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Children's Literature and Psycholinguistic Approach

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Abstract

Throughout centuries, children's books have influenced the identity creation of children in various levels, in the form of fairy tales, folk tales, picture books, Disney cartoons, and movies. Modern child spends more time on interactive learning/visual aids than traditional pedagogical means which mainly consist of printed texts. The majority of their learning and leisure activities include focus on picture books, flash cards or several interactive pedagogical structures like interactive boards, pop-up books, animated movies etc. Receptive skills in children can be enhanced in their developmental stage in this way. It aids their psychological development and language acquisition skills along with socio-cultural aspects. Adults also relive their childhood days while engaging themselves with children and children's books carrying the roles of facilitator, caretaker, parent or educator. This paper discusses the impact that visual media has imparted in the field of children's literature and how it helps in the cognitive and psycholinguistic development of children. Visual media has gained greater importance in recent years and has incredibly affected the contemporary modern world. It has made a tremendous influence on the field of literature, specifically in children's literature. I postulate that children's literature lays the foundation of shared intergenerational, national and international culture, a barometer of beliefs and anxieties about children and childhood, and a body of literature with its own genres, classic texts and avant-garde experiments.

Keywords: Visual media, children's literature, cognitive, psycholinguistic approach, picturebook, childhood

Introduction

Children's literature is influenced by visual media that includes several domains like television, movies, panting, photography etc. However, a close analysis of the term gives the idea related to the sensory perceptions like vision and hearing. In this modern context, visual media has a great impact in the field of children's literature. It affects the cognitive and psycho- linguistic development of children. Visual media has gained greater importance in recent years and has incredibly affected the contemporary modern world. It has made a tremendous influence in the field of literature, specifically in children's literature. Visual media infiltrates into every culture and affects it deeply. It has a major role in molding or shaping public opinion, thereby empowering the society and its people. In the contemporary world, visual media has given way to mixed media. They act as strong symbols or signs signifying a particular culture, age, philosophy or way of life. It is also important to think as what should be displayed or made visible for the society, is also socially and culturally appropriate. Visual media in children's literature needs careful attention as the expected audiences are young children, who develop into better individuals in future. Hence, the visual display should be the most acceptable and appropriate form that could be

prescribed to them. In the modern world, parental or adult authority cannot completely control the entrance of children to visual media. Hence, it is a complicated process and raises several concerns regarding the appropriateness and entertaining purpose of the visual elements presented for the child.

Literature Review

Picture books represent a unique visual and art literary form that engages children in learning with pleasure. They form an initial threshold in children's world of literature. Our society is populated with visual images such as logos, emblems, etc. through which adults and children make sense of the world. Readers may find several ways in which the book for children is spelled: picture book, picture-book or picturebook. Authors and critics use it interchangeably, for example, the compound word 'picturebook' recognizes the union of text and art that results in something what each form separately contributes. (Marantz, 1977 ; Lewis, 2001). Sipe (2006) argues that picture books stress inextricable connections of words and pictures. Further Arizpe and Styles (2003) studied on stories in picture books that depend on interaction between written text and image where both have created a "conscious aesthetic intention." Dresang (1999) describes in detail the graphic synergy in picture books and suggests that the pictures are so

interrelated with the text that the reader cannot distinguish one from the other.

Scholars of children's literature concur that in many ways it is possible to call the object a picture book text (Lewis, 2001) because both the images and text work so tightly to convey temporal and spatial information. Fiction is a popular story genre developed in picture books that includes both narratives and non-narratives. As with fictional narratives, the art in picture books provides information in the written text. Words and pictures in a picture book never tell exactly the same story. Authors find it challenging to invent a useful language for talking about the use of visual media in children's literature (Goldstone, 2002; Pantaleo, 2004). Considine (1986) conducted a study discussing the issues concerning the interaction of visual and textual media. Koolstra (1996) with a team of researchers studied the longitudinal effects of television on children's leisure time reading with a test of three explanatory models. Studies were also carried out to identify the effects of other technologies on literacy and literacy learning (Kamil, et al, 2000). Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) identify five different ways-symmetry, complementary, enhancement, counterpoint and contradiction-through which words and pictures interact, opening up possibilities for readers' experience. Gavin (2011) carried out a research on how television affects the child and helps in their visual learning. The literary experience exposed to technology in the present era and media in a visual image format is widely used for an advanced literary experience.

Methodology

In this particular study, a qualitative descriptive methodology has been steadily followed to achieve its learning objectives. It is an endeavor to determine the impact of visual media on contemporary children's literature. It is contended in this study that the methodology is adequate because the findings are outlined in a descriptive way. Data has been collected from different sources, including primary works as well as secondary or critical works. This study is primarily limited to the impact of visual media on young minds. I have taken a psycholinguistic approach to make a theoretical framework for my analysis. Finally, I make an effort to discover the influence of visual media on children's literary experience and its effect in the development of psycholinguistic skills.

Childhood is a social construction that suggests biological immaturity corresponding to societal norms, based on socio-cultural and historical settings. Aries (1962) comments that notion of childhood as a distinct phase of human life cycle started to emerge in Western Europe only around the end of 15th century. He challenges the traditional claims that the 20th century family was suffering a decline and proved that the modern concept of family with a private,

domestic circle based on mutual affection is new. The figure of the child, which is the core of modern family, was analyzed in a detailed manner. Aries (1962) notes that childhood as a concept developed around 17th century. This is related to decrease in infant mortality, changes in European educational system, increasing class stratification and a gradual withdrawal of family from a wider web of social relations. He observes that "in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist" (p.125). He highlights the fact that childhood was not seen or valued as a distinctive phase of human existence. The medieval society could find fewer gaps between adults and children; however, he never meant that medieval families lacked affection towards children.

Childhood and Adulthood

Prior to 1700, concept of age and childhood was much different from the present day ideas. An individual was categorized as infant, youth or old person by physical appearance and habits, and not by chorological age. This fluidity of concept resulted in viewing children as miniature adults in the middle ages. Children were portrayed as small people with posture and muscles of adults in the medieval European art. As childhood and adulthood were not considered as different phases of life, needs of childhood like toys, books or stories were not seriously considered. Until 17th century, portraits of children were rare in domestic context. Later it developed as a trend to keep such portraits signifying the developing importance for child as holding the core position in family life. This could be seen more obviously in nuclear families. Parents displayed less emotional attachments toward children in the premodern era, probably due to the high mortality rate of children during that time. New interest emerged in the world of children by 17th century, focused on their words, mispronunciations, expressions, clothing, games, pastimes and holidays. It was made possible by creating a culture of childhood that showed more attention and affection toward them.

In modern times, fairy tales, party games, cartoons, Disney movies, etc. are associated with the world of children, whereas, in middle ages, fairy tales and other fun games were played and enjoyed by all. However, gradually as adult lost their interests in such activities, it became child-oriented. The image of child as a sexually indifferent individual changed to a sexually innocent one, by the end of 16th century and beginning of 17th century. The emergence of modern educational system demanded that the purity of child and childhood were to be safeguarded. The educators were mainly priests, who were concerned with morality of children alongside knowledge acquisition. They wanted the child and childhood to be kept pure from being corrupted by immoral influences. In middle ages, very few people had formal

education. 'Cathedral schools' where boys and men studied to become clerics were the parallel educational institutions of modern schools or universities. As the number of students increased, the modern educational system slowly emerged allowing more educational opportunities based on age. This helped in acknowledging childhood as a specific stage of life. In Aries' view, 17th century is the era in which the concept of child as integral part of family developed. Rise of family was the result of a general movement from sociability to privacy in the Western society. This inward move focusing on family helped in giving special focus to the child. Thus child became the center of family's attention by 19th century.

The historian Pollock (1983) provides samples of diaries and letters to prove the importance parents gave their children before 17th century. She reveals interesting facts about the history of childhood in Western society. The book analyses key features like parent-child relations, the idea of childhood, child rearing practices from infancy onwards and discipline. These are obtained from diary discussions of parents from Britain and North America supplemented by newspaper materials. She made significant observations and findings about some serious changes that occurred during the four centuries discussed above. Her focus is on the nature of parental reactions and childhood. She notes that people were aware of childhood even before 17th century and brutality towards children was rare during those times. The English philosopher Locke (1996 [1693]) comments that children are born neither evil nor good but as 'blank slates' whose minds and characters would be shaped by their education and training. By education, Locke primarily means 'moral education'. According to him, the aim of education is to give a man rational control over his passions and desires. He displays his constant interest with the origins and development of human knowledge.

For Locke, moral education is more important than other kinds of education as it helps in creating a person who obeys reason instead of passion. He thought that learning should be enjoyable. Locke (1996) demonstrates how learning can be a form of recreation. He proposes that children should never be forced to learn, but should be engaged in conversation and that their ideas should be taken seriously. He states that the playfully unruly spirit of children should be encouraged rather than restricted and along with the general temperament of childhood, the individual temperament of the child also should be considered. According to Locke, the goal of education is to guard against any vices to which a child is predisposed. By tailoring children's education to their characters, teachers not only get more effective results, but they also make the experience enjoyable. This could be practiced by adults in their roles as facilitators in imparting formal as well as informal education

to children. Locke comments on the importance of habit and example in education, while downplaying the role of rules. He discusses the importance of parents in detail while talking about education. He observes that when the children are young they should be placed under stern authority, whereas when they grow up and become a rational creature, parents can only hold their authority by inspiring love and reverence in children.

Children should be considered as friends and their opinion must be valued and respected. Locke highlights the fact that every child should learn a manual skill that helps to relax and refresh the mind after it is worn out from study. Rousseau (1979 [1762]), a political philosopher and thinker was immensely influenced by Locke's ideas. He states that childhood should be a time of innocence, when children learnt what they needed at their own pace, away from interference of adults. His seminal work Emile served as a foundational pattern for many works of educational philosophy that have appeared in the centuries that followed it. Many of the ideas that Rousseau forwarded in his work concerning human development and the wonders of childhood presage the work of many psychologists and educators of the present day. Rousseau believes that the natural goodness of a man can be nurtured and maintained only by means of a highly sophisticated model of education.

Language Acquisition

Children are active listeners since their days in womb, recognizing speech patterns, tunes and tones of language used in familiar contexts. Young children are proficient communicators during the first three years of life. Their language development is influenced by various factors, including the presence of sensitive adults, older children, caretakers etc. These people attend to their needs and expressions, and use appropriate language to communicate with children. Even deaf children use sign language to cope up their developmental stage of cognition and language communication. Preschoolers (2-3 years old) use language to influence people closest to them, showing their brain development and growing capacity for expressions. American linguist Noam Chomsky's (1965) Language Acquisition Device (LAD) theory suggests that the ability to learn language for humans is inborn. His theory is described as nativist as opposed to behaviorist, who believed that children learn language merely by imitation. However, children have the tendency to imitate actions of elders and the world around them.

Chomsky, the most influential linguist of the 20th century made many strong claims about language development. His concept of 'Universal Grammar' suggests that language is an innate faculty, that is, we are born with a set of rules about language in our minds. He believes that children are equipped with

LAD, i.e.; a set of language tools. These hypothetical tools explain the remarkable quality possessed by children in language acquisition and innate understanding of grammar and syntax. According to him, as children are born with an understanding of the rules of language, they simply need to acquire the vocabulary. He proposed that language is basically similar across all of humanity, i.e. every language has, e.g. noun, verb, and ability to make things positive or negative. Aitchison, (2003 [1987]) professor of Language and communication, identified three stages that occur during a child's acquisition of vocabulary, viz labeling, packaging and network building. Labeling is the first stage, where associating a name with something happens. In the second stage of packaging, the child understands the range of meaning of a word. The last stage of network building involves understanding the connections between words, including the idea that some words are opposite in meaning. He claims that the speed of learning of the child is influenced by innate abilities and environment. As language is partly learned by imitation, parents, siblings, caretakers, etc. play a vital role in accelerating the language learning process.

Crystal's (1987) theory on child language acquisition explains five stages. In the first stage, they say things for three purposes like to get something they want, to get someone's attention and to draw attention to something. In the second stage, the children ask questions, mainly 'where' questions predominate. Their questions usually begin with interrogative pronouns (what, where) followed by a noun or verb. They are concerned with naming and classifying things with frequent questions, talk about characteristics of things and are taught to learn things in opposites pairs like hot/cold, up/down etc. In the third stage, they start asking lots of questions with intonation, expressing more complex wants using more grammatically correct language, refer to events in past and less often in future, talk about continuing action, basic sentence structure expands. In stage four, children use increasingly complex sentence structures, begin to explain things, ask for explanations using the word 'why?' and make wide range of requests. Most significant development is their comprehension of language and use of abstract verbs. They communicate meaning indirectly by replacing imperatives with questions. They develop pragmatic understanding and suit utterances to context or situation. They also use negation and are able to use auxiliary verbs and may duplicate modal verbs. Finally, in stage five, children regularly use language to do everything that they need like giving information, asking and answering questions, requesting directly and indirectly, suggesting, offering, stating and expressing. They are able to talk hypothetically and conditionally, explain conditions required for something to happen, make general references to past and present, talk

about particular times and are comfortable with all questions starting with 'what?' and 'when?'

Piaget's (1950) theory of cognitive constructivism proposes that language was simply one of children's ways of representing their familiar world's, a reflection of thought. He was a psychologist, philosopher and natural scientist, who contributed to the theory of child cognitive development and learning process encompassed in his view of 'genetic epistemology,' i.e. origins of thinking. For him, language did not contribute to the development of thinking. He argued that cognitive development preceded that of language. His cognitive development theory describes how a child constructs a mental model of the world as he/she attains through biological maturation and experiences gained based on interaction with the world. Piaget focused on the fundamental concepts related to the emergence of ideas of number, time, quantity, causality, justice etc. He found that young children think in remarkably different ways compared to adults, whereas the common assumption before his work was that children are less competent thinkers than adults. Piaget argues that children are born with a very basic mental structure that is genetically inherited and evolved, on which all further learning and knowledge is based. His purpose was to explain mechanisms and processes by which infant and then the child develops into an individual who can reason and think using hypotheses. It proposed distinct stages of development to prove this fact. For him, cognitive development was a progressive reorganization of mental processes gained as the individual matures physically, mentally and socially. As a result of this development, they found out inconsistencies between what they already know and what they discover in their environment.

Piaget's Cognitive theory is based on three basic components. Firstly, 'schemas' which are the building blocks of knowledge. Secondly, intellectual growth is seen as a process of adaptation to the world, which happens through assimilation, accommodation and equilibration. Finally, the various stages of cognitive development for different age levels, namely, 'sensorimotor' (from birth-2 years), 'preoperational' (2-7 years),'concrete operational' (7-11 years) and 'formal operational' (11-adolescence and adulthood). Piaget's theory of constructivism addresses how learning actually occurs, without focusing on what influences learning. Teachers or adults act as facilitators to help the student/child in understanding, other than lecturing. Hence, the focus is on the child/student and their learning than on the teacher and lecture. Vygotsky (1978), made some most significant contributions to theories related to child development, especially in the field of cognitive development. His theory views language basically as social communication that gradually promotes both language and cognition. According to his theory of

cognitive development, social interaction and imaginative play contributes widely in the process of cognitive development in children. Social interactions enable the child to both discover and create meaning from the things they discover.

Vygotsky believed that some of the most important learning involved in the child's learning process happens by interaction with a skilled tutor, often and adult like a parent or teacher. The child observes their behavior and tries to imitate what they have seen. In this process, the child tries to understand what they observe and the instruction they received from the adults, by copying or internalizing. Later, it helps them in applying this knowledge in their own lives. This sort of collaborative or cooperative dialogue typically involves social interactions with adults or other children, someone from which the child can learn and could be considered as a more knowledgeable child. The idea of scaffolding also helps children in communicating on their own. Here also, with the aid of an adult, the child repeats names of pictures shown to them that eventually help the child in developing words and communicating independently. Vygotsky proposed three forms of language, namely, social speech, private speech and silent inner speech. He believed that at the beginning stage of a child's life, language and thought begin as separate systems within a child's brain and that these two systems would merge in the child around the age of three and becomes interdependent. Thus the child's communication can be internalized to become private speech to the self which is vital in its cognitive development. Imaginative play also has a vital role in child's cognitive development as it involves a very complex mental process which affects the child's thoughts and life as a whole. Role-playing is the main activity involved in imaginative play where children create their own stories or characters or imitate heroes or superheroes encountered in stories, books, films etc. This enables them to develop language and problem solving skills. Vygotsky assumed that the external language that children hear and imitates gets internalized during imaginative play.

Intentionality theories existed since Aristotle, which emphasizes holistic development that emerges from cognitive, emotional and social interactions. Fairclough (1992) approaches intertextuality on the macro level of narratives, genres and discourses. Fairclough in his theory on critical discourse (CDA) discusses how power is exercised through language in many forms as texts, talk, video and practices. His theory on Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis(TODA) discusses the mutual effects of formally linguistic textual properties, sociolinguistic speech genres and formally sociological practices. Based on Fairclough's (1992) opinion, practices are indirectly shaped and enacted. If so, the basic properties of discourse that are linguistically analyzable constitute a key element of their interpretation. He finds the socio-cultural effect on these discourse practices. Fairclough's language and power (1992) investigates the connection between language and social institutional practices and of wider political and social structures. He discusses the concept of synthetic personalization, a phenomenon noted on journalistic discourse. The effect is to stimulate some degree of closeness between newspaper and its readership, to imply that they are familiar or friendly terms. This suggests to reader of newspaper that journalistic authors are on the reader's own level and hence forges a bond between reader and his/her newspaper. It is applied in other mass-crafted discourse phenomena like advertising, marketing, political or media discourse. This could be viewed as part of a major process of technologisation of discourse, which includes the growing subtle technical developments communication field. This will provide the chance to bring under scientifically regulated practice semiotic fields that were formerly considered suprasegmental like intonation patterns, graphic layout of text on the page or proxemic data.

Contemporary researchers and theorists acknowledge that children have 'agency', which suggests that they are active learners co-constructing their worlds. For children, cognitive and language development depends highly on their socio-cultural environment, interaction with people around them, and how children represents all these in their minds. The role, actions and speech of adults also contribute to the holistic development of children. Children's literature is a foundation of shared intergenerational national and international culture. It is a barometer of beliefs and anxieties about children and childhood. It is a body of literature with its own genres, classic texts and avant-garde experiments. Throughout centuries, children's books have influenced the identity creation of children in various levels, in the form of fairy tales, folk tales, picture books, Disney cartoons, and movies. Modern child spends more time on interactive learning/visual aids than with traditional pedagogical means which mainly consist of printed texts. Majority of their learning and leisure activities include focus on picture books, flash cards or several interactive pedagogical structures like interactive boards, pop-up books and animated movies.

Visual Learning

Children engage in visual learning in the present time. Visual learning is a sort of spatial learning in which the visual-spatial learners process information in the form of pictures, images, diagrams, maps, graphics and charts. Disney movies and cartoons have immensely influenced both children and adults as a source of great entertainment. This is mainly due to the fact that entertainment is made possible within the comfort zones of domestic life. In this process, the

learners engage with color codes, draw things and create mind maps like keywords, examples, images etc., for visual organization of information. In addition to visual, auditory and kinesthetic methods are also involved in the modern child's pedagogic and playing world. Information is processed as pictures rather than words in this method. This practice can be traced back to Jane Johnson's nursery library in 18th century that aimed at instruction through delight. Print or visual media plays a major role in the communication of information in the present society. Receptive skills in children can be enhanced in their developmental stage in this way. It aids their psychological development and language acquisition skills along with other socio-cultural aspects of life.

In the discussion of literacy in the form of visual media, Goldberg (2005) mentions the practice of using visual imagery to process knowledge and thought. For Dubin (2011) literacy provides "the ability to make and communicate meaning from and by the use of a variety of socially contextual symbols" (1). Gee (2003) advocates the significance of visual media in the advancement of literacy through video games. He observes the role of visual media in teaching problem solving skills, even to the extent of "forming bridges [to] form one's old identities to the new one (52). He advocates how this type of learning make children empathized with others by gaining new perspectives and molding them to create a new identity by active and critical thinking. Visual media opens an exciting new world in the literary experience which is beneficial to both non-literate and pre-literate audience. The advancement of technology and internet enable visual literacy through visual imagery using video presentations such as YouTube. The twentieth century witnessed a rapid progression and growth in technology and the amount of time a child involves in visual media increase at a considerable rate. The ease of availability of visual media has helped to disseminate knowledge among children. Cartoons, movies, advertisements, read-along books etc. encourage children and trigger their potential to achieve higher academic standards and sustain critical thoughts.

Children stories or novels have become part of the popular culture creating a phenomenon where the stories are converted to the form of movies like Harry Potter. Visual media will continue to impact future generations as it is an evolving process, always in a flux and never being static to create a great impact on the public. Hence it is necessary that adult or parental monitoring should be made possible so that even the harmful effects of visual media could be made advantageous to the developing mind of the children. Fairy tales and cartoon characters have transformed over years, to fit into various cultures and ages. There are various versions to the original Fairy tales from 'Tales of Mother Goose' or 'Grimms' Fairy Tales.' 'Fulla' is a Barbie-like fashion doll marketed to children of Islamic and Middle-Eastern countries as an alternative to Barbie. Disney's Aladdin characters and the popular Disney princesses also adapt to various cultures and styles. As a result, children find a sort of adaptability to any situation or character presented in the stories. This is very important in developing a sense of universality in the present global situation.

Children's tales, stories and characters are interpreted differently by children and adults. For example, feminist and psycho-analytical readings of Little Red Riding Hood provide alternate readings of the fairy tale. Visual learning is adapted in the form of movies / motion pictures where stories are presented with moving images. This forms part of popular entertainment that fulfills the purpose of instruction through entertainment. The visual media gained great popularity with the advent of television and impacted a mass audience. Neil Postman (1985) comments on the impact of television: "discourse is conducted largely through visual imagery, which is to say that television gives us a conversion in images, not words" (p.7). Adults also relive their childhood days while engaging themselves with children and children's books carrying the roles of facilitator, caretaker, parent or educator.

Children's literature is significant to parents, educators, psychologists, students and to children themselves. Adults, by revisiting their childhood, reimagine their childhood memories and feelings and interpret facts differently. They analyze stories and events from various angles, find multilayered meanings as a result of life experience and enhance the character formation of the child. Hence, childhood is a stage that continually influences a person in one form or the other, which starts from being a child through thinking as a child and living with the child. The term children's literature itself appears to be controversial or an oxymoron as it is answerable to multitudes of questions like how can books written by adults, published and disseminated by adults, largely bought by adults, be appropriately called children's literature. As adult ideology is latent in all these choices, the questions remain as whether the child chooses his/her own stories, movies and games; or they are chosen for them to be liked with adult interference who holds the yardstick of appropriateness, acceptability and prestige.

Conclusion

Postmodern literary texts have the potential to draw intriguing and novel responses from children. They are exposed to all types of electronic media and factors like 'information highway' and 'cloud' present inordinate amount of information through online and other means. The great impact that visual media has created on children's literature helped in turn the cognitive and linguistic development of children. No

one can simply ignore the formative influence of visual media in literature today. It has been made clear that there is a close interaction between visual and textual media, the former either supplements or interferes with latter and make the literary experience of children more colorful and meaningful.

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