An Integrated Framework
for the Contextual Analysis of Indigenous Stories

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An Integrated Framework for the Contextual Analysis of Indigenous Stories

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DECLARATION

The work described in this Master Thesis, entitled “An Integrated Framework for the Contextual Analysis of Indigenous Stories” is to the best of the author’s knowledge that of the author except where due reference is made.

The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is becoming increasingly important due to its gradual disappearance in many communities. Consequently, there is need to capture and preserve stories which are a rich depiction of memories of past in societies. However, it is vital to understand the concepts of storytelling from indigenous people’s own perception before embarking into any documentation project that seeks to preserve stories. Hence, this research investigates the concepts of storytelling to identify the key aspects of context involved. In addition, the thesis reviewed the multiplicity of ontological representations, to study the possibility of integrative approach for context embedded story structure. Eventually, the researcher was able to formulate an integrative framework, of which the basic contextual parameters are embedded. To this effect, an evaluation framework was proposed. The proposed framework has its root from the Aristotle’s Rhetorical Model, which consists of three learning elements namely; Narrator, Story and Audience. Finally, the framework was conceptually validated to provide a proof of concept by developing an ontology to represent the contextual knowledge of indigenous stories using the proposed framework.

**Keywords:** Integrative framework, knowledge management, indigenous knowledge, indigenous storytelling, indigenous stories, context
Rangka Kerja Integratif untuk Analisis Kontekstual Kisah Orang Asli

ABSTRAK


Kata Kunci: Kerangka integratif, pengurusan pengetahuan, pengetahuan pribumi, pengisytiharan orang asli, cerita orang asli, konteks
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Oral storytelling predates the written word and computer code by many millennia and in passing it is easy to forget that oral storytelling has been part of all pasts of contemporary. While stories and plots can take place in the metaphysical world, be presented with humour and seem like fairy-tales to outsiders with little relevance to the physical world, they are very functional and foundational in communities that revere oral traditions (Rodil & Winschiers-Theophilus, 2015).

Hunter (2005) describes story as a key part of our legacy of intangible heritage that has been used across time to pass knowledge and culture specific traditions. Stories are often the primary and most important ways of sharing knowledge, ideas, history, as well as safeguarding the cultural heritage (Bidwell & Hardy, 2009; Turin et al., 2013). The stories, thus, function as the ideal ‘knowledge object’, which serve as relevant containers of shared knowledge within communities (Polkinghorne, 1989). Sugiyama (2011) notes that, “stories enable us to make the experiences of others our own, and add them to our episodic memory”. Heyes (2011) explains these stories’ relevance: “there is a timeless element about stories; they carry the wisdom and knowledge of previous generations, yet they often transmit knowledge that is of direct relevance to the future”. The stories reflect social values in a culture that inspires people to pursue a meaningful life and to learn about themselves and the world around them. The tradition of storytelling is indeed shaped by social bonds, roles, structures and protocols of an indigenous community (Bidwell & Winschiers-Theophilus, 2012).
In the past few decades, there has been a growing concern with the preservation of indigenous knowledge (IK) due to its gradual disappearance. This has prompted researchers and ICT professionals with the desire to capture and preserve stories, which are a rich depiction of knowledge and memories of past in communities. However, it has been noted that the focus of current approaches to IK preservation is mainly on developing technology that create archives of stories and local knowledge, which could ultimately result in decontextualized “cultural fossils” (Zaman, 2013). In addition, stories tend to lose meaning when interpreted differently (Ben-Amos, 1977; Ben-Amos, 1993). Even more important are the details of the occasion on which a story is told—including the purpose, personnel involved (e.g., storyteller and audience), the kind of beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, recent events in the locality and many other aspects, which are often overlooked by the current trends (Bascom, 1965; Finnegan, 2012). Therefore, while preserving stories via digital technologies can be a significant approach to preserve parts of indigenous intangible heritage, yet it is vital to understand the concepts of storytelling from the indigenous people’s own perception prior to technical choices (Rodil & Winschiers-Theophilus, 2015).

However, to understand the concepts of indigenous storytelling more appropriately there is a need to look at not only stories but the holistic communicative context within which the performance of storytelling takes place. The aspects of context need to be captured and preserved with stories so that knowledge could be preserved more appropriately. Even the genres of stories in themselves could capture some important implicit information that we are still unable to preserve because of the biased, one-sided and totally decontextualized way of preserving stories. When stories are ripped out of their original context, costly curated information may be lost forever. Hence, the author of this thesis investigates for not only stories but also context (Ben-Amos, 1993; Finnegan, 2012; Desalegn, 2015). Look at a
connected view of aspects of context, which tend to be embedded in the story. To capture and preserve story with aspects of context visual depiction of storytelling scenario is needed, providing room for continuous learning and incremental alignment to a changing outer reality.

1.1.1 Defining Context

For long, ethnographers have understood that the performance of indigenous story cannot be separated from its socio-political contexts (Kaschula, 1999; Kaschula, 2001). Okpewho (1990) in Kaschula (1999) says the ultimate purpose and functions of oral storytelling “are to represent social man in a creative capacity within the context of system of signs” that are recognized by an indigenous community. Gemeda (2008) maintains that through academic approach to the context of indigenous storytelling researchers can give the future generation a vision into fundamental creative spirit of indigenous stories.

In modern terminology, "context" refers to a broadly defined background of a composition or a structure, as well as to the parts that precede and follow a given passage. In the study of indigenous storytelling its use draws upon theories and methods in anthropology, linguistics, socio-linguistics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and coincides with similar usages in literary theory namely history and cultural studies (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992). However, literatures suggest that context does not have a standard definition (Finkelstein et al., 2002; Göker, Myrhau, & Bierig, 2009; Meibauer, 2012; Bhogal & Moore, 2014). Thus, for the purpose of this research, we consider Meibauer’s (2012) definition of context as the relation of a story to the aspects of the situation in which the story has been produced or interpreted. Most researchers would share the idea that such a context contains at least a storyteller, an audience, a communicative act and points in time and space, the knowledge and beliefs of
the audience, as well as storyteller’s persona and identity (Roskelly & Jolliffe, 2005; Meibauer, 2012).

Figure 1.1: Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters – an African Tale (Karen, 2017)

The contextual approach to storytelling emphasizes the study of particular performances or events in which a story appears instead of focusing solely on the content. In this form of analysis, the dynamics of human interactions become a central focus. Hence, it is important to note who performs the particular story, how it is being performed, to whom it is performed, and the response of the audience to that story. All of these factors fit into a discussion of the meaning of a story and it is felt that without contextual information, one cannot truly determine the meanings of stories. The artistic aspect of communicative events is also an important consideration for researchers who utilize this approach (Ben-Amos, 1993; Desalegn, 2015). Bhogal & Moore (2014) acknowledge “ontology” as the key technique through which “context” may be represented and constrained.
1.2 Problem Statement

In the past few decades, there has been a growing concern with the preservation of IK due to its gradual disappearance in communities. This has prompted researchers and ICT professionals with the desire to capture and preserve stories, which are a rich depiction of memories of past in communities. However, Zaman (2013) notes: the focus of current approaches to IK preservation is mainly on developing technologies that create archives of stories and local knowledge, which could ultimately result in decontextualized “cultural fossils”. Consequently, Rodil & Winschiers-Theophilus (2015) emphasize on the need to understand the concepts of storytelling from the indigenous people’s own perception prior to technical choices. The researchers state that each ethnical group carries their own characteristics found in their conceptualization of stories, which need to be analysed to inform preservation efforts.

Conceptualists insist that the concepts of storytelling apply not only to a story but to an event in time when a tradition is performed or communicated. In some way aspects of the realities of related parties needs to be kept in view. The researchers can no longer simply write down or tape-record a story, for the story is just part of each unique event. Generally, the contextual approach adopts socio-historical perspective in which the forms and contents of the story are analysed in the light of their ideological meanings and functions within the socialization process of a particular community (Ben-Amos, 1993; Desalegn, 2015). So, what would be needed? A good account of contextual knowledge and a good representation of it (e.g., ontology). The problems to be addressed in this thesis are precisely these, and the results would be a framework for contextual knowledge and an ontology to represent that knowledge.
1.2.1 Lack of Integrated View of Stories

Researchers make an assumption that knowledge must be contextualized in order to have a meaning (Srinivasan, 2004). More recently, there has been an almost exponential growth in publications on the concepts of storytelling with functional, contextual and ontological approaches (see for instance, Bascom (1054, 1965); Jacobson (1960); Joyner (1975); Ben-Amos (1977-1993); Gemeda (2012); Mulholland, Collins, & Zdrahal (2004) Muleka (2014) etc). However, despite the increase in publications in these areas, an integrated framework for indigenous conceptualization and analysis of stories remains elusive. In addition, Muleka (2014) acknowledges that choice of model in the study of African oral storytelling has been and still remains problematic. This is because researchers in this field have not ventured into inventing models that would be directly relevant to the field. Thus, this thesis aims to propose such an encompassing framework, whereby main the aspects of context can be connected and depicted. There is also a need for a formal way to represent the knowledge using the proposed framework (e.g. ontology).

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the concepts of storytelling, to identify the aspects of context involved.
2. To study the possibility of integrative approach for context embedded story structure.
3. To formulate an integrated framework, of which the main aspects are embedded.
4. To propose an ontological representation of knowledge from the framework.
5. To propose an evaluation framework for the proposed framework:
   a. Evaluate the integrative framework by engaging a community of participants
   b. Model sample stories using the proposed framework
   c. Present story representation of 2 stories where context can now be preserved.
1.4 Research Questions

According to Finnegan (2012), the idea that African stories are above all designed to convey morals has caught the imagination of many researchers. While this is true to a certain extent, lots of questions remain to be asked. In studying the storytelling of any community, we want to learn, for instance, about the views of the people themselves concerning the functions of their stories; about local classifications of different story genres and whether these have any relevance for indigenous assessments of their purpose/intention; about how far individuals, or people in general, are prepared to verbalize their attitude to their stories; about the consistency or otherwise of the actual narrations and audiences involved; and about the relative weighting they would give, perhaps varying in different contexts or at different periods, to the various functions involved such as entertainment, education, humour, elegance, ridicule, obscenity, or moralizing. Hence, the following questions were formed to guide the research:

a. What are the concepts of indigenous storytelling, and what are the key aspects of context involved? In other words, what does indigenous storytelling entail?

b. How are contexts modelled? Or how can we capture and preserve the aspects of context that are involved in the performance of indigenous storytelling? How can a framework be formulated for this?

   i. Are there differences in characterization of storyteller, audience and protagonist or communicative functions across story genres?

   ii. Can there be a scientific representation of this knowledge (e.g. ontology)?
1.5 Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 1 presents background of the study. The chapter also explains the rationale behind the study and then proceeded with the formulation of relevant research objectives and research questions. Chapter 2 presents a review of literature. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology. Chapter 4 contains the main contributions. It introduces the proposed integrative framework which serves as an analytical framework. More significantly, it proposes an ontological representation of the knowledge contained in the framework. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of sample stories, with the story representation of two stories where context can be preserved, together with the ontological representation. Chapter 6 presents findings from a card sorting workshop on the concepts of indigenous storytelling, used to validate the framework’s aspects. Chapter 7 gives the conclusion, recommendations and the directions for future work.

Figure 1.2: Traditional Music in Northern Nigeria (Ogunfuyi, 2015)
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The need for contextual approach to develop an integrative framework that addresses the unique aspects of indigenous storytelling has been identified. The chapter explores the theoretical gaps in the field of research and practice. The first section describes the indigenous and non-indigenous researcher’s standpoints on indigenous storytelling. The first section also focuses the need to study indigenous storytelling, the use of digital storytelling and the need to understand change and continuity. The second section explains two approaches: contextual approach and ontological approach by analysing existing models/framework for storytelling. Based on the literature review, the final part of this chapter explores the aspects of appropriate conceptualization and preservation of indigenous storytelling, summarises the comparison of current approaches and reveals the gaps in existing approaches. Hence with, objectives 1 and 2 have been addressed.

2.1 Definitions of Indigenous Storytelling

Various phrases or terms have been used to refer to an orally performed culture (Ben-Amos, 1971). Based on the existing literature, the term indigenous storytelling, folklore, orature, oral literature, folk literature or traditional literature, are used interchangeably (Finnegan, 2012; Kaboré, 2014). “Indigenous storytelling” has in recent times become a popular research topic in academic and development circles. However, defining and describing the concept of indigenous storytelling or establishing the research boundaries for studying the subject was not always an easy task. Different scholars have different definitions of indigenous storytelling (Ben-Amos, 1971). An interesting classification of these definitions is from Non-indigenous vs. Indigenous standpoints.
2.1.1 Non-Indigenous Standpoint

Definitions of indigenous storytelling are as numerous and diverse as the versions of a well-known story. Both semantic and theoretical differences have contributed to this proliferation. The Swedish, the Indian and German researchers all imply slightly different meanings that the English term cannot syncretize wholly. Similarly, anthropologists and students of literature have projected their own bias into their definitions of indigenous oral storytelling. In fact, for each of them oral storytelling became the exotic topic, to which they were attracted but which, alas, was not in their own domain. Thus, while anthropologists regarded oral storytelling as literature, scholars of literature defined it as culture. Folklorists themselves resorted to enumerative, intuitive, and operational definitions; yet, while all these certainly contributed to the clarification of the nature of oral storytelling, at the same time they circumvented the main issue, namely, the isolation of the unifying thread that joins jokes and myths, gestures and legends, costumes and music into a single category of knowledge. The difficulties experienced in defining oral storytelling are real. They result from the nature of oral storytelling itself and are rooted in the historical development of the concept (Ben-Amos, 1971). Oral storytelling cannot be separated from certain sociocultural, historical and linguistic frameworks.

2.1.2 Indigenous Standpoint

Indigenous researchers consider oral storytelling as a way of life than just “story” for entertainment. According to Rodil and Winschiers-Theophilus:

Oral storytelling predates the written word and computer code by millennia which have been part of all pasts of contemporary communities. While narratives and plots can take place in the metaphysical world, be presented with humor and seem like fairytales to outsiders with little relevance to the physical world, they are very functional and foundational for communities where
storytelling is enacted. Essentially, storytelling was (and in some communities still is) a mode for teaching and learning. In indigenous communities storytelling has enabled children to learn from collective experiences (Rodil & Winschiers-Theophilus, 2015).

As exemplified from the Pacific Coast of Vancouver Island, first nation people’s stories ‘Haa-huu-pah’:

are not fairy tales or entertaining stories for children—they are lived values that form the basis for Indigenous governance and regeneration. The experiential knowledge and living histories of haa-huu-pah comprise part of the core teachings that Indigenous families transmit to future generations” (Corntassel, Chaw-win-is & T’lakwadzi, 2009).

For the purpose of this research we adopted Ben-Amos’s (1971) definition of oral storytelling as:

an organic phenomenon in the sense that it is an integral part of culture. Any divorce of tales, songs, or sculptures from their indigenous locale, time, and society inevitably introduces qualitative changes into them. The social context, the cultural attitude, the rhetorical situation, and the individual aptitude are variables that produce distinct differences in the structure, text, and texture of the ultimate verbal, musical, or plastic product. The audience itself, be it children or adults, men or women, a stable society or an accidental grouping, affects the kind of folklore genre and the manner of presentation.

The definition highlights two important aspects of indigenous oral storytelling: first the sociocultural and historical system where the story resides, and the second, the dynamic nature of indigenous storytelling. Thus, within the scope of this research we consider Furniss’s (1996) definition of story as an umbrella term, denoting any kind of message, whether explicit or implied behind a proverb or any other referential device.