

The Potential of the Visual Narrative in Multilingual Environment (the Case of Modern Children's Picture books)

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Abstract. *The article is devoted to illustrated books and how they influence the formation of multilingual environment. A special emphasis is made on picture books as a popular genre of children's modern literature. Visual images occupy a dominant place within modern culture and affect it profoundly. Visual narrative is becoming a new way of communication, especially in children's literature. Multicultural environment and multilingualism set new objectives for authors and illustrators of children's literature. The general purpose of the research is to highlight the picture books with the most expressive visual narrative and to solve the problems related to multilingual and multicultural environment.*

Key words – *visual narrative, multilingual environment, childhood studies, picture books.*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is beyond doubt that visual information is dominant in modern culture. Nowadays visual perception and interpretation of culture through reading has become an integral part of a modern person's life. It is especially relevant for children. Children constantly communicate in the world of visual images. The process of knowledge, values, norms and cultural codes transfer is organized in such area. Children's literature is also a prime example of such visual environment. The use of images provides a wide range of possibilities for visual narrative which makes picture books appropriate for the development in multilingual society. In addition, the books certainly have an impact on the cultural memory and the identity preservation.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Childhood is a phase when a person learns the outside world, develops the necessary expertise and integrates into the culture of society. A French historian Philippe Aries made a major contribution to the rethinking of the concept of "Childhood" in 1960. He proved that childhood is not only a phase of human life but also presents social and cultural patterns depending on time and society [2]. Henceforth, the Childhood studies has transformed into a multidisciplinary field which unites such disciplines as psychology, sociology, anthropology, education studies, cultural history to name just few. Nowadays the traditional boundaries between the "child's world" and the "adult

world" have become more blurred. To be mentioned, the features of childhood such as child-centrism (the concept was submitted by Philippe Aries) and infantilization are important in modern society.

Literature for children has undergone significant changes over the past years. It has formed a new attitude towards childhood and has created a constantly developing practice in modern literature. The connection between children's literature and postmodernism culture is becoming increasingly evident. It is widely known that main features of modern literature include redistribution of role of the author and the reader, the variability of images understanding, deconstruction of the book's form, use of irony, eclecticism, a dialogue-game as it was envisioned by Anstey [1]. There is a tendency for textual and illustrative information to be developed in a creative communicative field where a child transforms from a passive spectator into an active creator and co-author. In this way, 'reading' a book is turning into an opportunity for interaction and the boundaries between reading, reflection, reasoning, a dialogue, fantasy and creativity are blurred. For these reasons the popularity of genre of a picture book, a comic book, a graphic novel or a book with no words has been increasing recently. The lack of text makes such books international.

The image has taken the central part in the field of children's literature in recent decades and this development assigns functions previously inaccessible to it and gives an opportunity to open up new horizons. Visual literature tends to be a special kind of art, which is built on the interaction of text and image and thus both parts complement each other [7]. Foreign researchers combined such literature under the concept of "visual narrative", which includes a picture book, comic books, visual poetry, photo essay, splints. It is generally agreed that a picture book is typically intended for children's use, where illustrations are more important than words of storytelling. A picture book can also contain no words at all, like the wimmelbook that was illustrated for the first time by Ali Mitgutsch in Germany. The name directly means "the teeming picture". A lot of details and stories could be found in just one illustration of this book. Such pictures contain no common semantic center and the storylines are narrated simultaneously. A book like this gives a reader an opportunity to find new relationships, life situations and characters, to analyze and anticipate the

development of events as well as learn new words. Psychologists and speech therapists often recommend such books in order to train children's memory and attention, to expand their vocabulary, to push the frontiers of knowledge, and to train logic. Unlike wimmelbooks, the illustrations in the picture books have only one phrase on each page which are combined by the common specific storyline. Also we should mention books which were published a few decades ago but still are relevant and have been reissued many times. For example, "Where the Wild Things Are" (illustrated by Maurice Sendak in 1963) and "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" picture book for the youngest children (designed by Eric Carle in 1969). It should be noted that a special kind of picture books was produced in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s and there are no equivalents of it in the world. Unfortunately, nowadays Russian libraries do not trust children's picture books arguing that books without words are not books but pictures.

Adults faced with a piece of art not only receive an aesthetic pleasure and entertain themselves, but also get some knowledge, inspiration and emotions. This is why a picture book is so important to a child who gains his first skills from it, for example, cognitive skills that are formed in early childhood. Cognitive skills are basic brain tools which are used in a process of thinking, reading and learning, memorizing, making reasons and concentrating. It is known that child's clip-and-fragmented thinking is formed mainly through the influence of the Internet and animated films. Children only see the action while looking at the screen and they have no time to catch the details and understand the meaning of a visual picture. This situation could be improved by interaction between parents and children through shared reading. Another important quality, which reading picture books help to form, is creativity. Creativity is a phenomenon whereby something new and valuable is formed. Emotional education is an important aspect, especially for children of early preschool age. Despite the priority of development of intelligence in the modern world, one can say that emotional education could be even more important than cognitive skills at this stage. One of the main emotions, experienced by children in modern society is anxiety. Currently, you can find a great number of psychological books which recommend how to work with various children's fears. Media for children, including books pay less attention to the moral education.

III. METHOD

Consequently, the visual literature involves a wide range of issues and has potential in many areas such as common education, moral education and child psychology. Modern society poses new challenges in the field of visual literature. It is necessary to go beyond just teaching a language to make children aware of today's growing migration, globalization cultural and linguistic pluralism. Issues of tolerance, cooperation and multiculturalism are to be central on the educational agenda.

The goal of multilingual education is not teaching as many languages as possible, but developing "multilingual competence and multicultural education, as a way of living

together" [3]. This statement is closely linked to the notion of multilingual education which aims at raising awareness and positive attitudes towards any differences, whether they are linguistic, cultural or religious, as well as building interactions and relations with representatives of other cultures and societies.

Nowadays there is a lot of foreign children's literature telling stories in two or more languages. But books that speak of tolerance for other nations are of particular interest. Analyzing the picture books presented in the children's department of the Library of Foreign Literature and the Russian State Children's Library in Moscow, we would like to get a better look at several examples of popular modern illustrated books. The selected books address the issues presented by a multilingual and multicultural society, including tolerance, integration, as well as the preservation of national identity and cultural memory. The formal-stylistic methods were used on the first selection of books and semiotic methods were exploited for the analysis of the selected visual narrative of five books.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The picture book "The Name Jar" by Yangsook Choi (2001) is focused on the difficulties which an immigrant child faces during the adoption to a new community [4]. The book demonstrates experiences, which include the acceptance into the society and the difficulty in pronunciation of a foreign name. The issue of national identification is also raised in this book and still remains relevant and controversial in the context of mixing different cultures and languages. The story tells us about a girl who recently arrived in the USA from Korea, knowing that her name is difficult to pronounce, so she refuses to introduce herself in a new school. The girl's classmates use a jar where they put the proposed American names so the girl is able to choose the name she likes. The girl thinks about this offer, but her desire to meet her comrades' position is contrary to her own. There are some more significant problems in this story. The name change is usually only a surface meaning of a major and obvious internal shift. "When we move to another location spiritually (as Jacob did), emotionally (as in a marriage or divorce) or geographically, like little Unhei, the questions arise: What do we take with us? What do we leave behind?" [10]. The child chooses his name and patiently instructs his classmates how to pronounce it. Such books often use the technique of introducing a certain agent to help the child solve the existing problem. The author herself is also a Korean immigrant and tells her own story through this book. Cultural details give new knowledge and illustrations make it expressive.

Another example we would like to mention is the picture book "Subway Sparrow" written by Leyla Torres. The main characters of this book are an English speaking girl, a Spanish speaking man and a woman who speaks Polish. The sparrow falls into the trap and it needs help, so the people have to overcome the language barriers between them and collectively save the bird. It means that public places can be hubs of productive intercultural exchanges and cooperation. The book demonstrates the ability of working together

despite the language and cultural barriers, age and gender to assist the trapped sparrow. The book is written in English, Spanish and Polish languages. Different languages are used in the dialogue corresponding to the character, but there is no simultaneous translation language and all context hints are given to readers by illustrations. Gesturing and specific objects help the characters to find common understanding, and the real intercultural communication has finally been achieved. These language options are very important because they show the reader the necessity of understanding additional languages, and introduce the concept of multilingual problem solving. The picture book "Subway Sparrow" tells a story in several languages and the particular technique is used to show how to reach multilingual goals. Quite often multilingual books are published simultaneously in two or more languages and in this case the technique is implemented differently. On the one hand the format of this book emphasizes the unproductivity of monolingualism, and the reader's knowledge of English as well, and on the other hand, stresses the need for multilingual perspectives.

The graphic novel "The Arrival" was written by an Australian author and artist Shaun Tan in 2006. The book tells us the story of an immigrant who leaves the insubstantial "world of the past" in order to find the nonessential "world of future". Trying to search for better life the man leaves his family home, his wife and daughter. Firstly, the author investigated the history of Chinese immigrants in Australia and then he started to get to know the stories of immigrants from different Eastern and European countries. He decided finally that his book would be written about immigration in general. The main character of Shaun's novel is a person who comes to unknown reality and does not understand what to do. In his fresh start he has to find a job, housing and learn how to interact with the authorities and officials. The author Shaun Tan read many immigrant stories and reviewed the archives of Ellis Island, the largest immigrant receiving station in America. The feeling of loneliness and alienation of the character is strengthened by lack of words in the book. It turns out that a book without words could be guidance. This novel is the way to announce very acutely of the "fragility" of immigrants in their new life and that they are usually treated like the "other" men. The book describes the main character's adventures when he meets other immigrants, listens to their stories, draws in his notebook, gets a job and tries to communicate with the locals, whose language he does not understand at all. The book illustrations with imaginary animals and unreal architecture emphasize the main idea of the author. The genre of the graphic novel sits on the line of art and literature and it is appropriate for readers of different ages.

We experienced such a fulfilling life living in a large multinational country during the period of Soviet Union, but unfortunately, nowadays the intolerance towards migrants and refugees has increased in our society. It is very difficult to find children's literature which contains issues related to the formation of a multicultural society. The reason for this is primarily a desire to be aware of existing problems on this topic. There is a certain amount of literature for teenagers on

the theme of migration, but the edition of picture books for younger children is very limited. The book "Hello!" was written by Alexey Oleynikov in 2016 and it tells readers about the national and cultural diversity in Russia [5]. The writer also describes the reasons why people of different nationalities, including migrants and refugees, live in our country and how it was like in the time of the former Soviet Union. The main character of the book is a boy who goes around his neighborhood in Moscow with his aunt and meets people of different nationalities and jobs; they are the janitor Alisher from Tajikistan, the builder Aurika from Moldova, the plumber Vasiliy from Belarus, the taxi driver Firuz from Azerbaijan and others. An inquisitive boy wants to learn how to say "hello" in the native language of his new neighbors. As long as the plot is progressing it involves more persons who tell the boy about their homeland. Every story is followed by an illustrated spread which gives information about geography, history and culture of a certain country. It provides the reader with overview of facts related to every particular place. All these facts are understandable and interesting not only for children, but also for adults in the case of their self-development.

As it has been mentioned above, the picture book, along with other resources, is a good tool for working with cultural memory. For example, we can point out the book named "The Keeping Quilt" written by Patricia Polacco in 1988 [6]. It describes the story of a young girl Anna, whose grandmother emigrated from Russia to America having just a dress and a shawl with her. When the dress becomes too small for Anna, her mother invites all the neighbors to help her to make a blanket. While the neighbors are creating a blanket, the reader follows many family stories which are told by them. It sounds like the blanket is sewed of threads of the history of generations, which is emphasized by "sepia" illustrations and related the reader to the past. Such pictures are as realistic as old photographs from a family album. "We will make a quilt and it helps us never forget our motherland" said Anna's mother. "It will look like our Russian family dancing around us at night." Patricia Polacco's own family story was told in her book. She herself was from a migrant family and whilst mixing with many ethnic groups she felt the need to refer to her own cultural memory. Patricia was diagnosed with dyslexia at high school and as a result she felt insecure. It led to speech and writing delay, so she used art as a method of self-expression. Turning to the picture books, she found ways to convey her ideas without words. Moreover, the author refers to semiotic signs that make her work interesting for adults who are familiar with Russian culture. For instance, some of the images in this picture book are similar in style and composition to the paintings the "Whirlwind" (1906) and the "Peasant Woman" (1904) painted by the artist F. A. Malyavin. We could also mention works by the artist Rodchenko, for example, the "Portrait of a Mother" (1924). This underlines the fact that a picture book blurs the boundaries between a book for adults and a book for children.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion it should be noted that nowadays immigration process has an impact on everyone's life as it creates multilingual and multicultural environment. Immigrants, involving parents and children, migrate for various reasons, and that is why many problems are still associated with this displacement, including adaptation, tolerance, preservation of identity and cultural memory. The matter of personal identity which accepts the diversity of cultures and languages is a part of the issue. The multicultural environment and multilingualism assign the new tasks for authors and illustrators of children's literature. At present a new way of communication is presented by visual narrative. It is thought that picture books present opportunities for children to develop a wide range of skills. The point, which makes picture books different from others and creates the greatest potential, is their ability to cultivate moral capabilities among children, including the respect for a multicultural society. Without doubt picture books could be a unique tool for solving psychological problems associated with immigration.

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