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РОЛЬ ДИТЯЧОЇ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ У НАВЧАННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ УЧНІВ МОЛОДШИХ КЛАСІВ: МОНОГРАФІЯ

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN: A MONOGRAPH

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Рецензенти:

«Роль дитячої літератури у навчанні англійської мови учнів молодших класів: монографія» стане у нагоді педагогам-філологам, а також студентам закладів вищої освіти, які вивчають навчальну дисципліну «Англійська література для дітей молодшого шкільного віку». Запропонований матеріал ретельно підібраний з метою забезпечення високого рівня сформованості умінь та навичок студентів із зазначеного аспекту.

Reviewers:

Syrko Iryna.
The Role of Children's Literature in Teaching English to the Primary School Children: a Monograph. Drohobych: Shvydkodruk, 2024. 77 p.

"The Role of Children's Literature in Teaching English to the Primary School Children: a Monograph" will be useful for philology teachers, as well as students of higher education institutions studying the subject "English literature for primary school children". The material of the monograph is carefully selected in order to ensure a high level of formation of students' abilities and skills in the specified aspect.

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ЗМІСТ

PREFACE

Teachers of young learners of English are often encouraged to use children's literature in their teaching. My overall aims in this research were to find out • whether there is any agreement about the meaning of the term 'children's literature', particularly among those who recommend its use in the teaching of English to young learners; • what types of teaching materials and resources teachers of English to young learners claim to use and to value, and what types of teaching materials and resources they actually use, and how they use them; • how a sample of textbooks, guided readers and popular children's literature commonly used by teachers of young learners rate when considered in relation to a range of criteria derived from a critical review of writing on children's literature and, in particular, 'good' children's literature.

There is considerable disagreement about what constitutes children's literature and, in particular, 'good' children's literature. Furthermore, although many writers claim that children's literature, particularly narrative, can contribute to children's social, cognitive and linguistic development, very little appears to have been written about the problems that can be associated with using literature designed for first language speakers in the foreign language classroom.

My overall conclusion is that the use of literature that is designed primarily for first language speakers of English in

teaching English to young learners in Ukraine may have little positive impact on learning, particularly in the hands of inexperienced and poorly trained teachers. Nevertheless, there is much that those who design materials for use in language teaching, in Ukraine and elsewhere, can learn from children's literature.

The overall aim of the research and the research questions

The overall *aim* of this research project was to investigate the use of children's literature in the teaching of English to young learners (aged 6-12).

From this overall aim, a number of research *questions* emerged:

1. What are the different ways in which 'children's literature in English' can be defined and how is it generally conceptualized by educationalists in Ukraine?

2. What, if any, are the characteristic linguistic differences between literature that is intended primarily for children for whom English is a first language and literature that is intended primarily for children for whom English is an additional language?

3. What are the professional and language backgrounds of a sample of teachers of young learners of English, what are their beliefs about their own teaching context and what materials and resources do they use in their teaching?

4. Does a sample of teachers of young learners of English actually use children's literature in their language lessons and, if so, when and how do they use it and what types of children's literature do they select?

5. What, if anything, does a sample of texts used in textbooks designed for young learners of English have in common with children's literature, and, in particular, with 'good' children's literature as defined by a number of educationalists?

6. What, if anything, does a sample of graded readers that are commonly used in Ukraine have in common with children's literature, and, in particular, with 'good' children's literature as defined by a number of educationalists?

7. When is the actual linguistic and pictorial content of a sample of children's books that are commonly used in Ukraine, and is that content likely to be consistent with the needs and interests of the majority of young Ukrainian learners of English?

8. What can educationalists learn from children's literature that can be applied to the design of teaching materials for young learners of English?

INTRODUCTION

As the age at which young learners are introduced to English in elementary schools in Ukraine has decreased, there has been an increased focus on the teaching of English to young learners. Ministry of Education explicitly encourage the use of stories, poems, rhymes, drama, riddles and humorous short prose passages in the language class. Textbooks (and the materials designed to accompany them) used by teachers of young learners in Ukraine are based on the national curriculum guidelines and are generally assumed to set clear teaching and learning objectives and to provide a systematic and progressive approach to language syllabus design.

However, in spite of the fact that some effort is being made to incorporate aspects of 'communicative language teaching', that is, language teaching in which learners are encouraged to engage in authentic communicative interaction in the target language, into these textbooks and to make them more interesting and motivating for young learners by including the types of text to which reference is made in the national curriculum guidelines, these efforts appear, thus far, to have been generally largely unsuccessful. Indeed, the claim made by some scientists that textbooks, by definition, contain texts that are designed for study *rather than* (as opposed, presumably, to 'in addition to') enjoyment does appear to be generally true of textbooks designed for young learners of English in Ukraine. It

is, no doubt, partly for this reason that there has been an increased interest in the potential of children's literature to contribute to language teaching. Indeed, Ukrainian teachers generally now believe that children's literature in English has an important role to play in the language classroom, a belief that is reinforced by the fact that many kindergartens and private language schools in Ukraine make extensive use of children's literature (often literature designed for first language speakers) in introducing young learners to English. However, many of these kindergartens and private language schools employ native speakers of English and are able to mimic, to some extent at least, the context in which children acquire native languages, often offering, in the case of kindergartens, English-medium childcare for extended periods of time each day. So far as public schools are concerned, however, English tuition may take place for as little as one hour each week in the early stages of learning. Furthermore, although Ukrainian teachers and teacher educators often make claims about the value of children's literature in the language classroom, they appear very rarely to explain what they mean by children's literature, to attempt to provide empirical evidence for the claims that they make, or to explore issues relating to the selection and use of children's literature in the context of language teaching in anything other than a very superficial way. It is therefore important to consider the recommendations of Ukrainian educators in relation to the use of children's literature in the teaching of English in the

context of a more broadly-based consideration of writing about children's literature. In this chapter, discussion of Ukrainian writing about the use of children's literature in the English language class is preceded by discussion of writing on children's literature in which the focus is, in turn, on definition, genre and text-type, illustration, language, language and literacy development, evaluation, and selection.

CHAPTER I

DEFINING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Before the nineteenth century, very few books were especially written for children. Since then, changing attitudes towards childhood and children's development, along with the increased sophistication of print technology, have led to the development of children's literature as a major industry. There is, however, no simple, straightforward definition of children's literature that can be applied with equal validity at different times and in different contexts. Just as concepts of 'child', 'childhood' and 'literature' have changed over time, so too have definitions of 'children's literature'.

It is not a simple matter to define 'childhood' or 'literature'. Some writers maintain that children's literature differs from adult literature in degree only; others maintain that it differs in kind, that is, that the word 'literature' when used in the context of 'children's literature' cannot necessarily be related in any straightforward way to the word 'literature' as used in other contexts. Thus, for example, Bottigheimer argues that children's literature is "an important system of its own". To complicate matters further, there are those who maintain that to be included in the category of 'children's literature', writing must be of 'good quality'. Thus, for example, Hillman would exclude from the category of 'children's literature', writing that is "stodgy,"

"too predictable," or "too illogical." Precisely how one determines whether a work meets these extremely vague criteria largely remains an open question.

Definitions of children's literature can be assigned to three broad categories (*intended audience; purpose; style/quality*), the second of which includes three sub-categories (*entertainment; entertainment and information; empathy*). Although, in terms of overall emphasis, the majority of definitions fall into one of these categories and sub-categories, some include aspects of more than one of them.

The most commonly occurring contemporary definition of children's literature is one that focuses on *intended audience*. For many writers, children's literature is simply a body of texts that is intended for a particular readership, that is, children, children being defined loosely in terms of a range of socio-cultural and individual characteristics. Also common are definitions of children's literature that focus on *purpose*. That purpose is sometimes seen in terms of both information and entertainment; sometimes, however, entertainment alone is the critical definitional feature, the emphasis generally being on works belonging tothe narrative genre. Less often, definitions that relate primarily to purpose focus on *empathy,* children's literature being classified as literature that is designed to help children to understand, and emphasize with, the world views and experiences of others, including other children. Finally, there are

those who believe that children's literature should be defined in terms of style and quality.

1.1 Intended audience

Many scientists do not define children's literature explicitly. They claim, however, that in any account of children's literature, "the child must be regarded as a necessary condition which the author consciously or unconsciously relates to in the creative process". For McDowell and Hunt the definition of children's literature includes explicit reference to intended readership. For them, the term 'children's literature' is applicable to books written for, and read by, that group referred to as 'children' by any particular society. It need not have any other specific characteristics or qualities.

Furthermore, McDowell notes that whether a particular text can be given a value "depends upon the circumstances of use". This approach to defining children's literature excludes books that are read by, but not primarily intended for, children. Even so, to define children's literature in terms of intended readership alone is potentially problematic in that it allows for the inclusion of, for example, textbooks which would not normally be considered to come within the domain of children's literature. This is an issue that is not resolved by Lesnik-Oberstein who defines 'children's literature' as "a category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships

with a particular reading audience: children". Even the inclusion of the word 'books' in this definition is problematic: it excludes a range of written materials that are not produced in book format.

Townsend observes that "any line which is drawn to confine children and their books to their own special corner is an artificial one", and therefore that"[the] only practical definition of a children's book today - absurd as it sounds - is 'a book which appears on the children's list of a publisher". Quote apart from the fact that, once again, the word 'book' appears in this definition, its usefulness is questionable. This definition would exclude works that appear in electronic format and are not listed in publisher's catalogues. It would, however, include books designed for adults that have been adapted for children. In this respect, it can be aligned with the views of Weinreich and Bartlett who includes in his definition of children's literature books originally written for adults that have been re-worked with children in mind.

1.2 Purpose/function
1.2.1 Emphasis on entertainment

For many writers, 'children's literature' is not only a term that applies to writing that is designed primarily to *entertain*, but also one that is restricted to narrative fiction. For Hollindale (1997, p. 30), for example, children's literature is "a body of

texts with certain common features of *imaginative interest*, which is activated as children's literature by a reading event: that of being read by a child", "a child [being] someone who believes on good grounds that his or her condition of childhood is not yet over" (emphasis added).

Ghosn explicitly confines children's literature to fiction, defining it as "fiction written for children to read for pleasure, rather than for didactic purposes" and explicitly excluding "'basal readers', or 'reading scheme' books, which are developed around controlled vocabulary and sentence structures". This definition raises some critical issues. It is not only 'basal readers' and 'reading scheme' books that are "developed around controlled vocabulary and sentence structures".

In excluding such material, Ghosn effectively excludes many very popular books that have been written for children. Furthermore, it is unclear what Ghosn intends by the use of the word 'didactic' in this context. The word 'didactic' can be applied to any material that is intended to convey information and instruction, whether or not it is also designed to entertain. In explicitly excluding materials that are intended to teach as well as to entertain, includingmaterials that are developed around controlled vocabulary and sentence structures, Ghosn would effectively exclude from the category of children's literature books such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (1969). He would also exclude all writing that does not belong to the category of narrative fiction.

1.2.2 Emphasis on information and entertainment

Galda and Cullinan (2002. p. 7) claim that literature "entertains and informs", that "[it] enables young people to explore and understand their world" and "enriches their lives and widens their horizons". Thus, through literature, children "learn about people and places on the other side of the world as well as ones down the street. They can travel back and forth in time to visit familiar places and people, to meet new friends, and to see new worlds. They can explore their own feelings, shape their own values, and imagine lives beyond the one they live". Such an approach, would allow for the inclusion in the category of children's literature of both fiction and non-fiction. It would also allow for the inclusion of works which are designed to teach as well as to entertain.

1.2.3 Emphasis on empathy

For a number of writers, children's literature is narrative, an important characteristic of which is the provision of access to understanding through empathy with the lives and experiences of others. For Saxby, "the raw material of literature is experience - life". Hollindale notes that the experiences recorded need not be fictional but might, for example, be based on the author's memory of his or her childhood. For Huck et al., children's

literature is "the imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structures of language". It is socially and culturally conditioned and focuses on the lives and experiences of children, thus enabling young people to broaden their world view through the imaginative apprehension of new experiences.

Through vicarious experience, Huck et al. claim, children's literature encourages the development of empathy. Thus, for example, *The Upstairs Room* by Johanna Reiss (1987) which describes the lives of two Jewish girls who hidfrom German soldiers in the cramped upstairs room of a farmhouse for two years, provides children with an opportunity to understand and empathize with experiences with which they are themselves unfamiliar. In common with many other writers for whom the development of empathy through vicarious experience is a critical characteristic of children's literature, Huck et al. restrict children's literature to the narrative genre.

1.2.4 Emphasis on style and quality

In a definition that is reminiscent of the canonical approach to adult literature often associated with F. R. Leavis, Lukens refers to children's literature as involving "a significant truth expressed in appropriate elements and memorable language", the ideas being "expressed in poetic form, [and] the truths of theme and character [being] explored through the elements of fiction, and the style of the artist". There is, however, no serious

attempt to define what is meant in this context by 'significant truth', 'appropriate elements', 'memorable language', 'poetic form' or 'style of the artist'.

1.3 A contextually relevant definition of children's literature

What all of the approaches to definition to which reference has been made have in common is that they all emphasize the fact that children's literature is written for children and, therefore, with the needs and interests of children in mind. Even so, children's literature can be defined in many different ways. For the purposes of this study, an inclusive definition that focuses on intended readership is the most useful. Thus, 'children's literature' is defined here as any material that is written for, and read by, that group referred to as 'children' by any particular society. This leaves open for the moment the issue of what constitutes 'good' or 'effective' children's literature. This is, however, an issue of considerable importance and one that will be addressed later in relation to context of use.

CHAPTER II

THE RELEVANCE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
TO THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH

2.1 Children's literature: genre and text-type

The words 'genre' and 'text-type' can be used in two very different ways. In line with traditional usage (particularly in literary contexts), a number of academic researchers use the word 'genre' to refer to socially constructed categories that describe written and oral texts such as, for example, novels, short stories, poems, lectures, and academic articles. Here, these are described as *text-types*, the term *genre* being reserved for the classification of texts according to primary communicative purposes such as instructing, explaining, arguing, describing, classifying and recounting. Texts may be mono-generic or multi-generic. Thus, for example, a text belonging to a particular text-type such as a short story, may include a variety of different genres such as description, classification, explanation and recount.

Drawing upon the work of Halliday, Martin and Rothery, Christie and others, and also upon the expertise of experienced teachers, the scientists outline six genres (recount, instruction, exposition/argument, narrative, report and explanation), associating each with structural elements and typical linguistic

features and arguing that it is important that young learners should be introduced to all of these genres.

As indicated above, a number of writers define children's literature as narrative fiction whose primary purpose is entertainment. This, however, restricts children's literature to one particular text-type (story) and one particular genre (narrative). In seeking to include different text-types within the scope of children's literature, Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown define children's literature as "good quality trade books written especially for children from birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interest to children through prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction." Leaving aside for the moment the question of what is meant here by 'good quality', a definition such as this would include, in terms of text-types, "novels, poetry, drama, biographies and autobiographies, and essays" as well as "writings in fields such as philosophy, history, and science", presumably including topicbased books belonging primarily to the information genre. However, since 'trade books' are books published for children and young adults that are not textbooks or part of a basal reading series, some works that I would wish to include here as works of children's literature are excluded from this definition.

According to Winch et al., children's literature can play an important role in cognitive and linguistic development, providing "a locus for the activation of speaking and listening skills, giving them purpose and direction", and a place "where children

encounter in a non-threatening way a diversity of possible perspectives on philosophical issues, worldviews, social ideas, and cultural practices". If any of these essentially pedagogic functions are to be realized, teachers need to understand the organizational and linguistic characteristics of different genres and text-types in making selections and deciding on appropriate methodologies.

2.2   Children's literature: Illustrations and their function

Illustration plays an important role in children's literacy development: children *like* pictures and children *need* pictures. For both children and adults, illustrations can play in important role in textual interpretation. It is widely known that the reader scans the picture first, then reads the text, then returns to the picture to reinterpret in the light of the words so that the words help us to interpret the pictures and vice versa.

However, there are good reasons for believing that children read picture-books in ways that adults do not: Consider the fact that children born into the first years of the twenty-first century are likely to possess a richer and more deft understanding of visual imagery and its modes of deployment than any other generation in the history of humankind. Their world is saturated with imagines, moving and still, alone and in all manner of hybrid

combinations with texts and sounds. This is the world in which they must function.

Whereas when adults read, they tend to ignore many of the details of accompanying illustrations, children tend to pay careful attention to them.

Although award winning books may, in the view of adults, have literary merit, they will not necessarily always be popular with children. Pascoe and Gilchrist (1987) therefore conducted a survey of a sample of children (aged 10-12) to find out what they regarded as being particularly important in relation to their enjoyment of books. The children surveyed ranked presentation, including illustrations, as the most important factor. On the basis of a similar survey, they reported that for a sample of children aged 8 to 11, book covers were critical in deciding whether to purchase a book. Preferred book covers had attractive eye-catching visual elements. With reference to another survey, it was noted that almost without exception, the children thought the pictures were more interesting than the words. They felt that a book would still be good if you only had the pictures, but if there were only words it would be boring, especially, they added, for children. In spite of the obvious importance of illustrations, approaches to reading tended in the past to refer to text only, with 'visual literacy' being largely neglected. Due, in part at least, to the rapid development of media technology, it is now considered important to include visual reading in literacy education and many children's books, particularly picture books,

provide a very useful resource for the development of visual reading.

There is generally considered to be a difference between an illustrated book and a picture book although there is no clear-cut distinction, with what are sometimes referred to as 'picture story books' falling somewhere between the two categories. Norton, notes that most children's books are illustrated, but not all illustrated children's books are picture books. According to Anderson, a picture book conveys its message through a series of pictures with only a small amount of text (or none at all). Text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost, an experience for a child, noting that as an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page. On its own terms its possibilities are limitless. Nikolajeva and Scott claim that picture books successfully combine the imaginary and the symbolic, the iconic and the conventional, having achieved something that no other literary form has mastered.

The pictures in picture story books must help to tell the story, showing the action and expressions of the characters, the changing settings, and the development of the plot. The interaction between text and pictures in picture story books can provide children with an opportunity to develop visual-reading competence. For learners of additional languages, they can, if

well chosen and appropriately used, provide an excellent opportunity to reinforce and practice language. It is therefore important that teachers should know how children view the pictures in picture books and picture story books, what types of picture appeal to children and how pictures can best be used to help children with their language development.

Although all children enjoy reading pictures, it does not follow that children from different cultures necessarily enjoy, or are able to interpret, the same types of picture. Like humour, illustration is culture-bound. For this reason, Nodelman notes that picture books can provide a significant means by which we integrate young children into the ideology of our culture, noting that [like] most narratives, picture book stories forcefully guide readers into culturally acceptable ideas about who they are through the privileging of the point of view from which they report on the events they describe. Thus, picture books encourage readers to see and understand events and people as the narrator invites us to see them. Thus it is important to bring cultural difference into the picture as well as potential discontinuities in home and school literacy practices when trying to understand [responses] to images

In picture-books the pictures are never just pictures; they are pictures-as-influenced-by-words. Thus the words on their own are always partial, incomplete, unfinished, awaiting the flesh of the pictures. Similarly the pictures are perpetually pregnant with potential narrative meaning, indeterminate,

unfinished, awaiting the closure provided by the words. The relationship between text and pictures may be more or less straightforward. Thus, pictures may elaborate, amplify, extend, and complement words or may appear to contradict or 'deviate' in feeling from what the words imply.

Based on a study of a large number of picture books, it can be noted that pictures can have a wide range of functions, including decoration, complement to the text, carrying the weight of the text, amplifying the text, and being integral to an understanding of the text. Children use pictures to clarify and expand text as they move from "picture-governed" to a "text-governed' approach to constructing meaning.

Furthermore, the pictures in picture books, particularly in the case of non-fictional picture books, can help children to become careful observers and interpreters of visual aids.

The fact that the relationship between text and pictures in picture books can vary means that they provide children with an opportunity not only to understand and interpret text, but also to create a story of their own. The levels of meaning and the ambiguities created in the relationship between words and pictures mean that picture books present a challenge to children. In particular, children from different cultural backgrounds bring their own cultural knowledge to bear on interpretation. It is important, therefore, that teachers of English who use picture books to present, revise and practice language are aware of this: it is something that can have a very important bearing on the

selection and use of picture books in language teaching and learning contexts. Furthermore, although children can become more involved in reading and listening if they are challenged by picture-books in which the relationship between words and pictures involves ambiguity and tension, the scientists found that the lower the level of language competence of students, the greater was their struggle to make effective use of picture books in completing tasks, those with the least language competence requiring constant help to fill in the gap between pictures and texts. For language learners, particularly those in the early stages of learning, the relationship between text and pictures generally needs to be a straightforward one.

Presenting learners with challenges that are beyond their current level of competence is likely not only to create frustration and a sense of inadequacy, but is also likely to act as a barrier to language learning. Thus, post-modern picturebooks, books that emphasize the incongruity between texts and illustrations, are unlikely to provide effective resources in the early stages of the teaching and learning of additional languages. Children in the early stages of the learning of an additional language need pictures that convey clear messages. There are three stages in the development of picture reading as an aspect of children's multi-literacy:

1) Bringing personal meaning to units (comparing/contrasting the author's text with their own background knowledge and experience).

2) Examining individual units for picture clues in the context of larger units (similar to looking at vocabulary in the context of sentences).

3) Extracting meaning from the words and sentences (discover the author's meaning through the use of text clues).

In proposing these three stages, scientists appear to presuppose an existing level of linguistic competence that is unlikely to characterize young learners of an additional language (unless the text is specifically written or selected with their existing abilities in mind). For young learners of English who need to learn to interpret and use an alphabetic writing system, the potential problems are compounded. For them, the stages involved in understanding and interpretation are likely to be rather different from those outlined above.

In selecting and using children's literature with reference to illustrations, teachers of English need to be both realistic and cautious. Pictures, along with colour and design, not only provide children with sensuous pleasure, but also with an aid to literacy and language development, providing something to which they can attach their ideas. Although this can be the case, it is equally possible for pictures to represent a barrier to language learning in some cases, especially where their relationship to the written text is not a direct one. The illustrators note, pictures can not only mirror text and expand text but can also act against text. Where a picture book is used

in the context of the learning of an additional language, ambiguity should generally be avoided.

Much has been written about children's book illustration. However, most of what has been written is cast in very general terms.

2.3 Children's literature: Language features

The majority of those who have written about children's literature have done so with children for whom the language of the text is a first language in mind. In Ukraine, as in many other countries, many children are exposed to literature written in their mother tongue, literature written in the primary language of scholastic instruction, literature that has been translated from another language into their first language and/ or the primary language of scholastic instruction, and literature written in other languages such as, for example, English. Many of the books to which they are exposed that come into the first three categories are story books (including picture story books), but those that come into the fourth category involve a range of different genres and text-types, including, for example, the following types of texts:

• **Alphabet Books** which present the letters of the alphabet one by one in order to help children to acquire the sounds and symbols of the twenty-six letters. One example is *Eating the Alphabet: Fruits and Vegetables from A to Z.*

• **Counting Books** which present numbers (generally from 1 to 10) along with the names of the numbers (one, two, three…).

• **Wordless Books** which have no written text but present their messages through pictures only.

• **Concept Books** which don't tell a story but introduce an idea or concept (e.g., opposites), an object (e.g., a car), or an activity (e.g., eating).

• **Nursery Rhyme Books** or other collections of verse (including traditional verse). Examples are the retelling of nursery rhymes (accompanied by new illustrations) by different writers.

• **Picture Storybooks** in which the interaction between written text and pictures is fundamental to interpretation.

• **Easy-to-Read Books** which are created specifically to help the beginning reader to read more successfully and independently. They contain larger than average print, bigger space between lines and limited vocabulary. Many of them (in common with many other types of book for children) include devices such as word patterns, repeated text, rhyming text and illustration clues.

In Ukraine, the increasing importance of young learner English education ensures steady sales of children's books in English. In fact, English language children's books account for 10 per cent of the children's book market in Ukraine. Unfortunately, the majority of writers who discuss the role of children's literature have little or nothing to say about the

language of children's literature in relation to contexts such as this. Some well-known children's writers, made the following observation about the language of children's literature: anyone who writes down to children is simply wasting his time. You have to write up, not down. Some writers for children deliberately avoid using words they think a child doesn't know. This emasculates the prose and bores the reader. Children love words that give them a hard time, provided that are in a context that absorbs their attention.

Assertions of this kind presuppose a particular type of text, a particular type of function and a particular type of reader, failing entirely to acknowledge the diversity of children's literature and the multiplicity of functions that it can serve. Writers of children's literature usually do not limit their word choices, knowing that children's listening comprehension is more extensive than their speaking and reading vocabularies. Quite apart from the assumption here that children's books are generally read *to* children rather than ready *by* them, it is clear that many writers of children's books do restrict the language they use and it is equally evident that they generally, in selecting language, do so with first language speakers in mind. Furthermore, whereas some scientists argue that the language in children's literature should be child-oriented and simple, the others argue that it should be rich and varied, fresh and imaginative.

Clearly, linguistic selection relates not only to the specific type of book involved and its purpose, but also to the age and language background of the children for whom it is intended.

Children's literature is determined by expectations of a child's competences, notions of what a child is and of what is good for a child", but add that although they have made some attempt to extract some general features, it is difficult to say what exactly characterizes the language of children's books. That something so fundamental as language should be treated in such a cavalier fashion by writers on children's literature suggests that many of them lack the necessary background and skills to provide a careful analysis and review of the linguistic aspects of children's literature. Furthermore, many of them are clearly culturally myopic, failing entirely to acknowledge that much literature written for children, particularly literature written in English, is likely to be read by children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

2.4 Children's literature: Issues of language and literacy development

Many writers refer to the role that children's books can play in language and literacy development. Children's literature, in providing models of language structure, can be useful in promoting children's literacy development. It provides a wonderful opportunity for children to see language in action, a

great resource for more formal learning about the structures of language and a locus for learning about these structures in meaningful contexts.

Among those who have discussed children's books in relation to language and

literacy development are some who have focused on second language and literacy development. However, most of those who discuss the role that children's literature can play in second language development appear to assume that the literature involved is primarily, even exclusively, literature that is written with first language speakers in mind.

Furthermore, many of these writers, whilst arguing that literature-based instruction can have a positive impact on the language and literacy of primary school children, including those from language minority backgrounds, have very little to say that is sufficiently specific to provide teachers of young learners with guidance on the selection and appropriate use of children's literature in second and/or foreign language contexts.

Literature in English can provide language learners with opportunities to master structure through exposure to repeated and predictable linguistic patterns. But there is also a specific indication of the potential linguistic value of some texts designed for children. Without reference to different purposes and contexts of use, some writers argue that literature should be selected in relation to its linguistic features, while others argue that is important not to exercise too strict control over the

language, apparently believing that there is little difference between natural language acquisition and the learning of an additional language for a few hours each week in a classroom context.

2.4.1 Children's literature in the first language development

Children's first language development takes place in the context of purposeful interaction with native speakers in social contexts. It is through this type of social interaction that children develop both thought and language. It should also be noted that language development is at the heart of the educative process; and language develops through listening, speaking, reading and writing. Because book language is carefully chosen, ordered and honed it serves as the best possible model for a child's growing mastery of the word, restricts his attention to the development of literacy, noting that the acquisition of literacy occurs more readily in a book-rich context where there is an abundance of purposeful communication and where meaning is socially constructed. Many writers agree on the benefits of literature-based instruction in preschool, kindergarten and first-grade classrooms.

In discussing the role that carefully selected children's literature can play in native language development, we refer to the ways in which a range of literature-based activities can

provide opportunities for children to engage in natural interaction with adults and other children. Some of the widely used literature-based activities to which reference has been made are reading aloud, silent reading, storytelling and literature circle activities.

Literature plays an important role in all aspects of oral language development, noting that we now know, for example, that when young children are read to, their own phonological production – the number and range of sounds that they produce - increases significantly. However, although it seems likely that this is the case, no specific evidence is provided.

Reading aloud has significant effects on the complexity of children's sentence structure and expository text and that conversations that take place as children and adults read together cement understanding about interactional patterns. Once again, no specific evidence for this claim is provided.

The relationship between literature-based activities and oracy, observing that guided discussion promotes many literate oracy behaviors: it improves vocabulary, offers opportunities for more sophisticated sentence constructions and syntax, and lets children hear the sounds of words as their peers say them. In studying the effects on children's language development scientists note that storytelling, and hearing stories read aloud, expose children to linguistic and narrative conventions in the course of *the power and pleasure they experience in play*. They

summarize the characteristics of their approach to literature-based instruction as follows:

• Literature is used as an important vehicle for language arts instruction.

• High quality narrative and informational literature provides the basis for a consistent read-aloud program in which children are read to daily.

• Literature is the sole or primary basis for initial reading instruction, or it is a significant supplement to a basal program.

• Opportunities are provided for students to listen to and read books of their own choosing.

• Students are provided with sustained time for both independent and collaborative book sharing, reading, and writing activities.

• Discussions of literature among students and teachers are commonplace.

Although this provides insight into the general context of literature-based language arts instruction, it tells us nothing about the selection of materials and little about the specific approaches to instruction adopted, including the methodologies associated with reading aloud.

2.4.2 Children's literature in the second/foreign language development

It is widely believed that literature-based instruction can positively influence the language development of primary school students, including those from language minority backgrounds. Some writers, in claiming that literature-based classrooms offer students a wealth of language and visual appeal along with current, relevant and interesting information in meaningful contexts, appear to believe that the only alternative is using basal-driven instruction which involves the teaching a series of isolated rules and skill sequences. In most cases, the implications of the fact that children may sometimes be operating in a foreign language context are ignored. In suggesting that literature stimulates oral language and provides the best medium for language teaching, some literary researches do not acknowledge that existing language proficiency may place severe restrictions on the literature that can be selected and the ways in which it can be used. Because high quality children's literature is characterized by economy of words, stunning illustrations, captivating but quickly moving plots, and universal themes, carefully chosen books can offer educational benefits for adult English language learners as well as for children. In summing up the reasons why authentic literature can be of value in the primary school EFL class, we shoukd not fail to acknowledge the difficulties that teachers of

English as a foreign language inevitably face in attempting to base language teaching and learning on 'authentic literature':

1. Authentic literature provides a motivating, meaningful context for language learning, since children are naturally drawn to stories.

2. Literature can contribute to language learning. It presents natural language, language at its finest, and can foster vocabulary development in context.

3. Literature can promote academic literacy and thinking skills, and prepare children for the English-medium instruction.

4. Literature can function as a change agent: good literature deals with some aspects of the human condition, can thus contribute to the emotional development of the child, and foster positive interpersonal and intercultural attitudes.

In observing that children's literature offers a natural and interesting medium for language acquisition because it contains predictable, repetitive patterns that reinforce vocabulary and structures, provides relevant themes for young learners, and is often highly generative, one should note the fact that literature intended for native speaking children often includes, in addition to repetitive structure patterns, a range of structures and vocabulary that can create barriers to understanding. Indeed, what may at first sight appear to be repeated sentence patterns often proves, on closer inspection, to involve structural and lexical variations. Furthermore, in claiming that quality literature presents a multitude of discussion topics - from the literal to those that transcend the story and allow children to link the

story to their own lives, at times making sophisticated generalizations, Ghosn makes no mention of the fact that learners of English as a foreign language, particularly children in the early stages of learning, may lack the linguistic resources in English that are required for this type of activity. Certainly, teachers may choose (where they are able to do so) to begin and/or end lessons in children's native language. However, while this may be motivating and interesting, its contribution to the learning of English will be, at best, an indirect one. Ghosn also claims that exposure to narrative children's literature can help children to develop academic literacy and thinking skills. In fact, however, the language of narrative is not necessarily appropriate to the development of academic literacy and the development of thinking skills requires exposure to a wide range of genres and text-types.

It is now widely accepted that children learn a language best within a rich and meaningful context in which speaking, listening, reading, and writing are integrated and in which language is learned and used for genuine communication. However, in claiming that literature provides language-rich illustrations of the uses of dialogue and often elicits a 'chime in' response from students, thus providing a natural link to the give and take of conversation, vocabulary usage, and appropriate syntactical structure, Ferguson and Young effectively ignore the differences between written and spoken language. Indeed, in certain contexts, questioning of this kind is more likely to be confusing and frustrating then effective.

CHAPTER III

'GOOD' CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Many writers appear to believe that the question of what constitutes 'good' children's literature can be addressed without taking direct account of context of use. Stewig (1980), whilst arguing that the most important factor in evaluating children's literature is the responses of children themselves, he notes that evaluation need not only be external (based on children's responses), but can also be internal (based on a set of pre-established criteria). So far as internal evaluation of children's storybooks is concerned, he includes *characterization, dialogue, setting, plot, conflict, resolution, theme*, and *style,* but makes no mention of illustration. Also, with the exception of general references to dialogue and style, he makes no mention of language. Nor does he provide any indication of possible internal evaluation criteria that can be applied to genres and text-types other than narrative.

Evaluation criteria should include considerations of literary merit, challenge, readability and appeal, noting that "the elusive quality 'literary merit' is taken to include notions of beauty in visual or linguistic terms and the overall cohesion and harmony of the work.

They add (p. ix) that challenge is considered in terms of the importance of the issues raised in each book, the seriousness

with which they are treated and the intellectual dexterity that is called for to unpack the meanings embedded in the work. Criteria such as these raise more questions than they answer. It is impossible, for example, to determine what Hillel and Mapin have in mind when they refer to 'beauty in visual or linguistic terms', particularly as concepts of 'beauty' vary from culture to culture and from person to person. Similarly, what constitutes 'cohesion and harmony' so far as Hillel and Mapin are concerned is a matter than remains unexamined. Equally, the requirement that 'intellectual dexterity' should be involved in unpacking meanings would be inappropriate in some contexts. Finally, the notion of embedded meanings would appear to presuppose an encoding-decoding model of language. The other scientists provide a range of vague and subjective evaluative criteria and focus exclusively on the narrative genre. They propose a series of evaluative criteria that relate to (a) fictional elements, (b) visual elements and (c) nonfictional elements. These evaluative criteria are outlined below.

Fiction elements

• **Plot** - A good plot produces conflict in order to build the excitement and suspense that can easily invite children to get involved.

• **Characters** - Characters must be memorable. The main characters in an excellent work of fiction for children are fully-developed, undergoing change in response to life-alerting events.

• **Setting** - The setting is an integral part of a story, which includes time and place. Although setting is often vague in traditional literature for children, detailed descriptions of settings can be an effective way of engaging children's interest.

• **Theme** –Themes in children's books should be worthy of children's attention and should convey truth to them. Furthermore, themes should be based on high moral and ethical standards. A theme must not overpower the plot and characters of the story, however; children read fiction for enjoyment, not for enlightenment.

• **Style** - Style is the way in which an author tells the story; it is an aspect of the writing itself, as opposed to the content. Style should be appropriate in relation to content. The elements of style include word choice, sentence selection and book organization. The words should be appropriate to the story told; sentences should be easy to read but melodic, and the paragraphs, length of chapters, headings and chapter titles, preface, endnotes, prologue, epilogue, and length of the book overall should be designed with children's age and stage of development in mind.

What Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown say about plot and characterization, though very general, is nevertheless useful except to the extent that there may be neither need nor opportunity in, for example, a short story to allow for character development. However, what they say about setting, theme and style is less useful. There may, for example, be contexts in which

it is inappropriate to provide details of the setting in which particular actions take place. So far as theme is concerned, to evaluate a book in terms of the extent to which it attracts children's attention presupposes some prior knowledge of the reactions of children to the work. Furthermore, children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds may react very differently to different themes. In addition, it is unclear precisely what is meant by to 'convey truth'. Furthermore, although many adults would now agree that the avoidance of explicit didacticism is generally sensible, this depends to a considerable extent on the direction of the message.

Children are often more than willing to apply moral lessons to others so long as they see themselves as occupying a superior moral position.

Visual elements

• **Line** - Lines are the stroke marks that form part of the picture. The line of a picture generally defines the objects within the picture. Artists may choose to use lines that are dark or pale, heavy or light, solid or broken, wide or thin, straight or curved, or have combinations of these elements. The lines of the picture should help to create and convey both the meaning and the feeling of the story.

• **Colour** - Colour can be described in terms of its hue, lightness, and saturation. Colours must be used to complement text. For example, soft warm tones are associated with calmness and contentment. Colours should change appropriately according to

the story lines. If the events and mood of the story change during the course of the story, then the colors should change to reflect the shifts in the story.3. 4

• **Shape** - Shapes are evaluated for their simplicity or complexity, their definition or lack of definition, their rigidity or suppleness and their sizes. For example, negative or blank space may be used to highlight a particular object or to indicate isolation or loneliness. The shapes in a picture, the spaces surrounding the shapes and the proportion of objects in relation to one another are important aspects of non-verbal messages.

• **Texture** – Texture conveys the impression of how a pictured object feels and can add a sense of reality to illustrations. Textures can be rough or slick, firm or spongy, hard or soft, jagged or smooth.

• **Composition** - Composition includes the arrangement of the visual elements within a picture and the way in which these visual elements relate to one another. The compositional characteristics of illustrations can help to convey an overall sense of unity and can reinforce aspects of textual meaning.
What Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown say about the visual elements of children's books is suggestive rather than truly informative. Nevertheless, it provides a useful starting point for those who are seeking for ways of determining how, and why, children react in different ways to different to illustrations.

Non-fiction

• **A clear, direct, easily understandable style is critical**. Stylistic devices such as the inclusion of questions including the second person pronoun (*you*), as in "Have you ever wondered how chameleons change colour?" can stimulate readers' interest and involvement.

• **Captions and labels should be clearly written and informative**. Though brief, these pieces of text serve the vital function of explaining the significance of illustrations or of drawing the reader's attention to important or interesting details.

• **Facts should be accurate and current.** Non-fiction should distinguish clearly between fact, theory, and opinion.

• **Personification should be avoided.** Attributing human qualities to animals, material objects, or natural forces is part of the charm of works of traditional and modern fantasy. However, it should be avoided in nonfiction.

• **Attractive presentation.** Works of non-fiction should be attractively packaged and presented. An intriguing cover, impressive illustrations, and appropriate balance between text and illustrations can make nonfiction more attractive to children.

• **Movement from known, simple and general to unknown, more complex and specific.** To aid conceptual understanding and encourage analytical thinking, presentation of information should be from known to unknown, general to specific, and simple to more complex.

• **Stereotyping should be avoided.** The best non-fiction goes beyond mere avoidance of sexist or racist language and stereotyped images in text and illustrations. It also shows positive images of cultural diversity.

• **Format and artistic medium should be appropriate to the content.**

The exactness, clarity, and precision of photography, for example, make this medium appropriate for authors whose purpose is to present the world as it is.

• **Depth and complexity of subject treatment must be appropriate for the intended audience.** If an explanation must be simplified to the extent that facts must be altered before a child can begin to understand, the concept or topic is inappropriate in terms of the age and/or conceptual development of the intended audience.

Although Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown refer to 'style', claiming that it should be 'clear, direct and easily understandable', they do not engage with the complex issue of precisely how one is to determine, with reference to a particular child or group of children, what factors determine whether style is clear, direct and easily understandable. So far as learners of English as an additional language are concerned, a critical factor may be the extent to which the vocabulary, structures and discourse features included have already been introduced and the extent to which the meanings of any new vocabulary,

structures and discourse features can be inferred on the basis of written and visual context.

Although Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown note that there should be a clear distinction between fact, theory and opinion, they do not indicate the ways in which this distinction can be conveyed verbally and visually or observe that both the language of such distinctions and the distinctions themselves will not necessarily be evident to all children unless they are pointed out and reinforced.

Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown claim that personification is inappropriate in nonfiction although much of the language of science is highly metaphoric and often involves aspects of personification.

Although Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown, in common with a number of other commentators, note that stereotyping should be avoided in non-fiction, it remains the case that certain types of stereotyping, such as, for example, the association of a medical doctor or a teacher with certain types of clothing and equipment, can be useful, particularly in introducing new vocabulary to language learners. Issues relating to stereotyping vary from culture to culture, and imposing essentially Western ideals of stereotype avoidance in some cultural contexts can lead to confusion, represent a barrier to understanding and even lead to resentment and a sense of alienation.

Finally, the clear-cut distinction that Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown make between fiction and non-fiction is unhelpful. This

type of binary labelling not only fails to acknowledge the existence of, for example, fictional works in which the context is

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intended to be as historically accurate as possible, but also represents an oversimplification of issues relating to genre and text-type.

In addition to evaluative criteria relating to *plot*, *setting, character, theme* and *style* in fiction, Glazer and Giorgis add criteria relating to coherence and integrity in fiction, defining 'coherence' as "a sense of completeness" and 'integrity' as "a creative approach to topics and an honest presentation of the story" (p. 41). They claim that a story is coherent if it lacks "the lags, random happenings, or intrusions that characterize real life" and flows "in a meaningful way, with each part related to other parts and the whole". Of coherence and cohesion as they relate specifically to language they have nothing to say. Nor do they specify what they mean by 'honest' in the context of "an honest presentation of the story". With reference to the evaluation of illustrations, they refer to *proximity to the text*, *development of the text*, *appropriateness* and *emotional linkage* with the text. To understand what they may have in mind in referring to 'emotional linkage', we need to turn to Wallace (1989, p. 7) who observes:

To discover the emotional link of a story, the illustrator must understand all levels on which the story functions: intellectual, physical, psychological, and spiritual. This link is

then made by a variety of means: appropriate media, colour, changing perspectives, shape of the illustrations, shape of the book, style of type, white space around the type and each of the drawings, and the position of each character in relation to one another. Nothing must be left to chance.

Apart from the vague reference to emotion, this adds little to the criteria for the evaluation for the visual elements of text. The purpose for which the book was designed can help define criteria for evaluating illustrations. They note, for example, that in concept books, which tend to show and name objects, illustrations should be clear and uncluttered and that in alphabet books, it is important to take care to avoid potential areas of confusion. Thus, for example, illustrations of objects symbolized by words beginning with the letter 's' should not include any which begin with the [ʃ] sound, notwithstanding the fact that words representing these objects also begin with the letter 's'. So far as illustrations in non-fiction are concerned, they note that they must help convey the facts or concepts being presented, adding that this means that diagrams must make a concept clearer, that photographs must convey information as well as beauty, that drawing must help the reader understand. Once again, the binary distinction between fiction and non-fiction is unhelpful as is the failure to recognize that different audiences and different purposes may require very different approaches to both written text and illustration. So far as external evaluation is concerned, scientists recommend that

teachers and librarians refer to lists of award-winning books. This is, perhaps, not surprising since awards are adult-driven enterprises.

Not only many children's book awards, but also, more generally, commentaries on the value of children's books are often driven more by adult perceptions of what is good for children in terms of socialization than by what children actually prefer. Thus, for example, the Canadian critic, Michele Landsberg makes reference to 'civilization', 'the `complexity of life' and 'empathy' in discussing what he refers to as 'good books':

Good books can do so much for children. At their best, they expand horizons and instil in children a sense of the wonderful complexity of life - No other pastime available to children is so conducive to empathy and the enlargement of human sympathies. No other pleasure can so richly furnish a child's mind with the symbols, patterns, depths, and possibilities of civilisation.

Identifying quality in children's books is controversial and it is clear that many of those writers who have attempted to do so are driven by adult values, often assuming without any specific evidence that the impact of books on children, in terms, for example, of 'empathy and the enlargement of human sympathies' will relate in some fairly direct way to content. However, how children respond may differ in some fundamental ways from how adults generally respond. This is clear, for

example, in the way in which children 'read' illustrations and in their sense of humour. It is also clear that children often have a taste for the ridiculous and the absurd that is different from that of most adults, that they often select books that adults might consider frightening or macabre or impolite, that they often respond positively to what might appear to adults to be excessive punishment for relatively minor misdemeanours on the part of protagonists, and that they often enjoy stylistic features, such as repetitive language patterns, that many adults would find tedious and dull.

Furthermore, many books that have been extremely popular with children, including the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling and the Famous Five series by Enid Blyton, have been banned from some school libraries. It follows that standard guidelines for choosing 'good' works of children's literature are of little use in some contexts. For our purposes, a 'good' work of children's literature is a work which is effective in relation to the teaching and/or reinforcement of language learning at a particular stage of language development. In this context, defining what is 'good' involves taking account of the needs and interests of the teacher, the learner and the curriculum designer.

CHAPTER IV

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING
OF ENGLISH: PRINCIPLES OF SELECTION

One of the biggest challenges in using children's literature to facilitate the English language development of children (native speakers and learners of English as an additional language) relates to selection and methodology. The issues involved in selecting and using children's literature with language development as a primary aim are necessarily very different in different contexts. It is therefore important to be clear not only about the intended audience but also about general and specific objectives and intended outcomes. In deciding whether and how to make use of children's literature, teachers of English in Taiwan need to take account of the national curriculum, the amount of in-class exposure to English that learners will have at different stages, and the existing language competencies of their students.

The factors that guide their selection and use of children's literature in English will necessarily therefore be different from those that guide the selection and use of children's literature in English in contexts where the majority of the children are native speakers and/or where English is the primary language of the communities in which the majority of the children live. For

teachers of English as an additional language, another important consideration is the fact that children's literature designed primarily for native speakers of a particular age may not be both linguistically *and* cognitively appropriate for language learners of the same age.

4.1 Selecting and using children's literature in primarily Englishspeaking communities

In selecting appropriate literature in the context of the primary language of instruction, teachers of young learners need to consider every aspect of individual development. This includes cognitive development generally, and physical, social, emotional and moral development, as well as the development of language and literacy.

Material selected for children should be within their zone of proximal development. Thus, for example, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (1969), a concept book about the growth and transformation of a caterpillar, is generally appropriate in relation to the linguistic and cognitive development of children in the age range from 4 to 7. However, in terms of language development, it is not appropriate for the majority of 4 to 7 year old learners of English in Taiwan. Nor is it necessarily conceptually appropriate for those older young learners who may be more able to cope with the fact that it includes over 100 different lexical items (including some low

frequency lexical items), a combination of count and noncount nouns and regular and irregular verbs, units of measurement, intensifiers, and a range of syntactic structures. Similarly, although *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Martin and Carle is considered generally suitable for the promotion of the cognitive development for 4 year old children in terms of layout, repeated sentence patterns, rhyme and conceptual simplicity, it is unlikely to be linguistically appropriate for many 4 year old learners of English in Taiwan. Equally, although many children in the 9 to 12 year old age range for whom English is a first language will be able to cope without difficulty with fiction in which there are a range of different time zones (such as, for example, the *Time Warp Trio* series by Jon Scieszka or *The Dulicate* by William Sleator (1988)), the complexity of time referencing that is involved is likely to be beyond the linguistic capabilities of young learners of English as a second or foreign language within the same age range.

4.2 Selecting and using children's literature in the context of the teaching
and learning of English as an additional language

Criteria for the selection of children's literature for language learners should include age-appropriate theme; simple language; limited use of metaphor and unfamiliar experiences; use of rhyme; unambiguous plot; realistic but simple dialogue;

potential for reading aloud; brevity; and good illustrations. Interestingly, given the significance of the fact that the stress-timed nature of English can present major difficulties for speakers of syllabic languages, no reference is made to rhythm and metre. Furthermore, what is meant by 'simple language' is an issue that requires detailed examination, as does that of what is meant by 'good illustrations' and 'potential for reading aloud'. Smallwood's expansion of these criteria (pp. 70-72), which is summarized below, makes little reference to text-types other than the novel and short story and genres other than the narrative genre and remains so general as to be of little value to teachers who are searching for criteria that will be of genuine use in the context of language programme design and implementation.

• Books (including illustrations) should be age-appropriate in terms of theme, topic or story line.

• Language and sentence patterns should be fairly simple and somewhat controlled, with tenses, structures and vocabulary repeated often through a book.

• There should be limited use of metaphorical language and limited references to unfamiliar experiences.

• As many books as possible should include rhyming. This is an excellent tool for memorizing (always helpful in language learning) and for visual phonetic transfer. This can be done in a mature way, with songs and poems in picture-book format.

• The plot should be very straightforward, chronological in order and unambiguous. Action should predominate, with characters and descriptions clear but not complex.

• Dialogue should be used as much and as realistically as possible, but books with dialects and excessive use of idiomatic expressions should be avoided.

• Books should be successful read-alouds. Most literature for ESL students should be first introduced orally, with the teacher reading so that students are exposed to the stimulation of language beyond their reading level.

• Books should be fairly short (either as a whole or by chapters) so that they can be completed in 5-10 minute sittings.

• Books should be single volumes, as opposed to part of a collection, wherever possible. This applies most often to fairy tales, poetry and songs.

• Illustrations should be clear and dramatic, ideally able to almost tell the story on their own. Both the teachers and students depend on these pictures to explain new vocabulary or experiences. The amount of text per page should be limited, with illustrations being predominant. With increased language proficiency, the balance should shift to more text.

In a later publication, these criteria were restated:

• Does the book help meet curriculum objectives or enhance the thematic units being studied?

• Is the book's content appropriate to the children's age and intellectual level?

• Does the book use language that is at or slightly above the level of the learners?

• Does the book contain repeated, predictable language patterns?

• Are there clear illustrations that help tell the story?

• Will the book add to the collection of bilingual and multicultural books in the classroom that represent the diverse languages and cultures of the children?

Smallwood notes that language and sentence patters should be 'fairly simple,' 'slightly above the level of the learners,' and 'somewhat controlled', the modifiers suggesting a lack of genuine in-depth understanding of the factors involved in language teaching and learning. This is equally true of most of the other points made.

Appropriate selections of children's literature give students exposure to new, illustrated vocabulary in context, provide repetition of key words and phrases that students can master and learn to manipulate, and provide a sense of accomplishment that finishing a single unit in a textbook cannot provide. It is impossible to determine on what basis the judgment is made that the completion of a unit in a textbook is necessarily less effective in providing learners with a sense of accomplishment than is the completion of a story. After all, there *are* some textbooks that include story telling along with a range of related tasks, which provide exposure to new language and revision of

existing language, that include repetition of key words and phrases and that are well, and appropriately illustrated.

When evaluating children's literature with language teaching in mind, teachers should pay careful attention to each of the following:

• **Length and complexity.** Simple, short stories with repetitive language work best for young EFL learners.

• **Type size and the number of words on each page.** If the size of type is too small, or there are too many words on a page, young students may be intimidated.

• **The level of vocabulary.** If students know less than 75% - 80% of the vocabulary, they may lose confidence in their ability to understand the story.

• **The nature of illustrations.** Illustrations should be interesting and should help students understand both the vocabulary and the story.

• **Personal enjoyment.** It will be difficult to convince students to be enthusiastic about a story you don't like.

In claiming that "simple, short stories with repetitive language work best for young EFL learners", Brown ignores the potential value of a wide range of other text-types and genres. Furthermore, there is no empirical support for any of the above claims, including the very specific claim that 75% - 80% of vocabulary should be familiar.

Decisions about the use of children's literature in the leaching of language should take account of learners' cognitive

development and language proficiency. She does not, however, discuss what she means in this context by 'language proficiency', a term which is generally applied to overall language competencies rather than to the details of how these competencies are realized. She goes on to list other factors which she considers important, providing reasons as indicated below:

• **Rich illustrations**: Students should be able to understand the content of the story with the support of illustrations.

• **Familiar stories:** Students should be able to acquire the language easily through familiar stories such as *The Three Little Pigs, Little Red Riding Hood*, and so on.

• **Predictable plot development**: Predictable stories provide an important aid to language learning.

• **Repetitive sentence structure**: Students can easily acquire sentence structures from repeatedly reciting the sentences of the stories.

• **Rhymes:** Stories containing many rhymes makes language learning fun and easy.

• **Songs with rhythmic beat**: Teachers can teach language through traditional songs, such as *Old McDonald Had a Farm* and *Five Little Monkeys*, and students can easily understand the stories associated with such songs.

• **Cognitive type books**: Students can make picture books with flash cards or self-painted pictures based on a theme of their choice. The associated language may be simple vocabulary or

easy sentences such as *This is my - I see------.* These self-made books are comprehensible and easy to learn from.

• **Interest and fun:** Books that are fun attract students' attention.

• **Big books:** Big books based on children's literature are more visible when they are used in large classes.

• **Book-related products:** Book-related products such as audio cassettes, CDs, and story props can increase the variety of activities in the language class.

Once again, these criteria are very general. There is little to add except for the suggestion that books created by language learners can be effective resources for teaching and learning. She refers to the potential relevance of songs with a rhythmic beat but does not refer to the usefulness of traditional verse such as iambic pentameter in teaching stress-timing (unless her reference to rhymes is intended to include verse of this type). Thus, for example, *Three Little Pigs* contains reflexive pronouns, modal auxiliary verbs, regular and irregular past tense verb forms, a range of modifiers, embedded constructions of various types, and signals of means, reason, purpose, condition and concession. *Little Red Riding Hood* is even more linguistically complex. Songs such as *Old McDonald Had a Farm* and *Five Little Monkeys* may be fun for young learners to imitate. However, both of them, particularly the latter, contain language that is unlikely to be either particularly useful or particularly appropriate in terms of overall curriculum objectives.

The most important criteria in selecting books for learners English as a second language is that they are appropriate in relation to age, interests and maturity. These criteria seem, at first sight, reasonably straightforward. However, there are many factors, such as cultural background, family background, past experiences and personality that inevitably impact on whether a work is interesting, and age does not necessarily relate in any direct way to maturity. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to find literature that is both interesting and appropriate in relation to cognitive development which is also appropriate from the perspective of linguistic competence and literacy. Thus, for example, although Joanna Cole's *Magic school bus* series (published by Scholastic in USA) may generally be appropriate for 9-year-old children who are speakers of English as a first language or who have a level of linguistic competence that approaches that of 'average' 9 year old first language speakers of English, it contains language that would be likely to act as a barrier to understanding in the case of many language learners. In some cases, these learners may be able to cope with the series in the presence of a range of appropriate instructional methodologies; in other cases, this is unlikely to be the case. Where learners are likely to be able to cope under some circumstances, a critical factor is whether the teacher intends to read the books aloud (with accompanying explanations) to the class as a whole or whether he or she intends that one or more students should access it themselves. Books may be used to

teach new language, to reinforce language to which learners have already been introduced, to lead into a range of tasks and activities, to initiate discussion or, indeed, some combination of these. To ignore factors such as this in recommending criteria for the selection of books for language learners is effectively to ignore the real needs of these learners. This is equally true where writers include factors such as language accessibility and cultural accessibility among their recommended criteria. They provide some useful criteria for determining what is likely to be linguistically and culturally accessible. Thus for example, they note that in terms of simple language that students can deal with as beginning language learners, Eric Carle's books are excellent examples. They reflect predictable text, enabling the reader to guess what happens on the next page. However, Eric Carle's books, such as, for example, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *The Tiny Seed* or *Do You Want To Be My Friend?* are often recommended for children aged 4 or 5 and learners of English as a second or foreign language may be considerably older than 4 or 5 when they are able to cope with the language of these books. In the case of non-fiction books, there should be an economy of new terms, adding that "new content area vocabulary should be highlighted in boldface type or brightly coloured type with sidebar explanations, explicit visuals and so on. In fact, however, sidebar explanations, where they are primarily intended for first language speakers, are often written in language that is more complex than the language of the main

text itself and are, therefore, not necessarily helpful. Furthermore, it is not simply new vocabulary that can be critical, but also structures and discourse features.

In some circumstances, bilingual materials and instruction are appropriate in that they provide a dual channel for students to explore their identity and express themselves, as well as to critically and intellectually evaluate their responses through discussion. However, quite apart from the fact that ESL learners may not be literate in their mother tongue, the question of language content and language level needs to be addressed in relation to both languages. Furthermore, a number of aspects of literary materials, such as humour, may be difficult to translate. Humour is a defining element of a culture: what one culture finds hilarious, another may not find to be the least amusing. Child development experts generally divide humour into four categories: physical humour; situationally-based humour; humour involving a play on language; and humour of character. Each of these, particularly humour involving a play on language, can create problems in relation to the provision of bilingual materials.

A number of authors claim that students are more likely to be able to discuss literary texts if these texts reflect their own culture. However, one of the aims of language teaching is often to provide access to different cultural concepts: issues relating to culture need to be considered in relation to the aims and objectives of particular teaching programmes.

Stewig observes in relation to illustrations, that "we must keep in mind the issue of authenticity", noting that in *Yu Min and the Ginger Cat* (1933), written and illustrated by Armstrong and Mary Grandpre, there are troubling historical inaccuracies. A Chinese student of his noted, for example, that "the woman, wife of a prosperous government official, has very long feet", "the hat shown on the second opening seems to be from the Ching Dynasty" (1644-1911), "neither the rice jar nor its cover in the third opening are very typical shapes", and "Chin Yu Min's clothing throughout is more modern and Western-influenced than clothing from the time period . . . would have been". Although inaccuracies such as these may not detract from use of the book for purposes that are primarily linguistic and/or social (relating, for example, to the value of friendship), they are certainly unfortunate and, notwithstanding the other positive aspects of the illustrations, limit the value of the work in relation to its use for cultural-historical purposes.

CHAPTER V

WRITINGS ON THE USE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

In addition to its advocacy in the national English curriculum, the use of children's literature in the teaching of young learners has been recommended in a number of academic publications. However, what characterizes many of these works is a failure to define clearly what they mean by 'children's literature' (an underlying assumption often being that 'children's literature' and story telling are synonymous), and a lack of empirical evidence for the often very general and sometimes extravagant claims made.

Story telling helps to develop social skills and the ability to solve problems through cooperating with others as well as providing access to different cultures. Using children's literature in the teaching of English allows learners to acquire vocabulary 'naturally', develop creativity and imagination, and acquire a life-long reading habit. There is, however, no definition of 'children's literature', no explanation of what is meant by 'natural' acquisition of vocabulary and no specific evidence for any of the claims made.

Storytelling can increase teacher talk and student participation in oral activities, and can have a positive impact on classroom atmosphere.9 However, although she notes that

teachers involved in story telling used more open-ended questions and prompts and that the students were more willing to participate in oral practice than was otherwise the case, she does not provide any evidence that that language learning is actually taking place. Tsou reports on the development of a multimedia storytelling website containing an accounts administration module, a multimedia story composing module, and a story re-playing module. Using this resource, students and teachers can select the background, subjects and objects (characters, animals, naturals, articles and others) for a story, write a story and replay it. This, according to Tsou, overcomes the problems that can be involved in selecting appropriate literature. However, Tsou does not indicate whether the language of the created stories was found to be both accurate and appropriate.

Storytelling combined with total physical response can motivate young learners and is beneficial to their learning of English vocabulary, sentences patterns, and comprehension. In fact, however, there was no control group. Furthermore, it is unclear how the meaning of some of the very complex sentences involved was taught (e.g., *The farmer brings the bag to the castle where a king and princess live. The princess sees the rabbit and suddenly sleeps because of a monster's magic*.). Indeed, the students may have been acting out translated meanings and reproducing memorized chunks.

The use of picture books during storytime can benefit young learners in relation to speed of comprehension, phonemic awareness, and, more specifically, the learning of letters of the alphabet, numbers, days of a week, shape, size and color. Once again, however, there was no control group and little, if any, evidence of genuine language learning. Furthermore, the context in which kindergarten students operate is often very different from that in which they operate in language classes in the public school system. Thus, although there can be little doubt that picture books can be of real value in the teaching and learning of languages, their value will be optimized only if they are carefully selected and used. It is not enough to note that they can play an important role in the teaching and learning of languages. Nor is it useful to make claims about their relationship to language learning in the absence of specific observations made in carefully controlled contexts.

A combination of verbal and non-verbal scaffolding in story-based classrooms enables students to easily comprehend stories in English. However, her study focused on vocabulary only and it appears that the learners understood the meaning of lexical items simply because they were translated.

Haseltine refers specifically to the relationship between story telling and the teaching of grammar and pronunciation, noting that story telling provides opportunities for young learners to improve their pronunciation and grammar and to activate memorization by listening to meaningful, repetitive text rather

than single words or phrases. In fact, however, although it is a self-evident fact that story telling can provide *opportunities* for language development, Haseltine does not provide readers with any specifics on which they can base a judgment as to whether particular stories used in particular ways actually do have a positive impact on language development and, in particular, whether they have a more positive impact on language development than other approaches to the teaching and learning of English. Furthermore, in claiming that storytelling may be more productive in relation to the teaching of grammar and pronunciation than focusing on single words and phrases, Haseltine appears to assume that the only alternative to story telling is the teaching of decontextualized words and phrases. This is, of course, very far from the truth. Nor is it true, as Haseltine claims, that the distinction between past tense, present tense and future tense can necessarily be related, in story telling, to the lives of the characters (past tense), dialogue about current activities (present tense) and predictions about what will happen (future). Thus, Haseltine's assertion that learning grammar through story telling is preferable to traditional word-form variation instruction involves the setting up of a straw target (traditional word-form variation instruction), a range of unwarranted and unsupported assumptions about the relationship between tense and time (with no reference at all to aspect), and an overall over-simplification of the issues involved in the teaching of language to young learners.

None of the writings to which reference has been made thus far refer explicitly to the differences between the learning of first languages in natural settings and the learning of additional languages in classroom contexts. None of them provides any detailed discussion of issues relating to curriculum design and the relationship between curriculum, materials selection and methodology. None of them refers to the fact that the principles that underlie the selection of language in narratives designed for native speaking children may be different from those that guide the selection of language in narratives designed for learners of additional languages. Indeed, the most critical aspects of using children's literature in teaching English to young learners in Taiwan are largely overlooked. These include *what* to select and *why* and *when* and *how* to use what is selected.

A number of writers refer to the value of what are referred to as 'literature circles', which provide a small groups of students with opportunities of exploring a piece of literature in depth through discussion. The results of a study that apparently indicated that a literature circle had a positive impact on students' attitudes towards reading. However, there is no in-depth discussion of the language encountered in the reading or of the extent to which that language was understood and reproduced by the learners.

All of these writings are representative a general trend in Ukraine towards recommending the use of children's literature, narrative in particular, in the teaching of English to young

learners. However, although many claims are made, experiments are often poorly constructed, and there is little, if any, genuine evidence for the sometimes extravagant claims that are made. The result of this is that many children's books, largely picture story books, are imported into Ukraine from English speaking countries and used, without appropriate scrutiny, as primary or, more generally, supplementary teaching materials. The extent to which this benefits anyone other than authors and publishing companies remains largely unexplored, as do the potential benefits of other genres and text-types.

CONCLUSION

There is considerable disagreement about what constitutes children's literature and, in particular, about what constitutes 'good' children's literature, much of the discussion that is available being couched in very general terms. Furthermore, although there appears to be general agreement that children's literature, particularly narrative, can contribute to children's social, cognitive and linguistic development, such writing as there is on the use of children's literature in the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language generally has little to say in specific terms about the problems that can be associated with using literature designed for first language speakers, or about the relationship between specific aspects of the selection and use of children's literature and issues relating to the language curriculum.

Research contribution. In spite of the limitations of this study (referred to above), I believe that there are a number of areas in which it makes a contribution to existing knowledge and understanding.

Educationalists in Ukraine and elsewhere often recommend that teachers use children's literature in teaching English to young learners. However, they rarely define what they mean by children's literature in any explicit way, tending to confine themselves to discussions that imply that the term 'children's literature' refers exclusively to narrative fiction or, at best, that

narrative fiction is necessarily of more intrinsic value than other types of children's literature. The critical review of writing on children's literature included here draws attention to a variety of different ways in which children's literature can be defined and evaluated. It also draws attention to the fact that those who recommend the use of children's literature in the teaching of English to young learners in Ukraine often tend to ignore or underrate the difficulties that can be involved in selecting works that are cognitively, linguistically and culturally appropriate and using them in ways that make a genuine contribution to teaching and learning.

In analysing a sample of English lessons taught to young learners in a range of different contexts in Ukraine, I was able to highlight the fact that children's literature may not be used as widely in primary school classes as is sometimes claimed, as well as some of the difficulties that teachers experience in selecting children's literature that is appropriate for their learners and in using it in ways that make a genuine contribution to children's learning.

In providing detailed analyses of samples of textbooks, graded readers, story books and concept books that are widely used in Ukraine in the context of the teaching of English to young learners, I was able to demonstrate the types of problem that can be associated with each and, in doing so, alert readers to the dangers involved in accepting too readily evaluations that are based on less rigorously applied criteria.

All of this provides information that needs to be taken into account by those who advocate the use of children's literature in primary English classrooms in Ukraine and, perhaps, believe that their advice is widely followed and has a positive impact on teaching and learning.

Recommendations for future research. The recommendations for future research that are included here relate, in part, to the limitations of the present study and, in part, to issues emerging from it. First, I believe that there is a need for further analysis of a wider range of language lessons taught in Ukrainian educational institutions, particularly in primary schools in Ukraine, from the perspective of resource use.

Secondly, there is a need to look carefully at the kind of advice that Ukrainian educationalists are giving teachers of English to young learners in relation to the use of children's literature in order to determine how useful teachers actually find that advice to be.

Finally, those who advocate the use of locally produced textbooks need to carefully examine the content of all of these books, taking careful account of the nature of the texts that they include and the relationship between these texts and the illustrations that accompany them.

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