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Author(s)	Soe Marlar Lwin
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**Abstract**

This article investigates how the dynamics of narrative development in an oral storytelling performance can be captured so as to explain its aesthetic and communicative effectiveness. In light of the narratological distinctions between *story* and *discourse*, an oral storytelling performance conducted by a professional storyteller in an institution in contemporary society is treated as constituting the story (i.e. content elements such as events, characters, time and location) and the storytelling discourse (i.e. expressive features employed by a storyteller during a storytelling process). It is then examined as an artistic process that ‘exploits’ more than one semiotic channel to evoke a storyworld. The performance-focused multimodal analysis shows how the interplay between verbal, vocal and visual features of the storytelling discourse produces certain interpretations and meanings of the events and characters in the story and how, through such interplay, the audience is encouraged to have relatively uniform cognitive, emotive and evaluative responses which are in line with the values and messages of the institution in/for which a particular storytelling performance is conducted. A performance-focused multimodal analysis is, therefore, suggested for capturing the dynamics of narrative development in an oral storytelling performance and for uncovering its aesthetic and communicative effectiveness.

Keywords: *narrative development, oral storytelling performance, aesthetic and communicative effectiveness*

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## 1. Introduction

Telling stories face-to-face with an audience as a live performance can be regarded as one of the oldest forms of oral art. In contemporary society, this kind of storytelling, often found in places like schools, libraries and museums, is receiving a renewed interest from various institutions as an effective means to cultivate institutional values and disseminate institutional messages. Stories inscribed with institutional values and messages are often told by professional or trained storytellers during specially scheduled sessions especially for children. In the words of Sobol (2008: 122), '[c]ontemporary storytelling has constructed itself as a compound of tradition-based performing art and a social agent in a variety of applied fields.' Although there is much anecdotal information about this kind of applied storytelling – e.g. in Language Studies, Theatre Studies, Performance Studies, Communication and Media Studies, Education and Child Psychology, as Greene (1996: 39) has alleged, there seems 'scant "hard" research' as such into its aesthetic and communicative effectiveness.

Following the earliest and perhaps the most influential study by Labov and Waletzky (1967) on elicited oral narratives, many different forms of elicited and conversational storytelling have been studied under the subject of oral narrative (e.g. Lambrou, 2003; Norrick, 2000). Storytelling by professional or trained storytellers is usually excluded in these studies as it is considered to constitute a more literary form. On the other hand, studies of the literary form of storytelling have concentrated on the complex forms of written literary narrative, rather than on the simple form of folk storytelling and its

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‘descendent’ oral storytelling performances (e.g. Bal, 1997; Genette, 1980; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). Although it is the analysis of those conceptually oral stories or oral-derived tales that has led to the development of many fundamental narrative theories (e.g. Propp, 1968; Bremond, 1977), the folktale tradition of storytelling is played down in the later studies of literary narrative. When such tales are studied in their written forms as part of the canon of children’s literature (e.g. Carpenter and Prichard, 1984; Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, 1999), the performance element is often left aside. At the same time, with their interest in stories from strictly oral sources, folkloristic studies of oral narratives have given little attention to contemporary storytelling performances in which storytellers tell stories whose sources are not limited to oral ones.

This study, therefore, explores those storytelling performances which are frequently held in many institutions and are gaining renewed recognition from today’s audience. It investigates how the dynamics of narrative development in an oral storytelling performance can be captured so as to explain its aesthetic and communicative effectiveness. The multimodal perspective adopted in this study somewhat parallels the kind of discussions surrounding dramatic texts as theatre and performance (e.g. Swann, 2006; McIntyre, 2008). Through an examination of the way in which verbal, vocal and visual elements are combined to produce certain interpretations and meanings, the study aims to uncover how the audience of one specific oral storytelling performance is encouraged to have relatively uniform cognitive, emotive and evaluative responses which

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are in line with the values and messages of the institution in/for which the storytelling performance is held.

## **2. Oral storytelling performance (OSP)**

Traditionally, a storyteller carried the images of not only an entertainer but also a sacred functionary, a historian, a teacher or a healer for both young and old of a society (Pellowski, 1990). However, with the advent of the written word and printing press, the need to share information face-to-face was greatly decreased, and so was the favour for an oral storyteller (Pellowski, 1990; Greene, 1996). Nevertheless, traditional storytelling performances have endured with certain features which are essentially different from technologically mediated forms of storytelling – such as print, film, or other electronic media. In technologically mediated forms of storytelling, the source and the receiver are separated in time and/or by space (Bauman, 1992). By contrast, the traditional form of storytelling involves a small group of people who are co-present closely and engaged in the event and moment of telling. The direct and immediate engagement of the audience, the story and the storyteller also allows audience participation and renders them ‘the immediate, in-context, situation-embedded nature of the experience’ (Livo and Rietz, 1986: 103). While technologically mediated forms of storytelling are recognized for their impact on mass communication and mass culture, the traditional form of oral storytelling has proved its communicative and social efficacy through its small-scale social interactions (Bauman, 1992). An oral storytelling performance (OSP) is aptly described by Sobol et al. (2004) as

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an artistic process that works with what we may call the technologies of the human mainframe – memory, imagination, emotion, intellect, language, gesture, movement, expression (of face and of body) and, most crucially, relationship in the living moment – person-to-person or person-to-group.

A brief review on the studies of oral storytelling, however, reveals that the traditional approaches tend to focus on the collection and analysis of oral tales in their written forms (e.g. Propp, 1968; Dundes, 1971; Jason, 1977; Bremond, 1977; Drory, 1977). The perspective taken in these studies was mainly textual and their focus was rarely on performance. Bauman (1986) commented that oral literature had been conceived of as ‘stuff’ and was extracted from the context in which it had originally been performed. The later approaches developed by Bauman (1986), Hymes (1975) and others, therefore, call forth attention to oral storytelling as contextualised performance – i.e. situated in a context and unfolding or arising within that context.

The shift to a performance-focused perspective on oral storytelling can be regarded as ‘a radical move which, amongst other things, revalued oral literature significantly’, for ‘what had seemed like fairly simple forms (with trite plots and limited characterization) were revealed as highly complex and creative performances’ (Swann, 2006: 158). For instance, Finnegan’s (1967, 1992) studies of Limba storytelling show how the literary quality in such storytelling is contributed by aspects of the performance event, e.g. the way the storyteller constructs a vivid portrayal of the events and how they enact characters through

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the use of verbal as well as nonverbal elements. Similarly, Swann's (2002, 2006) analysis of an OSP by a British storyteller, Jan Blake, shows how the interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements of narrator and character voices contributed to characterisation, and accordingly the literariness of the oral story. Considering performance as a contextualised model of literary creativity, these studies suggest that oral literariness is created in performance and that performance is 'not some simple "add-on" to a verbal literary text, but a range of multimodal dimensions and processes through which certain forms of literature come into being' (Swann, 2006: 165).

The present study intends to continue in this tradition by offering a performance-focused multimodal perspective on capturing the dynamics of narrative development in an OSP. Although earlier studies have examined some aspects of the interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements in an OSP, their interest has been on how such interplay contributes to its literariness and literary value. How a performance-focused multimodal analysis of an institutionalised OSP (i.e. an OSP particularly held in an institution for specific institutional purposes) can help us explain its aesthetic and communicative effectiveness (i.e. appreciation of the narrative as it is generated during a live performance and how messages which are in line with the institutional purposes of a particular OSP are conveyed to the audience) still needs to be explored. This study fills the gap by emphasising the applied aspect of an OSP and by attempting to explain the aesthetic and communicative effectiveness of an institutionalised OSP.

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Like folkloristic storytelling, an institutionalised OSP (e.g. an OSP held in a school to celebrate a special event such as Racial Harmony Day, Teachers' Day, etc.) carries such characteristics as performative and communal quality, simple narrative structures with similar repetitive forms, and some counter-intuitive elements in narrative contents. However, the subject matter of an institutionalised OSP is determined by specific institutional purposes. Distinguishing this kind of contemporary storytelling from traditional performances, Stone (1986: 18) attributes its development to the use of storytelling as 'a more flexible method of teaching' in institutions such as libraries and schools. Although it may appear as a form of entertainment, an OSP conducted for clearly defined institutional purposes often plays a significant role in the cultivation of institutional values and beliefs. It is observable that specific communicative, persuasive or educational purposes exist together with or behind the recreational façade of an institutionalised OSP. The complexity of interaction between different elements of an OSP, however, is hard to capture in analysis.

In light of the narratological distinctions between *story* and *discourse* (Chatman, 1978; Genette, 1980; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002), this study regards an OSP as constituting the story (i.e. content elements such as events, characters, time and location) and the storytelling discourse (i.e. expressive features employed by a storyteller during a storytelling process). On this basis, the dynamics of narrative development in an OSP will be examined as the realisation of a process that not only generates elements of the story, but also engages the audience in the (re)construction of a storyworld and encourages certain responses from

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them as it unfolds through the interplay between features from different semiotic channels. Verbal as well as non-verbal features emanating from the storyteller during the storytelling process are examined as to

- 1) how they help to maintain a keen engagement from the audience, which can be inferred by observing their participation and responses to the narrative in progress; and
- 2) how they set up a certain interpretive frame to process the story elements in a particular way and influence the audience's responses.

### **3. Parameters for a multimodal analysis of an OSP**

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), multimodality is the use of several semiotic modes and their interactions within a socio-cultural domain which result in a semiotic product or event. In the case of an OSP, apparently spoken words and the storyteller's voice, i.e. verbal and vocal features, are the primary means of communication. As Sawyer (1976: 131) notes: 'our instrument is our voice' and 'we work with, and by means of, the spoken language – words'. At the same time, the bodily presence of the storyteller allows them to use gestures, postures and facial expressions, and thus brings in one more semiotic channel – i.e. the visual. Each of these aspects represents a dimension of communication, and all these dimensions in combination lead to a characteristic called 'multidimensionality' in oral storytelling (Lipman, 1999).

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Given that an OSP takes its shape only through the direct, immediate and situation-specific interactions between the teller and audience during a storytelling performance (Livo and Reitz, 1986), verbal as well as non-verbal features employed by the storyteller during a storytelling process can all be regarded as parts of the anatomy of an OSP. Accordingly, the textual realization of an OSP can be examined as dynamics unfolded during the storytelling process. Various features employed by a storyteller during a storytelling process can be analysed according to the three major aspects of expression – (1) verbal, (2) vocal and (3) visual. Verbal features include those related to the use of a specific form of language, such as discourse markers, expressive elaborations (e.g. words that give detailed descriptions of a character), quotations from dialogues/monologues, syntactic parallelism and so on (e.g. Bauman, 1986; Norrick 2000). They may also include language choice, e.g. the choice of a particular language or switching between languages.

Vocal features, on the other hand, denote manipulations of voice by a storyteller during a storytelling process. The six main facets of vocal expression include pitch, pace, volume, pause, inflection, and tone (Müller, 1992; Krummel, 1998; Elam, 2002):

- pitch denotes the relatively high or low note of voice;
- pace, the relatively fast or slow speed of delivery;
- volume, the relative loudness or softness;
- pause, cessation or suspension of speech;
- inflection, *sliding* (glide) of voice up or down; and
- tone, emotional connotations attached to vocal features.

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In addition, a feature often noted in the studies of vocal expression is emphatic stress – i.e. a syllable or word said with greater emphasis and made more prominent than the other (Krummel, 1998; Fine, 1984). Such prominence is often achieved through one or more of features, such as pitch movement, louder volume, elongating vowel. Emphatic stress is noted on top of the above six main features because it is often a mix of features and it also highlights the importance of a word on the basis of meaning.

As regards features from the visual aspect, the most fundamental features which are inseparably linked to the presence of the storyteller in this type of storytelling are their spontaneous and synchronized gestures (and facial expressions). To understand the gestural contribution to a storytelling process, Cassell and McNeill (1991) have suggested a semiotic method, which takes into account the relation of gesture form to meaning and function. Adapting Cassell and McNeill's (1991: 382–385) typology, gestures can be classified into the following four major types.

- Mimic gestures<sup>1</sup>: Movements of the hands and arms (and the rest of the body) that bear a close formal relationship to the semantic content of speech (Although gestures typically refer to movements of the hands and arms, mimic gestures often involve the rest of the body, especially when the storyteller represents different characters by enacting or imitating their actions);
- Metaphoric gestures: Representational gestures like mimic gestures, but corresponding to an abstract idea, not to a concrete object or event (e.g. using two hands to depict the scales of justice when saying, “decide”);

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- Beats: Rhythmical moves of the hand according to pulsations of speech, indexing the word or phrase it accompanies as being significant (not purely for its semantic content, but for its discourse-pragmatic content);
- Deictic gestures: Points indicating objects around the teller, or abstract pointing (i.e. the gesture space may look empty, but to the teller it is filled with discourse entities)

The main features of analysis in each dimension are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1 about here.

An analysis of features working at each dimension will be followed by an examination of how features from different dimensions interact with each other to represent elements of the story and to encourage desired responses from the audience.

#### **4. Sample analysis**

In this section an OSP, *Why Crocodile Doesn't Eat Chicken* [sic], conducted by a professional storyteller in an all-girl primary school in Singapore is analysed in detail. Schools are one of the institutions where storytelling performances are held frequently. This particular event was for 6-year-old Primary One pupils to celebrate the end of a school term. At the same time, it was part of the school's values education programme to teach the children lessons about moral and social behavior. The didactic purpose contributing to the cultivation of certain institutional values shows that storytelling relates to the national education policy in this context. In this instance, a message emphasizing

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fraternity or racial harmony, which is considered crucial in the multiracial society of Singapore, was inscribed within the story.

To capture the different sign systems that work together during the storytelling process, the OSP was audio and video recorded. The next step was to transcribe the performance as a multimodal interaction. Several studies (e.g. Tedlock, 1983; Fine, 1984; Norris, 2004; Baldry & Thibault, 2005) have suggested some multimodal transcription systems, each reflecting its specific focus and aim. Tedlock's (1983) transcription system, which uses typography (e.g. small type, large type, capitals, etc.) to represent vocal features, records few gestures or body movements. Norris (2004), on the other hand, attempts to analyse human interaction in its vast complexity and suggests a fully fledged multimodal transcription system which uses not only typography for spoken words but also photos (with the time of each clip) for gestures, postures and proxemics. Baldry and Thibault (2005) have also suggested a comprehensive multimodal transcription system for features such as gestures, posture, movement, spatial relations, clothes, music, sound, etc. to examine multimodal texts in different media. However, as Fine (1984) has commented, considering the complexity of signals transmitted in performance and the limited channel capacity of print, it would be impractical and unproductive to mechanically record all the signals present in performance. To avoid 'overloading the text with too much information', Fine (1984: 149) suggests having some principles of selection when transcribing an oral storytelling performance.

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Thus, taking into account whether certain meanings can be attributed to a particular feature to explain the aesthetic and communicative effectiveness of the OSP, the present study has selected some verbal, vocal and visual features (listed in Fig 1) for the analysis and discussion. Through the use of typography (see Appendix for Transcription Conventions), the verbal text and vocal features will be annotated. For those vocal and visual features which are not evident in the transcript, succinct descriptions will be given in a separate column. First, below is a summary of the story elements that appear in this OSP.

*Event sequence*

*Day 1:* The crocodile was waiting in the river for her prey.

The chicken came to the river to drink water.

The crocodile attempted to eat the chicken.

The chicken pleaded with the crocodile not to eat her.

The chicken told the crocodile that she was the crocodile's sister.

While the crocodile was puzzled, the chicken ran away.

The crocodile reckoned that the chicken had tricked her when she remembered their different habitats – water vs. land.

The crocodile was angry and waited for the chicken to come again.

*Day 2:* The same sequence of events (except that the crocodile remembered their different features, scales vs. feathers as opposed to their different habitats, before she reckoned that the chicken had tricked her again).

*Day 3:* The same sequence of events was repeated until the crocodile realized that the chicken had tricked her again.

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The crocodile decided to chase the chicken.

The crocodile came up from the river to look for the chicken in the jungle.

The crocodile met her old friend the iguana.

The crocodile told the iguana how the chicken had tricked her.

The iguana told the crocodile that they all were members of one big egg-laying family, so the chicken was indeed her sister.

The crocodile accepted that the chicken was her little sister.

The crocodile decided not to eat the chicken.

### *Characters*

Three humanized animal characters – the crocodile, the chicken and the iguana – appear in the story. All three were represented as females with the egg-laying characteristic.

### *Time and location*

The story has a general anchorage for its time and location. That is to say, except for the chronological time line (Day 1, Day 2, Day 3), no precise time or period is specified. Similarly, except for the general locations (river, river bank, forest), no particular place or region is specified.

To find out how the interplay between features from different semiotic channels brings out the above story elements for the audience's responses during the storytelling process, a microanalysis was carried out for the different constituents of the story structure – namely

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abstract, orientation (background information, general frame, narrow frame), main action, resolution and coda (Norrick, 2000).

#### 4.1 *Abstract*

The launch of the abstract is marked by a cluster of verbal, vocal and visual features which are commonly associated with the function of drawing the recipient's attention (Table 1).

Table 1 about here.

Discourse markers in oral narrative are said to have special organizational functions, e.g. to signal the beginning of a new episode or to mark the next step in the narrative structure (Norrick, 2000). The discourse marker 'so' and a louder volume at the beginning of this storytelling discourse draws the audience's attention to the forthcoming storytelling process. Also helping to secure the audience's immediate interest are the vocal and visual features accompanying the verbal component. The relatively slow pace and noticeable pauses between words allow them time to speculate on the event sequence that lies ahead, while a shift to higher pitch together with emphatic stress and a particular type of gesture (i.e. beats) underline the clues about the characters and events. Hence, features in the abstract appear to be working together to draw the audience's attention as well as to trigger their expectations for the appearance of certain characters and events. Subsequent spontaneous responses from several audience members are noted as evidence of their immediate engagement and speculations about the upcoming story elements.

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#### 4.2 *Orientation – Background information (introducing the characters)*

Immediately following the instantaneous responses from some audience members, a transition is made from the abstract to the next constituent, i.e. the orientation which gives some background information about the characters (Table 2).

Table 2 about here.

As noted in the transcriptions, the transition is signaled by a discourse marker ‘now’. A question is then directly addressed to the audience. The subsequent chorus response ‘yes’ from the audience suggests that the direct question stimulates the audience’s prior knowledge about crocodiles and it seems to help engage them. A salient factor noted in the introduction of characters is how verbal, vocal and visual features work in concert to represent the distinctive behavior of each character. The two characters, the crocodile and the chicken, are identified by their respective characteristic actions (i.e. the crocodile’s action of waiting with only their eyes seen above the water to prey on other animal, and the chicken’s waddling). These actions are verbally represented in similar manners, i.e. through expressive elaborations and repetition of words. Vocally, however, two different paces synchronize the two distinctive actions – i.e. progressively slower pace for the crocodile’s action of waiting vs. faster pace with rhythmic up and down inflection matching the chicken’s action of waddling. From the visual aspect, their distinctive actions are clearly delineated by correspondingly distinctive mimic gestures. Through such coordination among features from verbal, vocal and visual aspects, clear images of the scenes with animated characters are evoked for the audience as the (re)construction of a storyworld begins.

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### 4.3 *Orientation – General frame*

The general frame gives the audience temporal and spatial orientation important for a storyworld (re)construction (Norricks, 2000; Herman, 2005). The time and location for the upcoming events are anchored generally as ‘one day’, ‘in the water’ and ‘down the far bank of the river’. The information is, nevertheless, foregrounded for the audience’s awareness when it is visually complemented by the abstract pointing of the storyteller (Figure 2).

Figure 2 about here.

### 4.4 *Orientation – Narrow frame*

As the storytelling progresses, the general frame segues into the narrow frame, i.e. the constituent which leads directly into the main action of the story in a narrative development (Norricks, 2000). The key element represented is the chicken’s motivation in coming to the river, i.e. to quench her thirst (Table 3).

Table 3 about here.

The interplay between verbal, vocal and visual features is noted as the storyteller’s attempt to create a particular effect (i.e. suspense) at this point of the storytelling process. From the verbal aspect, the disnarrated ‘she didn’t look around’, which is an event that did not happen but, nonetheless, is referred to in a negative or hypothetical mode (Prince, 1988), foregrounds the significance of the chicken’s action (i.e. going ahead to drink the water from the river following her failure to foresee the danger). When it is preceded by the representation of her thirst, intensified vocally by an emphatic stress on ‘so’ and non-

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linguistic sounds as well as visually by a metaphoric gesture for ‘thirsty’, the audience is encouraged to observe the chicken’s action as the preparatory steps leading the two characters into an eventful encounter. These well-coordinated verbal, vocal and visual features thus potentially create a suspenseful atmosphere by heightening the audience’s speculation about the consequences of the character’s action. Subsequently, when a shift to softer volume is made in saying ‘while she was drinking’, the audience appears to become more attentive to what lies ahead and the unfolding of events.

#### 4.5 *Main action*

The main action constituent is marked by the detailed representations of the events. A prominent verbal feature noted in this constituent is the expressive elaborations. Working together with them from vocal and visual aspects are the salient non-linguistic sounds and a series of mimic gestures and facial expressions. When these features complement each other, the audience is given a zoomed perspective on the climax, i.e. a detailed representation from all three dimensions for the crucial encounter between the two characters (Table 4).

Table 4 about here.

Noticeably contrastive qualities for both vocal and visual features in the representation of each character (i.e. loud volume and lower pitch complemented by the fearsome facial expressions for the crocodile vs. softer volume, higher pitch and frightened tone complemented by terrified and pleading facial expressions for the chicken) modulate an

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effect that seems to promote the audience's appreciation of the conflict between the two characters at this point of the narrative development. At the same time, it appears that the initial suspense created earlier in the narrow frame is built up by various vocal features adeptly employed by the storyteller. The slow pace at the beginning synchronizes with the careful movements of the crocodile advancing towards her prey, the chicken. As the crocodile moves closer to the chicken, the pace becomes faster and the volume louder. The gradual increase in pace and volume modulates effects that seem to build up the audience's excitement and anticipation for the climax. A sudden pause followed by a shift to softer volume, however, signals the shift in the point of view to the other character – i.e. the chicken. This also leads the audience to the direct quotations of the chicken's pleading words. The high pitch and emphatic stress in quoting the chicken's claim that she was the crocodile's little sister appears to be cuing the audience to watch these thought-provoking utterances as the plot-determining statements.

#### 4.6 *Resolution*

The resolution comprises a series of events which result from the chicken's thought-provoking utterances (Table 5). An interesting verbal feature noted in this constituent is the incorporation of spontaneous responses 'huh?', sounding disbelief and surprise from some audience members, into the storytelling process. Such incorporations seem to compel the rest of the audience members to have a similar response to the event.

Table 5 about here.

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The interplay between verbal, vocal and visual features becomes significant as it seems that the audience is exclusively led to the point of view of a particular character, the bewildered crocodile. Verbal quotations from the (interior) monologues of the confused crocodile are accompanied by corresponding vocal and visual features such as puzzled tone and facial expression, followed by angry tone and facial expression, and the abstract pointing originated from the crocodile's position. It demonstrates the coordination of features from different semiotic channels in attempting to lead the audience exclusively to the perspective of the provoked crocodile. As a result, the chicken's escape is presented to the audience as an unfavourable outcome, which justifies the continuation of the storyline, rather than a favourable one (from the perspective of the relieved chicken) which could have suggested the end of the storyline.

#### 4.7 *Representation of repeated sequence of events*

Having structured the audience's expectation for the continuation of the storyline, the storytelling proceeds with the representation of a repeated sequence of events which is linked chronologically (i.e. Day 2, Day 3) to the preceding events. At this point, the omission of verbal components becomes prominent. Instead of verbally repeating the same sequence of events, elements of the story are represented only through the vocal and visual features (Table 6).

Table 6 about here.

The omission encourages the audience to fill in the missing verbal components. As they contribute verbally by making out the vocal and visual features emanating from the storyteller, the audience is found to become directly involved in the storytelling process. The vocal and visual representations of repeated events allow the audience to follow the storyteller and join in with both sounds and gestures as the narrative progresses (Figure 3).

Figure 3 about here.

It appears that at this point of the storyworld (re)construction, the audience's mental prowess to process the story elements is essentially dependent on the vocal and visual features of the storytelling discourse. Specific vocal and visual features employed in representing the distinctive actions of the two characters seem to help reactivate the earlier context of the storyworld while reintroducing the characters (Emmott 1997).

#### 4.8 *Representation of new sequence of events*

When the storyline starts to deviate from the repeated sequence of events, a spatial connection is made between new events and earlier events. It seems that the audience's spatial awareness during this transition is facilitated both verbally by the paralleled prepositional phrases 'out of the river, up to the river bank, into the jungle' encoding the crocodile's point of view, and visually by the stepping-forward movements of the storyteller emulating the charging steps of the crocodile coming out of the river. The interplay between features from different semiotic channels again helps to evoke vivid images of the crocodile's meeting with the third character, the iguana, which is an

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important event for the remaining narrative development. For example, quotations from dialogues between the two characters are articulated in distinctive volume, pitch and tone, accompanied by distinct gestures and facial expressions, bringing the characters closer to the audience. Subsequently when the iguana's words 'I lay eggs; chicken...she lays eggs; you...croc...you lay eggs' are foregrounded by the syntactic parallelism and mimic gestures representing each animal, it seems the audience is encouraged to draw a parallel between different animals and acknowledge their common egg-laying characteristic. The slow pace and pauses from the vocal aspect also seem to allow the audience time to reflect upon this common characteristic while it is repeatedly emphasized from the verbal aspect.

In sum, the coordinated verbal, vocal and visual features appear to be leading the audience to an alternative interpretive frame which specifies different animals as members of one egg-laying family. Through this alternative interpretive frame, the chicken's claim about being the crocodile's sister is suggested as something plausible. This seems to encourage the audience to perceive the coherence in the preceding event sequence. The audience's desire for a complete whole seems to be fulfilled when the conflict, which has been keeping the narrative in progress, ends with the ultimate resolution – i.e. the crocodile decided not to eat the chicken.

#### 4.9 *Coda*

Following the representation of characters no longer in conflict with each other, connections are made in the coda between events in the storyworld and those in the actual

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world through some overt moral comments which also serve as the institutional messages (Table 7).

Table 7 about here.

The rhetorical question following the syntactic parallelism favors the audience's evaluative responses to be in line with the institutional messages about fraternity or racial harmony. These messages are underlined not only by the direct address to the audience but also by a change in the type of gesture (i.e. from abstract pointing in the earlier constituents to beats and specific points to the audience and the storyteller self in the coda).

## **5. Discussion**

The detailed analysis in the previous section reveals that in this OSP, vocal and visual features do not just complement, but extend or even replace the verbal component (e.g. omission of the verbal components when representing the repeated sequence of events). Vivid images of events as well as different narrative effects which may not be easily possible to achieve through verbal features alone are created by vocal features (e.g. non-linguistic sounds, progressively slower/faster pace) and visual features (e.g. mimic gestures and facial expressions). This shows that vocal and visual features play an integral, rather than peripheral, role in the narrative development, whether through interaction with the verbal features or as an independent semiotic system. Therefore, only through an analysis of features from different semiotic channels, can the unfolding dynamics of narrative development in an OSP be captured.

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The analysis also reveals how the audience's responses to the story elements can possibly be manipulated by the interplay between verbal, vocal and visual features of the storytelling discourse. Such interplay seems to stimulate desired cognitive, emotive and evaluative responses at appropriate points of the storytelling process.

Cognitively, it seems that synchronized features from verbal, vocal and visual aspects help to maintain a keen engagement between emerging story elements and the audience's mental processes. As they represent and foreground certain story elements (e.g. characters' motivations, actions and feelings), they seem to trigger the audience's inferential processes and encourage them to anticipate the subsequent events. This possibly enhances the audience's interest in the unfolding event sequence, and makes them follow the storyline closely as it progresses. Such instances become most obvious when the verbal components are omitted in the representation of the repeated sequence of events. By making them work out the vocal and visual feature in order to fill in the missing verbal components, the audience is encouraged to keep track of continuity and changes in their mental representation of the storyworld (Emmott, 1997). As they join verbally, vocally and visually in representing the characters and events, their participation and responses suggest that their mental processes are kept active while they are 'harnessed' to the storytelling performance.

Features from verbal, vocal and visual aspects work in concert also to create various narrative effects that seem to promote emotive responses from the audience. For example,

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as the storyline approaches the climax, increasingly detailed verbal representation of the character's actions synchronizes with increasingly faster pace and louder volume. When this is visually complemented by a series of mimic gestures representing moment-by-moment actions of the character, the result is an effect that appears to promote a sense of urgency and excitement for the audience. Similarly, when the crocodile comes out of the water to look for the chicken, the storyteller's forward-moving steps towards the audience create what Stempel (1986: 209) calls 'the impression of spatial proximity to the event'. When these movements are made together with fearsome facial expressions and non-linguistic sounds in loud volume and low pitch reflecting the feelings of an enraged character, an effect that seems to intensify suspense is created. Expressive screams from the audience following these features indicate how relatively uniform emotive responses can be achieved through the interplay between features from different semiotic channels.

The interplay between verbal, vocal and visual features also seems to influence the audience's evaluative responses. As shown in the analysis, features from different aspects work together in persuading the audience to initially observe the chicken's escape from the point of view of a particular character, the crocodile. Direct quotations from the (interior) monologues of the crocodile and the vocal and visual features exclusively corresponding to the crocodile's feelings and position appear to be leading the audience to an interpretive frame which processes the chicken's utterances as an implausible claim and the crocodile's attempt to chase the chicken as a justified action. Eventually, however, through the quotations from the words of another character the iguana, which are foregrounded by the

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syntactic parallelism as well as the slow pace and pauses, an alternative interpretive frame that encourages the audience to process the chicken's claim as something plausible and to regard the crocodile's decision of not to eat the chicken as a morally appropriate action is suggested.

## **6. Conclusion**

Given that the audience's cognitive, emotive and evaluative responses to the emerging narrative can possibly be manipulated by the interplay between verbal, vocal and visual features emanating from the storyteller, a performance-focused multimodal analysis of an institutionalised OSP can be helpful to capture the dynamics of its narrative development and to explicate its aesthetic and communicative effectiveness. More often than not, what makes a 'good' story is determined on the basis of such elements as sequentiality and causality in event descriptions, and the wholeness and coherence of the plot (e.g. Prince, 1982). While such an analysis is helpful to investigate the narrative potential in an oral story, they do not seem to be able to explain the pragmatic components such as how recipients respond to the emerging narrative structure and elements during an actual storytelling process.

Taking a performance-focused multimodal perspective, this study has attempted to explain how features of a storytelling discourse in all its manifestations contribute to the actualization of an oral story and how they seem to enhance the audience's appreciation of the narrative as it is developed during a live storytelling performance. It is suggested that

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capturing the dynamics of narrative development through a multimodal analysis of an OSP uncovers how the audience can be led by well-coordinated verbal, vocal and visual features to make certain connections or interpretations/speculations (rather than others) and perceive the sequentiality, causality, wholeness and coherence – factors which are believed to be important in making aesthetic judgment for a narrative. Also by shedding some light on how the interplay between features from different semiotic channels creates various effects that appear to promote the audience's enjoyment, such an analysis helps us understand the aesthetic and entertainment value of an OSP.

Closely intertwined with the aesthetic judgment for an OSP is its communicative effectiveness. As discussed earlier, while an institutionalised OSP may appear as a form of entertainment, it is in effect a 'vehicle' used to disseminate institutional messages. Defining communication in a narrative sense, Martin (1986) has argued that so long as a story or storytelling is regarded as a form of sheer entertainment, it does not seem to require interpretation. In fact, one can arguably claim that 'stories are at best ambiguous', for certain characteristics of narrative (especially narrative fiction) allow a story to be free from any determinate meaning or to provide multiple interpretations (Martin, 1986: 155). However, once the purpose of storytelling goes beyond entertainment, issues such as transmitting relatively accurate meaning(s), achieving preferred interpretations and responses from the audience become significant. In that respect, capturing the dynamics of narrative development through a multimodal analysis helps us understand how features from different semiotic channels work together in persuading the audience to process the

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story elements along certain lines so that their interpretations will be in line with institutional messages. Examples of interactions among verbal, vocal and visual features leading the audience to selective interpretive frames and paving the way for the delivery of overt institutional messages have explained how a storyteller attempts to ensure relatively accurate transmission of institutional messages, and by extension how the audience's receptiveness of these messages can possibly be enhanced as a result.

It is, however, acknowledged that a performance can be experienced differently by different audience members with different social, cultural and personal experiences. Nevertheless, the claims made in this study are based not only on the analysis of features emanating from the storyteller, but also on the observation of audience members' outward responses which are noted in the detailed analysis of each constituent in narrative development. Since the audience responses during this storytelling process appeared relatively uniform, arguably there was enough substantial commonality in interpretation among members of the audience, and the observable evidence serves as reasonable grounds for the claims made for this type of oral storytelling performances.

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## Notes

- 1 The first category in Cassell and McNeill's (1991) typology of gestures is iconics, which refer only to the movement of hands and arms. Fine (1984) makes a distinction between small icons (i.e. hand and arm movements) and large icons (i.e. mimes involving hands, arms and the rest of the body).

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