

An investigation of interactive e-books in children's literature

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Abstract

One of the materials which are used in preparing children for life is undoubtedly printed books. Yet, technological innovations which affect life in every aspect change the structure of books. Books, with innovative features of the internet and computer, take its place first as an e-book after as an interactive e-book which is one of the last products of today's technology. Interactive e-books which are commonly used in children's literature are also used as an educational appliance especially for pre-school children. It is an important problem for parents and educators that if products are prepared in line with the requirements of children, and the structure of production. In this context, raising awareness of relevant institutions and people becomes more of an issue. In our study, for setting an example for those who are concerned, the interactive e-book "Who Stole the Moon?" is investigated on various aspects.

Keywords: Interactive e-books, children's literature, who stolen moon

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1. Introduction

Technology which is renewed at an unprecedented pace, takes hold of people almost in all areas such as education, art and culture. Today's human being who becomes electronic as a trot, works up into first radio and television then computer and the internet as inseparable parts. Thanks to technology, people fulfil official business via e-state, correspondence via e-article, e-journal, e-newspaper and e-book and even signatures via e-signature. Scripts which are the source of information of human change rapidly to e-article, e-newspaper, e-book and interactive e-book. Interactive e-books are obtained by adding new features and tools such as video, sound, animation, simulation and game to e-books. Interactive e-books which take an important place in children's literature are prepared mostly for pre-school children. It is mystery if these books which are popular in recent years are prepared in accordance with the principle of "according to child". The interactive e-book "Who Stole the Moon?" is found worth to investigate in this respect. In our study, the work is examined in detail under two main titles "Language and Expression Features" and "Pictures and Interactive Applications".

2. Language and Expression Features

Writing a book for children is more difficult and toilsome than writing for adults. Because "children's literature applies 'to those works which have both literary value and appeal to children' Children's literature has to contain these two elements 'literary value' and 'appealing to children'" (G. Munde, 1997). Writers of children's literature can't use their pens freely no matter what kind of work they give. Above all, they have to tell a child's world with child language. Namely the writer must prepare the work's form and content according to level of children. Likewise, it must be indicated on the first page of children books that how old children it appeals to. It is said in the book launch that it is prepared for "5 year old children and younger ones". Yet, it can't be reached the information in the "About" part in the book's bought version. When examined general structure of the work, it is understood that it is prepared for pre-school children. For that reason, our evaluation will be within the frame of necessities of 1 to 5 year old children. Children at this age show interest to picture books. "While as picture books are given to 2-3 year old children, fairy tales and stories are told and read to 4-6 year old children beside picture books (Yuce & Nuhoglu, 2007). Since "Who Stole the Moon?" consists of a fairy tale and many pictures, it can be said that it is suitable for 1-5 year old children.

Subject in books which are prepared for pre-school children must be clear and understandable. Mostly, joy of life, family, nation, nature, zoolatry, friendship and etc. must be told. Characters of tales must be created in a way that the reader/listener will be able to be friends with them. For children at this period who can't distinguish real and dream, events must be associated with daily life and chosen from events that they will enjoy. Even though characters and events are imaginary, it is necessary that children will make connection between life and real world (Sever, 2003; Nas, 2002; Kıbrıs, 2010). Children at that period become friends with tale characters. They share their problems with them. And they go on a journey together. The character Bertie Brown has the quality that he can become friends with 4-5 year old readers/listeners. Bertie likes watching birds, clouds, planes and the moon before he sleeps. On one of these days, while he is watching the sky, he can't see the moon. He thinks the moon is stolen and gets worried. He goes out to the garden of the house to look for it. He asks questions to the nocturnal birds Hedgedog, Fox, Badger, Mole and Owl. The writer who starts arousing curiosity with these dialogs tries to reflect the characteristics of the period in which pre-school children ask many questions to the community, with passion of learning. A dialog starts between nocturnal animals and Bertie who feels hopeful about finding the moon:

"...First of all Bertie saw Hedgehog. 'Good evening, Hedgehog,' said Bertie politely (he didn't wait to offend Hedgehog). 'Have you stolen the moon? It's just that I can't find it anywhere.'

'No,' said Hedgehog. 'It wasn't me. I have been busy foraging for food in the leave this evening.'

'Okay,' said Bertie, 'sorry to bother you.' And he carried on with his search. Next, Bertie saw Fox.

When Fox and Badger says they haven't seen the moon either, Bertie gets more worried. He thinks that he won't be able to watch it again and nocturnal animals will have a difficulty if he can't find the moon. Bertie who stumbles on the molehill and halts, wakes up from his dream and asks the same question to Mole. Mole says he has searched for food in underground so he hasn't seen the moon but he says Owl may have seen it. Bertie comes to Owl and tells about what happened at that night and asks who stole the moon. Owl says he sees everything that happens in the garden from the treetop but nobody has stolen the moon. The dialog between Bertie and Owl continues: "...I don't understand' he said. 'So where is it? It is nowhere to be seen this evening.' 'Have a look in the sky,' said Owl. 'Can you see any stars?' 'Well, no' said Bertie. 'That's because it's cloudy,' said Owl. 'when it's cloudy, the moon and stars are hidden, but as soon as the clouds blow over, the moon and stars will be back. Don't worry.' 'Are you sure?' asked Bertie, unsure that something as big as the moon could be hidden by clouds.

Bertie who has been convinced that he can see the moon comes back to his room and sinks into sleep. Next night, when he gets into his bed, switching off the lights, he sees the gorgeous moon. He feels relieved and sinks into deep sleep. He has a dream in which he is an astronaut.

The writer chooses a suitable plot for expectations of pre-school children associated with the topic, characters and imaginarily predominant fiction. The characters' being animals and Bertie's talking to them are important in terms of reflecting common features of children. This period's children's will to ask questions, learn, search and find finds voice in Bertie's trying to find the moon. And also, the writer tries to give the audience/children information about both nocturnal animals and natural events in the flow of events. In the tale, rich imagination and having been given a place to making friends show children's developmental features are taken into consideration. The writer tries to fulfill the requirement and interest of the reader by creating Bertie as a dynamic character.

The work which is articulated in a positive way is open to criticism in many aspects. That is to say, it is an important problem to have been given the name "Who Stole the Moon?" to the work. Because stealing is an unacceptable event in terms of national and universal values. Bertie's thinking about the moon's being stolen instead of being lost shows him as a doubter. The audiences/listeners who identify themselves with the tale characters may play the role of a doubting character.

Because works which are prepared for pre-school ones will be read loudly, it must be prepared with an euphonic rhythmic style. It must improve language and expression skills of children, and it must be far from misspelling and incoherency. The number of words in the tale mustn't be more than forty words, and the words must be the ones which are known and used oftenly by children. Figurative expressions and sentences which may evoke the word's second and third meanings mustn't be used. Verbs in sentences must be used with simple tenses, not with complex tenses. Dialog-weighted expressions must be used rather than texts. Descriptions that are suitable for children's interest must be used but it must be kept within bounds (Yalcın & Aytaş, 2002; Nas, 2002).

The work which is successful in terms of subject and fiction is not that successful in terms of language and expression. While it is expected that sentences are so short that they include not more than 5 words, long sentences as follows are used.

"Bertie snapped out of his thoughts as he tripped over a small mole hill in the garden, and out popped Mole. If you lie in your bed tomorrow night and gaze out of your skylight, I am sure you will see the moon." "One cold November evening, Bertie was getting ready for bed and looked up through the skylight to see what shape the moon was (as he often did), but he couldn't see it anywhere." Most

sentences in the book are problematical in terms of meaning and structure. For example, the sentence "How would all the nocturnal animals about their business without the moonlight to guide them on their way?" is not clear. Present perfect continuous structure in these sentences "I have been busy burrowing in my tunnels this evening." and "I have been playing with my Fox cubs in our lair this evening." is not suitable for 1-5 year old children.

The book which has many figurative expressions, artistic similes, compound nouns and incoherency besides of compound sentences consisting of noun clauses and adjective clauses, has an unclear expression. We can concretise this with some examples: The writer widely uses phrasal verbs such as go in to, look up through, structural words such as carry on, pop out, figurative expressions such as offend, bother, gaze, idioms such as snap out of thoughts, trip over something, to see in all its glory, Bertie's heart sank, similes such as as if he was king of the garden. The writer makes the meaning more difficult to understand by using unnecessary words throughout the text. For example, "than a little" in the sentence "Bertie was getting more than a little concerned," is redundant. Apart from these, it can be seen that there are examples of lack of information transfer in the tale narration. For example, at the beginning of the tale, Bertie's wish to be an astronaut isn't mentioned but at the end of the tale, Bertie sinks into a deep sleep and he dreams that he becomes an astronaut.

It is not suitable for children that narrations such as stories, novels and tales are narrated from the perspective of third person he/she. Because a narrator who knows about future, past and what occurs in people's mind is hardly believable to children. Instead, they like first person narration which is realistic, sincere and in the atmosphere of conversation (Yalcın & Aytaş: 33). However, "Who Stole the Moon?" is narrated using third person narration. Everything that the characters experience is seen and narrated by someone else.

3. Characteristics of Pictures and Interactive Applications

At the beginning of the work, Bertie holds four balloons on which it is written the parts of the book "read, games, about, songs". Audiences reach the application of relevant part by touching the balloons. In our study, both pictorial design and interactive application of each part will be evaluated under different titles.

3.1. Read Part

The tale which is supported by pictures consists of twenty three pages which have interactive applications. Each page has animations that can be created by touching pictures. Animations occur with interesting sounds and different figures. The character Bertie is drawn as a cute simplified character regardless of realistic physical characteristics of children. Generally, place and intellection of forming are far from the need to be realistic. Illustrator tries to portray like in pictures that pre-school children draw to make narration stronger and attractive. Yet, colours used, even though giving no place to shades of grey, are chosen from real colours in the nature. For example, a red sky is not used. It is seen that all objects and characters are drawn with their natural colours to prevent its being extremely abstract.

Pictures in children books must keep children's interest alive and help them use their imaginations. Colour and shape used in the book is interesting from the children's point of view. The situation mentioned on all pages is stated in a composition which goes on a page. This causes unclearness in the work. Namely, it has a style of narrative, which makes "the picture appears its limitation by means of the pictorial nature, ensuring its closed character from an aesthetic point of view, but still has a hidden limitation." In this and such on forming intellections, narration can be strengthened via sub-meanings.

Yet, when 1-5 year old children are considered, it is unsuitable to use a narration with sub-meanings. As the dominant fiction in the book is unclear, visual elements remain weak in leading children to think and imagine. For example, on the first page where main characters are introduced, characters with alien-like appearances occur when touched the screen. The aims and functions of these characters are not explained on the next pages. Thus, this situation causes ambiguity for children. If these pictures refer to Bertie's dream in which he sees himself as an astronaut on the last page, we could say that it is quite difficult for pre-school children to understand. Illustrator draws the animal characters with their natural features and creates them in accordance to children's realism via individualisation. It's understood that the ones who prepared the book aim to raise audiences' awareness by their attitude to animals, correspondingly the narration of the tale. Yet, the animals in the book are in artificial living places which are created by the illustrator instead of their natural environment. This is contrary to the aim. Also, it is a lack that animals are created in different magnitude when considered the rate in each page. This situation causes distortion in continuity in terms of audience. For example, owl on a page is bigger than Bertie but on another page, it is normalized on a tree, and on the next one, when considered the previous tree, it is bigger. In pre-school books, it is unexpected that visualisation stays completely connected to the real or is described completely with imagination. Yet, children's understanding visual messages in a healthy way and their comprehending the subject in cohesion are important. For this, it must be provided the choice of figural understanding and composition with continuity.

In the work, some characters and some objects have the feature to move forward and backward. Children discover these interactive applications by touching some parts on the screen, not by exploration and imagination. This situation may be considered as an appropriate way of discovery when group of age takes consideration. On the other hand, these applications are static, and they are far from giving excitement. And also, as these applications do not consist of surprises, they do not have reinforcing features when they're discovered as well. Shortly, besides the part "read" is illustrated appropriately to children's realism, it also has several missing parts which must be corrected.

3.2. The Part "Games"

1. Puzzle: Visualization in games consists of puzzles whose level of difficulty changes by raising the number of pieces of pictures. Completion period of games can be followed with a time counter. Yet, some puzzles whose piece number is raised are in the quality that under 5 year old children won't be able to achieve without help of others. This situation makes us think that producers try to enlarge the group of age with commercial concern.

2. Lightning Bug Game: It is a game that children need to touch the screen to catch lightning bugs which are images in the part "read". The game whose informative aspect is not in the forefront neither helps children think nor inspires children's imagination. It can be said that it contributes only to the psychomotor development of children. If interactive e-books aren't prepared in a good quality, they become either a game device or an ordinary book which is tossed aside after being read once. If we are mentioning about a book which is prepared for children, we mustn't forget that tales are its main element. Likewise, the book we are investigating is named "Who Stole the Moon?" because of the narrated tale. No matter what kind of work exposed for audience it is (e-book or interactive e-book), it must be looked at the work as a book. "Who Stole the Moon" is weak in terms not only of interaction and visualization but also activating imagination. However, literary works mustn't be designed and presented as consumption stuff. This kind of works must take place in children's mind for a long time, and children must have a desire to reread the work, and they must enjoy the language, subject and visual elements every time they read it. Shortly, games in interactive e-books mustn't cause the book to be far from being a book.

3. **Painting Game:** In this game, different images of the tale characters are tried to be coloured by the help of digital equipments. This game gives children information about colours but it is lack of excitement and interesting features. Figures do not have the features to help children think and use their imagination, concerning the subject.

4. **Matching Game:** It is a simple game whose time is measured by a time counter and which consists of simple matching pictures. The level of the game is raised by raising the number of pieces in the game, and this contributes children's developing memory. It's understood that pictures which are used in matching part are chosen without the aim of being aesthetical and informative or different aims. It is hard to find either a clear or a hidden message related to the aims of the game and the book. The game's end does not have positive reinforcement. When pre-school children use it, it seems that the game is harder and harder, as the work to deviate from its goal. Because children may get bored of the game easily after they have some unsuccessful experiences.

3.3. "About" and "Songs" Parts

The part "About" which is prepared to give information about the book doesn't have enlightening and satisfying information. There aren't significant visual elements in both parts. Songs can not be translated into other languages, they must be in their original forms. When the book is prepared for illiterate audiences, it means that the children who cannot speak English are passive and can only listen to the song. The part "Songs" takes children's attention at first and may get them adopt the habits of understanding of aesthetic pleasure and listening. Yet, children find it difficult to listen to translated songs for a long time since they do not understand them. If the events that are mentioned in songs are narrated with pictures, it can be considered that it will catch children's attention for a longer time.

4. Result

Children get to know and like life and reading by quality books. Today's children who have met printed books can't find what they are looking for in the process of time. The ones who try to find ways to close the gap produce e-books and interactive e-books through technology. However, commercial concern must be ignored and we must be far from things that may cause the book to be far from a book, while these books are being prepared. If these books are prepared of good quality, individuals supply both with their having an amusing time and internet-based creativity and information satisfaction and aesthetic pleasure that can be taken from the book. Interactive e-books with their innovative features must be prepared in the way which makes an impression for a long time on children's mind. The children must have a desire to reread the book and whenever they read it, they must enjoy the book's language, topic and visualization. If these books are not written by pedagogues, psychologists and teachers of literature, they become a consumption product rather than a literary work. Lacking quality books may cause to learn wrongly and also it may affect children's affective, cognitive and social developments adversely.

Parents, educators and book producers must be aware that interactive books which have games and amusing activities are not just for entertaining individuals. Parents must bring their children together with printed books. They must make right choices and choose books of good quality. Specialists who are effective in preparation and usage of interactive e-books must always give particular importance to children's interests, wills and needs.

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