

## Original Research Article

**Challenges in Examining the Children's Poems Rhythms  
(Case Study: Nursery Rhymes and Contemporary Poets' Children's Poems)\***Hossein Ghanbariahmadabad<sup>1\*\*</sup>**1. Assistant Professor, Faculty of Music, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran.**

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**Abstract****Problem statement:** Meter and rhythm in children's poems have caused severe debates among researchers, as these multiple perceptions affect contemporary children's poems.**Research objective:** : Investigating the rhythmic aspects of children's poems and the factors that have caused different opinions on children's poems. Some children's poems are prosodic, and others are syllabic.**Research method:** This research applied a quantitative-qualitative, descriptive-analytical method using library resources; in the first step, it deals with the reasons for the different views and the upcoming challenges. The second step is to study the conventional rhythmic models. It specifies children's poems. The experimental phase of the research examined 300 children's poems by contemporary and written children's poems.**Conclusion:** Different opinions on children's poems and nursery rhymes are rooted in the following issues:

- 1) Poems' statistical community includes diverse types of poems that do not follow the same rule.
- 2) Researchers have ignored spoken language and noticeable differences in long and short syllables.
- 3) Some have not considered the difference between practical and theoretical values, i.e., the difference between the speakers' reading and the expected values in the theories.

**Keywords:** *Children's Rhythms, Meter, Nursery Rhymes, Rhythm.***Introduction**

Children's poetry or nursery rhymes have several meanings. Sometimes, nursery rhymes are a type of poem written for children. With such an application, any formal structure, both prosodic and non-prosodic, can be considered. However, the interpretations that exist in most research also consider a formal difference for children's poems,

consider it a subset of folk poems, and consider the descriptions of folk poetry to be generalizable to children's poems. Folk poems and classical prosody poems are different in three aspects:

- 1) Themes
- 2) Compliance and non-compliance with classical prosody rules
- 3) Sources (written or oral)

In the description of the poems above, there are different points of view about rhythm and meter. Some researchers consider folk poems to have a prosaic meter, in which the poet has more

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\*\* Corresponding Author: ghanbari\_hosein90@yahoo.com, +989120246753

freedom or applies a new approach. Some consider them fundamentally different from prosodic examples (and syllabic-stress type) and consider new analysis methods.

As a result of the different opinions mentioned above, the contemporary child poets also had different interpretations, and even some of them, such as Mustafa Rahmadoost and Shokoh Ghasem-Nia, have followed the rules of formal prose poetry. Some other examples have such a meter change that it is challenging to consider their prosody. Now the question is, what is the origin of the difference in views, and what patterns describe the rhythm and meter of children's poems? The current research assumes that factors such as the diverse statistical population and ignoring syllable practical and theoretical values have led to differences.

## Research Background

The first folk poem research related to Zhukovsky is Elvel-Sutton's about prosody, also mentioned by Natal Khanleri (Khanleri, 1994; Elwell -Sutton, 1976). Khanleri, Tabari, and Adib Toosi have mentioned the role of accent in making Persian poems rhythmic. Khanleri considers the folk poem meter prosaic and points to the accent concept in poems to justify the meter variety. From his point of view, relying on some words makes the poem rhythmic, and this framework can explain cases of deviation from classical prosody. On the other hand, he considers each stanza's syllable numbers to be the second most crucial factor in Meter. According to him, in the vernacular, an unstressed syllable may be read as long, fast, and short (Khanleri, 1948). Ehsan Tabari also works based on the syllabic-accent principle and considers short Meters of three to six syllables and longer meters of up to eleven. The factor of being balanced is the equality of syllables (Tabari, 1980). Adib Tusi believes that Persian folk meter poetry does not derive from Arabic prose, and the number and accent balance and, secondly,

the value of syllables play a role in making these poems rhythmic. So, in his view, the meter rule is based on syllables. Of course, he considers the role of seizure or pause but does not specify its exact role (Tusi, 1953).

In contrast to Khanleri and Tabari's theories, Vahidian Kamkar found Persian folk meter prosaic and does not consider the role of reliance effective in Persian poetry. This researcher believes that Persian folk poetry is also prosodic, that a poet's freedom is much more significant in folk poetry, and that the long and short syllable positions can be changed. However, the vowel number in each stanza is equal (Vahidian Kamiyar, 1978). In contrast to Vahidian Kamkar, Omid Tabibzadeh rejects previous theories about prosody and works based on pauses in his method. He introduces the pausing factor in the poem's rhythm, and for a short pause, he has marked | and for a more extended break ||

He has demonstrated each syllable has a \_ sign intersecting folk poems. For example, "Atal Mattel Tul Le Mattal" in the form \_ \_ | \_ \_ || \_ \_ \_ \_ . However, he does not specify the dependent syllables and the quality of the syllables in this method. Tabibzadeh finds formulas for the folk poem meters without considering each syllable's duration and accent.

It is necessary to mention

According to him, the researchers mentioned above have yet to specify a precise criterion for poetic authority and deviation from classical prose (Tabibzadeh, 2003).

Fatemi's theory also aims to eliminate the deficiencies related to classical prose in folk poetry readings. He accepts Vahidian Kamkar's theory about prosody. However, he has adapted Constantin Brillo's "children's rhythms" theory in Iranian folk (and children's) poems. In Brillo's theory, binary divisions dominate, and ternary divisions are less common. Fatemi presents a general pattern of 8 syllables with other variations, in which triplets are dominant (instead of binary in Braillo's writings)

and can adapt to the 6/ 8 time. Fatemi coordinates the movement of syllables with the ability of pre-made forms (Fatemi, 2003).

Each previous research study dealt with a specific aspect of folk poetry: sometimes ideas are compatible. For example, it is possible to match Fatimi's widely used eight-beat models with Tabibzadeh's four-beat lines. Some folk poems can adapt to classical prose. It seems that to find out the difference's origins, research should consider three aspects:

- 1) The patterns modeling has to use a diverse statistical community.
- 2) Paying attention to the syllables duration and its difference in spoken language and poetic language based on laboratory research.
- 3) taking into account the differences in rhythm from a practical and theoretical view's point. In other words, A study has to consider the natural musical rhythm. For this reason, the study has focused on these three aspects.

## Research Method

To examine the origin of different opinions on discussed patterns, the researcher used a quantitative-qualitative method. This study has three phases:

- 1) First, the descriptive-analytical method was used to investigate the metric factors. The statistical collection included 300 samples and two poem categories. First, the poems are from contemporary poets such as Mustafa Rahmandost, Shekoh Ghasem-Niya, Abbas Yamini Sharif, Rudabah Hamzai, Mahmoud Kianoosh, and secondly, the collected books of Baghcheban.

The reason for choosing contemporary children's poets is that they are available and written to expand the statistical community. There are different types of reading oral children's rhymes in the statistical society, which raises the error. On the other hand, there are many similar features between contemporary poems and nursery rhymes. The most important similarities are the preference for metric

square structures, the typical audience is children, rare prosodic structures (like Motefaelon), different readings from classical poetry language, and the presence of meaningless and merely melodious words. Due to the reasons above, children's poems can be used in addition to motels to expand the statistical population.

The study examines the selected poems from the classical perspective prosody, a more common pattern in children's poetry.

- 2) In the second part, the duration of the syllables and the difference between spoken and poetic language are discussed in laboratory research. Noteworthy, the root of some differences is the difference in poetry's colloquial and official dialect.
- 3) In the third part, the inconsistency of theoretical and practical values is discussed concerning two children's poems. These two examples of poetry have been converted to music using Cubase and Melodyne software. To obtain experimental samples, the study asked some speakers with Tehrani accents to read the poems. In converting the read samples to rhythm, the study did not use the quantization tool because the purpose was to show the difference between theoretical and practical expected levels. The speakers sing at a relatively fixed and moderate tempo during several recordings to obtain reliable samples.

### • Extracting rhythmic patterns in the Statistical community of children's poems

As previously discussed, some researchers consider children's poems generally prosodic or non-prosodic (of the syllabic-stress type). Some researchers advocate a non-prosodic approach (syllabic-based) when faced with examples of violations in prose or try to justify all cases in prose when faced with examples contrary to poetic options in classical prose. Sometimes, studies need help justifying precise proportions, and they blame classical prosodic rules rather than the changing nature of rhythm. According to the analysis of the poetry samples of this writing, in children's and folk poems, square metric cycles (quadruple with

repetition of two columns) are used more than hexagonal and octagonal bahrs (six and eight). Hazaj, Ramel, and Rajaz are used more in the rhythmic cycles. Among the Rajaz rhythmic cycles, poets have widely used the square forms such as Makhbon Rajz and the square Salem Rajaz. The study scope shows that square Raml is used more often (Faalat, Faelon), and Raml Salem rhythmic cycle (Faelaton, faelaton) is standard. Here are some examples. Bahr-e- Rajz-e- Morabba-e- Salem is (Mostafelon, Mostafelon). Rudabah Hamzai has written in Hazaj square rhythmic cycle form (Mafaelon, Mafael).

Another poem by Mahmoud Kianoush is in Raml Morabba (Makfoof Mahzuf Faelaton Faelon). Of course, hexagons are also standard. For example, the poem is written by Abbas Yamini Sharif in Bahr Masads (Bahr-e- Hazaj Masads Mahzuf)- (Mafaelon, Mafaelon, Faulon).

All children's poems cannot fit the entire poem in a specific rhythmic cycle. Some of them have many sea changes. For this reason, they do not adapt to the framework of a classic poem without changing the rhythmic cycle. Some of the changes are so much that rules defined in the prose books cannot justify them. For example, the syllables will not be equal if we read the following poem in the Mafulo Faelaton rhythmic cycle. Azarmakan and Nejati have discussed that each verse has a different rhythmic cycle (Azarmakan & Najati Jaza, 2015). In the following poem by Ghasem-Niya (2012), there are many rhythmic cycle changes, and there is a need for exceptions in the use of prosody. Fig. 1 shows the syllables below.

Analyzing the mentioned poems reveals that it is incompatible with poetical exceptions accepted in prose books. For example, the drawn syllable "Goft" in the last line has no consonant with "Re." Such poems are prosodic, with several exceptions. However, the successive changes of the rhythmic cycle and deviation from the usual exceptions poet make it challenging to place it in the framework of classical prose. However, these poems also have

features that are similar to classic examples. The common feature of the question-answer mode is that they are pairs. In other words, the poets have widely used the square and short types among classical poems, and the seizures divide the sections into equal parts; such poems are similar to musical periods. For example, it is possible to obtain rhythmic cycles of Mostafalon Faulon/Mostafalon Faulon, Mafulo Faelaton, and Mafulo Faelaton/Mafaelon Mafael, which are many changes in the rhythmic cycle. However, there is still the square rule of question and answer. This phenomenon is similar to fundamental periods in music that follow binary divisions (Kuregian, 2017).

Therefore, most children's poems discussed use Ramal, Hazaj, and Rajaz's rhythmic cycles of the square type (not octagonal and hexagonal). Some poems are outside the category of classical prosody, and their syllables are longer or shorter than expected. Some of the readings are outside the rule of the poetical language, but the square rule is still valid.

#### • Paying attention to the syllable's duration and the difference between spoken language and formal poetry language

In the link between poetry and music, researchers consider the difference between long and short syllables, and it is assumed to match long syllables with long durations (for example, quarter notes) and

دی	ش	زرگ	ب	گه	می	مان	ما
خواب	ب	ها	تن	ر	ب	دت	خو
دم	بو	چیک	کو	من	که	کی	کاش
لام	حا	ن	سن	از	تر	چیک	کو
کرد	می	بم	خوا	مان	ما	که	تا
بام	با	رام	ب	گفت	می	صه	قص

Fig. 1. Showing the syllables of Ghasem Nia's poem. Source: Azarmakan & Najati Jaza, 2015.

short syllables with short durations (for example, eighth notes). In contrast, laboratory studies show no noticeable difference between short and long syllables in today’s spoken language. Ignoring the spoken language difference resulted in a paradox in prosody. On the other hand, some children’s poems include meaningless and purely melodious syllables that do not follow the division of short and long syllables in formal poetry.

In Table 1, the right column shows the amount of stretching in seconds, and the left column shows the syllable type. To indicate consonants such as (b, p, t, s), the symbol c is used for the short vowel v ( \_ \_ \_ ) and the long vowel V (a, e, o). This way, cv symbols are used for the syllables of the Mu, cV for Bu, cVc for the Bough, and cvc for the Tab. There was a noticeable difference between the length of long and short syllables in the past and formal poetry. However, current laboratory studies do not show such a distinction.

This laboratory study reveals no difference in the duration of Be and Bi words. This distinction is essential in the connection between poetry and music, and some books consider the former eighth and the latter quarter notes. At the same time, the time ratio of both is 0.16 a second and, therefore, equal. Of course, this duration can be slightly different for different speakers; for example, it may be 0.18 instead of 0.16, but these durations are close.

In a nutshell, there is a difference between folk

and some children’s poems regarding language and classical poetry. This issue resulted in challenges in folk poems and their adaptation to prosodic meters. As a result, the rhythm obtained in reading folk poems sometimes needs to match the prosody. In the case of children’s poems, many poets have a prosody framework in mind. However, the spoken language sometimes replaces prosody elements with each other and reads long and short syllables instead of each other. For example, the poet may have the rhythmic cycle in mind, but according to popular reading, he considers short and long syllables to be the same.

• **Timing problems in displaying music rhythm and converting prosodic meters into note durations**

Converting prosodic meters to Athanine and rhythm accurately presents many challenges. Many studies have used precise mathematical ratios to connect poetry and music. However, this research will show that Persian speakers perform poems with different ratios than eight, quarter, and sixteenth notes. The differences must be addressed even in a conventional simple or combined scale, assuming accurate placement. This difference has sometimes led researchers to conclude that prosody is ineffective in describing rhythm. Fatemi points out the limitation of prosody in the rhythmic cycle of Mostafalon Faolon. He gives two examples that show different durations despite the same rhythmic cycle (Fatemi, 2003). According to the reading of this poem in the custom of current speakers, Fatemi probably considers the first one to be of the type of 2n quadruple divisions and the second one to be close to the 3x2n triole. However, the issue is that the ratios must be mathematically accurate when reading non-quantized poetry and music (not manipulated by computer tools). The difference is enormous in some cases. The following experiment in two poems will illustrate the issue.

As discussed above, the usual assumption in rhythm analysis is that the stretching of notes in music follows precise mathematical ratios. For example,

Table 1. From Mousavi's research on stretching words shows these syllables. Source: Mousavi, 2011.

Syllabic Structure	Vowels
cVcc	0.20
Cvcc	0.20
cVc	0.21
Cvc	0-22
cV	0.16
Cv	0.16

the eight-note duration is half of the quarter note. There is an assumption of rhythmic accuracy in converting short, long, and long syllables. For example, the syllable “Bi” eighth note equals a quarter note, and “Kasht” is equivalent to a dotted quarter tone. The attitude of accurate and correct rhythmic ratios is also present in Western music to a large extent. Sometimes, musicians make exceptions when adapting theoretical duration to practical durations. For example, musicians and theoreticians in “swing” music, rather than using equal durations for quarter tones, consider long-short with a ratio of 2 to 1 (triolet) to achieve the character of this music genre. However, laboratory research on swing and other rhythms shows that note durations do not follow the exact durations.

The swing studies based on performance illuminate that the ratios are entirely variable, different, and sometimes even close to 3. 5 to 1. One of the studies shows that different musicians perform different ratios in the swing at different tempos (Friber & Sundstrom, 2002). Thus, the usual idea of the triolet ratio regarding the deviations from the expected mathematical values mentioned above is striking. The swing example shows how different the expected values can be in practice. As a result, there is a significant difference in reading the poems compared to the previous examples. The current study has converted two poems into notes with natural reading. The poems are two examples taken from the glory of Ghasem-Niya in the Daman Chin Chin collection. According to Atanin, the rhythmic cycle is the repetition of the quarter tone/ eighth rhythm. If we also consider the metric simplicity constraints, we will have the following pattern: a rhythmic two-bar cell (Fig.2).

Fig. 3 originates from the precise notation of reading the same poem. To prepare the following example, the sample audio file was first recorded with the MIDI controller in the Qbase software. Then, the experiment has adapted the output to the Sibelius software. The following example shows

deviations from the above-simplified pattern. Fig. 3 shows that caesuras or interruptions occur as expected. In even amounts, but the short-long pattern in many cases is simple mathematical ratios  $2n \{2, 4, 8, 16\}$ , Simple measures or  $3 \times 2n \{3, 6, 12, 24\}$  in compound bars.

The following poem from Ghasem-Niya has a similar rhythmic cycle structure, but there are deviations in the syllable’s durations in the reading. The tested speakers pronounced the syllable “A” in the second line longer and pronounced “Rah” with “Baran” faster. An example of the notation of this poem as a result of reading is shown in Fig.4.



Fig. 2. Mostafalon Faulon's Rhythmic Cycle. Source: Authors.

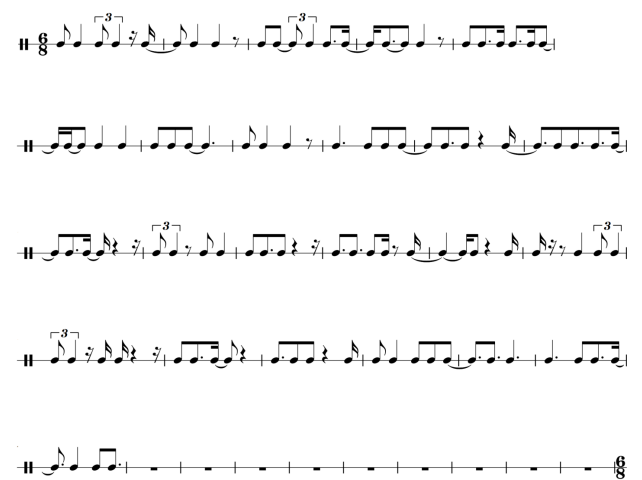


Fig. 3. The rhythm performance by the speaker's words in the poem "Aloo Maman, Kojae?". Source: Authors.



Fig. 4. Showing the rhythm of the performance of the poem "Ghatar Ghatar". Source: Authors.

The above examples analysis identifies several issues. First, the poem syllable ratios do not follow the exact expected durations. For this reason, it is natural that these poems' meters sometimes do not correspond to the usually fixed meters. The second point is that sometimes the same syllable is pronounced longer or shorter in the same syllable. Therefore, a normative rule derived from prosody cannot adapt to a precise notation. The third point is that there can be several different readings of a fixed phrase and even a fixed poem in folk poems, and the results will be completely different. Each tool invented in the analysis, whether in classical prose or newer analysis methods, such as Tabibzadeh, Fatemi, and Tusi, determines aspects of the poems. However, they cannot reflect all the details. The origin of different opinions on theories is rooted in the rhythm's variable nature, which has yet to receive much attention.

## Finding

This essay aims to find the origin of the difference in views toward children's poems and to explain patterns for describing these poems. The reason for the different theories is the diversity in the statistical community, which includes a wide range of poems. These perceptions appear in contemporary child poets who have different approaches. Some examples could be more justifiable, even prosaic, with the changing rhythmic cycles and the poetic prosodic freedoms. Therefore, the generalization of a rule to all poems brings contradictions. The second reason for the differences is the classical methodology, which does not make a difference between practical and theoretical syllable duration. Most authors consider all short syllables the same (equivalent to an eighth note) in the poetry and music connection. The third reason for different viewpoints is the need for more attention to spoken language in that researchers sometimes need to pay more attention to the fact that in

the currently spoken language, long and short syllables do not have noticeable differences (as in classical prosody). According to the analysis of this writing, three categories of poems are:

1) Prosodic poems that include most of the scope.  
2) accentual-syllabic poems that follow rhythmic rules.

3) Intermediate poems are justified by appealing to many exceptions to poetic freedoms. The examples of children's poems A and C are in the category of Bahr Raml, Hazaj, and Rajaz, as well as their variations. However, there are also differences with conventional classical prosody poems:

1) the difference between the rhythmic cycle used in children's poems and classical examples is that the classical examples are octagonal and hexagonal (six and eight). However, the children's rhyme examples are shorter and often square (four parts).

2) In many classical examples, the rhythmic cycle is constant throughout a poem or book. For example, Ferdowsi's Shahnameh rhythmic cycle is Faulon Faulon Faulon Faul. Despite this, folk poets have used many rhythmic cycles beyond poetical freedoms in classical prosody.

3) Changing the temporal syllable durations and unconventional word reading: The reason for this issue can be seen in the more accessible reading and meaninglessness of some expressions in children's poetry. In other words, in children's poetry, sometimes the word's rhythms replace the meaning, so it is easier to distort the reading of the syllables. Another issue in using short and long syllables is the variable nature of words. The essay has illuminated that note durations are relatively variable. In the case of children's rhymes and poems, this phenomenon happened, too. The second and third parts of the essay showed that spoken language has similar long and short syllables. Secondly, rhythm is far from the expected category in prosody, and it changes the rhythmic constraints and tone of speech.

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