

---

## **Defects on Children's Amharic Story-Books in Ethiopia: A Critical Evaluation**

**Bayleyegn Tasew<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Conducting research on the qualities of children's literature on a continuous basis can serve as supportive reading materials for children's literacy development in the country. But, unfortunately, there is no research work on this critical issue in Ethiopia. Therefore, the productive competence of the books for the development of knowledge and language acquisition skills in children still remains little known among policymakers, implementers, scholars, and those concerned. The main purpose of this study is thus to explicate the productiveness of children's storybooks written in Amharic in the last four decades using the major literary criteria in reflection on the fundamental concept of "children's realities," including 'age-stage, proposed by scholars from different but most closely related fields of study in the social sciences and humanities. Data are collected based on critical reviews done on 28 randomly selected children's story/folklore books.

**Key concepts:** children's literature, genre-types, folktale/story, support reading books, quality book

### **1. Introduction**

The flaws in a sizable number of children's story (folklore) books that have been released in the Amharic language for supplementary reading are what this paper is primarily concerned with. Beginning in the early 1990s, flaws and ineptitude were discovered in mass-produced children's story-books, which made it difficult to meet the demands of children at different ages in terms of growth and basic needs, such as curiosity and enjoyment.

The reason behind the undertaking coincides with the idea stated by Temple, Martinez, and Yokota (1994:10-11):

Children's books are worthy of serious study because the education of children warrants society's best energies. Good books will help children by making them literate, giving them knowledge of the world and empathy for those with whom they share it, offering them stories and images to furnish their minds and nurture their imaginations, and kindling their appreciation for

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD, Academy of Ethiopian Languages and Cultures, AAU: [bayleyegntasew33@yahoo.com](mailto:bayleyegntasew33@yahoo.com)

language used well. Given such worthy goals, such literature deserves attention and respect.

In theory and practice, quality literature books include:

- Help children improve their reading and writing skills while giving them insights into aesthetic or artistic values.
- Enrich children's future lives by stimulating their cognitive development, linguistic and literacy skills, etc. (e.g., Bauman, 1982; Bjorklund, 2001; Graham, Matthews, and Eslami 2020; Çer, 2016; Ellison, 2019) and, thereby, contribute to their acquirement to personality development of critical thinking and culture that “nurtures an appreciation of oneself and the potential for understanding and appreciating others” (Ellison, 2019: 249).
- Improve children's reading habits and life experiences while enabling them to make sense of what it is to be human, help them understand the world around them, and give ways for children to receive important messages (Sinan, Demir, and Doğan 2017: 134).
- Build up their personal values through happiness by:
  - a) Developing their imagination and inspiration and mediated experience;
  - b) Understanding and instilling cultural values and familiarizing heritages;
  - c) Teaching moral reasoning, and encouraging their literary and artistic preferences (Carl and Carol 1999: 3-4).

From the perspective described thus far, it is regrettable that popular books are having an impact on children's future propensities for loving the arts and/or linguistic development in addition to cognitive and linguistic development. The objective of this research article is thus to show the defects and deficiencies of the children's literature products in question with little (or no) merit to the acquisition of the most important properties.

A paucity of research has shown that children's literature has been overlooked by scholars, resulting in a lack of study in this field (e.g., Çer, 2016; Bauman, 1982; Bjorklund, 2001). As a result, many storybooks published for children in the past forty years suffer from the flaws of poor literature. This is a complex issue that has serious consequences. Parents are compelled to purchase books for their children, even though they may lack value. Meanwhile, children struggle to engage with such unappealing books, which not only slow their linguistic and cognitive development but also make them dislike reading altogether. Therefore, it is crucial to identify the factors responsible for this problem and understand the characteristics and trends in

children's literature over the past forty years. This paper thus aims to contribute to the development of children's literature since no relevant studies have been conducted before.

The central question seeking an answer appears to be: “What characteristics attribute a book to be classed as a good or a bad children’s literature book?” Following this, the major assumption lies in the basic idea that “the types of children’s literature books missing their target addressees and with no purposes figure out as inappropriate for children. Authors/artists who do not know the reasons for writing children’s books and whose subject matters, genre types, plot types, characters, and messages (moral values) do not fit children. Children’s literature books produced with no knowledge and skills about children’s realities are setbacks to exhaust rather than invigorate children’s literacy skills and their cognitive and linguistic development levels.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

The term “children’s literature” embodies the details when the conceptual and practical applications rest on the interdisciplinary perspective, which is commonly shared by leading scholars from different, but closely related, fields of study in the social sciences and humanities, including developmental psychologists (cognitive theorists) (e.g., Bjorklund, 2001; Vigotsky, 1985), folklorists (e.g., Ben-Amose, 1971; Dundes, 1980; Bauman, 1986), linguists (e.g., Bell, 1991), literary critics (e.g., Tucker, 1999; Hunt, 1999), and children’s literacy educationalists like Paris (1997) and Çer (2016). The concept of “children’s literature” refers to ‘literature that is exclusively about children or aimed at children.’ It concerns literature that involves ideas, relationships, and language that are often seen as simple and can teach moral lessons.

Next comes the broader term “children’s literature.” There are many different definitions of children’s literature, even varying definitions for literature and children. The definition of the term seems to have been still open to controversy. In the views of Hillman (2003), some think that children’s literature could be defined simply as ‘books for kids,’ while others say that the quality of literature depends on the eyes of the beholders - of individual perception. Others consider children’s literature to span the age group of birth through 18. Others define and study “children’s literature books” based on their genre-types by grouping texts with similar characters, communicative value, style, form, content, etc. Some see it in terms of the supposed purpose

or relationships between the writer and a particular reading audience, children (e.g., Lesnik-Oberstein 1999). As noted by Lesnik-Oberstein:

The definition of 'children's literature' lies at the heart of its endeavour: it is a category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children. The definition of 'children's literature' therefore is underpinned by purpose: it wants to be something in particular, because this is supposed to connect it with that reading audience— 'children'—with which it declares itself to be overtly and purposefully concerned (Lesnik-Oberstein 1999:15).

Children's literature also denotes genre-types and ideas ... exclusively created for children as the target audience" (Livingston and Brown, 1999: 3-4). Here in the citation, 'genre-types' refers to the familiar oral forms of children's folklore that are "shared expressive behaviours of children," or, in other words, traditionally formalized play activities that are engaged in and maintained by the children themselves. As defined, "genres in literature are categories of writing recognized for their patterns of organization, their style, and their effects on readers. Genres matter for they are the rules of the game" (Temple, Martinez, and Yokota, 1994). As perceived, the genres of children's literature include myths, legends, folktales/tales, fairy tales, fables, riddles, stories, narratives (narrative: prose utterances with a sequential plot that may be fictional or nonfictional), songs, poems, wisdom sayings, proverbs, and so on. Worthwhile at this junction would be to take a look at the concept of "tale/folktale" and its relation to the term "story."

As defined by one of the leading folklorists, Tucker (1999: 194), "The tale, or folk tale, as it is more properly called, is a story with traditional content that has a certain kind of plot structure is clearly recognizable, from the 'once upon a time' beginning to the 'happily ever after' ending." And as defined in Aarne and Thompson's *Types of the Folktale* (1961: 311), "folktale" can refer to "a form of folk narrative ... told primarily for entertainment, with an emphasis on action and adventure within a fictional framework." As such, "The folk tale ... has both simple and complex forms." As explained by Stith Thompson, traditional prose tales have been "handed down from generation to generation, either in writing or by word of mouth" (1946: 4). The term "narrative" (as a more general term) includes folk tales/ tales, stories which are relatively short, entertaining narratives that follow traditional patterns. That being so, tales for two to three-year-old children tend to be quite short for reasons of knowledge, language skills, and attention span. However, tales (or stories) for some four-

and five-year-old children can go on at more length than the first one (Knapp and Knapp, 1976:195).

In general, children's literature is the sum totality of spoken and written forms of folklore products created with artistic (aesthetic) concern that contribute to the development, interests, needs, pleasure, emotions and ideas of individuals between different age-stages (Lukens 2003: 24-27; cited Shaw 1966). Perceived as such, the concept of 'children's literature' subsumes the term 'children's folklore' as the broadest term 'text' (written or spoken form) subsumes multiple forms of oral folklore and written literature as well as informational reading books (Bell 1991: 162-163). In this connection, understanding the meanings of "textbook" (also "instructional book") and "trade/support reading book" would be of use to make out the difference between the usages and purposes of each category. Thus, as aptly noted by Carl and Carol (1999: 2-3):

The purpose of choosing trade book rather than textbook for children's literature is because both of them have different meanings. ...Textbook by design and content, is for the purpose of instruction. Textbook is used by every school in order to use it in classroom or as instructional media. In contrast, a trade book, by design and content [is] primarily for the purposes of entertainment and information. The important thing is that parents, teachers, and children should notice about the quality of book itself.

Herein the above citation, the concept "quality" has greatly "to do with originality and importance, ideas, imaginative use of language, and beauty of literary and artistic style that enable a work to remain fresh, interesting, and meaningful for years and years" (Ibid.).

Now, let us move to the theoretical (also methodological) stances commonly shared among the scholars from the most closely related disciplines mentioned so far. In history, children's literature has continued to draw the attention of folklorists, literary theorists, linguists, cognitive theorists and educationalists, especially, experts in the field of children's literacy education. Like children's literacy education, children's literature has located itself in the midst of the fields of study in the social sciences and humanities (Hunt 1999:2). Therefore, the diverse generic types of children's literature have remained the object of scholarly attentions ranging from cognitive theory/developmental psychology, folklore and literary theory, to linguistics and to children's literacy education (e.g., Bjorklund, 2001; Vygotsky 2004; Bruner 1986, 1990; Chall, 1983; Nelson 1989; Bauman 1982, 1992; Tucker 1999; Snow and Brown 1999; Bell

1991; Aguilera 2008; Çer 2016; Snow and Mathews, 2016; Kurkjian et al., 2007), so to make mention of a few among many others. Developmental psychologists strongly emphasize on the importance of preparing books for children at different age stages to consider:

(1) *age-appropriate thinking or cognitive<sup>2</sup> development level* that refers to children's knowledge bases and experiences within specific social-cultural contexts, including environmental settings with resources (e.g.: Bjorklund, 2001:19-20; also see Vygotsky2004; Nelson, 1996; Bruner 1986, 1990; Chall, 1983);

(2) "*age-related aspects of language development level*" that refers to the *five language acquisition development stages*; namely:(a) *phonological development*; (b) *morphological development*; (c) *syntactic development*; (d) *semantics development*, and (e) *pragmatics* that implies an actual use of language in a specific social-cultural context.

(3) *qualitative changes* that refers to changes in children's thinking and linguistic acquisition level at different age stages that are '*qualitative*' in kind, but, not '*quantitative*,' simply because they are not a matter of amount or rapidity (Bjorklund, 2001: 19-20).

The basic principles provided by developmental psychologists are grounded in the culturally embedded or constructed age-oriented norms and rules governing folklore performances in the history of every society with entirely (also partially) oral cultures (Goody, 1992: 12-20; Kellog 1973: 55-66). Thus, the methodological principles link up with the theoretical insights of different scholars in the most closely related disciplines: folklore, literature, linguistics and education in general and children's literacy education in particular.

Folklorists strongly emphasize the qualitative difference between the worlds of children from the worlds of adults in many respects so that the scholars classify folklore broadly into the adults' and children's folklore/lore' (Bauman 1982, 1992; Tucker 1999). The principles have long been put in practice crucially involving essential elements of literature and oral performance by drawing on "the resources of linguistics and, more specifically, those branches of linguistics which are connected with the psychological and social aspects of language use: psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics" (Bell 1991: 13; also see

---

Bauman, 1992:12). It would not be difficult to understand how children's literature is an interdisciplinary subject area. It might be for this reason that leading scholars like Hunt (1999) noted by saying:

'Children's literature' has not become the 'property' of any group or discipline: it does not 'belong' to the Department of Literature or the Library School, or the local parents' organisation, etc. It is attractive and interesting to students (official or unofficial) of literature, folklore, education, library studies, history, psychology, art, popular culture, media, the caring professions, and so on, and it can be approached from any specialist viewpoint. Its nature, both as a group of texts and as a subject for study, has been to break down barriers between disciplines, and between types of readers (Hunt, 1999: 1).

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Data Sources**

The necessary data evaluated in this contribution builds upon critical readings conducted on 24 folklore books. I picked up representative books intended to reflect on their (de) merits. As was indicated in the introductory section, the overall number of literature books for children published in the Amharic language for the last 40 years might rise to no less than 350. If it were not for time and space limitations, examining all the supporting reading books would have been important. However, almost all the reviewed books share a similar flaw; therefore, dealing with a number of representative books picked at markets on a random basis would suffice to explicate the weaknesses omnipresent in all of the texts. For this reason, all 24 books selected and reviewed contain more than 150 different genre-types of folklore text. As shown, epigrammatic and qualitative data drawn from each of the folklore texts are listed in table form in parallel to each measuring criterion, followed by descriptions, analyses, and interpretations. Only 6 out of the 24 books suppose young children at kindergarten (kindergarten) level as their target audiences, when the remaining 22 books have been published with no indication of to whom they were devoted.

#### **3.2. Analytic Framework**

Scholars have continued to separately and commonly provide us with alternative methodological approaches to the study of children's literature. Of course, it may not mean that it is impossible to investigate children's literature relying on a single theory or a method if the end results do not lead one to failure or arrive at inadequate, partial results (Dundes 1986). Dundes (1986)

strongly advises that in order to avoid such weaknesses, researchers involved in such critical social and cultural issues need to craft or adopt an integrated interdisciplinary approach for successful achievements. Taking this into account, the researcher employs a context-centred interdisciplinary approach by combining the basic literary elements upheld for a long by literary critics, linguists, and folklorists (e.g., Tucker, 1999; Bell, 1991; Dundes, 1986; Bauman, 1992) in harmony with the essential principles advanced by cognitive theorists (developmental psychologists) (e.g., Bjorklund, 2001) and the best practices involved by literacy educationalists (e.g., Çer, 2016, Carl and Carol, 1999).

Children's literacy educationalists use literary criteria for evaluating the quality of a book for children, including a well-constructed plot (the sequence of events showing characters in action), worthwhile content and theme, credible or convincing characters, characterization, point of view, appropriate style, attractive format and design, and didactic attributes. As such, these defining characteristics of a text should conform to the concept of child reality: nature, interests and needs, and their perspective (Huck 1964, Çer 2016). Along with this, a text should be understood, analysed, compared, and interpreted in context (Dundes, 1980: 19–32; Ben-Amose, 1993: 210–212). As noted by Ben-Amose (1993: 210–212), “the meaning of a text is its meaning in context. ... A valid interpretation is an interpretation of a text in context. Pragmatically, context is the interpretant of folklore.” Socio-cultural psychologists like Vygotsky (1985, 2004) and prominent applied linguists like Bell (1991) strongly stress the relevance of understanding texts within specific socio-cultural contexts. Interestingly, Ben-Amose (1971) and Bell (1991) provide us with the following seven specific-context criteria, which are often expressed in question forms of use to validate and determine the quality of a text from interdisciplinary perspectives:

1. **Why?** This concerns the *intentionality*: the underlying reason, the factor, motivating the writers to prepare the literature books for specific readers.
2. **What?** This implies age-sensitive subject matter: theme, content, idea, etc. contained in text- types, for example, varieties of genre of children's folklore such as riddles, stories, examples, narratives, folktales, fairy-tales, legends, etc.
3. **[for/to] Whom?** This denotes the target audience (addressee) together with age-stages – physical, linguistic and cognitive development levels or children's realities: needs, interests, nature and perspectives.
4. **Who?** The question refers to the writer's/speaker's knowledge about the background knowledge (cognitive level), linguistic capacity, experiences, of



the intended addressees' realities at different age-stages. It also implies the writer's/speaker's knowledge about the text-types (genres), skills and competence in the how of orderly sequencing the essential elements of the language: the phonological (also phonographic), lexical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects.

**5. *When* and *Where*?** *When* refers to the time of communication realized in the text and situate it in its historical, socio-cultural, context or in contemporary, in recent or remote past or in the future. Likewise, *Where* refers to the place of the communication; the physical location of the communicative event realized in the text. So, *when* and *where* together create the *settings* of the text-type. As such, "the setting of a story - its location in time and place - helps readers share what the characters see, smell, hear, and touch, and also makes the characters' values, actions, and conflicts more understandable" (Wisniewski 1996: 87).

**6. "How?"** This implies: (a) the cohesion: the ways how the words, clauses, sentences hold together in the text and *coherence* or the how of binding together the propositions; (b) the manner of delivery - the medium of communication, the style(s), the *modes of representation* including the verbal, non-verbal, visual, writing/speaking, the form/structure, the ways how a folklore text/genre is presented or composed in written/oral form. It also refers to *acceptability*, meaning the way how the reader/listener takes it.

**7. [for] "What Purpose?"** This refers to the purpose for which the text-type was produced, the *illocutionary forces* of the writing/speaking, the primary functional uses of the message encoded in the text-type: the moral/ethical values the author wanted to convey to the intended audience through the text. It is about *relevance* or *what* is the text for.

Interestingly and importantly, Bell strongly underscores by saying, "The seven defining characteristics, the set of standards of text, apply to all written or spoken text types with communicative values. Each of the seven standards is essential. ... Failure to comply with one of them results in failure overall. A text which lacks any one of these characteristics is not a text but merely an aggregate of words, sounds or letters." (Bell 1991: 7-8, 163-168). Thus conceived, the measuring criteria are crafted or modelled by integrating the major literary standards principles and the fundamental principles linked to age-centred-cognitive and linguistic development levels of the target readers as well as the authors' knowledge and skills about the background knowledge of their intended addressees.

If a book satisfies the following criteria, it is a good children's book: expands awareness; gives children names for things in the world and for their own experiences; takes children inside other people's perspectives and lets children develop confidence. It broadens children's understanding of the world and their capacity for empathy and provides an enjoyable read that doesn't overtly teach or moralize. Many children's books turn out to be about something—to have themes, in fact—and it is often possible to derive a lesson from them. But if a book seems too deliberately contrived in order to teach a lesson, children (and critics) will not tolerate it.

Good books tell the truth. Outstanding children's books usually deal with significant truths about the human experience. Moreover, the characters in them are true to life, and the insights the books imply are accurate, perhaps even wise. Good books embody quality. The words are precisely chosen and often poetic in their sound and imagery; the plot is convincing, the characters believable, and the description telling. Good books have integrity. The genre, plot, language, characters, style, theme, and illustrations, if any, all come together to make a satisfying whole. Good books show originality. Excellent children's books introduce readers to unique characters or situations or show them the world from a unique viewpoint; they stretch the minds of readers, giving them new ways to think about the world and new possibilities to consider" (Temple, Martinez and Yokota 1994:10-11).

### **3.3. Data Analysis Procedures**

Procedurally, the major tasks and activities move tracking mainly on the following steps: (1) creating a set of measuring criteria based on the understanding of core concepts, theoretical views, methods and best practices available in the literature; (2) carrying out swift readings on the books to classifying them by genre-types; (3) carrying out critical readings on each of the stories contained in each of the books to collect primary data; (4) processing, identifying and classifying the data using the measuring criteria; (5) drawing out the common characteristics of the books for the later discussion: analysis and interpretation.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

This section presents the analysis and discussion in two sections. The first section below focuses on the folktale books, and the section after it focuses on the story books.

#### 4.1 The Folktale Books

The first analysis was done on three books by the same author, named Tesfaye Sahlu. The interpretive data based on the seven criteria are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Annotated data on the folktale books

Author and Title		
1.ተስፋዬ ሳህሉ: ለገገ ተስፋዬና ተረቶቻቸው - ልጆች!! የዛሬ አገገዎች፣ የነገ ፍሬዎች (አንደኛ መጽሐፍ) (Tesfye Sahilu. <i>Father Tesfaye and His Tales: Children! Today's Flowers, Tomorrow's Fruits</i> ).		
2.ተስፋዬ ሳህሉ: በሬጉ ለአገገዎች በኋላ ለልጆች!! - ልጆች! የዛሬ አገገዎች፣ የነገ ፍሬዎች: (ሁለተኛ መጽሐፍ) (Tesfye Sahilu. <i>First for Fathers and Then for Children!! Children! Today's Flowers, Tomorrow's Fruits</i> . (The Second Book).		
3.ተስፋዬ ሳህሉ: ለገገ ተስፋዬና ተረቶቻቸው - ልጆች! የዛሬ አገገዎች፣ የነገ ፍሬዎች: (አራተኛ መጽሐፍ) (Tesfye Sahilu. <i>Father Tesfaye and His Tales: Children! Today's Flowers – Tomorrow's Fruits</i> ).		
Criteria	Interpretative data	
	Strength	weakness
Why?	Shaping the young generation	
What?	The 3 medium-sized books contain 31 folktales; Appropriately chosen subject, themes, contents, ideas.	
For whom	Young “Children!” symbolized as “Today’s Flowers, Tomorrow’s Fruits,” but indefinite addressees/ audience in childhood period.	
By whom		Having good competence and knowledge about children’s worlds and of the genre-types.
How	Text un-contextualized or otherwise. Use of too long sentences and out-dated words; Imprecise and inconsistent use of punctuation marks; No use of follow-up techniques.	Best fitting and logically sequenced plot types; Good characterization and image formation/ pictures.
Setting		Best fitting settings.
For what purpose	Too much emphasis on moral/ethical values.	

Tesfye Sahilu, the renowned nationwide storyteller on TV programs, has written four children’s folktale books, of which three are brought for review. The genres, contents, and themes, the plots, the characters with their minds, attitudes, and behaviours, and the pictures applied in the three books have been appropriately chosen and fittingly presented to the background

knowledge, experience, skills, capacities, and inner lives of the target addressees.

As shown in the table above, the phrase "... Children! Today's Flowers – Tomorrow's Fruits," put as part of the book titles, it would be true to say that Tesfaye's intention includes young children symbolized as "Today's Flowers." However, one can say that the books conform more to children from age 7 than to those from ages 4 to 6/7 children. In each brief introductory note of the books, the author seems to understand the functional values of the folktale in the sense that it reads, "Folktale is told not only for entertainment and jokes; rather, it is a dictionary that reminds us about past experiences while also telling us about our future. It helps us learn from past deeds, improve the present, and forecast the future."

The tales evidently show the author's knowledge and ability to write using the grammatical codes of the Amharic language. Syntactically, phrases, clauses, and sentences are sequentially ordered, which helps the plot actions be well-constructed and cohesive. Characters are vividly portrayed with illustrations that will help children easily make sense of the meaning of the narrated texts. What makes Tesfaye unique from the other authors, writers/translators is also the effectiveness of his unique style in interpreting and transmitting the core moral and ethical values put immediately after the ending episode of every tale that are often addressed in formulaic and respectful tones, often put as:

“እ ሺ! አ ያ ቸ ሁ ል ጆ ቸ! አ ያ ቸ ሁ!(Ok! Children! Have you seen!) Have you understood what the tale means to you?”

Saying this, he goes on drawing and interpreting the underlying meaning(s) of the tale at hand. Then, he convincingly persuades the readers to learn from the good and bad ideas, deeds, and acts of the antagonist dramatis personae involved. Children's literature functions by integrating social consciences (senses of right and wrong). Concerning this, Tesfaye's books achieved this by presenting sound moral and ethical principles that were appreciated and kept by society as a whole. But for all their merits, Tesfaye's books are not without shortcomings when seen, especially from the stances of cognitive theory connected to 'emergent literacy.' For example, according to one of the distinguished scholars, Bjorklund, 'emerging literacy' takes on phonological and morphological development aspects. We need to see the development of word meanings in children's reading materials. He says that "at about 18 to 24 [months], children know a few dozen words and begin putting them together, a few at a time, into short sentences or phrases. ... Children are economical in

their word choices, using only the concrete and high-information words described as telegraphic, leaving all the ifs, ands, and buts” (Bjorklund 2001:284), whereas from age 2 to age 5, children’s language develops from “baby-talk to adult-like communication” (Ibid. 278). If compared with this seminal idea, Tesfaye’s folktale books show some flaws, such as:

- 1) Allowing the texts to take up a greater proportion of each page by making the size of the pictures smaller and less profuse.
- 2) There is no exercise that could help to enhance the development of the memories of the intended readers, to follow-up on children’s activities and participation, as well as to reinforce a sense of story plot.
- 3) Inconsistency in the use of punctuation marks. Long sentences, many of them containing more than 40 words, create constraints for children to grasp and retain meanings. See, for example! The following sentence is quoted in “*At First for Fathers and Then for Children!! Children! Today’s Flowers - Tomorrow’s Fruits*” (Tesfaye 1966:14):

አንዳንድ በሀብትም ሆነ አነስ የሚል ሰው ሁሉ የሚጭረው ነገር እከፍተኛ ማህዘን ሳይጥል እንደማይቀር የታወቀ ቢሆንም ከነጋዴዎች በሀብቱ አነስ ያለው እንዲህ ሲል ማውራት ጀመረ: “እኛ ሀገር ጥለን ከቤተሰቦቻችን እርቀን ሁለት ሦስት ዓመት ተለይተን ለኑሮአችን እንደክማለን። ነገር ግን ሚሴተቶቻችን ይማግጣሉ ክብራችንም በዚህ የተነሳ ዝቅ ይላል” እያለ አነስተኛው ነጋዴ የቅናት ወሬውን ያወርደው ጀመረ።<sup>3</sup>

As we see, the sentence contains 51 words that make up a paragraph. The opening point of the quotation mark in the fourth line is left unnoticed.

The next group of books to be analysed are seven translated books. The books and their flaws are summarized in Table 2.

<sup>3</sup>Cited in “ባለሁለት መቶ አጋሰሶች ባለጠጋ ነጋዴ” (“The Rich Merchant Who Has Two Hundred Horses”), በሬት ለአባቶች በጎሳ ለልጆች!!- ልጆች! የዛሬ አበባዎች፣ የነገ ፍሬዎች። (ሁለተኛ መጽሐፍ) (*At First for Fathers and Then for Children!! Children! Today’s Flowers - Tomorrow’s Fruits* (The Second Book).

Table 2: Data on translated folk-tale books

Author/Translator and Titles	Interpretive data
<p>1. በ ጎ ዳ ፍ ፡ ቁ ጥ ር 2 ( ዳ ጎ ኤ ል 2009 (እ ኢ ኦ ) /Chuchu Begodana, Book No.2 (Dane’al, 2017 (GC))</p>	<p>Page length: 65 containing 6 tales. Lack of knowledge about the realities of the right addressee. Lack of knowledge about text worlds. No definite audience. Ill-structured lexico-syntax relationship. Use of long sentences. Ineffective in making sense of meanings Full of typographic errors. Failure in conveying moral values.</p>
<p>2. ተ ረ ት ተ ረ ት ሙ ጽ ሐ ፍ አ ምስ ት ፡ - ሙ ል ካ ም ል ደ ት ለ አ ጎ በ ሰ (ኤ ር ሚያ ስ 2009 (EC))/Tarat-Tarat Mets’haf Amist: Happy Birthday for Anbessa; Book Five (Ermias, 2017 (GC))</p> <p>3. ጣ ፍ ጭ ተ ረ ት ለ ል ጆ ች (ኤ ር ሚያ ስ 2009 (እ ኢ ኦ )/ Sweet Tale for Children (Ermias 2017 (GC))</p> <p>4. ብ ል ሀ እ ረ ጅ ፍ ሌ ሎ ች ም ተ ረ ቶ ች (ኤ ር ሚያ ስ 2009 (እ ኢ ኦ )) /The wise shepherd (Ermias 2017 (GC))</p>	<p>Page length: 77, 78, 70, all in all with 14 tales. Lack of knowledge about the world of the right addressees Lack of knowledge about text worlds. No definite audience. Lexico-syntactic elements badly related. Use of long sentences. Unproductive in making sense of meanings Full of typographic errors. Poor in conveying functional values. Poorly designed and formatted.</p>
<p>5. ፍ ፍ ተ -ጥ በ ብ እ ጎ ዳ ለ ተ ረ ት ተ ረ ት እ ፍ እ ጎ ቆ ቅ ል ሽ (ፍ ፍ ተ -ጥ በ ብ እ ጎ ዳ ለ 2011 (እ ኢ ኦ )) /Tarat-Tarat and Riddles (Fnote-T’beb Endale 2018 (GC))</p>	<p>Page length 34, with 3 tales plus 43 riddles. Lack of knowledge and skill about genre-types. No definite audience. Clauses, words, and sentences fragmentally structured. Ineffective in making sense of meanings of texts. Full of typographic errors. Dull, dark illustrations. Very poor in sending functional values of texts.</p>
<p>6. ብ ሥራ ት ዕ ውነ ቱ ተ ወ ዳ ጅ የ ል ጆ ች ተ ረ ቶ ች ፡ - ል ጆ ች ጎ እ ያ ዝ ፍ ፍ ሚያ ስ ተ ምር (ብ ሥራ ት ዕ ውነ ቱ 2011(እ ኢ ኦ ) /Favourable Tales for Children: Teaching by Entertaining children (Besrat Ewnetu (2018(GC))/</p>	<p>Pointless intentionality. Page length 75 with 5 translated tales. Page length 34, with 3 tales, plus 43 riddles. Lack of knowledge and skill about genre-types. No definite audience. Erroneously structured clauses, words and sentences. Ineffective in making sense of meanings of texts. Full of typographic errors. Source language influences the target language's structural use. Poorly designed and formatted. Dull, dark illustrations</p>

In these books, we observe a lot of deficiencies at the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels of the language system, as well as at the cognitive level, etc. For example, in “*Chuchu Begodana*” (Dane’al, 2017):

“... የላስቲክ ጎጆዎች ላይ ዘሎ ወጣበት።” (ዳንኤል 2009:-1)። ይህ “... ከላስቲክ ጎጆዎች ላይ ዘሎ ወጣ።” ተብሎ መገለፅ ነበረበት። “ጎጆዎች” የሚለው “ጎጆዎች” ተብሎ መሥፈር ነበረበት።

We find in Dane’al’s books a lot of deficiencies at the phoneme, grapheme, and morpheme levels in every paragraph, as well as fragmentally constructed clauses and sentences at the syntax and semantic levels. On every page of the books, we find errors such as missed or lost alphabets in words, use of possessives for place markers, use of singular for plural, use of active for passive verb, use of definite for indefinite articles, or vice versa, incorrect Amharic language structure, etc. This means that the author imposed on children to read the books with all their faults.

The books in this category also share the weaknesses of those in the first category pointed out above. Each author does not indicate his/her specific target audience or to whom the supporting reading material is intended to be addressed. The same comes true in the book “Favourable Tales for Children: Teaching by Entertaining Children” (Besrat, 2018). The book contains five tales translated from English. Among the texts, the longest one runs to 21 pages, and the shortest is 11 pages. In the first place, the translator labels the texts as ‘story’ when the genre type represents a ‘tale’. This shows a lack of knowledge about the subject matter the translator was dealing with. He also lacks one of the most required pieces of knowledge about the target reader to whom the book is intended to be delivered from the outset. As a result, the deficiencies made the translator ineffective in conveying the driving forces or the underlying messages of the texts. Consider for example, the way in which the translator tries to convey the message of “አረኛውና ተኩላው”/“*The Shepherd and the Wolf*” (Besrat, 2018) by asking the readers to translate a short poem written in English language into Amharic language. “አሁን

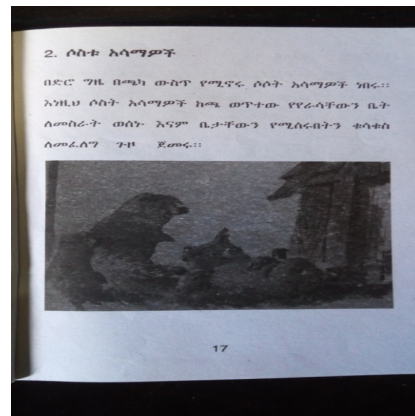


Figure 1: A picture of a page from Besrat (2011:17)

ደግሞ በተረቱ ሊተላለፍ የተፈለገውን የሞራል/የስነምግባር<sup>4</sup>) ትምህርት በእንግሊዝኛ ግጥም እንደሚከተለው ጽፏል፡፡ እናም ግጥሙን አንብባችሁ ግጥሙን<sup>5</sup> ወደ አማርኛ ለመተርጎም ሞክሩ፡፡”

“The man who is wise,  
Doesn't defend himself with lies.  
Liars are not<sup>6</sup> believed, forsooth,  
Even when liars tell the truth.

“ግጥሙ<sup>7</sup> ውስጥ ያሉትን ቃላቶች<sup>8</sup> ትርጉማቸውን እንደሚገባለሁ ጽፏል፡፡

Wise (ዋይዝ) = ብልህ /አስተዋይ

Defend (ድፊንድ) = መከላከል

Lie (ላይ) = መዋሸት/ውሸት

Lair (ሊየር<sup>10</sup>) = ውሸታም

Believe (ብሊቭ) = ማመን

Forsooth (ፎርሱ<sup>11</sup>) = የእውነት/የምር” (Besrat 2018: 52-53).

Besrat provides dull pictures that make it very difficult to make distinctions, thus repelling children. All the more, the translator avoids translating the didactic attributes encoded in the text of the source language into the Amharic language; rather, we see him putting the burden on the reader children, and that will have a negative impact on their interests and habits of reading books. The point reminds us of Huck's remark noted as “children are quick to resent a book in which the style of the author is a patronizing (demeaning, denigrating, belittling, superior) one. There is no reason to talk down to children today, for the world is speaking up to them” (Huck, 1964:469). The books consist entirely of clichés, coordinating conjunctions and appositions, bad proofreading, and distracting numbers of typos.

In sum, severely impaired with multiple defects, the books will have negative impacts on children's reading comprehension, span of memory, and speed of learning meanings at the phoneme, phoneme-grapheme and morpheme, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels.

<sup>4</sup> ግ should be printed as ግ.

<sup>5</sup> The word unnecessarily repeated in a sentence.

<sup>6</sup> Spacing between the two words.

<sup>7</sup> ግጥሙ should be printed as በግጥሙ.

<sup>8</sup> ቃላቶች should be printed as ቃላት.

<sup>9</sup> ፊ should be printed as ፊ.

<sup>10</sup> ሊየር should be printed as ላየር.

<sup>11</sup> ፎ should be printed as ፊ.



The texts are not written in accordance with the principle of appropriateness for children of different ages. They fail to give priority to children's realities: interests, needs, nature, perspectives, development levels, etc. which are the most basic functions of children's literature. Perhaps, the defects might coincide with the words stated by Erkan Çer (2016) as:

“Texts which are inappropriate for the child's linguistic, cognitive, personal and affective development and his nature and which do not address to the child's interest and needs, and which do not reflect his perspective may create barriers between the child and the book from early years, that is, they may dull children's desires to bond with a book. Reflecting the child himself and reality of life in books by adapting them to child's level is quite important because children must not have difficulty in receiving while performing those affective, cognitive and behavioural actions” (Çer 2016:78).

In all cases, the books appear inappropriate for beginning children-readers to learn linguistic skills and reading comprehension. In most cases, we find everywhere subject-verb disagreement. Development of learning to read and reading comprehension demands integration of meaning across words, sentences, and passages relies on the component skills at each of these levels for the construction of meanings: (1) at word level which is one of the most essential the components of comprehension and children's literacy skills; (2) comprehension at sentence level requires the processing, storage and integration of a variety of syntactic and semantic information; and (3) at text level where two fundamental components in children's developing comprehension are identified crucial for establishing coherence, inference-making and understanding information from different parts of the texts such as themes, main ideas (Paris and Hamilton. 2009:.39). The books should have been designed from the perspective of syntactic development since “the question central to a language has been the acquisition of syntax” (Bjorklund 2001: 282-283). However, the writers/translators and illustrators fail to develop children's knowledge of sentence structure or grammar, which is cognitively held as one of the essential principles important to developing children's literacy skills. So in these cases, the authors/artists should question themselves when they produce the books aimed at helping children of different ages make sense of the messages and eventually discover the underlying rules of the language. Thus, focusing on young children's syntactic development of negatives, questions, passive sentences, and relating events in sentences would have been useful in the production processes of the books (Ibid.).

The third group of books analysed contain 6 books published by Mega Publisher and Distributor Co. The books and the interpretative data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Data drawn on Folktale Books Published by Mega Publisher and Distributor Co.

Author and Title	Criteria	Common traits of the books
1. ሜጋ ተረት፣ ተረት፡፡ ተራኪ፡ - የናስ ገለታ (2007 እ.ኤ.አ)/Mega Tarat Tarat: Terraki (Narrator), Yonas Geleta, Third Book, (NA), Mega Publisher and Distributor, Publishing Co., 2015 (GC). 2. ጅግሪት ጅግሪት፡፡ ተራኪ፡ - ትግሉ ጀግናው፣ 5 ተረቶች- በስድ እና ጥቂትግጥሞች፣ ሜጋ አሳታሚና አከፋፋይ ኃላ/የ ተ/የ ግ/ማህበር፡፡ (ያለህትመት በታ)፡፡ 3. ሀብታሞቹ ነጋዴዎች ቅሌት፡፡ ተራኪ፡ - አብዱል አዚዝ አ/ቃሲም፣ ሜጋ አሳታሚና አከፋፋይ ኃላ/የ ተ/የ ግ/ማህበር፡፡ (ያለህትመት በታ)፡፡ 4. ጥበቡ ፍቃዱ ተረት ተረት ሙጽሐፍ አምስት (ጥበቡ 2007(EC))/ Tarat-Tarat Mets'haf Amist; Book Five	Intentionality	Not spelt out
	What?	Folktales (genre-types misplaced)
	For Whom?	Age unconsidered; target reader mismatched
	By Whom	Novice/inexperience writers, incompetent
	How (method)	Incoherently composed sentences.
		Inflated everywhere with typographic errors leaving words meaningless
		Long sentences far from the children’s comprehension capacity
		Fragmentally arranged, weak, plots of the tales
		Badly drawn pictures in blue, brown and dark colours.
	Setting	Inadequately situated into the social-cultural contexts and environmental resources

<p>(T'bebu, 2015 (GC)) (ቴዎድሮስ በቀለ፤ ሰዓሊ) ሜጋ አሳታሚና አከፋፋይ</p> <p>ኃላ/የተ/የግ/ማህበር: : (ያለህትሙት በታ): :</p> <p>5. ዘነበ አብርሃም: : 2008: : መሻራዎ አይጥ: : አዲስ አበባ: - ሜጋ አሳታሚና አከፋፋይ ኃላ/የተ/የግ/ማህበር: : (ያለማተሚያ ቤት): :</p> <p>6. ዳንኤል ነጋሽ: : 2009: : ጅጅ ባሳይ: - ቁጥር 2: : አዲስ አበባ: - ሜጋ አሳታሚና አከፋፋይ ኃላ/የተ/የግ/ማህበር: : (ያለማተሚያ ቤት): :</p>	<p>Purpose</p>	<p>Ineffective</p>
---	----------------	--------------------



Figure 2: A picture of a page from MegaTaratoch, 3rd Book (2007:13)

The books published by Mega Publisher and Distributer contain 28 folklore materials. The writers are assigned as “narrators” as if the texts were intended for film, video, CD, DVD, or radio production. Besides, the books produced are severely plagued with ineptly arranged plot structures, errors of prepositional usage, subject-object, predicate relations and inconsistencies in the use of verb aspects such as irregularities in present, future and past times, long sentences corrupted with blurry and foggy pictures in black, brown, and blue colours. Moreover, the writers do

not know to whom they had written the books. This implies that they lack the background knowledge, experiences, skills, and linguistic and cognitive development levels of their respective target audiences. This also shows that the books cannot help children develop their literacy skills and reading comprehension.

- The writers seem to have overlooked the younger age group in favour of the older children, who can participate more fully in the childhood period of life (underground).
- Ambiguous sentences that do not help children make sense of the meanings of stories.

- Lack of grammatical relationships between the words, clauses and sentences in the grammatical rules of Amharic language that will create constraints for children to grasp and retrieve denotative and connotative meanings and messages. The deficiencies create formidable obstacles.
- After all, the whole meaning of the texts cannot be spelled out in actual written texts unless they are situated in the actual contexts of the actual uses of the communities.

#### 4.2. Story Books

The story-books reviewed in this sub-section are characterised as original works and translations into Amharic from other source language(s). The word “story” is “a general term that indicates a verbal account with some sequential development; one event follows another, and characters experience major or minor changes. Among the youngest narrators, ‘story’ is often the best term to use. All legends and tales are stories, but not all stories lend themselves to classification by traditional folkloristic categories” (Tucker, 1999:194). Schiffirin also notes that story-telling facilitates the socialization of children into the cultural-social roles of their society and the acquisition of their literacy skills. Story-telling/reading provides important scaffolding for the social roles and behaviours appropriate to schoolchildren. Hence, “the form of our stories (their textual structure), the content of our stories (what we tell about), and our story-telling behaviour (how we tell our stories) are all sensitive indices not just of our personal selves but also of our social and cultural identities” (Ibid.).

Table 4: Data drawn on the story-books

Author and Title	Criteria	Interpretative data
Dr. Alem Eshetu <sup>12</sup> 1. ደ ጭቱ የ ት ለ ለ ች? (ዓ ለ ም እ ሸ ቱ ማያ ዝያ 2009) ( <i>What Shall I Feed My Cat?</i> )	Intention (Reason)	To kindle children's minds, develop their cognitive levels, provide enjoyable reading, enhance their reading skills

<sup>12</sup>Together with these five works, the author has contributed more than 10 reading books for children.

Kindergarten level (Alem Eshetu, 2017 (GC)) 2. “እኔና ምኞት” (Me and My Dreams) Kindergarten level (Alem Eshetu, 2017 (GC)) 3. ጥሩ ንገ ሃፊውና ሌሎች ምርጫ ተረቶች (ዓለምእሸቱ 2005 EC) ( <i>The Trumpet-Man and other Best Tales</i> ) (Alem Eshetu, 2013 (GC)). 4. አያ ጅበና ጎረቤቶቹ - ሌሎችም የሕፃናት ታሪኮች (ዓለም እሸቱ ሚያዝያ 2003) (Mr. Hyena and His Neighbours and other Tales) (Alem Eshetu, 2011 (GC)) 5. ቀበሌዝንጃሮ (ዓለም እሸቱ ሚያዝያ 2009) ( <i>The Restless Hyena</i> ) (Alem Eshetu, 2017 (GC))	What? (content, theme, action)	Stories by genre-type but misconceived as folktales. The story books contain 10 stories, all with no participatory strategy (exercise) for memory development
	For Whom?	Children at kindergarten level
	By Whom	Author with little knowledge of the principles about children's developmental
	How? Modes of presentation	aspects, realities/worlds Length of one story covers 20 to 24 pages Typographic errors make words and sentences meaningless. Paragraphs composed of long sentences far from the children's comprehension capacity. Fragmentally arranged plots Domination of the writer's intonations and point of view.
	Setting	Convincingly situated into the culture
	Message, purpose	Possible to derive lessons from the stories.

Table 4 presents books by a renowned author and translator of children's books, Alem Eshetu. Interestingly, the author seems to be aware of the need to produce quality books for children. He noted in the introductory section of *Mr. Hyena and His Neighbours ...* ”

Storybooks are important not only to entertain children and make them enjoy but beyond that they help develop their cognitive levels, and know about their respective cultural background, environment and society. Besides what children are able to learn basic education in primary school grades, carefully designed and written supporting reading story books for children help them identify alphabets, recognize sentence structures, and learn more about the use of punctuation marks in practice. ... The storybooks also help improve the children's reading and writing skills. ... To achieve such purposes, teachers and parents must always assist the children (Alem 2003: iii-iv).

But, ironically, Alem's books suffer from multiple weaknesses at the phoneme-grapheme, word, and syntactic levels that will have negative impacts on the development of children's literacy skills. For example, the books commonly reflect the following problems:

- (a) Phonographic errors recurring on every page and incorrect use of words that deject beginning reader-children to easily make sense of the right meanings.
- (b) Fragmentally constructed plot actions, episodes, and events that will be constraints for beginner readers to understand the meaning of text structures.
- (c) Long sentences with words from 20 to 27 that will be difficult for children to absorb or remember the text messages.
- (d) Page length of each story that does not match the capacities of the intended reader.

Although the genre type of the texts contained in his books represents a "story," Alem perceptively recognizes it as a "tale." Rather than being a traditional folklore type with no identifiable author, Alem's stories represent literary works produced based on his own imagination. This proves that the writer lacks one of the most required knowledge and skills about what genre types or subject matter he had been dealing with and the modes of representation he should follow as well as the how of conveying the underlying reasons, illocutionary forces, for writing the books to the target readers.

In "ድምፅን ምን ለገለቅ" ("What Shall I Feed My Cat?") and "እኔና ምኞቴ" ("Me and My Dreams"), we see character developments. In "What Shall I Feed My Cat?" the main character, a four-year-old child named Mamush, intensely loves a pet animal that he calls "my Cat." Mamush tries to feed his cat foods eaten by people, like carrots, cabbages, cucumbers, peppers, tomatoes, and so on. At last, we see Mamush learn about the nature of the cat, which never eats such types of food except for meat. The text is grounded in the readers' backgrounds and experiences and is illustrated with clearly drawn cartoons. In this regard, the story can be appreciated as good text. But when seen by children as the ultimate judges, the book would not bring them satisfaction and appeal to their interests and age, which should be considered by the writer. In "What Shall I Feed My Cat," young children at KG level will not be able to cope with reading the story written with long words and many extended pages.

The same is true to “አኔና ምኞት” (2008 (EC)) (“*Me and My Dreams*” (Alem, 2016)). As we see, the topic focuses on the children’s future aspirations. The target audience represents young children at kindergarten level of age six. As such, the child of the same age, identified with the name Almaz Tesfaye plays a role as the main character who introduces herself to the readers at the start of the story by saying:

“May God bless you with good health! My name is Almaz Tesfaye. I am a first-grade student. I am six years old” (“*Me and My Dreams*” (Alem, 2016: 1-2)). This shows the incompatibility between the character’s and the writer’s minds regarding the right addressee and the principle of “author-text-addressee relationships” (Bell, 1991). On the one hand, the writer tells us that the book was devoted to “children at kindergarten level” and, on the other hand, the main character introduces herself as a “first-grade student.”

In *The Restless Monkey*, Alem (2017) provides exercises after reading each story that help children to actively participate and strengthen their reading and writing skills, memories and knowledge when the rest of his books fail to promote the basic skills.

As we can see, the defects will have negative effects on the development of children’s literacy skills and their acquisition of productive competence. Recognizing that words are made up of sounds (called phonemes) is a key to children’s literacy achievement. It is key because children must learn to map those phonemes to letters or letter sequences (called graphemes) to read unfamiliar words (decode). Teachers and writers must focus on helping children learn and apply the basic principles for mapping sounds into print and vice versa (Snow and Mathews, 2016:68).

The set of books analysed next shares a lot of similarities. Five of the six books are authored by the same author. The books and interpretive data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Data on translated story-books

Translator and book title	Criteria	Interpretative data	
<p>አረፍ አብዱል ቃድረ ሁሴን (ትርጉምና ዝግጅት) (Arif Abdulq’adir Husien (translator and preparation) (n.d).</p> <p>1. “Tom &amp; Jerry በአማርኛ” (“Tom &amp; Jerry in Amharic”) (n.d).</p> <p>2. “ሁለቱ አይሎች” (“The Two Mice”) (n.d).</p> <p>3. “ዶራ ወደ ትምህርት ቤት እየሄደች” (“Dora Is Going to School”). (n.d).</p> <p>4. “Sherik ሸሪክ” (n.d).</p> <p>5. “Shaun ዙ ስክ” (n.d).</p> <p>(Note: the 5 books Page length of the 5 books ranging from 22 to 28 - all containing 8 stories)</p> <p>6. ዳዊት ትዕዛዙ/ከሃዲው ነገር (2011) /<i>The Infidel Tiger</i> (Dawit 2019 (GC), no printing place), (64 pages with 8 stories).</p>	Intentionality	Unexplained	
	What For whom	Target addressee with unspecified age-stage.	
	Bay whom	Novice writer/translator: Lack of skills and knowledge about the audience and translation principles.	
	How		Age-inappropriate, ineffective and inefficient.
			Badly influenced by source language structure.
			Poor knowledge and skills in the target language.
			Full of typographic errors.
			Use of <i>misto</i> (mixed) languages
			Inaccuracies at word-syntax level: incohesive, incoherent.
			Unconvincingly arranged plots.
			The characters are unbelievable - untrue to life.
	Setting		Poor communicative values, very difficult to make senses of meanings.
			Very poor images (pictures); dark, undetectable
		Unfamiliar social-cultural contexts and environmental settings	
Purpose	Fruitless		

Mr. Arif translated many books, of which five were brought for this review. To start with the titles, the books are presented in a mixture of two languages, as in “*Tom & Jerry በአማርኛ*”, meaning “*Tom & Jerry in Amharic*.” The symbol “&” itself appears here as an odd entry, which will not be intelligible to young children at first instance. Likewise, we also see an unacceptable style of putting the topic of the book titled: “*Sherik ሸሪክ*.” The name “*ሸሪክ*” is printed in Amharic language standing for “Sherik” in English. In the “*Shaun ዙ ስክ*”, we also see the Amharic alphabet “ዙ” replacing the definite article “the” in the English language. The reviewed books show no years of publication and no target addressees as well. “*Dora is Going to Her School*” is



a single story containing 3 episodes or a series of events, even though the translator claims that it has 3 stories.

Although visual representations and texts have equal importance in conveying the messages of books, the pictures provided in Arif's books appear quite repulsive to the readers. As shown below, Arif designed the books with cloudy or dim pictures printed in blue and brown colours, which makes it difficult for children to detect the lines, shapes, and edges of the images or characters clearly. The translator fails to identify his target. This means the writer also misses or ignores the target addressee's reality: nature, interests, needs, perspectives, etc. The other problem arises relating to the naming of characters in English tradition as "Mike" and "Tike" which is strange to the children's culture-specific contexts. The topics of the three books are written in a mixture of English and Amharic words that will let children easily get tired and be discouraged from the very start.



Figure 5: A picture of a page from *Atrif* (nd.:12)



Figure 4: A picture of a page from *Atrif* (nd.:10)

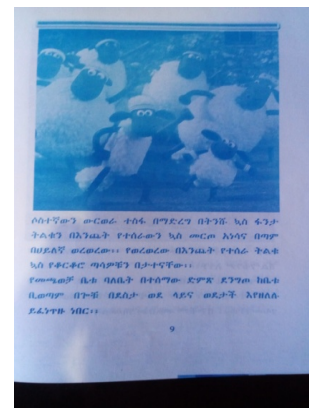


Figure 3: A picture of a page from *Atrif* (nd.:9)

The texts are composed of long sentences, each ranging from 15 to 23 words. Proper names in a source language can be translated into the target language in the case of adults' literature. The question that arises here is, "Should proper names be translated into children's literature?" Regarding this, scholars in the field of translation also consider age as one of the important standards for children's literature (e.g., Sas, 2010; Aguilera, 2008; Yamazaki, 2002; Puurtinen, 1995; Bell, 1991). Puurtinen noted, "Preference for acceptability is connected with the properties of the primary target group: ... children with their imperfect reading abilities and limited world knowledge are not expected

to tolerate as much strangeness and foreignness as adult readers” (Puurтинен, 1995: 23). Sas also says that “a proper name often implicitly describes a character’s personality or physical traits. ... The aural (auditory, hearing, and acoustic) quality of a proper name is very important as well; especially young children find characters with easy, repetitive names delightful (2010: 199; also see Aguilera, 2008: 5).

The same is true for “The Infidel Tiger” (Dawit 2019): we also see long sentences containing 25 words on average. The story plots are fragmentally sequenced. Such constructions will be boring and repellent to children at a stage of reading to learn. For this reason, the book becomes inefficient and ineffective in conveying the moral values the writer wanted to transmit through the stories. Structurally, the book is composed of cyclical words in a sentence embellished with the translator’s intonations, which becomes monotonous and dreary to beginner readers. Besides, the stories in the target language are highly influenced by the structural rules of the English language. Given their blurry and cloudy brown colour, the images drawn along with the texts become barriers for children to make distinctions between the lines and edges of the pictures. In general, the translators, as communicators, failed to make the semantic sense of the stories in relation to word and sentence meanings. As felt, the translators show incompetence in reflecting the knowledge bases, actual communicative performances, and pragmatic aspects of the linguistic development of the intended reader. Perhaps the incompetence could get an explanation if seen from the lack of access put aptly by Bell (1991: 36-37) in what follows:

‘The professional (technical) translator has access to five distinct kinds of knowledge; target language (TL) knowledge; text-type knowledge; source language (SL) knowledge; subject area (‘real world’) knowledge; and contrastive knowledge.’ Add to this the decoding skills of reading and the encoding skills of writing....The translator must know (a) how propositions are structured (semantic knowledge); (b) how clauses can be synthesised to carry propositional content and analysed to retrieve the content embedded in them (syntactic knowledge); (c) how the clause can be realized as information-bearing text.

Then, Bell strongly emphasizes that “lack of knowledge and control in any of these cases would mean that the translator could not translate” (Ibid.). If seen from these specifications, we can say that the books are translated inaccurately in a slapdash fashion. Therefore, they lack functional coherence and communicative values. As felt, the books can be characterized as worse than

all the books reviewed in this study and seen as heavy burdens put irresponsibly on the shoulders of children involved in emergent literacy. Generally, the books can be called ‘commercial books’ because their primary purpose seems to be to benefit from selling something rather than enhance the development of children’s literacy skills and competencies.

### **5. Concluding Remarks**

The purpose has been to show how folktales/storybooks are inappropriately written for children. The main research question has been: what qualities make children’s literature books outstanding? How do we validate the appropriateness of children’s literature books? The evaluation covers 24 randomly selected books, all containing over 140 folktales/stories. The leading question seeking answers in the process of the research activities grows out to be related, especially, to the choice of the most appropriate theoretical and methodological applications oriented toward the development of children’s literacy education. Methodologically (and also theoretically), modelling a set of working criteria for the evaluation of the qualities of children’s literature books has been mandatory so as to arrive at substantial conclusions.

The major findings drawn on the discussion made thus far include:

- 1) Almost all the reviewed books qualify as worthless materials. For example, the books are spoiled with incorrect construction of sentence structures that do not fit the grammatical codes of Amharic at all.
- 2) Another key finding drawn from the discussion shows the range of weaknesses of the books, from phoneme-grapheme print, to morpheme (word formation), to construction of structure and to semantic tasks.
- 3) Almost all the folklore/story books studied are found to be prone to serious defects, including the lack of knowledge about children’s realities: cognitive and linguistic development levels, background knowledge, context-specific experiences, interests, nature, needs, perspectives, etc. In all cases, the negative effects the books may have on children’s affective development can correspond to the striking points stated by Çer (2016):

Expecting a child to read and comprehend a book which is far from children’s realities and which forces a child with its narration is nothing more than flogging a dead horse. Hence, there has to be a relation between the child and the book he will read in terms of interest, need, language, perspective and developmental level. In other words, visual and verbal texts which are inappropriate for the child’s linguistic, cognitive, personal and affective development and his nature and which do not address to the child’s

interest and needs, and which do not reflect his perspective may create barriers between the child and the book from early years, that is, they may dull children's desires to bond with a book (2016: 78).

- 4) The writers, translators, designers, and illustrators show a lack of identification of their right addressees. In actual fact, children in first and second grades are at a stage of learning to read, and at a stage of reading to learn. However, the writers concerned misplace the second stage for the first one, the first for the KG level, and so on. In all cases, the books are put as hefty burdens on children's shoulders rather than working as productive means for the development of their competencies and capacities.

**\*Acknowledgements:** *Special thanks to Jenni Fuchs for her valuable assistance and to Peg Koetsch and members of the Centre for Folklife and Cultural Heritage Cultural Research and Education Team — Betty Belanus, Olivia Cadaval, Diana N'Diaye, Cynthia Vidaurri, Nilda Villalta, and Charlie Weber — for their important feedbacks. The author is indebted to Amy Kotkin Warner, Holly Cutting Baker, and Margaret Yocom, whose Family Folklore Interviewing Guide and Questionnaire laid much of the groundwork for this manuscript. My special thanks go to Dr. Moges Yigezu for his valuable ideas and assistance that, as a result, enabled me to gain a lot from the engagement in the far-reaching Joint Research Project: “Beyond Access: Improving Quality of Education Early Years Reading Instructions in Ethiopia” through building capacity of researchers, writers, and teachers.*

## References

- Aarne, Antti and Thompson, Stith. 1961. *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.
- Bauman, Richard. 1982. “Ethnography of Children's Folklore.” *Children In and Out of School: Ethnography and Education*, Perry Gilmore and Allan A. Glatthorn (eds.). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, pp. 172–187.
- Bjorklund, David F. 2000. *Children's Thinking: Developmental Function and Individual Differences* (Third Edition), Nelson/Thomson Learning. Ontario: Scarborough.
- Bell, Roger T. 1991. *Translation and Translating: theories and practice*. New York: Longman Inc.

- Ben-Amos, Dan. 1971. "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context." *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 84, No. 331, pp. 3-15.
- Bishop, Kay and Van Orden, Phyllis. 1998. "Reviewing Children's Books: A Content Analysis." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Apr.1998), pp. 145-182.
- Carl, Tomlinson M. and Carol, Lynch-Brown. 1999. *Essentials of Children's Literature* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). NY, NY: Pearson.
- Çer, Erkan. 2016. "Preparing Books for Children from Birth to Age Six: The Approach of Appropriateness for the Child." *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.7, No.6, pp 78-97.
- Chall, J. 1983. *Stages of Reading Development*. New York: Mcgraw-Hill.
- Dundes, Alan. 2002. "Bloody Mary in the Mirror." In *Bloody Mary in the Mirror: Essays in Psychoanalytic Folkloristics*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, pp. 76-94.
- . 1979. "The Dead Baby Joke Cycle." *Western Folklore* 38/3, pp. 145-57.
- Gamble, N. 2013. *Exploring Children's Literature: reading with pleasure and purpose*. Sage: Los Angeles.
- Hillman, Judith. 2003 (Vol: I, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition), University of Michigan: Merrill
- Huck, Charlotte S. 1964. "Children's Literature-Defined." *Elementary English*, Vol. 41, No. 5, pp. 467-470.
- Lukens, Rebecca J. 2003. *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature*. Seventh ed. Boston, Mass.: Pearson Education
- Shaw, Jean Duncan. 1996. *An Historical Survey of Themes Recurrent in Selected Children's Books Published in America Since 1850*. Temple University Graduate Board.
- VisikoKnox-Johnson, Leilani. 2016. "The Positive Impacts of Fairy Tales for Children." HOHONU 2016, Vol. 14, pp. 77-81.
- Lesnik-Oberstein, Karin. 1999. "Essentials: What is Children's Literature? What is Childhood?" In Peter Hunt (ed.), *Understanding Children's Literature: Key essays from the International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature*. Routledge: New Fetter Lane, London.
- Sinan, Ahmet Turan, Demir, Sezgin and Doğan, Fatma Döner. 2017. "Teacher's Views Regarding the Place of Children's Literature in First Language Education." *Journal of Education and Training Studies* Vol. 5, No. 12; December 2017, pp.133-145.
- Graham, Keith M., Matthews, Sharon D., and Eslami, Zohreh R. 2020. "Using Children's Literature to Teach the 4Cs of CLIL: A Systematic Review of EFL Studies." In: *Latin American Journal of Content & Language*

- Integrated Learning*, 13(2), pp. 163–189.  
<https://doi.org/10.5294/laclil.2020.13.2.2>
- Ellison, M. 2019. "CLIL in the primary school context." In S. Garton & F. Copland (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of teaching English to young learners* (pp. 247–268). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315623672-17>
- Hunt, Peter. 1999. "Introduction: The World of Children's Literature Studies." Peter Hunt (Ed.), *Understanding Children's Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1-14).
- Knapp, Mary and Knapp, Herbert. 1976. *One Potato, Two Potatoes: The Secret Education of American Children*. New York: Norton.
- Kurkjian, Catherine and Livingston, Nancy. 2007. "Children's Books: Story Characters, Problems, and Settings Are Elemental." *The Reading Teacher*, Vol. 60, No. 5, pp. 494-500.
- Livingston, Candice and Brown, Molly. 1999. "Types of children's literature." *Children's Folklore*, Brian Sutton-Smith, et al. (eds.). University Press of Colorado, Utah State University Press.
- Neuman, S.B., and Roskos, K. 1997. "Literacy knowledge in practice: Contexts of participation for youngwriters andreaders." *Reading Research Quarterly* 32 (1): 10–33.
- Paris, Scot and Hamilton, Ellen. 2009. "The Development of Children's Comprehension." Online: <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/>
- Sas, Isabeau .2010. "The Treacle Triples: A Functional Approach to the translation of Children's Literature." (Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Translation at Stellenbosch University December 2010).
- Shaffer, D. R. and Kipp, K. (2010). *Development Psychology: Childhood and adolescence*. UK: Cengage Learning.
- Snow, Catherine E. and Matthews, Timothy. 2016. "Reading and Language in the Early Grades." *The Future of Children*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 57-74.
- Temple, Charles, Martinez, Miriam and Yokota, Junko. 1994. *Children's Books in Children's Hands* (6 editions, 1994 - 2019). Boston: Pearson.
- Thompson, Stith. 1946. *The Folktale*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Tucker, Elizabeth . 1999. "Tales and Legends." *Children's Folklore*, Brian Sutton-Smith, et al. (Eds.). 1999. University Press of Colorado, Utah State University Press.
- Vygotsky, Lev Semenovich. 2004. "Imagination and creativity in childhood." *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 42(1), pp. 7-97.

Wisniewski, David. 1996. *Evaluating and Selecting Literature for Children*. Clarion books/Houghton Mifflin Company

**Reviewed Amharic Children’s Story-Books**

- ተስፋዬ ሳህሉ ኤጀርሳ፣ 1965። አባባ ተስፋዬና ተረቶቻቸው፡- ልጆች!! የዛሬ አበባዎች፣ የነገ ፍሬዎች (አንደኛ መዕሐፍ)። አዲስ አበባ፡- ንግድ ማተሚያ ቤት።
- .1966። በሬት ለአባቶች በኋላ ለልጆች!!፡- ልጆች! የዛሬ አበባዎች፣ የነገ ፍሬዎች። (ሁለተኛ መጽሐፍ)። አዲስ አበባ፡- ንግድ ማተሚያ ቤት።
- .1997። አባባ ተስፋዬና ተረቶቻቸው፡- ልጆች! የዛሬ አበባዎች፣ የነገ ፍሬዎች (አራተኛ መዕሐፍ)። አዲስ አበባ፡- ንግድ ማተሚያ ቤት።
- . ያለ ዓ.ም። ምክር ሰጭ ተረቶች፡- ጨዋ ኢትዮጵያዊ ልጆችን እንፍጠር፡- የልጅነት ጊዜ ትዝታ፡- እንደምን አላችሁ ልጆች! የዛሬ አበባዎች የነገ ፍሬዎች። (በቪዲዮ ቅንብር የተዘጋጀ፣ ስድስት ተረቶች (1 ሰዓት ትረካ)። አዲስ አበባ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት ስም)።
- ትግሉ ጀግናው (ተራኪ)፣ ጅግሪት ጅግሪት፡- 5 ተረቶች- በስድ እና ጥቂት ግጥሞች። አዲስ አበባ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት ስም)።
- ብሥራት ዕውነቱ አወቀ፣ 2011። ተወዳጅ የልጆች ተረቶች፡- ልጆችን እያዘናና ሚያስተምር። አዲስ አበባ፡- ወገግታ አሳታሚ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት ስም)።
- ስም አልባ (ያለ ደራሲ ስም)። 2007። ተረት-ተረት፡- ሦስተኛ መጽሐፍ (ተሻሻሎ የቀረበ)። አዲስአበባ፡- ሜጋ አሳታሚና አከፋፋይ ኃላፊ/የግ/ማህበር (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት ስም)።
- አብዱል አዘዝ አ/ቃሲም (ተራኪ)፣ የሀብታሞቹ ነጋዴዎች ቅሌት፡- አዲስ አበባ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት ስም)።
- አሪፍ አብዱል ቃድር ሁሴን (ትርጉምና ዝግጅት)። (ያለዓ.ም.)። ዶራ ወደ ትምህርት ቤት እየሄደች፡- ሦስት ተረቶች፣ አዋታ መፃሕፍት። አዲስ አበባ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት ስም)።
- .(አዘጋጅና ህትመት)፣ ያለዓ.ም። ሁለቱ አይጠኙ፡- አዋታ መፃሕፍት። አዲስ አበባ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- .(ትርጉምና ዝግጅት)፣ ያለዓ.ም። Tom & Jerry በአማርኛ፣ አዋታ መፃሕፍት። አዲስ አበባ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- .ያለዓ.ም። Sherik ሸሪክ። አዋታ መፃሕፍት። አዲስአበባ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- .ያለዓ.ም። Shaun II ship። አዋታ መፃሕፍት። አዲስ አበባ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- ኤርሚያስሁሴን፣ 2009። ብልሁ እረኛና ሌሎችም ተረቶች። አዲስአበባ፡- ዜድ ኤ ማተሚያ ቤት።
- . 2009። ጣፋጭ ተረት ለልጆች። አዲስ አበባ፡- ዜድ ኤ ማተሚያ ቤት።
- .2009። ተረት ተረት መጽሐፍ አምስት፡- መልካም ልደት ለአንበሳ። አዲስ አበባ፡- ዜድ ኤ ማተሚያ ቤት።

- አዲሱ ያለው፣ 1999። *ዘመናዊ አማርኛ መጽሐፍ አንድ ለጀማሪና ለመካከለኛ አፀደ-ሕፃናት፣ ለክፍተኛ አፀደ-ሕፃናትና ለ1ኛ ክፍል መሰናዶ (የጀመሪያ ዕትም 1991፣ ሰባተኛ ዕትም 1999)* አዲስ አበባ፡- (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- ዓለም እሸቱ። የካቲት 2003። *አያጅቦና ጎረቤቶቹ- ሌሎችም የህፃናት ታሪኮች።* አዲስ አበባ፡- አልፋ አታሚዎች (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)። (ሰዓሊ ሠናይት ወርቁ ማሞ)።
- 2005። *እኔና ምኞቴ (ለአፀደ ህፃናት ተማሪዎች)።* አዲስ አበባ፡- አልፋ አታሚዎች። (ሰዓሊ ሠናይት ወርቁ ማሞ) (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- ሚያዝያ 2009። *ቀበጡ ዝንጀሮ።* አዲስ አበባ፡- አልፋ አታሚዎች (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)። (ሰዓሊ ሠናይት ወርቁ ማሞ)።
- (ያለዓ.ም.)። *ድመቴን ምን ላብላት? (ለአፀደ-ህፃናት ተማሪዎች)።* አዲስአበባ፡- አልፋ አታሚዎች። (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- 2005። *ጥሩንግ ነፊውና ሌሎችም ምርጥ ተረቶች።* አዲስአበባ፡- አልፋ አታሚዎች (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- ጥበቡ ፍቃዱ። (ቴዎድሮስ በቀለ፣ ሰዓሊ) (2007)። *ተረት ተረት መፅሐፍ አምስት።* አዲስ አበባ፡- ሜጋ አሳታሚና አከፋፋይ ኃላዮተ/የግ/ማህበር። (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- ዘነበ አብርሃም። 2008። *ሙሽራዎ አይጥ።* አዲስ አበባ፡- ሜጋ አሳታሚና አከፋፋይ ኃላዮተ/የግ/ማህበር። (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- ዮናስ ገለታ (ተራኪ)፣ 2007። *ሜጋ ተረት፣ ተረት።* አዲስ አበባ፡- ሜጋ አሳታሚና አከፋፋይ ኩባንያ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- ዳንኤል ነጋሽ። 2009። *ቸቸ በጎዳና፡- ቁጥር 2።* አዲስ አበባ፡- ሜጋ አሳታሚና አከፋፋይ ኃላዮተ/የግ/ማህበር፣ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- ዳዊት ትዕዛዙ (ትርጉምና ዝግጅት)፣ 2011። *ከሃዲው ነብር።* አዲስ አበባ፡-(ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።
- ፍኖተ-ጥበብ እንዳለ፣ 2011። *ተረት ተረት እና እንቅስቃሴ*። አዲስ አበባ (ያለ ማተሚያ ቤት)።