

# What is symbolic power and what's in it for foreign language teachers?

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## La Fontaine *Fables* (1668)

### Le Loup et l'Agneau

La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure:  
Nous l'allons montrer tout à l'heure.

Un Agneau se désaltérait  
Dans le courant d'une onde pure.  
Un Loup survient à jeun qui cherchait aventure,  
Et que la faim en ces lieux attirait.  
"Qui te rend si hardi de troubler mon breuvage?"  
Dit cet animal plein de rage:  
Tu seras châtié de ta témérité.  
— Sire, répond l'Agneau, que Votre Majesté  
Ne se mette pas en colère;  
Mais plutôt qu'elle considère  
Que je me vas désaltérant  
Dans le courant,  
Plus de vingt pas au-dessous d'Elle;  
Et que par conséquent, en aucune façon  
Je ne puis troubler sa boisson.  
— Tu la troubles, reprit cette bête cruelle;  
Et je sais que de moi tu médis l'an passé.  
— Comment l'aurais-je fait si je n'étais pas né?  
Reprit l'Agneau; je tette encore ma mère.  
— Si ce n'est toi, c'est donc ton frère.  
— Je n'en ai point. — C'est donc quelqu'un des tiens;  
Car vous ne m'épargnez guère,  
Vous, vos bergers, et vos chiens.  
On me l'a dit: il faut que je me venge."  
Là-dessus, au fond des forêts  
Le Loup l'emporte, et puis le mange,  
Sans autre forme de procès.

## **The Wolf and the Lamb**

The reasoning of the more powerful is always the best.  
We will show it presently on the following case.

A Lamb was drinking at a brook  
That was flowing downstream, pure and clean.  
From the woods comes a wolf in search of adventure  
His sharp hunger had drawn him to the scene.  
"Who makes you so bold as to muck up my beverage?"  
The creature snarls in rage.  
"You will pay for your impudence!"  
"Sire," the lamb replies, "let not Your Majesty  
Give in to unjust anger,  
But instead please consider, Sire:  
I'm drinking — just look —  
In the brook  
Twenty feet below Your Majesty, if not more,  
And therefore in no way at all  
Can I be muddying Your Majesty's drink."  
"You are muddying it!" insists the cruel beast.  
"And I know that, last year, you spoke ill of me."  
"How could I do that?" says the lamb.  
I was not yet born. I am still suckling at my mother's breast."  
"If it wasn't you, then it was your brother. All the worse."  
"I don't have a brother." "Then it's someone else in your clan,  
For to me you are all the same - a curse.  
You, your shepherds and your dogs.  
I've been told: I must take revenge."  
And with that, deep into the wood,  
The wolf drags the lamb and eats him up,  
Without further judicial ado.

(my translation)

## **Le Corbeau et le Renard**

Maître Corbeau, sur un arbre perché,  
Tenait en son bec un fromage.  
Maître Renard, par l'odeur alléché,  
Lui tint à peu près ce langage :  
"Hé ! bonjour, Monsieur du Corbeau.  
Que vous êtes joli ! que vous me semblez beau !  
Sans mentir, si votre ramage  
Se rapporte à votre plumage,  
Vous êtes le Phénix des hôtes de ces bois. "  
A ces mots le Corbeau ne se sent pas de joie ;  
Et pour montrer sa belle voix,  
Il ouvre un large bec, laisse tomber sa proie.  
Le Renard s'en saisit, et dit : "Mon bon Monsieur,  
Apprenez que tout flatteur  
Vit aux dépens de celui qui l'écoute :  
Cette leçon vaut bien un fromage, sans doute. "  
Le Corbeau, honteux et confus,  
Jura, mais un peu tard, qu'on ne l'y prendrait plus.

## **The Crow and the Fox**

Master Crow, perched on a tree,  
Held in his beak a cheese.  
Master Fox, enticed by the smell,  
Held forth more or less in these words:  
"Hey! Good day, Sir of the Crow !  
How pretty you are! How handsome you look!  
It's no lie, if your song  
is like your feathers,  
You are the phoenix of the denizens of this wood."  
At these words, the crow was beside himself with joy;  
And to show his beautiful voice,  
He opened his large beak, letting fall his prey.  
The fox seized it and said: "My good sir,  
Learn that every flatterer  
Lives at the expense of his listeners.  
This lesson was well worth a cheese, no doubt."  
Ashamed and embarrassed, the crow swore,  
But a little too late, that he would not be taken in again.

(Martha M. Houle's translation in Marin 1988:94)

**Oscar Brown Jr (1963)**

**The Snake**

On her way to work one morning down the path alongside the lake  
A tenderhearted woman saw a poor half-frozen snake.  
His pretty colored skin had been all frosted with the dew  
“Oh well,” she cried, “I’ll take you in and I’ll take care of you”

“Take me in oh tender woman  
Take me in, for heaven’s sake  
Take me in oh tender woman,” sighed the snake

She wrapped him up all cozy in a comforter of silk  
And then laid him by the fireside with some honey and some milk.  
Now she hurried home from work that night; as soon as she arrived  
She found that pretty snake she’d taken in had been revived

Now she clutched him to her bosom, “You’re so beautiful,” she cried  
“But if I hadn’t brought you in by now you might have died”  
Now she stroked his pretty skin and then she kissed and held him tight  
But instead of saying thanks, that snake gave her a vicious bite

“I saved you,” cried that woman, and you’ve bit me even, why?  
You know your bite is poisonous and now I’m going to die”  
“Oh shut up, silly woman,” said the reptile with a grin  
“You knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in”

“Take me in, oh tender woman  
Take me in, for heaven’s sake  
Take me in oh tender woman,” sighed the snake.

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