Propp, the Russian folklorist and linguist provided a fundamental method for the structural analysis of folktales and published his theory in 1928 about their morphological structure. Propp analysed the plots in the Russian folktale collection of Afanasev (1845), dissected the text of each fairy tale into a sequence of actions, thus he simplified the stories into a pure action list and discovered constant recurring elements (Meletinsky 1969).

Propp made fundamental observations regarding attributes of folkloristic fairy tales (Propp 1995):

- I. Functions of characters are steady, fixed elements of fairy tales, independent of who the actor is and how the act is executed.
Although the name and appearance of the characters vary, the action and function they fulfil remain unchanged.
- II. Number of possible functions are definite.
Propp recorded altogether 31 functions (actions) which could possibly occur in a fairy tale, and described their possible ways of appearance in several sub-categories.
- III. Sequence of functions is always consistent.
Propp has defined rules of the sequence how the functions may – or may not – occur. All 31 functions almost never occur in the same fairy tale. However, the ones included in a story strictly follow the same typical order and rules in each folktale as he listed.
- IV. Structurally all fairy tales are homotypical, thus belong to the same type.
(Propp 1995)

In order to reveal whether cultural differences exist in the structure of folktales from different nations, or to confirm that according to the thesis of Propp all fairy tales are homotypical, I selected two Cinderella variations for the structural analyses. Both were collected and recorded in the 19th century. One of them, *Rushen Coatie*, is a Scottish fairy tale collected by Joseph Jacobs and first published in *English Fairy Tales* (1890). The other, *The Golden Slipper*, was recorded in Russia by Alexander Nikolaevich Afanasev who first included this tale in his collection of *Russian Fairy Tales* (1845).

Firstly, both fairy tales were dismantled to acts of the story to support the identification of each function. All functions were then analysed and classified into relevant subcategories on the basis of Propp's method (1995), the analysis of which resulted in the schema of the fairy tales as shown in Table 1. Arabic numbers identify each function. The lines marked by I. list the functions of the first course in the tales, whereas the line marked by II. shows the actions in the second course, and the lines marked by R present the repetition of actions. The numbers marked in blue represent common functions in both tales.

Schema of <i>Rushen Coatie</i> and <i>The Golden Slipper</i> Fairy Tales	
1) <i>Rushen Coatie</i>	
I.	i, 1, 2, 8, 14,
II.	4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 28, 29, 27, 31
R.	8, 14, 15, 19, 20, 8, 14, 15, 19, 21, 20
2) <i>The Golden Slipper</i>	
I.	i, 1, 2, 3, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 17, 20, 21, 27, 31
R.	8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20

Table 1: Schema of *Rushen Coatie* and *The Golden Slipper*

The schematic description of the tales in highlights is as follows:

Function 'i' is always the initial situation, introduces the setting. E.g.: There was a king and a queen, they had one daughter (as in *Rushen Coatie*). Or, there was an old man and his old wife, they had two daughters (as in *The Golden Slipper*).

Function No. '1' means someone leaves the household. For example, in the Scottish tale the queen dies (Function No. 1) and warns her daughter (2) to expect a red calf which, if any trouble happens will help her. And indeed, the new stepmother and her own three daughters make her starve (8), but the red calf comes to feed the poor girl (14) and supports her also in later difficulties when the stepmother discriminates and abuses her.

In the Russian story the old man goes to town (Function No. 1) and brings fish for his two daughters. The fish beg to be rescued (2) and the younger girl releases her fish (3), which later returns and helps when her biological mother neglects her and does not allow her younger daughter to go to church (8). With the help of her magical animal supporter she's nicely dressed and becomes the most beautiful lady in church with whom the prince falls in love. But the girl rushes home. The movement is repeated (Functions 8-20), at the second time she loses her slipper, the prince pursues her, finally finds and marries her.

Almost all functions of the Russian tale are equally seen in the Scottish one. However, *Rushen Coatie* is a more complicated story and contains additional difficulties:

- Functions 4-5-6: the enemy (the mean stepmother) seeks information why the girl did not die of hunger and succeeds in staying alive, thus, the stepmother makes the king kill the supporter red calf.
- Functions 24-28-29: appearance and exposure of the false hero, personalized by the youngest stepsister. Then *Rushen Coatie* receives a new appearance before she meets the prince again, when she is recognized to be the beloved girl.
- The Scottish tale of *Rushen Coatie* contains a threefold repetition of the same movements, while *The Golden Slipper* repeats the same actions only twice.

In spite of the differences, the sequence of the appearing functions is steady in both tales, and follows the order as defined by Propp. Thus, Propp's theory was confirmed: structurally the fairy tales are the same, and their functions basically follow the same order, despite the difference of their origin in various cultures.

However, other observations during the analysis conflicts with some statements from the methodology of Propp.

The specification of some functions is arguable or incomplete. Such an example is Pursuit. Propp precisely specified it as a threatening operation between the hero and the enemy and even described possible forms of its appearance in 7 sub-categories, which all describe hostile and malevolent situations in detail. But in the Cinderella tales the prince pursues the

girl with the best intention to marry her, thus the motivation of the prince is considered positive. However, as Propp's definition does not contain such positive criteria for 'pursuit', his definition is likely to be arguable or incomplete.

Consequently, Propp's categorization of characters based on their participation in certain functions is also arguable. Propp stated that the typical character types of a fairy tale can be defined based on their occurrence in certain functions. Accordingly, the prince falls into the category of the 'enemy'. Disregarding the motivation of the character this interpretation is misleading and contradicts the context of the fairy tale.

Propp also claims that certain functions always, necessarily occur in pairs. Such an instance is the function Pursuit, which is to be followed by Rescue, or Struggle always to occur in pair with Victory. But in the tales under investigation this rule was not perceived, thus this part of the theory could not be confirmed.

Storygraph analysis (Söter 1988)

Several linguists have already studied and confirmed the cultural impact on the individual through the verbal as well as written expression. Culture influences the manner people organize spoken or written discourse (Purves 1988). With the assumption that cross-cultural impact is traceable within the narrative of the fairy tales, the selected Cinderella varieties were investigated based on the storygraph conception of Söter (1988).

The first major study was Kaplan's (1966) to analyse how native thinking and discourse structures are revealed in the writing of second language speakers. He stated that writers are all influenced by their environment and community, thus the knowledge of the world, the cognitive styles, the discourse styles, the content of writing and thinking, the language system – these all sum up the cultural context, which influences all individuals. Söter (1988) adopted the view that written discourse is a culturally defined form of expression and initiated a study to investigate cultural transfer in narration and confirm the theory.

For the study Söter (1988) selected three cultural groups in Australia: students with Arabic, Vietnamese and native Australian background and in two age categories of 11 and 16 years. The task of the students was to write a narrative of a fairy tale in English, and their writings were then analysed by the so-called storygraph method. This means segmentation of all information in the stories into propositional units. The propositional units were established with the verb in the centre, and adjectives were only included if they expressed stative information (for instance as in "she was beautiful"). All propositional units were numbered and categorized according to what information they convey.

The storygraph consists of four categories:

A) Story about story

This category contains information about storytelling, such as descriptions of the storyteller, reasons for telling the story, their circumstances, and occasional interactions with the audience.

B) Setting

The setting includes references made to place and time.

C) Scene

The scene captures the communicative aspects of the interaction among participants, their attributes, attitudes, emotional and psychological states.

D) Plot

The plot refers to the sequence of actions and events of the story.

A proportion of units in any of the four sections A to D above indicated where writers concentrated their information. The purpose of the storygraph is to plot the structural features and thereby to indicate the structural patterns that characterize the writing of different groups (Söter 1988). Findings of her study are summarized in Table 2:

Means (%) of Propositional Units in Storygraph Categories for Each Group of Students Related to Average Range of Quality Rating Scores on Selected Items				
Group	Storygraph Categories			
	A	B	C	D
Vietnamese (T)	33.84	5.98	20.55	45.78
Grade 6	26.34	6.58	17.60	54.88
Grade 11	42.42	5.60	23.92	35.36
Arabic (T)	15.45	5.31	17.61	68.62
Grade 6	20.65	4.90	5.97	72.75
Grade 11	10.90	5.66	27.90	65.04
NS English (T)	3.27	7.32	16.20	81.82
Grade 6	4.26	7.12	16.63	81.26
Grade 11	2.14	7.53	16.88	82.45

NOTE: Storygraph categories A, B, C, D represent "story about story"; setting; scene (description, attributes, states of mind); and, plot line.

Table 2: Storygraph analysis results of Söter (1988: p.198)

Major highlights of Söter's findings were that (1988):

- the Vietnamese students were more concerned with presenting a context for their stories (category A: Story about story), and the least focussed on the development of the plot of the story (cat. D);
- Arabic students used more detailed description of the characters (cat. C);
- the native English speaker group was very consistent in storytelling, focussed on the development of the plot, which begun almost immediately (cat. D).

According to the storygraph method of Söter (1988), the text of the Cinderella fairy tales was dissected into propositional units and based on their meaning categorized into one of the four sections. Results of the storygraph analysis are summarized in Table 3.

Means (%) of Propositional Units in Storygraph Categories of the Scottish and Russian variations of Cinderella tale				
Tale	Storygraph Categories			
	A	B	C	D
Rushen Coatie	2	7	22	69
The Golden Slipper	11	8	16	65

Table 3. Results of Storygraph Analysis of *Rushen Coatie* and *The Golden Slipper*

Although there are differences between the storygraph of the studied fairy tales, the deviation is not outstanding. The narrators of both fairy tales had similarly concentrated the information on the Setting (B) and on the Plot (D) sections.

The most remarkable deviation is that the Scottish tale is more descriptive (cat. C). This category contains all descriptive references to physical and emotional attributes and attitudes

of characters. The narrative of the Russian tale is less copious than the Scottish story, and supposedly this difference is reflected also in the storygraph analysis.

The Russian version notably includes the narrator in person during storytelling (cat. A). *The Golden Slipper* contains 11% of its propositional units to express information about the storyteller. For instance, the narrator shared information also about his own experiences at the wedding of the married couple. There are less similar references in *Rushen Coatie*, where only 2% of the propositional units belonged to this category, and with occasional remarks during storytelling such as “But ye all know” or “You may be sure”.

These differences assumedly feature the cultural impact on the narration style of different nations, but further analysis of fairy tales in larger volume is necessary to confirm the assumption.

Cinderella varieties written by Hungarian students

In the hunt for cross-cultural impact on narratives, I also collected and analysed Cinderella stories written by Hungarian students, and I compared the results to the previously investigated Scottish and Russian varieties.

In this experiment 12 students of Grade 3 in a Hungarian high school in Siófok were requested to write the Cinderella fairy tale as they have heard the story. Their average age was 17 years old. Use of English was required in order to enable a comparison to the results of Söter (1988).

During the 20th century two varieties of the Cinderella tale were the most widespread in Hungary: the version from the Grimm Brothers (translated by Elek Benedek, 1904) and another from the collection of János Erdélyi (1853) with Slavic origins (*Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon* 2018). Therefore, my expectation was to find traces of either of these tales in the narratives. But, rather unexpectedly, all of the Hungarian students provided the Walt Disney film-variety of Cinderella in writing, (this version of the tale is derived from the 17th century, written by Charles Perrault), and none of the students employed either the Grimm, or the Erdélyi variety of the tale.

For the structural analyses of the tales the method of Propp (1995) was applied. The Cinderella variety of the students is a simplified version of the story in comparison to the Scottish or the Russian version of the tale which misses many functions that appear in both the Scottish and the Russian tales. The identical functions in all three tales are highlighted in blue in Table 4, showing the Proppian schema of the tales.

Schema of <i>Rushen Coatie</i> and <i>The Golden Slipper</i> and the Hungarian Students' Cinderella Fairy Tales	
1) <i>Rushen Coatie</i>	
I.	i, 1, 2, 8, 14,
II.	4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 28, 29, 27, 31
R.	8, 14, 15, 19, 20, 8, 14, 15, 19, 21, 20
2) <i>The Golden Slipper</i>	
I.	i, 1, 2, 3, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 17, 20, 21, 27, 31
R.	8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20
3) <i>Hungarian students' varieties</i>	
I.	i, 1, 8,
II.	6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 17, 21, 27, 31

Table 4: Comparison of the structure of the Scottish, Russian and Hungarian Cinderella-varieties

The following functions and movements are not included in the Hungarian students' tales:

- In the preparatory phase there is no warning to the heroine (2), neither reaction to it (3).
- The technique of repetition of certain movements is completely missing, which is employed three times in *Rushen Coatie*, and two times in *The Golden Slipper*.
- The story of the students covers a less detailed structure by omitted references to several actions (functions 14-15-19-20), which are included in both other tales. These actions are the detailed description of how the girls achieved getting to church (or to the ball in the students' version).
- The appearance of the false hero (Functions 24-28-29) claiming the right to marry the prince is missing from the Hungarian story, similarly to the Russian tale.

In summary, the Hungarian teenagers' Cinderella variety has a very consequent line of acts and all functions appear in the sequence according to the theory of Propp (1995), but compared to the other versions of the tale, the plot is very much simplified and misses many of the recurrent elements observed in the other varieties of the story.

The writings of the Hungarian students were also examined using the method of storygraph (Söter 1988). The results are shown and compared to the Scottish *Rushen Coatie* and the Russian *The Golden Slipper* in Table 5:

Means (%) of Propositional Units in Storygraph Categories of All Studied Cinderella varieties				
Tale/Group	Storygraph Categories			
	A	B	C	D
Rushen Coatie	2	7	22	69
The Golden Slipper	11	8	16	65
Student 1	0	7	16	77
Student 2	0	8	24	68

Categories: A (Story about story), B (Setting), C (Scene), and D (Plot)

Table 5: Storygraph analysis of the Scottish, Russian and Hungarian students' Cinderella varieties

Concerning the comparison with the storygraph analysis of the other varieties of Cinderella, the Hungarian students' tales correspond more to the Scottish version, with even more emphasis on the actions of the plot (Cat. D). The peculiarity of the Russian tale: the strong focus on category A (Story about story) is not at all found in the Hungarian students' writings.

The storygraph analysis of the students' writings show strong resemblance to the results of native English speakers as described in the study of Söter (1988). Thus, the characteristics of Hungarian students' narration likely resembles the rhetorical patterns of Western cultures, but certainly, a larger number of samples, including many age groups would be required to confirm this theory.

Conclusion

Morphological analyses showed structural unity of the folktales, which confirm the perception of Propp (1995) that the sequence of the functions follow a defined order in all investigated fairy tales, independently of the content, context and origin of the tales.

The storygraph analysis (Söter 1988) identified some differences: the Scottish tale proved to be more descriptive, the Russian version put more emphasis on describing the storytelling circumstances, while Hungarian students' writings were the most focused on the plot, but in general all investigated tales' narratives show the Western rhetorical patterns.

The results suggest that the influence of the cultural context is more traceable on the rhetorical patterns of the narratives than on their morphological structure.

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