Style in Children's Literature: A Comparison of Passages from Books for Adults and for Children

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Date of Award
1984

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy in English

Department
English

First Advisor
Paul G. Arakelian

Abstract
In this study I tested the standard assumptions about differences in language usage in adult and children's literature by analyzing parallel passages from the works of four authors, Nathaniel Hawthorne, George MacDonald, Oscar Wilde, and John Gardner, who each wrote prose fantasy for both audiences.

A computer program and syntactic code based on those used by York University in Toronto provided a statistical analysis of the 20,000 words of selected text. I found that the passages from the children's books had much shorter paragraphs, and slightly shorter sentences, T-units, clauses, and words. T-units were the most consistently and notably reduced elements. The children's books also had more lexical repetition and fewer abstract and Latinate words and tended towards a verbal style. These characteristics support some of the common assumptions about children's literature, but the differences were slighter than anticipated. In the area of syntax, the assumption that coordination would increase and subordination decrease markedly in the children's stories did not prove true. Coordination was only marginally more frequent in the children's passages, and subordination nearly equal in both sets. The reduction of prepositions in the juvenile samples seems of more significance syntactically. In the children's passages there are large increases in the amount of dialogue and in the use of Germanic based words.

My general conclusion is that the differences in the children's passages reflect a stronger tendency towards everyday speech, that children's authors borrow more conventions from conversation and from oral traditions when writing for a child audience.

Recommended Citation

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books are often illustrated, sometimes lavishly, in a way that is rarely used for adult literature except in the illustrated novel genre popular especially in Japan, Korea and France. Generally, the artwork plays a greater role in books intended for the youngest readers (especially pre-literate children). Children's picture books can be a cognitively accessible source of high quality art for young children. Many authors work with a preferred artist who illustrates their words; others create books together, and some illustrators write their own books. Even after children at In book: Children's Literature in Second Language Education, Edition: 1st, Chapter: 1, Publisher: Bloomsbury Academic, Editors: Janice Bland, Christiane Lütge, pp.1 - 11. Cite this publication. Janice Bland. literature for children and adolescents, including oral literature, such as fairy tales, and nursery rhymes, graphic narratives and young adult literature, reflecting the. eclectic interests of children (see Hunt, 1996 and 2001; Watson, 2001; Nodelman, et al., 2003; Rudd, 2010). A number of different directions have been chosen from which to approach and discuss the advantages of children's literature for L2 education, including examples of good practice and the presentation of research results. The. first approach, in Part I, is extensive reading, also called free reading, with literary.