

Nursery Rhymes: Beyond Children Knowledge

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1. Introduction

Nursery rhyme is a children song or a poem which is commonly aimed to entertain and introduce knowledge to children. It is spread hereditary. This is in line with one function of folklore, as Dundes says “aiding in the education of the young”. At their age, children are considered easy to adopt folklore. They still have strong memory to memorize rhymes and sound plays (Endraswara, 2009: 60)

Nowadays, nursery rhyme spread over the world easily reach children. This study aims at triggering awareness of parents in order to understand and be more selective in selecting nursery rhyme which is going to be introduced to their children. From the exploration to nursery rhymes of three countries (Indonesia, England, and Japan), their contents are beyond children knowledge.

2. Discussion

2.1 Minangkabau (Indonesia) Nursery Rhyme

Sapu Sapu Rangik

Sapu sapu rangik

Katekong anyang-anyang

Anyang-anyang balaku

Ndak balaku di Ulak Karang

Cok simarocok

Kodong kaki

Kodong tangan

Dikodongnyo dek buayo putih

Sapu Sapu Rangik is commonly sung in a children game in Minangkabau. The game is played by more than two children (3 – 5) sitting side by side putting out their legs. As the song stops at a child's legs, it means the legs have been cut off as they had been bitten by a white crocodile. This nursery rhyme describes children activity to repel mosquitos in order to avoid their bites which can

leave wound turning into sore on skin. The pain will be irritating. However, the condition does not occur in the region of Ulak Karang, Padang, which is situated by the beach near an estuary (Kuranji river). Seawater can cure skin diseases that skin sore is not found in such area. As the replacement, crocodiles are usually found by the river's estuary waiting for their preys. Thus, children are alarmed to the danger since crocodile's bite can amputate legs and hands.

The sample nursery rhyme coming from Minangkabau (Indonesia) contains rich local wisdom. Other than using a lot of words from the local dialect, that can develop vocabulary, it introduces children to the faunas living nearby, from the smallest to the largest. However, the size may not manipulate the effect since any animal's bite results on certain effect to human. There is also a knowledge of certain region being introduced to children. For instance, Ulak Karang is located by western coast of Sumatera. Circumstancially, Minangkabau children can learn that there are two main georgaphical divisions in minangkabau: *luhak* (the regions located on the high lands near Marapi mount) and *rantau* (the regions located by the beaches). The leassons from the nursery rhyme are to always be watful and to be able to get natural medicines from the nature (like, seawater is a cure for skin problems).

2.2 English Nursery Rhyme

Jack and Jill

Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water

Jack fell down and broke his crown

And Jill came tumbling after.

Up got Jack, and home did trot

As fast as he could caper

He went to bed and bound his head with vinegar and brown paper.

The nursery rhyme teaches children that, in order to live, they have to have some efforts (fatching a pail of water by climbing up a hill). An effor usually faces obstacle or difficulty which leaves a pain/scar. The lesson of the rhyme is, when facing a difficulty, it is better not to give up because there is always be a solution for every problem. By the rhyme, children are encouraged not to give up easily because there is always be an opportunity as long as they keep trying.

Back to the backgroung history and culture, *Jack and Jill* was actually originted in France (the nursery rhyme under study here is the English version). Jack actually resembles King Louis XVI. He faced a tragic end since he was sentenced the death penalty by being beheaded. Similarly, Queen Marie Antoinette faced the same end (www.rhymes.org.uk/jack-and-jill.htm). In the nursery rhyme of *Jack and Jill*, king Louis XVI's figure is represented in Jack character. King Louis XVI felt from the throne then beheaded. Meanwhile, Jack in *Jack and Jill* falls from a hill which causes a broke on his crown and a scar on his head. Marie Antoinette is represented through the Jill character.

Marie Antoinette was rulled down and faced her death with beheaded sentence. Jill tumbles down with no clear further explanation on her condition. As the final note, the background history and culture of *Jack and Jill* should not be informed to children of early age, or what so called ‘beyond children knowledge’ because their are not in the proper age to face violence of kingdom succession.

2.3 Japanese Nursery rhyme

通りゃんせ (*Tooryanse*)

通りゃんせ 通りゃんせ
ここはどこか 細道じゃ
天神さまの 細道じゃ
ちっと通して 下しゃんせ
御用のないもの
通しやせぬ
この子の七つのお祝いに
お札を納めにまいります
行きはよいよい
帰りはこわい
こわいながらも
通りゃんせ 通りゃんせ

The word choices in *Tooryanse* are not really appropriate to children since they do not understand the real meaning. It is told in *Tooryanse* that there is an oblige activity which is passing a narrow trail in order to arrive at the *Tenjin* God temple (*Tenjin sama no hosomichi ja*). Those who want to walk are those with certain/who bring purpose. When they come without a purpose (*goyoo no nai mono*) they will not received the permit to pass (*tooshasenu*). The words used in the nursery rhyme may confuse children. The aim of passing the narrow trail is to take the prayer card/wooden plaque (in Shinto) for a child’s 7th birthday. However, there is a diction causing fear to children in the sentence “the safe coming (*iki wa yoi yoi*), but the scary return (*kaeri wa kowai*). Even though it is scary, the path has to be passed with a beg in order to be allowed. The nursery rhyme teaches that any path/effort is not always be fun, but with obstacle to face. No matter how difficult the obstacle is, never gives up. Keep moving forward and never be afraid to step on.

The culture behind the *Tooryanse* is the annual *Sichi-Go-San* celebration in Shinto by Japanese children on 15 November (Kids Web Japan). In the past, there was a period with the high infant and children mortality. People then celebrated and was grateful when their children lived untill the age of seven (*sichi*), five (*go*), and three (*san*) by visiting temple. The age for the girls are three and seven while for the boys are three and five. Today, the age difference between girl and boy does not exist any longer; either girl or boy has equal right and can visit temple as s/he reaches seven, five, and three (7-5-3). Children visiting temple with their parents pray for further health and salvation.

The children wear the best clothes similar to the adults'. The girls wear *kimono* and the boys wear *haori* (jacket) and *hakama* (traditional trousers); some of them may also wear western cuts. The parents buy them *chitose ame* (the long live candies) which look like a stick wrapped in paper with the illustration of cranes and turtles. Both of the animals are the symbols of the long live and prosperity. All of them are aimed for the God in order to recognize that their parents have watched and cared for their children well and they have also prepared their children to become adults who can contribute for the local community's health and harmony. It is similar to the way God shares his responsibilities to the community in order to set a harmonious relationship between human and God.

The full loaded of the Japanese traditional culture behind the *Tooryanse* has passed beyond children knowledge because there is a(n implied) meaning in every action. Even though the dictions are quite confusing for children, explanation on the meaning of the walk/path to the temple can assist children's understanding. The dictions which increase fears for them may also be followed with the advice to keep walking pass regardless the fears. The nursery rhyme is suggested for the material of character building for children because it teaches them the existence of God who blesses human with health and kindness.

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