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## Focused Attention Technique in Teaching Future Language Teachers to Read Creolized Texts

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### Abstract

The authors investigate the problem of the formation of readiness of future language teachers to design educational situations that foster value orientations in schoolchildren. A complex semiotic structure – creolized text – was chosen as a tool for constructing such educational situations. The authors continue to study the educational potential of film fragments – creolized texts – used as a didactic means of teaching to make detailed utterances, as well as a model for improving students' speech. The purpose of the study is to substantiate possibility of using classical works of Russian cinematography in teaching philology students, as well as of using a specialized case study of educational situations for a language teacher capable of developing reading skills and forming educational actions of schoolchildren. Among the specific research objectives, the authors consider the determination of the educational potential of using creolized texts in the process of professional training of future teachers of the Russian language, the analysis of how schoolchildren perceive the screen adaptations of the Russian literature. The research was carried out based on theoretical research method and experimental work in order to test the hypothesis about the effectiveness of the use of creolized texts in the linguo-methodological training of philology students. As a result, we justify the idea of including the method of focused attention into the classification of communicative methods of teaching reading.

*Keywords:* functional literacy, creolized text, visual stylistics; linguo-methodology.

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## **Introduction**

Traditionally, the theory of teaching language and speech considers the use of creolized texts for professional training in three aspects. Firstly, it is a visual and sensory support for the perception and processing of linguistic and speech information (Belenko, 2012; Besedin, 2017; Bogoyavlenskaya & Tulaykina, 2019; Trubina, 2019; Zacks, 2015). Secondly, it is a source of obtaining, transforming and interpretation of linguocultural information, which native speakers routinely use in everyday situations (Kolosova, Korobova, & Ukhanova, 2018; Khurmuz, 2019; McKee, 2019; Moiseenko & Maltseva-Zamkovaya, 2019; Seger, 2020). Finally, it is a specially selected basis for expanding one's professional experience (Belenko, 2012; Besedin, 2017; Bogoyavlenskaya & Tulaykina, 2019; Gromova, 2016; Khurmuz, 2019; Moiseenko & Maltseva-Zamkovaya, 2019). Based on our theoretical analysis of the literature, as well as the generalization of the results of linguodidactic research carried out by the authors, we put forward the following assumption: in the conditions of developing principles of media didactics and / or digital didactics, the use of creolized texts in the linguistic training of students has broad prospects for both future teachers of Russian, and for schoolchildren. The very nature of creolized texts simultaneously immerses the modern reader into several semiotic systems and requires his / her immediate mental reaction and an instant interpretation of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. Since creolized texts reflect the new phenomena of digital communication, it is necessary to develop the skills of reading and transforming them. The relevance of the object chosen for joint research is confirmed by the practical needs of the day, and the social order from society. For example, the Council for Culture and Arts under the President of the Russian Federation instructed the Ministry of Education of Russia to develop methods for studying the heritage of Russian cinematography (The List, 2021). Our study originates from the provisions of the Presidential Decree "On the Strategy of Scientific and Technological Development of the Russian Federation" as of December 1, 2016 No. 642, which we consider as a specific scientific and practical task for future teachers-philologists in creating an effective system of enhancing and complete use of the intellectual potential of the nation.

## **Purpose and objectives of the study**

The general goal of the study, which we consider as a program of our joint actions, is to develop a specialized case study of educational situations for a language teacher capable of developing reading skills in schoolchildren and forming their study skills, basing our effort on the achievements of aesthetics, philosophy, the art of cinematography, semiotics, psychology, general pedagogy and methodology of language teaching. Study skills are universal skills that have a supra-subject nature. The goal is achieved through solving specific research problems.

First, we determine which creolized texts have educational potential. Then we establish how the selected creolized texts can be applied in the process of professional training of future teachers of the Russian language and analyze the students' perception of screen adaptations of works of Russian literature in Russian cinematography.

### **Literature review**

The theoretical foundation of the research is comprised of ideas about linguopragmatics, texts of a new sign culture and the speech behavior of a person who mastering a new literacy (Cousins, 2018; Khurmuz, 2019; Kibrik, 2018; Zacks, 2015), which is necessary in the era of digital modernism (Kolesnikova, 2019). The new way of perception prompts us to seek a different, unusual way of decoding information codes. The authors agree with the statement "the discourse of the new culture is primarily formed through an appeal to emotions, personal beliefs, and personal experiences" (Kolesnikova, 2019, p. 74). A number of works (Belenko, 2012; Besedin, 2017; Bogoyavlenskaya & Tulaykina, 2019; Trubina, 2019) state that the modern user has developed a habit of referring to creolized texts, the perception of which develops new adaptive mechanisms of the brain. The increased speed of perception helps an individual to process digital information of a high degree of semantic compression (animation, comics, anime, strips, memes, video clips, creeping line, ultra-short Tik-Tok shows, commercials, etc.). The ideology of postmodernism supports (paraphrasing an ancient saying) the postulate: "I have fun, therefore I am." A person of digital modernism is a "beholder" (Cousins, 2018, p. 8); therefore, in addition to professional competencies, today's teacher has to master specific competencies, not directly related to teaching. From now on, special skills of filmmaking: directing, writing scripts, editing, acting, presenting are in demand in teaching (Cousins, 2018; McKee, 2019; Seger, 2020; Vogler, 2019). A number of publications record this tendency: the teacher of the new century has to master genres and forms of communication that are not familiar to him or her. Hence, new requirements for professional training of teachers arise (Besedin, 2017; Bogoyavlenskaya & Tulaykina, 2019; Gromova, 2016; Kibrik, 2018; Moiseenko & Maltseva-Zamkovaya, 2019; Trubina, 2019; Khurmuz, 2019). Well-known facts force us to put forward the assumption that it is possible to teach the perception and analysis of creolized texts taking into account the selectivity of attention and its volume, fluctuations, concentration, switchability and distribution. In this regard, the study of Zacks (2015) on the connection between the viewer's personal experience and artistic reality is of particular interest. The quality of a person's perception and processing of diverse information is directly related to the directedness and concentration of mental activity, within which the brain synthesizes the received information and forms new connections.

### **Methodology**

Our discussions, conducted since 2018, are based on an experiment involving the inclusion of creolized texts in the educational process in secondary general and higher education schools. In our research, we adhere to the current idea that creolized, or polycode, text is a semiotically complex semantic formation, or a multisemiotic unity. From the point of view of semiotics, creolized texts are literally woven from meanings of various codes and signs. In addition to verbal content, such texts include various semiotic signs: iconic, light, graphic, musical, animation, etc. In terms of the degree of influence on the recipient of information, it is more effective, since signals and information are simultaneously received through several channels (Cousins, 2018; Khurmuz, 2019). Therefore, it is difficult to perceive multicomponent text and the processing of codes. In this regard, it is appropriate to recall the classical understanding of creolized text offered by Bart: “In television, cinema, in advertising, the emergence of meanings depends on the interaction of images, sounds, and signs” (Bart, 1975, p. 124). The rules for presenting polycode texts that are emerging in digital didactics take into account the initial reading skills and reading actions that readers have before perceiving creolized texts. The linguodidactic interpretation of creolized text, in our understanding, is associated with the elimination of knowledge entropy. On the one hand, while learning the native language in communicative situations, students master syntactic models and speech stereotypes; on the other, they analyze semiotic signs, codes, non-verbal clues accepted in a particular linguocultural sphere. In addition, proceeding from Bart’s semiotic theory, we believe that individual interpretation should be taken into account, since the perception of the components of creolized texts “varies individually” (Bart 1975, p. 313). In this regard, the use of the term “creolized” text in digital linguodidactics is preferable, in our opinion.

The authors summarize the theoretical and practical experience of the Institute of Education Development Strategy of the Russian Academy of Education, Moscow State Regional University, Taganrog Institute named after A.P. Chekhov. The experimental work was carried out from the end of 2018 to March 2021 and included three stages: indicative, adaptive and summarizing. In the study took part:

- 211 schoolchildren (13 to 15 years old);
- 19 school teachers from Moscow, the Moscow Region and Taganrog (men and women aged 27 to 58);
- 302 undergraduate students of the Moscow State Regional University and the Taganrog Institute named after A.P. Chekhov (young men and women aged 19 to 21).

The experimental work was based on the following hypothesis: the productivity of the formation of the professional competence of philology students can be increased using a specially organized methodology for teaching reading, and analysis and interpretation of cultural content in creolized texts.

We assumed that there was a relationship between the quality of an individual's perception of cultural content and the degree of focusing their attention. The following research tools were used:

- two questionnaires – one for schoolchildren and one for university students. Didactic content, questionnaires and tests were developed by Aleksandrova, Dobrotina, Gats, and Narushevich in 2019;
- two tests for university students: psychological (distribution of attention) and culture test (mastery of the primary skills of conscious interpretation of films). Data were analyzed on Google Forms and Survio platforms in 2020-2021;
- interviews with teachers with seven standard questions;
- linguo-methodological situational tasks focused on the method of using creolized texts in teaching the Russian language. Tasks for students can be found in the electronic information system of the Moscow State Regional University.

The collection of the first empirical data among schoolchildren and students was carried out using B. Bourdon's "Dot cancellation test", modified forms and formulas devised by Baskakova, and Krylov's correction test that takes into account the "attention selectivity" indicator (Krylov & Manichev, 2004). Throughout the experimental work, pupils of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades and students of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years of philological faculties were observed in order to record changes in the nature of their perception of literature and cinematography. Experimental work was carried out during school hours and in classrooms, questionnaires for students were distributed through instant messenger (Telegram, PRIVte channel IREN\*\*\*\*\*IN RE), through the electronic information system of the Moscow State Regional University. The questionnaires were anonymous; the interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis. Google forms and Telegram provide anonymous survey functions. Teacher interviews on the use of artistic content took place at school outside the classroom hours.

## **Results**

The ascertaining experiment helped to substantiate the relevance of our proposal - to consider the method of focused attention as a realization of the communicative method of teaching students of philology. Since the experimental work on the substantiation of the methodological idea is still in progress, we present the interim results of the fact-finding experiment in a generalized form. The statistical results showed that:

- a) 82 percent of the subjects preferred the visual way of presenting information;
- b) all participants in the survey were unable to define the levels of analysis of a feature film clearly;

c) one fifth of the teachers interviewed regarded the analysis of the film language as a tool for self-cognition; d) two teachers out of nineteen defined watching a movie as co-creation;

e) modern students do not associate the concept of functional literacy and the specificity of the creolized text – only 9 percent of students gave appropriate answers;

f) 13 out of 300 university students were able to name more than six works of literature adapted by cinematography;

g) none of the participants was able to indicate more than five films – adaptations of Russian classical literature.

A detailed analysis and breakdown of the results were presented to the teaching community in the work of Gats (2020).

In the course of the study, simultaneously with the collection of empirical data and its processing, the authors watched in total 126 works of Russian and foreign cinematography, of which 24 films were selected. The selection was carried out according to the following criteria:

- films should have high aesthetic value and educational content;
- films should be accessible for perception by schoolchildren aged 11-16;
- the content of a film should complement the content of bachelor study program “Pedagogical Education” (for students aged 19-22);
- the use of film fragments should be relevant to the classroom activities of schoolchildren aged 11-16 studying Russian as a native language;
- the use of films should be appropriate for extra-curricular activities of schoolchildren aged 11-16 studying Russian as a native language.

The analysis of selected films led to a reasoned conclusion that it is advisable to use films – screen adaptations of classical and modern Russian literature.

The results of the indicative stage of the experiment confirmed that the interpretation of creolized texts has not yet found its way in the professional training of language teachers. Until now, the question of the analysis algorithm remains open, contrary to the widespread opinion about the very real possibility of explicating videos, film fragments, animated films, video clips, screenlives (the film newspeak, screenlife – “life in the screen”), educational films, advertising texts, political posters. At the same time, it is clear that creatively expressive, bright, mixed types of texts can be presented in pedagogical interaction in order to help students master verbal and non-verbal means of digital communication.

Thus, the majority of materials of All-Russian monitoring of the formation of functional literacy, initiated by the Russian Academy of Education were devoted to teaching to read creolized texts. It is also our main interest how films can be used in the methodology of teaching Russian to schoolchildren and in the linguo-methodological training of university students – future teachers of the Russian language. We offer our general considerations for further discussion by interested specialists below.

The purpose of using creolized texts in the course of methodology of teaching the Russian language is to form the students' ability and readiness to use aesthetic content in teaching Russian.

Students master educational situations, which is aimed at expressing their own emotional attitude to what they see, or more correctly, to what they read on the screen. Visual illustration is traditional in the lessons of the Russian language and literature; therefore, we are convinced that the interpretive essence of the film text is significant for the study of theory and teaching methodology. This means that future teachers understand that reading creolized texts is associated not only with a personal interpretation of the film, but, more importantly, with an ability to explain their aesthetic and cultural significance, as well as the author's interpretation of the film. Image-mediated illustration serves to enhance the cognitive activity of a teenager. Creolized texts help students to complete their emotional impressions about a literary character, to make up for the vagueness of their ideas about literary heroes, the setting, artistic details, and the world of things. Moreover, an independent perception of a film and a literary work serves to expand life experience and to comprehend the image-centered language of cinema, and ways of expressing imagery.

## **Discussion**

Peculiarities of creolized texts stipulate methodological techniques and didactic rules for their inclusion in the methodology course. We conclude that it is possible to direct the activity of students towards the conscious construction of the task to develop the speech skills of schoolchildren with the help of focused attention. This technique of reading creolized texts may help organize the initial learning situation for the students. In accordance with the communicative-activity learning, such texts are used to create communicative situations, within which the skills of spontaneous speaking, maintaining a dialogue, bringing forward arguments, and making value judgments are developed. Such educational situations expand not only personal experience of the students, but also their professional and pedagogical experience. In our view, the structure and content of an educational situation that uses creolized texts, should take into account:

- the reality of the viewer and the reality recreated by the author of the film;
- communication code, which helps to interpret the figurative language of cinematography;

- relationships that arise between the viewer and the film.

The content and topic unity of educational situations is designated as a specialized case with the code name ReCoRe, which functions in professionally oriented conditions (to illustrate something, to introduce a problem or to teach assessment). The learning situation preserves the didactic components: 1) motivation, personal and cognitive needs of the student; 2) the formulated task of educational activity; 3) educational activities; 4) assessment and reflection. The experience of teaching meaningful viewing allows us to distinguish two tracks: from a methodological task – towards the film text, and from a film text towards the methodological task. The ReCoRe case contains creolized texts that may be used in teaching philology students:

- information sources (hyperlinks to media texts; movie sites, e.g. *Afisha.ru*, *kino-teatr.ru*, *Film.ru*, *kinonews.ru*; collections of comments; teasers; trailers; long reads);
- visual sources (works of contemporary visual art);
- media library (artistic animation; popular science films; fragments of films, short and full-length feature films).

The content of the media library is comprised of classics of Russian cinematography. It includes film adaptations of Russian literature, and films based on literary works: *Dubrovsky* (1988, directed by V. Nikiforov); *Dubrovsky* (2014, directed by K. Mikhanovsky); *The Stationmaster* (1972, directed by S. Solovyov); *The Aristocratic Peasant Girl* (1995, directed by A. Sakharov); *The Captain's Daughter* (1958, directed by V. Kaplunovsky); *The Captain's Daughter* (2000, directed by V. Martynov); *The Nose* (1977, directed by R. Bykov); *Without a Dowry* (1937, Y. Protazanov); *Without a Dowry* (1974, directed by K. Khudyakov); *Cruel Romance* (1984, directed by E. Ryazanov); *Simple Death* (1985, A. Kaidanovsky); *Resurrection* (1960–1962, directed by M. Schweitzer); *Asya* (1977, directed by I. Kheifits); *A Few Days in the Life of I.I. Oblomov* (1979, directed by N. Mikhailkov); *The Jumping Girl* (1955, directed by S. Samosonov); *The Lady with the Dog* (1960, directed by I. Kheifits); *Uncle Vanya* (1970, directed by A. Konchalovsky); *The Bad Good Man* (1973, directed by I. Kheifits); *The Days of the Turbins* (1976, directed by V. Basov); *French Lessons* (1978, E. Tashkov); *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957, M. Kalatozov); *Ivan's Childhood* (1962, directed by A. Tarkovsky); *The Geographer Drank His Globe Away* (2013, A. Veledinsky).

ReCoRe takes into account the classroom (4 - 10 academic hours) and autonomous work of students (10 - 36 hours), which includes the methodological development of assignments for the lessons of the Russian language and literature. Focused attention technique prompts the student to analyze the imagery of a film, to search for metaphors, allusions, and hyperboles. “A really good film has layers, and underneath there are more layers. Not a single word, not a single gesture, not a single deed is accidental.

Much of what we hear and see in a good film carries or implies something else – a contradiction, an association, a hint” (Seger, 2020, p. 215). That is why focused attention technique directs the subject’s mental activity to three levels of reading the text: drama, image and sound, and editing. From the point of view of the perception of various semiotic signs, we teach to be attentive to the means expressed verbally:

- the content and quality of the dialogs / monologs of the characters and the accompanying sounds, music, intonation, background song;
- textual information expressed in different ways – names, posters, the world of things, letters, signatures, screen images with text;
- to the author’s comments - plot credits, subtitles, afterword;

as well as to non-verbal means: landscape, interior, transport, behavior of the characters, household items, paralinguistic means (nominative and descriptive units).

During the analysis of film texts, students answer questions related to the ideological, semantic, plot and linguocultural components of the film text, consistently relying on color associations, light, angle, frame length (large, general, medium), details in the frame, cut transitions, tempo of the cut chosen by the director. The very content of creolized texts, which encourages the expression of personal attitude, paves the way to the analysis and construction of statements. Communicative actions form the basis of speech activity and are expressed in the form of a monologue statement and participation in group discussions.

## **Conclusion**

Introducing fragments of films into the general context of pedagogical education of language and literature teachers creates conditions for gaining experience in the formation of functional literacy. The method of reading creolized texts in the course of training of language teachers is justified: firstly, by the postulate of neoclassical postmodern pedagogy about the productive socialization of students; secondly, the generalization of the pedagogical experience of the use of film texts in the process of teaching the Russian language; thirdly, it is confirmed in practice, where high-quality learning outcomes of students are manifested.

The consolidation of the authors’ personal practical teaching experience, survey materials and the results of the independent work of philology students made it possible to determine the intermediate results of the professional training of future language teachers in the modern language situation. First, our assumption has been confirmed: it is productive to consider and describe the texts of a new sign nature used in digital linguodidactics as creolized, pragmatically complex texts. Second, it is substantiated that the technique of focused attention when teaching to read creolized texts is part of the communicative method of teaching reading.

Third, the most important criterion for selecting a creolized text for linguodidactic purposes is not only the presence of functional content and value-semantic logic, but also educationally significant content. Works of Russian cinematography, adapting Russian classical and modern literature, meet the specified selection criteria. Fourth, the linguodidactic parameters were established for the analysis of the creolized text, namely:

- the content of the listener’s oral monologue consists in building an utterance adequate to the speech situation;
- creolized texts are selected as a didactic means for monitoring the formation of professional skills;
- the level of development of students’ speech skills is assessed using a unit of control - an independent statement with communicative support;
- the indicators of speech properties are: the number of nominative and descriptive elements used in the utterance (description of the background and landscape, description of the characters’ actions, value judgments about offscreen narration, general personal perception, personal assessment of the content of the film text).

Thus, the focused attention technique in teaching to read creolized texts is a specific tool for the productive combination of language teaching methodology with the art of cinematography. It is used to form functional literacy, and for the development of associative and imaginative thinking of students. The materials of the joint research of the authors of the article will be useful in teaching the disciplines of the psychological and pedagogical cycle in pedagogical educational programs and can serve as the basis for the formation of linguo-methodological skills of modern teachers.

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