

A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Nursery Rhymes : a comparison between English and Arabic Lullabies

Inst .Emmad Ahmed Farhood

Asst.Inst.Reham Abdulkareem Mohammed-Zaki

Department of English /College of Education for Humanities-University of Diyala

Email:reham.env.hum@uodiyala.edu.iq

Abstract

This paper seeks to explore how nursery rhymes contribute to the process of development of emotions and cognition among children. The rhymes are derived from song tradition, history, riddles and proverbs and represent cultural memory and connection between parent and child in terms of voice and repetition. The analysis will be based on two theoretical paradigms: Speech Act Theory of J. Searle (1969) and Speaking Model by D. Hymes (1972). While the former provides for categorization of the speech act performed, the latter gives an insight into the situation in which this act takes place. Both approaches provide equal attention to both functionality and social meaning of a phenomenon and therefore allow for a balanced approach. Nursery rhymes prove to have much more value than just being fun. They can be treated as tools of language acquisition. The rhythm and repetition stimulate ears and develop understanding. The vocabulary expands, and the melody **Keywords:** Socio-pragmatics; Speech Acts; Nursery Rhymes; Cultural Values; Lullabies becomes a part of the overall cognitive development.

التحليل التداولي الاجتماعي لأناشيد الاطفال: دراسة مقارنة بين التهويدات الانجليزية والعربية

م. عماد احمد فرهود

م.م رهام عبدالكريم محمد زكي

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدراسات الاجتماعية-البراجماتية؛ أفعال الكلام؛ الأناشيد الطفولية؛ القيم الثقافية؛ التهويدات

جامعة ديالى-كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية

الايمل Email:reham.env.hum@uodiyala.edu.iq

المستخلص

تُعتبر الأناشيد الطفولية عنصرًا جوهريًا في تجربة الطفولة المبكرة، إذ تسهم بشكل فاعل في تنمية الجوانب العاطفية والمعرفية لدى الطفل. وتستمد هذه الأناشيد مضامينها من مصادر متنوعة، منها الأغاني التقليدية، والمسرحيات، والأحداث التاريخية، والألغاز، والأمثال، ما يجعلها مرآة لثقافة غني. ولا تقتصر أهميتها على جاذبيتها السطحية فحسب، بل تحمل دلالات أعمق تعكس طبيعة العلاقات الأسرية وتعزز الروابط العاطفية بين الوالدين والأطفال. تعتمد هذه الدراسة إطارًا متكاملًا يجمع بين نظرية أفعال الكلام لجون سيرل (1969) ونموذج هايمز (1972). يصنف نموذج سيرل أفعال الكلام، بينما يحلّل إطار هايمز العناصر السياقية، مما



يتيح تحليلًا وظيفيًا واجتماعيًا ثقافيًا شاملاً. تشير النتائج إلى أن أغاني الأطفال لا تعمل فقط كوسيلة للترفيه، بل أيضًا كأدوات فعالة لاكتساب اللغة. فُتِناها الإيقاعية والتكرارية تعزز مهارات الاستماع والفهم والمفردات، بينما تدعم خصائصها الموسيقية التطور المعرفي. وبشكل عام، تسهم أغاني الأطفال بشكل كبير في النمو اللغوي والعاطفي والمعرفي والثقافي للأطفال

1.1 Problem of the Study

Despite the prevalence of nursery rhymes during childhood worldwide, nursery rhymes have always been considered mere fun without giving credit to their educational role in a child's life. It seems that the educational value of nursery rhymes is still unexplored and this research aims at filling this gap via the following questions.

1. What are the different kinds of speech acts used in nursery rhymes in English and Arabic languages?
2. In what way do nursery rhymes affect children's development via the use of speech acts and context?
3. How can Dell Hymes' Model of Speech help reveal the underlying messages of English and Arabic nursery rhymes and how can these messages contribute to the development of children's linguistic, emotional and behavioral aspects?

1.2 Aim of the Study

This study aims to analyze nursery rhymes from a socio-pragmatic perspective according to John Searle's Speech Act Theory and Dell Hymes's Model. It focuses on identifying the speech acts and contextual elements used in English and Arabic nursery rhymes and exploring their role in children's linguistic, emotional, cultural, and behavioral development.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

It is hypothesized that nursery rhymes function as socio-pragmatic tools for children's socialization. They employ assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts to convey meaning and guide children's behavior. It is also hypothesized that their dominant function is instructional, promoting moral values and positive habits. Furthermore, expressive speech acts foster emotional awareness, such as love and respect, while nursery rhymes reflect cultural and religious values in both English and Arabic societies. It is also hypothesized that English and Arabic nursery



rhymes share similarities in the use of speech acts, especially the prevalence of assertive acts.

1.4 The Scope of the Study

The investigation of the study is limited to the analysis of selected English and Arabic nursery rhymes, using John Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969), and Dell Hymes's Speaking Model (1972), which examines contextual elements .The study adopts both qualitative and quantitative approaches: frequencies and percentages are applied only to Searle's speech act categories for statistical analysis, whereas Hymes's Model is used qualitatively to interpret the contextual and communicative aspects of the nursery rhymes.

Section Two

1.5 What are Nursery Rhymes?

Nursery rhymes capture children's attention and they carry deeper meaning for they reflect parental bond ; "nursery or nursing" refer to feeding ,the child accepts food and caring from his parent, so food symbolically refers to "word" or the "culture" itself , children learn cultural values and traditions. (Mintz,1966, as cited in Rausch-Molnar, 2024) and (Dundes ,1966, as cited in Rausch-Molnar ,2024)

Lullabies exist in every human culture. The English term "lullaby" is believed to originate from "lu, lu" or "la la" sounds used by mothers or nurses to reassure and calm children. (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019)

Major dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster, Cambridge, and Collins are largely consistent in their definition of lullaby, they generally defining lullaby as a quiet song used to help babies and young children fall asleep (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.; Collins Dictionary, n.d.; Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Nursery rhymes originated from various sources for example traditional songs , plays, historical events, riddles, proverbs...etc.(Baldwin, n.d.)

Nursery rhymes shape the values children absorb and, in the process, sharpen faculties of memory and reasoning. Grandparent and grandchild meet within the same verse, the words carrying a household's past into its present. Folklore lies beneath most of them, drawn from communal storytelling and ritual practice rather than invented for the nursery alone (Janabergenova, 2024).

1.6 Importance of Nursery Rhymes



Campbell (2023) resists the idea that these verses exist merely to amuse; for him, they are early scaffolding for language itself. Further elaboration can be found in Rausch-Molnár (2024), who suggests that nursery rhymes are important for just this reason: they include elements of "historical events, religious beliefs, traditions and superstitions, fears, and regrets."

Repetition plays a significant role in the process. A child listens to the same melody over and over again and, unwittingly, begins distinguishing sounds and storing new words in his head. Speech comes long before reading or writing ever will, so an early diet of rhyme leaves a mark that persists well past infancy (Armstrong, 2021).

1.6.1 Language Development

Nursery rhymes are vital for language development, forming the basis for effective interaction. Their rhythmic nature boost phonemic awareness, which is essential for reading and writing skills. Through regular exposure to nursery rhymes, children strengthen their language proficiency and enhance their verbal communication abilities. (Kiddale123, 2026)

Golden (2023) adds that nursery rhymes are effective tools for teaching children how to communicate. Children begin developing their language skills through songs and rhymes, which enhance listening and comprehension abilities and encourage them to respond to the sounds they hear. Through frequent repetition, children learn to articulate words and vary pitch, volume, and intonation in their speech. Some expressions from nursery rhymes may even become part of their earliest vocabulary. In addition, nursery rhymes contribute to early literacy development by strengthening children's phonological awareness and preparing them for reading skills, as Mallett (2022) points out.

Singing nursery rhymes can help infants and children develop their auditory abilities. Furthermore, both listening to and singing nursery rhymes expose them to new vocabulary that they may not encounter in their everyday lives. Additionally, songs and rhymes generally follow a structured format with a beginning, middle, and end, which supports the understanding of sequencing and following sequential instructions. (Bambino Mio , 2023)

Nursery rhymes are considered valuable resources for language learning, especially in early childhood, as children learn effectively through singing and repetition. Singing nursery rhymes also helps children develop their auditory and listening abilities. Furthermore, both listening to and singing nursery rhymes exposes your child to new vocabulary that they may not encounter in their everyday lives. Additionally, songs and rhymes generally have a structured format with a

beginning, middle, and end, which supports the understanding of sequencing and following sequential instructions. (Bambino Mio , 2023)

Investigations suggest that children typically develop the ability to process phonetic information at around seven months old. Consequently nursery rhymes are valuable resource for learning language , because at early stages they learn more effectively through rhythmic rather than phonetic information . (University of Cambridge , 2023)

1.6.2 The Role of Nursery Rhymes in Reading Development

Reciting nursery rhymes or singing songs with your baby can be a pleasant way to entertain them for a short while, they are also vital for their future reading, language, cognitive, and social/emotional growth. Nursery rhymes may involve finger plays, which are engaging and help children develop essential literacy skills. Moving fingers from left to right teaches them the right direction used in reading and writing. In addition Pointing to the words in a nursery rhyme book while reading helps strengthen their understanding of this concept.

Nursery rhymes usually tell a story, and every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Understanding this structure is an important part of reading. When children learn to place events in the correct order, stories become easier for them to understand and predict as they start learning to read. (Golden, 2023)

According to (Partridge,1992, as cited in Valencia,2003), when parents read nursery rhymes to their children, they contribute to language acquisition through meaningful parent–child interactions and support the development of early reading skills. Moreover greater exposure to printed materials helps children develop interest in reading and fosters a love of reading from an early age.

1.6.3 Cognitive (Brain) Development

The effect of sound and music extends from the auditory system throughout the body to the brain, engaging multiple neural regions. Among these, the brainstem comprising hindbrain and midbrain structures plays a crucial role in early sound perception, analysis, and decoding. In early development, lullabies embody a dynamic prosodic structure that can soothe and catch infants' attention. They also function as emotional conduits for caregivers, while supporting language acquisition, behavioral regulation, and the enhancement of learning and memory. (Papatzikis, 2017)

Researchers observed the electrical activity in the brains of 50 infants at four, seven, and eleven months old while they watched a video of a primary school teacher

singing 18 nursery rhymes to a baby. Low-frequency brainwave signals were processed through a specialized algorithm, which generated a “readout” of the phonological information being encoded. The study revealed that babies gradually develop phonetic encoding during the first year, starting with labial sounds (like “b” in “baby”) and nasal sounds (like “m” in “mummy”), with the readout increasingly resembling adult patterns over time.

Professor Giovanni Di Liberto, a cognitive and computer scientist at Trinity College Dublin and a researcher at the ADAPT Centre, mentioned that “This is the first evidence we have of how many brain activity relates to phonetic information over time in response to continuous speech.” (University of Cambridge ,2023)

1.6.4 Psychological Impact of Nursery Rhymes on Children

Nursery rhymes contribute to early cognitive development through their engagement of several senses simultaneously. As O'Donnell (2023) notes, it is the rhythmical and repetitive nature of the rhymes that helps people remember and memorize. This is good for memory but it is also useful for emotional development because playful speech and music evoke spontaneous joy. And when people dance and sing together, something else is accomplished – ties are made.

1.6.5 The Cultural Significance of Nursery Rhymes

Culture heritage lives on not only through sophisticated means but also through relatively mundane mechanisms such as nursery rhymes. The values, practices and memories pass from one generation to another through the rhymes unnoticed by many people. An example of such is the “Johnny Johnny Yes Papa.” Though the rhyme originated in a certain setting, it has been assimilated into the culture of other nations far away from its birthplace (Kiddale123, 2026).

1.6.6 Developing Creativity Through Nursery Rhymes

Children visualize the falling down of Humpty Dumpty or the hustle and bustle in Old McDonald's farm because nursery rhymes encourage such visualization processes. Repetition also comes into play at this point. When a rhyme is repeatedly sung, like “Wind the Goblin Up,” children are encouraged to create their variations eventually, and such an exercise enhances creativity overall (Bambino Mio, 2023).

Types of Nursery Rhymes

There is no general formula that applies to all nursery rhymes. Some are meant to help a fussy baby fall asleep, while others incorporate mathematical concepts into the fun. Holman and Snyder (2020) present the following classification.

1. Lullabies

The characteristic features of lullabies include softness and slowness because they aim at putting babies to sleep. Popular examples include "Rock-a-bye Baby" and "Hush, Little Baby," and they are appreciated mainly because of their melody and pace but not for the plot they contain.

2. Clapping songs

Here, language finds realization through actions since the song contains a rhythmic pattern created as the singer claps his/her hands along with the sung words. "Pat-a-cake, Pat-a-cake, Baker's Man" is the best-known example.

3. Finger and toe games

Here, we see small gestures accompanying brief verses. "This Little Piggy," dating back to 1760, gives each toe a separate line during the performance of the rhyme.

4. Counting rhymes and songs

Counting is incorporated through rhythmical means and not through teaching explicitly (Eckenstein, 1906). "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe," dated 1805, is a popular example of such a type.

5. Riddle rhymes

These rhymes are focused on a question or small riddle and allow children to think instead of just repeating the rhyme.

6. Fables

Short stories are narrated here to pass some moral lesson in a short verse format. "The Itsy Bitsy Spider," dated 1910, is the story of perseverance told through what seems like nonsensical verse at first sight.

1.8 Arabic Rhymes: An Exploration



Music has always been an important part of humanity's culture, passed down from one generation to another as a sign of cultural continuity. Lullabies are a part of that continuity. When a mother sings lullabies to her child to help him fall asleep, she communicates love, comfort, and security. Each mother may have her own unique song, yet lullabies across cultures share similar themes, even though they differ in language, dialect, and style. Over time, these songs may evolve to match social changes, but they will always remain a lasting tradition as long as people continue to live, sleep, and experience day and night. (Al Jazeera, 2020)

A lullaby is perceived as a traditional or improvised chant that many mothers sing to soothe their children and help them sleep. Mothers throughout history and even prehistory used lullabies to calm their children and lull them to sleep. usually mothers improvise words and sounds that may carry no specific meaning, but through their rhythm and melody they aim to prepare the child for sleep. The history of lullabies dates back about five thousand years, and Sumerian lullabies were known in Iraq since ancient times. (Al-Qashtini, 2016)

Mothers across different cultures share the common practice of singing to children while soothing them to sleep. These lullabies are known as part of the heritage of human culture passed down from generation to generation. They usually have localized content, derived from the local environment of the mother, and are mostly multi-meaningful, expressed in different melodies. The practice is usually done by starting with a strong voice and then gradually lowering it to a whisper as the child falls asleep. (Al Arabiya, 2018)

Section Two

Data Analysis

1.9 The Adopted Model

This study draws upon two related theoretical approaches: Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969) and Hymes' Ethnography of Communication, especially his SPEAKING model (1972). The theory formulated by Searle outlines the role of the speech act, which may be one of many, namely, stating a fact, requesting someone else to do something, committing oneself to take certain actions, revealing one's attitude, or declaring some changes in the affairs. Hymes attends instead to context, mapping the setting, the participants, the purpose of an exchange and the norms that govern it. Read together, the two accounts capture what is said, and equally why it is said and how, locating communication within its social and cultural surroundings.

1.10 Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of English Nursery Rhymes: Speech Act Analysis (Searle's Model)

Speech acts are categorized as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.(Table1,P:11) examines how these speech acts appear in selected English nursery rhymes:

1.**Humpty Dumpty** is mainly consist of assertives, as the speaker describes events and states facts.

2.**Tucked In My Bed** contains mainly assertives and directives, often expressed through gentle instructions or rhetorical questions.

3.**Skidamarink** mostly involve expressives, conveying feelings of love and affection.

Note 1/ See Appendices: (Humpty Dumpty , p: 26 , Tucked In My Bed, p: 26, Skidamarink, p:27)

Table(1)

Nursery Rhyme	Line from the rhyme	Speech Act Types	Explanation
Humpty Dumpty	Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.	Assertive	The speaker states a situation or fact about the character's position.
Humpty Dumpty	Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.	Assertive	Reporting what happened to the character.
Humpty Dumpty	All the king's horses and all the king's men	Assertive	Introduces participants involved in the attempt to solve the problem.
Humpty Dumpty	Couldn't put Humpty together again.	Assertive	It shows that failure is the result
Tucked in My Bed	Tucked in my bed where I'm counting sheep	Assertive	The speaker describes a situation or state (preparing to sleep).

Tucked in My Bed	Until I'm tired and I fall asleep	Assertive	Reports an action and its result.
Tucked in My Bed	And when I do I'll dream you said	Assertive	Expresses a future or imagined state.
Tucked in My Bed	Did you ever see a dragonfly singing a lullaby?	Directive (Question)	A rhetorical question, inviting the listener to imagine things.
Tucked in My Bed	Tucked in your bed	Assertive	Describes the listener's state.
Tucked in My Bed	Did you ever hear a bee buzz a melody?	Directive (Question)	Encourages imaginative thinking and interaction with the listener.
Skidamarink	Skidamarink a dink a dink / Skidamarink a doo	Expressive	Nonsense rhythmic phrases used to maintain beat and melody.
Skidamarink	I love you	Expressive	Direct expression of affection toward the listener.
Skidamarink	I love you in the morning	Expressive	To keep loving and valuing someone over time.
Skidamarink	And in the afternoon	Expressive	Reinforces the emotional message.
Skidamarink	I love you in the evening	Expressive	To convey strong emotions
Skidamarink	And underneath the moon	Expressive	Adds poetic imagery to intensify the feeling of love.

1.10.1 Pragmatic Interpretation of English Rhymes

A. Humpty Dumpty

- 1.The rhyme describes events rather than giving commands or promises.
- 2.Repetition showing us that some events are irreversible and improves children's language skills.



3. There is an implicit meaning that suggests regret or helplessness and teaches a moral lesson.

B. Tucked In My Bed

1. The rhyme focuses mainly on assertive speech acts to describe bedtime activities.
2. Questions encourage children to imagine things, helping them falling asleep.
3. The illocutionary force is soothing, being in bed and listening to the mother creates a peaceful nightly atmosphere.

C. Skidamarink

1. Repetition of loving words emphasizes the depth and sincerity of emotions.
2. The rhyme highlights the close relationship and attachment between mother and child.
3. The rhyme motivates children to express their feelings openly and confidently, teaching them that love can be shown through words and daily interactions.

Note 1/ See Appendices : (Humpty Dumpty , p: 26 ,Tucked In My Bed, p: 26, Skidamarink, p: 27)

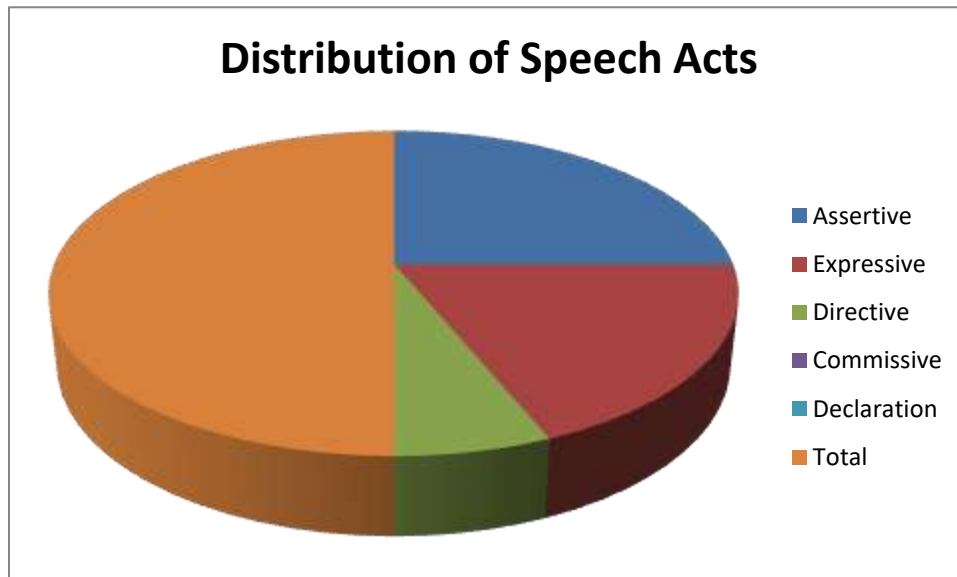
1.10.2 Frequency and Percentage of English Rhymes

The table below and pie chart (p.13) show combined frequency and percentage data from three nursery rhymes: *Humpty Dumpty*, *Tucked In My Bed*, and *Skidamarink*.

Table (2)

Speech Act Type	Frequency	Percentage
Assertive	8	50%
Expressive	6	37.5%
Directive	2	12.5%
Commissive	0	0%
Declaration	0	0%
Total	16	100%

Figure (1)



1.10.3 Interpretation of the Findings

The combined results show that **assertive speech acts are the most frequent (50%)**, indicating that children's rhymes often focus on narration and description of events. **Expressive acts (37.5%)** are also highly present, reflecting the emotional and affectionate nature of children's songs. Moreover, directive acts (12.5%), which appear less often, are used mainly for involving the interlocutor using interrogatives. According to John Searle (1969), this shows that the role of such rhymes is to be narrative and expressive tools and also interactive and imaginative ones to some extent.

1.10.4 Ethnography of Communication Analysis (Hymes's Speaking Model) of English Rhymes

Using Dell Hymes's Speaking framework, each nursery rhyme can be analyzed as a communicative event. The model helps us examine who participates, the setting, purpose, act sequence, tone, instruments, norms, and genre in the use of nursery rhymes.

A. Humpty Dumpty

This rhyme reflects the cultural value of valuing people and things because once they are lost, they may never be restored or fixed. It helps shape children's sense of responsibility from an early age.

B. Tucked In My Bed

The rhyme creates a relaxing bedtime routine in which children may imagine a comfortable bed, a peaceful atmosphere, and loving parents. It also highlights the importance of sleep for children's health and well-being.

C. Skidamarink

This rhyme is full of love and care, planting positive values that may grow later in life. It reflects warmth through love expressions and shows the importance of expressing emotions within family and society.

Note 1/ See Appendices : (Humpty Dumpty ,p:26 .Tucked In My Bed,p:26 , Skidamarink, p: 27)

The table bellow applies Hymes's speaking model to three nursery rhymes: *Humpty Dumpty*, *Tucked In My Bed*, and *Skidamarink*.

Table (3)

Component	Humpty Dumpty	Tucked In My Bed	Skidamarink
S – Setting/Scene	Setting home, classrooms, or playgrounds. Scene : instructional , teaching moral lesson	Setting : Bedtime environment at home. Scene :peaceful	Setting : homes, preschools, or playgroups Scene: loving ,emotional
P – Participants	Speaker: parent/teacher/storyteller. Audience: children.	Speaker: parents or caregiver. Listener: child who is being prepared for sleep.	Speaker: parent, teacher, or caregiver. Listener: children
E – Ends (Purpose)	Entertainment, language learning, rhythm development, and possibly	To prepare children for sleep, entertain,	To express love, entertain children, and

	conveying a moral lesson about consequences.	and stimulate imagination.	encourage emotional bonding.
A – Act Sequence	Narrative sequence: Humpty sits on a wall → he falls → attempts are made to fix him → the attempts are in vain.	The speaker describes bedtime routine → preparing the child for sleep → imaginative bedtime questions	Rhythmic nonsense words → expression of love → repetition across different times of the day
K – Key (Tone)	Serious	Gentle, calming, and playful.	Cheerful, emotional, and playful.
I – Instrumentalities	Oral storytelling or singing; simple repetitive language and rhyme scheme.	Oral recitation or singing as a lullaby with rhythmic language.	Singing or chanting with rhythm and sometimes hand movements or gestures.
N – Norms	To entertain and children while teaching a moral lesson.	To comfort children at bedtime.	To express deep feelings
G – Genre	Nursery rhyme /Riddle , folk	Nursery rhyme / lullaby.	Nursery rhyme / love song.

1.11 Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of the Arabic Rhymes : Speech Act Analysis (Searle's Model)

Speech acts are categorized as assertives, directives, and expressives, among others. The three Arabic rhymes (1 – أمي ما أغلاها , 2 – نظيف نظيف, and 3 – الوردة البيضاء) contain a combination of these speech acts, reflecting their different communicative purposes:

Rhyme 1 – نظيف نظيف emphasizes assertive acts to encourage children to maintain cleanliness.

Rhyme 2 – أمي ما أغلاها relies mainly on expressive and assertive acts to convey love, appreciation, and emotional attachment.

Rhyme 3 – الوردة البيضاء combines assertive, directive, and expressive acts to teach children healthy habits and gratitude.

Note 1/ See Appendices : (الوردة البيضاء , امي ما اغلاها , نظيف نظيف) p:28)

The table below presents an analysis of the speech acts found in selected Arabic nursery rhymes:

Table (4)

Rhyme	Line from the Rhyme	Speech Act Type	Explanation
نظيف – نظيف	مرحبا، مرحبا أنا نظيف	Assertive	The speaker introduces himself and states a quality (being clean).
نظيف – نظيف	أنا صديق الأطفال اللطيف	Assertive	Describes a friendly relationship with children and expresses friendliness.
نظيف – نظيف	بلعب معكم بمرح معكم ما بنسى أمر التنظيف	Assertive	Describes playing happily while indirectly reminding children about cleanliness.
نظيف – نظيف	في مدرستي / داخل صفي / أنا في المتجر	Assertive	Identifies places where cleanliness is practiced.
نظيف – نظيف	بكل مكان أنا نظيف	Assertive	States that cleanliness is maintained everywhere.
نظيف – نظيف	مع أصحابي / مع إخواني / مع جيراني	Assertive	Describes social situations connected with cleanliness.
نظيف – نظيف	مع كل حال أنا نظيف	Assertive	States that the speaker remains clean in all circumstances.

نظيف 1 – نظيف	لما بلعب / لما باكل	Assertive	Implies that children should remain clean during daily activities.
نظيف 1 – نظيف	بكل أحوالي نظيف	Assertive	Emphasizes constant cleanliness in all situations.
نظيف 1 – نظيف	جوة الباص / وفي السيارة / وفي الطيارة	Assertive	Mentions transportation settings where cleanliness is maintained.
نظيف 1 – نظيف	وين ما أكون أنا نظيف	Assertive	Reinforces the idea of always being clean everywhere.
نظيف 1 – نظيف	نظيف نظيف	Assertive	Repetition emphasizing the theme of cleanliness and identity.
أمي 2 – أمي ما أغلاها	أمي أمي ما أغلاها	Expressive	The speaker expresses deep appreciation and affection for the mother.
أمي 2 – أمي ما أغلاها	يفرح قلبي حين أراها	Expressive	Shows the speaker's emotional happiness when seeing the mother.
أمي 2 – أمي ما أغلاها	هي تهواني أنا أهواها	Expressive	States the mutual love between the child and the mother.
أمي 2 – أمي ما أغلاها	أدعوري أن يرعاها	Expressive	Expresses a wish or prayer for the mother's well-being.
الوردة 3 – البيضاء	اني وردة بيضاء شكلي جميل	Assertive	The speaker describes herself metaphorically as a beautiful white flower.
الوردة 3 – البيضاء	يامحلا جمالي لمن اميل	Expressive	Expresses admiration and appreciation of beauty.
الوردة 3 – البيضاء	يا اطفال يا حلوين اشربو الحليب	Directive	The speaker gives advice encouraging children to drink milk.
الوردة 3 – البيضاء	للصحة والقوى اسالو طبيب	Directive	Urges children to seek medical advice for health and strength.
الوردة 3 – البيضاء	اشرب على مهلك واشكر الله	Directive	Advises proper behavior and gratitude.
الوردة 3 – البيضاء	لازم تشكر ربك ابدًا ما تنساه	Directive	Instructs children to always thank God.



الوردة – 3 البيضاء	والحمد لله والشكر لله	Expressive	Expresses gratitude and praise to God.
-----------------------	--------------------------	------------	--

1.11.1 Pragmatic Interpretation of Arabic Nursery Rhymes:

Rhyme 1 – نظيف نظيف

- The rhyme mainly uses assertive speech acts to describe the character's behavior and identity as a clean person.
- The repeated speech act of saying “نظيف نظيف” is a performative speech act that emphasizes the importance of keeping clean as an important behavior among children. Therefore, the illocutionary act as a whole serves to promote hygienic awareness among children.

Rhyme 2 – أمي ما أغلاها

- The rhyme contains expressive speech acts that show love, gratitude for mothers emphasize their importance in children's lives.
- The rhyme reflects the child's heartfelt joy in the mother's presence.
- The final line introduces a prayer-like statement, reflecting cultural and religious values related to respecting and caring for parents.

Rhyme 3 – الوردة البيضاء

- The rhyme combines assertive speech acts (describing beauty), directives (giving advice about health and behavior), and expressives (showing gratitude).
- The dominant illocutionary force is instructional, guiding children toward healthy habits that contribute to good health and a positive appearance.
- The repeated references to thanking God highlight religious and cultural values within the communication.

Note 1/ See Appendices : (الوردة البيضاء , أمي ما أغلاها , نظيف نظيف) : p:28

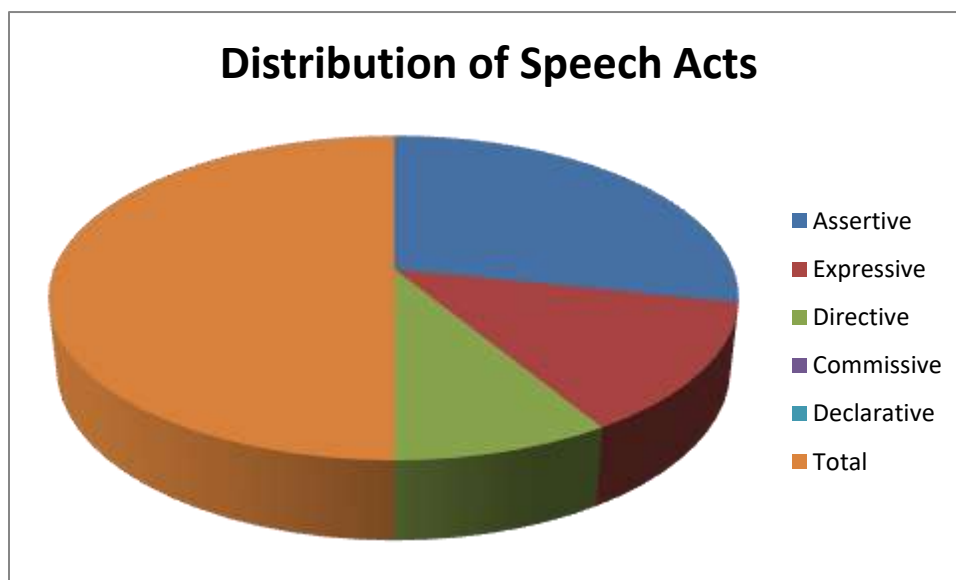
1.11.2 Frequency and Percentage of Arabic Rhymes

The following table and pie chart present the combined frequency and percentage data from three Arabic nursery rhymes.

Table (5)

Speech Act Type	Frequency	Percentage
Assertive	13	56.5%
Expressive	6	26.1%
Directive	4	17.4%
Commissive	0	0%
Declarative	0	0%
Total	23	100%

Figure(2)



1.11.3 Interpretation of the Findings

The combined analysis of the Arabic rhymes shows that assertive speech acts are the most frequent (56.5%), indicating that the rhymes mainly describe behaviors, states, and daily routines such as cleanliness, self-description, and social interaction. Expressive acts (26.1%) also appear frequently, reflecting emotional content such as love, admiration, happiness, and gratitude. Directive acts (17.4%) occur in instructional lines that encourage children to adopt good habits like hygiene, drinking milk, seeking advice, and thanking God. Commissive (0%) and declarative (0%) acts are not present.

1.11.4 Ethnography of Communication Analysis (Hymes' Speaking Model) of Arabic Nursery Rhymes

Using the Speaking framework proposed by Dell Hymes, the communicative events of the three rhymes can be analyzed individually as follows:

Rhyme 1 – نظيف نظيف

The rhyme functions as an educational tool in which being clean is presented as an essential value to implement in children's minds. The rhyme motivates children to practice cleanliness everywhere, helping them become strong and healthy while promoting one of the important values in society. It may also increase children's curiosity about personal hygiene.

Rhyme 2 – أمي أمي ما أغلاها

Loving one's mother is one of the natural instincts we all have, and the rhyme highlights how precious and important she is. Asking God to protect her reflects religious and cultural values, while the lyrics are filled with love and emotion, encouraging children to realize their mother's importance.

Rhyme 3 – الوردة البيضاء

From a socio-pragmatic perspective, the rhyme functions as an educational tool that teaches children to appreciate beauty, love and care for themselves, and value the blessings God has given them. Through simple language and repetition, it encourages gratitude to God for everything we have while reinforcing important social and moral values within society.

The table below applies Hymes's speaking model to three nursery rhymes: نظيف نظيف , أمي أمي ما أغلاها , الوردة البيضاء,

Table (6)

Component	نظيف نظيف	أمي أمي ما أغلاها	الوردة البيضاء
S – Setting/Scene	Setting Educational environments such as schools, classrooms, homes. Scene	Setting: schools, homes, or children's celebrations. Scene: Highly	Setting :Educational or family contexts such as schools, homes, or children's



	:Practical, instructional (focused on hygiene)	affective , emotional.	programs. Scene :Descriptive, aesthetic context.
P – Participants	Speaker: teacher, parent , Audience: children.	Speaker: child or student. Listener: teacher, classmates, or family members.	Speaker: teacher, narrator, or child character (the white flower). Audience: children.
E – Ends (Purpose)	To teach children the importance of cleanliness and hygiene in everyday life.	To express love and appreciation for mothers and reinforce family values.	To teach children healthy habits, encourage drinking milk, and reinforce gratitude toward God.
A – Act Sequence	Introduction of the clean character → description of positive behavior → repetition across different places and situations.	Praise of the mother → expression of happiness when seeing her → statement of mutual love → prayer for her protection.	Self-description of the flower → addressing children → giving health advice → encouraging gratitude and praise.
K – Key (Tone)	Cheerful, playful, and educational.	Warm, emotional	Cheerful, instructive, and encouraging.
I – Instrumentalities	Singing or chanting with rhythm and repetition, often accompanied by gestures or visuals.	Recitation or singing in a rhythmic poetic style.	Singing or rhythmic recitation with simple language suitable for children.
N – Norms	Cultural norm of teaching children good habits such as hygiene and cleanliness.	Cultural norm of teaching children to respect and appreciate their	Cultural norms promoting healthy living, respect for guidance, and gratitude to God.

		parents, especially mothers.	
G – Genre	Children's educational rhyme / song.	Children's rhyme / educational poem.	Educational nursery rhyme / children's song.

1.12 Conclusions

Nursery rhymes in Arabic and English amount to considerably more than songs for amusing children; they function as instruments of instruction and communication that bear directly on a child's emotional, social, linguistic and cultural development. Assertive utterances within these rhymes cluster most often around depictions of daily routine, habitual conduct and the texture of everyday social interaction. Directive speech acts pull in a different direction: they work to instil values the community judges worthy, whether obedience, generosity or diligence. The expressive acts capture the emotional tone of the verses. The expressions of love, respect, and sometimes even sadness are compacted into forms memorable enough for a child rather than an adult audience. With regard to Hymes's SPEAKING approach when considering this data, there is one more element which becomes apparent: the context, people involved in the activity, and social norms inherent in each rhyme are very much in line with the values and ways of communication practiced by the culture that created them. There are some aspects which are highlighted differently in the Arabic corpus compared to the English corpus, but the principle stays the same for both of them – that of socializing through a form known to the child before they know what they are being socialized into.

References

- Al Arabiya. (2018, April 3). *ماذا غنت لك أمك عندما كنت طفلاً؟*
<https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2018/04/03/ماذا-غنت-لك-أمك-عندما-كنت-طفلاً؟>
- Al Jazeera. (2020, April 22). *التهوية العربية: أغاني الأمهات*.
<https://www.aljazeera.net/women/2020/4/22/التهوية-العربية-أغاني-الأمهات>
- Al-Qashtini, K. (2016). *أول تهوية*. Asharq Al-Awsat.
<https://aawsat.com/home/article/736681/أول-تهوية-خالد-القشطيني>
- Armstrong, A. (2021, January 27). *The importance of nursery rhymes for children's development*. The Old Station Nursery.

<https://www.theoldstationnursery.co.uk/journal/the-importance-of-nursery-rhymes-for-childrens-development/>

Baldwin, E. (n.d.). *Nursery rhyme*. Poem Analysis. Retrieved February 27, 2026, from <https://poemanalysis.com/genre/nursery-rhyme/>

Bambino Mio. (2023, October 23). *The role of nursery rhymes in language development*. <https://www.bambinomio.co.uk/blogs/baby/the-role-of-nursery-rhymes-in-language-development>

Campbell, J. (2023). *Nursery rhyme*. EBSCO Research Starters. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/nursery-rhyme>

Eckenstein, L. (1906). *Comparative studies in nursery rhymes*. [Publisher].

Golden, M. (2023, July 19). *The importance of nursery rhymes in reading development*. Growing in Literacy. <https://growinginliteracy.com/importance-of-nursery-rhymes>

Holman, B., & Snyder, M. (2020, January 29). *Nursery rhymes: All kinds*. ThoughtCo. <https://www.thoughtco.com/nursery-rhymes-of-all-kinds-2725449>

Janabergenova, Z. (2024). *The linguistic and cultural analysis of traditional nursery rhymes in English folklore* [Doctoral dissertation, Karakalpak State University n.a. Berdakh]. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14270677>

Kiddale123. (2026). *The psychology of nursery rhymes: Why they stick in our minds*. <https://kiddale123.com/blogs/musical-interactive-books/the-psychology-of-nursery-rhymes-why-they-stick-in-our-minds>

Mallett, E. (2022). *The importance of nursery rhymes*. EdShed Blog. Retrieved March 16, 2026, from <https://blog.edshed.com/the-importance-of-nursery-rhymes/>

O'Donnell, A. L. (2023, November 8). *The benefits of nursery rhymes for children*. Practical Outcomes. <https://practicaloutcomes.edu.au/benefits-nursery-rhymes-children/>

Papatzikis, E. (2017). The educational neuroscience perspective of ABR and lullabies: Setting up an infant's brain development study. *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education*, 8(3).

Rausch-Molnar, L. (2024). English nursery rhymes in the U.S.: The importance of cultural aspects in education. *AMERICANA E-journal of American Studies in Hungary*, 20, 79–88. <https://doi.org/10.14232/americana.2024.2.79-88>

University of Cambridge. (2023, November 30). *Why reading nursery rhymes and singing to babies may help them to learn language*. University of Cambridge News. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/why-reading-nursery-rhymes-and-singing-to-babies-may-help-them-to-learn-language>

Valencia, L. J. (2003). *Are nursery rhymes/chants helpful in pre-reading skills for kindergarteners and English as a second language students?* [Master's thesis]. Scholar Works Repository. (Theses Digitization Project No. 2428)