

Reviewing realistic stories: Children's Books in Persian Language

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is categorizing realistic stories as a literary genre in Iranian children's books through 2000 - 2008 based on standard comparative table. A checklist was designed as a mean of registering information of every book. Findings showed that in 633 Iranian children's books, 153 books (24.2%) are realistic stories. Considering seven standard sub-genres for realistic stories demonstrated that 11 books (7.2%) are in realistic children's fiction, 68 books (44.4%) are in stories of children life and their difficulties story, 6 books (3.9%) are in animal realism, 41 books (26.8%) are in adventure story genre, 12 books (7.8%) are in historical fiction, 15 books (9.4%) are in humorous story genre and only 1 book (0.6%) is in romantic story. The results show that realistic stories, as a literary genre, are not considered as an important one in Iranian children's literature.

Keywords: Literary genre; literary realism genre; literary realism sub-genres; children's book; Iran, children's literature

INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews realistic stories genre and sub-genres in Iranian printed children's books during 2000 - 2008. The period involved in this research ranges from January 2000 to December 2008, covering nine years. The year 2000 has been selected as the starting point for this discussion, the beginning of 21st century, and the year 2008 marks the end point of the discussion.

As we know children read stories for pleasure and amusement; they love stories which attract them more. Lukens (2003) believes that "children, like adults, read to explore the world, to escape the confining present, to discover them, to become someone else. Children seek pleasure from a story, but the

sources of their pleasure are more limited". Because of this limitation, literature for children should be simpler and more enjoyable. So, books which are written for them should be interesting, easy to read, align with their ages and understandings.

Every story has a specific literary genre which can attract the reader. Attebery (2009) believes that "literary genre is, among other thing, a map for reading". Studying this kind of literature can be an important area for researchers and help to develop many studies. According to literary genres (2009), "the study of genres may be of value in three ways. On the simplest level, grouping works offers us an orderly way to talk about an otherwise bewildering number of literary texts. More importantly, if we recognize the genre of a text, we may also have a better idea of its intended overall structure and/or subject. Finally, a genre approach can deepen our sense of value of any single text, by allowing us to view it comparatively, alongside many other texts of its type". So in this article we consider literary genre as a category of literature which can be defined by its shared and

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(Received on 12.11.2010, Accepted on 18.12.2010)

common characteristics.

It is worth saying that an important part of the children's literature can be allocated to study literary genres in every country and also in Iran. Iran is a country located in the geographical territories of the Middle East and Southern Asia, along with six thousands year's civilization, 2500 years codified history. Iran has many legends, poems, epics, myths, folklore and fables which are literary masterpieces such as: Shahnameh, Ghaboosnameh, Kalileh va Dimne, Golestan and Masnavi which are full of messages and moral points. But these were not specified for children, since Hunt (1996) [3] believes that "Children literature, disturbingly enough, can quite reasonably be defined as read by, especially suitable for, or especially satisfying for, members of groups currently as children". In fact these literary works belong to adults but children could also understand and enjoy.

It is said that, portion of children's literature was not significant in Iran, neither old legends which transferred through oral tradition nor the first codified books, belonged to children. As a fact there were few books for children in Iran. Pooladi (2005) [4] believes that "Children's literature in Iran has not an old history, although historians believe that it has been made from long time's age, we should know that children literature as an independent literature has originated from Constitutional Revolution". After the Constitutional Revolution (1906) and also Printing Industry (1816) in Iran, new schools established and authors had more attention to children, so they gradually have special literature for themselves. Thus adults addressed children and writing books for them became as the most important cultural value. Firstly, some educational books were printed for teaching in new schools and after some years, Iran had some famous children's writers such as: Jabbar Baghcheban, (1885-1966), Abbas Yamini Sharif (1919-1989) and Samad Behrangi (1939-1968) who wrote many books for children and young adults. Lastly children's literature in Iran were accepted as a special literary branch. During the recent thirty years, writers and publishers have

created many literary materials for children in Iran. So, researches have a wide realm for studying these works. We consider children literature as literary works which have been written specially for children's up to nine year by professional writers in this field.

But what do we mean by realistic story as a literary genre? Lukens (2003) [1] believes "realism means that a story is possible, although not necessarily probable. Effect follows cause without the intervention of the magical or supernatural". Realism is an approach that attempts to describe life without idealism or romantic subjectivity. Best literary works which are written in realistic genre have round central characters. But the poor ones load protagonist with problems, or have flat or stereotyped characters. Usually there is no kind of conflict in plot, setting or theme. The author uses all devices as style. So we consider realistic stories as literary genre that have real characteristics and can be happen in real life in every time. Further more, within each literary genre, there are some sub-genres which can be categorized in one group. And also realistic stories genre has some sub-genres within the scope of children's literature.

Related Studies

Shamisa (2007) [5] regrets that "literary genres are in the field of methodology and literary criticism; one of the new literal sciences or a branch of theory in literature", related studies showed that very limited studies have been done in the area "literary genres in the children's literature". Also there is no comprehensive study in this subject in Iran; only limited studies have been done in the field of "literary genres" in children's literature which is somehow related to this study.

Lukens (2003) [1] in a critical literary book refers to genre in children's literature. She studies different genres completely and also realistic stories as a literary genre and it's sub-genres. Lukens regrets that children's books can be categorized in seven sub-genres.

Karimi (2005) [6] reviews the Iranian legends, as a literary genre, finding magical objects and their effects. Analyzing contents method has been used in the study. Findings show that magic legends have many effects in child's mind for better life in the future.

Attebery (2009) [2] in a research article argues about family story as a literary genre. He believes though many literary works, such as *Little Women* (1868) and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899) have family story genre, yet almost nowhere can one find a discussion about just what a family story might be. Then, he studies about this literary genre in 5 literary works written by Elizabeth Enright and contrast the different ideas of researchers about this neglected literary genre.

Harris (2009) [7] in a dissertation argues for and represents a genre's importance to nineteenth-century British literary studies. The genre, literary annuals (also identified as gift books), is generally criticized as a benign form of popular culture from the early nineteenth century. He argues that both nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics evaluate the genre based on a normative literary aesthetic that is not valid. With the premise that the book is a body and is part of the textual condition, much of this dissertation deals with the creation and evolution of the annual as a literary genre, popular phenomenon in print culture, powerful feminine form and cultural marker of early nineteenth-century England.

To sum up, building this research on previous works mentioned above, this paper reports a comparative study examining literary realism sub-genres.

Research Questions

Two main questions of this study are:

- 1- What are standard realistic stories' sub-genres in Iranian children's books?
- 2- Do Iranian authors consider realistic stories genre and sub-genres as an important literary genre in children's literature?

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this study, the following standard categorizing was selected. Knowing and categorizing realistic stories' sub-genres in Iranian children's books is one of the main points of this research. As mentioned before, within each literary genre, there are some sub-genres, and also realistic story genre has some sub-genres. In order to gain this aim, we should have a comparative table.

a) Standard categorizing

- Delphi Tests based on texts in a comparative table (table 1) are considered, with more than two times repeated in ten printed references.

Comparative study of table 1 shows that there are seven realistic story sub-genres which have been repeated more than two times. Since researchers may consider different sub-genre for one literary text, we have considered definitions for realistic story sub-genres based on well known ideas in this field as follows:

1) Realistic children's fiction

Lukens (2003) [1] regrets that "realistic fictions have in common several characteristics; they are fictional narratives with characters who are involved in some kind of action that holds our interest, set in some possible place and time". Realistic stories can actually happen and are true to life. The situations of these kinds of stories are real or possible and were popular over the last years. In these kinds of stories people do not have universal problems but personal and particular. Readers can gain an understanding of the past and relive past events vicariously. There are titles dealing with the problems and joys of living. There is often an element of character growth or self-realization in these books. Titles can promote tolerance and understanding of others and their experience. In fact, realistic children's fictions show new horizons to children, broadening their interests and allowing them to experience new adventures.

Table 1. Comparative table in realistic story sub-genres

Row	Literary genre	Gezelayagh	Hejazi	Pooladi	Nazemi	Nematollahi	Lukens (Oxford)	Canada	Minnesota	Java	California
*	Realistic story	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
1	Realistic children's fiction	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
2	Children life and ...	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	School story	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
4	Animal realism	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	-	-
5	Adventure story	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
6	Historical fiction	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	+
7	Humorous story	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+
8	Romantic story	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
9	Sport story	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
10	Regional realism and story of other country	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-
11	Realism social story	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	Survival story	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-

These stories show them different ways to view and deal with conflicts in their own lives.

These kinds of fictions have protagonist and antagonist characters which children like or hate them. Lukens (2003) [1] declares that "novels about social issues showed the character - usually the protagonist, or central character - encountering a kind of problem engendered by society, like discrimination because of race, gender, or social position".

An example of realistic fiction in Iranian children's books is: 41st day by Hajian (2004) [8].

2) Children life and their difficulties story

These stories are the most important sub-genres of realistic story. These literary texts are full of good and bad accidents that happen for children. Almost all of children love these fictions and follow them. "In these stories, children have interesting events

such as a new born sister or brother, or bad accidents such as loss of a child in walking" (Hejazi, 1998) [9].

An example of children life and difficulty story in Iranian children's books is: Here is an angle by Kalhor (2007) [10].

3) Animal realism

Some realistic stories have animal characters. As a fact animal story is a "nonfiction that evokes a thoroughly efferent response should deal accurately with animals, telling the details of their appearances, their habitats, and their life cycles. Animal realism as fiction adds another dimension by giving continuity and conflict or adventure to the story" (Lukens, 2003) [1]. In these stories animal characters should behave like animals, not like human beings. The author must have accurate information about animal's life. He can make some discoveries about animals or

about their relationships to humans.

An example of animal realism in Iranian children's books is: *The Single Swan by Moosavi (2002)* [11].

4) Adventure story

As its name, these stories are full of adventures. Adventure stories fascinate children and adults alike for centuries. There is something contained within them that opens up the imagination. Characters overcome whatever difficulty they encounter by their cleverness. Almost all of children love a good adventure story.

An example of adventure story in Iranian children's books is: *Jilli and bicycle thief by Khoshdel (2003)* [12].

5) Historical fiction

Historical fictions set in the past with fictional characters who take parts in actual historical events. "Historical fiction is placed in the past, and the time and place in the past determine setting. Details about vehicles, clothing, or food preparation, for example, must fit the times and the place. Sometimes title is known of the period, and at other times much is known. History presents facts. To turn facts into fiction, the writer must combine imagination with fact, bringing about an integrated story with a fictional protagonist in a suspenseful plot." (Lukens, 2003) [1]. Historical fiction presents readers with a story that takes place during a notable period in history, and usually during a significant event in that period. Historical fiction often presents actual events from the point of view of people living in that time period.

An example of historical fiction in Iranian children's books is: *Return of swallows by Karimi (2000)* [13].

6) Humorous story

Humorous stories are full of fun, fancy, and excitement, meant to entertain. Children are interested in happiness, so they read these stories. "Good humorous stories teach children do not ridicule each other but laugh at interesting accidents" (Hejazi,

1998) [9].

An example of humorous story in Iranian children's books is: *Hello: Mr. Top and birds by Vakili (2004)* [14].

7) Romantic story

Romantic stories are an old kind of realistic stories and young people often have been absorbed to them for generations. "Under the guise of realism, the romantic story may oversimplify and sentimentalize male-female relationships, often showing them as the sole focus of young lives" (Lukens, 2003) [1]. Romantic stories have similar patterns of plot development; characters have similar character and only different name or hair and eye colors. Good romantic stories which are written for children should not describe sexual scenes.

An example of romantic story in Iranian children's books is: *A dress as nice as bee wing by Naseri (2007)* [15].

b) Queries or keywords searched

- Iranian children's literature history
- Realistic story
- Constitutional revolution

DATA COLLECTION

To achieve the purpose of this paper, which deal with the review of realistic story genre and its sub-genres in Iranian children's books; we have considered 633 children's books, these books have been printed for the first time in Iran, in Persian language. Then a checklist was designed as a mean for collecting and registering information of the books. A copy of final checklist is included in Appendix A. All of the checklist items codified by reviewing 633 books and then registered in a data bank.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We now address our two research questions: A. what are standard realistic story sub-genres in Iranian children's books? B. do Iranian authors consider

realistic stories genre and it's sub-genres as important one in children's literature?

After replying these questions our hypothesis will be confirmed. In order to gain this aim the first step is determining the percentage of realistic story

dren's authors do not proportion consider realistic stories as an important one. Realistic stories genre and sub- genres have not significant portion in Iranian children's literature. So, they are advised to write stories inrealistic stories for children. Also a

Table 2. Frequency of literary Realism sub-genre in Iranian children's books based on standard categories

Realistic story sub-genres	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-Realistic story	11	7.2	7.2
2-Children's life and... story	68	44.4	51.6
3- Animal realism	6	3.9	55.5
4- Adventure story	41	26.8	82.3
5- Historical fiction	12	7.8	90.1
6- Humorous story	15	9.3	99.4
7- Romantic story	1	0.6	100.0
Total	153	100.0	

sub-genres in considered Iranian children's books. Findings show that through 633 Iranian children's books, 153 books (%24.2) have realistic story genre. Based on comparative table 1, we have considered 7 standard sub-genres in realistic story. Categorizing considered books based on these realistic story sub-genres are included in table2.

As can be seen in Table 2, 11 books (7.2%) are in realistic story sub-genre, 68 books (44.4%) are in of children's life and difficulties story sub-genre, 6 books (3.9%) are in animal realism sub-genre, 41 books (26.8%) are in adventure story sub- genre, 12 books (7.8%) are in historical fiction sub-genre, 15 books (9.9%) are in humorous story and 1 book (0.6%) is in romantic story sub- genre.

So, findings clear that through realistic stories' sub-genres, children life and their difficulties story with 44.4% have the highest ratio. Historical fiction with 7.8% is in the second step and Romantic story with 3.9% is in the last step.

Conclusions and Future Research

Apparently, the research findings confirm that portion of realistic stories genre and sub-genres are not notable in Iranian children's literature. In fact, findings of the study, confirmed that Iranian chil-

large percentage of books specify to children's life and difficulties story and the other sub-genres such as historical story, realism story, adventure story, humorous story and animal realism story. But romantic story has an insignificant proportion. Even it can be said that this literary sub- genre has been neglected totally. Based on these results, it may be derived that realistic stories as a literary genre have not a strong effect in children's literature in Iran, so new writers and publishers should have a special attention to this important literary genre.

As for the future, it is suggested that the new studies be conducted for other literary genres, different decades and countries and also using the findings of these research in the other comparative studies as well.

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