

**LATIP 2021****International Conference on Language and Technology in the Interdisciplinary Paradigm****ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' CREATIVE TEXTS IN A  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES**

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ak.tarabakina@mail.ru**Abstract**

Assessment of creative texts in a foreign language presents a methodological challenge as creativity is difficult to measure, which is further complicated by absence of a common set of assessment criteria for creative works. However, creative texts, as any outcome of learning activity, require assessing. Accordingly, the author developed an assessment method for creative texts in a foreign language basing on three principles: a multi-criteria approach to measuring the quality of creative works; assessment objectivity and absence of unconstructive criticism; focus on formative assessment. The major goal of formative assessment lies in forming self-evaluation and self-reflection skills. The study outlines four types of assessment: self-assessment; mutual assessment in pairs or small groups (3-4 students); reviewing; "writers' conference". The necessary conditions for method implementation are detailed. The most essential condition presupposes that a teacher should contribute to students' awareness of a creative text being individual and subjective. A survey was conducted among 3rd and 4th year students majoring in Linguistics at the Department for the Humanities at Novosibirsk State Technical University in order to reveal students' attitude towards assessing creative texts and identify optimal assessment forms. The survey has shown that all respondents have a negative attitude to assessing creative texts using a 5-mark grading scale. The majority of respondents (70%) highlighted comments as the best assessment tool; the remaining 30% preferred a combination of comments and points which are scored according to certain criteria. Further interview revealed that the majority of students consider assessment of creative works indispensable.

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*Keywords:* Assessment of creative texts in a foreign language, creativity, creative writing, writing in a foreign language

## 1. Introduction

Assessing creative works is one of the most complicated issues in teaching foreign languages. On the one hand, there are no common criteria for assessing creativity. On the other hand, fear of receiving a low grade may negatively influence the creative process and impede creative writing significantly. It is the problem of assessing creative writing that leads to diminished use of creative writing potential by teachers. However, students' creative texts in a foreign language, along with other types of outcomes of learning activity, require assessing. Thus, Wolfrum (2010) underlines that assessment of creative works guarantees that creative writing is taken seriously by both teachers and students (Wolfrum, 2010, p. 71). In addition, he points out that assessment boosts motivation to write creative texts (Wolfrum, 2010, p. 63).

Creative writing, as defined by Spinner (2001), is a kind of writing which rather involves personal creative effort of the writer than aims to reproduce a set pattern (p. 108). Creative text, as a product of creative writing, represents a certain unity of meaning which reflects the process of cognition of the world by the author, as well as their self-actualization (Kizrina, 2009, p. 5). This type of text is a mode of self-expression and communication with other people, and should be original or at least include original elements.

It is natural to assume that a certain type of creative text requires a specific approach. Thus, Böttcher and Becker-Mrotzek (2003) proposes the following criteria for assessing poetic texts: 1) choice of words (choosing words and word combinations appropriate to the theme of a poem); 2) style of language; 3) "audacity": inventive use of word combinations, antonyms; communicating emotions, engaging the reader empathically; 4) content (message, choosing an appropriate title); 5) overall coherence of structure and tone (a poem possesses a certain "centre of meaning"); 6) structuring a text according to the chosen poetic form (haiku, acrostic, etc.) (Böttcher & Becker-Mrotzek, 2003, pp. 68-69).

Abraham (2010) singles out aesthetic value, novel metaphorical imagery, and coherence of style as criteria for assessing poetic texts (p. 96). To assess creative works based on original prosaic texts, Abraham formulates the following criteria: 1) recreating the original text (adding detail, interpreting, changing content); 2) introducing new ideas, demonstrating correct use of language; 3) "stylistic risk-taking" (use of tropes, stylistic devices) (Abraham, 2010, p. 99). As an additional criterion, he also mentions a "degree of immersion in the literary image" as not every type of productive creative tasks requires this capability (Abraham, 2010).

Taking into account the fact that universal criteria for assessing creative texts are non-existent, we aim to formulate them so that these criteria could be applied to assess all types of creative texts.

## 2. Problem Statement

Is it possible to assess creativity objectively? Is it necessary to assess creative texts? As a rule, it is the responsibility of a teacher to decide whether students' creative texts should be assessed, the decision depending on current objectives. However, as the conducted survey has shown, students want their creative texts to be assessed. Assessment boosts motivation to learn and serves as stimulus for self-development and forming necessary skills.

Thus, creative texts in a foreign language, as any outcome of learning activity, require assessing, and we deem it necessary to develop an assessment method for such works.

### **3. Research Questions**

- It is crucial to develop universal criteria for assessing all types of creative texts.
- It is necessary to consider forms of assessing creative texts in a foreign language.
- It is necessary to detail conditions that will ensure the productivity of assessing creative texts.
- It is important to formulate the guiding principles for organising the assessment of creative texts.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

- To develop an assessment method for assessing creative texts in a foreign language.
- To detail conditions for implementing the above-mentioned method.

### **5. Research Methods**

#### **5.1. Theoretical base of the study includes research works focusing on:**

- experience of teaching creative writing (Avramenko et al., 2018; Kizrina, 2009; Nevskaya, 1968; Schreiter, 2002; Shcherbinina, 2019; Spinner, 2001; Wolfrum, 2010);
- assessment of creative texts (Abraham, 2010; Böttcher & Becker-Mrotzek, 2003; Jachmann, 2003; Shaimerdenova & Mukhamadi, 2019; Vaezi & Rezaei, 2019);
- formative assessment of written works (Bodony, 2020; Melekhina & Vinnik, 2017; Rakhimova, 2020).

#### **5.2. The study uses theoretical methods including critical analysis, comparative analysis of relevant research papers; hypothetico-deductive method, which was employed to assess creative texts in a foreign language.**

#### **5.3. Empirical base of the study is represented by student survey conducted at the Department for the Humanities at Novosibirsk State Technical University (NSTU); post-survey interviews with students; pedagogical experiment.**

#### **5.4. Statistical methods included qualitative and quantitative analysis of research results.**

### **6. Findings**

To resolve issue 3.1, we have reviewed the literature focusing on the process of producing a creative text in a foreign language (Kuz'mina, 1998; Kizrina, 2009; Nevskaya, 1968). Consideration of the planes of utterance (content, creative and language planes) contributed to formulating universal criteria for assessing all types of creative texts. Regarding the *content plane*, we have selected the

following criteria: meaningfulness/thoroughness (presence of a message and sufficient factual basis to reveal it); coherence and integrity (presence of a compositional pattern and logical and conceptual structure; a text represents a unity of introductory, developing and concluding elements). To evaluate the *creative plane*, we propose the following criteria: use of imagery and expressive means (lexical and syntactical stylistic devices: epithets, metaphors, similes, hyperbole; rhetorical exclamations, rhetorical questions, direct address, etc); originality (original message, unconventional images, associations, non-standard lexical, grammatical and stylistic means of expressing the message); expressiveness (degree of expressing feelings and emotions); subjective modality (the author's attitude towards the subject matter; ability to sharpen semantic focus). Regarding the *language plane* (we argue that this plane is least important when assessing creative texts), we have selected correct use of language, which includes lexical, grammatical and spelling components. Each criterion (or parameter of creative utterance) can be rated using a 2-point scale. After rating each criterion separately, the total is calculated as a sum of all points scored.

To resolve issue 3.2, we have considered the following forms of assessment: 1) self-assessment; 2) mutual assessment in pairs or small groups (3-4 students); 3) reviewing (performed by both teacher and students); 4) "writers' conference" (Abraham, 2010, p. 110).

Further, we shall provide more detail concerning reviewing and "writers' conference". Reviewing creative texts by students can be carried out as "blind reviewing". Authors should print out their texts in Word format and bring them to class. Then the teacher numbers the texts and every student is assigned a text for reviewing. Later all reviews are read aloud in class. It is worth noting that reviewing a creative text written by another student, students produce creative texts of their own, as reviews of creative texts differ from strictly formatted reviews based on academic papers. A "writers' conference" means collaborative text editing in a friendly atmosphere, as if it took place in a writing workshop, and includes optimizing the first draft and discussing the outcome - a creative text in a foreign language.

It is also important to detail the conditions of assessment procedure:

- the teacher should contribute to students' understanding of the individuality of creative text and impart the idea that the author's message and their ideas should not be interfered with. It is possible to suggest changes in the plane of expression, but the meaning should be kept intact;
  - the author may disagree with the variants suggested by other students and has a right to stand their ground providing arguments;
  - assessing presupposes emphasis on positive aspects of creative text: balanced wording, novelty of the message, use of unconventional similes, metaphors, etc;
  - building a collaborative climate;
  - assessing is a collaborative effort of both students and their teacher. The teacher cannot be solely responsible for assessing;
  - the teacher should form students' self-evaluation and self-reflection skills boosting self-development, which is one of the major goals of formative assessment (Bodony, 2020; Melekhina & Vinnik, 2017; Rakhimova, 2020);
  - the teacher should consider compiling a portfolio of creative texts produced by students during the semester to monitor and analyze the progress in forming creative writing skills.

Within the framework of this study we have set out the principles for organizing assessment of creative texts in a foreign language:

- multi-criteria approach to measuring the quality of creative texts;
- absence of unconstructive criticism which could impede creative writing; objectivity of assessment;
- focus on formative assessment (Bodony, 2020; Melekhina & Vinnik, 2017; Rakhimova, 2020).
- The first principle was fully observed, the criteria for assessing creative texts were outlined above.

To implement the second principle, the teacher should make students aware of the importance of using constructive remarks only. It is important to do so prior to assessment. Schreiter (2002) points out that final judgements and “sentencing” should be avoided. The aspects to be assessed include thematic variations, balanced wording, interesting plot twists. One could also point to textual fragments which are less expressive (Schreiter, 2002). Assessing could incorporate suggestions concerning more adequate choice of vocabulary; ideas which help to achieve coherence and integrity of the text. According to Wolfrum (2010), the following rules for assessing texts should be adopted. First, the opinions of those who assess the text should be well-founded and provided with arguments. Second, the author of the text should be treated with respect; assessors of the text should state their opinion honestly and in an unbiased way, offer their own ideas for editing and changing the wording. Third, the author of the text should be ready to argue their point of view in case disagreement arises (Wolfrum, 2010).

Students’ frequent participation in assessing creative texts will result in enhanced objectivity of their comments.

The ultimate goal of assessing creative texts presupposes rather linking assessment results with correcting steps than identifying drawbacks, which leads to formative assessment. Formative assessment focuses on individual achievements of each student and does not involve comparing results, or drawing conclusions concerning learning outcomes. Assessment aims at identifying gaps in mastering the content of education and finding ways to further cope with them (Bodony, 2020; Melekhina & Vinnik, 2017; Rakhimova, 2020). All mentioned above allows us to conclude that grading is not the sole goal of assessing, but it is creative text itself, which is taken through several stages of drafting and thus attains optimal form.

A survey was conducted among 3rd and 4th year students majoring in Linguistics at the Department for the Humanities at Novosibirsk State Technical University in order to reveal students’ attitude towards assessing creative texts in a foreign language. The survey also aimed at identifying forms of assessment and essential criteria for assessing creative texts, as well as revealing students’ attitude towards ‘ranging’ creative texts (assigning places). Thirty students participated in the survey.

90% of the respondents believe that creative texts can be assessed, and only 10% think otherwise. 93% believe they could face assessment and constructive criticism. Accordingly, 7% fear negative assessment and critical remarks.

The following options were offered as potential assessors of the creative text: 1) the author of the creative text; 2) the teacher; 3) groupmates; 4) both the teacher and the groupmates; 5) other (students were supposed to come up with a variant of their own). 83% of the respondents are of the opinion that

creative texts should be assessed by both the teacher and the students; 7% are certain that creative texts can be assessed only by the teacher; 3% believe that the creative text should be assessed by its author. It is remarkable that 7% offered a variant of their own - "independent experts". During a post-survey interview students clarified that "independent experts" could be their groupmates with excellent command of a foreign language. We also found out that "independent experts" should be selected by the students and the teacher.

In relation to the "ranging" of creative texts, 50% of the respondents demonstrated a negative attitude, whereas 50% believe that it is a fruitful experience.

The following options were offered for the question concerning the form of assessment for creative texts: a) standard 5-mark grading system; b) comments; c) points which are distributed according to certain criteria. The 5-mark grading system was not chosen by anyone (0%); 70% chose comments as the best form of assessment; 30% preferred a combination of two assessment forms - comments and points.

The survey participants could also choose several criteria for assessing creative texts. 88% of the respondents highlighted originality as the most important criterion for creative texts; 60% chose meaningfulness; 50% - expressiveness and correct use of language; 33% - coherence and integrity.

In the post-survey interview all students underlined the importance of assessing creative texts in a foreign language.

## 7. Conclusion

- Assessing creative texts in a foreign language proves productive if the assessment method is based on the following principles: multi-criteria approach to measuring the quality of creative texts; assessment objectivity and absence of unconstructive criticism; focus on formative assessment. Moreover, the assessment procedure depends on certain conditions. Awareness of the individuality of creative text is key to its adequate assessment.
- The optimal form of assessment for creative texts combines several elements: self-assessment, mutual assessment, assessment by both students and teacher.
- Creative texts should be assessed using a scale of points distributed according to certain criteria, and/or in the form of comments. The criteria should be formulated by the teacher in cooperation with students so that they meet the objectives set prior to assessment.
- Creative text should be a priority in the course of assessing. The text should pass through several stages of drafting thus attaining optimal form.
- Post-survey interviewing revealed that the majority of students consider assessment of creative texts crucial, which supports relevance of the study.

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