

AGE-ADDRESSIVITY AS A POETIC PRINCIPLE IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH AND UZBEK CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Abstract

This study examines age-addressivity as a poetic principle in children's literature. Drawing on Uzbek and English-language scholarship, it explores how literary works reflect the developmental characteristics of their implied readers through verbal, narrative, figurative, dialogic and visual-material features.

Keywords

children's literature, age-addressivity, poetics, implied reader, picturebooks, comparative poetics.

Children's literature is distinguished from literature for adults not only by subject matter or educational purpose, but also by its orientation towards a particular readership. In Uzbek children's literary scholarship, this principle is traditionally discussed through orientation towards a particular age group. B. Jamilova¹ states that a writer for children should consider the reader's age, psychological development, level of understanding and interests, and distinguishes preschool readership from primary-school and adolescent readership. M. Jumaboyev² likewise defines preschool readership as the period from two to seven years and stresses that literary works should correspond to children's age and level of comprehension. In the present study, age-addressivity is used as a working

1 Jamilova B.S. O'zbek bolalar adabiyoti/O'quv qo'llanma – Toshkent: Noshir, 2019. –10- 11 b.

2 Jumaboyev M. Bolalar adabiyoti va folklor – Toshkent: O'zbekiston Yozuvchilar uyushmasi Adabiyot jamg'armasi nashriyoti, 2006. – 4-5 b.

analytical term for the orientation of a literary work towards an implied child reader at a particular developmental stage and for the manifestation of this orientation in the poetic structure of the work. Age may influence plot organisation, rhythm, repetition, imagery, dialogue, verbal complexity, the relationship between words and pictures and even the material form of the book. Therefore, age-addressivity can be approached as a literary-poetic principle rather than only as a pedagogical or psychological criterion.

Reader-oriented theory provides a basis for this approach. Theresa Rogers,³ drawing on reader-response traditions, emphasises the transaction between the reader's affective, experiential and cognitive world and the literary text. This is especially important in children's literature because a two-year-old, a four-year-old and a six-year-old reader possess different experiential and interpretive capacities. The implied reader of preschool literature, consequently, cannot be treated as age-neutral.

A methodological contrast becomes visible when Uzbek and English-language classifications are compared. Uzbek sources generally treat preschool childhood as a broad category: approximately two or three to six or seven years. By contrast, *Essentials of Children's Literature*⁴ differentiates age-addressivity between 0–2, 2–4 and 4–7 ages. Books for ages 0–2 typically employ simple content, repetitive language, clearly defined illustrations, durable formats and opportunities for participation. For ages 2–4, picture storybooks increasingly contain simple plots and illustrations that participate in narration. The 4–7 age group is associated with broader social interaction and more developed picture-story structures⁵. This suggests that the preschool period should not automatically be treated as poetically homogeneous.

3 Rogers, T. *Literary Theory and Children's Literature: Interpreting Ourselves and Our Worlds*. *Theory Into Practice*, 38(3), 1999, pp. 139–140.

4 Rogers, T. *Literary Theory and Children's Literature: Interpreting Ourselves and Our Worlds*. *Theory Into Practice*, 38(3), 1999, pp. 138–146.

5 Short, K. G., Lynch-Brown, C., & Tomlinson, C. M. *Essentials of Children's Literature*. 8th ed. Pearson, 2014. pp-16-17

Recent scholarship on baby books further supports this view. Clémentine Beauvais⁶ argues that cognitive-poetic approaches require scholars to relate textual and pictorial features to the physiological and cognitive development of the implied audience. Research on baby books also foregrounds rhythm, sensory participation, touch and materiality. Lassén-Seger and Österlund⁷ describe baby books as a form of ‘pre-literature’ that may constitute an infant’s first encounter with visual and textual art and preliminary narrative relationships. The poetics of literature for the youngest children therefore cannot be reduced to verbal text alone.

Uzbek theoretical sources reveal comparable principles. Jumaboyev⁸ notes that works read to preschool children should be short, simple in content, visually attractive and linguistically appropriate to the child’s age, psychological state and level of comprehension. Lullabies, songs, fairy tales, riddles, proverbs and tongue twisters are identified among central forms of preschool literary experience. These observations point to the importance of brevity, oral performance, sound patterning, concrete imagery and visuality. Yet the broad 2–7 category does not explain whether these features remain equally dominant throughout the entire preschool period or how their functions change as the intended reader develops.

On the basis of the reviewed sources, age-addressivity may be identified through five interrelated groups of poetic markers: (1) verbal-rhythmic features such as repetition, rhyme and sound play; (2) narrative features such as plot length, causality and predictability; (3) figurative features such as concrete imagery, familiar objects and

6 Beauvais, C. “A is for Aesthetics: The Multisensory Beauty of Baby Books.” *Children’s Literature in Education*, 54, 2023, pp. 288–289.

7 Lassén-Seger, M., & Österlund, M. Survival Kits for Babies: Baby Box Books and Infant Temporality in Finnish Maternity Packages. *Children’s Literature in Education*, 54, 2023, pp. 337–338.

8 Jumaboyev, M. Bolalar adabiyoti va folklor. Tashkent: O‘zbekiston Yozuvchilar uyushmasi Adabiyot jamg‘armasi nashriyoti, 2006. - 4-5 b.

anthropomorphism; (4) dialogic-performative features including call-and-response patterns, oral performance and the adult co-reader; and (5) visual-material features, including word-image interaction, page design, book format and tactile engagement. Their relative dominance may change according to the age of the implied reader.

Thus, age-addressivity should be considered one of the constitutive principles of preschool children's poetics. Uzbek scholarship has long recognised age, psychology and linguistic accessibility, whereas English-language scholarship demonstrates the analytical value of narrower stages within early childhood. The methodological task is not necessarily to replace existing Uzbek classifications, but to investigate their internal poetic differentiation. Using age-addressivity as a comparative criterion may help identify shared typological features, age-specific poetic dominants and nationally distinctive forms of their realisation in contemporary English and Uzbek preschool children's literature.

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