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VISUAL IMAGE AS A TRIGGER FOR CHILDREN'S NARRATIVE

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The paper focuses on narration acquisition, which is a process believed to be at least partly related to school teaching practices. The problem of constructing a story with the help of a visual image is discussed through an analysis of children's written responses to two photographs, different in some key respects of the way in which their characters and settings are presented. The range of visual elements which can effectively trigger production of different elements of a story is also established.

Keywords: narrative, narrative grammar, narrative acquisition, children's writing, teaching literacy, creative writing.

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Introduction

For decades children's narrative have been considered through different anthropological, sociological, linguistic and psychotherapeutic perspectives (([Applebee 1978], [Hickman 2003] and others). «Narration acquisition» in these studies is believed to be a natural process, part of a first language acquisition, which is only in some cases influenced by school practices. Therefore, a major pedagogical problem of teaching narration is only occasionally linked to the approaches used in narratology (for a full but short bibliography see, for example, [Dehn, Merklinger, Shuler 2014].). Real-life or fictional narratives have been gradually moving towards the center of writing and reading lessons in primary school since the beginning of the 20th century. However the term 'narration teaching' is absent from pedagogical usage (the idea being expressed by synonyms such as 'teaching creative writing' or even 'teaching literacy' in a broad sense) and there is a gap between theory and practice.[3]

I do not intend to discuss the importance of teaching narrative techniques to children in this paper, as the necessity of this task is a given. It is common practice in Russian schools that the classroom activities of 7 – 11 years olds include a vast amount of exercises which are constructed to stimulate oral and written storytelling. In order to encourage a child to create an original narration (meaning not a reproduction of another author's text) the school recommends five basic kinds of tasks[4]:

1. Create a story on a given topic.
2. Add a missing part to a given story.
3. Choose your own topic and tell/write a story.
4. Play a game which includes constructing a narrative or narrative elements.
5. Create a story based on a visual image.

Every type of task has its own shortcomings: D. Graves [Graves 1983] demonstrated poor results of children who, as Graves put it[5], are «fed topics» compared to the results of those who invent the topics themselves; the method of simplifying one's experience to present it in a story, as proposed by Graves himself, implies numerous and long training sessions and the active participation of a mentor, as it is also the case with most kinds of narrative games [Corbett 2009]. Visual images (where a picture, a photograph, a comic or a picture book are the most common) presentstimuli for narration that demand the minimum resources and are the most effective. Some authors claim, for example, that the narrative strategies used to create responses to a wordless picture book are much more diverse than structures observed in class discussions [Dehn, Merklinger, Shuler 2014] The question therefore arises as to which features an image ought to possess in order to stimulate a fully developed story. An answer to this question could lead us to a better understanding of the process of structuring reality through narration by selecting some mental images and rejecting others.

The goal of this study is to identify a range of criteria which must be met by a visual image to be a trigger for a child's narrative. I suggest implementing my findings 1) in school teaching practices; 2) in research into the area of children's real-life stories (narration created for psychotherapeutic purposes, for example).I believe it is likely that a child will more eagerly recollect visual images which she can with less efforts inscribe in a certain narrative frame. Not only the perceived importance of a scene, but its compliance with a set of rules is, therefore, considered in the process of selecting material for a real-life story.

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[3]In the same way, the precise criteria for evaluation children's narrative abilities are also absent. See, for example, English programs of study: key stages 1and 2 (National curriculum in England www.gov.uk) or Federal Curriculum in Russian (Federal'nyj gosudarstvennyj standart nachal'nogo obshhego obrazovanija (1 - 4 kl.) http://standart.edu.ru)

[4] As in many other cases in the field of narration teaching the recommendations are not expressed explicitly; our classification is based on our study of a wide range of Russian school textbooks and instructional materials.

[5] Graves 1983, p.21

Materials and hypothesis

For their written responses children received two photographs, which differ in some basic ways in their depiction of scenes[6].

Photograph 1 (P1[7]) (see Figure 1) represents:
a)   a dynamic event (a moving boy figure);
b)   an unattained goal, unfinished action; focus on the future (the boy running «out» of the photograph frame);
c)   an absence of clearly designated emotions (the faces of both characters are too small to see their expressions; the general vagueness of an emotional context);
d)   an exotic setting (Afro-American appearances of the characters; airplanes without a common airport background; a deserted landscape).

Photograph 2 (P2[8]) (see Figure 2) demonstrates:
a)   a static scene (all three figures sitting);
b)   the result of an action; focus on the past (a scratch on the girl's knee; the boy's posture implying an injury);
c)   the characters' clearly depicted emotional state (all the faces in close-up);
d)   an everyday environment (a wooden porch of a typical country house; scattered toys; foliage).

Figure 1

Figure 2

Each photograph was accompanied by a caption:

P1: *This photograph is part of a museum collection. There is a story behind it. Unfortunately an etiquette where the story was written is lost. Help us restore the story.*

P2: *Masha Ivanova keeps this photograph in her album under the «My sad days» section. She had a short story written under each photograph, but unfortunately the sheet with this particular story is torn. Help Masha restore the story.*

The photographs were presented to a group of 10 – 11- year- old children for a written response. Three schools participated in the research (Moscow schools №1236 and № 252 and the Lesnogorodskaya school in the Moscow region). The schools were selected because of their strong teaching practices and also their noncompetitive entry requirements. This meant, firstly, that the pupils were familiar with the basic principles of a written story composition, and secondly, that the children's families were generally not focused on top class education. I presumed that a culture of reading was not particularly developed in these families and that the children's discourse was influenced by literature and its intellectual consequences to a very small extent. A poll was conducted in order to assemble a group of children whose narration couldn not entirely copy the models of children's fiction. During the poll questions about children's reading habits were posed. Based on the survey results 80 children were selected. These participants showed very little or no interest in books and reading. The texts were randomly distributed around the group. 39 written texts based on P1 and 41 based on P2 were received, with an average text length of 55 words.

My initial hypothesis was based on an intuitive definition of 'interesting' as 'dynamic' and 'exotic'. I believed that an 'interesting' visual image (P1), i.e. one which was far removed from an everyday child's life, was more powerful and might induce a more accomplished narration. Bruner's studies (for example, [Bruner 1986], [Bruner 1990]) stressed the importance of narrative in minimizing the gap between the unknown and the ordinary which, as I thought, supported this assumption. Another argument in the defense of the hypothesis is the lasting tradition in UK and USA (average results in PISA reading understanding test 2012 [OECD]) of presenting in schools textbooks photographs, movie stills and drawings of extremely strange, scary or, in some other way, exceptional scenes. Conversly, Russian narration teaching, which acheived rather poor results (below average results in PISA reading understanding test, 2012 [OECD]) traditionally involves writing essays stimulated by visual images which depict static

situations familiar to a child. As we shall see, the hypothesis proved to be wrong: the research revealed a number of characteristics that a visual image must possess to effectively stimulate a story and neither former nor the latter traditions represented these features in their entirety.

Method

A narrative analyst works with different kinds of meanings wich are transmitted through a wide range of materials, such as transcripts of audio interactions, oral traditions, written documents and exhibits of an online communication. The main characteristics of all these texts are their resemblance to a *story*, a verbal representation of events in a sequence that an author himself determines. I presume that since children have been urged to write *a story* related to a photograph, their texts must be evaluated as narratives. The 'narrative grammar' (as it was described and defined in the works of Propp, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes and Greimas) is a set of elements and their functions which must be present in any story. An absence of these elements does not allow the narrative to form. In this case, the text represents a sequence of sentences with a very weak interconnection and an unclear meaning, for instance, as we shall see in the children's texts, failing to choose a protagonist means that the child is unable to establish a series of events which are used to convey meaning. I adopt the Labovian approach here, with its emphasis on analysing the frames of a rigid narrative structure (6 parts of an orally told story presented in [Labov 1972]). Combining Labov's, Bruner's and Stein & Policastro's [Stein & Policastro 1984] sets of narrative features, I establish a set of eight elements which I consider to be necessary parts of children's written stories. From this, I classify children's narrative into 'good' or 'bad'(see [Stein & Policastro1984]). While using these terms I do not suggest that one story is valuable and another invalid. I only evaluate in this way a text's completeness and wether the whole set of elements constructing a typical narrative are in it. I presume that every important element of a story based on a photograph is related to an element of a photograph itself. For example, a protagonist in a story is a person seen in a photograph or a person that, according to a child's experience, could be seen in a photograph's background. The emotional atmosphere of a story is linked to characters'facial expressions etc.. It can be argued, therefore, that some visual images stimulate a good narrative more effectively than others.

In this section, I define eight main elements of a story. The subsequent sections analyze the named elements in the children's texts. I compare P1 and P2 in terms of their capacity to generate these key structures and, finally, describe the main features of a visual image which can become a stimulus for a good children's narrative.

There are eight main structural points, which must be included if a child intends to design a narrative:

1. <u>Orientation phase</u>. No meaning can be transmitted without a clear understanding of the scene setting. It is common to locate answers to who/when/ where questions at the beginning of a text. All of the 80 children's texts contains, at least partly, the orientation element. Even the worst examples, which lack a protagonist figure, their intentions or their actions, demonstrate *where* or *when*, as in the following (the text is quoted in full: hereafter if unspecified I quote part of a text):

Upali tri samoleta, kak v skazkah. I vse odinakovo. I tam tri cheloveka tozhe kak v skazkah. Eto bylo letom.

'Three planes have crashed, as in fairy tales. And everything is the same. And there are three people, also as in fairy tales. It was in the summer'

Here we can see an author who desperately wants but never succeeds in creating a story: his desire manifests itself in the reference to a fairy tale (which is repeated twice).

2. <u>Animated protagonist</u>. An intention and a process of its subsequent realization constitute the core of any narrative structure. If a lifeless object happens to be at the center of a

story, it must therefore be endowed with desires and the ability to act. See below an impressive example of uncertainty in the choice of protagonists. Neither the reader nor, it seems the author can decide between a substantiating metonymy (*airplanes* as *airplanes' passengers)* and the strange personification of a plane:

U nas okolo bol'shogo polja prizemlilis' istrebiteli. I chto ja nikogda ne zabudu, kak oni pili chaj i eli okroshku. No my ne ponjali, pochemu oni prileteli. I ja sprosil. Oni prileteli, potomu chto u nih zakonchilos' gorjuchee. My im dali gorjuchego, skol'ko bylo…

'We have three planes which landed near our big field. And the thing I'll never forget is how they were drinking tea and eating okroshka. But we didn't understand why they had come. And I asked them. They came because they didn't have any petrol. We gave them all the petrol we had.'

This text, despite some promising features, is a characteristic example of a bad narrative. It appears that the author could not dare to realize his unconscious intention of giving the narrator the role of protagonist. Passengers, as well as planes, never receive enough 'soul' to act meaningfully.

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3. <u>Invariable identity of a character</u>. Although many of a person's qualities can change in the course of narration, some substantial characteristics must remain, such as their name, social status, gender or age, which allow us to identify them throughout the story. We shall see later how the absence of such an identity can hinder a narrative. Here is one example (quoted in full):

Eto bylo v zakate. Pervyj, kotoryj stojal na kryle samoleta, skazal: Ty kuda bezhish'? Prosto begaju.

'It was at sunset. The first, which was standing on the plane's wing, said: Where are you running to? I'm just running. '

The author, unable to locate the identity of a person (*first* and *which was standing* represent inconstant features) cannot distinguish between the two characters (see incorrect in respect to punctuation dialogue, clouding the meaning) and prefers not to proceed further with the narrative. The absence of a goal (*just running*) and of a protagonist (the two participants in the dialogue are not assessed according to a hierarchy), despite perfect temporal and spatial orientation, also prevent the narrative from developing. Note that this particular deficiency is very common in the children's texts.

4. <u>An explicit statement of a protagonist's desires or goals</u>. This statement triggers a story and allows its main function, solving a problem, to be fulfilled. Without the trigger, the text loses its narrative mode and the author, aware of their inability to proceed further, confines themselves to a sequence of sentences[9], as in the following example (quoted in full):

Na etoj fotografii my vidim aeroport. Na nem stojat neskol'ko samoletov. Na kryle odnogo iz nih stoit chelovek. On smotrit na zemlju. Po zemle bezhit mal'chik. I po nebu letjat oblaka. Oni pohozhi na ovechek.

'This photograph shows us an airport. There are a few planes at it. On the wing of one of them stands a person. He is looking at the ground. There is a boy running on the ground. And in the sky clouds are flying. They look like sheep. '

In this text, there is an easily distinguishable pattern of descriptive writing. The connection between sentences is not based on chronology or logic, but on the spatial principle; characters' posture is their only feature; there is a standard comparison. I therefore suggest, although I cannot elaborate on the topic in this paper, that writing and analyzing descriptive

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[9] Here and later we shall use the terms 'text' and 'sequence of sentences' as synonyms for the 'bad narrative': a 'text' does not include all eight elements which a 'good narrative' or a 'story' presents.

pieces at school should be organized in such a way so as to not hinder the child's ability to narrate.

5. <u>An overt action carried out to achieve the protagonist's goal</u>. A description, as we have already seen, often disturbs children's narratives by substituting statuses for actions. Texts without actions are unfamiliar for children, but among the 80 children analyzed, one wrote (quoted in full):

Eto sluchilos', kogda im vse nadoelo. Oni uzhe vo vse poigrali. I im skuchno. Masha - ah!

'It happened when they had had enough of everything. They'd already played all the games. And they are bored. Masha – ah!'

In spite of the evident intention to create a story (*it happened*) the author's concentration on the state of mind instead of an action makes a narrative impossible to develop.

6. <u>References to a tradition</u>. A narrative must depict a cultural code because it's violation in the story reveals another important function of a narrative, the reconciliation of habitual and unusual. Here we shall consider one rare example of a completely strange reality, reproduced in a child's story (quoted in full):

Ogromnaja staja samoletov rabotorgovca stolknulas' mezhdu soboj i vse oni upali v ogromnuju kuchu navoza. Kakim-to chudom vyzhilo dva afrikanca: rebenok i ego papa. Rebenok ubegaet, potomu chto on v shoke. Otec reshil pokonchit' zhizn' samoubijstvom, potomu chto ego zhena umerla iz-za togo, chto ej v rot popala muha, kotoraja kruzhilas' nad jetim navozom.

'A huge flock of airplanes crashed into each other and they all fell into a huge manure pile. By some miracle, two Africans survived, a child and his Dad. A child is running away because he's suffering from shock. The Father has planned to commit suicide because his wife had died, because she had got a fly in her mouth which had been in the manure.'

Even with most other essential elements present (orientation, protagonists, goal, action), the text seems meaningless in the absence of an understanding of a distinct cultural code. The reader cannot see the author's purpose: did he want to express a feeling or a thought? Was it a parody? Perhaps he just intended to irritate his teacher with an unpleasant scene?

7. <u>Outcome related to the attainment of a protagonist's goals</u>. Without this element, a story does not only seem incomplete, but also cannot have any implications for the narrator's and reader's life and so lacks meaning. Consider for example the following (quoted in full):

Deti byli na meste padenija samoletov. Oni obsledovali samolety, tshhatel'no osmotrelis' i odin iz nih pobezhal dokladyvat' o meste padenija.

'Children were at the planes' crash site. They explored the planes, looked around carefully and one of them ran to report the crash site.'

The settings, desires and actions are all in place. A protagonist is not clearly identified, and maybe this prevented the author from continuing the story. Whatever the case, one sentence depicting an outcome could give a meaning to this otherwise incomprehensible text.

7. <u>'Landscape of consciousness'</u> (in Bruner's vivid terminology [Bruner 1986]). The protagonist's reactions and interpretations are always present in a good narrative. Any deficiency of emotions can ruin an otherwise good text:

Na etoj fotografii proizoshlo. Oni katali Mashu na sankah i oni naehali na kochku i Masha Ivanova upala s sanok i razbila kolenku, a mal'chik udarilsja golovoj.

'It happened in this photograph. They were sledging and they ran over a hummock and Masha Ivanova fell from the sledge and scratched her knee, and a boy hit his head. '

We can see a strangely dispassionate tone in this story about a painful accident. Once again, an emotional exclamation mark (as in, *Masha was sad* or *It was the worst day!!!* from other children's stories) would be enough to create a narrative.

I now turn to an examination of every element in the texts prompted by P1 and P2.

Settings

The orientation phase receives considerable attention from all kinds of narrators, children included. For the purpose of this analysis, I divided this section into two parts:

1.   Information about characters and about the protagonist in particular.
2.   Information about the place and time of action.

My evidence shows that the two types of information are commonly provided at the very beginning of children's stories, although we have noted that there are some rare pieces of writing where authors put off orientation to the end.

1.   <u>Information about characters and the protagonist.</u>

Both P1 and P2 represent more than one human figure and so, while successfully constructing a story, the authors choose one of two strategies. They either (**A**) specify the protagonist or (**B**) specify the group (category) from which the protagonist is later separated from, as 'one of'.

A. The 'Protagonist' strategy.

Boy is evidently the most popular (71%) protagonist in the P1 stories (P1S). The other texts use *me*, *man*, *child* and *person* in that role.

P2, as we know, was accompanied by a text where the girl's name was stated, and so *Masha* makes up 50% of the P2 stories' (P2S) protagonists. *She* (without any name later, perhaps as a reference to the text-stimulus) is used by 1.5% of the children, while P1S shows no such examples. The same text-stimulus, which used a first-person narration ('My sad days') is the reason for the more frequent use of *Me* (18% vs 1%) as a P2S protagonist. The other protagonists are *girl*, *boy, younger son* and *Sasha*.

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Once the protagonist is established, the author is meant to produce information about his relationship to the other characters in the story, unless of course the narrator chooses to ignore them, which was a strategy that none of the children adopted. Relationships in P1S and P2S are categorized in the following way:

P1S: *boy (child) – man; man – boy; boy – pilot* (of the airplane that the boy arrived on); *boy – teacher; boy – his father (Dad); boy – grandfather; (younger, little) brother – (older, big) brother; boy (me) – his (my) friend (comrade)*;

P2S: *Masha (Me, girl, she) – her (my) friends; Masha (Sasha)- Petya, Van'ka (Grisha, Sveta or other names); Masha – her (younger) brothers; boy – his sister and brother; Masha – her neighbors.*

Consider, for example, these story beginnings:

Muzhchina stoit na kryle i on hochet pereletiet' v druguju stranu zabesplatno...V jetot moment shel mal'chik...

'A man is standing on a wing and he wants to fly to another country free of charge…At that moment, a boy was walking…'

or

Vo dvore byla Masha i ee druz'ja.

'In the yard there were Masha and her friends.'

The stories then usually proceed smoothly on to the statements of goals and actions. However, issues arise if a P1S author is determined to write a story about the 'character on a wing'. If he perceives the person to be a *boy*, he can proceed easily with the ' older – younger friends' format, but as soon as the character is seen to be a grown up, the only other way to

qualify their relationship to each other is to make them into a family. The narrators who do not intend to go in this direction and call their main character *man* have already fallen into a trap. The narrator cannot find a cultural code or a language to describe the 'man – boy' relationship and the narrative fails. My previous example is the only story in which the author was able to find a solution to this problem (man and passer-by). The narrator obviously has many skills of a very good storyteller, but even this text shows many discrepancies in verbs tenses, perhaps due to uncertainty about the main character. Here is another example of a bright idea but the failure of the narrative because of an incorrect choice of protagonist (quoted in full):

Chelovek kotoryj stoit na kryle samoleta sledit za mal'chikom vnizuju Sledit on za nim potomu chto jetot mal'chik syn prezidenta i emu porucheno ohranjat' mal'chika no mal'chik ob jetom nichego ne znaet. Ohrannik stoit na kryle eshhe potomu chto jeto samoe nezametnoe mesto v pole. Mal'chik bezhit potomu chto on igraet v dogonjalki so svoim vydumannym drugom.

'A man who is standing on the plane's wing is keeping track of a boy on the ground. He's keeping track of him because this boy is a son of a president and he is entrusted to guard him but the boy knows nothing about it. The guard is standing on the wing because it is the most inconspicuous place in the field. The boy is running because he's playing touch-last with his imaginary friend.'

The narration stops here, despite very promising goals, settings and even a hint of emotion. The impossibility (Russian National Corpus[10] gives us zero examples) of the collocation of the 'guard and his…' keeps the story from unfolding. The author seems somehow aware of his mistake: if the *man on a wing* could function as an *imaginary friend* from the last sentence, the story could move in the right direction. Note that the collocation the 'boy with' (e.g. the boy as the protagonist) gives the author more possibilities than 'man with'. In the RNC, we find 'boys with' *classmates, friends, giants, cannibals, school masters, evil waiters* and all kinds of other characters. 'Man' is almost invariably 'with' a woman (*girlfriend, wife, companion, date)* .The literary tradition, as well as language, does not support the unfolding of a story about a man and another male character: in contrast to a 'boy' an unnamed 'man' is a very uncommon persona in texts designed for children.

In this respect, P2S authors are luckier: 'boy' and 'girl' are almost symmetrical in their collocations, so with any choice of protagonist, their relationship to others can be easily assessed.

B. 'Group' strategy.

The P1S as well as the P2S data indicate many successful narratives based on this strategy, with protagonists defined as 'one of' the *children, boys (guys), people from the plane, passengers, family, Africans, friends*, *brothers,* or *we*. The B strategy may be seen as opposite to the A strategy. Here, the relationships are established first and only afterwards is the protagonist found.

Here again P1 presents a more challenging case for young authors. If in P2 the group is homogenous and can be easily described as *children*, constructing a narration from P1 is easier if it becomes a family story (*brothers*) and more difficult when applying other formats. *Friends* are another good option; as with *brothers* 'one of' can be comfortably established as either *younger* or *older*. Age is the only characteristic that readily comes to mind, which can split the P1 group; narrators use it widely not only with *younger/older*, but also in constructions like *a boy of…years*. Narration is impossible if, as is the case in many examples, the idea of age does not appear in the text, which begins with a reference to a category. Consider, for example:

Dva parnja sbezhali iz tjur'my
'Two guys escaped from a prison'

The author here cannot refer to an age, otherwise the youth of 'one guy' would become too evident. Unfortunately, the author cannot proceed, and becomes entangled in the course of three sentences with the *first* and the *second* 'guys'.

In another example (quoted in full), the group as a whole becomes the protagonist:

Ljudi, kotorye izobrazheny na jetoj fotografii - afrikancy. Oni zhivut rjadom s zabroshennym ajeroportom. Vozmozhno, jeti zhiteli berut kresla iz samoletov i drugie nuzhnye im veshhi. Na fotografii vidno, chto net dverej u samoletov.

'The people that we see in this photo are Africans. They live near a deserted airport. These inhabitants probably take the seats and other things they need out of the plane. We can see that the planes have no doors.'

It appears, though, that actions and goals of a group united on principle of race (*Africans*) or masculinity (*men*) or being human (*people*) seem incomprehensible to young authors. The first-person narration where *we* clearly stands for *I* is the only type of good P1S text with a 'collective' protagonist. Another interesting attempt at creating a 'collective protagonist' is a text where *two brothers*, *two future lawyers* feature. Unfortunately, the story does not proceed further: its author seems disturbed by this bizarre reduplication and unable to separate one character from another.

The P2 characters are on the one hand easily organized into a category, but on the other hand, each possess distinctive qualities (age, gender and clothing) so that they can be chosen as good protagonists for a narrative. *She* and *they* who act through one narrative as protagonist and helpers are an illustrative example of ways to explore these possibilities.

2. <u>Information about the place and the time of action</u>.

The temporal orientation is much more common in my data than the spatial (46% vs 17%). I could not find any research that would provide an explanation for this observation. I suggest that children believe the photograph and the piece of writing to be two parts of one narrative (my text-stimulus supports this point of view). The visual image of place has already been provided to an observer, whereas time must be specified verbally. Because P2 is more precise about the place (it cannot be other than *yard* or *outside*) fewer children mention it. Conversely, P1 were given reason to doubt the location of the scene, so more children felt obliged to refer to locations such as *airport, field, Africa, America* or *place unknown to us*. An image, where the observer could be less certain about a place or the time of action, could become a more effective trigger for children's narratives.

It is worth noting that every piece of writing I consider to be a good narrative, because of its compliance with the other rules of storytelling, contains either temporal or spatial orientations. They range from the very broad:

...segodnja ona prosnulas'...
'…today she woke up…'
or
Tut stojat samolety...
'There are planes here…'
to very precise:
V odnom starom gorode v 1111 godu...
'In an old town in the year 1111…'
or
29 avgusta v Amerike...
'On August 29th in America…'

It would be interesting to assemble a body of texts prompted by an image of a scene set against a monochromatic background, and to examine the setting element in the narratives. Its presence could confirm the idea of the rule of a story, which is intuitively perceived by a child. Otherwise we could say that the young authors just 'describe pictures'.

Animated protagonist

P1's visual composition clearly states the running boy's figure as the main character. The boy's primary importance to the story is also supported by many young narrators' intention to identify themselves with the protagonist. If this is not done through the first-person account then it can be through a familiar cultural code, such as a pupil- teacher relationship or father-son. There is a story that brings an invisible *Mom* onto the stage, where she is looking for her son who is trying to hide to avoid being punished. The 'protagonist – helper' is the most common story pattern. In the narrative quoted above, the second male figure is a *friend* who helps to distract *Mom*'s attention. The main obstacle to a successful narration is a mismstch between the role and the character perceived by an author. The authors who are 10 or 11 years old sometimes consider the P1 'boy' too young and too insignificant to be a protagonist (he is often described as *boy of 7 (6) years old* or as a *small (very small) boy*). In this case he becomes a helper and the protagonist's place remains vacant. The second figure is too far away and too strangely placed to form the center of a story. The personas out of the frame of the photograph must be invented to perform the role. The passengers of a crashed plane appear in 6 texts. They have tried to repair the engine, to find petrol or food or to save cargo; they are dying and send the little boy for help. Everything runs smoothly but suddenly the narrations stop (I have only one completed story like this). The authors have to invent an outcome without a prompt from the image and they are not able to conjure up inspiration for this. Here is a typical text (quoted in full):

Dva samoleta seli v neizvestnom meste i odnogo mal'chika poslali uznat' net li poblizosti poselenija. K schast'ju, rjadom byla doroga. Mal'chik shel po doroge i cherez neskol'ko chasov on doshel do shosseju. Posle on prishel k samoletam i skazal

'Two planes landed in an unknown place and a boy was sent to look for a settlement nearby. Fortunately there was a road. The boy walked down the road and in few hours he reached a highway. Afterwards he came to the planes and he said'

What did he say, that boy? The author does not know, and the narrative fails. The problem arises from the protagonists' totally imaginary character. The narrator does not see or 'feel' them, while the pattern commands that their destiny and not the boy's attract his attention.

I have touched on some of the ways in which narrative is affected by the visual image of human figures. Let us now turn to the problems arising from the presence of inanimate objects. The necessity of establishing some spatial settings has led many authors (31% of P1S) to mention airplanes in the very first sentence. A protagonist must then be introduced. A story cannot develop if the character and the place are not interconnected in one way or another. Consider, for example, the beginning of a poor text which lacked many important elements of narrative:

Na foto izobrazheny voennye samolety. God nazad zakonchilas' vojna mezhdu Amerikoj i Afrikoj. Jeti deti sluzhili v kachestve shpionov...

'The photo shows military planes. The war between America and Africa finished a year ago. These children served as spies…'

The narrator is not able to determine the relationship between the protagonists and the setting. His characters are lost within space and at a loss with their goals.

The most obvious way to continue from planes to characters is to put the people *in* (*before, on, behind*) the objects with the help of prepositions. For example:

…ljudi vybegali iz samoletov...

…people were running out of planes…

or

…na kryle samoleta stoit mal'chik…

…a boy is standing on the plane's wing…

if they happen to begin with this kind of orientation (*before the porch/the stairs*). However, P1 offers a more interesting opportunity which narrators exploit widely; *airplane* can become a metonym and imply *passengers:*

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Podshibleny byli dva vrazheskih samoleta. Pogibli vse.
Two planes were shot down. Everybody died.

The metonym demonstrates a much more elegant connection between a place and a character. P2 could offer the same pattern if it represented a house, but in P2 only the stairs are shown.

A character's invariable identity

A name would be the best way of establishing identity. 26% of P2S vs 1% of P1S used this strategy (I do not count *Masha* here, because the name was presented in my text- stimulus). The stories with names in them proved to be more compatible with other key rules of narrative, perhaps because their authors did not have to struggle to find things that distinguished one person from another. It could be argued that it was not only the name in the accompanying P2 text that was the cause of the strategy's popularity in the P2S group. P1's exotic setting prevents the authors from choosing a name. It is important to remember that the young narrators are not very good readers and so are not familiar with the global culture. Conversely, P2's familiar atmosphere invites the children to tell a story about someone known from their everyday school experience; *Vitya*, *Andrey* or *Filya*.

I have already discussed the ways in which the characters are labeled by their occupation (*pilot, farmer, passenger, teacher*), age/social status (*man, grown-up, girl, boy, child, big guy, kid*), but most often by gender (*boy, girl*) or their position in the family (*Dad, Mom, parents, grandfather, son, brother, sister, relative*). Let us touch here on the issues involving the 'group strategy'. Consider the means by which narrators try to identify their characters. It is worth bearing in mind that only the last one ('Group strategy c'), as I have shown, leads to a good story. The 'Group strategy a' fails because it is difficult to remember throughout a story who was the first and who the second, and the 'Group strategy b' fails because the actions depicted in the photograph are followed by other actions in a story.

a. Order of appearance: *the first, second; one, another*.
b. Actions:
…mal'chik, kotoryj potom fotografiroval…
'…the boy who was taking photos afterwards…'
or a very striking example:
Mal'chik, kotoryj stoit, on stoit na kryle... mal'chik, kotoryj bezhit, on bezhit za pomoshh'ju...
'The boy who is standing, is standing on the wing…the boy who is running is running for help…'
c. Age: *younger, older, small, big*

The idea of differences in people's appearances seems irrelevant to the children's narrative. Although the people in P2 wear different clothes, they are never described in P2S, as well as in P1S. An ability to create description would be very useful for narrators here but, as shown earlier, children who do not read much are not able to insert the descriptive writing, that they were taught to produce, into their narration.

An explicit statement of the protagonist's desires or goals

The example below shows an impressive attempt at creating a narrative, which begins from the step-by-step approach to the statement of a goal. Once the aim is established the text is perceived by its young narrator as accomplished (quoted in full):

Na kartine my vidim begushhego mal'chika. S vidu mozhno podumat' chto on bezhit prosto tak, no jeto ne tak. V ego dvizhenijah my vidim opredelennuju cel'. Vyrazhenie ego lica vyrazhaet ozadachennost' i kakuju-to neponjatnuju cel'. Jeta kartina delaet bol'shoj akcent na samolet i mal'chika kotoryj bezhit po vsej vidimosti ot svoego rodstvennika. Po vsej vidimosti jetot muzhik rabotaet pilotom i neudachno posadil samolet. A mal'chik pobezhal za pomoshh'ju. Konec.

'The picture shows us a running boy. Judging from his appearance, we might think that he is just running but that is not the case. We can see a definite goal in his movements. His facial expression is puzzled, expressing an incomprehensible goal. This picture places emphasis on a plane and on a boy who seems to be running from his relative. It seems that the big guy works as pilot and he landed the plane badly. And the boy ran for help. The end.'

The story cannot be classified as good; its main defect is the narrator's inability to imagine the goal which he is trying so hard to work out. The *puzzled expression* and the boy running *from the big guy* do not fit into the protagonist-helper pattern. The text nevertheless is very vivid manifestation of a narrative construction process, and of a goal as the trigger for a story.

P2's visual image is unsurprisingly described in children's stories as an unpleasant outcome. The story therefore exists only where an author depicts the previous state of affairs (*happy birthday, sunny weekend, interesting play*) and states a wish (which is unfulfilled) to maintain the *status quo*. Any text, where an author does not mention these goals and merely depicts actions which resulted in an accident, does not constitute a good story even if the other elements are in place, for example (quoted in full):

Masha possorilas' so svoim bratom. On tolknul ee i ona razbila kolenku do krovi i Masha dala emu sdachu i on udarilsja golovoj. Oni possorilis' i pojetomu ej stalo ochen' grustno i ona napisala na fotografii "Samyj grustnyj den' v moej zhizni".

Masha had a quarrel with her brother. He pushed her and now her knee is bleeding and Masha hit him back and he banged his head. They had a quarrel which made her really sad and she wrote The saddest day of my life' on the photo.

One curious thing about my data is that scenes shown on the photograph are presented as undesirable in all P1S and P2S stories. P2S see it as a result, whereas P1S mostly sees it as a starting point of events, but both times the narrative characters are determined to avoid the state of affairs that the visual image shows. If this is the universal rule of the story stimulated by a picture, I would not be as surprised as I was by the image of suicide and imminent death that many children saw in P1. It would be useful to verify my idea by assembling children's texts based on a clearly 'happy' visual image.

An overt action carried out whilst meeting the protagonist's goal

P1 shows dynamic action. P2 is static, yet P2S present a much more abundant and diverse set of movement verbs. Compare:

P1S: *run (to, from, away), start running, disperse, jump, go (up, down), fly, crash, land, come, open, bump into, walk, hide.*

P2S: *catch, fell, climb, push, strike, go, run, splash, slip, stumble, crash, jump, stamp, trample, throw, creep, land, fight, fly, tear, sit down, stand up* and others.

To unpack this discrepancy, we ought to turn to the notion of 'outcome'. P2 is perceived as a result of events and the P2S narrators feel self-reliant while 'reconstructing' these events with a visual image as a clue. Conversely, P1 is perceived as a beginning of a series of actions, which can develop in any direction. P2S demonstrate less than 1% of expressions of uncertainty such as *probably, it seems that, I don't know*, vs 20% for the P1S group. The more certain the authors are in the unfolding of events in their stories the more readily they use words which refer to movement.

Descriptions always slowed-down actions. In children's texts they can completely destroy them. A child feels an obligation to describe an important object and so loses the thread of a story or becomes tired and cannot continue writing. The *airplanes* mentioned above are considered to be an important detail by many authors, but their presence in the text often stops the narration. The P2 shows no such important details. A *camera* may be regarded as a significant component of a picture, but all the children who decided to use it in their narration become entangled with it and did not finish the story. Conversely, a *bicycle* is a pleasant choice

for many P2S narrators. It is not seen in the picture and so does not require any description and can just appear in the right place to trigger an action.

References to a tradition

I considered P1 to be the best stimulus for narration, in particular due to its exotic setting which would be unknown for a regular child from Moscow. Children's fiction is full of deserted lands, empty roads, hot sands and blue skies which invite adventure. However, the strange landscape never appears in P1S, and few authors refer to *an unknown place*. No one noticed the sand or wrote about an uninhabited desert. Familiar things like *tow trucks*, *lorries* and *village houses* are the main staples of the stories' imaginary setting. Exotic images seem to exert a bad influence upon a narrative. Authors are not sure about what kind of cultural tradition they are operating in and so express uncertainty:

S verojantnost'ju 99% procentov mogu skazat' foto bylo na zakate.
'With a probability of 99% I can say that the photo was taken at dawn'

They cannot understand the goals or determine the actions of their characters. The very basic 'run for help (food, water, petrol)' plot is the most common P1S pattern. Unsettled by the unfamiliar code, the children try to find consolation in an unsophisticated narrative.

P2 shows a simple everyday scene; the cultural code is familiar, the authors feel safe and let their imagination run wild. The range of topics considered in P2S is very wide; robbery, birthdays, family visits, outdoor adventures in the streets of a big city, a fight between siblings or neighbors, a boring Sunday or a car accident. The imaginary landscape is full of details from *a tall wardrobe* and *a happy puppy* to a *beautiful shop window* and a *gun*.

Outcomes based on the attainment of a protagonist's goals

As P2 evidently presents the result of an action, more of the P2S group than P1S had the outcome element (59% vs 12%). It is important to stress that the P2S outcomes do not necessarily revolve around the accident theme which was presented in P2. Once received from the image, the outcome can be described in many different ways, for example:

Ih papa zaplatil shtraf 300,000,000 dollarov.
'Their father paid a fine of 300,000,000 dollars'.
or
Roditeli zastavili Sashu i Dimu vse ubrat'.
'The parents made Sasha and Dima tidy everything up'
or
Na sledujushhij den' vse bylo horosho.
'The next day everything went well'

'Landscape of consciousness'

Emotions are rarely expressed in P1S, although the narrative here deals mainly with critical situations. Only the children who were very elaborate in their plots and verbal structures presented the 'landscape of consciousness' in P1S, for example:

Ljudi zhutko hoteli domoj.
'People wanted to return home very badly'
or
Chestno govorja jeta istorija vsem dazhe ponravilas'.
'To tell the truth, everybody liked this adventure.

The well known cultural tradition and the familiar code of behavior, as well as the peculiarity of the text-stimulus, were why feelings tended to appear in most P2S stories:

Den' byl uzhasnyj!!!
'It was an awful day!!!'
or

Masha sidela i grustila.
'Masha grieved.'
and even
Ja ochen'-ochen'-ochen' rada!
'I'm very very very happy!'

Exclamation marks, evaluation judgments (*he was a very naughty boy, an awful day, the wicked brothers*) are much more often expressed when the children are referring to situations which they have experienced, than in P1S's texts, with their mention of disaster or death, where it is always described in a cold, detached tone.

Conclusions

Based on the data examined in the paper, I present a set of features in this section, which a visual image must possess in order to stimulate a good narrative text, in a classroom:

1. An observer has the opportunity of combining characters into a homogeneous group which can then act as a whole or be separated, based on a noticeable feature.

2. There are clearly stated points of comparison between characters (such as high-short, fat – thin, young – old).

3. The characters possess visible traits, which can distinguish them from one another (gender, age, clothes).

4. The protagonist comes forth visually, and can be designated by a word with wide collocability

5. Peripheral characters can also be named by words with wide collocability and cultural connotations, so that an author can select them as protagonists.

6. The supposed protagonist 'deserves' their role, e.g. from the child's point of view they are worthy of their central position in the narrative.

7. If the image is labeled, it is useful to have a personal name in the description. However, it is worth remembering that this kind of name could cause personal pronouns to be incorrectly used, i.e. they can be related to the image and not to the text.

8. The visual image does not present an easily readable and unambiguous spatial (or temporal) setting.

9. There are objects designated by nouns that can become metonyms for animated characters (house, train, forest).

10. There are no 'important' objetcs which call a child for a description during the orientation phase.

11. The image depicts common and 'safe' situations for a child, and which are deciphered through a familiar cultural code.

12. Results of actions and not the actions themselves are visually presented.

13. The scene may be interpreted as an undesirable situation, which characters try to avoid.

My analysis has therefore shown that my initial evaluation of P1 as visual image which could stimulate a better children's narrative was incorrect. An exotic setting, which I considered to be a trigger for a child's imagination is, on the contrary, an obstacle to successful storytelling. A child who does not perceive a familiar cultural code in a photograph feels unsafe and expresses in uncertainty about every element of the story in their texts. Even if the young author finishes his narration the plot of such story is very simple and the setting consists of details from the child's everyday experience. This way the child tries to return the unknown material under control. The narrative tension is rather weak in most P1 texts, because their authors are afraid of making a mistake. Exotic details and complicated plots are common to P2 stories. Here, the outcome gives children a clue to the unfolding of events and they are free to imagine. Not only exotic details but any visual detail evaluated by a child as important exerts some negative influence over a child's written story. It demands a description, yet my study shows that children

aged 10 -11 who are not acquainted with a book culture are unable to insert descriptive parts into their narratives.

The dynamic event which depicts P1 does not correspond to the frequency of the verbs of motion in P1S. P2S present more actions because of the clearly stated outcome demonstrated by the visual image . If uncertain about a result, a child is unable to discuss actions that have led to that outcome. A focus on the past therefore offers more possibilities of completing a story than a focus on the future.

I do not think that emotional facial expressions are the cause of the emotions in P2S. Neither the P1S, nor the P2S children paid attention to appearances of the characters. It could be argued that the less familiar (and more interesting) the situation is to the child, the fewer emotions they expresses in their narrative. An emotional context is the element which always requires an imaginative effort, as is the case when choosing a 'worthy' protagonist out of the picture frame. A child cannot often make an effort to do this, and their narration stops. At the same time, the presence of an unambiguously depicted setting in a photograph relieves children from the duty of trying to imagine it or to state it verbally, which deteriorates the story. Therefore, a visual image can become a trigger of a good story if a child is certain about its protagonist, its emotional atmosphere and its cultural code, but unsure about the where/when settings.

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