

Imitation and creativity in school essays

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Abstract. The paper deals with the problem of representation of the imitation processes and productive activities in school essays. The prerequisites for the study are approaches to the analysis of school essays as a type of creative work, which reflects one or another degree of imitative communicative activity of a person, as well as the relevance of the problems of determining the features of the integration of reproductive and productive activities in communication, the representation of the creativity of a linguistic personality in the text. Solving these problems allows us to determine the ways of actualizing the creative component of preparation for essays and translating it from a potential state into a real one. The purpose of the study is to determine the conditions for the realization and indicators of the reproductive and productive components in the communicative activities of the author of the essay and the conditions for the dynamics of their communicative state. The following methods were used content analysis, communicative and structural/semantic analysis of essays, analysis of linguistic marking of the processes of imitation and creativity in texts. For the first time, the paper reviews the awareness of the communicative intention and genre characteristics of the sample as the leading condition for the implementation of imitation and creativity in school essays, describes the indicators of the dynamics of the communicative state from the state of imitation to the state of creativity, which are correlated with creative abilities: the multiplicity, diversity, and consistency of micro themes (indicators of thinking flexibility), the balance of the boundaries of the author's intention (an indicator of the ability to see the essence of the problem, the subject of speech), the transformation of speech cliches (an indicator of the ability to resist stereotypes). The authors also propose a typology of reproductive, reproductive/productive, and productive communication skills of school students: the ability to copy the genre frame, interpret the sources of the author's intention, correct the system of structural and semantic components of the text of the essay.

Keywords: school essay, imitation in school essay, communicative creativity of a student.

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1 Introduction

In the pedagogical sciences, the essay is traditionally viewed as one of the most reliable and effective methods of communicative development of a student, teaching them how to create a text. At the same time, researchers emphasize that, regardless of the content of education, an essay with identical communicative and linguistic characteristics can become the pinnacle of educational achievements for one student and only a stage in communicative development for another one.

In a typical essay, the fact of referring to a certain model, on the one hand, and the development of the linguistic personality of the writer, on the other, revives the question of the correlation of reproductive and productive activity, imitation, and creativity in written creative works. The analysis of this phenomenon currently not presented in research can be carried out in line with the studies on the “reproductive and productive components of communicative processes” [1: 144].

Traditionally, the issue of correlation of imitation, following a certain model, and creativity in various types of activities (including communicative ones) is viewed in the context of psychological research [2-5], which does not provide full involvement in the problem area to the extent of the results of the study of speech [6, 7]. It has now been established that the creation of a text is carried out based on the integration of reproductive and productive procedures, which makes it possible to apply the criteria of creativity [2, 8] to the product of speech activity.

Several psychological studies review the phenomenon of “imitative activity of a creative personality” which traces the stages of imitation/copying, creative imitation, which is characterized by the presence of allusions with a certain model, and independent creativity [4]. An analysis of the process of working on an essay and of the essays themselves shows that the stages of imitative activity are reflected in the language design of the speech works of school students.

The prerequisites for the formulation of the problem discussed in the paper are the following: the integration of reproductive and productive activities in communication, the representation of the creativity of the linguistic personality in the text, the reflection of imitative activity in the creative works of students. The problem posed is how the imitation and creativity of the writer are reflected in the essay and how the creative component of preparation for essays can be implemented by translating it from a potential state into a real one.

2 Methods

The study was carried out using the methods of content analysis, communicative and structural/semantic analysis of essays, analysis of the linguistic marking of the processes of imitation and creativity.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Reflection of the creative abilities of the writer in the essay

The initial idea of the study was the idea that the optimal ratio of imitation and creativity in the process of writing an essay was most conducive to the embodiment of a communicative concept in the text. At the same time, let us note the predestination of the named states by the essay as a type of educational work and as a genre. On the one hand, an essay is an exercise that ensures the student’s involvement in the learning process, limiting the activity of the

writer to a certain framework that guides them to the pattern of activity. On the other hand, an essay is a creative work, like any other product of communication. The dynamics of the communicative state of the writer are determined by the degree of their involvement in communication, their personal and psychological characteristics, and the level of language proficiency [9, 10]. Let us dwell on the analysis of these phenomena.

The degree of involvement in communication, as it seems to us, should be considered primarily as a psychological state of the writer, conditioned by their ability to be in a flow state [7, 8, 11]. In educational practice, this characteristic of the student's communicative state is correlated with various indicators: from the volume of the essay to the depth of the study of its problems. Note that at present this problem has just been defined, and its solution is situated at the intersection of the psychology of creativity, psycholinguistics, and communicative stylistics. However, it is obvious that one of the forms of involvement in communication, namely, the interpretation of someone else's text, is determined by the influence of the speech environment on the writer. This form of involvement will be discussed below.

In the context of the problem under consideration, the actual personal and psychological characteristics of the author of the essay are their creative abilities, which include (among others) flexibility, originality, imaginative thinking, the ability to see the essence of the problem, the ability to resist stereotypes [2]. Each of these characteristics is somehow embodied in the product of speech activity, i. e. a text created by a school student. Flexibility, which is expressed in a variety of ideas and the ability to combine them, is reflected in the text in a variety of meanings, micro themes, and a plurality of aspects of comprehending the subject of the speech. The originality lies in the novelty of the approaches to the subject of speech and the expressiveness of the language. The ability to see the essence of the problem correlates with the ability to see the boundaries of the author's intention and the ability to resist stereotypes correlates with the ability to deviate from speech patterns and clichés. Note that in this list of means and methods of translating the creative abilities of the writer into the text we can already trace their connection with a certain directed imitative behavior, and this orientation is given by the communicative situation. Thus, the subject of speech as a component of the communicative situation limits the variety of actual meanings, and the author's intention limits the genre framework of the essay.

The level of language proficiency is traditionally considered in the methodology of teaching the Russian language as a factor limiting the dynamics of the child's communicative state, in the context of the problems of enriching the vocabulary and developing the grammatical structure of the student's speech. It is obvious that in modern society, due to the mobility of boundaries between styles and genres of speech, the problem of activating the communicative activity of a linguistic personality under the influence of an unstable speech environment, in which new speech norms are reflected, becomes relevant. In linguistics, this problem is considered based on the analysis of public speech in a digital environment [7]. It seems that the approaches indicated by linguists apply to traditional speech genres, including school essays.

3.2 Imitation and creativity in the process of writing an essay

To analyze the integration of imitative and creative activities in the process of writing an essay, it is advisable to single out essays written based on the read text from the entire set of creative written works of students, since in them the influence of the speech environment manifests itself in a certain way as the influence of written book speech and as the influence of actual communication. It would seem that a collision in the process of writing an essay of a literary language and speech, which is currently characterized by the instability of norms, should negatively affect the result of speech activity, both in the aspect of following the

model and in the aspect of literary creativity. However, practice shows that essays based on the text read by the student to a large extent reflect the desire both to comply with genre norms and to the free, “streaming” expression of one’s thoughts. It is to this type of essay that the well-known statement concerning the characteristics of the interaction of imitation and creativity is applicable: the new “is created unconsciously in the forms of the old” [3: 76]. In the very process of writing the text, one can clearly distinguish actions and the corresponding skills which can be characterized as reproductive, reproductive/productive, or productive actions or skills. The first category includes the copying of the genre framework, the second one includes the interpretation of the sample text and the correction of one’s speech work based on the sample, and the last one includes the emergence of the author’s intention and the speech deployment of the concept.

The central action in the context of the problem under consideration is the interpretation of the original text. At the same time, the texts of the speech environment that are relevant to the student are subjected to interpretation, which should include works of fiction, textbook texts, the best essays of classmates, statements of the teacher, etc.

3.3 Ways to actualize the creative component of preparation for essays

It seems that the comprehension of the communicative task when writing an essay as a non-standard one can be provided by modeling a situation of dialogue with the author of the original text, as well as with the authors of other speech works, where the essay receives the status of a means of targeted communication, such as a public written statement.

4 Conclusion

Thus, the representation of imitation processes in written creative works is determined not only by the orientation of the essay to a certain model as a type of educational task, but also by objective circumstances such as the genre predestination of any type of speech communication, and the action of speech norms. The creative approach to the creation of the text of an essay is most obviously manifested at the stages of the emergence of the author’s intention and its development based on the interpretation of other texts as components of the actual speech environment.

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