

Rhyme Teaching in English for Primary Classes

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Key Words: Rhyme teaching, rhyme chart, contextualization, recontextualization

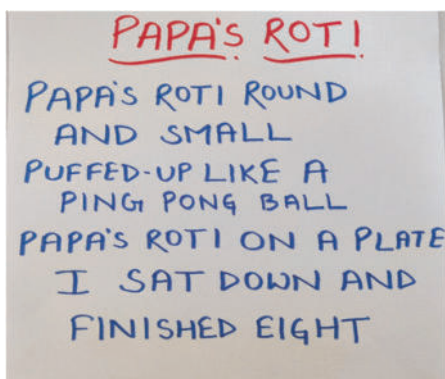
Abstract

Rhymes and songs have been and will always be an integral part of the primary classroom owing to their fun element, to which children are attracted. They provide oral input to students, and with proper actions and gestures, rhymes enable the students to comprehend unfamiliar words. This study is on the use of rhyme as a pedagogical tool to develop English language vocabulary, reading and writing skills. The study was conducted in a government school with students of grade III in the Bageshwar district of the state of Uttarakhand.

Introduction

Rhymes are one of the most widely used pedagogical tools in a primary classroom. They help to make a classroom interesting and vibrant and ensure the involvement of even the shy students. Stephen Krashen advocates "comprehensible input", which according to him is a crucial ingredient for the acquisition of a second language (1982). Rhymes are authentic teaching materials where students are exposed to the target language in a low-anxiety environment. They help in phonological development (Dunst, Merter, and Hamby, 2011), development of vocabulary (Mohanty and Hejmadi, 1992; Regina and Li, 1998) and reading (Peterson 2000). The purpose of this study was to use rhymes as a pedagogical tool for developing vocabulary, reading and writing in the English language. The study was conducted for seven days in a classroom of 10 students of Grade III in a government school in the Bageshwar district of Uttarakhand. The rhyme selected was called, "Papa's Roti" (Figure 1)

Figure 1
Rhyme Selected for the Study



Process of Teaching the Rhyme

The rhyme was taught using a seven-step process: contextualizing the rhyme,

reciting it, building vocabulary, working with the rhyme chart, recontextualizing the rhyme, writing and home assignment. In this process, the oral language skills were integrated with the writing skills, and the entire process was then personalized through recontextualization. Each step in the process is detailed below.

1) Context Setting

Krishna Kumar (1987) states that a school where little children are not allowed to talk freely in class is a useless school. Indeed, teachers who do not let their children talk have no business complaining about a lack of funds to buy books or other resources; they are already wasting a highly valuable resource that costs nothing at all. In this study, I made use of children's talk. Before starting the rhyme "Papa's Roti" (Father's Bread), I discussed its theme with the students to familiarize them with it, and also to introduce the vocabulary in the rhyme. The rhyme was also used to discuss gender-related issues.

Somya: /क्या आप आज एक नया तुक सीखना चाहते हैं?/
[Do you want to learn a new rhyme today?]

Students: /हाँ (उत्साह के साथ)/
[Yes! (excitedly)]

I drew a circle on the board and asked what it could be? Immediately, one student replied, "roti". Other responses included "ball", "plate", "potato", "rolling-board", "egg", and so on.

Somya: /यह चाक या डस्टर या पेड क्यों नहीं हो सकता?/
[Why can't it be a piece of chalk or a duster or a tree?]

Students: /क्योंकि वह गोल नहीं है/
[Because they are not round.]

Somya: /तो, इसका मतलब है कि यहां खींची गई वस्तु गोल है, और आपके द्वारा दिए गए सभी उदाहरण गोल-गोल वस्तुओं के हैं/
[So, this means that the object drawn here

are round, and all the examples you have given are of round objects.]
I wrote the word "round" on the board and asked the students what it meant.

Students: /गोल/
[round]

Somya: /हाँ। लेकिन क्या आप उच्चारण कर सकते हैं जो वहाँ लिखा गया है?/
[Yes. but can you pronounce what is written there?]

The students spelt the word but were unable to pronounce it, so the teacher pronounced the word for them, "round".

Somya: /इसलिए, बच्चों, जबसे आपने इसका उल्लेख किया है, हम आज रोटी के बारे में चर्चा करेंगे/
[So children, since you have spoken about it, we will talk about "roti" today]

Somya: /आपके घर पर रोटी कौन तैयार करता है?/
[Who prepares rotis at home?]

Students: /माँ, चाची, दीदी, बहन/
[Mother, aunt, paternal grandmother, sister]

Somya: /क्या आपके पापा रोटी तैयार करते हैं?/
[Does your papa make rotis?]

Student 1: /कुछकुछ समय/
[Sometimes.]

Student 2: /जब माँ घर पर नहीं होती।/
[When mother is not at home.]
Most students responded that their fathers made rotis when they were away from home on work

Somya: /ठीक है, अगर आपके माता-पिता दोनों घर पर हैं, तो रोटी कौन तैयार करते हैं?/
[Okay. If both of your parents are at home, who makes the rotis?]

Students (all): /माँ/
[Mother]

Somya: /पापा क्यों नहीं?/
[Why not papa?]

[Why not papa?]

Student (girl): /यह उनका (पुरुषों) का मन ही बल्कि महिलाओं का है/
[This is not their (men's) work but women's.]

Somya: /आपको क्यों लगता है कि यह काम महिलाओं के लिए है?/
[Why do you think this work is specifically for women?]
Nobody responded.

Somya: /आपकी राय में कौनसे कार्य हैं जो केवल महिलाओं के लिए हैं?/
[What other work do you think are meant only for women?]

Students named several tasks such as washing clothes, bringing water, cleaning utensils, clearing the cow dung, and ploughing the field. During the discussion, most of them argued that the male family members could also do all these, but they did it only when the women were not at home or if they were staying away alone. In response to the question of why fathers could not make roti, the students replied that since he was "working" outside the house, he would not do these household chores.

Somya: /अगर आपकी माँ भी बाहर "काम" कर रही है, तो रोटी कौन बनाएगा?/
[If your mother is also "working" outside, who will make the rotis?]
All the children remained silent.

Somya: /क्या आप मुझे एक ऐसे काम का उदाहरण दे सकते हैं जो केवल आपकी माँ करती है और आपके पिता नहीं? और इसके विपरीत?/
[Can you give me an example of some work that only your mother does and not your father, and vice-versa?]
Students started discussing amongst themselves.

Student 1: /दैनिक मजदूर का काम/
[Work of a daily-labourer.]

Student 2: /नहीं, मैंने देखा है कि ममहिलाएं अपने सिर के ऊपर रेत और सीमेंट ले जाती हैं/
[No, I have seen women carrying sand and

cement on their head.]
 Student 3: /खेत की जुताई /
 [Ploughing the field.]

Somya: /महिला ऐसा क्यों नहीं कर सकती?
 [Why can a woman not do that (plough the field)?]

Student 4: /क्योंकि वे कमजोर है /
 [Because they (women) are weak]

Somya: /अगर वे सीमेंट और रेत ले जा सकते हैं,
 तो क्या वे खेतों की जुताई नहीं कर सकते? /
 [If they can carry cement and sand, can't they also plough a field?]

Students (most): /लेकिन वे ऐसा नहीं करते /
 [But, they don't do it.]

Somya: /जब पिता घर पर नहीं होते तब भी? /
 [Even when the father is not at home?]

Students: /नहीं, हम उस काम को करने के लिए
 किसी को नियुक्त करते हैं, लेकिन महिलाएं ऐसा
 नहीं करती हैं /
 [No, we hire someone to do that work, but the women don't do it.]

Somya: /लेकिन आप सभी का मानना है कि वे यह
 कर सकते हैं, है ना? /
 [But you all believe that they CAN do it, right?]

Students: /हाँ /
 [Yes]

At the end of this discussion, students agreed that both their mother and father could do all the chores mentioned earlier, but the division of labour (who will do what) was a debatable issue.

ii) Rhyme Recitation

After this discussion, I recited the rhyme and asked students to repeat it with me. All the students sang the rhyme, along with gestures. After they finished singing the rhyme several times, I wrote it down on the blackboard.

iii) Vocabulary Building

Rhymes recited with actions and gestures

helped the students in meaning-making without translation. New vocabulary was further reinforced by discussing the word and connecting it to the students' context. For example, the word "round" was introduced by asking questions such as, "What are the round things around you?" Similarly, the word "small" was introduced by comparing two different-sized objects and introducing the opposite words "big" and "small".

iv) Working with a Rhyme Chart

The rhyme was written on a chart paper, and pasted on the classroom wall. The art was used for the identification of letters, words and sounds and to familiarize students with the script. The discussion was around some questions related to the chart.:

- Identify the words "round", "small", "puffed-up" and, "finished" written in the rhyme?
- How many times is the word "roti" written in the chart?
- Where is the title of rhyme written?
- How many times is the word "and" written in the chart?
- How many words start with the letter "p"?
- How many words start with the letter "r"?
- Identify the rhyming words.

These types of questions involved the students in meaningful learning of the script.

v) Recontextualizing the Rhyme

The process of language-learning and meaning-making becomes easier when the content is related to the learner's context. To contextualize the rhyme, the students were asked to replace the pronoun "I" with their names, or the names of their friends, and also to change the number of rotis. So, the contextualized version of rhyme could be:

Papa's roti round and small
 Puffed up like a ping-pong ball
 Papa's roti on a plate

----- sat down and finished-----.

Each student was asked to come forward and recite the rhyme by pointing to the word while reciting and contextualizing the rhyme by changing the names and number of rotis. This process provided the students with an opportunity to read with understanding.

vi) A Step towards Writing

Some worksheets were designed based on the rhyme to involve students in the process of writing (Figure 2). The worksheet was filled by the students after a discussion around it.

vii) Home Assignment

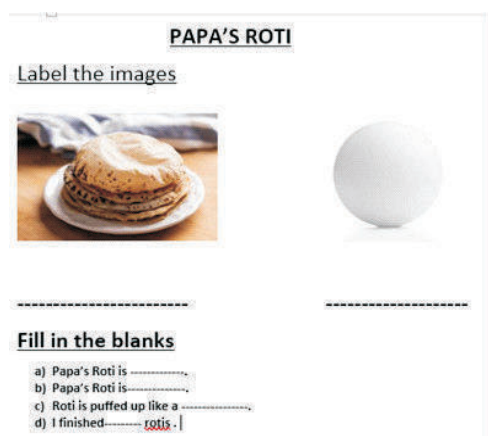
Students were asked to recontextualize the rhyme and to write it in their notebooks by replacing "papa" with any family member who made rotis at home, and replacing "I" and the number of rotis with whatever they wanted. The aim was to involve them in the process of purposeful writing.

gestures and provide the word without the aid of translation. They were able to use the word in different contexts as well. For instance, when students say a stool, they immediately said 'round'.

Students were familiarized with keywords before starting the rhyme. This helped them identify those words in the rhyme and multiple readings of the rhyme developed reading skills. When students were called individually to read the rhyme, most of them were successful. In case they were stuck, the use of actions and gestures helped them to identify and read the word. In writing, students engagement with writing was high in modifying the rhyme by adding their names and changing the number of rotis. In filling the worksheet, students tried to read the questions refer to the rhyme and fill in the blanks. They made a lot of spelling mistakes. Nevertheless, it was a significant step since the writing process includes thinking and not merely copying.

Figure 2

Example of a Worksheet



Findings

The use of rhyme helped vocabulary development as words were introduced through action and gestures and discussion around the concept. Students were able to guess the meaning through

Conclusion

The process of rhyme teaching was completed in one week and students were exposed to listening, speaking, reading and writing. They were able to apply the vocabulary to objects in their surroundings, read the rhyme and think and write. We have used the classroom experience in many teacher workshops. Most of the teachers shared that they found the idea of using rhymes as a pedagogical tool enabling English learning. They also learnt ways of talking about sensitive issues such that students could relate to them. This study demonstrated how rhymes can be a pedagogical tool for English language learning.

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