

**DESIGNING DRAMA ACTIVITIES BASED
ON NASREDDIN HODJA JOKES FOR ENGLISH
AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL)
CLASSROOMS¹**

**Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğretilen Sınıflar için Nasreddin
Hoca Fıkralarına Dayalı Drama Etkinliklerinin Tasarlanması**

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Abstract

Employing drama activities in foreign language classes has proved to help language learners improve their skills. Within the context of drama course offered in an English Language Teacher Education program in Turkey, the present study suggests some drama activities based on well-known Nasreddin Hodja jokes. The study aims to find answers to whether Nasreddin Hodja jokes can be exploited in the foreign language classes and integrated in drama activities. It also tries to find out that whether the junior students could find out linguistic elements to be used in the drama activities. The document analysis method has been employed in the study. Students have been asked to analyse 470 Nasreddin Hodja jokes on the purpose of determining the linguistic elements and communicative functions of the jokes. The study concludes that drama activities based on Nasreddin Hodja jokes have numerous linguistic elements and communicative functions to be exploited and they can be used in designing drama activities in the foreign language leaning context.

Key words: Drama activity, Nasreddin Hodja jokes, foreign language learning.

Özet

Yabancı dil sınıflarında drama aktivitelerinin kullanımının, öğrencilerin çeşitli becerilerinin gelişiminde yardımcı olduğu bilinmektedir. Mevcut çalışmada, Türkiye’de bir İngiliz Dili Öğretmen Eğitimi programında sunulan drama dersi bağlamında, iyi bilinen Nasreddin Hoca fıkralarına dayalı drama etkinlikleri önerilmektedir. Çalışma Nasreddin Hoca fıkralarının yabancı dil sınıflarında kullanılıp kullanılmayacağı ve bu fıkraların drama aktivitelerine dönüştürülüp dönüştürülemeyeceği sorularına cevap aramaktadır. Aynı zamanda çalışmada, üçüncü sınıf öğrencilerinin drama aktivitelerinde kullanılmak üzere bu fıkralardaki faydalı dil yapılarını belirleyip belirleyemeyecekleri de saptanmaya çalışılmıştır. Çalışmada belgesel tarama yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Öğrencilerden 470 adet Nasreddin Hoca fıkrasını dilsel öge ve iletişimsel işlevler açısından incelemeleri istenmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda, Nasreddin hoca fıkralarında yabancı dil öğrenimi bağlamında kullanılabilecek çok sayıda dilsel öge ve iletişimsel işlevin olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Drama etkinliği, Nasreddin Hoca fıkraları, yabancı dil öğrenimi.

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1. Introduction

Providing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students with classroom environments where real-like communication can be fostered is crucial as the overall objective of foreign language education is to enhance students' communicative competence. For this reason, researchers and language practitioners have been searching for new ways, techniques, and methods of how to enhance students' communicative competence in the language learning process. One of these techniques is to employ drama activities in EFL classes. Utilizing drama activities in EFL classes can be considered as an effective technique as the focus of instruction is on meaning rather than on form. In the course of drama activities, students have plenty of opportunity to use language meaningfully and they have specific reasons to communicate in the target language. McGregor, Tate and Robinson (1977) state that 'In order for the group to become deeply involved in acting-out, they need a 'sense of significance' in what they are doing. They need to feel that what they are doing is important for them' (pp. 88-89). Drama activities can draw the attention of learners and transform the artificial atmosphere of the classroom into quasi-real language situation (Karabetca, 2015). In addition, the activities improve students' self-confidence in that students can use the target language meaningfully and they can get a sense of success in communicating with each other. This study first discusses the possible advantages and benefits of using drama activities in EFL classes by presenting some important research conducted in the field. Then, it provides a rationale for why to include drama activities in foreign language learning process. Last but not least, explaining how to incorporate humour, drama and a cultural hero into EFL classes through drama activities, our study focuses on some sample Nasreddin Hodja jokes. Some drama activities designed in accordance with Maley and Duff's (2005) drama activity format are presented at the end of the study.

2. Drama in EFL Classes

Due to the fact that drama is regarded to be not only a performance but also a process in language learning, a lot of scholars have emphasized its use in EFL setting. Smith (1984), for example, points out that drama activities are effective for both language teachers and learners. Students have a chance of expressing themselves and try to communicate during drama activities, which can result in remarkable improvement in language learning outcomes. Dougill (1994) also states that students devote extensive time and energy to learning objectives thanks to drama performance. Likewise, Oxford (1997) asserts that drama performance fosters cooperative learning that lowers anxiety and prejudice and promotes intrinsic motivation. In addition, enumerating nine reasons for using drama; motivation, familiar activities, confidence, group dynamics, different learning styles, language personalization, language-in-context, cross-curricular content, and place of a lesson, Philips (1999) emphasizes the significance of using drama in language learning process. Wagner (1998) states that "drama is powerful because its unique balance of thought and feeling makes learning exciting, challenging, relevant to real life concerns, and enjoyable" (p. 9).

As for skills development, Dodson (2000) states that drama can bring the skills of grammar, reading, writing, speaking, listening and pronunciation together in a course and the focus is on meaning and fluency rather than on the form. Savignon (1983) points out that drama activities can foster communicative competence and facilitate language learning by involving the whole learners in the process. Gomez (2010) investigates into the effectiveness of the use of drama in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. The

researcher compares traditional instructional method with drama-based instructional method within the context of enhancing students' oral communication skills including pronunciation and fluency. The study concludes that teaching English through drama is more effective than using traditional methods. The researcher also states that the students feel motivated and they realize language has a purpose thanks to drama activities. In another study, Zhang and Gao (2014) focus on the possible benefits of drama writing. They point out that drama writing can arouse students' enthusiasm and highly motivate them because it involves creation, playfulness, and imagination. Comparing conventional English Language Arts (ELA) lessons with more dialogic discourse-based lessons, Anderson and Loughlin (2014) assert that dramatic arts integration contributes to participants' dialogic use of specific and complex academic discourse forms over a conventional ELA setting. The researchers also emphasize the importance of contextualized language through drama activities covering oral language use, reading comprehension, and writing production.

Reed and Seong's study (2013) suggests pragmatic instructions which focus on speaking and listening skills through using drama as a language teaching activity. The research examines drama activities in accordance with the constructivist methodology in Korean EFL setting. A model is proposed to enhance students' speaking and listening skills. The model blends some approaches and techniques in EFL field emphasizing warm-up, team-building, and guided activities together with scenarios and debates in the classroom. Moreover, drama activities in general and utilizing jokes in foreign language classes in particular have been emphasized by Akkaya (2013) in his study about Nasreddin Hodja jokes in the context of teaching Turkish as a foreign language. Akkaya (2013) states that using jokes can foster students' lexical competence, cultural awareness, and basic language skills. He also asserts that jokes can provide students with highly motivating atmosphere. What makes a course entertaining is the activities in which students can impersonate the characters and situations they may face in real life. In addition, since Nasreddin Hodja jokes are full of dialogues, they can be regarded as important sources for developing oral communication skill as well as reading, writing, and listening skills.

As above-mentioned research conducted in different EFL contexts makes it clear, most of the scholars have tried to uncover the possible benefits of drama performance and activities in foreign or second language classes. Much of the research focuses on how to incorporate drama into language learning process to foster specifically oral communication skills of learners. The following section highlights the rationale for why to include drama activities in foreign language learning process.

2.1. Why use drama?

Drama can be defined as activities involving people in a social context. There is no doubt that effective communication in social situations involves other forms of communication beyond language competence such as the use of gesture, body posture, intonation and other prosodic features. Drama as an active approach to learning consists of participants with roles and situations to be able to engage with, explore and understand the world they live in. Godfrey (2010) explains this as;

This goes beyond language, as social interaction involves communication on multiple levels that cross cultural and language boundaries. By being part of a drama ensemble and participating in a fictitious context, the class is experiencing a shared moment of intensity that involves emotions, facial expressions, gesture, movement and a heightened awareness of others, that would not necessarily be experienced outside the drama

environment. Students are thus freed from the constraints of precision of language that may be required in the conventional language classroom, and are equipped with many other tools with which to communicate meaning' (taken from tomgodfrey.wordpress.com)

Godfrey (2010) maintains that humans are physical, mental and psychological beings. Language teachers need to satisfy learners' whole person needs. That is to say, teachers need to recognise and address students' physical, mental and psychological as well as purely linguistic needs. Likewise, Maley and Duff (2005, pp. 1-2) enumerate the reasons why teachers prefer drama in foreign language classes as follows;

- It integrates language skills in a natural way. Careful listening is a key feature. Spontaneous verbal expression is integral to most of the activities; and many of them require reading and writing, both as part of the input and the output.
- It integrates verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication, thus bringing together both mind and body, and restoring the balance between physical and intellectual aspects of learning.
- It draws upon both cognitive and affective domains, thus restoring the importance of feeling as well as thinking.
- By fully contextualising the language, it brings the classroom interaction to life through an intense focus on meaning.
- The emphasis on whole-person learning and multi-sensory inputs helps learners to capitalise on their strengths and to extend their range. In doing so, it offers unequalled opportunities for catering to learner differences.
- It fosters self-awareness (and awareness of others), self-esteem and confidence; and through this, motivation is developed.
- Motivation is likewise fostered and sustained through the variety and sense of expectancy generated by the activities.
- There is a transfer of responsibility for learning from teacher to learners – which is where it belongs.
- It encourages an open, exploratory style of learning where creativity and the imagination are given scope to develop. This, in turn, promotes risk-taking, which is an essential element in effective language learning.
- It has a positive effect on classroom dynamics and atmosphere, thus facilitating the formation of a bonded group, which learns together.
- It is an enjoyable experience.
- It is low-resource. For most of the time, all you need is a 'roomful of human beings'.

As Maley and Duff (2005) remark, drama has numerous advantages such as contextualization of language, integration of language skills, whole person learning, enhancing self-confidence, high motivation, learner-centeredness, addressing different

learning styles, cooperative learning, and so on. They also provide a format for drama activities to be integrated in lessons.

In the light of the above-mentioned benefits of drama in foreign/second language education, the current study aims at finding answers to the following research questions;

1. Do Nasreddin Hodja jokes include adaptable linguistic elements which the students are able to find out to use in designing drama activities?
2. Can Nasreddin Hodja jokes be exploited to design drama activities to be used in foreign language classes?

3. Method

The study has been structured around the document analysis evaluated in the context of qualitative research. Document analysis is defined as a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents. Similar to other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data are examined and interpreted to elicit meaning and gain understanding (Glenn, 2009).

3.1. Participants

The study was conducted in cooperation with 32 students taking compulsory Drama course offered in an English Language Teacher Education Program in Turkey (ELT) in the fall term of 2015-2016 academic year. 26 female and six male students participated in the study. All of the participants were junior students when the research was conducted.

3.2. Research Design

The current study employs document analysis which is comprised of skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation (Glenn, 2009). The document analysis was carried out within the scope of the drama course offered in and ELT program in Turkey for prospective English language teachers. The course is offered four class hours a week and the main aim of the course is to enable students to integrate drama activities into their teaching practice. To this end, the researcher provided students with randomly selected five books to analyse as the skimming phase of the study. The following table indicates the name of the books and number of the jokes;

Table 1. Analysed Books on Nasreddin Hodja Jokes

<i>Name of the Book</i>	<i>Number of Jokes</i>
Nasreddin Hoca Fıkraları	197
202 Jokes of Nasreddin Hodja	202
Nasreddin Hodja	54
Jokes from Nasreddin Hodja	3
The Old Wit (Nasreddin Hodja)	14
Total	470

As Table 1 makes it clear, students analysed totally 470 jokes in five books on Nasreddin Hodja jokes. In the skimming phase, they only selected the jokes which seem easier to be adapted for the design of drama activities. In the second phase of the document analysis,

the students examined the selected jokes thoroughly to determine the level, linguistic focus, and communicative functions. In the interpretation part which is the last phase of the study, the students decided on which sample jokes they would design and act out. In the designing process, they followed the format used by Maley and Duff (2005). Maley and Duff's (2005) format contains aim, focus, level, time, preparation, procedure, follow-on, variation(s) and note(s) sections.

4. Findings and Sample Drama Activities for Different Levels

Subsequent to three phases of document analysis, the students were able to design 17 drama activities based on Nasreddin Hodja jokes and they acted them out in the classroom. In the light of the analysed jokes and as an answer to the first research question "Do Nasreddin Hodja jokes include adaptable linguistic elements which the students are able to find out to use in designing drama activities?", it can be deduced that most of the Nasreddin Hodja jokes include linguistic elements that students can discover to use in designing drama activities. However, it was found that the students had some difficulties in adapting the jokes for drama activities although they found out several linguistic elements within the jokes. In the interpretation phase of the study, most of the jokes were eliminated by the students because of the existence of more than one linguistic elements to be exploited. They could not decide which one was worth designing the activity. As for the second research question, "Can Nasreddin Hodja jokes be exploited to design drama activities to be used in foreign language classes?", it was noted that Nasreddin Hodja jokes can be highly exploited on the purpose of designing drama activities because the students found numerous linguistic elements, but they stated that the number of jokes containing more dialogues which were regarded as respectively easier for activity design were limited. In order to represent the end products of students, five sample drama activities selected among the students' studies are presented below;

Drama Activity 1

You are Right Too

Once when Nasreddin Hodja was serving as qadi (judge), one of his neighbours came to him with a complaint against a fellow neighbor.

The Hodja listened to the charges carefully, then concluded:

-Yes, dear neighbour, you are right.

Then the other neighbour came to him. The Hodja listened to his defence carefully, then concluded: -Yes, dear neighbour, you are right.

The Hodja's wife, having listened in on the entire proceeding, said to him:

-Husband, both men cannot be right.

The Hodja answered:

-Yes, dear wife, you are right too.

Aim: To practise how to add agreeing thought/comment

Focus: Use of 'too' as an agreeing comment

Level: A1-A2

Time: 5-10 minutes

Preparation: Choose four students to act out

Procedure: One of the students takes the role of Nasreddin Hodja as a Judge, another one acts as his wife, and the other two act out as defendant and complainer.

Follow-on: The students can extend the activity by trying to create new jokes based on the target linguistic focus.

Variation(s): The students can act out another joke covering 'either' in negative sentences.

Note(s): Narration parts in the joke can be assigned to one of the students.

Drama Activity 2

Bear Hunting

One day the Sultan invites Nasreddin to go on a bear hunt with him. Sultan:

-Nasreddin, Come with me tomorrow. I'm going on a bear hunt.

Nasreddin is afraid of bears but he can't say 'no' to the Sultan. Nasreddin:

-Thank you, Sultan. I'll be at the palace early tomorrow morning. Sultan:

-Good! Come at 6 o'clock.

Nasreddin is away for five days. When he returns to his village, he meets his neighbour.

Neighbour:

-So, what was the bear hunt like? Nasreddin:

-It was fantastic! Neighbour:

-How many bears did you kill? Nasreddin:

-None! Neighbour:

"How many bears did you chase?"

Nasreddin:

-None! Neighbour:

-How many bears did you see? Nasreddin:

-None! Neighbour:

-Then, why did you say the bear hunt was fantastic? Nasreddin:

-Because when the sultan invites you to go on a bear hunt and you're afraid of bears, not seeing any bears is fantastic!

Aim: To teach how to ask and answer the quantity

Focus: Use of 'How many'

Level: A1-A2

Time: 5-10 minutes

Preparation: Choose three students to act out

Procedure: One of the students takes the role of Nasreddin Hodja, another one becomes Sultan, and the other one acts out as neighbour.

Follow-on: The students can extend the activity by trying to create new jokes based on the target linguistic focus.

Variation(s): The students can act out another joke covering 'How much'.

Note(s): Narration parts in the joke can be assigned to one of the students.

Drama Activity 3

If I Had That Much Money

Hodja went to the tailor one day and asked:

-This coat I have is too large for me, how much will it cost to have it taken in?

- Two pieces of gold, he replied.

This was quite a high price and Hodja was amazed and said:

-Come on. If I had that much money I would eat a lot of food so that my stomach would get bigger and then my coat would fit me just right!

Aim: To teach how to use conditional sentences (Type 2)

Focus: Using Type 2 conditional sentences (unreal present)

Level: B1

Time: 5-10 minutes

Preparation: Two students, a coat

Procedure: One of the students takes the role of Nasreddin Hodja and the other one becomes a tailor.

Follow-on: The students can extend the activity by trying to create new jokes based on the target linguistic focus and record the activity and present it in the classroom.

Variation(s): The students can act out another joke covering Conditional sentences Type 1 and 3.

Note(s): Narration parts in the joke can be assigned to one of the students.

Drama Activity 4

Leaven Yoghurt Culture into a Lake

Nasreddin Hodja wanted to teach a lesson to idle people. He went to Akshehir Lake with a large bucket full of yoghurt in his hand. He started to throw yoghurt with a spoon to the lake. When bystanders saw him they asked:

-Hodja, what are you doing?

-Leavening yoghurt culture into the lake.

said Hodja. The people there were surprised:

-Hodja, you cannot be serious, how possible is it for the lake to turn into yoghurt?

Hodja replied:

-Just think, what if it will.

Aim: To teach how to use conditional sentences (what if), culture-related vocabulary.

Focus: Using conditional sentences (what if)

Level: B1

Time: 5-10 minutes

Preparation: a few students as bystanders, a student as Hodja

Procedure: One of the students takes the role of Nasreddin Hodja and the others become bystanders.

Follow-on: Students try to create similar jokes using 'what if'

Variation(s): Different variations of the joke can be acted out by changing the setting.

Note(s): Narration parts in the joke can be assigned to one of the students.

Drama Activity 5

The One who has fallen from Tree should come

One day Nasreddin Hodja climbed an apple tree to pick up an apple. As he stretched to pluck an apple from a higher branch, he slipped and fell down. He moaned and groaned with pain when he fell. People gathered around him immediately and said to him:

-Hodja, be patient! Why are you moaning? Aren't you ashamed to cry like a baby!

Hodja got angry and asked them:

-Have you ever fallen down from a tree?

They all said:

-No

Hodja quickly replied:

-then, leave me alone, someone who fell from a tree should come.

Aim: To teach the usage of relative pronoun 'who'
Focus: Using relative pronoun 'who'
Level: B1+
Time: 5-10 minutes
Preparation: a few students as bystanders, a student as Hodja
Procedure: One of the students takes the role of Nasreddin Hodja and the others become bystanders.
Follow-on: Students try to create similar jokes using relative pronoun 'who'
Variation(s): The students can vary the drama activity focusing on other relative pronouns like 'which', 'that', and 'whose'.
Note(s): Narration parts in the joke can be assigned to one of the students.

As shown in the sample activities above, the activities based on Nasreddin Hodja jokes can be extended in line with the linguistic focus which is aimed to be practised. In addition, the following table indicates the other suggested jokes which were designed by the students.

Table 2. Suggested Jokes for Different Linguistic Focus

LINGUISTIC FOCUS	CORRESPONDING JOKES
Talking about past, regular, irregular verbs	The Cauldron Gave Birth The Cook Sells Smoke I was also in it
Talking about the events happening at the moment of speaking	I am Sleeping
Practising conditionals	Where is the Cat? I Know What to Do The Donkey is Lost
Talking about future events	Tomorrow will be the Doomsday
Practising polite request	The Fish
Practising Imperatives	Take the Goat Inside
Talking about Seasons	Complaining about the Seasons
Practising Noun Clauses	What's the Use?

5. Discussion

Considering the very nature of the activities designed by the students, it is obvious that the students produced drama activities with both grammatical and functional objectives. These grammatical and functional objectives can be matched with different levels (from A1 to B1) stated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). When the grammatical objectives which the students determined were past forms of the verbs, imperatives, relative clauses, conditional sentences, present continuous, simple future tense, noun clauses, and etc. As for the functional objectives, the students suggested the functions such as talking about seasons; past, present, future events, requesting, ordering, agreeing, and etc. All these suggestions about the communicative functions can be said to have communicative aspects of daily life. Akkaya (2013) puts it, jokes can be used to teach students frequently used daily expressions without getting them bored. Students can impersonate the characters and situations they may encounter in their daily lives. From this point of view,

what the students suggested as functional objectives in the drama activities support the ideas behind the exploitation of jokes in foreign language education.

Another important issue we can discuss is the concept of familiarity. The students were all learning English as a foreign language in Turkey and they would be language teachers after graduation. They were all familiar with Nasreddin Hodja jokes and in the course of document analysis, it was observed that they really had fun with what they were doing. They were re-designing what they had known since their childhood, but this time with different objectives and with a critical eye. In addition, humour which is available in all Nasreddin Hodja jokes can also contribute to students' learning process. In our study, the students focused on linguistic elements as well as entertaining aspects of the jokes. When they handed in their end products, they stated that they never get bored during the process and they never regarded the course as an ordinary course taken to be successful. This can be attributed to the familiarity of students with Nasreddin Hodja as a cultural figure and hero who has always a moral to teach in each joke. From this point of view, jokes can be thought to be valuable means of integrating values education into learning process.

One important limitation of the study may be related to the levels of the suggested jokes. Since the students mostly endeavoured to uncover how to utilize the linguistic elements in the jokes and focused on the language pieces they would exploit, the overall difficulty of discourse may have been ignored. For example, the first drama activity (see Drama Activity 1) suggested by the students aims to practise how to add agreeing thought/comment in a conversation. However, students who would practise the activity may be exposed to relatively difficult linguistics unit. Nonetheless, the fact that language can be regarded as a whole rather than pieces, it can be tolerated.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The study aims to find answers to whether Nasreddin Hodja jokes can be exploited in the foreign language classes and integrated in drama activities. It also tries to find out that whether the junior students could find out linguistic elements to be used in the drama activities. The study having employed the document analysis method as data interpretation concluded that Nasreddin Hodja jokes can be used for designing drama activities in foreign language classes. The prospective language teachers who were already familiar with a cultural hero from their childhood could modify and adapt the jokes to practise and use them in the learning environment as drama activities. This also made learning fun and they not only learnt but also entertained during the activities. The students tried to incorporate humour, drama, and a cultural hero into English language classes through the activities they designed. There is no doubt that these activities have something more than what they cover as linguistic focus.

The activities also reflect our basic cultural richness and this is significant in terms of value education in primary and secondary schools in Turkey where the Ministry of National Education has recently initiated new curriculum studies. During the designing process of the activities, it has been observed that students act more enthusiastically if the material they are preparing includes something from their local culture, which encourages them to be more productive. In addition, it is well-known that almost each Nasreddin Hodja joke has a moral to teach at the end. From this point of view, it can be concluded that teachers who employ these jokes through drama activities in the foreign language classes can kill even more than two birds with one stone.

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