

TEXT, COMPREHENSION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT

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Abstract: Presented theoretical study deals with problems of text, its understanding and interpretation. These basic terms are characterized from different points of view and we point out its function that represents important role during development of reader's literacy. When defining the understanding of a text we aim at the all-round understanding, different kinds of text and understanding of literary texts. We also study text interpretation, which is an essential requirement for work with text and it is one of the tools used for uncovering of understanding.

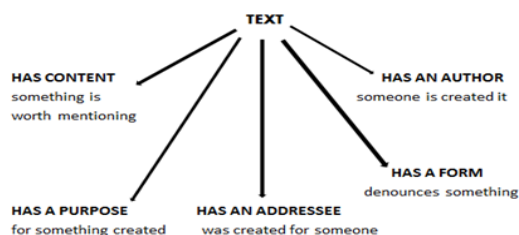
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1 Introduction to research study, text and text characteristics

The main goal of this study is to introduce problems of text, basic kinds of texts, to point out basic text characteristics, to focus on the relationship between text understanding and interpretation and factual or artistic nature. Theoretical part is divided into three chapters. The first chapter concerns with origins and meaning of the word „text“, which represents basic subject of this study – it serves as a tool for education, recognition of a surrounding world, but also as a possibility of self-fulfilment. This part consists of basic text characteristics and determination of text typology based on two different point of views. Another essential topic of this study is problems of text understanding and its development, which is very discussed question. We define and enlighten process of understanding within the connection to activation of existing skills of text reception. In the last part of the study we focus on interpretation and relationship to the text understanding. We aim at the interpretation based on the variability of the functional aspect, that means literary-scientific, literary-educational and interpretation in detailed view.

We also pay attention to interpretation activities, and interpretation competences. Word „text“ nowadays has a lot of definitions. Our goal is not to introduce and analyse different text definitions, therefore we chose only one definition. Word „text“ comes from Latin word *texte/textere*, which can be translated as textile material and in the past, it was understood as a unit woven by speech (Miháľechová, In Gavora, 2008). „Student acquires big part of information through the written text. He/she reads popular-scientific literature, newspapers and magazines. Student uses guidelines, encyclopaedias and dictionaries. We can say that written text plays very important role in the universal development of the student“ (Gavora, 1991, p. 10). School's task is not only to teach the student how to acquire formal parameters of reading techniques, but mainly to teach him/her how to understand and fully interpret concrete text. According to the following scheme, we can say the text:

Scheme 1 Content structure of a text



Source Miháľechová, In Gavora, 2008, p. 9

Main function of the text is to transfer information and to fulfil concrete communication purpose. Text is formed by words, sentences, phrases, not accidentally, but based on the rules of the particular language. Text can have form of coherent notation (text formed by symbols, signs, numbers, characters, words), but it can also have audio form, played form or animated form. Regardless of the form of the text, it usually has an author, content, form, purpose and recipient (Miháľechová, In Gavora, 2008). „Text represents specific object and textuality is a special feature. All parts of the text conforms to the communication purpose. Its goal can be awareness, change of the recipient's opinion, motivation to perform some activity etc.“ (Gavora, 1991, p. 12). Awareness is considered to be one of the basic text characteristics. Other characteristics that are fulfilled by the text are cohesivity, coherence, acceptability, situationality, intertextuality. From the view of textual linguistics, language unit has to fulfil certain criteria to function as a text. Robert de Beaugrande (In Klimovič, 2009, p. 12) defines seven standards of textuality (essential properties of texts):

- language standards: coherence, cohesion;
- psychological standards: intentionality, acceptability;
- social standards: situationality, intertextuality;
- communication standards: informativity.

These standards will now be briefly discussed in relation to textbooks. „Coherence is related to the referential aspect of the content structure of a text. Text units are coherent if they convey information“ (Dolník & Bajzřková, 1998, p. 15). Coherence refers to the thematic connectedness of a text which enables the reader to easily identify the topics and relationships between them. Cohesion refers to the internal connectedness of a text. Cohesion facilitates the reader's orientation in the text as well as reading comprehension.

„Cohesive means can be identified by looking at how a sentence in a text connects to the previous sentence“ (Mareš, In Čáp, Mareš, 2001, p. 486). The intentionality of a text is related to the ways in which the text serves the goals of the author, how it expresses the author's intentions and purpose. The intentionality of an educational material is apparent in the careful selection of information verified through research as being appropriate for students of a certain age, education and perceptive skills. The intention is to convey to the students the body of knowledge, relationships and procedures that they will need to succeed in a particular subject or else to integrate knowledge from several content areas, to encourage the students to internalise certain values and attitudes and, lastly, to teach them how to work with texts and develop their competence to learn how to learn. All this should contribute to the students' personal development (Mareš, In Čáp, Mareš, 2001).

Informativity refers to thematic and functional unity. Another text characteristics are text acceptability for recipient and implementation of the text to a situation – situationality (its contextual relevancy). A text is informative if it provides new information to the recipient.

After reading the text, the reader's (recipient's) level of information saturation should increase. The requirement that texts should be readable means that they should be structured in a way that makes it simple for recipients to perceive and understand them. This requirement is based on the principles of logicity, lucidity and economy. The principle of logicity dictates that the content of a text should be segmented into utterances, which should be arranged in a certain hierarchy. The principle of lucidity translates into the effort to achieve as great a correspondence between the content and form of a text as possible. The principle of economy refers to the need to convey information quickly and intelligibly. Situationality refers to the relationship of a text to the situation of occurrence.

Intertextuality covers the relationships of a text to other texts (Hoffmannová, 1997; Slančová, 2001). "Intertextuality refers to the process of establishing connections between the students' existing knowledge and new information presented through texts" (Mareš, In Čáp, Mareš, 2001, p. 486). Intertextuality covers relationships between various text types used in the context of one content area (textbook, reader, a mathematics exercise book, study guide, etc.) and relationships between texts used across several content areas.

„Text is a relatively self-contained unit of communication which has content, illocutionary structure and propositional and pragmatic function" (Dolník & Bajzlková, 1998, p. 10). „Structure of the text contains content structure that is motivated by a proposition function and illocutionary, which is connected to a pragmatic function" (Dolník & Bajzlková, 1998, p. 13).

1.1 Basic kinds of text

Mistrík (1997) divides texts into factual and artistic. Function of the factual texts is to inform the recipient. These can be divided into journalistic, expert and educational, administrative-judicial texts. The main function of the artistic texts is an aesthetical function, evoking of aesthetical experience (feelings, moods etc.). Based on the elaboration we can distinguish prose, poetry and drama. Such dividing (factual texts, artistic texts) can be considered as theoretical, there is no clear boundary between them, we cannot put them into one clear group of texts only. There are also so-called personal kinds of texts (they are based on the moment of social participation of the recipient). Among these, Mistrík assigns (1997) essay, non-fiction and science-fiction texts. Further literature for women (typically „women" literature, like recipes, patterns, women novels and others). Literature for men also belongs to this group (sport news, texts with hunting themes etc.). To this kind of text, we can also assign typical „children" texts (children magazines, books for children), and typically „teenage" texts (magazines and books for teenagers).

„Early school metatext (or text) is modelled according to the requirements of school literary education, based on the recipients' age variability and reading effectivity. Optimally, it is focused on ideological-aesthetical experience of the reader's reception" (Jurčo & Obert, 1984, p. 27).

Ordinary forms of texts are so-called connecting texts that represent brief reproduction of skipped unit before the extract or behind him and they deliver necessary information relating to the context of the whole piece. To this group we also assign so-called supplemental texts explaining unknown words (archaic, foreign words, expert expressions, translations etc.). Among the school metatexts we can talk about biography, which is represented by five areas – author's biography, biography of a book, biography in a book, author's autobiography and autobiography of the book. All of these formal kinds of metatexts are called general term complementary informative texts (Jurčo & Obert, 1984).

Other kinds of complementary texts are (Jurčo & Obert, 1984):

- Paraphrastic texts.
- Didactic texts (didactic instructional texts, didactic receptive texts, didactic situational texts).

Paraphrastic texts provide secondary information about the original text (its graphic, musical, theatrical, radio, movie processing). Between didactical-instructive texts we can also find didactical tasks and questions, lessons from literary theory, history and critics, summarized knowledge about literature and biographical-bibliographical data. Deepening of the perception of the literary work based on the reproductive, conceptual, explicative and discussion approach it has didactic text. Didactical situational texts represent incentive educational influences on the cultural, social life and the development of personality.

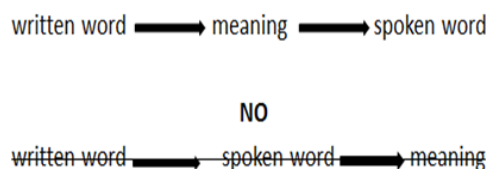
2 Understanding and reception of text

„Understanding to a text is a basic human activity and we cannot imagine human's life without this activity. Every human tries at every moment to understand what is happening around him or inside himself. He/she tries to find out what is the purpose, importance of every situation in his/her life – it means to understand it. There are only few activities requiring pure mechanical activity without understanding – there is always at least some minimum understanding" (Gavora, 2008, p. 51).

„Comprehension is synonym to understanding. Understanding is based on knowledge about world and number of cognitive abilities and skills" (Gavora, 2008, p. 51). There are more cognitive skills and abilities being involved in the process of understanding. We can understand understanding as an activity, but also as a result of understanding (it means product of this activity) – more detailed description has to be used for their distinction (Gavora, 2008).

„Understanding of written text is one of the ways how to acquire information about the world. Human also understands to verbal expressions, pictures, movement and complex situations (e.g. breakfast, fire, wedding). Text is specific case, because it brings information expressed by written verbal means that are organized through a specific way, which is called text structure" (Gavora, 2008, p. 52).

Scheme 2 Relationship between vocal reading and understanding of text of adult reader



Source Smith, In Gavora 2008, p. 53

Zelinková (2001) divides process of understanding into three source levels, namely:

- lowest level, understanding to isolated words, simple sentences – typical for beginning reader (other activity is pairing of words, see the picture above);
- higher level, where perception and remembering of the text is mechanical, without logical context – students are not able to perform deeper text analysis (typical for the first grade of elementary schools, pupils have to be led by teachers to understand the context);
- at the highest level, we can talk about text reception typical during the transfer from the first to the second grade of the elementary schools, it depends on the development of the cognitive skills of a given individual.

We have to make an effort to make the reception happen. We have to actuate ourselves. Without a will to perceive the text, understand it and remember it no reception can happen. This will involvement is necessary requirement for the text reception (Gavora, 1991).

Experienced text recipient can routinely perceive the text, quickly and to some extent unconsciously. Unconsciousness is proving that reception processes were perfectly adopted and that they run fluently with no problems. Unconsciousness is sign for effective reception, this is not a negative phenomenon. Depending on the level of the recipient and the difficulty of a particular text smaller or bigger part of such text can be perceived through this unconscious way. Some part of the text can be therefore processed with a higher consciousness, another part with a lower one. Ideal situation where the students should be led is an unconsciousness trouble-free text reception. This level can be reached through progressive awareness of own activity and its improvement under the leadership of a teacher.

This should be done mainly within the text activities that are tough for the particular student and where he/she needs to make a significant effort. Other activities that are performed fluently and easily do not have to be transformed into the consciousness level. But it is necessary to give student a possibility to use and develop them (Gavora, 1991).

Other experts dealing with development of text understanding define four areas (Perfetti, Landin & Oakhill, 2005):

First one, area of general knowledge, allows to orientate oneself in a text, to understand content context on the basis of previous experience.

Second area is linguistic and includes phonological, syntactical and morphological knowledge.

Third area is lexical, and it is focused on the understanding of meanings of individual words.

Fourth area is aimed at the interconnection of orthographic units and corresponding phonological units. We can say that this last area is tightly connected to the ability of decoding. Aforementioned authors declare that ability to read with understanding increases it grows with repeated experiences during reading. Most common form of development of text understanding at schools is formulation of questions, by both teachers and students. When forming the questions, it is necessary to consider fact that understanding takes place on individual levels (from the lowest to higher cognitive activities) and use this knowledge to form the questions or activities relating to the text.

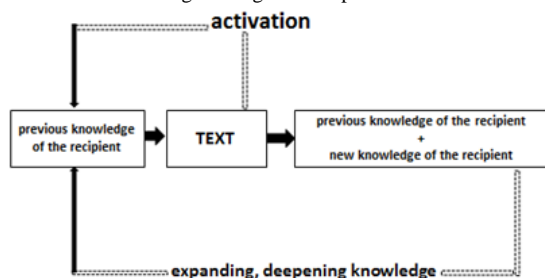
„Questions oriented to different levels of text understanding do not only represent tool of its detection, but mainly tool for development. Asking good, well-considered questions focused on understanding is one of the crucial factors that influence how the reader approaches text and its understanding“ (Zápotočná, 2012, p. 99). At present there is a wider selection of reading methods (e.g. Cloze-test, Cinquain, Term map, ...) and strategies (PRISE, RISE, ...), it is not enough for the teacher to adopt their progressive steps and apply them to any text. For the teacher it is necessary to know how to implement these into process of work with text and to use them for means of development of understanding.

„Reading represents intellectual activity that is applied in every class of the first and second grade of the elementary schools and the secondary schools. It supports learning ability. It is the most valuable method of getting information and at the same time it is a mean of self-fulfilment“ (Manniová, In Gavora, 2008, p. 27).

„To understand the text not only information involved in a text, but also certain knowledge previously acquired in the given area is crucial for recipient“ (Gavora, 1991).

Process of using of existing knowledge during the text reception can be mapped as follows:

Scheme 3 Knowledge during text reception



Source Gavora, 1991, p. 26

For activation of existing knowledge we need three basic conditions, namely (Gavora, 1991):

- 1) – existing knowledge has to be formed in a system – unit (knowledge should be structured) that is activated during the text reception;
 - recipient has to know how to put the existing knowledge into the context together with information involved in a text;
- 2) – students differ in ability to activate their existing knowledge, therefore there are significant differences between them;
 - it is not helping if student cannot remember his/her existing knowledge and use it;
- 3) – for activating the existing knowledge, it is necessary that text brings enough impulses for the recipient;
 - it is also teacher's role to activate student's existing knowledge;
 - student's task is to identify relationship between text's content and existing knowledge.

3 Interpretation in relation to text understanding

Interpretation and text understanding are two inseparable parts; therefore, we cannot understand them as two isolated elements. „Understanding of text is an interpretation, it is searching and finding of a meaning of the text, it is an explanation for ourselves“ (Gavora, p. 51). Dolník and Bajžíková (1998, p. 102) states that „core phenomenon during analysis of text interpretation is mechanism of sorting of gradual apperception (perception with understanding) of text components that leads into the interpretation of the communication unit in the sense of its functions“.

In the linguistic context, the term “interpretation” is often used with attributes, for example, semantic interpretation, syntactic interpretation, phonological interpretation, etc. (Dolník, 1998). These attributes describe the actual processes involved in the perception of language expressions. A child processor is initially influenced by semantic and pragmatic strategies rather than syntactic ones.

During interpretation, children rely on perception and general knowledge. Syntactic strategies are not typically utilised at the initial stage of language processing development. When faced with syntactically complex sentences, children tend to rely on passive knowledge. The semantic representations created by children are typically of the “bottom-up” kind. Based on the relationships between concepts expressed by words in a sentence, the child arrives at the meaning of an utterance (Schwarzová, 2009, p. 128–129). In connection with text interpretation we can talk about reader's interpretive competence. Interpretive competence „is the ability of a language user to relate the structure of language expressions to the structure of his or her knowledge which is necessary for understanding the text“ (Dolník & Bajžíková, 1998, p. 107).

Jurčo and Obert (1984) distinguish interpretation from the view of variability of function aspect to literary-scientific, literary-educational and interpretation in a narrower sense. Literary-scientific interpretation approaches the examination of the particular work from the literary-theoretical, literary-historical and literary-critical view. Literary-theoretical interpretation is focused on artistic elements of the literary text. It observes nature of its existence within the content and form. Literary-historical interpretation examines character of the literary work in relation to literary-historical complex, it is oriented to the literary tradition development benefit. Literary-critical interpretation deals with observation of particular structure components of a literary text.

During interpretation of a literary work within the context of literary experience and culture of an interpreter (on the basis of his/her literary education) we can talk about literary interpretation in a narrower sense. „This is confrontation between literary work and existing level of individual literary

experience. Relative accordance between facts of interpretation nature and facts of artistic text pattern represents measure for its value (Jurčo & Obert, 1984, p. 40). With respect to teaching of literary education meaning of literary-educational interpretation is being emphasized. Its model is influenced by control, didactical and regulative function. School interpretation represents unique style of interpretation – it examines communication relations between structure of a literary text and a recipient and it is dependant to the method and dimension of perception of the literary work. We can distinguish between „literary reading“ (reader’s interpretation), „literary behaviour“ (diagnostical interpretation) and audio interpretation where we can find recital of poetry and prose (Jurčo & Obert, 1984).

„Reader’s interpretation of the literary text is primary connected to the education of the reader as a basic participant of literary communication. It characterizes organization of individual parts of a literary work within the reader’s consciousness on the basis of artistic statement about world and life, which was acquired through the reader’s existing contact with literature“ (Jurčo & Obert, 1984, p. 43).

There is also so-called natural text interpretation, which „includes knowledge of its content and sensual part. At first, we focus on the interpretation in relation to the content part, it means we are interested in the natural content text interpretation abstracted from its pragmatic (sensual, illocutionary) interpretation“ (Dolník & Bajžíková, 1998, p. 108).

Text interpretation does not have to mean insightful explanation of the meaning and it should not be firstly carried out through the frontal education. Such proceeding allows giving pupils finished knowledge, there is no possibility to acquire relationship to a literary work and to produce own texts (Hník, 2014).

According to Hník, we can understand full-value interpretation activities as relationships between text and activities. Within the pedagogical-educational process it is inevitable to pay attention to such interpretation activities that are at the same time very creative. Especially if „we truly care for the movement of the core of the education from knowledge towards abilities and at the same time for work with own content of the field of study and school subject – through texts of artistic literature“ (Hník, 2014, p. 62).

Following the interpretation activities, we can also talk about relevant interpretation knowledge. Relevant interpretation knowledge is defined by Dolník and Bajžíková (1998, p. 109) as knowledge, which is „directly connected to text (text knowledge) and knowledge, that is related to its environment (non-textual knowledge)“. Among the text knowledge we can assign language knowledge, namely phonological, morphological, syntactical and reference knowledge. Except these we can also assign knowledge about kinds of text, stylistic knowledge, intertext knowledge and knowledge about the content parts of the text. Among non-textual knowledge we assign knowledge about the author of the text (recipient approaches the text with some expectations that relates to the image, which he/she created about the author of the text), abstract knowledge (it is possible to identify abstract themes and their implications) and empirical (they touches perceivable world and they relate to standard forms, for example traveling, public celebration, meeting, elections, doctor’s appointment etc.) knowledge about the world (Dolník & Bajžíková, 1998).

Conclusion

Through presented paper we wanted to create view into the problems of text, its understanding and interpretation. Relation between interpretation and understanding of the text is very close, there is no sense to perform interpreting without understanding. To ensure high-quality interpretation, it is necessary to develop understanding through means of text, which is incentive and meet requirements that were brought nearer in this study. Important part of work with text is

represented by interpretation activities, which should not be just mechanical activity, but should encourage students to be creative.

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