Minitexts of poetic titles as markers of the English cognitive paradaigm

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Minitexts are of interest to scholars due to the 'shrinking' trend in communication which affects not only language products but also the human mental structures generating them. The correlation of these two planes of human interaction as reflected in minitexts presents a challenge for linguistics. A minitext is viewed as a text of limited length (up to 600 words). The present paper reveals cognitive, pragmasemantic and discursive aspects of minitexts, exemplified by the titles of children's poems. The authors characterise the basic features of such texts (cohesion, coherence, wholeness, intentionality, etc.) and present their thematic typology. The analysis shows that adequate assessment of the identifying markers within poetic minitexts depends on the interaction of text discursive parameters, on the one hand, and their location in the hierarchy of other signs or markers, on the other. Choosing titles for English poems addressed to children, the authors focus on the unusual linguistic units involved in the creation of the titles' artistic imagery and aesthetic effect. One of the evident advantages of the cognitive and pragmatic approach is that it illustrates how minitexts can be useful in developing children's world perception, as well as their artistic tastes.

KEYWORDS: *cognitive-pragmatic approach, discourse analysis, poetic titles, minitexts, children's literature*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern paradigm of linguistic knowledge, minitexts have become a focus of interest for researchers since today's communicative trends largely derive from the accelerating pace of life of contemporary society (sometimes referred to as 'the global speed tendency' or 'the shrinking of the present') (Malinowska, 2017; Rosa, 2013), hence allowing less time, space and effort to be spent on verbal interaction. Thus the 'shrinking' effect is inevitable not only in verbal products, but also in mental structures generating them. The correlation of these two planes of human interaction as reflected in minitexts is what presents a challenge for linguistic analysis.

A minitext (or mini-format text) is any text, regardless of genre and content, which meets the

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main demand of brevity. It is the criterion of length that distinguishes the prototypical form of a minitext, which specificity is reflected in structural, semantic, pragmatic, and conceptual characteristics (Kharkovskaya et al., 2017).

Titles, headings, captions, text messages, Internet slang and the like present vivid examples of the accessible ways of wrapping our messages in tight concise forms. This has become a habitual and convenient practice that to some extent shapes people's linguistic consciousness.

While the pros and cons of this trend are not a priority for the present research, the paper is aimed at revealing and describing both verbal and non-verbal aspects of children's poetic titles from the angle of the valid combination of their obligatory and optional features, as well as their ability to shape a true-to-life perception of the world.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study of minitexts of the titles of English poems for children (hereinafter referred to as MTPCs) appears quite promising from the

standpoint of the currently popular cognitive-discursive approach.

Thus, Stockwell (2009; 2015) elaborates on the cognitive paradigm related to the main trends in literature such as the cognitive aesthetics of reading and cognitive stylistics, stating that familiar concepts, such as characterisation, tone, empathy and identification, can be useful in describing the natural experience of literary reading. His publications cover issues of stylistics, psycholinguistics, critical theory and neurology to explore the nature of reading as an art.

The development of cognitive ideas in reference to literary resonance can also be seen in Coats' (2013) claim stating that *'the crucial role children's poetry plays in creating a holding environment in language to help children manage their sensory environments, map and regulate their neurological functions, contain their existential anxieties, and participate in communal life'* (Coats, 2013, p. 132).

Brandt (2005) who authors works dealing with cognitive poetics and imagery in the framework of cognitive semantics and semiotics, pays special attention to interrelating literary reading and cognitive research as directly as possible and thus exploring meaning production as it occurs in poetic texts, rather than using poetry only to illustrate certain notions in cognitive semantics.

Therefore, the inner mechanisms of poetic textual structure are to be analysed based on the conceptual network actualised in the format of linguistic markers and interacting with both English poetic discourse and the titles' contexts of poems intended for children.

The discursive interpretation of text characteristics is another issue to be considered. While some scholars tend to equate the concepts of text and discourse, we rather oppose the idea of their outright similarity.

The term 'text' denotes a completed construct, built up as a holistic verbal entity, while 'discourse' refers to such a construct in the process of its immediate functioning, enriched with a whole lot of sense accretions and pragmatic meanings due to various situational factors, especially those connected with the recipient (Van Dijk, 1992).

Naturally, the same speech addressed to children and adults will be perceived differently and has to be pragmatically recipient-orientated to avoid communicative failures (Malyuga & Orlova, 2018; Ponomarenko, 2016).

These theoretical issues on cognitive studies, discourse analysis and pragmalinguistics applied in the classification of MTPCs contribute to the methodological background of the present paper.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Minitexts – notions and characteristics

Typical textual features are generally peculiar to both large and mini-format texts. Minitexts are of special interest for researchers as their limited structure provides an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive in-depth analysis (text mining) of their inherent basic characteristics. In *Minitexts in Modern Educational Discourse: Functions and Trends*, Kharkovskaya et al. (2017) point out that the main difference between the phenomenon of minitexts and the traditional understanding of a text is the volume parameter, and emphasise that a mini-format text in fact differs from the generally accepted meaning of 'text' only because it contains a limited number of elements (up to 600 words), *'otherwise bearing typical features of all the classical standards of textuality (cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality)'* (Kharkovskaya et al., 2017, p. 67).

Minitexts have certain systemic properties in terms of their formal structure, the main being stereotyped compositional model, uncomplicated syntax, and brevity of language units constituting the text.

Moreover, some types of minitexts are characterised by certain conventionality, i.e. by

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some prescribed rules or traditions of style and layout and slight variability in their structural formation (business letters, legislative acts, official autobiographies, references, leaflets, etc.). The study of the variation of different split-level language devices within minitexts helps clarify the concept of a communicative and pragmatic norm applied thereto.

Also, the notion of the communicative and pragmatic norm includes the use of extralinguistic devices (fonts, interspace, colour, text arrangement, capital letters) that define particular types of minitexts. Thus, each type of minitext conforms to a particular communicative and pragmatic norm, which presents a combination of obligatory (primary) and optional (secondary) characteristics of the text.

Prototypical minitexts that demonstrate genre specificity, as well as features of the compositional structure and semantic organisation, can be found in various discursive formations, since text exists as a result of a person's discursive activity, as a

complex marker in the unity of its three sides: semantics, pragmatics and syntax. In discursive space, a person's speech activity reflects various types of knowledge about the surrounding world and its mental representations.

As noted by Alexandrova et al. (2017), an individual's cognitive activity is always conjugated with the linguistic reflection of reality due to the systemic perception of the world which is *'organically connected with the indissolubility of knowledge through discourse – a dynamic process by which the predicative connection between the phenomena of the world and a direct expression of this connection through the language is made'* (Aleksandrova et al., 2017, p. *104).*

3.2 Cognitive paradigm markers in the titles of English poems for children

The study of any type of discourse supposes its segmentation and traditionally focuses on highlighting linguistic features of texts, representing the analysed discourse at the verbal level. The analysis of minitexts of titles, which are relatively completed elements of English literary poetic discourse, objectified in writing and possessing a structural and semantic unity and special functional purpose, shows that the adequate evaluation of identifying attributes of the type of the discursive space in question depends on the interaction of discursive parameters, as well as their place in the hierarchy of other markers.

3.3 Cohesion, coherence and wholeness as text constructive features

As the basic constructive features of any text applicable to titles, *cohesion*, *coherence* and *wholeness* need to be indicated because they reflect the structural, semantic and discursive essence of the text, respectively. These properties imply the link between text elements, their unity as a whole, and embrace different aspects of speech products organisation.

Cohesion is traditionally treated as the use of explicit linguistic devices (phrases or words) signalling relations between parts of texts and text units that help the reader associate previous statements with subsequent ones.

Connor (1996) supports the idea of cohesion being determined by lexically and grammatically overt inter-sentence relationships, and coherence being based on semantic relationships. While text cohesion is manifested through external structural markers and the formal dependence of the text components, its coherence reflects its thematic, conceptual organisation. While the concept of coherence governs thematic and communicative construction of a text, the concept of cohesion administers its form, i.e. its structural organisation (Bublitz, 2011).

Cohesion and coherence are inseparable and overlap; the presence of only one of them cannot attest to an appropriately constructed text. Thus, a coherent text will always be cohesive. Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify five general categories of cohesive devices that signal coherence in texts, which are reference, ellipsis, substitution, lexical cohesion, and conjunction.

Speaking of titles, their small volume hardly allows for a simultaneous occurrence of all or several of these devices, yet at least one of them is a must. For example, the famous poem *The Owl and the Pussy-Cat* by Edward Lear illustrates that the conjunction *and* in the title functions at both structural (as a linking element drawing homogeneous parts of the phrase to each other thus providing for cohesion) and semantic levels (as a linking element coordinating names of the participants belonging to the same class of objects – animals – thus ensuring coherence).

Being inalienable from each other, these two planes underlie the *wholeness* of the text via their interaction. Text wholeness implies situationality, i.e. the factors that make the text relevant to the situation, be it specific or abstract, real or imaginary. The text always reflects the circumstances in which it is constructed and used. Being a category of content, wholeness is orientated towards the general sense, which the text generates in accordance with the prevailing situation (Khramchenko & Radyuk, 2014; Malyuga & Tomalin, 2017).

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A holistic text is usually monothematic. The transition from one topic to another serves as a boundary signal that marks the end of one text and the beginning of another. Thematic cohesion is the basic characteristic of a title, which is interpreted as a kind of multidimensional formation constructed as a result of compression of the main content of a work. Therefore, it can be argued that the title of a fictional work is inherently always coherent. In MTPCs, cohesion is manifested in the reflection of referential objects of extralinguistic reality refracted through the author's and reader's subjectivism.

3.4 Constructive markers of mini-texts of headings of English poems for children

Content cohesion and structural coherence of minitexts actualise the category of *informativity*, which manifests itself in the nominative function of MTPCs (Van Dijk, 1992). It should be stressed that the analysed texts have different extents of informative potential and can present the information to the recipient in the most general way, as in:

Geography Lesson (Cookson, 2006, p. 22).
Snow (Morgan, 2003, p. 469).
Summer Storm (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 39).

Sometimes, on the contrary, they are focused on a diverse and explicit palette of the poem's thematic content, when the text specifies the smallest details, as in:

How to Turn a Class Hamster into a Dinosaur (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 83).
Lost Kitty in New York City, $ 500 Reward (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 416).
The Day I Got My Finger Stuck Up in My Nose (Morgan, 2003, p. 24).

The informative self-sufficiency of MTPCs defines their *separability*, i.e. the possibility of distinguishing one text from another relying on the difference in their denotative unities (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2007). If in the course of verbal communication the referent remains the same in the communicators' understanding, the unit of writing is viewed as a single, separate text.

Each separate MTPC also has logical *maturity*, since it gives the description of an object, which is exhaustive from the perspective of the goals and tasks set by communicating parties, as well as their awareness of this object. The focus on the recipient of the information plays an important role in composing any speech message. As stated

above, the addressee factor is a system-forming category of children's literature, which largely determines the nature and the verbal actualisation of the communicative act.

Based on the addressee parameter, two types of texts are typically distinguished – texts targeting an undifferentiated mass audience, and texts targeting a specific addressee, i.e. a group of people of certain educational, professional, cultural, aesthetic, social and age-specific background.

Children's literary poetic discourse is orientated towards a designated addressee, a child reader, whose perception of reality is qualitatively different from that of an adult. Children's readership is specialised, as it has particular age, educational and cultural parameters. Such 'limitation' of addressees is reflected initially in the theme of English poems intended for children, and allows authors to make their texts more comprehensible to their audience.

Secondly, the category of *intentionality* within the discourse under study determines the specific choice of structural and linguistic elements that constitute the text library of the titles in question and form the notion of a special 'child' language. In other words, titles of English children's poems are characterised by a direct correlation of the message with the addressee.

The specific nature of children's perception stems from the peculiarity of the anthropological forms of infantile cognition, which depends not only on psychophysiological factors but also on the social characteristics of childhood (Coats, 2013). The fact is that while both children and adults observe the same objects, children's approach to reality appears selective due to the peculiarities of their worldview. What is closest to the child's inner world is seen by them as a close-up, while what is less close to the child's inner world appears secondary.

Poems intended for children have the same reality as a creative product addressed to an adult audience, however what the child sees and perceives on a large scale, taking into account his/her child's worldview, comes to the forefront. A change in the perspective of understanding reality leads to a shift in emphasis in the content of the work, which creates objective prerequisites for the use of special stylistic devices (Brandt, 2005; Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2007). Thus, an author, referring to the young reader, is called upon to fulfil the most difficult task – namely, to take into account the peculiarities of the child's worldview while showing high literary skill. Exhibiting deep awareness of the world, a poet is expected to share his/her own outlook refracted through the prism of childhood, while at the same time remaining a kind of compass guiding the reader along the route.

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The peculiarities of children's comprehension of reality are the main reason for the specificity of knowledge, which is presented in English literary poetic discourse intended for the infantile audience. While these poems deal with the realities of the surrounding world, they also transform the information turning mundane statement of facts into an exciting process promoting the expansion of a child's cognition. According to Gibbs & Gibbs (1994), this determines the increased imagery and expressiveness of English literary poetic discourse intended for children, since *they 'think metaphorically about their own experiences, elaborating on the comparison between a physical object and the poet's psychological experience'* (Gibbs & Gibbs, 1994, p. 400).

4. STUDY AND RESULTS

Children's poetry aims to tell readers about what they really know, about what is really interesting and understandable for them. So, the main theme that has found its vivid reflection in MTPCs that make up the body of our sample is the world of the child and everything that has to do with it directly. Of course, any poet should be cautious in choosing the theme of their work. The ability to find a field of human knowledge, the boundaries of which are determined by the child's interest, partly determines a poem's success.

In children's poetic discourse, it is fundamental for an author to look at the world from a very specific perspective, to see the most ordinary things from the point of view of an adult person, yet through the eyes of a child. It is rare for children to think globally: they prefer to ask questions, the answers to which are sometimes hard to find. They simply explore the world around them, study life in all its diverse manifestations, including verbal. However, children do it in such a concentrated and enthusiastic way that the very process of a child's perception of reality deserves close attention, which is directly reflected in poetic titles, as in:

Five Ways of Looking at a Lemon (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 430).
How Teachers Leave School Each Evening (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 385).
Ode to My Nose (Cookson, 2007, p. 197).

Notably, in children's English poetic discourse there is traditionally no place for despotic adults with their admonitions and ready-made guidelines for action. In the poetic texts, children prefer to find issues taken from the lives of their peers. Some kind of partnership and trusting relationships with peers sharing similar interests are more

'A poet not for a moment forgets that child impressionability is very high and therefore deliberately chooses some bright situation or image, which is not banal, to make a lasting impression on a child'

important here. A certain image of the child, created by a poet, is of universal significance, since the figurative essence, i.e. associative and creative reinterpretation of objective meanings, is an integral part of literary poetic discourse.

Analysing the term 'literary image' presented in contemporary literary criticism and linguistics, Borisova (2009) defines it as *'a specific and at the same time generalised picture of existence created via verbal means and literary and compositional techniques and having an aesthetic meaning'* (Borisova, 2009, p. 25).

Consequently, the nature of figurative thinking lies in the specific usage of the word as a method of making an aesthetic and emotional impact on the addressee. The role of literary image within the framework of children's poetic discourse cannot be over-emphasised, for in this particular age group eye-mindedness, along with the emotional component, are of paramount importance.

Imagery as a way of thinking and the category of cognition has verbal and conceptual aspects. Therefore, the figurative word can serve as a source of various subjective-associative representations of the addressee and contributes to his/her inclusion in the process of comprehension of the poem's entire structure.

Thus, Gibbs & Gibbs (1994) notes that *'part of the delight children take in hearing certain stories stems not only from the enchantment they have as works of art but also from the psychological meaning children will continue to extract at different points in their lives, depending on their individual needs and interests'* (Gibbs & Gibbs, 1994, p. 402).

Appreciating the impressionable nature of a child's cognition, a good author will intentionally choose a vivid image to make a lasting impression, backing it up by a non-trivial choice of language tools:

The Teachers Jumped Out of the Windows (Nesbitt, 2009, p. 131).
Aliens Stole My Underpants (Cookson, 2006, p. 134).
The Dream of the Plastic Bag (Cookson, 2007, p. 143).

Literary poetic discourse represented by MTPCs is naturally emotional since they appeal to children's

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feelings and experiences characterised by immediacy, sincerity and reliability. The peculiarity of perception of the surrounding reality by a young reader, as a rule, is reflected in every work.

However, when the author sets a goal of making an emotional impact on a child, he/she cannot ignore the fact that the child's values system is not fully developed yet. Children are by nature oriented towards the perception of beauty and subconsciously reject everything that has elements of aggression and disharmony, which is why a good poet tries to avoid topics which can have a negative effect on a child, keeping in mind that a sense of satisfaction is a guarantee of younger generation's favourable mental development and social comfort.

MTPCs have certain distinctive features whereby they can be considered as a particular type of minitext with length as their main prototypical marker. The study shows that the number of components in MTPCs varies from 1 to 18 lexical units. The composite elements of MTPCs include isolated language units represented by both content words and auxiliary parts of speech, as in:

Sun (Cookson, 2006, p. 10).

Thanksgiving (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 62).

Why Old People Say the Things They Do When Young People Ask Them How They Are (Cookson, 2007, p. 191).

Secret Diary of The Girl We All Want to Sit Next to When Her Best Friend is Absent (Cookson, 2007, p. 52).

At the same time, the group of MTPCs comprising 3 to 7 lexical units is the most numerous:

The Rainmaker Danced (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 171).

Magic Me This (Cookson, 2006, p. 512).

The Way I Am (Cookson, 2007, p. 229).

A Minute to Midnight (Cookson, 2006, p. 316).

Today I Wrote This Poem (Nesbitt, 2009, p. 74).

My Mother Saw a Dancing Bear (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 336).

Who left Grandad at the chip shop? (Morgan, 2003, p. 77).

MTPCs can be explained by the peculiarities of the reader's perception in this age group. Turning to mono-component titles, authors should not forget the threat of the discrepancy between theirs and the reader's cognitive base stemming from figurative-associative cognition. On the other hand, too long a title, which, as a rule, has a complex syntactic structure, can make it difficult for children to perceive the information offered.

Thus, MTPCs consisting of 3 to 7 linguistic elements is optimal, since it can be considered quite sufficient for the adequate interpretation of the fundamentally important text categories.

The thematic focus of MTPCs can be recognised rather easily, which is due to the extreme importance, in the semantic sense, of the role of the title and its place. We know that the title of a poem is intended to attract the attention of a young reader and motivate him/her to read the whole text of the poem. The choice of an interesting topic that can grab a child's attention contributes to a large extent to the author's success.

For instance, *At the End of a School Day* (Morgan, 2003, p. 435) focuses on a topic having to do with school life. Any child wonders what events the described school day is filled with and wants to share the narrator's joy at the end of the lessons. The title *First Appearance of a Superhero in a Book* (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 57) promises the reader a fascinating story about the life of a superhero, full of adventures and heroic deeds in the name of saving mankind.

Authors refer to topics readily understandable by children and prompting an immediate emotional response and a keen interest, as in:

Fantasy Christmas List (Morgan, 2003, p. 46).

The Kitten at Play (Cookson, 2006, p. 307).
I Cloned Myself on Friday Night (Nesbitt, 2009, p. 88).

Poets use positive emotional attitude as a sure way to draw young readers' attention to objects of everyday reality so that they can find something special in them. For instance, in *Isn't My Name Magical?* (Cookson, 2006, p. 206), the author asks a question about the magical origin of his own name, and a young reader, driven by endless curiosity, cannot resist the temptation to read the poem in order to reveal the secret.

To create thematic clarity and maturity, one will have to take into consideration the psychological factor as well. The fact is that children perceive the world not through abstract concepts but rather through specific objects surrounding them.

Hence, poetic discourse is often about concretising the phenomena, characters and events described, as in:

I Tried to Ride a Skateboard (Nesbitt, 2009, p. 51).
The Oldest Girl in the World (Morgan, 2003, p. 166-168).
One Moment in Summer (Cookson, 2006, p. 287-288).

The main characters often receive personal names and in the course of the narration are endowed

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with certain abilities, skills and behaviour:

Playing Tennis with Justin (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 292-294).
Betsy Burped the ABC (Nesbitt, 2009, p. 44).
Waltzing Matilda (Cookson, 2007, p. 224).

Distinctive features of English MTPCs include general accessibility of the vocabulary and the simplicity of the syntax. In this respect, the lexical form of MTPCs radically differs from the same for adult readers.

Thus, the vocabulary used in children's poetry is practically devoid of terms, abstract concepts or complex words, as they can lead to misunderstanding or incorrect comprehension of the information.

Not to overload MTPCs with unnecessary meanings, authors use a language that reflects the peculiarities of everyday communication between readers of a certain age group. Poets use lexical units denoting objects and phenomena that are well known to children. Simple syntactic

constructions, used in English MTPCs, also contribute to understanding, as in:

Our Tree (Corbett & Morgan, 2006, p. 348).
Uncle and Auntie (Cookson, 2006, p. 520).
Have a Nice Day (Morgan, 2003, p. 246).
I Bit an Apple (Cookson, 2006, p. 96).
Gran Can You Rap? (Cookson, 2007, p. 216).

Thus, English MTPCs have special semantic and syntactic characteristics, since in conjunction with one another they create a momentary effect that attracts children's attention.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study suggests that components of English literary poetic discourse are interrelated and interdependent, and it is this interaction that determines the specificity of this type of person-centred discourse endowed with two anthropocentric elements – the author and the recipient – determining its very nature.

The distinctive features of literary poetic discourse considered in the present work are its subjectivism and creative nature. Special mention in this regard should be made of the specific role of the individual reader's reception in the process of understanding the discursive space of a work of art. In cases where children are the target audience, the dialogue in the poetic discourse is particularly evident.

However, this dialogue is specific as it appeals to emotions, and not on rationality. The reader's personality acts as the leading factor in organising the space of children's poetic discourse in English, in which minitexts of titles of poetic works serve as the main reference point.

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