Extended Abstract

A Pathological Study of Folklore Tales for Pre-School Children from the Perspective of Cultural Schemas
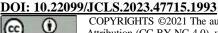
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Introduction

Due to their structure and appealing mode of narration, folklore tales have always seemed attractive to children. Through history, adult narrators have also taken advantage of the potentials of these tales to amuse children and teach life skills to them. Therefore, folklore tales have always been considered important sources in children's literature. however, a detailed content analysis of these tales shows that aberrant and inappropriate moral and social and cultural themes are highly frequent in these tales, and since in the childhood period, mental schemas are shaped based on the data provided by adults (parents) and the environment, narrating these tales for children of successive generations shapes their mental schemas and cultural beliefs. Credible and powerful narrators of these tales (parents, grandparents, etc.) also help the fixation of these themes in the minds of the children and shape their parent record which unconsciously influences their decisions and their interpretations of the world around them to the end of their lives.

On the other hand, common and similar contents in texts provided for children of a society through time produce similar mental schemas for people of the same generation and gradually constructs the cultural beliefs of that society. As such, one can trace the causes of many actions and behaviors in any society to the texts produced for the children of that society.

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In the present research, the content of one hundred and eighty tales which are frequently rewritten and published for children are analyzed to show which content and theme can create inappropriate schemas in the minds of pre-school children.

Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose

The pathological study of folklore tales is conducted with a critical reading. In critical reading, the norms in the texts as well as the themes of dominance and exploitation which are hidden in the deep structure of the texts are critically reviewed and with the help of dialectic view (which shows the contradictions of the text) and a critical look at the ideology of the text, the researcher tries to draw the hidden aberrations of the text to the surface.

This research is based on the concept of schema. According to Piaget, schemas are organized actions which can be repeated or generalized in similar situations and can organize the phenomena in the environment in certain groups and classes. When a child encounters a new phenomenon, s/he creates a new schema in her/his mind and finally, by creating a balance between her/his mental schemas and the external world, s/he reaches a logical and integrated interpretation of the world. Eric Berne formalizes the human psychological conditions based on three patterns of the parent, the adult and the child and believes that a significant part of anyone's draft of life is written before they turn seven. Although this draft is constantly modified as the child grows up and acquires more life experiences, the person quite unconsciously adheres to the main framework of that draft to the end of life.

Accordingly, it is the purpose of this research to show how many of the cultural schemas that take shape in the minds of the children by hearing folklore tales remain with them forever and unconsciously affect their decision-making processes.

Discussion

Mohammad Reza Shams has collected and rewritten 180 famous tales for children in his book, *Tales from This Side of the Sea*. Most of these tales are very old and have been narrated and rewritten many times in many ways. A thorough study of each tale shows that a significant number of superstitions and discriminatory, immoral and aberrant themes are repeated in various tales and narrated over and over by credible narrators (parents, grandparents, teachers, etc.); therefore, they gradually create aberrant schemas in the minds of children. Trickery, lying, deceiving others, misogyny, belief in fortune, seeking vengeance, stealing, laziness, violence, absolute obedience of parents, putting aside critical thinking are some of these themes which can create incorrect and inappropriate schemas in the mind of the child gradually, due to constant repetition.

On the other hand, tales are usually made accessible for all (or most of) children of the same generation in a certain period of time, so they shape the cultural schemas of that generation on the whole. This is how these aberrations are continued from one generation to the next. Therefore, while rewriting

or recreating tales for children, it is of great importance to pay due attention to the hidden messages of the tales.

Conclusion

Folklore tales are precious cultural heritages of each society and should be properly recorded and conserved; however, many of these tales, while having many great and proper cultural themes, have some elements which cannot be deemed appropriate for young children.

In this research, a contextual analysis was carried out on 180 famous tales which are frequently rewritten for children and their immoral elements, aberrations and flawed beliefs were extracted. The study showed that trickery, dishonesty, distrust and contempt toward women, pessimism and distrust toward others, belief in determinism and fortune, belittling effort, illogical criteria for marriage, and many other similar themes are very frequently repeated in these tales (and definitely in other tales). These themes are narrated by strong and credible narrators (parents, grandparents, nurses, teachers, etc.) for children from generation to generation and shape their mental schemas about different things in their lives. These schemas are gradually modified, of course, as the children grow up and acquire more life experiences, but since they have learned them from omniscient parents, these schemas are registered in their unconscious and significantly affect their decisions, behaviors and interpretations of the outside world in an unconscious process.

Also, common life experiences and common themes instilled in the minds of children lead to the creation of similar schemas in the society and produce similar cultural patterns which eventually make up the culture of that society. In this constructed culture, trickery is preferred over cleverness and alertness, laziness over hope in the grace of God, dishonesty and disrespecting the rights of others over readiness for opportunities, and such incorrect preferences or illogical criteria are suggested for decision-making in various aspects of life, whether material or spiritual. This gradually shapes a different ethical culture in which morality and immorality, norm and abnormal are intermingled.

Keywords: folklore tales, children, mental schemas, cultural beliefs

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