

LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN

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"The poorest man in the world is the man limited to his own experiences, the man without books."

D.N.FADER and SHAEVITZ (1966:10)

It is a known fact that books are indispensable for all human beings. This article discusses the need of separate literature for children, which is different from that of adults for several reasons. To clarify this point, we first explain reading through which literature is presented.

Goodman and Niles (1970:5) explain reading as "a complex process by which a reader reconstructs, to some degree, a message encoded by a writer in graphic language." It must not only be accepted as a creation of the sound form of the word on the basis of its graphic reproduction. As Crowder claims

Reading is not just a matter of transfer of information from the print to the reader's mind, there is also an active contribution from the reader's store of knowledge. We bring our experience to bear on what is being read by filling gaps, by interpretation, and by extrapolating from what is given in the text.

(1982:137)

Literature is regarded to play a great role in reading. It is a form of communications, a way of saying something. If we relate this to the above quotation, literary meanings which are often emotive, or impressionistic, connotative as well as denotative are understood by the readers' past experience. Their capacity for understanding contributes to the meaning of the text. All these relations show its complexity.

In order to show this complexity of the reading process, the following diagram can be given.

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Transmitter	— Message —	Receiver
Perceives		Receives
Encodes		Decodes
Transmits		Responds

(Spink 1989:4)

In this diagram, it is seen that the sender perceiving the need to send a message, encodes it into a written text. Then the transmission of the message may be realized when the person receives it perfectly or imperfectly. Having decoded it, the receiver reacts in some way. The following communication model can be given:

Writer § Novel § Reader

(Spink 1989:4)

When the above-mentioned definition of reading is taken into account, it is seen that reading is not as simple as it seems, and the reader is not as passive a receiver as it is supposed. The reader reads what is written, and reads what is implied. The reader also extends the author's ideas, using his or her own knowledge, experience, and so forth.

When compared with adults, children may be said to have less knowledge about language and experience in reading books. Smith (1953:15) points out that it is true that children go through stages in their reading as in their physical growth similar to Smith, Harris and Coltheart (1986:86-87) contend that "children normally proceed through four broad-phases as they progress from being entirely unable to read to possessing a normal adult level of skilled reading." What they propose is that children should pass through four phases such as sight-vocabulary phase, the discrimination -net phase, phonological- recoding phase, and the ortographic phase. For any child in the first phase of learning to read, which emerges when children are at the age of 4 or 5, there exists a sight vocabulary which the child has learned by rote association to read using the direct procedure. Word shapes are not important and recognizing words depends upon recognizing letters. In the second phase, children use fragmentary or very general features of the printed stimulus to select the word they believe the stimulus to be. Children cannot read aloud novel words or unfamiliar words. In the phonological-recoding

phase, children make extensive use of letter sound correspondence rules to read words by phonological recoding. They recognize words in terms of their pronunciations. In the orthographic phase, children recognize words in terms of their spellings.

All normal children except for retarded ones, pass through all these reading stages. At different stages children show differences in understanding texts.

Besides the different stages of development of children, there are other factors affecting reader's reception. These factors are the degree of reading competence, the reader's relationship with the author, the reader's background knowledge and the reader's own experience and associations. By means of these factors, elements, readers may engage with a book in a personal way and understand the meaning of the text. In short readers extract meaning from a small piece of text in terms of what they bring to that text. The above-mentioned factors show us that child-readers may be different from adult readers. This brings adult-child segregation. Some people disregarding this distinction argue that there are not books for children but there are only books which children happen to read. On the other hand, the others accept the fact that some books are written by their authors only for children and are clearly for children and add that some books which were never specifically intended for children may have qualities which attract children to them. This attraction may be realized by means of language rather than its plot because of the relationship between reading and language. Wilson and Hall (1972:35) assert that "reading instruction in both decoding and comprehension must be based upon a child's existing level of language development."

Reading, in other words, can be defined as a life long activity. When compared with adult readers, children may be regarded as immature readers. Because while they are reading literature, the individual words are important.

The discussions above bring a dichotomy of child readers, and adult readers and present the term implied reader whom an author addresses. The ways used to present the narrator, the events, comments on the events in the story

imply the reader, so that the agreement between the reader and author may be realized.

Seeing that books can be grouped according to implied readers, the literary books written for child readers, may be gathered under the heading of literature for children. We agree with Smith (1953:18), who says, "writing for children is an art and should be approached as such." Children cannot understand everything which adults read and comprehend. As Dayioğlu, who is a famous author writing for children in Turkey says "in order to adress to children we must keep in mind the suitability and relevance of the books to children in the same the way as we bend over to kiss their cheeks! (Dayioğlu 1989:328-329). From this point of view, she is against the fact that there is not an exclusive literature for children. She recommends that language, style, plot and concepts should be always used moderately. Thus, writing for children needs a special discipline.

Last but not least, children need their own literature. Because of their limited vocabulary knowledge, sentence structures and experiences, authors aiming at a young audience must restrict himself in certain areas of experience and vocabulary. While a mature reader is aware of the text, that is, standarts of textuality which are cohesion, coherence, intertextuality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intentionality, a developing reader may not. When compared with a mature reader, a child reader has not completely learned how to give himself up to the book. In this respect, he is an unyielding reader. That is to say he wants the book to suit him, expecting an author to take him as he finds. On the other hand, appropriateness to the supposed readership or reading age should be taken into consideration. Not only particular age group but also types of children, that is, children from different social classes may differ in understanding texts. Hence, all commercial books may be classified under the heading of exclusive literature for children which covers more or less the same genre with adults'. The proposed term 'literature for children' may stop the discussions on children's literature, which is an ambiguous term including books written by children or childish literature apart from literature in general.

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ÖZET

Bilindiği gibi kitaplar tüm insanların ayrılmaz birer parçasıdır. Bu makalede çocuk okurların yetişkinlerle karşılaştırıldıklarında, dilsel gelişimleri tamamlıyor olmaları, dünya bilgi ve deneyimlerinin daha sınırlı olması ve metinsellik boyutunu iyi kavrayamamaları nedeniyle çocuklar için ayrı bir yazının gerekliliği vurgulanmıştır.