

<https://doi.org/10.34142/2709-7986.2024.29.2.25>

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND AESOPIANISATION: WHEN THE POPULARITY OF FABLES UNLOCKS SPANISH

ІНОЗЕМНІ МОВИ ТА ЕЗОПІАНІЗАЦІЯ: КОЛИ ПОПУЛЯРНІСТЬ БАЙОК ВІДКРИВАЄ ІСПАНСЬКУ

Received: 17/07/2024

Accepted: 17/08/2024

Kassim Boudjelal SAFIR

Ph.D. in Psychopedagogy, Faculty of Letters and Languages,
Mustapha Stambouli University, Mascara, Algeria.

✉ E-Mail: safirreading@yahoo.comID <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8902-3679>

How to Cite (APA Style):

Safir, K. B. (2024). Foreign languages and Aesopianisation: When the popularity of fables unlocks Spanish. *Educational Challenges*, 29(2), 372–387. <https://doi.org/10.34142/2709-7986.2024.29.2.25>

ABSTRACT

Purpose. This article explores the concept of the 'Aesopianisation' of other languages, focusing on the idea of using Aesop's fables as a language learning aid. The fable of "The Fox and the Grapes" serves as an example of the widespread popularity of Aesop's timeless stories, making them an ideal resource to unlock related languages, such as Spanish.

Methodology. The integration of beloved fables into reading comprehension and classroom discussion captivates students' imaginations and may help to solve one of the most daunting challenges in education: mastering analytical reading. Employing content analysis, this article delves into the application of narrative popularity effect (NPE) (1), linguistic context predictability (LCP) (2), lexical interlingual cognates (LIC)

Мета. У цій статті досліджується концепція «езопіанізації» інших мов, що зосереджено на ідеї використання байок Езопа для допомоги у вивченні іноземної мови. Байка про «Лисицю та виноград» є прикладом широкої популярності вічних історій Езопа, що робить їх ідеальним джерелом для розкриття споріднених з іспанською мов.

Методологія. Інтеграція улюблених байок у процес розуміння прочитаного, обговорення прочитаного захоплює увагу слухачів і може вирішити одну з найскладніших проблем у навчанні: оволодіння аналітичним читанням. Використовуючи аналіз контенту, ця стаття заглиблюється в застосування ефекту популярності наративів (1), передбачуваності мовного контексту (2), лексичних міжмовних спорідненостей (3) і

© Kassim Boudjelal SAFIR, 2024

Foreign Languages and Aesopianisation: When the Popularity of Fables Unlocks Spanish © 2024 by Kassim Boudjelal SAFIR is licensed under **Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International**. To view a copy of the license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

(3), and collocational patterns (CP) (4) as four useful linguistic tools to solve one of the most daunting educational challenges: unlocking a foreign language through detailed analytical reading.

Results. The findings reveal a remarkable ability of these tools to extract the lexicon and structures from ten selected popular fables in Spanish, underscoring the potential efficacy of this approach in language learning.

Conclusions. The study suggests that combining linguistic and cultural awareness can be a powerful tool for learning foreign languages, demonstrating that the 'Aesopianisation' of a language is indeed possible.

Keywords: Cognates, collocational patterns, cultural awareness, linguistic context predictability, narrative popularity effect.

шаблонів спілкування (4) як чотирьох корисних лінгвістичних інструментів для вирішення однієї з найскладніших освітніх проблем: вивчення іноземної мови через детальне аналітичне читання.

Результати. Отримані дані показують дивовижну здатність цих інструментів покращувати лексикон і опанування лексичних структури з десяти вибраних популярних байок іспанською мовою, підкреслюючи потенційну ефективність цього підходу у вивченні іноземної мови.

Висновки. Дослідження показує, що поєднання мовної та культурної обізнаності може бути потужним інструментом для вивчення іноземних мов, демонструючи, що «езопування» мови справді можливе.

Ключові слова: запозичення, колокаційні моделі, культурна обізнаність, передбачуваність мовного контексту, ефект популярності наративу.

INTRODUCTION

While not a fable itself, the following scenario mirrors one. The boy represents language learners worldwide. The teacher embodies those teaching foreign languages to challenged students tired of ineffective methods. The linguist is akin to an Aesopian hero, armed with four magical tools: the global popularity of Aesop's stories, the predictability of linguistic contexts, lexical borrowing between languages and collocational patterns.

This 'Aesopianisation' of language – a neologism – involves leveraging the popularity of Aesop's narratives as well as related cultural and linguistic elements to decipher any story written in a foreign language. There have been timid attempts to use fables to learn languages. However, none of them has emphasised the use of the four linguistic tools together, while taking advantage of the incredible popularity of old narratives. Therefore, and to gain time, raising awareness about the linguistic potential of Aesop's fables is more crucial than ever before.

This study presents an imaginative approach to enriching Spanish language learning through drawing inspiration from the timeless charm of Aesop's fables. By weaving together the four linguistic tools – narrative popularity effect (NPE), linguistic context predictability (LCP), lexical interlingual cognates (LIC) and collocational patterns (CP) – we propose a method that breathes life into the curriculum. The integration of beloved fables into reading comprehension and classroom discussion captivates students' imaginations and may help to solve one of the most daunting challenges in education: mastering analytical reading.

As students delve into these stories, they encounter cognates between Spanish and other languages. This forges connections and deepens their understanding of word meanings. Through comparative vocabulary activities and cognate identification exercises, this lexical journey becomes even more illuminating (García, 2022).

Furthermore, the magic of common collocations within the fables enhances students' linguistic intuition. Collocation analysis tasks raise learners' awareness of how to apply these patterns to their own language use. This may foster fluency and confidence. This method transforms the classroom into a vibrant learning ecosystem.

To assess the impact of this innovative approach, formative assessments, student feedback and comparative analysis of learning outcomes with and without fables can be employed. This blend of practical pedagogical strategies and theoretical concepts underscores the profound potential of Aesopian principles in language education. By harmonising these elements, we offer a more engaging and effective pathway to mastering Spanish. For sure, the wisdom of ancient tales can indeed illuminate modern learning.

Aesop's fables stand as timeless narratives that have crossed generations, brought to life through the guise of anthropomorphic animals (Handford, 2010). Their enduring presence in our cultural consciousness lies in their universal themes and relatable characters (Meynell, 2017). These fables, with their simplicity and accessibility, bridge age gaps (Morgan, 1995). They are even becoming bedtime tales for elders (Robinson, 2010).

Through tales of the repercussions of greed, the virtues of diligence, and the significance of compassion, Aesop's narratives resonate across diverse epochs (Tompkins, 1995). Beyond their cultural significance, Aesop's fables serve as valuable tools for language acquisition (Goldman *et al.*, 1984). Thus, their popularity extends beyond mere popular stories to tell children to send them to sleep.

Moreover, delving into the linguistic realms depicted within Aesop's fables unveils an invaluable strategy for reinforcing language proficiency (Balla, 2000). These tales intricately weave together a tapestry of language elements encompassing vocabulary, grammar structures, idiomatic expressions and cultural subtleties. They also allow language learners to deepen their comprehension of lexical usage within a new context.

Consider the fable "The Lion and the Mouse", where readers encounter a lexicon intertwined with themes of power dynamics, reflective of sociological constructs (Patterson, 1991). The very notions of power and lion evoke imagery of roaring, devouring and clawing, illustrating the exhaustive nuances that aid in predictability and understanding. Nuancing is central when reading a text in context.

Furthermore, exploring lexical interlingual cognates between English and Spanish is similar to a linguistic game (Mohammad & Idris, 2022). Recognising shared words or akin roots between English and Spanish empowers learners to decipher unfamiliar vocabulary with informed guesses. Moreover, the gamified aspect of this approach injects a sense of fun into language learning (Al-Dosakee & Ozdamli, 2021).

Collocations are word combinations that naturally occur together and are widely used in language. By analysing how words are used together in these fables, we can gain insights into common collocations in both English and Spanish. For example, in the fable "The Boy Who Cried Wolf", we encounter the collocation 'cry wolf'.

As a result, we can never repeat sufficiently that delving into the linguistic realms depicted within Aesop's fables unveils a golden strategy based on four valuable linguistic tools for FL learners all over the planet.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

– Narrative Popularity Effect (NPE)

Stories, whether based on real events or fiction, have a long history dating back over 30,000 years, as suggested by historical sources (Boyd, 2010). Some narratives can be traced back to around 1500 BCE, found in ancient texts such as the Rig Veda (Cohen, 2017). Initially, stories were depicted through cave drawings, illustrating the daily activities of our ancestors.

Both children and adults are captivated by stories, often recalling tales from their youth. Stories serve various social functions, being used to influence behaviour, raise awareness (Keen, 2015) or inspire change (Kottler, 2015). They facilitate social interactions, and entertain while conveying truths through fiction or reality. Stories often include human, animal or object characters, using personification and allegory (Korhonen, 2019). They tackle social issues, showing consequences for 'anti-social' behaviours and offering resolutions (Holzberg, 2002).

Reflecting values and wisdom, stories are deeply ingrained in cultures, often borrowing from each other. Nations preserve their myths and legends (Robinson & Wilson, 2023), viewing them as cultural and historical treasures. These narratives are protected through academic processes, and, for example, Dracula represents only a portion of this rich heritage.

Fables are concise narratives that reflect various aspects of human life. Their brevity has contributed to their enduring popularity, especially among post-millennials, despite the competition from social media and longer literary works (Butow et al., 2022). These stories, often featuring animals, humans and other elements, convey morals either explicitly or subtly.

Aesop, a legendary figure known for his fables, is believed to have crafted over 300 tales that 'highlight human weaknesses' (Singh, 2015). Although no written works attributed to Aesop survive (McCafferty, 2021), his stories have been transmitted through oral tradition. Aesop's influence on literature is profound, inspiring authors such as Jean de La Fontaine, Lewis Carroll and Rudyard Kipling.

The stories, often featuring animals behaving like humans, are relatable and engaging. Their brevity and simplicity make them memorable and shareable. The morals, typically centred around virtues like honesty, hard work and kindness, remain relevant today. They often find their equivalent in real life (Kollias, 2015).

Despite the rise of social media and AI content, Aesop's fables remain familiar (Short & Ketchen, 2005). They have been translated into numerous languages and adapted into various forms of media. The stories are frequently encountered in childhood and revisited throughout life. Today, fables are commonly used in schools to teach ethical principles and critical thinking (Ummah, 2022).

– Linguistic context predictability (LCP)

Linguistic context predictability (LCP) is a concept that refers to the ability to anticipate or predict the meaning of words or phrases based on the surrounding context (Kintsch, 1988). In the context of Aesop's fables, LCP plays a significant role in language learning and comprehension. For example, in the fable "The Lion and the Mouse", the setting of

the story in a forest or jungle immediately suggests the presence of certain elements such as trees, animals and predators, such as lions.

Words like 'prey', 'hunt', 'hunters', 'roar', 'claws' and 'teeth' are likely to appear, given the context of a lion as one of the main characters. Additionally, the context of the fable helps to predict actions or events that may occur. For instance, words like 'jump', 'eat' and 'devour' are predictable in a story involving interactions between animals. The theme of power dynamics, fear and survival further adds to the predictability of certain words and phrases.

In fables, context plays a central role in setting the tone and providing clues about the language and vocabulary used (Seken, 2021). It encompasses elements such as the setting and characters, and the underlying moral or message of the story. These elements work together to create a cohesive narrative that entertains and educates. For instance, in "The Tortoise and the Hare", the context of the slow tortoise and the fast hare in a race sets the tone for the story.

The contrast between the characters can hint at the outcome. Hares, tortoises and foxes cannot have the same characters. They communicate different norms and values in society from a sociological Aesopian perspective. Context also provides clues to meaning (Leckie-Tarry, 1995). For example, fables set in rural settings may feature vocabulary related to nature, while those set in urban environments may focus on social interactions.

A key advantage of using Aesop's fables is their contextual richness. The repetitive structure of stories offers a predictable framework for learners (Fallon, 2024). This predictability builds vocabulary and grammar. Moreover, adding the cultural insights embedded in the fables gives more depth to the stories in terms of styles of communication. So, by studying the lexical context and collocational patterns in these narratives, learners can improve their understanding of language structure, usage and cultural nuance.

– **Lexical Interlingual Cognates (LIC)**

Lexical interlingual cognates (LIC) are crucial in visual word recognition (Whitford, & Joannis, 2021). The term refers to the process by which languages share the same linguistic blood (Otwinowska, 2016). When LIC occur, we say that those two similar languages are blood relatives. The presence of cognates is often due to cultural or historical influences, such as trade, migration or colonisation.

In the context of Aesop's fables, which have been translated into numerous languages over the centuries, we can observe examples of LIC. For instance, in the Spanish version of "The Tortoise and the Hare", the word for 'tortoise' is 'tortuga', borrowed from the Latin "'tortūca'. Similarly, in the French version, the word for 'hare' is 'lièvre', borrowed from the Latin 'lepus', which also gave the noun 'lapin'.

Many instances of cognates/borrowings can be mentioned, for example English 'lion' and Spanish 'león' (borrowed from Latin 'leo'). These examples illustrate how words from one language are borrowed and adapted into another language. They often retain some of their original phonetic and semantic features. This process of adaptation is a natural part of language evolution and contributes to the richness and diversity of languages worldwide. However, false cognates can be tricky (Chamizo Domínguez, 2008). To

avoid confusion, beginners at earlier stages can equip themselves with a simple list of these borrowings and cognates available online.

– Collocational Patterns (CP)

‘Collocations are both pervasive in language and difficult for language learners, even at an advanced level.’ (Nesselhauf, 2005). However, collocational patterns (CP) in Aesop's fables offer an easy resource for language learners, especially when comparing different languages like English, Spanish and French. These patterns provide a window into how words are naturally combined and used together in each language.

For example, in the fable "The Boy Who Cried Wolf", we encounter the collocation ‘cry wolf’, meaning to give a false alarm. This collocation illustrates how the verb ‘cry’ is paired with the noun ‘wolf’ to convey a specific meaning beyond their individual definitions. In Spanish, this collocation could be translated as ‘gritar lobo’ which is also very similar to the French ‘crier au loup’, /K/ sound being very close to /g/ sound in addition to ‘lobo’ and the French cognate ‘loup’, /p/ and /b/ being both bilabial.

Similarly, in the fable “The Tortoise and the Hare”, we find the collocation ‘fast asleep’, meaning to be deeply asleep. This pairing of ‘fast’ with ‘asleep’ forms a common collocation in English. In Spanish, this could be translated as ‘profundamente dormido’. By examining the collocations in Aesop's fables, language learners can not only improve their vocabulary but also gain a deeper understanding of how words are used together in natural language (Nesselhauf, 2005).

For instance, in the fable “The Tortoise and the Hare”, the collocation ‘slow and steady’ is used to describe the tortoise's approach. This pairing of adjectives illustrates a common collocation in English. In Spanish, a collocation might be ‘lento y constante’, which combines adjectives to convey a similar meaning. In French, the collocation ‘lapin rapide’ (fast hare) could be used to describe the hare. This pairing of adjective and noun demonstrates how words are commonly combined in French to describe characters or objects.

By analysing and comparing CP across languages, learners can ‘gain good understanding on how languages differ’ (Ellis, 2016), for each language is unique. Moreover, studying those patterns in Aesop's fables provides learners with practical examples of language usage in narrative contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses content analysis to examine selected linguistic elements in ten Aesop's fables, focusing on popularity (1), predictability in linguistic context (2), lexical borrowings (3), and collocational patterns (4). Any language learners around the world can equip themselves with the four tools mentioned above to unlock or ‘Aesopianise’ the content of the ten fables. The chosen fables are among the most popular in Aesop's collection, which includes a long series of less well-known fables, such as “The Hare and His Ears”.

1. The Tortoise and the Hare
2. The Boy who Cried Wolf
3. The Fox and the Grapes
4. The Ant and the Grasshopper

5. The Lion and the Mouse
6. The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs
7. The Crow and the Pitcher
8. The Miller, his Son, and their Ass
9. The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse
10. The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

The present paper is based on the hypothesis that equipping students of Spanish with the linguistic principles and notions listed below may make the language more engaging and edutaining, leading to an increased cultural awareness. This approach highlights the universality of Aesop's fables as valuable linguistic treasures for second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language acquisition (FLA) learners. Those principles and notions are:

1. Narrative popularity effect (NPE) of Aesop fables (see Introduction and Theoretical Framework)
2. Linguistic context predictability (LCP) (see Theoretical Framework)
3. Lexical interlingual cognates (LIC) (see Theoretical Framework)
4. Collocational patterns (CP) (see Theoretical Framework)

RESULTS

– **Narrative Popularity Effect (NPE) in the Ten Fables**

The over popularity of the ten fables is undeniably the main linguistic tool that any learner may utilise. Moreover, their timelessness makes them eternal bed time stories for everyone, even older people. “The Tortoise and the Hare”, for instance, can be translated as ‘La liebre y la tortuga’. Spanish people are familiar with the following proverb ‘Más vale ser constante que ser valiente’, that can be translated as ‘It's better to be consistent than brave’. The proverbialisation of the majority of Aesop’s fables is a way to culturally assimilate narrative in language learning strategies. Table 1 includes more details about the ten proverbialisable fables.

Table 1

The proverbialisability of Aesop’s fables

	Fable	Spanish translation	Spanish proverb	English translation
1	The Tortoise and the Hare	“La liebre y la tortuga’	‘Más vale ser constante que ser valiente’	It's better to be consistent than brave
2	The Boy who Cried Wolf	‘El niño que gritaba “lobo”’	‘Mentira repetida, verdad conocida’	Repeated lie, known truth
3	The Fox and the Grapes	‘El zorro y las uvas’	‘Es fácil menospreciar lo que no se puede alcanzar’	It's easy to scorn what you cannot reach

4	The Ant and the Grasshopper	'La cigarra y la hormiga'	'A quien madruga, Dios le ayuda'	God helps those who get up early
5	The Lion and the Mouse	'El león y el ratón'	'La unión hace la fuerza'	Unity makes strength
6	The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs	'La gallina de los huevos de oro'	'No mates a la gallina de los huevos de oro'	Don't kill the hen that lays the golden eggs
7	The Crow and the Pitcher	'El cuervo y la jarra'	'La necesidad aguza el ingenio'	Necessity sharpens ingenuity
8	The Miller, his Son, and their Ass	'El molinero, su hijo y el asno'	'No se puede contentar a todo el mundo'	You can't please everyone
9	The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse	'El ratón de ciudad y el ratón de campo'	'Mejor un plato de paz que un barril de pleitos'	Better a dish of peace than a barrel of disputes
10	The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing	'El lobo con piel de cordero'	'Las apariencias engañan'	Appearances can be deceiving

– **Linguistic Context Predictability (LCP) in Aesop's Fables**

Context plays a huge role in text comprehension. It connects the writer with the reader. Any information that helps to make sense of a text, literary or not, can be considered as context, even a seemingly insignificant comma. Context may take many forms.

It can be physical, historical, rhetorical/situational, authorial, semantic, syntactic or holistic (inferential). Aesop has wittingly hinted at some cues explicitly, with other twisted implicit ones, in a game-like manner, as if inviting us to discover his subtle messages. This has made his fables into a timeless literary treasure. Most of Aesop's fables break historical boundaries, often occurring at an unspecified time. This allows them to be timeless and their morals to apply to any era. However, and for a better interpretation, almost all the fables subtly hint at a physical context, letting readers guess the setting.

For instance, in "The Hare and the Tortoise", the setting is a natural environment, likely a path through a field or forest, where the characters would logically exist. The presence of the hare hints at speed and thus an arrogant overconfident antagonist, and we expect to find actions and interactions that mirror those psycho-social traits. Despite his slowness, the protagonist – the tortoise – is expected to show humility, confidence, perseverance and challenge, and we expect to find actions and interactions that reflect those values.

In "The Boy who Cried Wolf", the events unfold in a rural area, specifically in a pasture near a dark forest. The village is within shouting distance. In "The Fox and the Grapes", the story takes place perhaps in a forest or vineyard, in a place where foxes might roam.

"The Ant and the Grasshopper" is an exception. The historical context is subtly presented. The fable takes place in late autumn. Winter is at the door, but the story happens outdoors in a sunny area. A family of ants is busy working. The setting suggests a natural environment, likely a field or a place where ants can be found. For "The Mouse and the

Lion”, the story unfolds again in a natural environment, seemingly a forest where both lions and mice might be found.

Another exception is “The Crow and the Pitcher”, where the time context is subtly pointed at. The fable is set during hot, dry weather, which creates a context of scarcity and urgency for the characters. The story takes place outdoors, likely in an arid environment. A simple road leading to a market is the setting for “The Miller, his Son and the Ass”.

In “The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse”, the narrative begins in a house in the countryside then moves to a house in the city, creating a clear contrastive picture. The tenth and last narrative primarily takes place in a pasture. It moves to the sheep pen later, where the shepherd keeps his sheep.

Character wise, the narratives avoided sophistication. Usually, two or maximum three characters are enough to tell a story so relatable to our everyday life that almost every human can recognise him/herself. In terms of semantics, syntax and lexis, Aesop’s narratives are full of linguistic – pragmatic mainly – elements making stories approachable for any learner. However, those learners should be made aware of the possibility of unlocking meaning using the four aforementioned tools in a holistic way.

The following example will explain the holistic approach in more detail, including all the useful linguistic elements. In Aesop’s gems, we expect to find actions and interactions that mirror the psycho-social traits of the central characters he wanted us to discover. Aesop is not just entertaining children; he is also educating adults through creating and then undoing our potential actions/inactions as if we lived them and turned back the hands of time at the end.

The presence of specified and well-described characters makes some actions and reactions predictable in an almost game-like activity. The boy is expected to shout ‘Wolf! Wolf!’ and to laugh at the villagers. The villagers are expected to drop everything, arm themselves with sticks or sharp tools and run to save the boy and the sheep. A real wolf is expected to snarl, attack, kill and devour. We can easily predict who will do what and how they will act / react, and which adjectives and adverbs the writer will use. These examples show the complementarity of the elements we explained above. In the sentence, ‘Lo único que podía hacer para divertirse era hablar con su perro o tocar su flauta de pastor’, we can easily predict the boy’s two pastimes.

Without knowing Spanish vocabulary or grammar, one can translate that structure as follows: ‘The (or his) unique entertainment are ... (thing nº 1/unknown) or playing with shepherd’s flute (thing nº 2 known).’ So, we can infer that ‘tocar’ is a verb that means to play. No need to be a linguist when we possess the linguistic tool of cognates combined with LCP and of course some basic grammatical notions, not necessarily Spanish grammar. We expect some social values to pop up in the story as well, such as lying, deceiving, being honest, losing trust. One can notice that almost all the different types of contexts – whether linguistic or pragmatic – can be utilised leading to a holistic approach.

– **Lexical Interlingual Cognates (LIC) in Aesop’s Fables**

Lexical interlingual cognates are crucial in word recognition. Language learners can easily recognise lexis with a basic awareness of cognates, false cognates and semi-

cognates. If we take “The Tortoise and the Hare” as an example, we notice the presence of a multitude of recognisable words such as *rapido, constante, tortuga, idea, competidores*.

In Table 2, the words in brackets are the most accurate translation. So, instead of ‘rapid’, the word ‘fast’ is closer in meaning. The number of cognates differs from one fable to another. However, the ten fables share a surprising 14.06 % of cognates, a significant number for a beginner. “The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse” came first with an impressive 29.65%, more than one quarter of the word count of the fable.

Table 2

Spanish/English cognates in Aesop’s fables

Fable	Spanish cognates	English cognates
1 The Tortoise and the Hare	rápido-constante-tortuga-idea-aceptó-competidores-alinearon-línea-comenzó-confiada-velocidad-decidió-mucho-tiempo-avanzando-ritmo-concentrada-finalmente-pasó-continuo-final-embargo-tarde-cruzó-primero-moraleja-historia-progreso- eficaz	rapid (fast)-constant (steady)-tortoise-idea-accepted-competitors-lined-up-line-commenced (started)-confident-velocity(speed)-decided-(much) long-time-advancing- rhythm (pace)-concentrated-finally-passed-continuous-final (end)-embargo-tard (evening)-cruzed (crossed)-primary (first)-moral-history (story)- progress- efficacious (effective).
2 The Fox and the Grapes	Pastorcillo-bosque- oscuro-único-divertirse-flauta- pastor-bosque- tranquilo-lobo-plan divertirse-atacaba-emocionados-encontraron-días-tarde-Pastorcillo-tarde-realmente-terrorizado, - Muchas-Maestro- observando	pastor (Bible meaning of shepherd)-bush (forest)-obscure unique (alone) -divert (have fun)-flute-shepherd-forest-calm-wolf-plan -divert (have fun)-attack- emotionally (excited)-encountered (found)- days-tardy (late)-shepherd-tardy (late)-really-terrorized (terrified), - much (many)-master-observing
3 The Boy Who Cried Wolf	un- día- largo- jugo- boca-nostalgia-grupo-primera-mucho-distancia-en vano-disgusto-mucho-pretenden-despreciar-intent	one(a) day--large (long)- juice-buccal (mouth)-nostalgia-group-first-much (a lot)-distance-in vain-disgust-much (a lot)-pretend-depreciate (despise)-intent
4 The Ant and the Grasshopper	Otoño-una-familia- -durante-violín- humildemente-no-pasado-no tiempo-ocupado-música-disgusto- continuaron	Autumn-one (a)-family- during-violin- humiliated (humble) not-past-not-occupied (busy)-time-music-disgust- continued
5 The Lion and the Mouse	león-dormido-bosque-ratoncita- tímida- escapar-cruzó- despertado-enorme-furiosamente-criatura pobre-	lion-dormitory-bush (forest)-rat-timid-escape-cruze (crossed))-despair-enormous-furiously-creature-poor-rat-favour-much-

		ratón-favor-mucho- generoso- finalmente-días-bosque- incapaz-liberarse-furioso- reconoció- rápidamente- encontró -grandes-separó	generous-finally-day-bush (forest)-incapable-liberty (freed)- furiously-recognised- rapidly(quickly)-encountered (found)-grand (great)-separated
6	The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs	Compatriot-maravilloso-imaginar-visitaba-brillante-mercado-mucho-tiempo-impacientara- suficientemente-rápido-terminado-contar-ocurrió- idea- precioso	Compatriot-marvellous- imagine-visited-brilliant- market-much (long)-time- impatient-sufficient- rapid (quick)-terminated (finished)- counting (telling)-occurred- idea-precious (beautiful)
7	The Crow and the Pitcher	Cuervo- período- tiempo- encontrar- encontró- mucho- intentara- idea- fin- suficientemente- necesidad- ingenio	Crow- period- time- find- encounter (found)- much (a lot)- intend (try)- idea- end- sufficient - necessity – ingenuity
8	The Miller, his Son, and their Ass	Un- día -mucho- tiempo- molinero- dirigían- mercado- asno- vender- condujeron- posibilidades-venderlo- mantenían- en buenas condiciones- estúpido -tres – molinero- avanzado- pasaron- tres- mercaderes- respeta- joven- molinero- complacer- comerciantes- vender- exclamó- asno- molinero- molesto- comenzado- nuevo- grupo- personas- crimen- bestia- capaces- transporter- pobre- criatura- vender –otro- molinero- rápidamente- tiempo- mercado- poste- gran multitude- personas- vision- asno- desagradaba- pobre- molinero- partió- complacer- complacido- asno-intentas complacer	One-day-a-long-time-miller- directed (led)-market-ass- vend (sell)-led-possibilities- vend (sell)-maintained -in-good- condition- stupid -three -miller- advanced- passed- three- merchants- respect- young- miller- compliment- merchants- vend (sell)- exclaimed- ass- miller- molested (annoyed)- commenced (started)- new- group – persons (people)- crime- beast- capable- transport- poor- creature- vend (sell) -other- miller- rapidly (quickly)- time- market- post (pole)- grand (great) multitude- persons (people)- vision- ass- disagreeable - poor- miller- parted (left)- please – compliment – ass – intend (try)- compliment
9	The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse	ratón -visitó –pariente- sirvió- ratón –moderación- claro- cortesía- larga- tranquilamente- ratón –lujos- delicias- urbana- descrito-día- ratón- acompañara- aceptó- mansion- ratón- encontraron- banquete- jaleas- deliciosos- ratón- imaginar- justo- delicioso- ratones- permanecieron- durante- mucho- tiempo- respirar-	rat (mouse) -visited –parent (relative)- served- rat (mouse) - moderation- clear- courtesy- large (long)- tranquilly(quietly)- rat (mouse) -luxuries- delicacies (delights)- urban- described- day- rat (mouse)- accompanied- accepted- mansion- rat (mouse)- encountered (found)- banquet- jellies- delicious- rat (mouse) – imagine- just (fair)- delicious- rats (mice)-

	aventuraron- regresar- banquete- entraron- sirvientes- Ratón –Ratón- tiempo- suficiente- lujos- delicias- prefiero- paz- abundancia- medio- incertidumbre	permanent (stayed)- during (for)- much (a long)- time- respire (breathe)- ventured- regress (return)- banquet- entered- servants- rat (mouse)- rat (mouse)- time- sufficient - luxuries- delicacies prefer- peace- abundance-medium- uncertainty	
10	The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing	suficiente- vigilancia- encontró- día- rápidamente- entró- sucedió- dirigió- primero- resulta- perjudicado- propio	sufficient- vigilance- encountered (found)- day- rapidly (quickly)- entered - directed –first- results- injured (harmed)- property (own)

Table 3

Aesop's fables with the largest number of cognates

Nº	Fable	Total Number of words	Number of cognates	%
1	The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse	172	51	29.65
2	The Miller, his Son, and their Ass	381	65	17.06
3	The Fox and the Grapes	157	24	15.28
4	The Lion and the Mouse	185	27	14.59
5	The Tortoise and the Hare	192	28	14.58
6	The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs	142	16	11.26
7	The Crow and the Pitcher	110	12	10.90
8	The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing	111	12	10.81
9	The Ant and the Grasshopper	128	13	10.15
10	The Boy who Cried Wolf	252	16	06.34
Averages		183	26.4	14.06

– **Collocational Patterns (CP) in Aesop’s Fables**

Collocations are indeed limited by both linguistic and mathematical constraints. There are linguistic limitations that include semantic compatibility (1), usage frequency (2) and contextual relevance (3). In semantic compatibility, words need to make sense together. For example, ‘creature’ collocates well with adjectives such as ‘mythical’ or ‘strange’ because they fit semantically. However, it would not make sense to attach an unrelated adjective such as ‘mathematical’ to ‘creature’.

As far as the usage frequency is concerned, some collocations are more commonly used than others. Native speakers tend to use certain word combinations more frequently because they sound more natural, simpler or have become more conventional. To complete the whole picture, contextual relevance is crucial. The context in which a word is used limits its collocations. For example, ‘creature of habit’ is a specific phrase with a

distinct meaning, whereas 'creature of excitement' does not carry the same contextual relevance.

A language is almost mathematically constructed, and is predictable unless the context is fiction or fantasy. We know that lions do not fly, but they can do so in fictional stories. So, from a probabilistic perspective, readers can predict the likelihood of word sequences. Artificial Intelligence (AI) generative tools like ChatGPT are trained to recognise and use specific collocations. Technically speaking, no dataset is infinite. The range of collocations in any given language model is restricted by the size of the corpus. An AI language model may learn new and thus infinite database.

One of the constraints when using algorithms and natural language processing (NLP) is the inability of computers to deal with nuanced and idiomatic expressions. However, humans have no problem in distinguishing nuance, jokes or idioms from purely academic style. The human brain is the most sophisticated machine in the universe. No wonder, its capacity to recognise, analyse and interpret texts is not restricted by the concept of a finite database. The following paragraph is an attempt to analyse the different CPs found in the fable "The Miller, his Son, and their Ass". Readers can do the same with the nine remaining fables. The number of collocations differs from one fable to another.

1. 'Un día, hace mucho tiempo'. This translates as 'One day, a long time ago' and is typically used to begin a story or anecdote, setting the scene in the past.
2. 'se dirigían al Mercado'. (To head to the market) is a common collocation in Spanish, where 'dirigirse a' (to head to) often pairs with destinations or goals.
3. 'un asno que esperaban vender'. 'Esperaban' must mean the verb hope. 'esperaban' being too close to aspire. So, the meaning of the whole is 'a donkey they were expecting to sell'.
4. 'mantenían en buenas condiciones'. This translates to 'they kept (them) in good condition'. If someone says 'keep in ...' we might expect to hear the phrase '...good condition'. In terms of usage, the phrase is hugely frequent.
5. 'avanzado un poco'. This means 'moved on a little', and 'avanzado' collocates naturally with 'un poco'. This collocation is frequent in many languages, including Spanish.
6. 'comenzado de nuevo'. 'comenzo', to commence or to begin, collocates with 'de nuevo'(again), and is very close to the French 'commencer de nouveau/or recommencer'.
7. 'otro grupo de personas'.. This translates as 'other group of persons (people)'. This usage is frequent in storytelling and an almost literal translation.
8. 'pobre criatura'. Semantically speaking and in terms of frequent usage, creatures can be described as poor 'pobre'. There is a limited list of adjectives collocating with 'criatura'.
9. 'Una gran multitud de personas'. This translates as 'a large crowd of persons (people)'. This collocation occurs naturally in the Spanish language to describe a number of people when narrating a story.

10. 'El pobre molinero partió tristemente'. The adjective 'pobre' frequently collocates with nouns to indicate pity. The verb 'partir' (to depart) can be paired with various adverbs to describe the manner of departure, such as 'rápidamente' (quickly), 'silenciosamente' (silently) and, as here, 'tristemente' (sadly).

DISCUSSION

The linguistic predictability of the vocabulary in Aesop's most popular fables can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, its complex simplicity is fabulous – no pun intended. This deliberate simplicity aims to convey moral lessons and universal truths clearly and concisely. Secondly, these fables often employ common language. They feature familiar animals and objects described in straightforward terms. Additionally, the fables tend to follow a similar narrative structure.

For instance, they typically start with a simple premise, followed by a series of events leading to a moral lesson or conclusion. This repetitive structure helps readers anticipate the language and vocabulary to be used. This consideration is particularly relevant when selecting fables for language learners, as some may be more intimidating than others due to their complex sentence structures. Understanding these factors can help learners choose language that is more approachable and suited to their level of proficiency.

CONCLUSIONS

Combining the popularity of Aesop's fables with linguistic predictability – whether lexical or syntactic – is a valuable opportunity for language learners. These fables, widely known and easily accessible, provide relatable content. Aesop's narratives contain moral lessons relevant even to digital learners. They are not only entertaining but also intellectually stimulating.

By leveraging the phenomenon of cognates (sometimes borrowing), learners can identify words in the fables that are related or borrowed from their native language or other languages. This recognition can help them infer the meaning of unfamiliar words in the target language.

Moreover, understanding the different types of contexts can make learners aware of the interconnectedness of languages. Analysing and comparing collocational patterns across languages is key to unlocking many foreign languages. Any student can acquire different foreign languages, such as Spanish, Italian or Turkish, in addition to English and French, if they are paying attention to the repetitive lexical structures.

By combining these tools, learners can unlock the secrets of their target language and reach proficiency. Just trust the father of all fables, Aesop. He can provide you with fabulous edutaining stories.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

FUNDING

The authors declare that this study received no specific financial support.

REFERENCES

- Al-Dosakee, K., & Ozdamli, F. (2021). Gamification in Teaching and Learning Languages: A Systematic Literature Review. *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 13(2), 559–577. <https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/13.2/436>
- Balla, E. M. (2000). *Ten Fables for Teaching English*. Good Year Books.
- Boyd, B. (2009). *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*. Harvard University Press.
- Butow, E., Billow, L., & Galvin, B. (2022). *Social Media and the Evolving Literary Landscape*. Digital Press.
- Chamizo-Domínguez, P. J. (2008). *Semantics and Pragmatics of False Friends*. Routledge.
- Cohen, W. (2017). *A History of European Literature: The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present*. University Press.
- Ellis, E. (2016). *The plurilingual TESOL teacher: The Hidden Languaged Lives of TESOL Teachers and why They Matter*. Walter de Gruyter.
- Fallon, A. (2024). *Write Your Story: A Simple Framework to Understand Yourself, Your Story, and Your Purpose in the World*. Forefront Books.
- García, A. (2022). The Role of Cognates in Second Language Acquisition: A Comparative Study. *Journal of Language Learning*, 45(2), 134–150.
- Goldman, S. R., Reyes, M., & Varnhagen, C. K. (1984). Understanding Fables in First and Second Languages. *NABE Journal*, 8(2), 35–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08855072.1984.10668465>
- Handford, S. A. (1988). *Aesop's Fables*. Worthy Publishing.
- Holzberg, N. (2002). *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction*. Indiana University Press.
- Keen, S. (2015). *Narrative Form: Revised and Expanded Second Edition*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kintsch, W. (1988). The role of knowledge in discourse comprehension: A construction-integration model. *Psychological Review*, 95(2), 163–182. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.95.2.163>
- Kollias, O. (2015). Anthropomorphism, Aesop's Fables and Their Use in Lifelong Learning and Vocational Training by Awakening Participants' Memes. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 15(2), 96–103. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2736974>
- Korhonen, T. (2019). Anthropomorphism and the Aesopic Animal Fables. In R. Mattila, S. Ito, Fink, S. (Eds.), *Animals and their Relation to Gods, Humans and Things in the Ancient World. Universal- und kulturhistorische Studien. Studies in Universal and Cultural History* (pp. 211–231). Springer VS, Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-24388-3_10
- Kottler, J. A. (2015). *Stories We've Heard, Stories We've Told: Life-changing Narratives in Therapy and Everyday Life*. Oxford University Press.
- Leckie-Tarry, H. (1995). *Language and Context*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

- McCafferty, T. (2021). *Aesop's Fables: The enduring legacy of an ancient storyteller*. Classic Tales Publishing.
- Meynell, M. (2017). *What Angels Long to Read: Reading and Preaching the New Testament*. Langham Creative Projects.
- Mohammad, T., & Idris, S. (2022). *ELT Methods and Approaches: Experiments and Observations*. iUniverse.
- Morgan, H. (1995). *Historical perspectives on the education of black children*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Nesselhauf, N. (2005). *Collocations in a Learner Corpus*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Otwinowska, A. (2016). *Cognate Vocabulary in Language Acquisition and Use: Attitudes, Awareness, Activation*. Multilingual Matters.
- Patterson, A. (1991). *Fables of Power: Aesopian Writing and Political History*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1131ckr>
- Robinson, J. C. (2012). *Bedtime Stories for Elders: What Fairy Tales Can Teach Us about the New Aging*. Collective Ink.
- Sari, D. P., & Jufri, J. (2018). Using Aesop's Fable to Teach Reading Comprehension of Narrative Text at Junior High School. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 7(4), 711–219. <https://ejournal.unp.ac.id/index.php/jelt/article/view/101695/100620>
- Short, J. C., & Ketchen, D. J., Jr. (2005). Teaching timeless truths through classic literature: Aesop's fables and strategic management. *Journal of Management Education*, 29(6), 816–832. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ797946>
- Singh, A. (2015). *The Secret Red Book of Leadership*. Wisdom Tree Publishers.
- Tompkins, G. E., & Hoskisson, K. (1995). *Language Arts: Content and Teaching Strategies*. Macmillan College. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED375412>
- Ummah, S. F. (2022). *The Use of Fable in Teaching Writing Skill in English Intensive Program at SP (Satuan Pendidikan) Muadalah Ulya in Academic Year 2021-2022* [Thesis]. Islamic Institute of Darussalam.
- Whitford, V., & Joannisse, M. F. (2021). Eye Movement Measures of Within-Language and Cross-Language activation during reading in monolingual and bilingual children and Adults: A focus on neighborhood density Effects. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 674007. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.674007>