

Nine Deviations of Childlike Language

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Abstract

Over the decades there have been discussions regarding the ownership and definition of texts written for children. The paper discusses the term “childlike language” as the one distinguished from other types of language through its connection to the image of a child and children’s culture, but generated by adults. Accordingly, childlike language is marked by a distinct deviation/aberration from the norm and is produced by adult authors who often engage in literary experimentation and exhibit a propensity for identifying with their child audience. In their strong association with the “semiotic”, as defined by Julia Kristeva, denoting the prosody and sound of language, such literary works for children exhibit deviant nature linguistically/lexically, phonetically, semantically, orthographically, and grammatically through their use of neologisms, word play, sound patterns, hyperbole, nonsense, and other stylistic and structural elements. Therefore, authors for children express their childlike nature by means of language which defies common rules, challenges status quo, and which results in playfulness, humor, subversiveness and grotesque. For this purpose, the research focuses on the examples of popular works by children’s authors belonging to the English-speaking literary tradition, such as Roald Dahl, Dr. Seuss, A. A. Milne, J. R. R. Tolkien, J. K. Rowling, Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, J. M. Barrie and others, in order to detect and illustrate the categories of childlike language. However, though the analysis will stick to its designated focus, the childlike expression is universal regardless of age and location. It is a source of freedom and divergent thinking, it makes us want to read, and it lets us grow up to be very powerful people.

Key words: children’s culture and literature; humor; nonsense; the semiotic; word play.

Introduction

Contemporary children's discourse studies express a "concern with the implications of language for self-relevance, for sense-making, and for the construction of peer cultures and children's worlds" (Cook-Gumpertz & Kyratzis, 2003, p. 592). In Editor's Preface to *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History* (1995) Peter Hunt discusses the ownership of children's literature, stating that nobody is "quite sure what children's literature is" or "whose it is" (ix-x). These rather philosophical questions involve the issues of authorship and readership, due to the fact that an observation into the process of creating products for children reveals the participation of two distinctly different cultures, namely that of adults versus that of children. In *Children, Media and Culture* (2010) Máire Messenger Davies defines the foundations of "children's unofficial culture" not only in terms of folk and fairy tales and oral traditions, but also playground games, nursery rhymes, jokes and riddles that constitute "traditional playground culture", as researched by Iona and Peter Opie (p. 116), revealing the fact that children's culture often works outside the boundaries of what adults consider appropriate for children. Yet, in most cases the authors of works for children *are* adults. In *Feeling Like a Kid: Childhood and Children's Literature* (2006) Jerry Griswold defines five recurrent themes in classic and popular works for children¹ and describes writers of children's literature thus:

Because they are still connected to their childhoods and sympathetic, then, the best writers for children can speak to the young. Looked at from the opposite direction, from the point of view of the young, this is the very source of their appeal; in preferring certain authors and works, while ignoring many others, the young confirm that there are a chosen few who can speak to them where they are. Simply said, the great writers for children know – and their stories speak of and reveal – what it feels like to be a kid. (p. 4)

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to define the term *childlike language* as a means of communication and rapport between the authors of children's literature and their child audience. Accordingly, *childlike language*, which is generated by adult authors who gladly engage in experimentation with literary form and identify with their readers, is defined by its:

- a) association to the "semiotic" as defined by Julia Kristeva (1980),
- b) deviation/aberration from the norm (disregard for rules),
- c) creative quality.

In other words, *childlike language* is characterized by the dissolution of the standard language. It often deviates linguistically/lexically, phonetically, semantically, orthographically, and grammatically, and results in the creation of new terms and concepts. By drawing on (post)structuralist theories and those of children's cognitive

¹ Snuggness, Scariness, Smallness, Lightness and Aliveness

development, this paper will attempt to define and categorize the term childlike language by offering a qualitative overview of the most representative examples of childlike language in the English language from the Golden Age onward. Like the kiss becoming a thimble or an acorn button in *Peter Pan* (Barrie, 1911/1993, p. 32), the usage of childlike language reveals that meaning is arbitrary, resulting in the manifestation and development of creativity and divergent thinking. The overall effect of such literary text is playfulness, humor, subversiveness and grotesque, which delight the child reader, who is inevitably empowered in the process. If “*language is culture*” (Kristeva, n.d.), then childlike language is a type of literary discourse that belongs to and defines children’s culture, as it unites all its aspects and quirks.

Children’s Literature, Imagery and the “Semiotic”

Children’s media theorists suggest that the younger the children are, the more they respond to salient features, such as animation, sound effects and lively music (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002, p. 19). Likewise, children’s literature, especially aimed at its younger consumers, is often onomatopoeic, mimicking the sounds and other sensory impressions of children’s surroundings. Accordingly, Dr. Seuss’ first book *And to Think that I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937) was inspired by the sound of the Kungsholm ship engine while he was crossing the Atlantic (Nel, 2003, p. 32) and in Watty Piper’s *The Little Engine That Could* (1930/2012) the “mantra” “I think I can. I think I can.” dissolves into the sound of the chugging train engine. “Perceptual boundedness” (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002, p. 19) is the reason why the examples of playful sound patterns are plenty in literature for children, and in some cases the text can assume shape and form, as in this example of a concrete poem (see Figure 1).

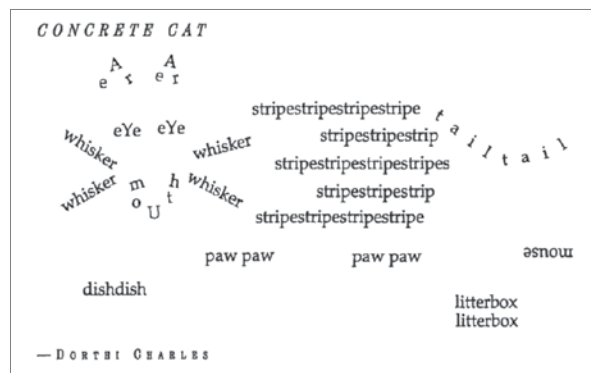


Figure 1. Dorthi Charles’ Concrete Cat. A concrete poem features words, their meaning, shapes, and position on the page in order to produce an image (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2005, pp. 55-56); Charles, D. (1982). Concrete cat. In X. J. Kennedy & D. M. Kennedy (Eds.), *Knock at a star*. Illustrated by K. A. Weinhaus. Boston: Little, Brown.

In *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980) Julia Kristeva discusses “poetic language”, the result of an interplay between the “semiotic” and “symbolic” signifying process, as a discourse which “measures rhythm against the

meaning of language structure and is thus always eluded by meaning in the present while continually postponing it to an impossible time-to-come” (p. 33). Accordingly, the “semiotic” (*le sémiotique*) aspect of language is the one connected to the maternal body and it is the discourse of a mother and an infant characterized by its rhythm and timbre, prosody, word play and laughter (Morgenstern, 2000, p. 115). The “semiotic” aspect of language is gradually repressed in children by means of the entry into the realm of language, or the “symbolic”. The theory of “the poetic” emphasizes the relationship between the “symbolic” and “semiotic” which leads to “making and breaking of discourse”, in other words, “the tendency of the semiotic (rhythm, timbre, prosody, word-play, laughter) is to constantly seek to dissolve the sign back into the body and thus alert us to ‘the material basis of the symbolic’...” (p. 115). Literature, therefore, is a type of discourse in which the “semiotic” is privileged to the highest degree. However, as opposed to Morgenstern’s claim that because of the recent entry into the “symbolic” children “may well prefer the stability of the symbolic to the flux of the semiotic” (p. 116) and that their literature “aspires to the castle, to mastery, to the Name of the Father that is Law” (p. 117), we would like to assert that because of their liminal position children retain a natural connection to the “semiotic” and can occupy the space of both realms. Consequently, in order to achieve mastery, children need to engage in “upsetting the Father” in order to know language, a process which is achieved by occasionally returning to the “maternal sea of the semiotic.” For this reason, dissolutive and regenerative utterances appear in many forms within childlike language, such as in Roald Dahl’s *The Witches* (1983) in which the main antagonist “had a peculiar way of speaking. There was some sort of a foreign accent there, something harsh and guttural, and she seemed to have trouble pronouncing the letter w. As well as that, she did something funny with the letter r. She would roll it round and round her mouth like a piece of hot pork-crackling before spitting it out” (Dahl, 1998, p. 69). Since children’s writers “inevitably create a colloquy between past and present selves” (Nel, 2003, pp. 98-99), they are in a position to deliver the literary text which constantly returns to the rhythm, prosody, play and laughter of the “semiotic”. In the following passages we will consider which aspects of this interplay constitute the core features of childlike language.

Deviation or Breaking Rules

The dissolution and disruption of verbal expression as a chief feature of childlike language is achieved through deviation/aberration from the norm by means of the (un)conscious breaking of linguistic rules concerning lexis, phonetics, semantics, orthography and grammar. It is for this reason that in *The Hobbit* (1937) the Gollum “whispers and hisses” utterances replete with grammatical errors, such as “Praps we sits here and chats with it a bitsy, my preciouss” (Tolkien, 1996, p. 68), and Dahl’s witch shouts prosodically, “Down vith children!/[...] Bish them, sqvish them, bash them, mash/them!/Brrreak them, shake them, slash them, smash/them!” (1983/1998, p. 85).

However, this process is not destructive, but often denotes a linguistic breakdown for the purpose of playful production of novel expressions. This is due to the fact that the production and use of childlike language is grounded in play and humor development. Accordingly, in order to develop the higher-order thinking functions of the brain, children need to engage in experiences which stimulate all of the senses, most of which occur during play as “a critical path to those experiences that [...] provide the foundation for future learning” (“The Power of Play,” *Boston Children’s Museum*). Accordingly, imaginative, fantasy, pretend, or “symbolic” play is characterized by an alternate reality in which a character, function, time and location belong to the world of “as if” (James & McCain, 1982, as cited in Valkenburg, 2001, p. 122; van der Voort & Valkenburg, 1994). Research by Singer and Singer (1990) revealed great benefits of imaginative play for the cognitive and social development of a child, resulting in better concentration, development of greater empathic ability, as well as the ability to consider a subject from different angles, more personal self-assurance, and flexibility in unfamiliar situations (as cited in Valkenburg, 2001, p. 122). Furthermore, several studies, such as those by Dansky (1980) and Fisher (1992), revealed indications that imaginative play in childhood is positively related to creativity in adulthood, mostly due to the “breaking free of established associations or meanings” (Sutton-Smith, 1966, as cited in Valkenburg, 2001, p. 122). In defining and tracing the development of children’s humor, Jennifer Cunningham (2005) concedes that humor is also a type of play because it is enjoyable, it “constructs an unreal world” similar to that of imaginative play, and because this “as if” world “performs the same cognitive, social and emotional functions” as play (p. 94) Cunningham goes on to claim that “[e]ven the simple scatological ‘jokes’ of a preschooler (‘You poo in your pants!’) are just instances of enjoyable pretense that observe the rules for ordering the real world by breaking them” (p. 94). For the same reason, according to Neuß (2006):

Children relish playing with logic and content, violating the rules of language with reinterpretations and distortions, with exaggerations, combinations of the uncombinable, concoctions and collages – either by means of their own creations or by adopting given parameters. Their language games are an expression of the pleasure they derive from twisting, overstating, deforming, and contradicting but also from excessively taking things literally in inappropriate situations, from violating rules and conventions. (p. 20)

Therefore, deviation from the norm in different shapes and forms is the integral part of children’s development, as well as children’s culture and its products: for the purpose of ordering the world and as an outlet. Some of the most representative examples of this practice in children’s literature are the literary techniques of wordplay, nonsense and exaggeration.

Word Play

Top children’s authors frequently engage in playing and experimenting with words, employing different stylistic devices, such as sound patterns (e.g. alliteration,

assonance), puns, blending (portmanteau words²), or various orthographic alterations. Philip Nel (2003), while discussing the author whose book is received by “one out of every four children in the United States as its first book” (pp. 3-4), claims that Dr. Seuss’ poetry “reveals language as a complex game, with rules made to be bent, and meanings that shift as quickly as their context changes” (p. 23). Nel further observes morphological, phonetic and orthographic characteristics of Seuss’ work:

In *The Lorax*, the Once-ler’s machinery goes “Gulppity-Glupp” and “Schloppity-Schlopp,” which has the effect of “glumping the pond where the Humming-Fish hummed!” The Lorax himself, choking on the “smogulous smoke”, speaks with a “cruffulous croak.” The verb “glumping” sounds like dumping clumps of goo, “smogulous” turns “smog” into an adjective, and “cruffulous” sounds like crusty, huffing, wheezing old man. These words not only sound like what they mean - they’re fun to say. [...] Taking rhyme, alliteration, consonance, and assonance to their logical extremes, Seuss reduces words to sounds, amusing to say, but distracting from sense. (pp. 26-27)

Similarly, in the literary phenomenon that is the Harry Potter series, J. K. Rowling plays with language intertextually and postmodernly. She separates different aspects of language, its meaning, sound and form to produce spells such as *Expecto Patronum*, *Accio*, *Imperio*, *Expelliarmus*, *Engorgio*, *Alohomora* or *Riddikulus*, or play with sound patterns when creating names Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, Salazar Slytherin, and passwords like “Mimbulus Mimbletonia” (2003, p. 340).

Playing with the rules of language is also the reason why in Chapter VIII of A. A. Milne’s beloved classic *Winnie-the-Pooh* Christopher Robin leads an “Expotition” to the North Pole. Here the “North Pole” denotes a pun referring to a stick that they “stuck in the ground, and Christopher Robin tied a message on to it”, as is brilliantly depicted in the final illustration by E. H. Shepard in which the whole company admires the “Pole” and their accomplishments (Milne, 1926/1992). A. A. Milne not only provides puns and alternative spelling for terms and concepts that a child encounters for perhaps the first time, but also capitalizes and, thus, highlights very important ones, such as “Big Boots”, “Adventure”, “Dangerous Place”, “Confused Noise” or “Ambush.” In doing so, Milne orthographically plays, participates, understands and empathizes with the child reader.

Finally, word play is also employed for the purpose of mystery, an integral part of children’s culture (Messenger Davies, 2011), as is the case with anagrams, mirror writing, or riddles.³ That is why in the Harry Potter books the inscription on the Mirror of Erised reads “*Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi*” (Rowling, 1997, p. 157), Tom Marvolo Riddle spells I AM VOLDEMORT (Rowling, 1998, p. 337), and in *The Hobbit* Gollum engages Bilbo in the riddle game in exchange for his life (1937/1996, p. 70).

² “snozzberries”= snooze + berries (Dahl, 1964/2005, pp. 104-105)

³ A riddle is “a verbal puzzle, a trick of words” (Zipes et al., 2005, p. 1147).

By utilizing word play, authors of children's literature acknowledge the fundamental needs of their audience. In other words, by "breaking and making discourse" they build rapport with their readers and aid them in their personal discovery of language and discourse as they gradually enter into the world of the "symbolic".

Nonsense

Likewise, nonsense is an important component of children's literature, since it is a stylistic technique and a genre characterized by semantic deviation. The Victorian era (1837-1901) presented a great turning point in children's literature with the emergence of what is today known as the Golden Age of Childhood (Messenger Davies, 2011, p. 27), when literary works for children distanced themselves from didacticism and became more attuned to children's preferences and tastes. According to Jacqueline Rogers (2008), "Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear contributed to producing children's literature not solely as instruction and admonishment, but as entertainment for the pleasure of the child" (p. 44). They did so in part by reviving literary nonsense and giving nonsense verse in the English language its characteristic form (Zipes, Paul, Vallone, Hunt, & Avery, 2005, p. 1154). Edward Lear, whose expertise was limerick combined with comic illustrations, wrote *A Book of Nonsense* in 1846, and produced songs such as "The Owl and the Pussy-cat" (1867) who "[...] sailed away, for a year and a day, / To the land where the Bong-tree grows, / And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood, / With a ring at the end of his nose, / His nose, / His nose, / With a ring at the end of his nose" (Lear, 1996, p. 121). Lear's literature, still enjoyed today, was complimented by his caricatures (see Figure 2):



Figure 2. Edward Lear's illustration for the nonsense limerick "There was an Old Man on whose nose," Lear, E. (1846/1996). *The Book of Nonsense and Nonsense Songs*. London: Penguin Books.

Likewise, Lewis Carroll, whose *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) was the first piece of modern fantasy literature in English, incorporated much nonsense verse into his writing as a response to strict Victorian etiquette, the masterpiece of which is his epic poem "Jabberwocky," published in 1871 in *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. The poem, which initially appears in mirror writing, opens

with: “‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe; / All mimsy were the borogoves, / And the mome raths outgrabe” (Carroll, 1981, pp. 117-119) and is chock-full with invented words which need additional explanations via glossary and footnotes appended to the poem in every respectable reader or anthology. Carroll’s, as well as Lear’s tradition of nonsense verse was continued by writers such as Shel Silverstein in “Ickle Me, Pickle Me, Tickle Me Too” (1974, pp. 16-17), Dr. Seuss in *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960) and Dennis Lee in *Alligator Pie* (1974). Therefore, it is no surprise that Headmaster Dumbledore’s opening address in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* is, “Nitwit! Blubber! Odment! Tweak!” (Rowling, 1997, pp. 91-92).

The appeal of nonsense lies in its incongruity, the relationship to which it is conditioned developmentally. In addressing this issue, Cunningham (2005) refers to Paul McGhee’s (1979/2002) five-stage model of humor development, beginning with a child being able to perceive incongruity during infancy (stage 1), followed by the ability to produce incongruity nonverbally as a toddler in stage 2 and then verbally in childhood by, for example, misnaming objects or actions (p. 104). Playing with words occurs in stage 4, and, as the child develops, stage 5 encompasses riddles and jokes as the child begins to seek a resolution to incongruity. Cunningham notes that:

[...] unreality is at the center of many theories of humor and of play in general. For some theorists, the pleasure of humor is in the cognitive realization that the situation is unreal and incongruous with the “rules” of the world as we know it. As children begin to use their perceptions and past experiences to formulate expectations about situations and events, they often react with laughter and surprise when these expectations are violated. (p. 97)

Therefore, nonsense, unreality and incongruity form the basis of childlike language which is created by breaking linguistic rules in order to provide a fundamental understanding of how language actually works.

Exaggeration

Similarly, it is no news that children enjoy exaggerating, and this inclination is perhaps the most distinct point of divergence between children and adults. In 1997 Blum-Kulka found that Israeli and American middle-class families exhibited differences “in the extent to which they allowed the child to be the focus of the storytelling attention, and the extent to which parents stressed that ‘tall tales’ or exaggerations were inappropriate” (as cited in Cook-Gumpertz & Kyratzis, 2003, p. 598). Accordingly, hyperbole is “a figure of exaggeration and deviation from the norm” and “generally indicates all manner of exaggerated representations of a situation in which the boundaries of the *aptum* (in the sense of the reasonable, the probable, the credible) are transgressed” (Messlin, 2014). For example, the illustrations from Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) demonstrate the semantically and syntactically deviant power of hyperbole via repetition to create a dramatic effect, as well as to represent children’s darkest feelings (Natov, 2001, p. 321).

In children's literature hyperbolizing opens up not only the possibility for taboo, grotesque and gore, but also laughter. Roald Dahl, one of the greatest children's writers of all time, claimed that "children are cruel and have a vulgar sense of humor, and [...] believed that they respond to forthright portrayals of their lives exaggerated through fantasy" (Zipes et al., 2005, p. 359). Accordingly, Dahl describes Miss Trunchbull, one of his ridiculously grotesque characters from *Matilda* (1988), as a "gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster" (2004, pp. 61-62), and in *The Witches* "A REAL WITCH hates children with red-hot sizzling hatred that is more sizzling and red-hot than any hatred you could possibly imagine" (1998, p. 7). Mark I. West (1990) notes the discrepancy between Roald Dahl's immense popularity with children and dislike by many adults. The exaggerated violence and grotesque of Dahl's writing is often interpreted literally by adults, also because it is, in fact, aimed at them. Dahl himself claimed that "children are inclined, at least subconsciously, to regard grown-ups as the enemy. I see this as natural and I often work it into my children's books" (as cited in West, 1990, p. 116). It is a fact that children often laugh at the things which adults find unacceptable, disgusting or revolting, and, as Wolfenstein claims, like "making fun of the bigness, power and prerogatives of the grown-ups whom they envy" (as cited in West, 1990, pp. 115-116). Because they differ from adults through lack of control and restraint in both behavior and speech, children are the occupants of the transitional realm in which they are familiar with words, but have the tendency to do with them as they please. Therefore, verbal exaggeration of many children's authors affirms "the child's need to make noise, to be creative, and to make a mess, if need be" (Nel, 2003, p. 195).

Children's natural inclination to embrace the extremes is also evident in the adoption of fairy tale as a genre nowadays primarily associated with child audience, though it "never was told or written explicitly for children" (Zipes et al., 2005, p. 175). Accordingly, the flat characters of the fairy tale and the battle of good and evil, according to Bettelheim (1976/2010) satisfy a child's need to overcome the inner monsters and for justice to prevail. Fairy tales as "stories of human experience told in primary colors" (Tunnell & Jacobs, 2008, p. 102) provide children with a "sense of values and of one's place within society" (Zipes et al., 2005, pp. 175-176), and so does hyperbolizing in general. Unfortunately, products of exaggeration are also the cause of much censorship related to literary works for children. Yet, as one of the features of childlike language, it is a tool of subversiveness, empowerment, experimentation, freedom and justice necessary in the process of growing up.

Creation of New Wor(l)ds and Concepts

As is evident from the passages above, childlike language as a transformational, regenerative and perennial type of expression often results in the creation of new words, concepts and expressions, constituting an exercise in lexis and etymology. Some of the most fascinating secondary worlds are those belonging to children's literature, such as Carroll's *Wonderland*, Lewis' *Narnia* (1955/1995), Tolkien's *Middle-earth*,

or Lloyd Alexander's Prydain (1968/2006). Though in no way a prerequisite for the creation of novel expressions, the fantastic secondary worlds allow for an invention of original creatures, locations, objects, customs and procedures. Accordingly, Tolkien's work has been expounded in numerous encyclopedias composed solely on the basis of his writing. Likewise, Lacoss (2002) notes that in creating her wizarding world, Rowling devises a "specialized lexicon" of a distinct folk group by drawing on roots of words, especially foreign ones, evident in her creation of names, but also in terminology unknown to the occupants of our primary world: apparating and disapparating, flue powder, Griffindor vs. Slytherin, or dementors (p. 70). Consequently, in his essay on free reading Desmond (2001) brings up the analysis of children's Internet comments which revealed that the majority of children wanted to attend Hogwarts at the boarding school age and that they "finished the book faster than any they have read" (2001, p. 33). Likewise, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Newsweek* have reported on the use of "Potterisms" in the workplace (Lacoss, 2002, p. 70). The creation of children's fiction, realistic or fantastic, frequently includes the production of neologisms to which children are naturally drawn. Accordingly, in his *The BFG* (1982) Roald Dahl invents a new language called "Gobblefunk," featuring words such as "delumptious," "froboscottle" or "whizzpopping," which has resulted in many decades of "gobblefunking" (Hughes, 2011). Occasionally, the expressions of childlike language expand our understanding of everyday world and language, such as "Muggle," a word invented by J. K. Rowling which was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2003 (*CBBC Newsround*, 2003), or Dr. Seuss' "nerd" from *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950) and "Grinch" from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957), which have made their entry into the English language (Nel, 2003, p. 25). Likewise, in *The Owl and the Pussy-cat* Edward Lear made up the word "runcible," yet, "the phrase 'runcible spoon' has come to mean a curved fork with three broad prongs, sharp on the outside edge" (Zipes et al., 2005, p. 1155). Childlike language, therefore, unites the characteristics of imaginative play and children's humor for the purpose of play with meaning, sound, and form of language, often resulting in novel expressions which delight and enlighten the child reader, and enrich language in general.

Conclusion

In "Child Discourse" Cook-Gumpertz and Kyratzis (2003) state that "[l]anguage is used by the child actively to construct a social identity and a self-awareness that comes with the self-reflexiveness made possible through the grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic resources of language" (pp. 594-595). Childlike language draws on the resources of imaginative play and children's humor to alleviate and celebrate the liminal position of the child reader. Authors of children's literature who have managed to retain the connection to their childhoods, therefore, construct texts for children based on knowledge and memory of what it is like to be a transgressor between the "semiotic" and the "symbolic". Their playful and subversive usage of onomatopoeia and

sound patterns, puns, riddles, orthographic alterations, portmanteau words, nonsense, hyperbole, or neologisms constitute approximately nine deviations of childlike language. As a type of literary discourse, childlike language is dependent on rule-breaking and regeneration. Its playfulness, humor, subversiveness and grotesque are the foundation for the vicarious experience needed by the child in order to construct his/her own everyday reality. Consequently, the cognitive, social and cultural benefits of being exposed to such discourse are innumerable, the most obvious perhaps being verbal creativity and divergent thinking.

Similar to Tunnell and Jacobs' claim of fairy tales, children's literature is, among other, produced so that children "may vicariously vent the frustration of being a child controlled by an adult world" (2008, p. 109). It is true that adults also enjoy aspects of the childlike listed in this paper, for we are not permanently severed from our childhood selves and our childhood experiences. We urge you to look for examples of childlike language, as outlined in this paper, in your own surroundings, literature and culture, because they are universal and they are there, to amuse you and put a sparkle in your eye. However, there is one crucial difference connected to the production and reception of childlike language: we all need childlike language to be entertained and amused, but children's task here involves something much greater. Children need childlike language to understand the world and their place in it.

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Devet devijacija djecolikog jezika

Sažetak

O definiciji i autorstvu tekstova pisanih za djecu raspravlja se već desetljećima. U izlaganju će se govoriti o pojmu “djecolikoga jezika” kao jezika koji se razlikuje od ostalih vrsta izričaja svojom povezanošću s pojmom djeteta i dječjom kulturom, no čiji su izvor odrasli. U skladu s tim djecoliki se jezik odlikuje izrazitim odstupanjem/zastranjivanjem od norme, a stvaraju ga odrasli autori koji pokazuju naklonost prema književnom eksperimentiranju te se često poistovjećuju sa svojom dječjom publikom. Povezanošću sa «semiotičkim» oblikom jezika kako ga definira Julia Kristeva, a koji se odnosi na prozodiju, zvuk i melodiju jezika, takva djela dječje književnosti ukazuju na devijantnost lingvističkih/leksičkih, fonetičkih, semantičkih, pravopisnih, gramatičkih i ostalih stilskih i strukturnih elemenata, specifičnu uporabu neologizama, igru riječi, glasovne figure, hiperbole, nonsense. Na taj način autori tekstova za djecu stvaraju posebnu vrstu izričaja jezikom koji se opire standardnim pravilima i ne trpi status quo, a čiji su rezultat zaigranost, humor, subverzivnost i groteska. Sa svrhom određivanja i opisivanja kategorija djecolikoga jezika ovo se istraživanje bavi primjerima popularne dječje književnosti autora engleskoga govornog područja kao što su Roald Dahl, Dr. Seuss, A. A. Milne, J. R. R. Tolkien, J. K. Rowling, Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, J. M. Barrie i drugi. Iako analiza primarno obraća pozornost na primjere specifičnoga govornog područja, djecoliki je jezik univerzalan bez obzira na dob ili područje. On je izvor slobode i divergentnoga mišljenja, potiče nas da čitamo i omogućava nam da izrastemo u vrlo moćne ljude.

Ključne riječi: dječja kultura; humor; igra riječima; neologizam; nonsens; semiotičko.