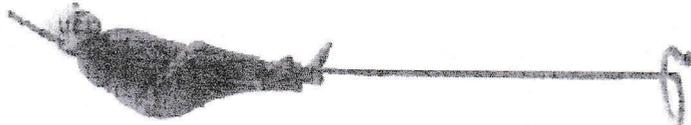


A Gruesome Performance

The teacher introduces and reads the following story:

Just before sunset, a fakir calls the passers-by to come and watch his performance. Seated in a circle with torches, the audience watches the fakir take a length of rope from a wicker basket and throw it into the air. He repeats this action a couple of times to demonstrate that it is an ordinary rope. But then, as he throws the rope into the air again, it suddenly coils up in the darkness, until the top is no longer visible and then miraculously stays there. The fakir's assistant, a slim young boy climbs the rope and is seen to vanish into thin air. He ignores his master's calls to come back down. Impatiently, the fakir draws a sharp knife, clenches it between his teeth, and clambers up after the boy – and also vanishes from sight. Then there is a series of blood-curdling yells, and various dismembered limbs of the young boy fall to the ground, followed by his head. The fakir then slides down the rope, which falls down behind him. He joins his other assistants, who are standing in tears around the remains of the young boy. They put the parts of the body into a basket. When the fakir claps his hands, the young boy emerges from the basket, smiling, miraculously reassembled and with no apparent damage.



Text

The trick – for a trick it is – is performed at twilight, before a background of nearby hills or trees. The fakir relies on a thin but strong black cord slung between two high points about fifteen meters above ground level. The rope, which has a small but heavy black ball at the end and which is strong enough to support the weight of the slim boy, is thrown up over the cord. The boy climbs up the rope. The public is blinded by the light of the torches and cannot see the boy high up on the rope in the dark sky. Once the boy reaches the top, he attaches the rope to the horizontal black cord, which can then take the weight of the magician.



And the boy's dismembered body parts? When the fakir climbs up, hidden under his wide robe there are shaven monkey limbs, dressed in clothes similar to the boy's, and with a bit of red sauce splattered around. The boy's head is a wooden model fitted with a turban. When the fakir reaches the top, the boy climbs into his robe and throws down the limbs. When the fakir descends and goes to the basket, the boy disappears into it. The limbs then go into the basket, the lid is put on, the fakir claps his hands, and – presto! – the boy pops out.

Figure 3 A gruesome performance. A task taken from a task-based syllabus for Dutch language teaching at the level of secondary school. (From: KLIMOP+TATAMI, Centre for Language and Education, Leuven)