

TRADITIONS OF FOLLOWING FAIRY TALES FOR CHILDREN IN LITHUANIAN CULTURE

Rita Virbalienė

Social Wellbeing Department, Faculty of Pedagogy, "Vilniaus kolegija" Higher Education Institution, Lithuania

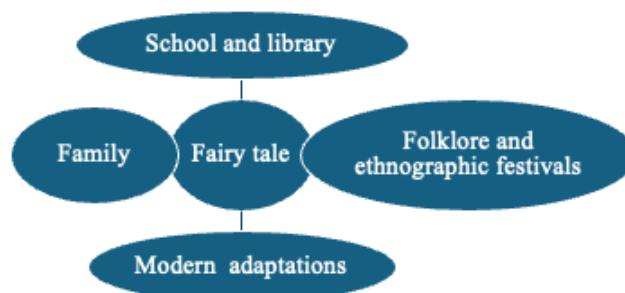
Abstract

The children's story-telling discussed in this article is an important and deep tradition in Lithuanian culture, with roots in ancient times. Fairy tales not only enrich children's imagination but also transmit values, moral lessons and the cultural heritage of the nation. Many Lithuanian families have a tradition of following fairy tales at bedtime, which is not only a soothing ritual but also a way to strengthen family ties. A study of primary school teachers found that the most common bedtime stories were read by mum and grandma, and sometimes by dad and grandpa. Regular exposure to fairy tales has a positive impact on the development of children's language skills in several key ways. Firstly, fairy tales expand children's vocabulary by introducing them to new concepts and contexts that may not be present in everyday language. Secondly, listening to fairy tales promotes children's mastery of grammatical structures, as the texts are often rich and varied in sentence structure. Thirdly, fairy tales improve children's understanding of narrative structure by teaching them to follow the plot, identify the main characters and understand the causal links between events.

Keywords: *fairy tale, fairy tale following, tradition, family, cultural heritage, child*

INTRODUCTION

Children's story-telling is an important and deep tradition in Lithuanian culture, with roots in ancient times. Fairy tales not only enrich children's imagination, but also transmit values, moral lessons and the nation's cultural heritage. Fairy tale following has a very long tradition in Lithuania, with families, schools, libraries, folklore and ethnographic festivals following and reading them. In modern Lithuania, fairy tales are also adapted into books, animated films and theatre. Some fairy tales are adapted into interactive forms such as mobile apps and computer games, which help children to engage with the world of stories through modern technology. Regular exposure to fairy tales has a positive impact on the development of children's language skills in several key ways. Firstly, fairy tales expand children's vocabulary by introducing them to new concepts and contexts that may not be present in everyday language. Secondly, listening to fairy tales promotes children's mastery of grammatical structures, as the texts are often rich and varied in sentence structure. Thirdly, fairy tales improve children's understanding of narrative structure by teaching them to follow the plot, identify the main characters and understand the causal links between events. Fairy tales have always had an important place in Lithuanian families, not only enriching children's leisure time but also playing an important role in their moral and intellectual development. The fairy tales read in families reflect both the national heritage and the world's literary tradition, and the choice of fairy tales is often closely linked to the family's values and cultural identity.



The tradition of following fairy tales runs very deep in families, and is divided into **evening tales** and **old wives' tales**. Most Lithuanian families have a tradition of following bedtime stories, which is not only a ritual to soothe the children, but also a way to strengthen family ties. In Lithuania, fairy tales were often followed by older family members, especially grandmothers. They would pass on stories from their childhood, which were handed down from generation to generation. The Lithuanian folklore tradition is characterised by a rich treasure trove of fairy tales and folktales, which have been passed down from generation to generation over the centuries. Children's evening tales have been an integral part of this treasure trove, and following them has had not only an entertaining but also an educational function. Listening to fairy tales instilled values in children, taught them norms of behaviour and helped them to understand the concept of good and evil. Fairy tales were also used as a means of transmitting historical knowledge and legends, which shaped children's national consciousness. Evening tales play an important role in children's emotional and psychological development. By listening to fairy tales, children learn empathy, empathise with the experiences of the characters and experience different emotional challenges in a safe environment. In addition, following fairy tales stimulates children's creativity, imagination and problem-solving skills. Studies show that children who are regularly exposed to fairy tales have better language skills, are more sensitive to the emotions of others and are more likely to be interested in literature. In Lithuania, fairy tales have long played an important role in the transmission of cultural heritage and values from generation to generation. Often, the older members of the family have been the main followers of fairy tales, passing on the stories orally to the younger generations. This tradition not only contributed to strengthening family ties, but also helped to preserve and pass on the treasure trove of folklore. The tales told by elders often contained important moral lessons, social norms and life wisdom, thus shaping the worldview and values of children. In this way, following fairy tales in Lithuania went beyond mere entertainment and played a significant educational and social role. Fairy tales have always occupied an important place in Lithuanian families, not only enriching children's leisure time, but also playing an important role in their moral and intellectual development. The fairy tales read in families reflect both the national heritage and the world's literary tradition, and the choice of fairy tales is often closely linked to the family's values and cultural identity. This article examines which fairy tales are most popular in Lithuanian families and what factors determine their popularity. The choice of fairy tales in Lithuanian families is influenced by several key factors. Firstly, cultural heritage plays an important role. Lithuanian fairy tales, such as 'Egle the Serpent Queen' or 'Nykštukas', retain an important place in families' everyday life because they convey national values, legends and myths that children identify with from an early age. Secondly, classic fairy tales from world literature are often chosen, such as H. Ch. Andersen or the Brothers Grimm, which are characterised by universal themes and deep moral lessons. Lithuanian fairy tales are not only a means of entertainment for families, but also an expression of cultural identity. Many families read fairy tales that reflect the national traditions, nature and social relations that are characteristic of Lithuanian folklore. Such tales not only provide children with knowledge about the history of their nation, but also shape their worldview and value system. The popularity of these tales in families remains high, as they convey the wisdom of generations and maintain a living link with the past. In addition to local fairy tales, fairy tales from world literature, which convey universal human values, are widely read in Lithuanian families. H. Ch. Andersen's "The Snow Queen" or the Brothers Grimm's "Little Red Riding Hood" are among the most frequently chosen fairy tales, as they not only fascinate with the richness of their plots, but also encourage children to think about moral choices, friendship, loyalty and other important aspects of life. The popularity of these tales reflects their ability to remain relevant in different cultural contexts, including Lithuania. While traditional fairy tales remain popular, a growing number of Lithuanian families are turning to modern fairy tales that address topical social issues such as ecology, gender equality or the impact of technology on life. Fairy tales such as Astrid Lindgren's "Pippi Longstocking" or J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" also feature prominently on families' reading lists. As well as providing entertainment, they encourage children to reflect on the problems of today's world, broaden their horizons and develop critical thinking.

The traditions of fairy tale tracing in Lithuania can be grouped and categorised in the following sequence:

Tradition	Who and where?	How is it going?
Fairy Tale Tracking in Families	Evening tales:	Many Lithuanian families have a tradition of watching bedtime stories. It is not only a calming ritual, but also a way to strengthen family ties.
	Old wives' tales:	In Lithuania, fairy tales were often followed by older family members, especially grandmothers. They passed on their childhood stories, which were handed down from generation to generation.
Schools and Libraries	Literature lessons:	In schools, fairy tales are an important part of the literature curriculum. Teachers use fairy tales to teach children about moral values, folklore and the beauty of language.
	Library events:	Lithuanian libraries often organise story tracking events for children. These can be readings, performances or interactive activities involving children.
Folklore and Ethnographic Festivals	Lithuanian folklore:	Lithuanian fairy tales are often associated with folklore heroes such as Jurate and Kastytis, Eglė the Serpent Queen and other mythical creatures. These stories are important to the identity and cultural heritage of the nation.
	Ethnographic events:	The tales are followed live at various national events and festivals. This is not only a form of entertainment, but also a way to preserve and promote traditions.
Modern Adaptations	Books and videos:	In modern Lithuania, fairy tales are also adapted into books, animated films and theatre. This helps children to learn about traditional fairy tales in a modern context.
	Interactive technologies:	Some of the stories are adapted into interactive forms, such as mobile apps and computer games, which help children engage with the world of stories through modern technology.
Effects on Children	Moral education:	Fairy tales often have moral lessons that help children understand the difference between right and wrong, the value of friendship, and other important life principles.
	Cultural identity:	Listening to fairy tales, children learn about the history, myths and values of their own people, which shape their cultural identity.

The tradition of following fairy tales in Lithuania is vibrant and diverse, connecting the past with the present and helping children grow up with a strong cultural heritage and values.

Evening story time for children in Lithuanian families: traditions and contemporary practices. Evening story time is one of the oldest and most deeply rooted traditions in Lithuanian families. This practice not only transmits cultural and moral values, but also shapes children's imagination and emotional intelligence. This article focuses on the tradition of evening story-telling in Lithuanian families, its evolution and its significance in a contemporary context.

Contemporary practices of following evening stories. Although technological developments are changing the forms of children's entertainment, evening stories remain popular in contemporary Lithuanian families. However, it is noticeable that the traditional form of story tracking is often

changing, with people choosing to listen to recorded stories or watch cartoons instead of live tracking. However, the practice of live storytelling, where parents or grandparents follow children's stories, remains important because of its proximity, the strengthening of the emotional bond and the opportunity to communicate directly with the child. The importance of reading books to children is unquestionable, whether they are reading themselves or listening to stories read by parents, teachers or babysitters. Unfortunately, the genre of fairy tales seems to be losing its popularity lately. This is sad, because reading fairy tales is beneficial for both children and adults.

The effect of regular story tracking on children's language skills development. The development of language skills in early childhood is a key factor with a lasting impact on children's cognitive development and social integration. Studies show that children who are regularly exposed to stories have significantly better language skills. This paper explores the mechanisms behind this effect and presents empirical evidence supporting the importance of story tracking for the development of language skills.

Theoretical foundations of language skill development. The development of language skills in early childhood is based on several theories. Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism stresses the importance of social interaction in the acquisition of language skills, while Chomsky's theory of universal grammar argues that language is an innate ability that is activated through environmental interaction. Regular exposure to fairy tales creates an environment in which these theories can be put into practice - fairy tales encourage active listening, dialogue and semantic enrichment, which are essential for language development (Ten Hacken, 2007).

Marginson, Dang (2017) argue that Vygotsky's social constructivism theory emphasises the central role of social interaction in the acquisition of language skills. According to this theory, children learn language through interaction with more experienced individuals, such as parents, teachers or peers. According to Vygotsky, language development is not an isolated process; it takes place in a social context where language is used as a tool for communication and thinking. A key element of this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which defines the difference between what a child can do on his or her own and what he or she can achieve with help. The social interactions in this zone, especially linguistic interactions, foster the child's cognitive development by helping the child to acquire new linguistic structures and expand his/her vocabulary. Vygotsky stresses that social dialogue, through story-telling, question-and-answer, discussion or other interactions, is essential for the development of the child's language and reasoning. Thus, Vygotsky's theory highlights the importance of language as a social phenomenon, pointing out that it is only through active interaction with others that a child can fully develop his or her linguistic abilities (Jaramillo, 1996).

Chomsky's theory of universal grammar states that language is an innate human ability, not merely learned through environmental interaction. According to Noam Chomsky, all human beings are born with an internal grammatical structure, the so-called universal grammar, which is common to all the world's languages. This structure makes it possible for children to learn a language quickly and efficiently, despite the limited linguistic stimulus they receive from the environment. Chomsky's theory argues that children are able to formulate complex grammatical rules and create new sentences that they have not heard before because they have an innate language mechanism. This explains why all languages share some common grammatical principles, even though their surface structures may differ greatly. Thus, according to Chomsky, language is not only learned through experience and training, but is also a natural human characteristic that has developed through evolution, allowing the rapid acquisition of any language at an early stage of childhood (Ten Hacken, 2007).

Prėskienienė (1999) observed in her research that during the first activity, the teacher, as recommended by the teacher, read the story to the children, trying to use different intonations, to convey the text in an emotional and expressive way, so as to make the children empathise. However, the study found that it is more difficult for children to concentrate when the story is read without visual aids. Kerbelytė (2011) points out that children are used to watching fairy tale adaptations and therefore find it harder to concentrate when fairy tales are read without visual elements. It was also observed that some children listened attentively to the story and, when they heard unfamiliar words, asked for explanations. It is significant that many children actively participated in the discussion of the story and expressed their thoughts. Realising that reading the story without visual aids was not very impressive, the teacher

decided to follow the story with visual aids, using Brėdikytė's (2000) method of dialogue with puppets, in order to interest the children. Knowing that children learn through experience, the educator encouraged them to actively participate in the story and to help follow it. It is important to mention that, based on Vygotsky's theory of personality development, the teacher encouraged children's curiosity, created a rich environment and developed their skills, focusing on the child's immediate developmental zone. It was observed that these activities were more engaging for the children and that the tools used stimulated their curiosity and interest, so that many of them actively participated in the activities. Although only some of the children were able to follow the story, many of them moved expressively and responded with facial expressions and gestures. Lithuanian authors often explore animal imagery in folklore. Lithuanian authors have written many tales about various beasts, birds, insects and reptiles, and have also depicted various fears, death, mythical creatures, etc. Authors such as Vėlius (1990), Džekčiorūtė-Medeišienė (2022), Racėnaitė (2006) and others can be mentioned. These scholars usually aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of animal imagery in oral tradition, discussing various folklore genres and comparing material from different nations and ethnological, folkloric and mythological data from different periods. Such a mythopoetic methodological approach to the analysis of animal symbolism and meanings is prevalent in Lithuania.

Mechanisms of the effects of story tracking. Regular story tracking has a positive effect on children's language skills development in several key ways. Firstly, fairy tales expand children's vocabulary by introducing them to new concepts and contexts that may not be present in everyday language. Secondly, listening to fairy tales promotes children's mastery of grammatical structures, as the texts are often rich and varied in sentence structure. Thirdly, fairy tales improve children's understanding of narrative structure by teaching them to follow the plot, identify the main characters and understand the causal links between events.

METHODS

Theoretical analysis of the literature. Qualitative research - semi-structured interviews, content analysis of the data.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The aim of the study is to reveal the traditions of fairy tale following in Lithuania. Methods of data collection and analysis - qualitative research was chosen in order to reveal the peculiarities of the selected object in the social environment. According to Bitinas (2013), in qualitative research, the researcher communicates directly with the subjects, taking into account the individuality of each person and the recounting of situations. The aim is to describe the situations in a comprehensive, general language and to remain neutral with regard to the results obtained. This study focuses on the experiences and opinions of the subjects, which is the object of this research, and the essence of which it seeks to uncover. This study uses a semi-structured interview method with open-ended questions, as well as additional questions inserted during the interviews to help to reveal the views and experiences of the participants as fully as possible. The semi-structured interviews and content analysis were used to reveal the types of story-following and the benefits of story-reading for child development.

The participants were 15 primary school teachers working in different Lithuanian schools.

Who used to read fairy tales as a child? "<...>I remember moments from my childhood when I was looking forward to the evening. My mother would tell me to go to bed, and she would bring me a book of fairy tales that she had already memorised."(1); "My mother used to read me stories in the evenings"(3), "I don't even remember who, but I definitely listened to bedtime stories as a child"(4), "My mother used to read to me a lot, but my favourite was my grandmother's stories from her childhood"(5), "I was almost always read to at bedtime by my grandmother, who used to live with us, and then my father would read to her when she was not available."(8)"<...> Even when I could read the most complicated story completely on my own, I liked to listen to my mother's voice. Then my brother grew up and the evening's entertainment became role-play reading"(11).

What feelings did you get when you listened to the stories? "<...> The adventures of queens and princesses begin to burst out of the pages, greedy lords try to wrong everyone, and cunning peasants twist them around their finger, wicked witches abduct the children, and fire-spitting dragons protect long-necked beauties! What a thrill!"(1), "Even when I could read the most difficult story completely on my own, I loved listening to my mother's voice."(3).

What reading skills have you noticed in your class? "<...> the children who were followed by stories at home were more fluent every day"(1), "the children were more adventurous and creative"(2), "the children in my class were very eager to read books, they were curious"(4), "they knew so many words"(6), "they were very quick to memorize difficult words and to say age-appropriate, overly complicated sentence structures"(8), "they were curious and eager to take on new activities"(12).

Every family has a very different tradition of reading fairy tales, and children bring these traditions to school, where the teacher has the very difficult task of engaging with fairy tales those children whose homes do not have a tradition of reading children's stories, which are very important for the development of children.

CONCLUSIONS

Regularly following children's stories is a crucial practice that makes a significant contribution to the development of their language skills. Children who are exposed to stories on a daily basis have a wider vocabulary and a better grasp of grammatical rules at an early age. Thanks to stories, children not only enrich their vocabulary and improve their understanding of grammatical structures, but also acquire the ability to understand and reproduce complex narrative structures. In the light of the abundant empirical evidence, it can be argued that story-tracing is an effective means of promoting children's language skills and should therefore be integrated into early childhood education practices.

The fairy tales most loved by Lithuanian families reflect a complex combination of cultural heritage and world literature. The selected fairy tales not only enrich children's imagination, but also shape their moral values, strengthen their national identity and encourage their interest in the diversity of the world. In the light of these aspects, it can be said that fairy tales in families remain an integral tool for cultural education, contributing to children's personal and intellectual development.

REFERENCES

- Aurylaitė, K., Višomirskytė, V., Eidukvičienė, R., Žindžiuvienė, I. E., Danytė, M. J., Kuizinienė, D., ... & Cummings, E. M. (2023). V&R Unipress.
- Barnackienė, A., & Bernotienė, D. (2009). Parents' opinion on the education of moral values through fairy tales. *Young Scientists' Works*, (2), 75-81.
- Brėdikytė, M. (2000). Acting dialogue with puppets - a method of stimulating creativity in preschool children. *Pedagogics: scientific works. Vilnius: Vilnius Pedagogical University Publishing House, 2000, Vol. 44.*
- Džekčioritė-Medeišienė, V. (2022). *Children's mythical fears in Lithuanian folklore practices* (Doctoral dissertation, Vilnius University).
- Feitelson, D., Kita, B., & Goldstein, Z. (1986). Effects of listening to series stories on first graders' comprehension and use of language. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 20(4), 339-356.
- Jaramillo, J. A. (1996). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and contributions to the development of constructivist curricula. *Education*, 117(1), 133-141.
- Kerbelytė, B. (2011). *Meanings of Lithuanian folklore works* (p. 440). Vytautas Magnus University Publishing House.

- Macijauskaitė-Bonda, J. (2009). A child in Lithuanian fairy tales and sagas: a descendant and a special person.
- Macijauskaitė-Bonda, J. (2015). *Child in Lithuanian fairy tales and sagas: a monograph*. Vilnius: Gimtasis žodis.
- Macijauskaitė-Bonda, J. (2016). Amalas and other fairy brooms in Lithuanian traditional culture. *Folklore Studies/Tautosakos Darbai*, 52.
- Macijauskaitė-Bonda, J. (2020). The Tradition of Riddling Questions in Contemporary Lithuanian Children's Folklore. *Sociocultural Dimensions of Childhood*, 218-226.
- Marginson, S., & Dang, T. K. A. (2017). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in the context of globalization. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 37(1), 116-129.
- MİRAY, Ö., Çetin, Z., & Doğan, Ö. (2015). The effect of adolescents reading children's literature to their younger siblings on their book reading habits. *Creative Education*
- Prėskienienė, E., (1999). Fundamentals of Word Art. Šiauliai.
- Sadauskienė, J. (2021). Canonical conception of folk song: from the 18th century to the present day. *Folklore Studies/Tautosakos Darbai*, 61.
- Sadauskienė, J. (2018). People and animals in Lithuanian fairy tales: didactic and psychological aspects. *Folklore Studies/Tautosakos Darbai*, 56.
- Sadauskienė, J. (2014). Emotions as an Object in Lithuanian Song Research. *Folklore Studies/Tautosakos Darbai*, 48.
- Sadauskienė, J. (2021). The Concept of Lithuanian Folk Song in Lithuanian Folklore 1800-1940. *Literary Canon Formation as Nation-Building in Central Europe and the Baltics: 19th to Early 20th Century*. Leiden: Brill, 86-106.
- Vėlius, N. (2012). *Baltic mythology from a falcon's flight*. Aids.
- Norbert, V. (1990). "The origins of the Lithuanian folk tale "Wolf Singing" (AT 163)". *Lituanistica*, 54(3), 95-106.
- Ten Hacken, P. (2007). *Chomskyan linguistics and its competitors* (pp. 1-377). London: Equinox.