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The Child Narrator Technique in English and Uzbek Prose

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Abstract: This article explores the use of the child narrator in English and Uzbek prose, with particular attention to Mark Twain's The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Gafur Ghulam's Shum Bola. It considers how a child's perspective can reveal aspects of social life that remain unnoticed or unspoken by adults. The study focuses on first-person narration, focalization, unreliable narration, and the distance between the child who experiences events and the narrator who later recounts them. The analysis shows that the child narrator serves not only to create humour and emotional immediacy but also to expose social injustice, hypocrisy, and restrictive adult values. While the English texts tend to associate childhood with personal freedom and moral awareness, Shum Bola places greater emphasis on survival, poverty, social experience, and cultural memory.

Keywords: child narrator, children's literature, Uzbek prose, English prose, narratology, focalization, childhood, Gafur Ghulam, Mark Twain.

Introduction

The use of child narrators became increasingly prominent in English-language children's fiction during the nineteenth century. Initially regarded as an experimental narrative technique, it gradually developed into a conventional means of presenting young characters as active participants in the narrative rather than as passive recipients of adult ideas. Through the child's perspective, authors can reveal social realities from a position that differs from that of adults, particularly because children have limited access to social resources, authority, and established systems of power. As Bayrak Akyıldız observes: "Child narrators make us think more on the child's position that is different from the adults' in the society. As they have limited access to the resources and systems of public authority, they have different takes on the society's identity schemes and values and this leads to a different positioning, thus a different use of language. Of course, to what extent an adult writer can render this tongue is questionable. [1]"

This distinctive position of the child narrator is particularly significant in children's fiction, where the limited social experience and linguistic perspective of young characters can offer an alternative view of adult society. In this respect, the child narrator functions not merely as a storytelling device but also as a means of exposing social relations, conflicts, and values through the eyes of a young character. A similar narrative tendency can be observed in Uzbek prose, particularly in works that portray social inequality, family conflict, poverty, and the moral contradictions of adult society. In such works, the child's perspective enables authors to present social reality through the experiences and observations of young protagonists, while also highlighting the contrast between the child's understanding of the world and the norms imposed by adults.

This article compares the function of the child narrator in English and Uzbek prose. The principal texts are Mark Twain's The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Gafur Ghulam's Shum Bola. Although these works belong to different historical and cultural contexts, they share a central narrative strategy: the adult world is represented through the eyes of a child. The article seeks to

[1] Bayrak Akyıldız H. A Child's Point of View as a Narrative Technique // Turkish Studies — International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic. — 2014. — Vol. 9, No. 6. — P. 150.

answer three questions: How does the child narrator shape the reader's perception of social reality? What is the relationship between a child narrator's limited understanding and the reader's broader interpretation? How do English and Uzbek writers adapt this technique to their respective cultural contexts?

In narratology, a child narrator is usually associated with first-person narration and internal focalization. The concept of focalization helps distinguish between the question of "who sees?" and the question of "who speaks?", with focalization referring to the perspective through which narrative events are perceived and presented. In internally focalized narration, the narrative can "mimic" a character's perspective and present only what is accessible to that character [2]. The authors further argue that internal focalization invites readers to imagine fictional events from a character's point of view[3].

In the case of a child narrator, the narrator is also a character who experiences the events. This creates a distinction between the experiencing self and the narrating self. The experiencing self is the child who encounters events without fully understanding them, while the narrating self is the voice that later recounts those events. Thus, when a child narrator is combined with internal focalization, events are presented through the child's limited perceptions, emotions, and understanding, allowing readers to experience the fictional world from a perspective that differs from that of adults.

This distinction is especially important when the narrator is older at the moment of narration. In such cases, the adult narrator may preserve the emotional immediacy of childhood while also adding retrospective understanding. However, some texts present a narrator whose language, knowledge, and worldview remain close to the child's age. In Shum Bola, for example, the story is narrated in the language of a young boy, and its narrative effect depends on the combination of childish simplicity, folk humour, and difficult life experience[4].

The child narrator is not necessarily completely reliable or completely unreliable. Rather, the narrator's limitations create a productive gap between what the child understands and what the reader can infer. A child may interpret cruelty as a game, social prejudice as a natural rule, or adult hypocrisy as something confusing. This gap encourages the reader to participate actively in interpretation. The child's misunderstanding can therefore become a powerful form of social criticism.

In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer[5], Mark Twain uses the child's perspective to transform ordinary social life into an imaginative world of adventure. The story is told through Tom's eyes and is enchanting and adventurous, just as any young boy's life would be. His daily life included mischief and budding young love, which is told with great detail.[6] Tom sees school, church, punishment, friendship, and work through the language of play. Adult institutions are not presented as neutral or universally valid. They are filtered through Tom's imagination and therefore become open to humorous reinterpretation.

The famous fence-painting episode illustrates this narrative method. From an adult perspective, Tom is being punished and forced to perform an unpleasant task. From Tom's

[2] Bruhns A., Köppe T. Internal Focalization and Seeing through a Character's Eyes // Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics. — 2024. — Vol. 61 (XVII), No. 2. — P. 127. — DOI: 10.33134/eeja.364.
[3] Bruhns A., Köppe T. Internal Focalization and Seeing through a Character's Eyes // Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics. — 2024. — Vol. 61 (XVII), No. 2. — P. 129. — DOI: 10.33134/eeja.364.
[4] Allambergenov H. K. National Values and Folklore Traditions in the Work of Ghafur Ghulam // International Journal of Literature and Languages. — 2024. — Vol. 04, No. 12. — P. 60. — DOI: 10.37547/ijll/Volume04Issue12-11.
[5] Twain M. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer / introduced by R. Peck. — 2015. — P. 321.
[6] Makenova G. T. The Theme of the Freedom in "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" by Mark Twain // XXI Century Renaissance in the Paradigm of Science, Education and Technology Innovations. — P. 204–208.

perspective, however, the task can be represented as a privilege. By changing the meaning of the work, Tom persuades other boys to exchange valuable objects for the opportunity to paint the fence. The episode reveals both his childish imagination and his ability to understand social desire. Through Tom's eyes, Twain satirizes adult concepts of labour, discipline, and authority.

Tom's narrative world is characterized by limited knowledge. He interprets events through romantic stories about pirates, robbers, and knights. Nevertheless, his limited perspective does not weaken the novel's social criticism. On the contrary, it exposes the artificiality of adult conventions. School discipline, religious rituals, and social reputation often appear absurd because Tom does not accept them automatically.

At the same time, Tom's perspective develops through experience. The graveyard scene, the conflict involving Muff Potter, and the episode in the cave force him to confront fear, responsibility, and death. Tom's childlike imagination is gradually combined with moral awareness. His decision to tell the truth in order to protect Muff Potter demonstrates that the child narrator can move from playfulness to ethical action.

The Child Narrator in Uzbek Prose

"Shum Bola" and the voice of social experience

Gafur Ghulam's Shum Bola[7] offers a significant example of the child narrator in Uzbek prose. Qoravoy narrates his own adventures in a language shaped by oral storytelling, humour, colloquial expression, and emotional immediacy. The narrator's voice is central to the work's artistic effect. Studies of the story emphasize that the narrative is presented through the language of a thirteen-year-old boy and combines childish joys with difficult life experiences.[8]

Unlike Tom Sawyer, whose adventures are largely motivated by play and freedom, the protagonist of Shum Bola often acts in order to survive. Poverty, family conflict, displacement, and social vulnerability shape his childhood. His movement through different spaces and encounters with different adults reveals a society marked by inequality and insecurity. The child narrator therefore provides access not only to a personal adventure but also to a broader social world.

The protagonist's humour is particularly significant. Qoravoy does not narrate suffering in a purely tragic manner. Instead, difficult situations are often transformed through irony, exaggeration, and comic observation. This method does not diminish the seriousness of poverty. Rather, it expresses the child's psychological resistance to a harsh environment. The narrator's ability to laugh, invent, and adapt becomes a form of survival.

The narrative voice also creates a contrast between the child's interpretation and the reader's understanding. The boy may describe an adult's behaviour in a simple or humorous manner, while the reader recognizes exploitation, hypocrisy, or cruelty beneath the surface. In this way, the child narrator exposes social problems without always explaining them directly. Research on Shum Bola has noted that the narrator's youthful point of view presents the atmosphere of ignorance and confusion through the eyes of a child.[9]

Comparative Analysis

The child narrators in English and Uzbek prose share several important characteristics. First, they create immediacy. The reader does not receive childhood as an abstract concept but experiences events through the narrator's perceptions, emotions, and misunderstandings.

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[7] G'ulom G'. Shum Bola. - Toshkent: Yoshlar nashriyot uyi. – 2018. 190p.

[8] Allambergenov H. K. National Values and Folklore Traditions in the Work of Ghafur Ghulam // International Journal of Literature and Languages. — 2024. — Vol. 04, No. 12. — P. 63 — DOI: 10.37547/ijll/Volume04Issue12-11.

[9] Shoniyozova O'. M. Gafur Ghulam's Role in Children's Literature // American Journal of Science and Learning for Development. — 2023. — Vol. 2, No. 11. — P. 91.

Second, they destabilize adult authority. Institutions such as school, family, religion, law, and social reputation are presented from a perspective that does not fully accept their claims to legitimacy.

Third, all three texts use the gap between the child's knowledge and the reader's knowledge. Tom may interpret work as play, and the narrator of Shum Bola may describe painful social realities through humour. In each case, the reader understands more than the child but depends on the child's perspective to perceive the emotional truth of the situation.

The differences are equally important. In Twain's novel, the child narrator is primarily associated with imagination, individual freedom, and resistance to formal discipline. In Ghulam's prose, the child narrator is more directly connected with poverty, social survival, cultural memory, and the collective experience of ordinary people.

The linguistic dimension also deserves attention. Tom's voice is shaped by American colloquial speech and satire. The narrator of Shum Bola relies on Uzbek colloquial language, folk humour, and oral narrative patterns. Thus, the child narrator is not a universal technique with a single fixed meaning. Its function changes according to language, culture, genre, and historical context.

Conclusion

The child narrator technique enables English and Uzbek writers to represent childhood as both a state of innocence and a process of social discovery. In The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, the child's imaginative voice challenges adult discipline and transforms ordinary life into adventure. In Shum Bola, the child narrator combines humour, vulnerability, and social experience, presenting the realities of poverty and inequality from the perspective of a young survivor.

Despite their cultural differences, the two works use the child narrator to question adult-centred interpretations of reality. The child's limited knowledge becomes a source of artistic power because it exposes the contradictions that adults often accept as normal. The technique also gives childhood an active narrative role: children are not merely represented by adults but are allowed to speak, interpret, remember, and evaluate the world.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that the child narrator in English and Uzbek prose performs three major functions: it creates psychological immediacy, provides a critical perspective on adult society, and connects individual experience with broader cultural memory. The technique remains significant because it shows that a child's voice, although limited in knowledge, may possess exceptional moral and interpretive power.

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