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O. E. Gribova
Moscow, Russia

**FORMATION OF TEXT COMPREHENSION COMPETENCE
IN STUDENTS WITH GENERAL SPEECH UNDERDEVELOPMENT
(UNDERSTANDING FACTUAL INFORMATION):
STAGES AND PECULIARITIES**

Abstract. The article considers the problem of formation of text competences in students with general speech underdevelopment in terms of communicative-pragmatic approach. Based on a multivariate analysis of experimental data, it describes the dynamics of formation of mechanisms of text activity and strategies of comprehending factual text information by primary school children and adolescents enrolled in a school for children with severe speech disorders. The main tendencies and the stages of their formation in the conditions of special education are described.

The article argues that under the conditions of general underdevelopment of speech the level of text competence formation is determined not so much by age parameters as by a complex of reasons, the most important of which is the maturity of text activity mechanisms, namely the mechanisms of text compression, anticipation, recipitation, probabilistic prediction, association, etc. At beginner levels, the text is perceived as a whole verbal unity from which the learner first singles out the key positions of the text (introduction, main part, conclusion), and then determines the subject-predicate base.

Successful comprehension of factual information is determined by the possibility of segmental perception of the text, ruling out irrelevant associations, analysis of the communicative structure of the text, and auto-reflection processes. The article also reveals the relationship between the level of development of lexico-grammatical skills and the level of understanding of the factual information of the text. At early stages, limited vocabulary and underdevelopment of grammatical skills hinder text comprehension; later on, after the formation of text activity mechanisms, and especially the mechanisms of reasons-based knowledge, the students master contextual guess which allows them to overcome the lack of proper lexico-grammatical skills.

Keywords: general speech underdevelopment, understanding factual information of the text, text comprehension competence, mechanisms and strategies of text comprehension activity, stages of formation.

About the author: Gribova Ol'ga Evgen'evna, Candidate of Pedagogy, Professor.

Place of employment: Department of Special Pedagogy and Special Psychology of the Academy of Advanced Training and Professional Development of Teachers.

Federal State Educational Standards of Primary General and Basic Education and Federal State Educational Standards of Primary General Education for Students with Special

Educational Needs pay considerable attention to the formation of metasubject results.

Text competence is one of the metasubject competences as long as it

does not only provide acquisition of the subject areas of the Standard but also guarantees further successful socialization in the community [7; 11]. Ability to work effectively with the text is one of the conditions of formation of professional competence and social adequacy of a member of a civilized society. It is due to this fact that the modern pedagogical research presents an active discussion of the problem of studying and forming the text competence in the process of secondary and professional education.

Most attention in the methods literature is paid to the questions of formation of skills of independent production of texts. But the problem of formation of skills of comprehension of texts belonging to different genres in various conditions of reception is also very important. Unfortunately, the problem of text comprehension competence is mostly considered in the framework of teaching and development of skills of work with written texts. An exception can be made for studies of teaching methods in the field of learning foreign languages in the framework of which pedagogues describe methods and techniques of teaching oral comprehension of texts.

Research of peculiarities of development of text competence in terms of understanding the content of text information revealed certain regularities (E. D. Bozhovich, N. I. Zhinkin, N. A. Plenkin, K. F. Sedov, etc.).

– By the time of beginning school education pupils can perceive text content provided it corresponds to their life experience. The mechanisms of text activity (we mean here the

mechanisms underlying text comprehension, for example, mechanisms of compression, anticipation, reception, etc. [3]) are still in their infancy. And associative mechanisms are strong enough to prevent real understanding of the text. The formation of the image of the text as a complete linguistic unit is a new development at this level.

– At the level of 3-4 grades there forms an idea about text integrity which allows the pupils to define the topic of the text by themselves. While reproducing the original text the pupils try to reproduce its verbal representation in as more detail as possible (retelling close to the text). The keywords are distinguished mostly with reference to denotative meanings.

– In grades 5-6 there forms the concept of text integrity due to the formation of the mechanism of anticipation. The text is perceived as a separate creative unit. There forms text projection at its perception.

– In grades 8-9 retellings represent re-coded information. The mechanisms of text activity have been basically formed.

In the recent decade, there appears to be a contradiction between the high enough level of text comprehension in the primary school and the low level of its comprehension in the basic and secondary school [4; 6].

The given contradiction may have a large enough number of explanations and interpretations. We believe, in particular, that the “root of the evil” seats in the absence of methods aimed at the formation of text activity mechanisms and in relying on their intuitive operation by pupils of both primary and sen-

ior secondary school.

Working out such methods is especially urgent in the framework of special pedagogy because it may not only help to resolve the problem of providing methods for the process of teaching children with special educational needs but may also help to reveal the difficulties of the typically developing pupils.

The problem of methods of diagnostics and technologies of formation of the text competence in children with speech disorders is being actively discussed in the Russian and foreign logopedics (G. V. Babina, V. P. Glukhov, L. F. Spirova, D. V. M. Bishop, K. Cain & J. Oakhill, B. Leonard Laurence, etc.); and the attention is focused on the study of speech of children of senior preschool and junior secondary school ages (V. K. Vorob'eva, V. P. Glukhov, E. N. Rossiyskaya, L. F. Spirova, G. V. Chirkina, etc.). This fact shows that there is deficit of research of the problem in adolescents.

The goal of our research is the study of peculiarities of formation of text competences in pupils with general speech underdevelopment in terms of understanding factual information of the text.

The research methodology is based on the ideas of text linguistics about the text as a multi-level hierarchically structured unit of the semiotic system (I. R. Gal'perin, A. A. Zalevskaya, W. Kintsch, etc.), the theory of psycholinguistics about the processes of text comprehension including the formation in the mind of the recipient of a whole image of the content in which the in-

formative aspect of the text is realized (V. Z. Dem'yankov, A. I. Novikov, T. A. van Dijk & W. Kintsch), the postulate by L. S. Vygotskiy about the unity of regularities of development of psychological functions in children with developmental disabilities and without them; the ideas of ontolinguistics about the process of formation of text competence as a long intermittent process having considerable individual variability (N. I. Zhinkin, K. F. Sedov), and psycho-pedagogical approach to the analysis of speech and linguistic activity of children with general speech underdevelopment (R. E. Levina, L. F. Spirova, G. V. Chirkina, etc.).

70 primary school pupils and 209 pupils of grades 5-10 of boarding schools for children with severe speech disorders from Moscow, Vladimir and Krasnodar took part in the experiment.

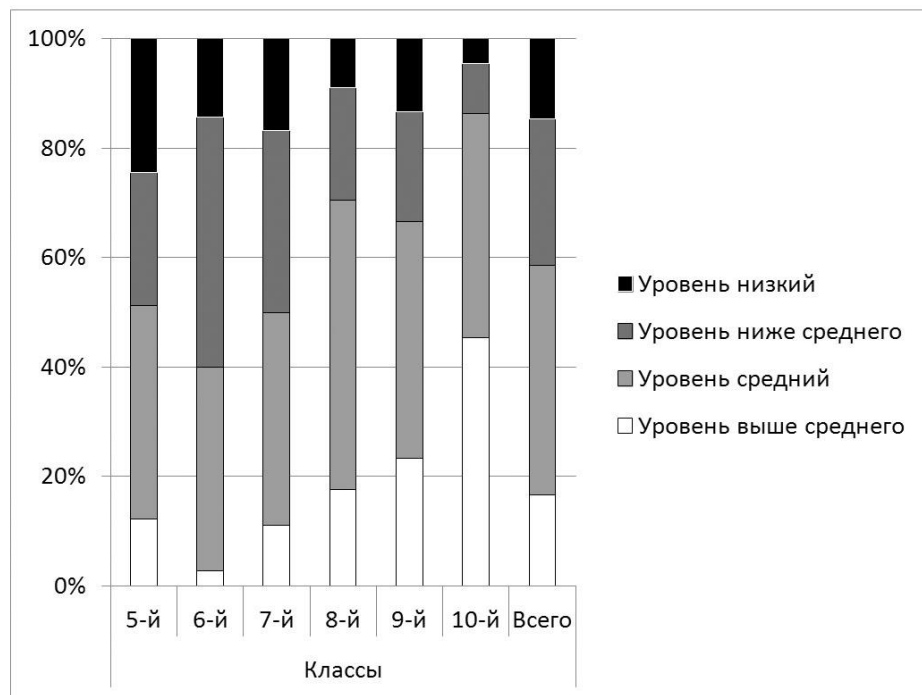
Planning the experimental research was based on the assumption about the necessity of a complex approach to the study of speech and linguistic activity of schoolchildren and the use of a number of methods and techniques [3; 9], and also an assumption scientifically substantiated by E. L. Goncharova: one task – many texts [4].

In the result, we analyzed the following number of secondary texts: in the primary school – 205 retellings and works with marked key positions; in the basic school – 525 transpositions, 438 works with marked keywords; and 169 cloze-tests.

The data obtained through a multivariate analysis of secondary texts of pupils of 5-10 grades allowed us to single out four levels of formation of

the text competence and reveal the dynamics of its development in ado-

lescents with general speech underdevelopment (Fig. 1).



Уровень низкий – Low Level

Уровень ниже среднего – Lower Middle Level

Уровень средний – Middle Level

Уровень выше среднего – Upper Middle Level

Классы – Grades

Всего – Total

Figure 1. Indicators of dynamics of formation of text competence in terms of understanding content-factual information by pupils of grades 5-10 with severe speech disorders (percentage of pupils, %)

The largest number of children with the low level of text competence is found in grade 5. This illustrates the fact that the processes of understanding factual information have not been properly formed at this age.

Further on, the number of children with the low level of understanding

slightly decreases by grade 6 but similar problems occur during the whole period of study. The existence of children with the low level of formation of text competence after grade 8 and with upper middle level before grade 8 may be regarded as a variable property depending on the variable “form contingent”.

A different dynamics is observed in the analysis of representativeness of children with the upper middle level. If in grades 5-6 such children are rare, their number grows by grade 10. But even in grade 10 only separate schoolchildren demonstrate the upper middle level.

The middle and the lower middle levels are more typical of children with general speech underdevelopment. They prevail during the whole period of learning at the basic school beginning with grade 5 and lasting till grade 10 and demonstrate inverse relationship. Grade 8 is critical, as the number of children with the middle level of formation of text competence increases, and the number of children with the lower middle level falls down. In grade 10 the number of children with the middle level is about the same as the number of children with the upper middle level. Thus, we can argue that the dynamics of formation of the text competence of adolescents with general speech underdevelopment consists, first of all, in the transition from the lower middle level to the middle one. Qualitative-quantitative and statistical analyses of the dynamics of formation of the text activity and text competence in terms of understanding content-factual information of the text by pupils with general speech underdevelopment allowed us to reveal the main regularities of their development in the conditions of special education.

At initial stages of development of the text competence, the pupil's attention is concentrated on the verbal frame of the text which has a super

value for them; that is why in their secondary texts they try to reproduce the original text literally without singling out facts (information) and not trying to produce implication. Analysis of information content is practically not performed independently and is possible only under the guidance of a grown-up. Response activity of the pupils is low. Nevertheless, by the end of primary school education, pupils acquire the knowledge of tripartite nature of the text which facilitates future understanding the text because the introduction and the conclusion are its strong positions.

The basic school pupils deal with longer texts; that is why the mechanism of word-for-word memorizing which the pupils used in primary school no longer works as the suggested volume of material exceeds the capacity of their short-term verbal memory. This fact stimulates the development of other mechanisms of text activity.

Specifically, the pupils demonstrate the process of formation of the mechanism of singling out key elements of the text such as the subject and the actions it produces. In the first place, this mechanism begins to be effectively used for understanding information of narrative texts with linear structure which raises the level of comprehension of such texts as the distinguished elements make up the basic plot. The secondary texts acquire relative originality in comparison with the primary ones.

This phenomenon may be considered as an indicator of growing response activity of children in text comprehension. But this level of development of text activity shows the

co-existence of the strategies of transformation of the primary text and the strategy of its direct quoting which, in a number of cases, determines the appearance of the so-called pseudo-texts or desemanticized lexical units.

A qualitative analysis of the character of distinguishing the key units of the text made it possible to determine that they have rather referential than denotative character (the difference between the referent and the denotation of the sign may be defined as the difference between its concrete and generalized meanings [5]). The given phenomenon is due to the fact that the pupil with a low level of understanding content-factual information of the text cannot yet build up a projection of the text and take the author's position. The child correlates the information received from the text with his theoretical knowledge and life experience. That is why while defining an object from the information field of the text as a significant one the pupil means a concrete object known to him from practical life or communication. As a result there forms a strategy of association of text referents with objects from one's own experience which calls forth the appearance of additional information not related with the information of the primary text to the extent of distorting the main massive of information.

Thus, at initial stages of education in the basic school in the presence of the positive tendency in the formation of the mechanism of distinguishing keywords we observe the competition of two strategies: the

strategy of literal (word-for-word) reproduction of the text and the strategy of association with referents outside the primary text; and the associations have, as a rule, affective coloring.

It is worthy of note that both mechanisms – the mechanism of distinguishing keywords and the mechanism of association – are formed parallel to each other. It is the subject-predicate structure of the text that serves as the basis for distinguishing key positions but not the denotation one. This fact ensures understanding the plot of a narrative text and lack of understanding connections between the objects in a descriptive text as text integrity at the given stage is determined in the child's mind by a common subject.

The procession of text information goes on step by step from one sentence to another or from one key word combination to the next distinguished key word combination. The topic of the text and its general content are ignored. The difficulty of keeping the verbal material in memory calls forth numerous information gaps and violations of the sequence of narration. Incorporation of information in cases of comprehension difficulties does not take place; that is why the pupils at the given stage of development of the text competence are unable to evaluate the degree of their own understanding text information.

Further development and improvement of the mechanism of distinguishing keywords gives a chance of identifying the introduction and the conclusion as the key positions of the text which alone ensures the topical

integrity of the content of the text in the child's consciousness. This is the way in which a new phenomenon is formed – the idea about a tripartite structure of the text and its key positions. The association mechanism is also transformed: there prevail direct associations which are based on attempts to correlate one's own knowledge with the facts the child gets from the text. A transition to active construction of the text projection takes place. The response activity of the pupil aimed at interpretation of the content-factual information of the text increases. But the child can hardly get into the modeling realm of the author at this stage of understanding. The mechanism of outgoing knowledge has not been formed yet; that is why the child still builds up the text projection in accordance with the encyclopedic knowledge and experience he has. What is more, the strategy of word-for-word text reproduction is still rather active.

Partial understanding of the text factual information is characteristic of the given stage of development of the text competence. It is caused by a number of heterogeneous reasons: inadequate volume of short term memory and difficulties of distinguishing keywords; problems of ruling out subsidiary irrelevant associations and poor formation of the mechanisms of anticipation and recipitation.

An important role in further development of the text competence is played by the formation of mechanisms permitting analysis of the topic-focus articulation of the text which defines the possibility of formation of the idea of text integrity in the child's con-

sciousness. The more the topic-focus articulation of the text differs from linear incorporation, the more difficult it is for the child to discover connections between separate facts in the text. That is why there still remain difficulties in understanding descriptive texts whereas narrative texts are understood relatively well.

Expansion of linguistic means nomenclature is one of the conditions which prepare the adolescent with general speech underdevelopment for the transition to the next level of the text competence. In particular, we have registered cases of using "adult" vocabulary units which in the majority of instances are unsuccessful because of inability to use them adequately in the text.

It is possible that this stage is responsible for the development of the skills to analyze the communicative topic-focus structure of the text. The pupils master descriptive texts. But the analysis of complex topic-focus structures demands understanding various lexico-grammatical constructions; quite naturally, it presupposes a high level of acquisition of the lexico-grammatical aspect of speech which is still far from being high enough at the given stage of formation of the text competence. As a result, text comprehension is rather fragmental. Inadequate understanding factual information is compensated for by launching the mechanism of probabilistic prediction, which becomes more active due to the presence of lacunae in understanding. Thus, the given mechanism "is born" as a strategy of resolving a contradiction between the

need to build up a coherent secondary text and the inability to create it using the already mastered mechanism of text activity. The functioning of the mechanism of probabilistic prediction presupposes that the processes of auto-reflection are formed during the analysis of the text content: whether the author's intention of the primary text is understood adequately enough. It is manifested in the form of commentaries and specifications of the information of the primary text. In secondary texts, pupils try not only to reflect sheer facts extracted from the text but also reveal the position of the author, his relation to the given facts which, in its turn, stimulates the activation of the pupils' attention to expressive means.

The further development of the text competence is ensured by the improvement of all the above-mentioned mechanisms and also by ruling out irrelevant associations. Work with the whole text massive allows forming linguistic guess and mechanisms of outgoing knowledge which compensates the inadequate level of development of the lexico-grammatical skills. It is at this stage that the development and improvement of the mechanisms ensuring not only independent analysis of the content-factual information but also the transition to semantic text analysis becomes possible.

Let us make some conclusions. In the course of the experimental study it became clear that the level of formation of the text competence in terms of understanding content-factual text information is determined by a complex of reasons, the most important of

which is the maturity of mechanisms of text activity. Thus, the development of the text competence is a long-term and incremental process during which non-productive strategies are subdued, and productive ones are formed; they do not only help to comprehend the factual information of the text but also understand deeper semantic levels.

Irrespective of general positive dynamics, the majority of basic school leavers with general underdevelopment of speech do not achieve the acceptable level of analysis of the text factual information. Each class represents a heterogeneous set due to the fact that its pupils demonstrate different levels of development of the text competence which demands reconsidering the primary school teaching methods and working out special methods for the basic school.

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