

Psychological mechanisms of metaphor, proverb and saying understanding by children

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the psychological mechanisms for metaphor, proverb and saying understanding by children in English and Russian literature via theoretical and empirical methods. The testing of proverb understanding by children showed that all children (bilinguals and monolinguals) coped well with the assignment. However, the bilingual children coped with the test better than the monolinguals. After all, the authors concluded that the level of proverb understanding by children, both bilinguals and monolinguals, depends on the development and the manifestation of associative thinking and a child's ability to see the meaning behind the images.

Key words: Metaphors, Psychological Mechanisms, Children, Student.

Mecanismos psicológicos de metáfora, proverbio y refrán entendidos por los niños

Resumen

El artículo está dedicado al estudio de los mecanismos psicológicos para la metáfora, el proverbio y la comprensión de los niños en literatura inglesa y rusa a través de métodos teóricos y empíricos. La prueba de comprensión de proverbios realizada por niños demostró que todos los niños (bilingües y monolingües) cumplieron bien con la tarea. Sin embargo, los niños bilingües afrontaron la prueba mejor que los monolingües. Después de todo, los autores concluyeron que el nivel de comprensión de los proverbios por parte de los niños, tanto bilingües como monolingües, depende del desarrollo y la manifestación del pensamiento asociativo y la capacidad de un niño para ver el significado detrás de las imágenes.

Palabras clave: Metáforas, Mecanismos psicológicos, Niños, Estudiante.

1. Introduction

The scientific literature on pedagogy and psycholinguistics has no unambiguous understanding of proverb, metaphor and saying role, both in Russian and in English. Most authors consider them as the means of expression in the language. The relevance of this topic is that the study of a foreign language among modern children is associated with the processes of metaphor, proverb understanding in their comparison with the Russian language.

2. Methodology

Research methods are theoretical (the review of scientific literature on the research problem); empirical (sociological survey, the monitoring of sites, questioning and observation).

3. Results and discussion

The studies of a number of authors are of particular importance for our research. They consider that the creation of a text and its understanding are equally difficult for children. We agree with the authors that the reader receives information in the form of signals (words and sentences), as well as the relationship between them. That is why the key to a text understanding is the reader's ability to perceive signals and react to them. Children understand all the words literally, in the literal sense. Therefore, hearing or reading proverbs, they can only say who or what is meant in their opinion. For example, about Senka and Eremka (A hat for Senka hat, a cap for Eremka) or about eggs and hen (Eggs do not teach hen).

It is possible to recognize the position by Abulkhanova and Slavskaya (2016) that the understanding of proverbs is the result of logical, semantic and lexical analysis. The authors believe that in order to understand the proverbs, a child must be able to make a conclusion by analogy, own generalization technique, and distract from specificity.

After the conduct of research and the analysis of results, the authors draw the following conclusion: the children with a developed verbal-logical thinking and a developed generalization technique understand the proverbs better than their peers. Brushlinskiy (2013) propose to pay more attention to proverbs during Russian language and literature lessons, since the study of proverbs contributes to the development of the child's verbal and logical thinking. A teacher is offered to reveal the meaning of proverbs during the work with them in class, use them in didactic games, and students are offered to write essays on the topic of proverbs and keep the diary of proverbs.

Sayings and proverbs are actively used in the teaching of children. Chebucheva and Matyukova (2014) are of the opinion that the authors of textbooks select proverbs by the level of accessibility for understanding, real-life usage, topic and instructive potential. For example, during the study of sounds, the proverbs with sound recording are used. In the proverb where friendship is valued, enemies are trembling, the repetition of the sounds *др* and *ж* creates the effect of trembling. There are more difficult exercises, For example, the grouping by subject and the selection of a proverb suitable by meaning to a poem or a story. Such tasks help children to develop analysis and comparison skills.

We are impressed by Kolesnikova's (2009) works, who considers proverbs as the means of influencing the behavior and the consciousness of children. From the works of this author, we can

conclude that in order to achieve an educational effect, children, first of all, must learn to understand the proverbs. The work with the proverbs during Russian language and literature lessons contributes to their understanding. Children learn to analyze them and see the meaning behind the images. Patricia Carlson and Moshe Anisfeld from Cornell University write that children can create metaphors spontaneously and unconsciously. The authors studied the records of one child speech in the age range from twenty-one to thirty-three months. The mother (Patricia Carlson) recorded the interesting statements of her son when he was busy with his usual business. For example, when the child was twenty-nine months old, he climbed onto his father and slid along him, saying, I am a big waterfall. Thus, we can conclude that the child transferred unconsciously the property of the waterfall (downward movement) to himself, thereby creating a metaphor (Yoon et al., 2016).

However, Yakovleva (2015) argued that, although children can produce metaphors, their understanding of metaphors is lagging behind, especially with the understanding of proverbs. The authors conducted the study suggesting that the children choose one picture from two that best suited to the proverb. The correct picture and the proverb were related only by the figurative meaning. But in the end, the authors came to the conclusion that the children of 7–9 years old are still able to understand proverbs. In Belentsov's et al. (2016) works the analysis of understanding process by schoolchildren occupies a significant place. The author has identified four stages of understanding: recognition, the specification of concepts, the explanation through the reduction to the known and the explanation based on genesis, the search for the cause of a happening thing. But a child does not have complete knowledge and he is not ignorant of something. He has half-knowledge instead.

In their turn, Didkovskaya and Petrova (2014) argue that the proverbs for human memory are reproducible and valid. In other words, a person remembers a proverb as a complete statement. The Swiss psychologist J. Piaget in his book *The Child's Speech and Thinking* writes that the child's thinking is syncretic, that is, merged and undifferentiated. The experiment was conducted with the children of 8-11 years old. The children were offered a series of proverbs, then they were given 12 phrases, 10 of which expressed the same idea as the corresponding proverb. The children were required to combine the proverbs with phrases. The author analyzed some of the children's responses and came to the conclusion that two sentences which are understandable to the child separately, are distorted together by syncretism. We attempted to study the understanding of proverbs by the children of primary school age. To accomplish this task, several experiments were carried out with the children of nine - twelve years old, the students of third and fourth grades of a secondary school in the city of Kazan, Russian Federation. The experiment was conducted with 19 students of the fourth grade from the secondary school of Kazan at the age of 10-12 years. There were 11 bilinguals and 8 monolinguals among them. In the Republic of Tatarstan as the subject of the Russian Federation, it is believed that children from Tatar families are bilingual, since they are in a bilingual environment from birth. The children were given the task to determine the meaning of proverbs. The experiment was conducted in the following way: children were given cards, divided into two parts, one proverb was placed on one part, and several phrases and proverbs on the second part. There were four sets of proverbs. The task was to choose one proverb or phrase from the second part similar in meaning to the proverb from the first part. An empty space was left on the backside so that the child could write an explanation of his choice. For example, it was suggested to choose a synonymous proverb from the following to the proverb *Forge the iron while it is hot*: *There is no big deal without loss*, *one field berry*, *there is no forest behind the trees*, and *Rusty iron does not shine* or *Do everything in time*. The correct answer is *Do everything in time*, as the saying *Forge the iron while it is hot* calls to use the opportunity to do something while it is there, that is, to

act in time. Then they provided the list of all the proverbs used in the experiment. The proverb, to which a synonymous proverb should be chosen, is shown in bold, the rest in italics. There is a cross (x) near the correct answer. Some parables are interpreted.

1. Forge the iron while it is hot - to rush to do something, while there are favorable conditions, to take advantage of the moment. There is no big deal without loss. - When you perform an important business, you cannot do without errors and miscalculations. One field berry - very similar people, often about the similarity of any character traits. There is no forest behind the trees - to pay attention to the details without noticing the main thing. Rusty iron does not shine - inaction spoils a man. Do everything on time. (x)

2. One is not a warrior in the field - a person can achieve his goals in a team more effectively. It is difficult for a tree to grow alone. (x) Pure gold is expensive. Now shoes are made without an awl. Do not judge about the book by the binding - the appearance of a person and an object does not always reflect his soul. An unattractive person may turn out to be a kind, excellent friend, and a book with a boring cover can be an interesting one. No white dust comes out of the coal bag.

3. Not all gold that glitters - not all which seems beautiful and attractive has real value. As goes around comes around, so will respond. - Someone's attitude towards others causes a similar attitude of others to this person. A fed person does not understand the hungry one. A person learns everything from his own experience. Judge not by sight, but by deeds - A person's appearance does not matter, his deeds are important. (x) If you have not done your work - do not boast - you cannot rejoice too early, you cannot brag about a job that has not been done yet and whose success is not clear yet. One hand washes the other - about accomplices in some unfair deed.

4. What you sow, you reap - The consequences are determined by your acts. Do not halloo till you are out of the wood - do not consider the job successfully done until you have completed it. Do not marvel at the man, but marvel at his deeds - Judge a man by his acts, and not by appearance and other characteristics. You have the things you do. (x) Having checked only the tests, not yet taking into account the explanations of the children, we came to the conclusion that, in general, the children did well with the task. It is worth noting that the bilinguals coped with the test better than the monolinguals. Among Russian children, three (37.5%) completed the task correctly by 100%, one (12.5%) - by 75%, three (37.5%) - by 50%, and one (12.5%) - by 25% (see Table 1). Among Tatar children, there was no child who would perform the test only by 25%. Six (55%) showed 100% result, three (27%) completed the test by 75%, and the remaining two (18%) - by 50%. (see Table 2).

Correct answers	Number of children
25%	1 (12,5 %)
50%	3 (37,5 %)
75%	1 (12,5 %)
100%	3 (37,5 %)

Table 1. Results of monolinguals

Correct answers	Number of children
25%	-
50%	2 (18%)
75%	3 (27%)
100%	6 (55%)

Table 2. Results of bilingual

After the analysis of the explanations by children, we came to the conclusion that many children combined proverbs by lexical similarity. Some simply paraphrased the proverbs in their answers. In

this case, the monolinguals did better than the bilinguals. So, among the monolinguals, two were able to explain their choice by 100%, two - by 75%, two - by 25%, and the other two could not explain it at all (see Table 3). Among the bilinguals, those who could explain 50% of their answers correctly prevail, there were four (37%) of them. One respondent (9%) explained correctly by 100%, two (18%) by 75%, one (9%) by 25%, and three (27%) either did not write an explanation at all, or explained it incorrectly (see Table 4).

Correct answers	Number of children (percent)
0%	2 (25%)
25%	2 (25%)
50%	-
75%	2 (25%)
100%	2 (25%)

Table 3. Results of monolinguals

Correct answers	Number of children (percent)
0%	3 (27%)
25%	1 (9%)
50%	4 (37%)
75%	2 (18%)
100%	1 (9%)

Table 4. Results of bilinguals

4. Conclusions

An example of the method, teaching children to understand the figurative meaning of words was cited in Cassandra Claire's (2016) novel *Lady Midnight*. The boy (he was probably about 7-9 years old at that time) did not understand the meaning of idioms (for example, *Rains cats and dogs*), and his older brother decided to draw illustrations for him that showed first the literal meaning of the phrase, and then its figurative meaning. The child began to understand the difference between these values, and became interested in metaphors.

Claire (2016) describes various games and tasks that can be used by teachers during a break and by the leaders in children's camps. One of the game tasks is of interest for our research. The game is called *Hidden Words* and its essence is to guess the proverb by asking questions to other children. First, they choose the leader, who leaves the room, then make a well-known proverb and divide it into three parts. The leader enters, he should guess the proverb, having asked three questions to other children - he can ask any question to any child, and he should hide the part of the proverb in his answer. The answer may be long, so it is not always easy for the leader to guess the proverb. We believe that this assignment may attract the attention of a child to the proverbs, to show that small forms of folk art can be as exciting and entertaining as other forms of folklore (for example, fairy tales, folk songs). It also develops the ability to highlight the necessary information in a long utterance. However, such a task does not contribute to the understanding of proverbs, which is the main goal during the operation with proverbs. A teacher could explain to the children the meaning of proverbs that they do not understand (Zhestkova, 2015).

5. Summary

Having studied the theoretical material on the problem of research and conducted a series of experiments, we concluded that the level of proverb understanding by children depends on the

development of associative thinking and a child's ability to see the meaning of paremia behind the images. In general, children cannot analyze proverbs; they cannot separate the direct meaning of words from the figurative meaning of a phrase or a sentence. The egocentrism of thinking prevents a child from the logical analysis of paraemias and the finding of the general meaning of words.

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