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LANGUAGE IDENTITY OF A PRESCHOOLER IN THE ASPECT OF MODERN MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The paper discusses the impact of mass media on the development of a preschooler language identity. The authors shed light on the impact of such media as Internet and TV that largely affect the formation of a child's conceptual picture of the world, expressed in children's discourse. For the analysis, speech products that belong to the children aged 2-3 to 6-7 were selected from the site www.det.org.ru, available in the form of parents' diary entries transmitting children's direct Internet- and TV-related speech. Relevance and scientific novelty of the paper is due to the availability of separate works, on the other hand, the lack of a comprehensive study. The paper aims to identify the main media impacts that interact with a child language identity; define language levels at which this influence is expressed most clearly. The main research methods involve observation, contextual analysis, statistical method of data processing and descriptive-comparative method. The paper presents and discusses the examples of children's speech that reflect the interaction with the media at the phonetic, lexical and syntactic levels. It analyzes the means utilized to reveal the influence on the development of speech, thinking and attention of a child. The object of the research is the impact of media communication on child language identity. The subject of the research is language means reflecting the process of interaction between child language identity and mass media. The conclusion is made as to whether it is necessary to regulate the interaction of children with the media.

Keywords: Language, child's language identity, preschooler, the media, Internet, socialization.

1. Introduction

At present, mass communication represented by a set of media is increasingly becoming an integral part of people's everyday lives around the world. According to Kuzmin (2011), "mass media is something that surrounds us every day. This is a set of conditions in which context media culture functions, i.e., a sphere that, through mass communications <...>, connects a person with the outside world, informs, entertains, promotes certain moral and ethical values ..." (p. 30). Thus, a close interaction is established between an individual and mass media, which resides in all spheres of their lives.

In recent decades the Internet being a means of mass media, besides entertainment and communication functions, has been widely spread in the educational environment and is currently used as a tool for developing communication skills in the learning process (Bushma, Zuikova, Lipovka, Cherkasova, & Volkova, 2018), as a modern educational information resource (Keksela, Skvortsova, Sukhushina, Rudneva, & Spichenko, 2016), as a source for increasing the effectiveness of education through interactive teaching methods (Nikolaenko, Grakhova & Rakhimov, 2016; Keksela et al., 2016), as a direct tool for language skills on the example of correlation of "the logic of computer role-playing games and language-related activities" (Vinogradov, 2018, p. 4), and others.

According to Sazanov (2010), the Internet has become not only an information medium, a virtual environment, a way to make friends, order various goods, but also an indispensable assistant in the process of communication and socialization, which is one of the basic conditions for the mental and verbal development of an individual's language identity, particularly, a child's one, and which is provided through communication with others. By means of the Internet children get to know social rules, behavioral norms, models of speech communication, and become part of a certain linguocultural community (Danyushina, 2014).

2. Problem Statement

Due to the global spread of mass communication, mass media is increasingly becoming a source of knowledge and ideas, significantly influencing the formation of people's conceptual picture of the world, which is reflected in speech. Through mass media, a person endeavors to take his/her place in society as a linguistic person, "a person expressed in language (texts) and through language is a person actualized in his/her main features on the basis of language means" (Karaulov, 1987, p. 106).

Scientists tend to be more interested in the effect of mass media on the adult audience, the adults' language identity (Gerashchenko, 2008; Issers, 2013) and to a lesser extent on the children's one. However, it is children who are particularly affected, especially those of preschool age, due to the lack of critical attitude to information.

In this regard, it is necessary to address the interaction of mass media and the formation of the language identity of a preschooler.

3. Research Questions

According to a number of researchers, the accumulator and transmitter of knowledge and various kinds of important societal ideas (social, universal, national and cultural) that form a kind of specific

cognitive environment capable of shaping a picture of the world is precedent texts (such texts or expressions that are known to the majority of the educated population and are used as stable expressions, speech stereotypes) and phenomena. Mastering them leads to the formation of "the features of national (linguistic) consciousness, especially the ones stored in the consciousness of a person able to speak and manifested itself in communication" (Krasnykh, 2002, p. 89), i.e. realized as his/her language identity.

Traditional "sources of precedent phenomena that shape a cognitive picture of the world of children are known to be books in the range of childhood reading: folklore (first of all folk tales) and children's fiction" (Samigulina & Danyushina, 2014, p. 23).

Folklore in a child-friendly form helps to transfer the life experience accumulated by many generations. Through fairy-tale stories, children master certain moral norms, behaviors in society, ways of interacting with others, unspoken ethical rules, both common and typical of each particular culture, thereby developing the ability to empathy. As a result, the child is socialized, "its cognitive picture of the world is formed and objectified in speech" (Samigulina & Danyushina, 2014, p. 57).

It is believed that reading a book develops child speech, literacy, memory, imagination, and other cognitive processes (Eliseeva, 2008). Hudson Kam and Matthewson (2017) argue: "books have long been recognized as a source of input for children learning language in cultures with widespread literacy" (p. 110), which once again confirms the importance of reading for the development and formation of child language identity.

In the process of reading, children are immersed into a fairy-tale reality identifying it as their everyday lives and integrate phrases and characters from a fairy tale into the real world. Eliseeva (2008) argues, "a young child treats a work of art as reality, identifying 'secondary reality' with 'primary one', true reality" (p. 9), thus developing imagination.

All in all, author's and folk tales are an important medium fostering both child's verbal and other comprehensive development at large, which affects the child's way of thinking. They help to acquire knowledge, representations of the universal and national-cultural levels, generate value attitudes, develop interaction models, i.e. expand the child's life experience and ultimately contribute to successful socialization.

Recently, however, according to some scientists (Sokolova, 2011; Sobkin, Skobeltsina, & Ivanova, 2012), traditional children's activities like playing, reading fairy tales, sculpting, etc. are gradually being supplanted by watching TV, playing computer games, using phones, which significantly affects the development of the child language identity.

This belief is confirmed by sociological surveys by which a child of preschool age spends from 20 to 40% of all free time in front of a computer or TV screen. As a result, traditional fairy-tale characters from books are replaced with characters from cartoons or advertising, as reflected in the children's speech.

4.   Purpose of the Study

The study aims to identify the relationship between mass media and the development of language identity of a preschooler, to determine the nature of this relationship and the means by which this effect on the children's oral activity manifests itself.

5. Research Methods

To achieve the goal of the study, the authors analyze the effect of Internet and TV on the child language identity. For the experiment the authors selected some language material available in the form of an electronic version of parents' diary entries in Russian on the site www.det.org.ru. The material representing the speech production of the children aged 2-3 to 6-7 was selected upon several keyword-markers related thematically to the mass media under study, namely, the Internet, Computer, TV, Cartoon / animated film, Movie, Books. The total number of entries for each marker keyword was identified. The findings can be displayed graphically.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study comprised the works of Karaulov (1987) "Language and Language Personality", Gridina (2013) "Ontolinguistics. Language in the Mirror of Children's Speech", Tseitlin (2000) "Language and Child: Children's Speech Linguistics", Shorokhova (2006) "Criteria for the Development of a Preschooler Linguistic Personality", Plotnikova (2011) "Child's Vocabulary Development", Leontiev (1997) "Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics", etc.

During the research, the authors used the following methods, namely: observation, descriptive-comparative method, statistical method of data processing and contextual analysis.

6. Findings

In the texts analyzed there are language examples at various linguistic levels – from phonetic to syntactic.

The phonetic level involves a few examples. As a rule, these are English words that are the names of cartoons, the names of characters or borrowed words reflecting media content. Children try to adapt a speech unit they saw or heard from a cartoon for use in real life. This can be traced in the convergence of words based on the similarity of phonation (cross-language homonymy). For example, one child pronounces the name of an English cartoon, based on the most approximate in phonetic design, but actually available Russian word (*Molitva Poni*, "Pony Prayer" instead of "My little pony"). There can also be a substitution of words based on the similarity of their phonation (*Mishka na servere*, "Bear on the server" instead of *Mishka na severe* "Bear in the North"). In the future, this may lead to the fact that a child begins to substitute one concept for another, similar in sound to the realities of the Internet. For example, *za polyot v kosmos sobaka poluchila laik*, "for its space flight, the dog got a like, that is why it was named Like"; *Ulitsa Gogolya nazvana v chest osnovatelya Google?*, "Was Gogol street named after the founder of Google?". This in turn can adversely affect the development of the child's background knowledge.

The lexical level is comprised of a few examples reflecting the fact of close interaction of mass communication with the language identity of a child. Thus, children begin to include new precedent names and names in their lives and, consequently, in their speech (*Mom tells her daughter that school is closed due to the snowfall. The daughter replies: "Thank you, **Elsa**!"; Father and his son were returning home from kindergarten, on their way they saw the workers in uniform working in the ditch. The son says: "Dad, you said that **Mutant Ninja Turtles** do not exist. Maybe, **Spider-Man** is also not real? Oh, dad?; etc.*). This fact does not render a negative impact provided that, along with new characters, a child is sufficiently familiar with the traditional characters of its native culture.

There are some cases of replacing familiar words with media slang: *Mother asks her daughter to tell her a fairy tale. "Mom, wait, **a fairy tale** is downloading here," the daughter replies, pointing to her head; There is a pitcher filter in the house. The filter ran out of water. The son asks his mom: "Mom, **download me some water**!"; "I've **checked in**, instead of Bags it! I claim it first!"* It should be noted that this replacement is in most cases inherent in action verbs.

A strong effect of getting to know animated products, the Internet, etc. since early childhood, also become a part of the children's picture of the world, manifesting itself in the use of not only nominative words and action verbs, but also whole phrases and sentences. For example, *a child memorizing ready-made syntactic constructions, before going to bed tells his mother a phrase from the cartoon "Dobrynya Nikitich i Tugarin Zmey": "Now we are going to bed, but when I wake up, you should be there. **Is it clear?"***

It is also possible to give some syntactic examples typical of Internet users, which manifest in a variety of situations expressed at the verbal level. For example, a boy tried a new dish: "Mom! So tasty! **give you a million likes for it!**" The child told a self-authored story and ended with the phrase: **"Those who liked it, like and subscribe to my channel."**

Thus, summing up, one can talk about the active influence of mass media on the child language identity. The Internet and TV are also becoming an integral part of the younger generation. However, early acquaintance with these media often leads to negative consequences. A child does not expand its outlook, nor increases its cognitive ability. That can be testified by the following examples: *"We **have Google, we do not need to go to kindergarten** and learn ..."; "**Ask Google. Google knows everything** ...";* *The girl is going to kindergarten and asks her mother to check the weather forecast for today, whether it will rain or not. Mother answers that the probability is 100%. The girl is indignant, because no site has been visited to check. Mom responds that outside it's raining cats and dogs and there is a dash of rain on the windows, so there is no need visiting any sites.* Statistical feedback also proves the same.

The selected speech material demonstrates the indisputable effect of the above mentioned and selected for the subsequent analysis mass media, which manifests itself in a significant number of examples.

Figure 01 clearly shows a great deal of speech examples on the topic "Internet" unlike, for example, the texts selected upon the marker "Books".
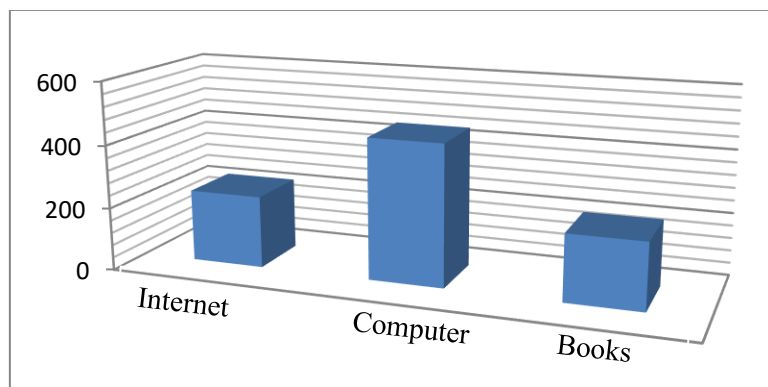

Figure 01. Statistical analysis of examples selected by the markers "Internet", "Computer" and "Books"

The graph shows the number of entries for each marker. Thus, out of 887 entries (the total number of entries considered), the share of "Internet" makes up 229, "Computer" – 447, "Books" – 211. In each of

the entries there are examples of the influence of a particular topic (a marker indicates the topic) expressed by linguistic means. In this case, one can talk about the significant influence of the mass medium "Internet" on the formation of the child's linguistic identity, since the quantitative indicators for the markers "Internet and, "Computer" both in total and separately exceed the number of entries for the "Books" marker.

Figure 02 shows the number of mentions selected for the topic "TV" in comparison with the texts taken by the marker "Books".
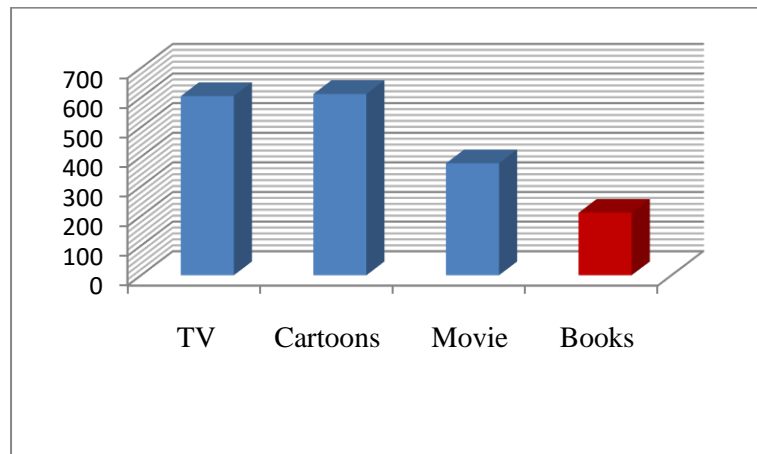

Figure 02. Statistical analysis of examples selected by the markers "TV", "Cartoons", "Movie" and "Books".

The graph shows the number of entries for each marker. Thus, out of 1806 entries (the total number of records considered), the share of "TV" accounts for 605, "Cartoons" – 612, "Movie" – 378, "Books" – 211. In each of the entries there are examples of the influence of a particular topic (a marker indicates the topic), expressed by linguistic means. In this case, one can talk about the significant influence of the medium "TV" on the formation of the child's linguistic identity, as the quantitative indicators for the markers "TV", "Cartoons", "Movies" both in total and separately significantly exceed the number of entries for the marker "Books".

Whatever seen or heard by the child in modern mass content passes through its consciousness and is actively represented in speech. In addition, the intensive interaction of the child with mass media has a negative effect on the development of its cognition, attention, and so on. What is more, "perceiving animated images, as contrary to visual, leads to no activation of imagination, which generally results in the passivization of children's perception" (Samigulina & Danyushina, 2014, p. 22). Moreover, spending a lot of time watching cartoons can bring about the confusion of real world with virtual one. Thus, the intensive influence of media production on a child leads to the emergence of fragmented or clip thinking and complicates the processes of socialization. This phenomenon interferes with the active development of a preschooler, prevents their entry into society, social adaptation, complicates the educational process in the future.

7. Conclusion

Thus, based on the examples analyzed and, on the fact, that mass media greatly influences the development of the child and its language identity, the formation of its conceptual picture of the world, the following can be concluded:

- Modern media has a significant impact on the child language identity, especially at preschool age.

- This interaction is most clearly seen in the child's speech at the lexical, syntactic, and to a lesser extent, phonetic levels. In other words, when it comes to the lexical level, a large layer of nominative vocabulary can be distinguished (characters, heroes, objects, etc.); action verbs describing the activity of Internet and computer users; colloquial vocabulary, etc. When it comes to the syntactic level, children use simple constructions, uncomplicated, non-common or fairly common, cliché models of constructing statements typical of Internet and computer users.

- The nature of the interaction between mass media and the child is negative as long as modern media replaces traditional children's activities, and the child is limited in developing its cognitive abilities. In this case the question also arises about the child's free access to any kind of information, including the one not intended for its age.

Furthermore, in the modern world, in the aftermath of universal globalization, the question arises as to how to preserve the language identity of not only an adult, but a child, as well. The analyzed material leads to the following conclusion: the influence of modern media content changes the national cultural attitudes of the child, resulting from the replacement of traditional national cultural realities with ubiquitous and often imposed international realities that do not reflect the native culture.

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