UNDESIRABLE MESSAGES OF THE SUPPORT TEXTS USED IN THE DIDACTIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: The present article aims to discuss some situations when the texts used as didactical support of the teaching-learning activities communicate undesirable messages to the pupils, from educator's point of view. We take into consideration only Romanian textbooks of Communication in Romanian for primary education, because at this level there is a great risk/danger of being assimilated by students (these wrong messages), given their age and ability, sometimes indiscriminate retention of information.Thus, our approach will mainly address two of the three detectable intentions in the interpretation of text, identified and discussed by Umberto Eco (intentio auctoris, intentio operis and intentio lectoris/ author's intent, intention of the work, and reader's intent).

Keywords: undesirable messages, didactical support, valences.

INTRODUCTION

The special feature of the children literature is that the overwhelming majority of the works subsumable to this type of literature end with the victory of good over evil. There are few texts in which good does not triumph (*The Little Tin Soldier*, by Hans Christian Andersen, *Neghiniţă*, by Barbu Ştefănescu Delavrancea). However, in all these cases the message is one with the deepest philosophical implications, so in fact we can consider that these texts are not even specific to the children literature. As far as the denouement is concerned, there are also texts in which we can't establish the prevalence of neither good nor evil, actions being insufficient or not at all reasoned, or the final good is a consequence of negative actions (*Thumbelina*, by Hans Christian Andersen, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, by Joseph Jacobs).

I. UNDESIRABLE MESSAGES AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

The special feature of the children literature is that the overwhelming majority of the works subsumable to this type of literature end with the victory of good over evil. There are few texts in which good does not triumph (*The Little Tin Soldier*, by Hans Christian Andersen, *Neghiniţă*, by Barbu Ştefănescu Delavrancea). However, in all these cases the message is one with the deepest philosophical implications, so in fact we can consider that these texts are not even specific to the children literature. As far as the denouement is concerned, there are also texts in which we can't establish the prevalence of neither good nor evil, actions being insufficient or not at all reasoned, or the final good is a consequence of negative actions (*Thumbelina*, by Hans Christian Andersen, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, by Joseph Jacobs).

The situation we are dealing with is not one of those outlined above since the size of the support texts couldn't allow for an intended ambiguity, the messages being overtly negative. Thus, we analyse the text *Cipi, this Giant Dwarf*, by Fodor Sándor, particularly the fragment presented in a textbook (Radu & Jeler, 2016) used throughout the country at the fourth grade, in primary school.

Cipi, a dwarf, encounters a frog that does not seem to know about the importance of his deeds. This frog laughs and mocks at him and does not accept the idea according to which all

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the animals of the forest act only with Cipi's permission. Concerned about the defying attitude of the rude animal, the dwarf forgets to coordinate the creatures of the forest. Troubled by his own thoughts, he oversleeps and, once awakened, he finds out that all the other beings have done their normal activities, even without his permission: the bird did their singing, the bees their working, the rabbit ate without waiting for him. Being demoralized by the disobedience of the animals, Cipi decides to become very mean.

Therefore, the last sentences in the support text presented in the textbook are clearly urging the students to adopt an undesirable behavior fallowing the failure of the other characters to comply with the wishes of the main character: *I know it! It beats all! I'll be bad. Unimaginable bad.*

Moving further to the learning activities proposed by the authors of the textbook, we notice that they target the following specific skills: formulating simple conclusions on the basis of the reading texts; associating the elements found in the text with their own experiences; selecting the significant elements from a text in order to support an opinion related to the message they lectured; evaluating the textual elements that lead to a deeper understanding of the reading material; writing a concise portrait on the basis of a simple plan; briefly relating a sequence of a story; manifesting interest for creative writing.

Analyzing the items proposed for solving in order to practice the specific skills concerned, we notice the variety of tasks, the foster of critical thinking and the development of student's creativity, all as general aspects covered by the nature of the integrated approach of the learning content. The negative impact of assimilating the undesirable message … *I'll be bad. Unimaginable bad.* … (Radu & Jeler, 2016, p.27) uninspiringly placed right at the end of the studied text, does not seem to be fully acknowledged by the authors of the manual. Their tasks involve many reiterations of the reading text, even filling certain gapped items with the unwanted statement, which can fix an undesirable behavior in student's tender and fond of knowledge brains. Their empathy, which should actually be manifested in the context of a suffering character which is insusceptible of being evil, is again channeled towards the arrogant character Cipi: I*f you were Cipi, how would you feel?* I*magine that you met Cipi … What would you say him to make his anger go away?* (Radu & Jeler, 2016, p. 29) The development of analytical sense, of critical thinking and creativity are sustained by two items which could lead to an improvement in the way in which the planned viciousness of the dwarf may reasonable be perceived by pupils: *Do you agree with the decision the dwarf finally made? Argue!* Or: *how could the story of Cipi end up after his departure from Rabbit?* (Radu & Jeler, 2016, p.29)

It is only the professional skillfulness of a teacher that might temper the opinions expressed as unwanted message so as it should not remain pictured in the minds of the students, and should not be reiterated too many times during the whole teaching - learning-assessment process. Even under these circumstances, we must not forget that the textbook remains the main source of information for some students, that it can be accessed by pupils as such, even before the study of the text in the classroom; the support text can be misunderstood, can be found as funny and the unwanted behavior can be adopted a priori. As a result of the above ideas we show our reluctance to the use of such a text at the level of primary education.

Not being frequently encountered, these texts do not represent a rule, but the exceptions which may mislead the student as far as the promoted values are concerned. Therefore we think that it is absolutely necessary to draw the attention on them and also on the fact that, by adopting a correct approach, we might reduce the misunderstandings and we could highlight the aspects worthy of being acquired by the students.

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As teachers, we consider that the texts used as support by the teaching staff should meet the following qualities:
- to respect the principles of the training requirements (i.e. to be truly the means of learning, allowing the achievement of the educational objectives derived from the skills specified in the National Curriculum) (***_Programa şcolară pentru disciplina limba şi literatura română_, clasele a III-a şi a IV-a, 2014)
- to be written in contemporary Romanian, complying with the spelling, punctuation and the literary form of the language, as much as possible;
- to be governed by the aesthetic principle;
- to convey desirable messages, in accordance with the moral and civic education and with the educational ideal of the nowadays society.

Regarding the analyzed text, the qualities mentioned above are met as it follows: it complies to a large extent with the principles of the training requirements, constituting a means of learning and, by that, may form the skills aimed by the National Curriculum; it is written in Romanian, it complies with the spelling, punctuation and with the literary form of the Romanian language; the text is governed by the principle of aesthetics, but ideologically, the attitude it promotes is inappropriate, and the ideas are expressed by using, without any hedging, nicknames and insults addressed to the characters (*Pork Rind, The Scam, Cucuci-the Tone-Deaf, The freckled bald thing, an awkwardly poor worm, the trickster, that rotten worm*) (Radu & Jeler, 2016, p.26-27); by promoting inappropriate attitude (*Who cares about you, you are the whole cheese?/ You should die .../...I'll be bad. Unimaginable bad.*)(Radu & Jeler, 2016, pp. 26-27). It is not possible to establish any connection with the idea of transmitting desirable messages, which shall be in accordance with the moral and civic education and with the ideal of our society.

In numerous works of practical psychology it is shown that the most important moments in any communication are represented by the beginning and the end. This idea concerning the importance of the first impression can be found in the book "The Successful Teacher" (Pânişoară, 2009). In the same time, the initial and final formulae in fairy tales are fixed structures and identity landmarks in the cultures they appear and may or may not be imbued with humor, while the middle formulae are always sober. (Roşianu, 1973)

This is why we must be careful! It is considered that the most important moments of the communication in the family are the first and the last 4 minutes (Van Pelt, 2007) … following this idea, the texts which contain undesirable messages could be preceded by the teacher's preparatory speech, corresponding the warm-up stage, *gaining students' attention* could be followed by a moralizing speech, by solutions found in common with the students while solving exercises, by expressing their own opinions; the average duration of the moment could be of four minutes. It is important that, at the end of the lesson, the student leave the classroom with clear ideas, without leaving it to chance or to the choice of the children what message might mould them or might shape their thoughts and behavior.

Other solutions which we can propose:
- giving up such texts at the primary classes, because the ability to discern with respect to desirable/ undesirable behaviors and emotions is in the process of consolidation;
- presenting in writing, if the manual does not provide this kind of information, the consequences of such a behavior, so as the teacher ensures that the student has at its disposal the complete and correct information, in order to be able to avoid unwanted behavior.
- teacher proposing various individualized tasks, so that the students could be guided to discern and analyze the consequences of the character's actions;

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- reminding that the text is a literary one, it contains imaginary facts and elements of fiction and the facts which would seem to go unpunished in the text, in reality could not be overlooked by an adult/the authorities;
- asserting and presenting in writing positive messages, pleasant knowledge from the studied texts, either within a border, by means of quotes/sayings, moralizing ideas, or through planning tasks which could lead to a conduct in agreement with the values of society in which we live.

Given the conditions in which more and more motivational authors, whose works have become the world bestsellers, recommend good as practice to counteract the evil, all the more we choose to promote the texts in which the message is undoubtedly positive.

In the book *Management şcolar, de la impresii artistice şi reflecţii, la teorie şi aplicaţii*, (Casangiu, 2016) it is recalled the need to use those magical words, motivational words, in the school environment, with special emphasis placed on reification words. Discussing in particular the students' feedback during the classes, the book states that it is important what you say, how you say and what gestures you use.

Thus we embrace the idea that a teacher, who has been having a constant preoccupation for using an assertive communication, might face a real challenge in case in which a literary text, similar to that we have debated upon, is to be studied in class, the final message of the text being in an absolute contradiction with those magic words used and promoted by the teacher. This fact can be avoided when the teacher chooses the textbook. In order to be suitable from all points of view, but especially as far as content is concerned, the book must comply with the content criteria specified in the same book (Casangiu, 2016): anticipating the educational efficiency, printing correctness, content and language accessibility. If teachers know and reflect upon these criteria, they may constitute the first step in order to avoid that manual containing unwanted messages in the training process should it ever arrive on the students' desks.

II. MISINTERPRETATION OF TEXTS USED IN PEDAGOGICAL PURPOSE

Distinct from the situation where the intention of the text is undesirable, there are situations in which the interpretation of certain artistic texts used as didactical support may be erroneous and with undesirable consequences.

The text ***Păpădia [A Dandelion]*** (Mihăescu, Pacearcă, Dulman, Alexe, & Brebenel 2014, p. 28) presents, through the two intentions that Umberto Eco was talking about and which we deal with (*intentio operis and intentio lectoris*), great difficulties in understanding / interpretation.

In this text, there are two children, Costache and Anghel, who, because their mother is missing from their home, are temporarily cared for by their aunt, Paraschiva. We do not know too much about Anghel, whereas "Costache wastes time, but he saves washing water" discovered his aunt when she found dirt *within* his nails. After she joked that "grass will grow here, tonight" (we suppose that *from that dirt*!), she washed him. In the morning, when Costache woke up, he found a dandelion near the pillow, and Anghel hypocritically assumed it probably grew up *from* his nails at night and broke when he changed his position on the other side! Although Costache suspected that Anghel had put the flower, and because the dandelion *was silent*, he began to wash his hands often.

First of all, the language of this text, probably thought humorous by the authors, is sarcastic, elliptical, and sometimes even incorrect. Through an oxymoron (wastes *vs*. saves), Costache is portrayed absolutely negative, although he certainly has qualities as well. Then, although it would not be impossible, Paraschiva finds dust *within* his nail, when most often it

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is *under* the nail. Likewise, Anghel tells him that the dandelion would have grown him *from* his nails, meaning that it would have grown from the dirt *beneath* the nails… If we can understand that the words of the characters are reproduced in the text, we can not understand how, in the exercise no. 3, students are asked to fill in the following gapped text: "Aunt Paraschiva discovered .... in Costache's nails"!

Anyone can conclude that the mother of these children was not careful enough about Costache's hygiene, as well as Anghel did not have a brotherly / friendly attitude towards him, but an obvious superiority. Costache is presented as immature / naive given the suggestion that he began to wash frequently only because he was not sure that Anghel put dandelions near his pillow! ... In other words, we can understand that it was sure that he did not use to wash his hands so often…

Because the text says "Anghel has put the flower", students can understand both that Costache is naïve and it would be right for him not to wash his hands!

In addition to this, though in the evening, aunt Paraschiva washed Costache's hands well, and having no longer dirt under his fingernails, the boy may think that the dandelion has truly risen from there! ...

Therefore, we believe that instead of the moralizing message, the text confuses the children, aged eight to nine, to whom it addresses, the intention of the reader and the text being manifestly opposed to the author's intent.

The text ***Părerea mea și a crocodilului tată [My opinion and my father-crocodile's opinion]*** (Mihăescu et al., 2014, p. 12) representing an adaptation after Octav Pancu-Iasi, presents a discussion from the family of some crocodiles at bedtime.

The father crocodile (Croco) thinks that all the small crocodiles (green, brown, having long or short tails, boys or girls) should sleep at eight o'clock (we suppose: *p.m.*!). His son, Crocodel, agrees with him. However, the next day, Crocodel's mother, grabbed his tail to wake him up. That's why one day she asked him when he would sleep at eight o'clock. The crocodile replied: "When I would have a watch. I do not know what time it is, so I sleep late".

Croco's answer can refer to at least four types of interpretations, depending on what we emphasis when we read it. So, it can be read/pronounced in a tone of reproach, impertinent, suggesting that his parents are guilty of him lacking the clock. It could as well be said with indignation, utterly rude. It can also be read / spoken in a tone of regret suggesting sadness for lacking the clock. As well, it can be read in a tone suggesting resignation about the lack of a clock. It could be read even neutral.

Naturally, a lot of questions arise: which tone would be the right one? What tone should the teacher choose in his/her model reading? The teacher's tone of reading would be taken over by the whole class? If students read this statement with a different emphasis resulting different interpretations, is it possible that different conflicts might occur in the classroom? Does the teacher notice that this is a good opportunity to apply the question method? To what extent does he allocate time to analyzing each tone of the message and its proper interpretation?...

Of course, in the sense of the *opera aperta* (Umberto Eco), every literary work implies a plurality of meanings, art being *an interactive process between reader and text.* Although lots of meanings are possible, they are individually addressed to each reader, depending on his level of knowledge, his previous readings, his expectations and his analytical capacity, but interpretative freedom is the aptitude of the formed lecturer and it has its limits. From the educational point of view, the option for a certain supporting text should take into account both the linguistic and interpretive competences directly concerned, as well as the transversal (derivative) skills that it can form.

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For the age group concerned (indicated by inclusion in a manual for the second primary class), Crocodel's replica without specifying his attitude / tone, has numerous shortcomings, as can be seen from the multitude of answers to the above questions having so many possible interpretations.

Another source of misunderstanding, confusion and messages that can be considered at least inappropriate, are texts that provide inaccurate and / or incomplete information. An example of this is the text ***Îngheţată sau salată*** **[*Ice Cream or Salad*?]** (Dumitrescu, Barbu, 2014, 34). Through three rhetorical questions, the authors manage to capture the attention of the students, block them from looking for answers, which may further away from reception lyrics below... Used to teach the Romanian sound written with letters ”ghe”, this poetry confuses: neither choosing ice cream or salad (as the title suggests), nor is it clear whether ”spaghetti and salad” replaced *pistachio ice cream*, Angheluș's favorite, a boy who likes to see (not *consume*!) daily ice cream exposed in the showcase!

CONCLUSION

We believe that by applying the strategies proposed above, every teacher can avoid the student’s receipting undesirable messages from the support texts. It is up to the teacher’s didactic skills to take action so as both derived/transversal skills as well as primary skills should be the desirable ones. However, when the texts contain overt undesirable messages it is advisable to give them up and to choose others, either from other alternative textbooks, or from different sources.

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