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Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding
CONSTANTS OF CHILDREN'S READING IN THE DIALOG OF
CULTURE

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Abstract

The article is directed to studying the constants of children's reading. Its relevance is associated with the search for ways of modern society's further development through a new understanding of cultural traditions. Constants are one of the ways to maintain a dialogue of cultures in different generations, a kind of standard for evaluating and designing a cultural picture of the world. In literature, they include images, motifs, plots, genre formations, etc. In language, they are a set of ideas about the world, enclosed in the meanings of words and expressions that represent universal and specific linguistic attributes of world culture concepts. As components of the matrix of world culture, constants are actively used in children's reading. By children's reading we understand the totality of children's literature itself, books recommended for reading to children, and children's periodicals. This is a special phenomenon of the nationwide literary process, whose hallmarks are clarity, plot orientedness, mandatory didacticism, combination of the fictional and real. Within the space of children's reading, constants acquire special educational significance, participate in the formation of a child's language picture of the world, in the creation of a system of moral traditions forming the younger generation's worldview concerning this or that particular nation. They simultaneously convey the human experience accumulated over the centuries and participate in the formation of the communicative competence, which is the main property of a cultured personality.

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1. Introduction

Human is inherently a creator. They create their own space, affect the space of other people, put their knowledge, skills and experience into the cultural process. Their knowledge is growing daily. And this is not always a purposeful mastery of any skills, an increase in knowledge most often occurs in the process of dialogue.

Human life as a whole is dialogical. And the concept of dialogue is also polysemous: dialogue is interpreted as a process of studying nature, as a conversation of literary heroes, as a form of philosophical understanding, as a conversation between a person and themselves, as an intersection of cultures of different nations. One thing is obvious: dialogue means interaction, journey from one point to another, transfer of something from one person to another; provides the communication process as the basis for the development of culture.

It is the dialogue of cultures that creates the system of knowledge, skills and abilities to understand codes and symbols that reflects the historical meaning of each phenomenon. In addition, Bibler (1990) focuses on the fact that dialogue is always a dialogue of different cultures. This statement characterizes children's literature very accurately. It is a dialogue of the culture of "fathers" and "children". In the process of this dialogue, the experience of one generation accumulated over the centuries is transferred to another, then this experience is activated in accordance with the conditions of the new cultural and historical era. Dialogue of cultures always implies communication. Moreover, it's not always two people in their physical appearance who should participate in the communication process. A dialogue is no less productive when one of the participants is a book.

Reading is one of the most effective ways of forming the worldview of an individual person and the nation as a whole. It enters the life of a person from early childhood, it is with its help that the spiritual foundation of the younger generation is formed. The formation of this system to a greater extent occurs under the influence of the constants of children's literature. Constants are the quintessence of human experience throughout the centuries. They help to build up a cultural picture of the world of the individual and the nation as a whole.

In this regard, it becomes relevant to study the mechanisms of the cultural dialogue that occurs in the process of "unwrapping" the meanings of the constants in children's reading.

2. Problem Statement

The study of the constants in children's literature in recent years has attracted researchers' special attention. Among the credible works there is a monograph by Hellman "Fairy Tales and True Stories. The History of Russian Literature for Children and Young People", in which the history of children's reading is considered against the background of the development of the general cultural process of Russia and is supplemented by deep historical and critical comments (Hellman, 2016).

Two directions in the study of children's literature can be clearly distinguished. Firstly, the sociological context. As a rule, this trend is typical for American and European researchers. In this aspect, children's literature is regarded from different points of view: in its relationship with the folk tradition (Hearne, 2010; Musiyiwa, 2008; Smith, 2015 and others), concerning the level of its social mobility

(Parkes, 2012, etc.), the degree of its dependence on the ideology of the state (Hubler, 2014), gender specificity (Clasen & Hassel, 2017; Slagle, 2018; Trites, 2018) and others. An extensive layer of research is devoted to the study of the national identity of children's literature in the cultural space of Europe, America and Asia (Creech, 2019; Rea, 2019, etc.).

Secondly, the philological context. This is an analysis of children's literature in terms of its poetics, genre identity, basic images and motifs, means of artistic expression (Dvorak, 2015; Guanio-Uluru, 2015; Natov, 2017). Although separate studies have already started appearing to compare the specifics of the linguistic and culturological characteristics of children's reading, they are still few in number and the culturological understanding of the conceptual sphere of children's reading still calls for a sufficient study.

Thus, it is logical to address the problem disclosed in the article: how the dialogue between cultures occurs in children's reading at the simplest level - at the level of personality formation. The problem itself can be formulated as follows: which constants of children's reading are the most productive in the process of dialogue of cultures and what mechanisms and levels of their disclosure in a dialogue with a book are.

3. Research Questions

The study aims to regard the following issues:

1. What constants are most often referred to in children's literature?
2. How does the “expansion” of the meanings of constants occur?
3. Is there any continuity in disclosing the meanings at different stages of children's literature's development?

4. Purpose of the Study

A constant is a cultural code, a combination of multiple meanings, “a certain constant principle of culture” (Stepanov, 2004, p. 84). The identification of the constants in children's reading and studying the specifics of their implementation at different text levels seem extremely important. Firstly, cultural information is being transmitted to a new generation. Secondly, the spiritual and moral potential of students is being formed. Thirdly, the prerequisites for the most complete development of creative thinking are brought into being. Fourthly, there is children's socialization. The above aspects are included in the concept of “communicative competence”, the basic property of a cultured personality, which provides a person with a full life in the society and is formed from communicative abilities, knowledge, skills, experience in all areas of communication. This determines the goal of our study – to reveal the mechanism of the constants of children's reading functioning in the dialogue of cultures.

5. Research Methods

Achieving the goal of the study required using relevant methodological tools. The study was carried out at the junction of several scientific fields using a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach, taking into account the interconnectedness and interdependence between such areas of social science as cultural studies, literary criticism, psychology, history and pedagogy, which allows us to approach a holistic

perception of the many-sided subject of the study. These methods made it possible to isolate the constants and study their structural and semantic embodiment in the literary text.

6. Findings

As a starting point, we used the thesis that a constant as a text of culture performs the function of the memory of culture. With regard to children's reading, we consider this concept as the quintessence of the experience humanity has gained over the centuries of its development. In addition to the concrete designation of this experience, it includes methods and forms of its implementation, as well as attributes of this concept. In addition, while discussing the concepts of children's reading, we should not lose sight of its pedagogical purpose - teaching communication, forming the communicative competence. It is achieved at the following levels:

1. Emotional (denoting the ability to express empathy and compassion, the ability to “feel” another person);
2. Cognitive (involving the expansion of the cognitive space, which helps to make the communication process more effective);
3. Behavioral (reflecting the individual’s ability to work together in all aspects, or its inclusion in mastering this constant, its implementation in practice).

These aspects can also be considered as closely interrelated levels of perception of the concept in the texts of children's literature.

The analysis claims that the constant “Family” proves the one most frequently used in children’s reading. This is quite natural, since it is in the space of the family where the formation of a personality begins, the family lays the foundation for education. “A family is a group of relatives living together (husband and wife, parents with children)” (Ozhegov, 1984, p. 618). But in the Russian tradition, in addition to designating the closest relatives, it involves distant relatives and people who are not connected by family ties, but who arouse warm feelings.

Emotional comprehension of the constant includes caring for the dearest and nearest, devotedness to them, worrying about their health. It is at this level that the positive idea about the mother's warmth, about the father’s strictness, about the affectionate grandmother is laid. Moreover, this aspect remains traditional, regardless of the era when it is embodied.

The concept of "Family" gets its versatile embodiment in the works of the Soviet writers of the previous century. These works tend to create a generalized model of a Soviet family - happy people living in their beloved country. The authors create an example of family relationships that are independent of the ideological vectors of the era. At the same time, to make it more realistic, the writers introduce into the plot family quarrels, children’s mischief, and the problem of generation gap within one and the same family. Such is Arkady Gaidar’s (2012) classical work “The Blue Cup”. The plot of the story is based on the events of one day of a happy family. As a starting point of the storyline, Gaidar (2012) chooses a usual situation: his mother’s beloved blue cup is broken. Mother Marusya believes that it was broken by her daughter and husband, takes offense at them and leaves for Moscow. We have a typical family quarrel over a trifle occasion. In turn, the father and daughter, also offended, decide to go "wherever they look." A walk together around the neighborhood makes the father and the daughter closer. During the walk, they meet another

family, in which everyone loves each other and is kind to other people. These are the traditions of the family. This model of attitude towards others is offered to the small readers.

Gaidar (2012) portrays his characters as kind, sympathetic people who live among the same Soviet citizens: Svetlana gives simple wildflowers to an elderly woman, who treated them with cucumbers from her garden, together with her father, they resolve a conflict between the neighboring boys and make peace, they receive a kitten as a present from little Fedor. By the evening, the travelers, forgetting the insult, return home, where their mother Marusya is waiting. The happy family at the evening tea share their impressions of the past day. "And life is very good!" - this is how A. Gaidar ends the story. That is the meaning of the "Family" constant in this work.

The events of World War II could not but affect the change in the quality of the family. For many orphans, an orphanage has become the family. The content of this concept in post-war works for children has also changed. This aspect is revealed in the poem "Zvenigorod" by Barto (1947) (Barto, 2019). It shows the post-war life of orphans. Here the functions of the family are performed by a state institution: each child has a photo album with portraits of mum, dad and other relatives who died at the front ("here are portraits of their fathers - cards in the album"); there are many children with one mother, the director of the orphanage Anna Pavlovna, who takes care of all her pupils. She knows each child well, loves them, and "knows without doctors who is sick, who is healthy" like a real mother does.

Children of different ages live in the orphanage, and the relationship between them develops in the same way as in a real family: the elders take care of the younger ones. The older children perceive the three-year-old girl Lelka as their little sister: they play with her, dress her, and put her to bed: "And today, the whole choir of twelve sisters lulled Lelka to sleep." In order for the children not to lose their memory of family traditions, each child's birthdays are celebrated here together, in a family way: "We'll invite guests here, let them come to the children!" It is also important to note the ideological context, which is obligatory for the literature of the Soviet era: the state takes care of the orphans ("These children are not orphans, they are not like orphans – the people surround them with motherly care").

Thus, the literary work reflected a new understanding of the concept "Family" and a new model of the family - an orphanage, which reflected all the typical features of the family in the conventional sense.

Regarding the modern children's literature it also does not deny this tradition. So, for example, the poem by Boroditskaya (2020a) "Botanist" reads about a botanist who came to the forest and greeted every grass and flower, like "a city nephew greeted a village relative". Here there is a transfer of habitual actions (respect for members of one's family) to another sphere of relations.

There are interesting poems by Esenovskiy (2014) about the boy Yura, with whom various incidents happen: he swallows a button, then gets a sore throat or a runny nose. And he is always close to his family: they are not active participants in the event, but exist in his space as essential values: they can assist with advice and an action, protect, solve a problem. And even the runny nose emphasizes this connection: parents are the guardians of traditions, rules and norms, they must be listened to, otherwise violations are possible, for example, the runny nose happened to Yura because he did not obey his elders and walked without high boots.

There is a family in Vostokov's short story (2016) "Frosya Korovina". And although the parents of the ten-year-old Frosya are far away "exploring the earth's crust", the girl herself is clearly aware of her

role in the family hierarchy. She takes great care of her grandmother and even brings her a flower in a pot to the hospital, because Aglaya Ermolaevna loves soil very much: “Having seen the pot with the ficus, the head of the Korovins’ family softened completely. Aglaya Ermolaevna stroked the soil with her callused fingers and whispered something affectionate. In the end, the old woman was so emotional that she dropped a couple of tears into the fertile Papanovo black soil. That day Frosya saw her grandmother crying for the first time” (Vostokov, 2016, p. 69).

The traditional, in the best sense of the word, family is represented on the pages of Abgaryan’s trilogy (2014) about the girl Manyunya. Moreover, this family consists of two different, but so like-minded people. And all six children are brought up together by adults who seek to raise them kind, honest, hardworking and humane. The situations which they go through are very difficult: the divorce of parents, first love, growing up, learning to manage the house. But always there is an attentive look of an adult who is sensitive to the doubts and hesitations of the children, even if they do not intervene.

The specificity of the modern interpretation of the constant “Family”, in our opinion, is that often the image of the grandmother comes to the fore. This is logical, because modern parents are busy with their careers, and it is a grandmother who is engaged in raising grandchildren, loving and pampering them. The traditions of female age-related stratification in the Russian society confirm that the role of the grandmother in the family is deeply archaic, and she is the embodiment of wisdom. It is the grandmother, as the eldest of the kin, who is responsible for its integrity, who protects and heals it. Not surprisingly, modern works of children’s literature claim a grandmother has magical properties and is able to transform grandchildren. This is what we read about in a poem by Ulanova (2018) “Visiting Grandma”. After her affectionate vocative “kitten” the granddaughter has a fluffy and cheerful tail, and if she calls her grandchildren “fish”, they immediately feel the fins and sparkling scales grow.

A grandmother always remains a grandmother, even if her grandson is a knight. Although he is a serious warrior and fights with a spear and mace in combats, he is always a matter of concern for his grandmother, so it is not surprising that the old woman is planning to knit him a chain mail (Khrushcheva, 2020).

As a conclusion to the analysis of the “Family” constant, one can cite the words from the poem by Mark Schwartz, who is ironical, but logical and clearly understands the little reader, thus, the formation of the word family is shown: “No need to think and guess, but just count: two grandfathers, two grandmothers, plus dad, mom, I. Made a sum? It makes seven people - a family!” (it is a wordplay here: the Russian word “family”, *sem'ya*, is homophonic to the phrase *sem'ya* which literally means “seven me”) (Schwartz, 2020).

Another constant is “Friendship”. The tradition of children’s reading has never questioned the existence of a friend. So, even at the very beginning of the children’s literature, the character always had a friend, albeit not always in human form (as in A. Pogorelsky’s fairy tale “Black Chicken, or Underground Dwellers” which completely changed the vector of development of children’s literature in Russia, according to Hellman (2016, p. 30), and although in Russian folk tales you will often find not a friend, but only an assistant to the main character, children’s reading confirms that a person is impossible without friendship. Stories by V. Dragunsky about Deniska Korablev, stories by N. Nosov about the Bear and the little men from the Solar City, the series by E. Uspensky “Uncle Fedor, the dog and the cat”, numerous poems about friends aim to prove this viewpoint.

Everyone's favorite fairy-tale novel by Volkov (2008) "The Wizard of the Emerald City", written in 1939 based on the tale of L. F. Baum, is read as a hymn to friendship and mutual assistance. The hurricane takes the girl Ellie and her dog Totoshka to the Fairyland, where they meet new friends: the Scarecrow in the garden, the Iron Lumberjack and the Cowardly Lion. The characters keep this friendship in each of the six parts of the fairy tale. When parting with Ellie, the friends say goodbye with these words: "It's hurtful and sad to part with you, Ellie," said Scarecrow, Iron Lumberjack and Lion, "but we bless the moment when the hurricane threw you into the Fairyland. You taught us the dearest and the best that is in the world - friendship" (Volkov, 2008). The emotional aspect of friendship is very important. Friendship literally does not exist without love for a friend, forgiveness for their weaknesses and faults, fairness in evaluating their actions and truth in the relationship. Despite the fact that the third generation of children reads the tale about Ellie and her friends, the rules of friendship have not changed and are implemented in the content of contemporary works, too.

In children's literature for young children, friendship is an absolute, it does not allow doubt and betrayal. And it doesn't matter who the friends are: people, animals, fairy-tale creatures or even products. The main thing is: "friendship is a close relationship based on mutual trust, affection, common interests" (Ozhegov, 1984, p. 155). We see such amazing relationships in a poem by Boroditskaya (2020b) about two friends, Bublik and Baton, who are friends, despite different interests and preferences.

In childhood, friendship begins easily, as it seems to adults who have forgotten about it. However, getting accustomed to an unfamiliar space is an extremely exciting, complex and responsible process for a small person. And we find the experience of this process in Berestov's poem (2019) "Friend or Foe". The main character is a boy who moved to a new home, leaving his friends somewhere far away. He understands that life is impossible without friends, and carefully considers the space that he needs to grow accustomed to. Attention is drawn to his orientation towards successful communication: "I'm local, brothers. I'm no stranger to you," because it gives an idea of the family he lives in, about its principles of mutual cooperation with people, about the atmosphere of goodwill that prevails there.

Friendship can be not only with living people, but also with objects animated by the power of friendship. In such a way Sevka from Dashevskaya's novel (2016) "Willy" finds a friend. And even if this is just an old bike, it's speaking, and it's with him that the boy goes through all stages of growing up, applies moral values in practice, and meets his first love. Sevka has got kind and loving parents, but it is his friends who fill his life: the girl Avgustina, Mark and Kolya, nicknamed Mosquito. Moreover, their friendship does not begin with any official acknowledgement: just Mark gives his bike to Mosquito to participate in the competition, and Sevka leaves the race on purpose, contriving the classmate's victory. The guys get accustomed to the space, creating their own theories, for example, about how cities emerge, or the theory of four colours: "Today I thought that we all have different eyes. Dark brown ones are Mark's, Kolya's eyes are blue, as they draw in books. He is even shy that they are so bright. I have gray ones, the most ordinary ones. And green-green - are Avgustina Blum's. We will have such a theory of four colors now" (Dashevskaya, 2016).

Noteworthy for children's literature is the following: friends do not necessarily bear official names, friendship is denoted by the pronoun "we" and the plural form of the verb. Thus, Usachev's poem (2006)

“Flying”, reads about friends who were sitting together, whistling and looking at the sky, trying to resolve the vital question for them about the meaning of the word “flyer”.

Another constant that is most in demand in children's reading is “Home” with the meaning “residential building and the people living in it” (Ozhegov, 1984, p. 149). However, this is the most ambiguous constant, it is intertwined with the concepts of “family”, “homeland”, “native place” (not outlined by borders). Even the constant itself in the direct sense combines these meanings and perceives the “Home” as a living creature. For example, Frosya Korovina, who discovered the loss of her house, reflects: “... maybe the house flew into the sky like a rocket? Although why would it fly away? She and her grandmother have always treated it well, mopped it and repaired. Aglaya Ermolaevna even broke her leg because she wanted to nail the fallen ridge back” (Vostokov, 2016, p. 74).

It should be noted that constants can be very close in content or intersect in reading. Sometimes a house, literally and figuratively, becomes both the cause and the result of friendship. In this way, toys - the characters of the book by Uspenskiy (2017) “Gena the Crocodile and His Friends” (Cheburashka, the doll girl Galya and Gena the Crocodile himself) started a very important project: to build a house for those who want to make friends, and invited them. “And assistants began to appear at the construction site: a giraffe Anyuta came, a monkey Maria Frantsevna, a modest and well-bred girl Maroussia joined, because she also had no friends” (Uspenskiy, 2017).

Uspenskiy does not hide possible disagreements among friends, but shows how important it is to be able to find a compromise, to agree, accept and follow the rules of the game. The house was ready, they just needed to paint it, and then friends got disagreements. “Gena the Crocodile himself was green and believed that the house should be green The monkey believed that the color most pleasing to the eye was brown Anyuta asserted that the best color was giraffe. Finally, Cheburashka invited everyone to choose one wall and paint it the way they wanted. And the house was wonderful at the end: all of its walls turned out to be different” (Uspenskiy, 2017). And most importantly, during the construction process everyone became friends. With such a reading of the concept “Home”, its connection and substantial interaction with the constant “Friendship” are obvious.

In Ulanova’s (2013) poetry, “Home” primarily stands for the people who inhabit it, affectionate, cozy, needed, from the point of view of a kitten: for example, a grandmother, who is needed to scratch his ear, or affectionate children to play with him (p. 23).

It is not at all necessary for these people to be related, the main thing is that they find warmth and tranquility in the house, as the characters of Buckman’s (2018) novel “Grandma ordered to bow and tell that she asks for forgiveness”. The little girl Elsa is trying to come to terms with the death of her extravagant and eccentric grandmother, a doctor who worked in the hottest spots on the planet. She collects heartbroken people who have lost hope and desire to live together with their beloved and relatives, and helps them find home, and the meaning of life with it. And this real space, closely intertwined with the space of the fictional fairy-tale country Prosonye, helps the girl understand the importance of home and family for each person. And for Elsa herself, the house consists of smells: “... tobacco, monkey, coffee, beer, lilies, detergent, leather, rubber, soap, gel, protein bars, menthol, wine, snus, shavings, dust, cinnamon buns, smoke, biscuit dough, clothing store, wax, cocoa, rag, dreams, tree, pizza, potatoes, meringues, perfumes, nutcake, ice cream, baby. It smells like a grandmother. The best smell of the best grandmother who is a bit nuts”

(Buckman, 2018, p. 468). It was her grandmother who gave her advice: “Protect the castle! Protect your friends and they will protect you”. This is the meaning of the constant: home is a place where you are loved, waited for, a place you seek to return to, a place you seek to protect. And its size or design is not important at all, it is only important that it is your homeland.

7. Conclusion

To this extent, the considered constants prove to be the key among many in children's reading. It is through them, above all, that the dialogue of cultures is carried out. And while the category of the Child as a reader and a recipient of literary and educational activity of adults has undergone significant changes in the development of the society, according to the researcher of children's literature Grenby (2008, p. 83), the content of these concepts remained unchanged.

As the reader grows older, the conceptual sphere of children's literature is filled with new meanings, accompanying the process of the child's socialization. In addition, students are expanding not only the form of the concept, but also its content. This causes the reader to create their own text (statements, interpretations, etc.), which once again confirms the very idea of the existence of the dialogue of cultures. This, in turn, allows, as Desyaeva (2016) says,

to implement the principle of eventuality relevant in modern pedagogy, one of whose main signs is the personal participation in the situation which is principal for students. Interpreting the text allows to initiate the students' activity, to arouse interest both in its perception and in the communicative qualities of speech embodied in the text. (p. 97)

Thus, the key constants “Family”, “Friendship” and “Home” enter the linguistic consciousness of a person at a young age with reading. Then they develop and transform in accordance with the age of the reader and the characteristics of the historical and cultural space, continue the traditions laid by the previous generations and lay the groundwork for the ones to come. Thus, the dialogue of cultures continues, embodying the semantic universe of the experience of human communication.

The results obtained make it possible to predict the effectiveness of the formation of a person's communicative competence at the early stages of development and can be used to create textbooks, popular science texts, and methodological scenarios.

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