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EVALUATION OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN IRAN FOCUSING
ON TWO ELEMENTS OF COLORS AND PICTURES



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Short Profile

Azar Naimi is working at Department of Educational Sciences, Guilan, Iran.



ABSTRACT:

The main purpose of this article is to evaluate two elements of colors and pictures in children's books published in Iran. On this basis, the major question of the article is that: what is the position and situation of colors and pictures in children's books in Iran? On this basis, this study deals with situation of colors and pictures in the books of children. Firstly, the position of colors has been evaluated in making children's books more attractive; and then, psychology of colors has been discussed. Following that, the role of pictures in the poetry of children has been discussed from

the viewpoint of the Iranian illustrators. Hence, pictures have been studied from two aspects i.e. their features in children's poetry books, and also characteristics of good pictures in children's poetry in Iran. Research methodology of this study is historical and data collection has been carried out through library research.

KEYWORDS

color, picture, children's books, Iran.

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INTRODUCTION :

The subject of children's books was not considered much a few years ago and the books did not have the present-day contents and forms. Nowadays, attention to the subject of children's books is so pervasive and global that it has become the subject of courses and researches at universities; a lot of institutes and organizations carry out researches and survey on it, and write books and articles to develop this subject.

Pictures and illustration are inseparable parts of children's books. A lot of thinkers regard illustration as an important art, just like writing, and sometimes they believe that the importance of pictures in such books is more than the importance of the text. Today, we can see that in many great awards of children's and adolescents' books, like Astrid Lindgren Award and Hans Christian Anderson Award, illustration has an important role in winning the awards, and along with the writer and compiler of the year, the illustrator of the year is also selected.

Illustrating children's books is an independent subject of art which has its own objectives and is audience-friendly. It has found its significant place in the literature of children and adolescents. The picture that the illustrator produces is itself based on narration and story, and even if the created book is entirely illustrated without any text, it includes a story in itself by connecting pictures to each other. In illustrating children's books, characterizing as well as color and print are the three fundamental elements that alongside each other can create a good product.

Illustrating is difficult for children because they still do not know the key factors and cannot mentally analyze and compile pictures. The illustrator should have a comprehensive knowledge of children's language and behaviors and must be commuting between his/her adulthood and childhood. Because of their different visual brain processes, pictures invite the readers to concentrate and think about them; whereas texts, due to the process of linear reading and their difficultness, direct the readers towards skimming quickly from one page to another. Therefore, the pictures too must be as light and dynamic to digest as possible, so that the short stopping process does not create any problem in the reading.

Books that lack artistic characteristics destroy children's imagination and thinking ability and do not fertilize their creativity and curiosity. Reading poems, their rhythmic and melodious words and messages, can better make flourish the creative ability of audiences.

In childhood, and in the ages between 3 and 6, children are mostly under internal and mental pressures. They are very much interested in colors and prefer colors to shapes and formats. Gradually, the more children's dependence on colors decreases, the more their interest in preferring shapes to colors increases. Hurrying up in creating the work, taking it as an order, putting restrictions on the work, working cheap, and illustrator's lack of familiarity with the mental situation of children are very effective elements in visual failures of children's books.

These books are favorable for kindergarten teachers as well. They can even have some of the poems performed as dramatic plays. It must be mentioned that parents too can use these books at home; because reading these books could be effective and interesting for children below 5 and could lead them to the right and moral path and towards a basic and constructive education.

Pictures should move along with and parallel to the story and come to help the text in the mazes of plot to make the story easier to understand. Technically, colors and style also have to be in accordance with the story. Cover is the protection for the context and should be strong and if possible,

water resistant. The cover design should have lively and dramatic colors.

Considering the importance of criteria of color, favorable design and format, creativity and innovation, as well as quality of the book's publication, we can study the works on the literature of children, specially, children's poetry, so that we can differentiate between the books and provide the favorable books for them.

In this regard, the necessity of children's study of poetry is also an issue that needs more consideration. Hence, applying interesting and attractive books is one of the most important elements that attract children to read poems.

APPLICATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Considering the importance of education and upbringing in growth and productivity of children's ideas and opening new horizons in their ideologies and creativity, more attention to the literature of children has become essential. Its applications are introduced in the following fields:

- "Gaining experiences and new information about different issues with scientific perspective
- Assistance in learning and acquiring national language
- Introduction of national culture to children, creating interest in global cultures and strengthening and reinforcement of global peace
- Development and expansion of their interpretational, verbal, literary and artistic abilities
- Leadership and reinforcement of thinking power for finding the correct philosophy of life
- Indirect introduction of children to the world and their habitat
- Participation of children in the past and better familiarity with the past for a better understanding of present realities and their participation in future
- Growth and development of children's interests and directing the diversity-seeking habit of adolescents
- Moral and behavioral guide of children without compulsion, punishment or encouragement
- Growth and development of social perspective and intentions, and honest and friendly cooperation in children
- Educating personality of children by creating self-confidence and personal independence
- Provision of some mental and emotional needs and virtuous enjoyments
- Promotion of studying in children
- Evaluating personal experiences of children, their movements towards the people around them by showing another person's image to the child." (Hejazi, 2006: 74-75).

2. Position of Colors in Making Attractive and Evaluation of Children's Books

Colors are present in all arts. In the art of illustration, colors have the same role as they have in other visual arts; unless because of being symbolic, they get closer to the role of colors in literature. Pictures as the complements to the text, can add to attractiveness of children's books. We can consider the close relationship between pictures and words as two inseparable elements. Pictures articulate a visual and conceptual language which is derived from the text and its hidden and apparent components.

In search of the language of colors and explaining its meanings, we cannot refer to a single and recognized source. Color has different values in different cultures; and because of cultural and climatic differences, every country, compared to other countries, has a different attitude towards colors.

The illustration artists, regarding their own cultural features, are mainly influenced by the colors of their own countries. Due to their specific forces in transferring messages, colors have both general as well as specific meanings. By doing research in the relationships between colors, we can achieve results which can appropriately serve arts. For this purpose, colors have regular signs which have similar meanings in different nations. In other words, color is an international language.

Children's books could be regarded as cultural products which employ color as a key element in creating relationship with children. For expressing the feeling inside the text, colors have an extraordinary power. Of course, this power is presented with the ability of the creative illustrators who direct this element towards their own purposes by the use of their knowledge, experience and dominance over colors; they create a glorious environment with the magic of colors. (Anvari, 1999)

Shapes are visible through light and colors. Colors are expressions of feelings. The feeling inside the text is transferred to the reader through colors. Colors and their characteristics have different expressive values and guide us, in some way, towards interpretation of the image, environment and identification of the artist. Colors have direct relationships with the audiences and also with the artists' geographical origin and culture of the society they come from.

Different artists have individual and emotional understandings of colors, and their attitudes to colors and their applications could be easily observed in their works. Lots of thinkers believe that mere use of colors is not permitted, and even some followers of realism or realist schools to some extent avoid mere imitation of colors of nature. In the picturing for children and adolescents, there is always this question that which group of colors is the favorite group for children and adolescents? This mainly depends on the personal view of the artist, and it is he who has a single understanding of the story. Colors and explanations that he applies for expressing his thoughts and feelings make his work different from other works.

Colors can play fundamental roles in visual values, provided that they are used in the correct place with entire coordination; as in the best works of art, colors have been applied beautifully and perfectly, and they are visible as outstanding signs and elements. Colors are utilized for the joy and refreshment of human soul and psyche. One of the objectives of applying colors in illustrating for children is to let them imagine distances, farness and closeness, and creative arrangement of a two or three dimensional surface in an attractive way, as well as creating emotional reactions in the viewers. What is certain is that apart from his abilities and his knowledge about aesthetics of colors, an artist has to be aware of his own attitude, the scope of his imagination and the understanding conditions of the target age group about colors and their importance; since he works for a range of audiences that if he cannot make relationships with, he will not be successful in his work.

In the way of applying colors and the relationships between them, one should be so much precise that colors become complementary alongside each other and build one another. They should convey the meaning of the image in a better and livelier way.

The importance of color and using it in creating images is specifically important for all illustrators. Prioritizing colors in the images of children's books does not mean that we should regard colors as more important than other elements such as lines and designs; because we definitely cannot pass rules or present a specific method in this regard. We should pay attention that the artist cannot get

rid of the influences of his environment either. Influences of ethnic and tribal cultures will always remain with the illustrator.

If we consider the design as the body of the image, color will be its soul. Therefore, image, words and colors are the nuts and bolts for each other. The illustrator should use color logically and as much as he feels it is necessary; and should not try to use it excessively, nor should he deceive the audience by the use of colors.

Colors are used a lot to create unreal imaginary, sad, happy, surrealistic, etc. environments, and sometimes, they are used for completing the space of composition. For reaching this stage, one should gain the level of cognition regarding the fundamentals of color. (Shabahangi and Hassanpur, 2007: 1-5). With a glance at many published works about children's poetry, we can see that by sad repetition of some subjects, poets create old and cliché concepts and images; and with the same narratives and languages, monotonous layouts and paintings are created without innovation. According to late ForoughFarokhzad, "Has not the time come for this window to be opened?" (Salarvand, 2011: 85).

3. PSYCHOLOGY OF COLORS AND SYMBOLS

Colors have always been means of expressing feelings and stating opinions. So much so that one can talk through the language of colors. On the other hand, color has become specifically important in the daily life of people.

Color is the bright side of childhood. It is the first identity recognized by children. Children understand black and white colors. In the period between the ages of 2 weeks and 6 weeks, children's conditions fundamentally change. Children start identifying red color, and after that, they start identifying bright colors, especially yellow. Also, priority of colors has a close relationship with gender; since most girls like pink and purple and boys prefer black and dark colors. Considering the neural system of children, it is better to teach colors to them through objects related to them. Emphasis on clear messages by the use of colors helps children remember that human eye pays specific attention to the mixture of yellow and black, and brain unconsciously takes it as a sign of danger. The color taste in children is instinctive. So, we had better not make this taste acquisitive by having the children accustomed to specific tastes in selecting clothes and objects.

If we want to use expressions like "to see everything black", "to go red because of anger", etc. it shows that under the influence of different cultures and emotional as well as mental elements, every color has specific meanings. According to Bastide, a great part of the symbolic meanings of colors depends on the customs and specific social environments where we live. In a specific social system, a color could have a meaning which is quite contrary to its meaning in another system.

All people are familiar with the differences between hot colors (red, yellow and orange) with cold colors (green, blue and purple). Mentally, these two groups of colors are deeply different from one another. Hot colors are stimulant and lead to activity and dynamism; they inspire brightness and happiness of life and are materials of motion. Whereas, cold colors on the contrary, lead to reflexive situations, inertia, and motionlessness, and inspire sadness and sorrow (Oliviero Ferrari, 1991: 96-98).

According to Kandinsky, who has become famous because of some of his articles, color is a natural value and includes the characteristics of motion and sound. He suggests that for understanding something he calls natural, you should draw two circles. Paint inside one yellow and the other one blue, and stare at them for a while. You will feel that yellow color comes out of its circle and gets closer to the

center of our vision with a motion; whereas, it seems that blue color gets away from us. In fact, eyes get intensely affected by yellow color, but get lost in the blue color. According to this artist, if yellow color is placed inside a geometric shape, when we look directly at it, it creates emotions, sadness and depression, and stimulates a form of anger. If the intensity of the color is increased, it might be unbearable for the eye and the brain. As it has been applied in Van Gogh's last painting, yellow might be the color of madness, delirium, forgetfulness and shallowness.

Physiologically too, color has effects. Ehrenwald and Goldstein's experiments have proved that color lights with warm backgrounds make arms and knees move towards the light, and blue and green colors cause different movements.

According to this, we can say that there is relationship between selection of colors and some physical, mental and emotional characteristics of the individuals. Joensch and Koch have mentioned color as an identifier of different characteristics of an individual and have invented tests with the help of this hypothesis by which it is possible to identify individuals' characteristics through their selection of colors and prioritizing them. Therefore, considering the psychology of colors and behaviors of individuals, especially children, it is possible to identify the effective elements in their attraction to studying, and take steps to increase their academic motivators (ibid: 98-100).

4. NEW CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN IRAN

Children's literature means that literature which is identically created for children and is part of the history of our literature. The attribute of constitutionalism has had important changes in the political, social and educational fields. On this basis, constitutionalists paid attention to children as the makers of a better future for the society. Socially too, some considerable changes occurred. Including that, new groups of people joined the public literates and joined libraries. Regarding the identity of their thoughts, constitutionalists paid a lot of attention to create a literate society and to establish modern educational approaches. Educational literature, as one of the branches of children's literature, grew up sooner than other branches. After establishment of education in the modern style, there was the need to provide course books in a way commensurate with the modern education. A book also was compiled which used images and big letters, and included poems of Yahya Dolatabadi, Iraj Mirza and pieces of texts from writers. Subject matter of the book was mostly educational and encouraged children for cleanliness, brushing their teeth and saying prayers.

Rewriting of classic works also was carried out with this tendency; for example Sheikh Hassan Tehrani, one of the constitutionalist activists and a member of parliament, rewrote the books *Kelilehwa Demneh* and *Marzbannameh*, which are instructive story books, into a simpler language for children (Pouladi, 2005: 96-97).

The Role of Pictures in Children's Poetry from Iranian Illustrators' Viewpoint

In this part, pictures in the specific poems of children will be discussed from the viewpoints of five experts in this field i.e. Sara Iravani, Muhammad Ali Bani Asadi, Nureddin Zarrin Kalk, Karim Nasr and Abulfazl Hemmati Ahouee.

Sara Iravani (1965) is a painter, outstanding illustrator of books, teacher of Iranian arts and winner of art rewards. She got her B.A from the Faculty of Fine Arts in University of Tehran and her M.A

from Az-Zahra University. She is now teacher of arts (Farokhzad, 2002: 68)

NureddinZarrinKalk (1937) is an author and illustrator of children's books, animation film maker, and known as "father of animation in Iran". He previously was chairman of ASIFA (Association Internationale du Film d'Animation) (Nasiri, 2003: 15).

Karim Nasr (1952) is one of the influential artists in drawing. He has B.A in architecture from a university in England and M.A in graphics from University of Tehran. He has won over 20 national and international awards including the Biennial of Illustration Bratislava and the Iranian Biennial of Select Illustration.

AbulfaziHemmatiAhuee (1950) got B.A in visual arts from Faculty of Fine Arts in University of Tehran, and has first class degree of arts in illustrating children's books. The results of these invaluable artistic efforts was, in addition to compiling and illustrating books, a lot of achievements in the eminent national and international festivals.

Muhammad Ali BaniAsadi is considered as the most active illustrator at the moment by illustrating over seventy books for children and adolescents. His attitude towards illustration is a professional and perpetual attitude (Akrami, 2003: 56).

6. Characteristics of Pictures in Children's Poetry Books

Sara Iravani: "in this age group, color is fundamentally important. Basically, color has a friendly feature. We are more familiar with color than with words. Words are conventions, but we have seen colors since we opened our eyes. Color conveys emotional and sensual feelings better. The feature of attributing color to objects and different shapes increases mental creativity. These colors create a sort of relationship and new concepts."

NureddinZarrinKalk: "children like images which are very similar to reality. It means that according to them, the best paintings and images are the ones which are more similar to the outside world; and the more beautifully and delicately this is done, children like it more. Folkly tastes or untreated tastes of instructors direct the tastes of children toward realism, of course, with more delicate and beautiful burnish. Therefore, if painting is beautiful, the child is told: wow, what a beautiful painting! And this might not be the real taste of the child."

Karim Nasr: "painter's understanding of poetry has fundamental role in illustrating that poem. Attention to this point is fundamental that what do we call poetry? What has just rhymes? No, if we reach the essence, we will see that poetic value of a text is the sign of its being poetry. Picture is also like that. Because of this, a certain definition cannot be given to image of poetry. Image of poetry could once include fluid elements, and another time, it could include simple elements, exactly like de-familiarization in poetry:

"My pillow is full of songs of swallows"

It is the same in pictures. Elements could be fluid like this. The earth could be mixed with water and human beings. Of course, all these could be presented badly. Imagery in poetry is equal to imagery in literature, of course, excluding the elements that are identically applied in poetry. Even it could sometimes illustrate the event before or after it happens, but anyway, picture is not the descriptive equivalent of poetry and its eventual structure is created on the basis of visual understanding of the

audiences."

AbulfazlHemmatiAhuee: "if we give Hafiz's poetry to illustrators and ask them to illustrate it, because of complication of its subject matter, we will have different images equal to the number of illustrators; but if we ask an illustrator of children's books to illustrate the poem "I have a rolling ball", because of flatness and one-dimensionality of its subject matter, there is no need to create complicated and deeply meaningful images; in these cases, the more important thing is technical presentation of the images."

Muhammad Ali BaniAsadi: "if an illustrator can reach a poetic balance in his pictures, he has accomplished a very important task. Image in poetry should not be merely made of the elements present in the poem, but they have to be so much interwoven and be placed with such a relationship alongside each other that they lead to fantasy. From now on, it depends on the abilities of a painter and his fantasy that how he organizes the form of relationship... picture in the books of children should not be mere decoration. Even if the personal experiences and suggestions of the poet lead the illustrator to conclude that it is better that he decorates the book, still he should work in a way to get the book closer to new experiences. Other things that must be considered in every children's book, including story books, poetry books and other forms, are as followings: the picture should not be tiresome, and the illustrator should have considerable ability and skill for presenting the goal he is following. By goal, I mean that if for example, he is about to illustrate a bird and the illustrator intends to get closer to nature, he must be able to do so; and if he is about to get satisfied by the element of simplicity in drawing, this simplicity must be monotonously apparent all over the work; or if an illustrator wants to paint an untouched and specific space, he should have the ability to organize and harmonize its visual elements, so that a space be created that the audience could comfortably step into it." (AsadiKhansari, 1997, 23-27).

7. Characteristics of a Good Image in Children's Poetry

Sara Iravani: "a good picture, in my opinion, is a picture which is capable of being understood by different people, that means a child should understand something from it and should love it; in the meantime, it should have so much to offer that even an ordinary adult also should like it. It also should have some other hidden points that another illustrator or a philosopher also should enjoy it. Of course, this is true about painting. The limits of an illustrator's maneuver are determined by the text and the poem that he illustrates. The art of illustrator is to maneuver up to the edges of these boundaries. Sometimes it is possible to go beyond the text, but if we go too far, we reach another area which has no congruity with what has been written. It means that in addition to heaviness of the image on the shoulders of the text, there is the possibility that the image might look unrelated to the text."

NureddinZarrinKalk: "in fact, the characteristic of poetry compared to other literary forms is that it must be imagination-oriented. Due to its nature, poetry better originates from imagination. Therefore, in order to illustrate children's poems, if the components that children are familiar with are applied, it will be useful for them; but in my opinion it is wrong to limit poetry to the imagination of the illustrator who has illustrated it, because in this case, we close the doors of imagination to children. In fact, there is

a delicate border in this case; it means that in the illustration given to children, apart from elements that are interesting for him and he knows and has relationship with, the ways should not be blocked. We should let the child go on imagining and should prepare appropriate conditions for that.

But about color, we should know that in fact, color is a tool in illustration. Color is an imagination provoker in itself and one can maneuver with it and no color can be omitted from the ray of colors; because in this case, colors cannot find themselves."

Karim Nasr: "poetic ideal illustration is an illustration that should primarily have three things:

- a. It should be an illustration i.e. it should own strong pictorial structure.
- b. If it includes that, it should be the illustration of poetry. It means that after it announced that "I am an illustration" it should also announce that "I am illustration of a poem not illustration of another text."
- c. It should have the ability to build a correlation with its audiences.

In fact, a good illustration for poetry can be, in its best form, the pictorial translation of that poem."

Abulfazl Hemmati Ahuee: "important difference of illustrating poetry with illustrating other literary texts, such as novel, scientific texts, etc. is that the illustrator has more freedom in illustrating poetry and can express his own feelings and mentality more and better; images, about whatever subject, will be successful only when they have power of expression, creativity and selection of appropriate techniques related to the subject. Successful illustration of poetry must include the element of imagination.

Muhammad Ali Bani Asadi: "in my previous reply to your question, I determined the realm I had in mind; the only remaining things are the skill of the illustrator and the literary talent of the poet which even encourage the illustrator, like the audience, and he can illustrate the image best." (ibid: 23-27).

CONCLUSION

In the article about illustration of children's books, discussions were carried out in two conceptual and empirical levels. In the conceptual level, children's literature and its nature were discussed generally; in addition to that, the article emphasized on the position of color in making the pictures attractive. In the empirical part, it evaluated illustration of children's poetry in Iran. Researchers in this field believe that it is impossible to present an all inclusive and exclusive definition of good illustration for children's books; nevertheless, all of them emphasize on the important role of pictures and colors in establishing relationships with children. Therefore, we can say that pictures in children's books help them understand better.

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