

Cognitive Poetics of Babytalk and the Poetic Potentials of Persian Lullabies

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Introduction

While communicating with infants, adults usually use a certain kind of language which is different from the usual adults' conversational language in vocal stretches, hesitations, repetitions, etc. This special kind of language is called "Babytalk". The cognitive studies on Babytalks has shown the existence of some specific poetic characteristics which prove the ability of literal cognition in human infants even in the first weeks of their lives. Lullabies are also one of the first sources for communicating with babies.

Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose

This research tries to answer the question whether or not the lullabies can be considered a source for discovering paradigms of cognitive poetics in children? What are these paradigms? This study uses the cognitive method and David Miall and Ellen Dissanayake's (2003) findings to investigate and extract poetic potentials and paradigms in lullabies.

Researches undertaken so far on Persian lullabies have focused on their categorization based on their geographical, contextual and thematic elements from the perspective of cultural studies and

anthropology. Some of the researchers who have undertaken the task of collecting the lullabies, for example, Omrani (2002), Javid (2004), Khazaei (2005), Qanbari (2006), Jamali (2008), Safidgar Shahanaqi (2015), have also studied the themes of the lullabies. Some researchers have also analyzed the contextual, structural and narrative features of the lullabies, but they have focused on the world of women and mothers; for example, see Hasanli (2001), Vojdani (2008), and Enayat et al (2012).

Qezel-Ayagh (2006) has studied children's literature from infancy to 3 years of age and pointed out the significance of lullabies in the physical and emotional education of children besides other songs and games. Perhaps the closest study to our study is the article titled "Children's poetry and the appearance of verbal aesthetics in children" by Haqshenas et al. (2010) in which the subject is investigated based on the theoretical framework of the formalist linguist, Ruqaiya Hasan. While that study focuses on learning literature from the ages of infancy to later years, the present study as a cognitive research focuses on lullabies and their rhetorical features for infants in the first weeks after birth.

Discussion

Miall and Dissanayake (2003) believe that the function of every hidden poetical potentiality in babytalk is creating a closer relationship between the mother and the child. Therefore, poetical potentialities are connected to Bowlby's famous theory of attachment (1982: 177-198). Miall and Dissanayake (2003) identify several poetical potentialities in babytalks, and we have tried to trace them in lullabies, too.

The frequency and repetition of frontal phonemes:

Repetition is one of the most obvious characteristics of lullabies. An interesting aspect of lullabies is the frequency of the consonant “L” due to the repetition of la la la la. Behavioral studies on phonemes show that front phonemes (those which are articulated in the anterior area of the phonetic system) generate senses of presence and closeness; while back phonemes (those which are articulated in the posterior area of the phonetic system) generate senses of distance. Therefore, the consonant L generates sense of close relationship between the child and the mother.

Iconicity: Miall and Dissanayake (2003) believe that the high frequency of front phonemes in babytalk results in its phonetic iconicity. In cognitive orthographic linguistics and in semiotics, iconicity means similarity homogeneity between the form and the meaning of a sign; for example, if a mother wants to show her intimacy with her child, she naturally and instinctively makes use of sounds which are articulated from her nearest area of the phonetic system to the child. Such a meaningful relationship between the form and the meaning challenges the basis of poststructuralist thinking which negates any natural and inherent relationship between form and meaning of a sign and believe that all the meanings of signs are cultural constructs (Dissanayake, 2001).

Parallelism: Parallelism is the arrangement of a number of words in a linguistic structure in a way that they are in parallel structures of grammar, sound or meaning (Corbett and Connors, 1999: 45). This technique, which is similar to balancing in traditional rhetorical

techniques, is frequently used in proverbs and epigrams. Parallelism is a frequent tool in lullabies, too.

Ritualization: The process of making a behavior meaningful, in a way that it comes out of the form of its primary goal (which is usually a biological need) and gains the function of a sign or a ritual, is called ritualization. One can argue that the rhetorical tools mentioned above, which exist in both babytalk and Persian lullabies, have turned into ritualistic behaviors for the mother and the child and are used for making and expressing “connection”.

Defamiliarization: Formalists believe that rhythmic structures are types of deviation from the standard language which defamiliarize speech; however, it is important to note that in children’s behavioral studies, the manner in which a mother connects with her child in the prelinguistic stage shows the rhetorical speech is exactly the familiar and natural type of speech for the child. In other words, contrary to the popular belief that identifies rhetorical language as a cultural construct, this type of language has a natural and biological basis.

Conclusion

The findings of the research showed that the same poetical characteristics exist in both babytalk and Persian lullabies. The poetics of babytalk has an interactive function and mothers make use of them unconsciously to connect with their children. The poetics of lullabies, too, creates this connection between the mother and the child. Evidence shows that from a very early age, the human child is able to understand rhetorical language. This is a potential field for the interaction and

mutual connection between the mother and the child. Interestingly, rhetorical understanding in young children occurs even before linguistic understanding; therefore, if rhetorical language is a deviation from the standard language, for children it is the natural type.

Keywords: Attachment, Babytalk, Cognitive Poetics, Persian lullabies

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