

The Use of Rhyming Linguistic Structures in Illustrated Children's Books

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal how the use of rhyming linguistic structures in illustrated children's books addressed to the preschool period is displayed. The study is a qualitative study aiming to reveal the utilisation of rhyming structures in works published within the scope of Turkish children's literature and the appearance of these linguistic structures in books with a focus on the books determined as the object of study. In this study, the works were analysed through descriptive analysis. The works analysed in the study consist of 3 books selected among illustrated children's books with a target audience of preschool children (4-6 years old). The illustrated children's books analysed in the study were selected from literary narrative texts and limited to books that have the potential to reflect rhyming linguistic structures and stand out in online book sales sites with these aspects. Among the selected books, 2 of them were copyrighted and 1 of them was a work of translation and 3 works in total were analysed. In the focus of the quantitative and qualitative findings, it can be stated that all the books analysed offer a rich narrative ground in terms of the use of rhyming linguistic structures. The diversity of sounds, rhyming expressions, sound similarities, reinforcements, doublings, reflected sounds, doublings derived from reflected sounds and word repetitions are linguistic elements that can contribute to the linguistic development of preschool children. On the other hand, the intense presence of these elements in the texts has also enabled the texts to have a unique rhythm of discourse. The analysed texts, as narrative fiction texts, are extremely rich texts in terms of capturing a rhyming discourse, reinforcing, including doubling and reflected sounds and words, and can contribute to the formation of the child's literary taste. In the texts, end-of-line and in-sentence rhyming (sound similarities) are used more than other linguistic structures such as reinforcement, doubling and reflected sounds. It is extremely important to determine the presence of rhyming linguistic structures in the books and to examine the quality of these elements in determining whether the children's books addressed to the preschool period support phonological awareness in terms of language and expression features.

Keywords: Illustrated Children's Books, Rhyming Linguistic Structures, Children's Literature

Introduction

Developing children's aesthetic tastes and transforming each student into thinking and conscious individuals with a reading culture are among the main goals of the educational system. Within this framework, especially the preschool period is a period in which the foundation of a child's personal, social and cognitive development is laid. In this period, children enrich their imagination by interacting with books, learn about different cultures and develop their emotional intelligence. Books also improve children's language skills during this period, enabling them to communicate more effectively with their environment (Sahin, 2014). National and universal works of literature are seen as an important tool for children to gain aesthetic values and to structure their artistic tastes. For this reason, especially in mother tongue classes, it is

important to read and discuss books of literary quality and selected books suitable for children's developmental characteristics. Thus, children will have the opportunity to recognize both the values of their own culture and the richness of universal literature (Balta, 2021). In Turkey, illustrated children's books began to develop rapidly, especially after the 1970s. With UNESCO's declaration of 1979 as the 'World Children's Year', interest in children's books increased and there was a significant leap in this field. The number of domestic and foreign children's books and the number of illustrators and writers grew rapidly. During this period, the content, visual design and quality of illustrations of children's books also improved significantly. These positive developments led many new talents to children's literature and increased the diversity in this field (Avci, 2006). Picture books, which have an important role in children's development, not only provide them with a fun time, but also help them to recognize people and life and develop various skills. These well-designed and visually rich books contribute to children's cognitive, emotional and social development (Uyank Balat et al., 2017). The visual transformation of children's books began in the 1980s. With advances in printing and illustration techniques, aesthetic concerns came to the fore in the visuals of books. Books were created in various sizes and with different designs (Kıbrıs, 2010). The period between the ages of 3-6 is a critical period in which the foundation of children's language skills is laid. Children's interactions with their families, teachers and other adults, the books they read and the songs they listen to all shape their language development (Pektaş & Kangal, 2015).

Illustrated Children's Books in Preschool Period

The love and interest in reading and the habit of reading play an important role in children's cognitive development. Therefore, introducing children to books from an early age is an important foundation for their success in life. Since children are sensitive to sounds even in their mother's womb, reading books to them sows the first seeds of reading habits (Yılar & Celepoğlu, 2011). Children's literature, which contributes to the development of children from birth to adolescence, consists of artistic works

enriched with visual and linguistic elements. These works nourish children's intellectual and emotional worlds and respond to their learning needs (Sever, 2003). Children take their first steps into the world of literature with picture books dominated by visual elements. In this period, children communicate mostly through visual images (Sirin, 1998). Preschool children's literature, which includes many different genres such as lullabies, nursery rhymes, riddles and picture books, activates both visual and auditory senses of children. Especially picture books attract children's attention with both text and pictures and support their learning (Demircan, 2006; Sirin 1998).

Illustrated children's books enable children to learn about the world and develop their imagination through their visuals and the subjects they cover. In addition to developing their creativity, quality publications also provide children with the skills to recognize and use the structure of their mother tongue correctly (Uzuner Yurt, 2011). Illustrated storybooks, which combine visual and written expression, make children's learning processes fun. These books enrich children's imagination and improve their language skills (Choudhuri, 2005; Şahin, 2014). The events and characters in stories show children different aspects of life and shape their emotional worlds (Ural, 2013). Picture books prepared for preschool children differ according to age groups. Books prepared for infants and toddlers between the ages of 0-3 are usually books with vivid colors and simple pictures that help them get to know the world around them. These books usually contain single words or short sentences, and large and colorful pictures are used to attract children's attention (Sever, 2005; Turgut Bayram, 2009). Books for babies aged 0-3 years can also be produced with different materials such as cloth, nylon, or with audible warnings. This diversity develops babies' senses and increases their interest in books. The length of sentences, the words used, and the style of expression in books for infants should be appropriate for their age and developmental level (Ural, 2013). The size of the books should allow children to hold them easily, and the cover should arouse curiosity about the content. The font size should also be determined in accordance with children's visual perception (Sever, 2003; Ural, 2013). The majority

of children's picture books (about three quarters) should contain interesting and meaningful pictures. These pictures should not only be visual, but should also be like works of art and form a moving and harmonious whole. The pictures should be designed to support the narrative in the text and attention should be paid to color harmony ([Gönen, 1989](#); [Kara, 2012](#); [Karatay, 2011](#)).

Reading activities in early childhood not only support children's language skills but also their cognitive development. Studies show that there is a positive relationship between the intelligence levels of children who regularly read books and their mathematical thinking skills ([Deretarla Gül, 2013](#)). The fact that children's books do not contain grammatical errors, have language and expression features that will expand their vocabulary, and are rich in different and original expression opportunities ensures the development of the child's vocabulary ([Sever, 2003](#)). The books that children encounter for the first time shape their reading culture. Therefore, books prepared with beautiful and meaningful pictures play an important role in children's acquisition of reading habits ([Güleç & Gönen, 1997](#)). The foundations of children's language skills are laid with steps taken at an early age. The enthusiasm shown by adults when reading to children and children's interaction with books support their language development and make them ready to learn to read and write ([Armbruster et al., 2006](#)).

In this study, an analysis was carried out to determine the extent to which rhyming linguistic structures are used in picture books for preschool children and the suitability of these features to the developmental characteristics of the child. On the other hand, in terms of language and expression features, it is aimed to provide a framework for the qualities that picture books should have in order to contribute to the development of preschool children. In line with this purpose, the problem statement of the study was determined as 'What is the use of rhyming linguistic structures in picture books for preschool children?'. The sub-research questions that are sought to be answered in the study in the focus of this main research question are as follows:

- What is the appearance of rhyming structures in picture books for preschool children?
- What is the frequency of alliteration in picture books for preschool children?

Method

This study is a qualitative study that aims to reveal the utilization of rhyming linguistic structures in works published within the scope of Turkish children's literature and the appearance of these linguistic structures in books, focusing on the books determined as the object of analysis. This research, which is designed in a qualitative research structure, is a descriptive study in the form of a 'survey'. 'Studies that aim to collect data about a specific group are called survey research' ([Büyükoztürk et al., 2011](#)). The sample of the study was determined by purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a type of non-random sampling that is not based on probability distribution. In this method, the researcher deliberately selects certain situations or individuals who are considered to be rich in information for the purpose of the study. Thus, he/she finds the opportunity to conduct an in-depth and detailed examination on a specific subject ([Büyükoztürk et al., 2011](#)).

Object of Study

It consists of 3 books selected among illustrated children's books with a target audience of preschool children. The illustrated children's books analyzed in the study were selected according to certain criteria. These criteria include the book's suitability for preschool children, being a literary narrative text other than ABC or concept teaching, and being selected from widely known publishers of children's books. Other characteristics such as the original language of the book and the date of publication were excluded in the process of determining the object of study; however, they were evaluated in the data analysis phase. The study is limited to books that are easily accessible to the researchers and have the potential to reflect rhyming linguistic structures and stand out in online book sales sites in this respect. Of the selected books, 2 were copyrighted and 1 was a translated book and 3 works were analyzed in total.

Table 1 Works Evaluated within the Scope of the Object of Study

Title of the Book (Abbreviation)	Author (Translator)	Illustrator	Year of printing	Publisher	Number of pages
Güvercin Kakası / Pigeon Poop (GK)	Elizabeth Baguley (Burcu Ural Kopan)	Mark Chambers	2017	Marsık Books	24
Üç Kedi Bir Canavar / Three Cats One Monster (ÜKBC)	Sara Şahinkanat	Ayşe İnan Alican	2018	Yapı Kredi Publications	30
Ayyy... Ay / Oh... Oh... (AA)	Ayla Çınaroğlu	Mustafa Delioğlu	2018	Yapı Kredi Publications	28

Data Collection Tool

The 'Book Review List' used in the study was created by the researchers by reviewing domestic and foreign sources on pre-school children's books and taking the opinions of experts in the field. This list is an evaluation tool to be used by marking 'yes/no' to assess the suitability of the books to the specified characteristics. The book review list was prepared in order to determine which variables the books would be analysed and was determined by the researchers by reviewing the relevant literature on the linguistic developmental characteristics of children in early childhood (phonological awareness, language sensitivity, etc.) and the language and expression features that should be found in children's books addressing the preschool period. Two experts working in the field of Turkish language teaching and children's literature were consulted regarding the variables determined after the literature review. The experts decided to analyse the books by focusing on the linguistic structures determined as 'end-of-line sound similarities', 'in-sentence sound similarities', 'doublings', 'reinforcements' and 'reflected sounds'.

Data Analysis

In the study, 3 children's picture books were analyzed using a checklist consisting of 5 sections. As a result of independent evaluations made by three different researchers, the compliance of the books with these features was recorded as 'yes-no'.

Findings

The illustrated children's books considered as the object of analysis are narrative texts in terms of text type. They are stories suitable for the age level they address in terms of plot, conflicts, characters and plan, and they are texts consisting of short and simple sentences.

The analyzed works are works that can be recommended to children at the 4-6 age level. It can be said that the books present a rhymed and redacted narrative. Although they are not poetry texts, the fact that they are presented with an expression close to the language of poetry can be said that an original expression is structured in terms of language and expression features. [Aksan \(2021\)](#) states that rhyme and red rhyme used appropriately is an important influencing element in expression.

Table 2 Appearance of Rhymed Structures in the Analyzed Works

Book Title	Frequency of End-of-Line Sound Similarities (Rhymed Pronunciation) (f)	Frequency of Sound Similarities in Sentences (f)	Dilemmas (f)	Reinforcements (f)	Reflected Sounds (f)
Güvercin Kakası / Pigeon Poop (GK)	32	15	8	1	4
Üç Kedi Bir Canavar / Three Cats One Monster (ÜKBC)	60	22	8	3	9
Ayyy... Ay / Oh... Oh... (AA)	66	24	31	2	22

Quantitative findings related to the questions ‘What is the appearance, alliteration and frequency of rhyming linguistic structures in children’s picture books addressed to preschool children?’ are presented in the table above. In all three works, the use of end-of-line and inline rhyming structures is extremely intense. The children’s book Pigeon Poop is a text consisting of 232 words and 61 lines in total, and in this text, a rhyming discourse that is pleasing to the ear is captured by using sound similarities intensively at the end of lines (32) and within lines (15). It is also seen that the sonic effect created by doubling, reinforcement and reflection sounds is also utilized. On the other hand, although this text is a work of translation, it successfully reflects the sound and pronunciation features of Turkish with a successful translation approach. Noteworthy examples in this work are presented below:

*‘With its cute little houses and narrow tree-lined streets
There was a quaint little town far away.
As the sun illuminated the squares with its rays that day,
And a pigeon leaves a trail
It was spinning in the sky.’* (GK, p. 2)
(...)
‘...paaaaat!’ (GK, p. 3)
(...)
*‘A black dog with a coat as soft as silk,
and all of a sudden, it’s all white spots. benek benek.’* (GK, p. 6)
*‘The dwarf statue in the garden was also unlucky that day,
giant sunflowers fertilized güm güm,
as the pigeon flies from here to there,
left behind
pat pata lot of poop.’* (GK, p. 7)

The children’s book Three Cats and a Monster is a text consisting of 471 words and 89 lines in total. In this text, it is seen that sound similarities are used intensively at the end of the lines (60) and inside the lines (22) as in the other texts. The use of reduplication, reinforcement and reflection sounds is also frequent and makes the narration fluent. Thus, a narration that attracts the attention of the child and enables him/her to easily remember the text has been achieved. Again in this work, alliteration was used to form the names of the story heroes (three cats

named Piti, Pati and Pus). Noteworthy examples in this work are presented below:

*‘How beautiful, bembeyaz everywhere
Streets, sidewalks, houses covered with snow...’* (ÜKBC, p. 1)
*‘He should move that basin to a nook.
They should huddle side by side and keep warm.’* (ÜKBC, p. 7)
(...)
*‘Hopefully Pus won’t miss it,
An apartment building entrance... right there.’* (ÜKBC, p. 9)
(...)
*‘It’s not for nothing that Piti jumped at that moment.
A piece of paper hitting his face, blown by the wind!’* (ÜKBC, p. 10)
(...)
*‘Winduuuu... humming. Jumping
The branches çat çat... crackling. They’re jumping.
Oh, that Piti and Paws... They think everything’s a monster.’* (ÜKBC, p. 12)

The children’s book Ayyy... Ay is a text consisting of 490 words and 121 lines in total, and in this text, it is seen that sound similarities are used intensively at the end of the lines (66) and inside the lines (24) as in the other text. Reduplication, reinforcement and reflection sounds are also frequently used. The frequency of reduplication (31) and reflection (22) is the highest in this text and it is one of the texts that can be effective in helping children acquire phonological awareness. Noteworthy examples in this work are presented below:

*‘-İh, no, that’s not going to happen.
While he was looking so sad and unhappy
I won’t be able to sleep tonight.’* (AA, p. 5)
*‘I got up immediately,
Everyone at home horul horul while sleeping
Horr!..’* (AA, p. 6)
‘Horr!.. Horr! HORRRR!.. Horr!..’ (AA, p. 7)
‘I turned the moon with a sour face, I turned it inside out.’ (AA, p. 13)
‘Cazur!, Cuzur!, Cızzz!, Cızır!, Cuzur!, Cozz!, Coz!, Cızz!’ (AA, p. 14)
‘Ayyy!..’ (AA, p. 15)
*‘Gür mü gür, özgür mü özgür
Dağıldı, saçıldı the environment,
Işık ışık reached all the way to the earth.’* (AA, p. 16)

Discussion and Conclusion

Illustrated children's books are the most important tools that show and make children in preschool and early childhood understand the reality of life and human beings. The child sees how the expressive possibilities of the mother tongue are used competently in these works; on the other hand, these books also carry the responsibility of making the child feel the subtleties of the mother tongue (Sever, 2003). Illustrated children's books may exhibit different text structures in terms of discourse and text type diversity. Since this is a period when listening and speaking skills are intensely focused on and just before the reading and writing stage, there are genres in which rhyming and rhythmic linguistic structures are frequently used. These include poems, stories in verse, fables, nursery rhymes, songs, lullabies, riddles and counting riddles. Even in narrative texts, rhyming structures, alliteration, doubling, reflected sounds and exclamations are used. In addition to the repetition of sounds, the connotative effect is also utilized. In the creation of images and designs in translated and copyrighted works, children should be made to intuit Turkish's original and creative ways of expression and its sonic harmony. Many studies emphasize the socializing, reassuring and motivating roles of nursery rhymes, which are one of the first genres that come to mind when rhythmic and rhyming structures are mentioned. They are also said to be useful in the process of developing children's linguistic, cognitive, social and physical skills. In the educational process, it is stated that nursery rhymes also contribute to children's aspects such as being good readers and improving themselves (Güneş, 2020).

In children's literature, there is a lot of repetition in fairy tales, nursery rhymes and game counters. The function of these repetitions is to respond to the child's need to survive and to feel safe. Based on this, these linguistic structures have also found a place in children's books written today. Repetition takes place in a children's book in two ways. One, repetitive words, sentences or paragraphs in the use of language. Two, the use of repetition in fiction, i.e. the repetition of similar/same events. Especially in books for the first years of preschool, single-structure texts based on repetition of sounds and words come

to the fore, while in later years, multiple fiction and repetition may be in question (Erdoğan, 2019).

In terms of language development, nursery rhymes enable children to recognize the sounds, rhythms, intonations and pitches that make up words and to improve their vocabulary by learning new words. In nursery rhymes, as in poems, children focus on the sound dimension of words rather than their meaning. This situation attracts children's attention and helps their speech to become fluent. Children's production of different sounds in nursery rhymes supports the development of mouth and tongue muscles (Harper, 2011). These determinations on tongue twisters help us understand the function and contribution of other linguistic structures that include sound and word repetitions. Rhymes appropriate to the sound to be taught can be used to teach the sounds in primary reading and writing instruction (Güneş, 2020).

Sayışmacalar, also known as game rhymes, are rhymes shaped around the element of play, which is an indispensable variable of the children's world. They vary according to the stages and roles in the game (Göktaş, 2006). Sayışmacalar, with its rhyming, dynamic and auditory sound feature, has the functions of being both a play tool and encouraging children to read/listen to fairy tales. On the other hand, they are linguistic structures that can be used to distinguish close sounds, to teach the meaning of words, and to help children pronounce the words in their mother tongue correctly. Children, who sense the rhythm in counting songs and the features of Turkish speech, develop an aesthetic sensitivity towards other literary genres such as fairy tales, poems, and stories in the future (Saltık, 2020). Children's songs, lullabies and manis, riddles formed with rhyming lines are other genres that contain rhythmic and rhyming structures. While sometimes the whole work can be composed in these genres, it is also seen that such linguistic structures are included in some parts of the narrative text. The common aspect of these linguistic structures is that they reflect the characteristics of the poetry genre and poetic language. There are many variables that make up the language of poetry. (Aksan, 2021) defines poetry as an art of speech that is original in terms of both content, essence, and presentation, and that is intended to impress and move, and draws attention

to two important components of poetic language: content (essence) and presentation. The presentation component of poetic language is largely composed of sound elements. Some of the sound elements used in poetic language are rhyme, alliteration and frequency, different types of alliteration, puns, meter and rhythm (Aksan, 2021). It is extremely important for children to see/listen to such linguistic structures in the texts they read, to gain awareness of sounds and their pronunciation, to understand the language of poetry, which they encounter in many genres, especially poetry, and to get aesthetic pleasure from this language.

Recognition of sounds and the letters that represent them is an important achievement in preschool and early literacy learning. In particular, phonological awareness is one of the strongest indicators of reading proficiency together with the acquisition of letter-sound knowledge and vocabulary. It means that children learn the sounds of letters and can analyze words in this sense (Foy & Mann, 2003; Moats, 2010). Phonological awareness develops rapidly between the ages of 3-5 (Paris, 2011). The components of phonological awareness can be listed as being able to recognize sounds in the environment, gaining word-syllable and rhyme awareness, distinguishing initial and final sounds, and phoneme awareness (Mihai et al., 2015). It also prepares an important ground for skills such as being able to separate words into their sounds, forming words by combining sounds, dividing syllables into phonemes, and producing new words using initial, middle and final sounds (Bennett-Armistead et al., 2005).

Although the number of scientific studies on children's books has increased in Turkey, it is seen that research on picture books that address the special needs of preschool children is insufficient. Determining the qualities of books for preschool children by examining them within the framework of various criteria is of great importance in improving the quality of the books to be presented to the target audience. Based on this purpose, three picture books that can be recommended to children at the age level of 4-6 were analyzed and the possible language and narrative features of these texts were analyzed in terms of developing children's phonological

awareness, as well as the child's mother tongue sensitivity and awareness. All the books analyzed offer a rich narrative ground in terms of the use of rhyming linguistic structures. The diversity of sounds, rhyming expressions, sound similarities, reinforcements, doubling, reflected sounds and doublings derived from reflected sounds, and the intensity of word repetitions are features that can contribute to the linguistic development of preschool children. On the other hand, the intense presence of these elements in the texts has also enabled the texts to develop a unique rhythm of discourse. In the texts analyzed, linguistic structures such as rhymes, counting, mani or children's songs were not encountered; however, as narrative texts, it was observed that they were extremely rich texts in terms of capturing a rhyming discourse, reinforcement, doubling, and the use of reflected sounds and words.

Recommendations

In this study, the appearance of rhyming linguistic structures was revealed on a limited study group; however, the affective and cognitive effects of these structures on children may be worthy of further study with experimental designs. The questions of what kind of activities can be carried out to develop children's mother tongue awareness and sensitivity through rhyming structures in children's books, especially in narrative texts, and at what level are the effects of such activities can be answered by other studies. Narrative texts in the narrative genre and texts in the poetry genre can be handled in a comparative manner and research on their effects can be carried out. On the other hand, longitudinal studies on how children's playing with sounds, imitating them, and discovering the similarities and differences of sounds through these texts affect their literary communication with texts and their reading culture in the future, and studies conducted with children growing up in different socio-cultural environments will make extremely important contributions to the literature.

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