

The Linguistic Formation of Personality in Children's Theatre

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Abstract:

The linguistic shaping of character in children's theatre is central to constructing the dramatic text, with language adapted to the child's cognitive and emotional stage. Dialogue is the main vehicle for presenting and developing characters, creating lively interaction that engages the young audience and reinforces values and behaviours. Presented in an appealing style with suitable vocabulary and subtle rhetorical touches, language and character work together to achieve both educational and artistic goals, enriching the experience and supporting the child's intellectual and emotional growth.

Key words: language; character; children's theatre; education; development.

1- Introduction :

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Children's theatre is one of the artistic mediums that speaks to the child in a language that balances simplicity with depth, and enjoyment with education. Theatre contributes to shaping the child's awareness, nurturing their imagination, and enhancing their aesthetic values through lively characters that are relatable in both manner and behavior. Since children strongly engage with theatrical characters, the linguistic shaping of these characters becomes a fundamental element in the success of the dramatic text and in effectively delivering the educational and aesthetic messages intended to be instilled.

Accordingly, this study centers on "The Linguistic Shaping of Character in Children's Theatre", as it represents both an artistic and functional component that contributes to the construction of the theatrical character and enhances its interaction with the young audience. Language serves as a means of dialogue and a tool that defines the character's features—such as age, level of thinking, social background, and even psychological dimension. Thus, language becomes a semantic agent that reveals the nature of the character and frames its development within the dramatic text.

The central problem of this research arises from the following question: How does linguistic shaping contribute to the construction of theatrical character in children's theatre? And to what extent is it connected to the specificities of the child audience in terms of age, cognition, and aesthetic sensitivity?

To address this issue, the study is grounded in the following hypotheses:

- That linguistic shaping in children's theatre carefully considers the characteristics of each character, ensuring their harmony with the world of childhood.
- That theatrical language is crafted according to children's age groups, serving a functional role in reinforcing values and facilitating understanding and engagement.
- That the success of a theatrical character in influencing the audience is closely linked to the precision of its linguistic choices and their suitability for the young viewer.

The objectives of this research are defined as follows:

- To highlight the role of language in shaping the features of theatrical characters intended for children.
- To analyze the relationship between linguistic shaping and the level of reception among children of different age groups.
- To clarify how language contributes to achieving the educational and aesthetic dimensions of children's theatre.

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, through the analysis of selected theatrical texts aimed at children, supported by theoretical studies that explore theatrical language and child psychology. The aim is to uncover the mechanisms of linguistic character construction and assess their effectiveness in communicating with a young audience.

2- Definition of Dramatic Language:

Dramatic language constitutes the artistic foundation of a theatrical text. It is written in a manner that enables the audience to reinterpret it

through their imagination, revealing underlying meanings and deciphering the symbolic codes presented on stage.¹

Critics distinguish between dramatic language (or writing) as it appears in the written text, and scenic language (or stage writing), which is brought to life on stage by the director and addressed to the audience².

Language in theatre expresses the psychological and physical actions of the characters within the unfolding of events and conflict³. It is marked by its immediacy and its ability to conjure the world of the play.⁴

Theatrical language is typically divided into two types: descriptive language, which sets the scene and illustrates the movements of characters; and dialogic language, which reveals the inner depths of the characters and evolves in harmony with the unfolding events and their emotional and physical journeys. This type of language steers clear of direct narration and overt oratory, favoring subtlety and natural expression instead.⁵

3- Theatrical Language: Characteristics Aligned with Children's Developmental Stages:

In children's theatre, language functions as both a pedagogical and aesthetic instrument, intrinsically tied to the developmental traits of each age group. Crafting such language requires from the playwright not only technical skill, but also a deep understanding of theatrical writing tailored to young minds. The child yearns for a language that touches the heart, mirrors their world, and stirs the imagination. Thus, the dramatic text must thoughtfully reflect the intellectual and emotional growth of the child at every stage of development.⁶

Among the key features of language in children's theatre is its clarity and purity—free from complexity and ambiguity—and its rootedness in the child's own linguistic repertoire. It must align with the child's cognitive abilities and emotional needs, enabling them to understand, engage with, and immerse themselves in the performance. Striking a balance between simplicity and depth is essential, for excessive simplification may rob the child of the joy of discovery and hinder their linguistic and emotional growth. Therefore, the language used should be imaginative, contextually harmonious, and theatrically compelling—expanding the child's horizons and nurturing their artistic sensibility.⁷

The characteristics of theatrical language can be summarized according to age group as follows:

Ages 3 to 6: At this stage, the language is characterized by simplicity, relying on short, familiar sentences and frequent repetition. Music and rhythm are also employed, as the primary goal is comprehension and engagement.⁸

Ages 7 to 9: At this stage, vocabulary begins to expand and the ability to grasp symbolic meaning develops. Therefore, it is essential to use more varied language—without veering into complexity—while incorporating subtle hints and indirect messages.⁹

Ages 10 to 12: At this stage, the child becomes more capable of analysis and reflection. Thus, the language used should be richer and more nuanced, while still retaining its childlike tone and remaining closely connected to the child's world and imagination.¹⁰

4- The Role of Character in Children's Theatre:

Modern criticism has deconstructed the notion of character, redefining it in terms of function. The behavior of characters in a play is not merely a reflection of their traits, but the result of specific attributes assigned to them by the playwright to fulfill particular roles and contribute to the unfolding action. A character is not a fixed being, but rather a textual space in which certain functions are performed—a site of meaning that is enriched with every new reading. Thus, the character is both an act and a role, and derives its essence from this dual nature. It is a bearer of discourse, speaking through a voice attributed to it, and through critical analysis, one can uncover its multiple functions and understand that character emerges from the interplay between these two dimensions¹¹.

Characters in children's theatre perform multiple roles, serving as educational, psychological, and social tools. These roles may overlap, with a single character often fulfilling several purposes at once. The character thus becomes a unified and intricately woven network of psychological and social traits. As some scholars suggest, every discussion about a character is, at its core, a discussion about values—and about the words we use to express those values¹². Among the most prominent functions of the character are:

4-1- The Educational and Instructional Function:

The character in children's theatre serves as an effective tool for achieving educational and instructional goals. It contributes to shaping the child's personality in a balanced and holistic manner. Educational Level: Theatrical characters help reinforce self-confidence, stimulate imagination, strengthen memory, and support the development of focus and discipline.

They also cultivate in the child verbal and physical expression skills through the use of words, movement, and gesture.¹³

Instructional Level: The character plays a role in enriching the child's linguistic and cognitive repertoire by enabling the use of terms and techniques suited to their level of understanding. Acting also fosters a sense of familiarity with the body, as children naturally express their emotions and ideas through movement, role-playing, and gestures. This, in turn, enhances their bodily awareness and control over facial expressions and physical actions.¹⁴

The characters In a play convey moral values, allowing the child to learn the meanings of courage, patience, contentment, cooperation, and the pursuit of goodness and peace. A positive character promotes noble ideas and rejects negativity, reinforcing values of love and addressing issues such as violence and injustice through a purposeful and artistically impactful approach.¹⁵

4-2- The Psychological and Emotional Function:

Theatrical characters play a vital role in nurturing the psychological and emotional dimensions of the child. A sense of delight and reassurance arises when a young hero outwits those older or physically stronger—an experience that strengthens the child's self-confidence and fuels the imagination. The act of role-playing becomes a subtle form of emotional education, cultivating sensitivity and refining inner awareness. It supports not only emotional and affective development but also enhances cognitive and motor skills, making it a holistic tool for shaping and enriching the child's personality¹⁶.

Theatre also serves as a powerful means of emotional release, bringing joy and delight¹⁷ to the child while offering a safe space for expressing repressed feelings. The child is particularly influenced by the main character—especially the hero—onto whom they project their own identity and with whom they deeply identify. This emotional connection makes the character's impact more profound and enduring.¹⁸

Theatrical performance also helps in relieving fears and psychological tensions, whether through active role-play or passive viewing. The child becomes immersed in the world of the play, finding in it a safe outlet for inner emotions and a space for emotional release.¹⁹

4-3 The Social Function:

Theatrical characters play a significant role in reinforcing cultural identity and developing the child's social skills. They serve as a mirror of culture, reflecting behavioral patterns and modes of psychological and social formation.²⁰

Reinforcing Cultural Identity:

Traditional characters—such as Juha or talking animals—are employed to revive folkloric heritage and connect the child to their Arab and human roots. This connection plays a key role in shaping a strong sense of cultural awareness and identity in future generations.²¹

Developing Social Skills:

Through theatrical performance, the child is trained in interacting with others, acquiring essential skills such as cooperation, discipline, patience, and self-reliance. This gradual process also helps the child

overcome shyness and social withdrawal, thereby enhancing their integration into the surrounding social environment.

Addressing Behavioral Issues:

Theatrical characters contribute to offering educational solutions to contemporary social and behavioral problems, using an artistic approach that resonates with the child's world.

Learning the Ethics of Dialogue and Teamwork:

Through the interaction of characters on stage, the child learns the principles of constructive dialogue—such as active listening and respect for others' opinions. Moreover, the inherently collaborative nature of theatrical performance fosters in the child a spirit of community, altruism, and cooperation.²²

5- The Dramatic Function:

The theatrical character plays a dynamic role in cultivating the child's talents and capacities, accustoming them to the art of speech and performance. This, in turn, strengthens their self-confidence and supports their ability to engage meaningfully in various spheres of life²³. Through the dramatic conflict inherent in theatre—mirroring real-life situations—the child comes to grasp the values of truth and justice, while developing a refined sense of judgment and moral discernment.²⁴

The function of the theatrical character is not limited to the moral dimension alone; it also extends to nurturing the child's aesthetic sensibility. This is achieved through careful attention to accompanying artistic elements—such as music, set design, costumes, and lighting—which together enrich the child's visual and auditory experience.

From an artistic perspective, role-playing nourishes the child's innate curiosity and love for exploration. It enables the release of emotional energies in a refined and purposeful manner.²⁵ Imaginary characters drawn from folktales and legends—such as speaking animals or mythical beings—serve to awaken the child's imagination and expand their inner world. They encourage observation, inquiry, and sensory engagement, opening wide the gates to limitless realms of creative discovery.

The Dramatic Character and the Narrative Character:

The dramatic character differs from its narrative counterpart in several aspects, despite the similarities that exist between them—especially when the dramatic character remains confined to the written text and has yet to be embodied on stage. Theatre, once regarded as a branch of literature before evolving into an independent art form grounded in performance, shares common ground with the novel in terms of character construction. However, essential differences remain between the two.²⁶

In drama, the narrator is absent in the traditional sense, unlike in narrative fiction where a narrator—often omniscient or first-person—guides and analyzes the characters. Except in autobiographical plays told in the first person (“I”), the playwright in theatre completely withdraws behind the characters, each of whom speaks for themselves in their own voice. This means the writer delegates the authority of speech and expression to the characters, who thus bear full responsibility for their words and actions without direct authorial intervention.²⁷

The mechanisms of character construction also differ between the two art forms. In the novel, the author enjoys considerable freedom in

psychological analysis and detailed description, thanks to the extended narrative that spans time and space. In contrast, the playwright is bound by the limitations of theatrical time and the constraints of stage setting, which require a focus on essential elements that serve the progression of the plot. Consequently, the dramatic character is shaped with greater focus and intensity, while the narrative character benefits from analytical depth and a broader scope for development²⁸.

Linguistic Foundations of Character Formation:

The linguistic formation of characters in children's theatre represents a creative challenge, requiring a delicate balance between educational and aesthetic functions on the one hand²⁹, and the developmental characteristics of the young audience on the other. In this unique theatrical space, language transforms from a mere tool of communication into a dynamic medium that shapes the child's awareness and nurtures imagination—while maintaining elements of simplicity and suspense.

A. General Criteria:

The linguistic formation in children's theatre is shaped by three interwoven dimensions: the psychological dimension, which takes into account the child's age and cognitive capacity; the aesthetic dimension, which ensures artistic enjoyment; and the educational dimension, which conveys moral and cognitive values ³⁰.To harmonize these layers, the playwright must craft a language for the characters that resonates with all three. This involves constructing vocabulary, syntactic structures, and dialogue patterns that serve as a bridge between the child's inner world and the imagined theatrical realm.

▪ Implied Age:

Language in a play varies according to the character. The playwright selects vocabulary appropriate to both the character's age and that of the audience. For example:

(The two children are playing and singing, dancing among the trees, eating sweets and fruit.)

The balloons: I'm tired, I'm tired. Tired from playing.

— First: Let's eat the candy. For in it is cure.

— Second: Do you know what? Do you know what?

— First: It is, my friend, The balloon candy. Mmmm Mmmm³¹

The writer crafts the characters' language with great care, ensuring it aligns with both their age and nature, while also considering the level of the young audience. This is illustrated in the scene where the two children express their joy through playing and singing among the trees, before swiftly shifting — as children naturally do — to talking about sweets.

Here, the simplicity of the childlike language is evident: the word “tired”, the playful expression “balloon candy”, and the delightful sounds like “Mmm Mmm”. Such age-appropriate language creates a sense of familiarity for the young viewer and makes it easier for them to follow the dialogue between the characters. This contributes to a joyful atmosphere and also highlights the linguistic contrast between the children's simple, direct phrases — such as “Let's eat the candy” — and their use of more sophisticated words like “For in it is cure”. This contrast, in turn, enriches the child's linguistic repertoire.

At an older age, the language shifts to become more profound, with words carrying deeper meanings. This can be observed in the characters of Maya and Hujaa from the play “The Maker of Happy Dreams”:

Maya: But why does everyone still ignore me?

Hujaa: Because the dream is still under the control of the Lord of Nightmares. You must cast out the fear within you, believe in your friends and your parents, and call out to them with all your strength — they will surely hear you and turn to you.

Maya: But what if they don’t hear my call? What if... they don’t really want me? I’m scared... truly scared, Hujaa.

Hujaa: You don’t have to be afraid anymore, Maya. Didn’t I promise I’d always be by your side? I’ll use my magic wand to bend the dream for you — but in the end, it’s all up to you now, dear. Trust yourself. Believe in who you are. Now go... and call out to them with all your might.³²

Language evolves according to the age and maturity of the characters. The more complex and profound dialogues are usually assigned to older or wiser figures who serve as guides or mentors. This is evident in the scene between Maya and Hujaa, where the contrast in language clearly reflects the psychological and age difference between the two. While Maya expresses herself with the emotional simplicity of a troubled child (“I’m scared, really scared”), Hujaa speaks in a more fluent and composed tone, using longer sentences and more complex structures (“You don’t have to be afraid anymore, Maya”). She combines emotional encouragement (“Trust yourself”) with language that still resonates with a child’s world. This linguistic contrast creates a dramatic balance between elements of realism and fantasy within the play.

B. The Dramatic Function:

The dramatic function of language plays a central role in shaping characters and developing events. It holds significant importance in theatre, as it contributes to building conflict and highlighting dramatic transformations. Through the linguistic contrast between characters, the playwright is able to create dynamic dialogues that reflect contradictions and drive the dramatic action toward its climax.³³

In the play(The Book of Wishes), the character of the child Jalal appears as wise and helpful to others.

Jalal: "I thank you, noble knight... You not only gave me your weapon, but also taught me the true meaning of strength. Even though the wish controls you, you still resist it just to do something noble³⁴".

Jalal presents an inspiring model of a hero who embodies positive values through his wise and emotional language. His speech flows smoothly, creating a dramatic tension that captures the young viewer's attention. His language is marked by several dramatic and virtuous traits, such as expressing gratitude and appreciation, highlighting the inner conflict between selfish, utilitarian wishes and noble aspirations, and encouraging perseverance.

And when a character is evil, they use harsh and severe language. This is evident in the character of Yassin in the same play, who, due to a wish, transforms into a tyrannical king.

Yassin: Knights, seize her! (To Yasmina) You shall become my prisoner. You will be punished for rebelling against the king!³⁵

The harsh language used by Yassin in the phrase "You shall become my prisoner" reveals a shift away from collective values toward individualism and tyranny. This reflects a cultural warning about the danger of power turning into despotism.

C. The Cultural Environment:

Each character in the play has their own environment, which reflects the values and social principles they were raised on, as well as the heritage and collective identity. Each cultural environment has its own linguistic characteristics that distinguish it from others, and this appears in:

▪ Language and Cultural Identity:

Traditional Vocabulary: Characters often use proverbs or traditional songs in their dialogue—such as Juha's saying: "Time has eaten and drunk from me."³⁶ These inherited expressions carry the wisdom and humor of ancestors, planting in the child a sense of belonging to their cultural identity. They also form a bridge between generations, preserving the popular heritage from being lost.

Cultural Symbolism: The integration of symbols from the local environment enriches the dialogue. For example, in a conversation between friends, the camel says:

Camel: "It seems each of us suffers in their homeland." (To the palm tree) "How cruel our loneliness is in this sandy desert."

The palm tree replies: Palm Tree: (with sorrow) "You are right, my brother. We have no companion in the desert, no friend. Travelers rest in my shade, then leave, never to return."³⁷

The dialogue between the camel and the palm tree embodies the desert environment, which symbolizes solitude and patience—values deeply rooted in Bedouin culture. The phrase "they leave, never to return" echoes the theme of departure often found in pre-Islamic poetry.

A character may also employ ancient words and repurpose them in modern inventions. For example, Lama says: "An electronic wasp I named 'Nanos'—and Nanos means 'dwarf' in the Greek language."³⁸

The invention of the "Nanos Electronic Wasp" reflects how the character combines historical knowledge with modern innovation. This encourages the child to make connections between the past and the future.

Social Values: For instance, when the children embark on an adventure through a time machine invented by (Maher), they travel to an abandoned palace where wishes come true. Maher says:

Maher: "It truly is a time machine; with it, we'll be able to travel through time."³⁹

▪ **Interaction Between Culture and Language:**

Rituals and Customs: The playwright Kenza Mebarki incorporates a deeply rooted social tradition: the distillation of flowers. Through the character Ward, she says:

"Spring breezes blow upon my homeland. In the tradition passed down from our ancestors to this day—and to tomorrow—comes the distillation of roses. Homes become workshops producing rosewater from roses and orange blossom water from the bitter pomegranate flower. The qattar, the ancient copper vessel, transforms the petals into fragrance, water, and medicine."⁴⁰

The distillation of flowers acts as a cultural documentation of an agricultural tradition widely practiced in the Arab world—such as rosewater in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. It connects the character to a shared Arab identity, while highlighting the unique use of ornate copper vessels in North African (Maghrebi) countries.

Folk Tales and Cultural Heritage: Some characters imitate the traditional storyteller style in narrating tales. For instance, the teacher begins telling the students a story about a just king whose kingdom was struck by a mysterious plague. He starts with the classic opening:

"Once upon a time..... there was a kingdom where people lived in peace and safety..."⁴¹

This storyteller narration style revives the oral storytelling tradition once performed in old cafes and by grandmothers at home—captivating and enchanting for children. It immerses the young audience in the world of "myth and legend," connecting them to their cultural roots through a familiar and imaginative narrative form.

Another character mimics the style of international fairy tales, as seen when Zaid says:

"Hello, handsome prince... The wicked wife of the minister turned me into a black swan years ago... and I will never become human again unless the prince dances with me... So please, dance with me, oh prince."⁴²

This plea from the black swan to the prince closely resembles tales from global folklore, such as "The Wild Swans", but it is retold in an Arabized form that is appropriate and engaging for children. It blends familiar fantasy elements with local cultural tones, creating a bridge between global literary traditions and Arab storytelling.

The linguistic formation of characters in children's theater relies on the use of language that shapes the child's awareness through a delicate balance between simplicity and depth, in order to create an engaging experience that reaches both the mind and heart of the child.

Linguistic Formation Tools: The linguistic formation of a character in children's theater is an artistic process based on a set of linguistic tools designed to achieve multiple educational and artistic goals. This process relies on a deep understanding of the child's psychological and cognitive characteristics, as well as their ability to comprehend theatrical discourse⁴³—while balancing both entertainment and educational dimensions.

The tools for shaping character language in children's theatre include:

Lexical Tools:

A child's vocabulary is still limited at this developmental stage, but it can be expanded⁴⁴. Therefore, words must be carefully chosen to suit the child's linguistic level.

For example, in the play "Hamou in the Land of the Amazing Balloons", the smallest balloon says:

"We are small balloons.

Bright colors and plenty of tones.

Innocence, honesty, and loyalty,

Everyone puts in us their great trust."⁴⁵

The excerpt demonstrates the use of lexical tools appropriate to a child's mindset, by selecting words that are simple and clear, such as "small," "bright," and "many," which align with a child's linguistic repertoire.

Moreover, there's a creative shift (semantic deviation) as balloons are transformed from mere objects into carriers of human values, as expressed in the line:

"Everyone puts in us their great trust."

Children's theatrical texts can progressively enrich the child's vocabulary based on their developmental stage. The use of challenging words does not hinder the young reader⁴⁶; rather, it encourages intellectual effort and fosters curiosity.

This approach is exemplified in plays like *The Trap*, where characters employ expressions such as "contempt,"⁴⁷ "mirage,"⁴⁸ "eradicate its roots,"⁴⁹ and "persevere."⁵⁰ These terms expand the child's lexicon while deepening their engagement with abstract concepts and emotional nuance.

Syntactic tools:

Refer to the clear and fluid construction of sentences, with deliberate variation between short and medium lengths to ensure both comprehension and engagement⁵¹. This technique is evident in the play (Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs), where the dialogue demonstrates this balanced structure:

Snow White: My mother died...

Queen: Do you remember her?

Snow White: No... but my father used to tell me about her.

Queen: Your father was my husband... and the king's wife is the mother of his children.

Snow White: But my father also passed away a long time ago...

Queen: Fine... go now.

Queen (to herself): No... no, I'm still the fairest, and I fear no one in that regard.⁵²

This scene highlights the use of short and medium-length sentences to ensure clarity and maintain suspense. Snow White's lines rely on simple sentences—"My mother died," "My father passed away"—which reflect the innocence of a child. In contrast, the Queen's lines are longer—"Your father was my husband..."—matching the complexity of her character. This balance between brevity and length, simplicity and emotional tension, supports the child's emotional understanding while preserving a compelling theatrical rhythm.

Stylistic Devices:

Children's plays targeting school-age audiences often employ appropriate rhetorical devices, clear similes, and simplified figurative

language.⁵³ For example, in the play *The Line... A Dot*, metaphors appear such as “I embrace the trees,”⁵⁴ “I play the melody of beauty,”⁵⁵ and “Your letters slay you with evidence and proof.”⁵⁶ Similes are also evident, like in *The Trap*: “But our efforts scattered like summer clouds,”⁵⁷ or “Time is like a train... if you don’t rush to board it on time, you’ll end up riding the donkey of failure.”⁵⁸ Symbolism is present too, as in: “I think that’s the voice of the ghost. Everyone, take maximum alert!”⁵⁹

Among the rhetorical devices used is antithesis, as in: “I connect the near and the far”⁶⁰ and “You say it’s the secret of life? No, it is sickness and death”⁶¹...

Rhymed prose is also evident in the passage:

“Catch her! Take her to prison.

Chain her and hang her by her feet.

Beat her, torture her,

Make her regret the moment she thought of invading my solitude—

I am the Line, the Sultan of Time, master of might and majesty!”⁶²

Stylistic devices have the power to transform a text into a vivid image that interacts with a child’s imagination. In the play “The Line... a Dot,” we find poetic metaphors expressing harmony with nature and a sense of safety, as in “I embrace the trees.” The phrase “I play the beauty” turns abstract beauty into an expressive art form. These expressions convert actions into tangible images.

The term “ghost ” serves as a metonym for exaggerated evil, while similes like “like summer clouds” convey disappointment, and “time is like a train” reflects the swift passage of time. These figures of speech aim to make abstract ideas more accessible in a smooth and imaginative way.

The texts are not devoid of impactful rhetorical devices, such as antithesis in “near and far,” and rhymed prose in “Catch her, take her to prison!” These stylistic features create a rhythm that pleases the ear and facilitates memorization.

Such devices help shape a three-dimensional theatrical language: they simplify complex ideas, spark imagination through vivid imagery, and instill values in an engaging artistic manner. All of this is crafted within a linguistic framework suitable for the child’s cognitive abilities—stimulating multiple senses without compromising the artistic depth or educational message of the work.

Sound devices:

Through the use of rhythm, alliteration, and repetition⁶³ suited to the nature of theatre and aiding memorization and recall. Repetition appeared in Theatre of the Little Spectator:

The book of English language:

Marwan, oh Marwan

Don’t drown in your sleep

Come, it’s time to work

Time is like a blade—sharp and deep

It passes and won’t return

It runs and doesn't keep⁶⁴

The book Arabic language:

Get up, get up, come on, come on

Don't be late, and finish your work

If you don't do it now, now

It becomes a burden that breaks your back⁶⁵

Repetition is one of the key sound devices in children's theater. It serves as a constant means of reinforcement and helps capture the child's attention through its simple musical rhythm.⁶⁶ This technique is evident in the verses through the repetition of names — such as "Marwan, oh Marwan" and phrases like "Listen... listen".

Such repetition strengthens memory, reinforces educational ideas, and transforms the theatrical text into a lively rhythmic piece, much like a chant or a nursery rhyme in its ease of memorization, as in the following examples:

"Get up, get up, come on, come on" such phrases generate energetic enthusiasm and emphasize the importance of using time wisely. Though all the verses revolve around a single idea, they present it through varied expressions.

This clever technique serves two main purposes: First, it teaches the value of time through emphatic repetition. Second, it delights the child with a playful rhythm that mirrors a game, allowing the educational message to be delivered subtly and smoothly.

From rhythm and alliteration, we hear the orphans' song:

The smiling dawn is our parade,
We are the stars —
We came to dance in the dark.
We are the breezes —
In a land that dreams of a breeze.
Bring the toys, let's play!
For this wide world is our grandest playground.⁶⁷

The text begins with a harmonious rhythm through the repetition of similar endings (stars — breezes), creating a pleasant musical tone that captures attention. The repetition of the word “we” strengthens the children’s sense of collective identity. The use of alliteration and rhythm facilitates memorization of the text, while the poetic imagery sparks imagination. The final call, “Bring the toys!”, invites children to become active participants in the scene, turning them from listeners into players in the game.

These stylistic devices interact with one another to shape well-defined theatrical characters, enabling effective communication with the child audience. They convey values and principles in an indirect manner, while maintaining the essential elements of engagement and enjoyment that lie at the heart of children's theatre.

Character Types and Their Linguistic Construction:

- **Human Characters:**

The Hero Character (brave — kind):

In children's theatre, the hero represents the symbol of goodness and the ideal role model children aspire to emulate. This character embodies noble human traits such as altruism, courage, and justice—making them both appealing and inspiring to young audiences⁶⁸. The hero's language clearly reflects these values: it is straightforward, sincere, and free of complexity, often infused with enthusiastic expressions that promote bravery and resilience.

For instance, in the words of Hujaa: "I told you I would stay with you and never leave you—we are friends"⁶⁹, and also, "The key to winning people's hearts is kindness and good treatment—this is how everyone will come to love you"⁷⁰.

The hero speaks with a tone that is confident and firm, yet remains gentle and encouraging: "I must not let fear control me. I have to stay alert and hold onto my courage... Fear destroys a person—and I am not afraid."⁷¹

Such language nurtures a child's confidence in their thoughts and encourages them to adopt positive behaviors.

Linguistic Formation:

The language of children's theatre is characterized by clarity and simplicity. It relies on short, easily comprehensible sentences that directly communicate positive values to the child. The heroic figure often employs encouraging expressions such as "We are proud of you" or "I will help you,"⁷² which foster a spirit of cooperation and build self-confidence. This character's speech is marked by an optimistic and wise tone that instills hope

and inspiration—exemplified in sayings like "The brave shall find success."⁷³ Here, wisdom is delivered in a smooth and accessible manner. This simple yet purposeful linguistic style renders the heroic character an admirable role model, one children can look up to and emulate in real life.

The Villain Character (Deceptive – Self-centered):

The villain in children's theater represents the forces opposing goodness, playing a key role in intensifying dramatic conflict and stirring feelings of fear or dislike in the child. This emotional response helps the young audience sympathize with the hero and firmly instills values such as justice and equality. The villainous character is marked by distinct linguistic and behavioral traits:

This character is self-centered, cunning, or aggressive. A clear example is the villain "Zalam" who declares: "No one will escape my grip tonight. I will make you all my slaves and servants in the world of nightmares"⁷⁴. Or the minister's wife saying to the maid: "Tell me a plan to get rid of that girl."⁷⁵ Such lines reveal a character who schemes and plots to achieve her goals with slyness and deceit.

The villain often uses harsh and sarcastic language to assert dominance, as seen in the minister's wife's words to the maid: "You're just a useless servant. Leave my house, you fool!"⁷⁶ Such expressions paint a vivid image of the evil character, making it easier for the child to recognize aggressive speech and learn to avoid it in real life.

Vocabulary that reveals selfishness and arrogance: The villain frequently uses possessive pronouns like "mine," "my right," and "belongs to me." For example, the minister's wife tells her daughter: "You must do it—

whether you want to or not. You will be crowned Queen of the Wheat, not that orphan girl.”⁷⁷ This manner of speech encourages the child to reject selfish behavior and embrace values of humility and equality.

The Comic Character (The Charming Trickster):

The comic character stands out as a source of joy and amusement, blending playfulness with a type of humor that delights young audiences. This character often emerges through quick-witted dialogues and exaggerated⁷⁸, fantastical descriptions—such as the dwarf who exclaims: "There's a dragon here! It has seven hundred heads, each with three hundred feet, and every foot has a thousand claws the size of giant trees!"⁷⁹ These outlandish depictions are not meant to be realistic, but rather to spark imagination, elicit laughter, and ease dramatic tension.

The linguistic construction of this character relies on inventive and unusual words—such as “claws the size of a giant tree!”

The Wise One (The Mentor):

The Wise Mentor Character in Children's Theater represents someone endowed with experience and insight, typically serving a supportive role by offering advice and solutions. Their language is marked by a balance of simplicity and depth, as in the elder's words: “Diseases and plagues are not cured with magic and superstition... but with hope and effort.”⁸⁰ The mentor often speaks in metaphors suited to a child's imagination, such as “Beauty springs from the purity of hearts,”⁸¹ turning abstract values into tangible ideas. This character is usually portrayed as a wise elder or an old animal, speaking in a calm yet firm tone that lends their words credibility and wisdom. They inspire the young audience with

messages of tolerance and cooperation through stories and examples that linger in the child's memory.

Non-Human Characters:

Non-human characters in children's theatre create a magical world that sparks children's imagination and makes it easier for them to grasp educational values.

Whether speaking animals, living plants, or fantastical creatures, these characters lend the theatrical work an artistic charm that transcends the boundaries of reality⁸². They play a vital role in nurturing the child's emotional and social awareness through a creative form that satisfies their curiosity and fulfills their natural desire to explore.

For example, among animal characters, we find the aggressive lion who speaks in a direct, threatening tone, saying: "I'll make you my next meal!"⁸³—using imperative verbs and short sentences that convey a sense of danger. Meanwhile, the hen represents the oppressed character through a language of complaint tinged with sarcasm, as in: "The coops are overcrowded with my kind. They're like cramped prisons, denying us the joy of fresh air and the sight of flowers—buk buk buk!"⁸⁴ She blends seriousness with comedy, offering a humorous yet thought-provoking portrayal.

Among inanimate objects, we find, for example, balloons in the play "Hamo and the Magical Balloons", and musical instruments in "Half a Peninsula". In the play "Colorful Birds", the moon embodies wisdom through poetic and metaphorical language, as in: "If you cannot be a silver

moon hanging in the sky, you can still spread light upon your beautiful blue planet.”⁸⁵ This reflects the idea that every person can be impactful within their environment, and that every place becomes beautiful when it is lit with goodness.⁸⁶

This linguistic diversity serves multiple purposes: it helps construct a safe imaginary world in which values can be internalized, nurtures the child's critical thinking through contrasting situations, and enriches language through imaginative and creative forms of expression.

Conclusion:

The linguistic shaping of theatrical characters intended for children forms an integrated system that combines psychological, educational, and aesthetic objectives. Through the analysis of character types and their linguistic features, we arrive at several key findings:

The linguistic construction of characters in children's theatre is a cohesive framework that directly influences the development of the child's moral and aesthetic awareness.

There is a strong correlation between the linguistic features of characters and the child's cognitive abilities at each developmental stage (ages 3–5, 6–8, 9–12).

The use of linguistic tools such as repetition, rhythm, and sensory metaphors proves to be among the most effective elements in fostering communication with the child.

Characters that employ Modern Standard Arabic impact the young viewer by subtly instilling values while maintaining excitement and entertainment.

Incorporating cultural heritage is essential for reinforcing a sense of belonging and connecting the child to their roots, provided it is balanced with clarity and comprehensibility.

Suggestions for Development:

Given the importance of linguistic formation in shaping characters in children's theater, it is essential to have specialized theater critics in this field. These critics should be capable of analyzing the educational and aesthetic content presented in theatrical performances for children, while ensuring that the shows are appropriate for the age of the young audience or actors. The absence of specialized criticism often leads to the repetition of stereotypical patterns and a decline in artistic and linguistic quality. It is also crucial to train playwrights and directors who can produce texts and performances that meet the psychological and cognitive needs of children, while respecting their linguistic and intellectual characteristics. Moreover, integrating children's theater into cultural and educational policies and strengthening the infrastructure of this vital art form is of utmost importance.

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