

**Direct Speech in Children's Short Stories**

**A Research by**

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**Abstract**

Children's literature aims at entertainment to make children keep turning the pages to find out what is coming next and how the story ends. In this case the action becomes the most important ingredients. An action- enhancing tool is the dialogue in children's stories because a lot of actions take place in the speech sequences, i.e. the dialogues. The aim of the study is to explore the direct speech used in the selected stories to gain a rather scientific idea of the language used as a whole. The language of children's stories should avoid being tedious or distorted. Rather, it should enhance the description of the action and the characters.

The purpose of the analysis in the present study will lead to the above. The selected stories are chosen from Short Stories for Children, by writers who have different themes. The main reason for selecting these stories is that the writers are from various cultures. Two of the main conclusions derived are: the impressions and messages contained in children's stories can last a lifetime that is why these stories are powerful vehicles for helping children understand their homes, communities and the world. This can happen through the language used in these stories. The second one is that direct speech is easier than indirect speech for children to comprehend. When giving a lesson to children it is easier to give it to them directly. The didactic element, in this case, will be easier to understand.

**Key Words:** Direct Speech, Children's Literature, The description of the action and the characters

## Introduction

Literature can be both a mirror in which children see themselves reflected, and also a window through which children explore the world around them; books are a good means to illustrate the concept that people from diverse groups can play and work together, solve problems, and overcome obstacles. At its best, multicultural children's literature helps children understand that despite many outward appearances and external differences, all people have similar thoughts, feelings, and aspirations. Those feelings include love, sadness, fear, and the desire for fairness and justice. So, through literature we can teach children morals, life lessons, emotions, ethics, and so on.

Stories play an important natural role in children's lives in most cultures. They have a universal appeal and provide a rich source of language and imaginative input making them ideal teaching tools in, for example, primary classrooms. If we want children to achieve a well-developed language and be able to express themselves well, we assume that the author of a good children's book uses a broader vocabulary and is more diverse and varied in her/his choice of words than the author of a popular fiction book.

Nodelman (1996) dislikes the term 'children's literature' altogether, arguing that books written for children tend to belong to already established genres, such as the adventure story or the historic novel. Therefore, he states that 'Genres exist primarily in the eyes of the beholder' (199, p. 146). Nodelman is not against the thought of children's literature as a genre in itself, however; he believes that '[e]ven if the texts of these sorts written for children share qualities with similar texts written for adults, they also have much in common with each other as texts for children' (1996, p. 146).

Rose (1989) dislikes the term 'children's literature', but for a different reason: she believes the 'child' in children's literature is invented for the needs of authors and critics, and that 'children's fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple' (1989, p. 1). Therefore, the actual reading children have less influence on the genre than the image of the reading child many authors write for.

## Children's Literature

Literature helps children understand their families, surroundings, environment, and communities. Before children can read, family members, childcare providers and teachers read them stories about people in faraway places, sometimes from the distant past and sometimes about people whose lives are similar to their own. The important messages by these stories can last a lifetime. Children's literature has transcended linguistic and cultural borders since the mass production scale in 18th century Europe. As it has always evolved from international rather than national paradigms, the subject of children's literature research must go beyond "geographically internal texts and [...] those responsible for their production" (Bouckaert-Ghesquière 1992: 93).

Reading stories equal to narrating them orally, serving as a springboard for conversation, which plays a role in oral language skills development. The opportunity for conversation afforded by children's stories is noted by Fassler (1998a and 1998b), Han and Ernst-Slavit (1999), Araujo (2002) and, Dennis and Horn (2011). Book reading is a "critical activity developing children's language and literacy skills" due to the opportunities for conversation it provides (Bond and Wasilk, 2009, p. 468).

Stories can provide young language learners with "a very special kind of shared experience and the basic English words and phrases needed to talk about it," (Ernst and Richard, 1994, p. 323). Moreover, Callaghan and Madelaine (2012) Gest et al (2006) and Connor Morrison and Slominski (2006) argue that children's vocabulary can be grown on reading books, which is likely to raise their level of participation in book related conversations.

## Direct Speech

Direct speech has been discussed by most linguists. Stephens (1996) states that the writer tacitly controls how the reader understands a text by the presence of the narrative voice. Readers willingly 'surrender themselves to the flow of the discourse, especially by focusing attention on story or content, they are susceptible to the implicit power of point view' (1996, p. 66). The writer as the narrator has less control over direct speech; therefore the specimens of direct speech are where the reader is allowed to interpret the text herself/ himself. Logically, 'indirect and free indirect speech have ... tended to receive most attention', thus 'more attention needs to be paid to direct speech dialogue'. Thus, children's makes use of more direct speech than indirect speech, because 'the general principle that the narration in the text appears to have less control over point of view in dialogue' (1996, p. 67).

In children's fiction, there is little use of reported speech. The speech sequences are often written out in the direct speech mode, to resemble 'an apparently verbatim report of what someone said' (Biber et al 1999, 1118) or thought enclosed in quotation marks frequently accompanied by a reporting clause, placed before, in between or after the direct speech. Still, there is dissension among linguists as to whether the words quoted in direct speech are the same words actually uttered (e.g. Li, 1986, Tannen, 1986, 1999).

According to Coulmas (1986, p. 4) '[d]irect speech always has a de dicto interpretation'; in other words, direct speech always gives the exact words that someone uttered. Coulmas' statement is contradicted by Perridon (1996), who says that 'there is ... no reason to subscribe to Coulmas' (1986, p. 4) view that 'direct speech always has a de dicto interpretation' (1996, p. 165). Perridon supports Tannen's (1986) view on direct speech being constructed speech. He thinks: '[a]lthough it seems as if the speaker is only repeating the lines spoken or written by another person, he is in fact improvising on the spot most of the times' (1996, p. 165). The speaker as the interpreter, Perridon says, 'is evident' (ibid). Haverkate (1996) expands this statement by pointing out that de re representations often produce 'a double- focus effect by separating the voices of the reported and speaker' (1996, p.100). Direct quotations are seldom literal and authentic reports as has also been pointed out by other scholars (e.g. Sternberg 1982, Fonagy 1986).

### The Selected Stories

The selected stories are chosen from Short Stories for Children, by different writers having dissimilar different themes. The main reason for selecting these stories is that the writers are from different cultures. Nevertheless, they share the same aim: delivering an authentic message to their readers; i. e. the children. The message contains package of educational, cultural, moral, and language lessons. The focal issue in children's literature is to pave the way for children in their lives and give them useful lessons about life itself. The selected stories in this research are:

1. When Papa Scolded Me by Ira Saxena.
2. The Turkish cap by B. P. Gupta.
3. All Because Of My Hair by S. G. Haidar.
4. At the Party by Anil Ekbote.

## The Exploration

For the purpose of exploring direct speech, four children's short stories have been selected. In all of them, the writer is the narrator. The following will show how each writer, by choosing direct speech, was able to deliver the message; in other words the lesson to the readers, i. e. the children. Each story is from a different culture than the other.

### When Papa Scolded Me

I quickly put on my slippers, picked up my favourite doll, Beeta, and rushed out into the verandah.

From the above we can see that the writer is, through the direct speech, is trying to convey the message that the little girl is wearing slipper instead of being bare foot. In the following paragraph, the writer is showing through the direct words that the little girl was happy because her father is at home this morning. This shows the close relationship between parents and children. So close that the little girl is cheerful with her father's presence.

It was quite unusual to find my father at home at that time. Normally he was in his clinic before I woke up. So I was very happy. My father wiped his spectacles with the kerchief as he listened to his patient carefully.

Being the youngest child in the family I received everyone's attention and affection. Papa of course, was the most affectionate. The writer in the above example is passing on the idea that the youngest children need more attention than the older ones. Everyone, even the older siblings are taking care of her. This idea is delivered by direct speech. Nevertheless, when children make mistakes, even the youngest who is much loved by everyone specially the father, is punished in order not to stop repeating this kind of misconduct once and for all. The following paragraph illustrate, by using direct speech, the concept of punishment:

Papa, a very soft spoken person, who was known never to raise his voice, had SHOUTED in anger at his darling daughter. I was very angry with him.

No matter how much angry the father is at his little daughter and even after shouting at her, he cannot bear the idea that she is sad or angry. So, he tries to make amends to her. There is punishment but it is wrong to infer from this that the parents dislike their children. They punish them as a corrective measure only. So that they could lessons of life and avoid making mistakes in the future. The writer is showing this to the children through direct speech:

I tried to run away in annoyance, but Papa caught me. He pulled my face towards his and picked me up. Tears came rolling down my plump cheeks. He patted my head lovingly and wiped my tears

### The Turkish Cap

The following sentence shows that children at school are supposed to play in the schools outside grounds instead of the classroom itself or the corridors. The lesson is quite clear and the writer is using direct speech:

We reached the ground outside our school compound where we usually played.

The following paragraph contains the concept of taking turns and waiting for turns even when playing. This is a good lesson to teach children how to behave in the proper way with each other. This is done by using direct speech:

But the way Khushal was hitting I felt my turn would never come. I would have to wait till the next day. I was hoping Khushal would miss just once. Then I would be able to start.

Making mistakes should be followed by apologizing. This is exactly what the writer is trying to teach his audience or readers. The children in the story made a mistake so the headmaster is asking them to apologize:

“Apologise to this gentleman, all of you.”

My heart was beating faster and faster. But how could I blame my friend? With a sinking feeling, I decided I would take the blame.

The main character, the narrator, is a good boy. He refuses to blame his friends. He wants to protect them that is why he takes the blame himself. The writer suggests that one should stand beside his friend(s) when needed. The writer is doing so through direct speech: But I could not laugh in the headmaster’s presence, either. So, I checked myself and with some difficulty managed a wide smile. When I looked round, the others were also trying to suppress their laughter. We were eager to go out and have a hearty laugh.

The above paragraph is a clear lesson of being polite and by avoiding hearty laughter in the presence of older people. Another lesson always taught to children.

### All Because of my Hair

The following two sentences show the importance of team work. When everyone teachers and ordinary people alike go hand in hand helping each other to clean and decorate the classrooms for the celebration. The writer is making it clear by using direct speech:

For days and weeks now, we had been preparing for an important function.

The classrooms were cleaned and decorated, and charts and photographs fixed. Everybody was busy.

The writer is describing someone as remarkably tidy and clean: a person whom children should look up to, a man admired and followed by the children. By using direct speech, the writer is directing the children (the readers):

He was an artist by profession and quite unnaturally insisted on everything being neat and clean and in perfect order.

The following two sentences clarify that there would be bad consequences when children give a deaf ear to the advice of their parents, schoolmasters, and the wardens. The readers (the children), will have this idea as a lesson in life. Using direct speech is much easier for children to comprehend:

The Sunday before the function the warden warned me repeatedly that I would be severely punished if I didn’t have a hair-cut.

I was of course not permitted to appear on stage the next day.

### At the Party

When we left the house, she once again made me promise I would behave and would not take anything before refusing it three times. The narrator is, in the above, sending a message promising to behave well when going out to the party. A promise which should be kept. Promises are important and children should learn how to respect their promise. The effective way to do that is by using direct speech way to explain that is by using direct speech.

The following example shows that everybody gather and have fun together without any hard feelings. Showing that everyone should try to be as social as possible. Through direct speech, the writer managed to handover this social concept:

A lot of boys and girls had gathered now. They were laughing and talking. All round, there were balloons and streamers.

The following shows that the little boy remembered his promise and decided to behave in the party. A very direct speech to encourage the children who read the story that keeping promise is a well behavior:

I was uneasy. I remembered the promise. I had to behave. I had to be a good boy!

When offered something, take it and be grateful. What a practical lesson to teach children specially through direct speech and in a way easily understood:

The girl in the green sari offered me some more cake and I gladly took yet another slice.

### Conclusions

1. The impressions and messages contained in children's stories can last a lifetime that is why these stories are powerful vehicles for helping children understand their homes, communities and the world. This can happen through the language used in these stories.
2. Direct speech is easier for children to handle and grasp than indirect speech. When giving a lesson to children it is easier to give it to them directly.
3. The selected stories are from different cultures. Teaching different cultures to children in early stages enable them in later stages of life to learn as more lessons as possible. By using direct speech, the writers succeeded in delivering an idea about these cultures.
4. Moral lessons like keeping promises, listening to parents, behaving in a polite way, sharing and helping each other were also introduced in the selected stories. Yet another reason why the writers used direct speech. Moral lessons ought to be as direct as possible.
5. There is an attitudinal issue in the use of direct speech of the selected stories: developing positive attitudes to language learning, different cultures, the self and others.
6. There is a cognitive and creative issue in the use of direct speech of the selected stories: use of the imagination and thought processes, academic skills development to support other kinds of learning in later stages.

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