

Mapping the child's world: The cognitive and cultural function of proper names in the book series *Paula's Life*

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Abstract. The article regards children's literature as a certain cultural tool. This approach enables to reveal various characteristic aspects of the poetics of children's literature, while relating them to children's cognitive and cultural development. Focusing on a book series *Paula's Life* by Estonian author Aino Pervik, it can be seen how two different ways of understanding — the initial, so-called mythological type of thinking of preschoolers and the emerging conceptual thinking — are combined.

The article draws mostly on the concepts of cultural psychology and the authors of Tartu–Moscow school of semiotics, who have elaborated the idea that proper names form one of the central components of mythological consciousness, the latter being comparable to “the language of proper names”. The main attention is drawn on the functioning of names and the topic of naming and categorizing in these texts.

As in humanities in general, theoretical pluralism in contemporary children's literature studies is obvious, ranging from pedagogical approaches, which concentrate mainly on the process of learning to read, to for example feminist and postcolonial studies, which pose the questions of power, adult dominance, and even the visions of the child “as a socio-historically constructed non-adult” (Lassén-Seger 2006: 16).

The present article aims to adopt a somewhat different perspective, trying to expand upon children's literature as a specific cultural tool.¹ This approach attempts to avoid sharp dichotomy between aesthetic and pedagogical aspects of children's literature, rather observing these as having complementary relations. Moreover, it enables to handle children's literature not from a strictly pedagogical viewpoint, but as a specific form of social interaction in culture, where certain intellectual and psychological properties are developed and various culture-specific values are passed on.

Theoretical background of the approach arises mainly from the tradition of cultural psychology, especially from the ideas of Lev Vygotsky and his contemporary followers, for example, Jerome Bruner and Kieran Egan. Their ideas enable to treat children's literature from a more holistic point of view, considering both socializing and aesthetic components of the texts. Up to nowadays, with some exceptions, Vygotsky's ideas have been employed for pedagogical purposes in order to advance the so-called scientific or formal-logical type of thinking. But the views of Vygotsky offer a perspective for studying also other types of thinking, as well as the role of imagination in the process of intellectual development.

The core of Vygotsky's theory is the social nature of cognitive processes. The mental development of an individual does not take place in itself (as it was presented by the developmental theory of Jean Piaget)², but all higher psychological processes are guided by social environment.

From Vygotskian point of view, learning occurs in collaboration between children and adults who introduce symbolic tools or mediators to children. They teach them how to organize and control their natural psychological functions with the help of these cultural tools (Kozulin

¹ According to the context and specific discipline, different authors use also the terms 'psychological' or 'symbolic' tools, sometimes synonymously. In the present approach the more general notion of cultural tool is preferred, because of its emphasis on the impact of cultural context.

² For the critique of the ideas of Piaget, see, for example, Kozulin *et al.* 2003, Egan 2002; Bruner 1986: 140–141; Nodelman, Reimer 2003: 89–95; Lowe 2007: 5–6, 75–77.

1998: 40). “Psychological tools are those symbolic systems specific for a given culture that when internalized by individual learners become their inner cognitive tools” (Kozulin *et al.* 2003: 3). This means that any mental function is at first introduced on the social plane and only after this will be internalized in the mind of an individual. Thus, mind, cognition and memory can be understood not as attributes or properties of the individual, but as functions that can be carried out inter- or intramentally (Wertsch, Tulviste 1992: 549).

Vygotsky specified cultural tools as following: language, systems of counting, mnemonic techniques; but also works of art, writing, schemes, diagrams, maps, all sorts of conventional signs (Wertsch 1985: 79). In principle, these categories correspond to the notions of primary and secondary modelling systems used in the semiotics of culture. It is also important to notice that in Vygotsky’s approach, psychological or cultural tools are not just auxiliary means that facilitate an existing mental function but they have a capacity to transform mental functioning (Wertsch 1985: 79).

Literature as a cultural tool

The idea of narrative as a specific cultural tool has been specified by Jerome Bruner. Bruner (1986: 11) outlines two different, but complementary modes of thought: logico-mathematical and narrative thinking, which both structure our experience and construct our conception of reality. While the former comprises categorization, conceptualization and strong abstraction, then narrative thought is based on subjectification, concerning rather the concrete and particular phenomena (Bruner 1986: 25).

In developmental perspective, the role of narrative in forming children’s minds is definitely crucial, as many cultural practices are passed on by means of narratives; education relies mostly on storytelling methods etc. In a word, various kinds of stories have a central place in the lives of all humans, shaping their minds as cognitive tools. We construct our

personal experiences with the help of narratives, using different cognitive models and narrative strategies to arrange the events in our lives.

Literary text as a specific form of narrative has also been viewed as a psychological supertool that mediates human experience, or as a specific semiotic device by which cognition is affected (Kozulin 1998: 130–132). More specifically, as Nicholas Tucker has put it, “[f]iction has always been a medium wherein the child’s here and now can be transcended, enabling the child to move into foreign worlds and different social roles” (Tucker 2006: 349). In other words, through literary texts we transcend our immediate experience, learn about alternative viewpoints, and discover new perspectives both in surrounding reality as well as in our inner world.

Regarding children’s literature as a cultural tool enables to reveal various characteristic aspects of the poetics of children’s literature, while relating them to children’s cognitive and cultural development. Thus, considering children’s literature as a specific cultural tool, we can pose questions such as: Why certain artistic means or techniques are used? What are the distinctive features of children’s literature in comparison with literature for adults? What is the role of children’s literature in developing imagination and creativity besides intellectual growth? It becomes possible to avoid a commonplace view of children’s literature as something less sophisticated and inferior to adult literature and to outline its strengths, considering children’s literature as an independent form of art.

Mythological consciousness

Some educationists have recently developed the idea about the mythical nature of young children’s consciousness. Kieran Egan, a psychologist and educational theorist, uses the term ‘mythological’ to describe the period in child development that coincides with the preschool years in many contemporary societies. Beginning at about the age of 2–3 years, the mythological period is directly connected with language

acquisition, and is gradually replaced with other, “more scientific” types of thinking around the age of 7, when cultural tools of literacy are introduced (Egan 1997: 36). In a word, this period is characteristic to the state before achieving literacy, but as Egan also admits, it does not disappear completely from the minds of adults, continually affecting mainly the sphere of creativity.

Drawing parallels between mythological and child consciousness offers an alternative approach to the dominating educational paradigms which are mainly focused on the development of children’s scientific and logical skills. Egan stresses the importance of this pre-scientific type of thinking, claiming that by investigating children’s mind processes, we could possibly find some intellectual functions in which children are typically above adults, e.g. creating metaphors, the fruitful employment of fantasy and creativity in general (see Egan 1997: 57).

The authors of Tartu–Moscow School have also drawn parallels between mythological consciousness and children’s thinking. They outline the characteristics of mythological stratum both onto- and sociogenetically, that is, in human mind and in culture. Juri Lotman admits that though diachronically unreconstructable as a pure form of consciousness, mythological pole of mind is still synchronically observable as a structuring principle of culture. Lotman regards both consciousness and culture as at least bipolar/bilingual mechanisms that consist of verbal-discrete and iconic languages, the latter being connected with myth (Lotman 2002: 2647).

Describing child consciousness as typically mythological, Lotman and Uspenskij (1999: 196–197) outline its characteristic features such as tendency to regard all words as proper names, identifying knowledge with naming and a specific experience of time and space. According to these authors, proper names are central or even constitutive elements of mythological thinking. Lotman and Uspenskij suggest that proper names form a special mythological layer in language, which functions differently than other linguistic categories. Archaic qualities of language and thought are preserved within the stratum of proper names,

while this stratum is perceived as being something basic and natural from the viewpoint of the addressee (Lotman, Uspenski 1999: 192–194).

Paula's world: Widening the perspective

Aino Pervik (b. 1932) is without doubt one of the best contemporary children's writers in Estonia. Having written over 30 books for children and adults since the beginning of 1960s, she has received the annual prize of Estonian children's literature a number of times. Her works have been translated into several languages, including English, German and Russian. Generations of Estonian children have grown up in the company of characters from her books.

The most well-known works by Pervik such as *Kunksmoor*, 1973 (*Old Mother Kunks*, in English 1986), *Kunksmoor ja kaptan Trumm*, 1975 (*Old Mother Kunks and Captain Trumm*), *Arabella, mereröövli tütar*, 1982 (*Arabella, The Pirate's Daughter*, in English 1985) have become classics of Estonian children's literature. Describing her works, mostly written in the genre of fantasy, critics have outlined their humane attitude and philosophical tone combined with simple and clear expression. Pervik loves to use folkloric motifs and mythical themes, her texts are full of cultural allusions and metaphors.³

The series *Paula elu (Paula's Life)* comprises 17 books published between 2001 and 2008. The books became extremely popular from the very beginning, being equally appreciated by the target audience, and also by the critics. The first five books of the series received the annual prize of children's literature by Estonian Cultural Endowment in 2001. One of the books, *Paula õpib emakeelt (Paula Studies Mother Tongue)* was included in IBBY Honour List in 2004.

The series has been written in a realistic mode, telling stories about real life. Paula, the protagonist of the books, is a seven-year old girl, who has loving parents and a little brother Patrik. The characters are chosen to represent an average Estonian family.

³ About Pervik in English, see, for example, Mattheus 2007: 16–21.

Paula-books are addressed mainly to primary school children who have just become independent readers. The aspect of the addressee is of crucial importance here, as far as the protagonist of the stories and the implied readers both traverse a critical turn in their development. According to Vygotsky, the period of starting school is one of the main critical periods of profound change in children's development, during which several qualitative transformations take place. These are connected with a set of new social relations, the development of conceptual thinking and contacts with new systems of knowledge, for example, literacy, math and science. As Vygotsky has called it, the child passes from one method of experiencing the environment to another⁴, bringing about qualitative restructuring of mental functioning.

The stories depict the process of discovering the world in a realistic manner, specifying the child's position in surrounding environment by narrating about instances in a small child's life. Everyday situations described and problems encountered are familiar and easily recognizable for the reader. The language used is very simple, meant to be easily followed by a young reader. The child's life, as described in these stories, consists initially of single familiar objects and well-known persons, each having a proper name. But the changes in the temporal and spatial universe (for example, going to school, moving from a village to a big city) alter crucially her field of experience. The environment becomes unfamiliar, more complicated and full of hardly perceptible details. Very simply structured, but essential texts support both intellectual and psychological maturation of young readers, simultaneously helping them to become a member of society.

In these texts it is possible to observe the interaction between the primary mythological world conception and a new, more scientific understanding of the world that is gradually introduced and explained to the readers throughout the books. The world is presented through the consciousness of a preschool child, functioning according to the mythological characteristics briefly outlined above, and the gradual

⁴ Mahn 2003: 124, quoting *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, vol. 5, *Child Psychology*. New York, Plenum, 1998, p. 295.

introduction of conceptual thinking via different categories which belong to a more abstract level.

One of the central features of the stories is the boundary between self and other, familiar and unfamiliar spheres. This is revealed mainly by proper names. All the books of the series can be regarded as having a typical plot structure of children's literature: leaving home and proceeding to the big unfamiliar world, while connections with home are still very strong, moving constantly back and forth between novel situations and a sphere of already known. According to Lotman, making the distinction between own and other words divides child's world into the spheres of own and unknown things, creating a semiotic boundary to remain one of the most important cultural dominants which plays a crucial role in the social, cultural, cosmogonical and ethical structuring of the world (Lotman 2009: 32).

Starting school is one of the central events described, and it proves to be one of the major critical turns in children's life. The safe period, when every minute detail is provided by parents, will be slowly left behind. From now on the child has to be more independent and more self-controlled, s/he has already some duties and responsibilities. The change is even intensified in these stories, because Paula moves to a new home in the city, and it is accompanied by some other minor changes in her life.

The author has concentrated on some novel situations, which may be scary and problematic for children — going to hospital, being home alone, the problem of bullying at school etc. The boundary situation here is marked both in space (moving to the city) and in time (going to school, the process of growing up). Considering the function of proper names in these texts, one should emphasise that the relationship between proper names and general concepts is very dynamic — for example, general names may function as proper names for the child; and vice versa, the meaning of proper names may extend and start to designate some general ideas.

Proper names in familiar world

Different strategies of naming reflect different ways of understanding and structuring the world. Initially, things that are familiar to Paula, do not form any general categories, they are rather unique objects constituting Paula's world:

Beside the houses, gardens and the factory there were also a post office, a shop and a schoolhouse. But these were not usual houses. These were buildings. All the houses and buildings together were a village. The village was named Järvispea⁵ after the lake⁶. (Pervik 2001a: 8)

As we can see, the environment in the village consists of single objects, each of them forms a separate, easily identifiable category. There is one shop, one post-office, one school, corresponding to mythological conception of space, which is seen as a set of unique objects, each bearing a separate proper name (Lotman, Uspenski 1999: 195). This kind of space is finite and enclosed, each of its objects is described by its name. Moreover, the connections between the lake nearby and the name of the village reflect the archaic unity between the object and its name, also the inseparable sameness between the two. As Vygotsky (1973: 128) has explained, for child consciousness, the word is an integral part of the object it denotes, for example, preschool children tend to explain the names of objects by their attributes. Giving an overview of his empirical research, Vygotsky (1973: 128–129) states that

[w]hen asked whether one could interchange the names of objects [...], children will answer no. [...] An exchange of names would mean an exchange of characteristic features, so inseparable is the connection between them in child's mind... We can see how difficult it is for children to separate the name of an object from its attributes, which only cling to the name when it is transferred, like possessions following their owner.

A perception of time and space is also shown through the small and determined world of a preschool child: "When winter was over, spring

⁵ The rough equivalent in English would be 'Lakehead'.

⁶ All the translations from Estonian are mine — M.N.

arrived at Järvispea. In fact, spring arrived everywhere, not only at Järvispea” (Pervik 2001a: 12). The narrator widens the perspective at once, indicating that the world is not confined with the familiar village.

Similar difficulties occur in the perception of time, the complicated relation between the notions ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’, which exceed the everlasting constant ‘here and now’ of children: “And now it was tomorrow. But it was not tomorrow anymore. Now it was already today. By the way, it’s not possible at all to understand how these things with yesterday, today and tomorrow are” (Pervik 2005c: 20). Naming the categories of time is confusing for Paula, because it is not possible to detect the transitions in the constant flow of time. Timespan — a day — has not changed for a child, but people call it by a different name.

Taking a closer look at personal proper names, we can assert that some persons and objects may be so familiar and self-evident that the existence of their proper names is not relevant for Paula. The names of Paula’s mother and father are never mentioned, because there is no need to call them by name. Rather, the words ‘mother’ and ‘father’ function here more likely as proper names themselves. Parents as the most important persons in children’s life are often perceived as somebody immanently present and self-evident, meanwhile being unique, and existing only for the particular child.

Personal proper names function according to the logic of child consciousness in these texts — they still do have some ontological connections with the name bearer (see Lotman, Uspenski 1999: 194). In his works on language development, Vygotsky has demonstrated empirically that in the early phase of acquiring a language, words tend to behave as proper names. This means that words initially signify mostly single objects for the child, later evolve gradually to designate more general concepts and finally abstract categories. Thus, at first words are inseparable from the objects they refer to. The identification of the word and its denotate, characteristic of mythological imagination, takes place within the sphere of proper names (Lotman, Uspenski 1999: 194). As an example, let’s see the process of choosing a name for Paula’s baby brother:

The name was given to him much later, when the boy had been at home for a while. Then several names were tested. Amandus, for example. Karl Simo, for example. Teodor, for example. None of them was suitable for him. The boy just didn't look like Teodor or Amandus or Karl Simo. Finally they understood *that the brother must be Patrik* [my emphasis]. So he was named Patrik. (Pervik 2003a: 8)

The brother's name could not be chosen, the right name had to be identified and understood, or as Lotman and Uspenskij (1999: 194) have outlined, under this kind of naming practice lies a belief in the unconventional nature of personal proper names.

Some characters in the stories have so-called motivated or significant names, for example, aunt Ingel [Angel], who “*was a real angel indeed*”, as Paula says, describing her as an incredibly kind and lovable person (Pervik 2005b: 15). The name of the village ‘Järvispea’ [‘Lakehead’] is connected with the proximity of a lake. Moreover, the family lives there in Järve Street (Lake Street). By direct connections between the lake, the name of the village and the street name, we can observe certain sameness of the objects, where general objects are reflected in more concrete ones. In other words, it could be described as a mythological principle of isomorphism between different objects as outlined by Lotman and Uspenskij (1999: 193, 209).

Ontological connections between a name and its bearer can also be found in nicknames, which often tend to describe some personal traits. A neighbour of Paula's family in their new home, an old wicked man, who children and even their mother are afraid of, is called ‘Kolemees’, [‘Uglyman’]. The name was attached to him soon after the family met him, and the name was perceived as the only possible nickname for the particular person. Uglyman is used as his proper name, with the capitalized first letter, thus the character's negative traits are exposed and intensified to an archetypal scale due to the nickname.

Some unexpected connotations of names become a cause for bullying. A schoolmate of Paula has a very extravagant name ‘Kassiopeia’. It is mentioned that everyone at school knows the girl because of such a strange name. Whereas its sound is associated with the Estonian word ‘kass’ [cat], it inspires one boy to treat her like a cat, forcing her to eat

cat food and inventing a story that the girl was originally a cat whom her parents have bewitched.

In this case the problem arises from the phonetic resemblance between an extraordinary proper name and an ordinary pet animal — under which lies again a belief of ontological connections between the name and its bearer. In this story, when the situation has already got out of hand, adults have to prove the falseness of the conception, showing that the relation between the person and her/his name is arbitrary.

The given examples show how surrounding world is perceived from the viewpoint of typically mythological consciousness. Ontological connections between a name and its bearer, a word and its denotate are very close in children's thinking. Specific understanding of space perceives surrounding places as consisting of single and unique objects and can thus be viewed as primeval and mythological. General names functioning as proper names or the mutual reversibility of proper and general names are also characteristic of mythological understanding.

Domesticating the unfamiliar

While some important persons and objects are so self-evident that they do not need to be named or sorted out, new situations and events create an urgency to name them, and to designate some categories child has to learn. In the present material we can follow how the process of encompassing the unfamiliar sphere takes place by learning the names of new objects and situations.

Spatial relations

As already emphasized above, the event of moving to the city and starting school is the constitutive element of the plot throughout several books of the series. The very fact of Paula's family moving to the city is worthy of a closer look. A change in one's life that a grown-up person

would describe as a long process of adaptation is described here as a sudden personal transformation: “They had arrived in the city. They will become city people in this city” (Pervik 2001b: 11). Starting city life is depicted as a rapid change, transforming the characters into ‘city people’ all at once in some mysterious way. As Lotman and Uspenskij have stressed, change of location in the mythological world brings about the transformation of a person or an object which becomes a completely new entity while all the connections with its previous state are completely lost (Lotman, Uspenski 1999: 195). Indeed, the fact of arriving in the city changes Paula’s identity forever.

The change is depicted by a sharp dichotomy how life was before and how it is now. The narrator gives a detailed description of the previous life, counting almost every single detail of the old neighbourhood:

Paula’s family had a nice house and a beautiful garden in the village. In front of the garden there was a street. Behind the garden there grew agrimonies and umbelliferous plants. There grew strawberries and raspberries in the garden. There grew flowers and carrots and peas in the garden. (Pervik 2001b: 8)

This world is small, basically everything in it can be counted. But the narrator introduces a new spatial scale soon: “It was all before. Paula’s family hasn’t got this house and garden anymore. [...] Paula lives *in the middle of a big city* [my emphasis] now with her mother and father and Patrik and Kiti” (Pervik 2001b: 10). Describing new neighbourhood in the city, the narrator mentions that “[t]here grew several trees and bushes in the yard of a new home” (Pervik 2001b: 33). This statement indicates already more general categories, while also referring to a small number of natural objects compared to the village.

The organization of space in the village was concentric: the house as the centre of the universe, the Lake Street and the village named Järvispea, which is being situated on the shore of the lake. The arrangement of space becomes more complicated in the city, but on the other hand, the territory of the own is much narrower, confined merely to the apartment. The stairway is already a more strange and unfriendly area, where unpleasant and unknown creatures as Uglyman can be met. Located in a spot somewhere “in the middle of the big city”, Paula is not

able to grasp or even imagine its huge territory, which could never be familiarized to the scale of her old home village.

Moving to the city involves radical, sometimes even dramatic transformations of the physical environment: "There were many people and many cars everywhere. Very many people and very many cars indeed" (Pervik 2001b: 11). Suddenly there are so many different new things in Paula's life, that they cannot be named, counted or described at once. The confinement of mythological world ceases to be valid. While mythological world could be described by counting objects by their names, now it has to be replaced with a new, already more abstract system of categorization. Yet vanishing of the old takes place gradually, little by little, and is described initially by constant comparisons between before and after, old and new, the own and the alien. Later on, Paula is already adapting to the new conditions and is able to orient in the changed environment.

Plurality of objects

Consequently, the multitude of new things causes some trouble. During the first days at their new home, Paula's little brother gets lost and tells a passing woman his old address which was Järve Street in the village. But there was a street in the city bearing the same name. The problem here is connected with synonymity, the fact that different objects or places may bear the same name, a concept impossible for the mythological consciousness of a small child. Mythological mind perceives the world as consisting of singular, unique entities, whereas the idea of multiplicity of objects presumes belonging to some common categories, that is, the level of metadescription (Lotman, Uspenski 1999: 191).

When shopping on her own for the first time, Paula gets upset, because the goods in the store have been rearranged. Though all the goods are arranged according to some categories, the category Paula needs is missing. "There was cheese. Plenty of cheese! There were sausages. Plenty of sausages! There was juice. Different kinds of juice. There

were even newspapers and magazines. But no bread” (Pervik 2003c: 29–30). The overabundance of different things makes her panic, she gets lost between the shelves, thinking that “[t]he goods were never rearranged on the shelves in the old homevillage. The breadshelf was a breadshelf and the freezer was a freezer” (Pervik 2003c: 39–40).

Lost in the store, Paula reflects about her pitiful situation: “There she is, wandering around in the supermarket, as if in some fairy tale, and can’t find the bread. And perhaps she can’t even find her way back home! Perhaps she can never get out of this store! Because perhaps it’s all bewitched here...” (Pervik 2003c: 31). So, even the supermarket is so enormously huge in the city that a person can get lost between the shelves of innumerable categories of goods, wandering endlessly in a labyrinth consisting of different imaginable and unimaginable things, while the most natural and essential category — the bread — is missing.

Learning new names

One of the basic human fears is connected with new and yet unnamed things and situations. This means that the fear and anxiety about the unknown is connected with the inability to name it. In turn, the possibility to know surrounding people by their names, being able to identify persons and things, makes one feel safe and self-confident.

Paula is extremely worried about her first schoolday, because she does not know anyone. In Järvispea all children and teachers were familiar to each other, but in the city, on the contrary, everyone is a stranger to her. Her father comforts Paula, saying that “[a]ll first-graders go to school for the first time. At first they are strangers to each other, but later they will become friends” (Pervik 2001d: 8). At school, when every pupil introduces him- or herself, Paula is not able to remember the names of her classmates at once and that makes her anxious. Knowing surrounding people by name gives a feeling of comfort, thus equating knowing the names with becoming familiar with something in some respect.

Starting school creates also a novel temporal perspective, illustrated with the episode with final-year pupils, who traditionally accompany first-graders on their first schoolday: “The final-year pupils had spent terribly long time at school. They had started school long before the first-graders were even born” (Pervik 2001d: 18). Starting school marks the beginning of a period way longer than the first-graders’ lives have been since birth. For someone only 7 years old, it is a completely ungraspable timespan. Again, the first schoolday introduces abstract, empirically ungraspable future.

Unnameable sphere

While some things in Paula’s world did not have a name or could not be named, because they were so essential, there is another category of unnamed or unnamable things. It is noteworthy that her fears are typically connected with the sphere of unnamed, anonymous things. The unfamiliar city sounds from the street and howling pipelines are scary, because they penetrate the walls of the apartment and interrupt the silence, break into the cozy sphere of home. Some hooligans make a phone call when children are home alone. “Some music sounded from the handset and someone said something in another language” (Pervik 2003a: 43). Paula gets very scared, hanging up hastily. The sphere of unfamiliar intrudes the sphere of known, even the language used is unfamiliar and cryptic for young children.

Another separate category comprises homeless people, called “trash bogies” by children, because they search for food in the garbage cans. It seems that they form a distinct class somewhere ‘in between’ persons and non-persons. They do not have names, at least for children, and they are feared for various reasons, for example, they are believed to kidnap children and to commit some other obscure deeds. Again, not having a unique personality for children, trash bogies become scary as a group that is labelled with a terrifying general name.

The process of discovering the world is slow and gradual, involving orientation in widening space, discovering new objects and categories of objects. The act of naming is crucial in this process, either by learning new names or naming unknown things. This process corresponds to the period of development when the formulation of more abstract categories takes place and general categories of objects replace unique objects in children's world. The child has entered a period where s/he can not grasp everything by personal experience any more, but starts to acquire mediated knowledge: at school, but also in everyday situations.

Emerging literacy

Concentrating on the depiction of the period of critical changes in these stories, it is inevitable to speak about achieving literacy. Literacy as a major consequence of schooling is recurrently emphasised in all these texts. For example, artificial systems of categorization are introduced already in the first lesson at Paula's school: the teacher introduces the alphabet by categorizing pupils according to the first letters of their names. The system, functioning also as a mnemonic device, helps Paula and other pupils to learn each other's names more easily.

Writing, more specifically, can be characterized as a means of expanding and reordering reality (Bruner 2006: 30). It is also considered a cognitive tool that enables to contemplate the information and to use it for mnemotechnical purposes, also to simplify reordering and processing information (Goody 2005: 150). Writing is mediated communication, which creates a distance between sender and receiver of messages. One of the main differences between spoken and written speech is the physical presence or absence of the addressee (Kress 1994: 20). According to Vygotsky, written speech requires high level of abstraction from the very beginning. During the process of writing, one has to distance from the real-life situation and to recreate it mentally (Vygotsky 1973: 99).

In Pervik's stories, every book ends with a short letter by Paula to her dog Pontu who had to stay in the country with Paula's grandparents. This kind of repetition or revision of the events that took place in each story represents an important cognitive operation. The plot of every story concludes with a general overview, singling out the most important information for the protagonist. Looking back at her first days at new home, Paula writes: "DEAR PONTU, BOW-WOW! I HAVE A NEW DESK. PATI GOT KIDNAPPED, BUT WE GOT HIM BACK. WE ARE IN THE CITY. THERE IS A BOY CALLED JOOSEP IN THE CITY. PAULA" (Pervik 2001b: 47).

In the above quote all essential functions of writing can be observed: arranging a direct experience to a story form, structuring events into a coherent narrative, creating hierarchies of importance by outlining some events and omitting others.

The topic of achieving literacy culminates in one of the last books of the series, when Paula, already familiar with printed words, decides to make a primer for her little brother. The text of this book is accompanied with the narrator's reflection about language and speech, the differences between spoken and written words. Paula wants to write an exemplary sentence to present each letter, where every word should begin with the same letter. As she soon discovers, this is not an easy task. For example, to introduce the letter G, Paula writes: "Grete collected Gerberas" (Pervik 2007: 24) and argued: "It did not matter that the word 'collected' did not begin with G. It can be seen only when reading. If you spell it, there would be no difference. That's just the way it is with these letters, you just have to know where you should put G and where C. This is what makes writing so difficult" (Pervik 2007: 24). The complicated task of writing a primer creates an impression of the successful completion of a certain period in child's life, and demonstrating mastery of a new skill.

Considering the aspect of the addressee, in these short letters the omniscient point of view of the narrator is replaced with the one of the protagonist. Moreover, concluding remarks of this kind resemble structurally a moral lesson that is traditionally added to fables, but in these

books its function is absolutely different. While the moral of a fable represents the author's didactic intentions; in these books the story is retold through the subjective eyes of the protagonist, making her point of view more explicit. In this respect, the books of the series are functioning on two levels: intratextually, composing little stories about the events taken place, thus organizing the experience of the main character; and extratextually, providing readers with a short overview or revision of each story.

Visual text of the books

The role of the visual text in these stories is also relevant for the topic under discussion. Illustrations form an integral part of the narrative in the picturebooks, working together with the verbal text to convey the story (Golden 1990: 93). As a genre specific to children's literature, picturebooks contain at least three stories: one told by the words, the one implied by the pictures, and the one that results from the combination of the other two (Nodelman, Reimer 2003: 295); while special attention is paid on the relationship between words and pictures. Without paying closer attention to the theoretical details here, let us just mention that there are various terms in use to describe the relationship between words and pictures in recent picturebook studies: interanimation, dialogue, synergy etc. (for example, Lewis 2006: 298–300; Arizpe, Styles 2006: 313). Despite terminological differences the theorists find quite unanimously that the more diverging the verbal and pictorial codes are, the better (see, for example, Nodelman, Reimer 2003: 295; Nikolajeva, Scott 2006: 287). Nikolajeva and Scott (2006: 287) claim that "as soon as words and images provide alternative information or contradict each other in some way, we have a variety of readings and interpretations", thus considering this type of relations between words and pictures to be more open to diverse interpretations and hence more stimulating for the reader.

However, the case with Paula-books is somewhat different.⁷ Very simple black-and-white graphical drawings are placed between the text lines, one to two illustrations per page. The style of the images resembles children's drawings in its simplicity and lack of perspective, for example, the buildings are drawn *en face*, using no depth. There are no backgrounds in the pictures, just objects discussed in the verbal text. Characters and objects placed into an empty space between the verbal text create a static effect, while giving extra emphasis to the themes the verbal text is currently narrating about.

Verbal and visual texts that are in a symmetrical relationship, are considered to be the simplest by various theoretical studies (see Lewis 2006: 300–305). But this kind of representation is once again contributing to the general intention of the books. The symmetry between words and images creates an effect of fixing the categories introduced in the verbal text. For example, speaking of school, the author describes the schoolhouse briefly, while a picture of a schoolhouse follows the verbal description.

In some respect the page layout is structured as a pictorial dictionary where words and pictures are closely interconnected. We could say that illustrations function as visual definitions of the objects — the books resemble a dictionary which translates new concepts and situations into a parallelly exposed pictorial code. While the visual text emphasizes the singularity and proper-namedness of the objects mentioned in the story, the verbal text tries to widen the perspective, introducing more general categories.

According to Tartu–Moscow School's theory of myth, iconic thinking, being diachronically earlier, is related to myth, whereas verbal thinking is connected with subsequent linear-logical type of thinking. But on synchronic axis — either in human mind or culture — the image and the word are working as two opposing, but still complementary principles. As outlined before, Tartu–Moscow School connects iconic-spatial thinking with child consciousness. Lotman (2002: 2648) also

⁷ The illustrator of the books is Piret Raud, Aino Pervik's daughter, an artist and children's author as well.

emphasises that 'living myth' is always iconic-spatial, whereas myth appearing in the form of a verbal text is already a translation of the former. Thus, on a general level, the specific word-picture interaction in these books can be seen as a translation from mythological iconic text type to a verbal one. The symbiosis of linear-temporal and iconic-spatial types exposed in these books could be observed as some intermediary form from one type of thinking to another. Consequently, symmetry, seen usually as the simplest relationship between verbal and visual texts, has a certain cognitive function in these books. Moreover, the general design of the page layout constituted by the fluctuating relation between words and pictures contributes to beginners in reading, offering practical help. Thus a child who makes her/his first efforts in independent reading, may take a closer look at the pictures in the meantime and have a little rest between spelling the words. The fact that pictures are integrated in between the text lines facilitates the process of reading whereas it does not interrupt the linear progression of reading in order to go into viewing pictures.

Conclusion

The analysis above tried to reveal how a literary text could contribute to the cognitive, emotional and cultural development of a child. Two different ways of understanding — the initial mythological type of thinking and the emerging conceptual thinking — are combined in the present material. The characteristic traits of preschoolers' consciousness are used as a point of departure, complementing them with the features that usually occur in a later developmental phase. The latter type of thinking is already closely connected with the impact of schooling and literacy and is based on generalization and abstraction.

The analysis was mainly focused on the process how the names and different naming strategies convey some more general tendencies in children's intellectual development. Centering around the period of starting school, it can be shown with the example of the books under

discussion, how the usage of proper names by the author shapes (and reflects) the changing dispositions of the surrounding world, leading to the understanding of general concepts. The books reveal that initially there were tight ontological connections between words and the objects they designated; as well as between proper names and their bearers. Gradual introduction of more general categories can be observed, indicating the transition from one phase of cognitive development to another. The sphere of names was revealed as a means for structuring the world in these books, creating the boundary between known and unknown things.

Literacy as the main effect of schooling was explored in an illuminating way in the series, exposing its various cognitive tasks, meanwhile demonstrating how the protagonist achieved the skill of writing.

Visual text, at first glance very simple, is also contributing to the cognitive development of young readers, refuting the widespread opinion to be too simplistic form of interaction between words and pictures.

The analysis also showed possible connections between literary texts and the development of the addressee. What Aino Pervik has done in these, at first glance very simple books, is supporting the psychological maturation process of child readers.⁸

⁸ This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Center of Excellence in Cultural Theory, CECT) and research grant no ETF7988 "The Power of Nomination in the Society and in the Culture".

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Когнитивная и культурная функция имени в книжной серии «Жизнь Паулы»

Статья рассматривает детскую литературу как определенный культурный инструмент. Этот подход позволяет показать различные характерные аспекты поэтики детской литературы, связывая их с

детским когнитивным и культурным развитием. На примере книжной серии *Жизнь Паулы* эстонского автора Айно Первик можно заметить, как объединяются два различных способа понимания — начальный, так называемый мифологический тип мышления дошкольников, и возникающее концептуальное мышление.

Автор статьи опирается главным образом на понятие культурной психологии и труды авторов Тартуско-московской школы, которые разработали идею о том, что имена собственные формируют один из центральных компонентов мифологического сознания, сопоставимое с «языком имен собственных». Главное внимание посвящено функционированию имен и теме обозначения и категоризации в этих текстах.

Lapse maailma kaardistamine: pärisnimede kognitiivne ja kultuuriline funktsioon raamatusarjas *Paula elu*

Artikkel vaatleb lastekirjandust teatava kultuurilise tööriistana. Selline lähenemisviis võimaldab avada lastekirjanduse poeetika erinevaid iseloomulikke aspekte, suhestades neid samal ajal laste kognitiivse ja üldkultuurilise arenguga. Keskendudes eesti lastekirjanik Aino Perviku raamatusarjale *Paula elu*, on võimalik jälgida, kuidas kombineeruvad kaks erinevat arusaamisviisi — esmane, koolieelikutele iseloomulik nn mütoloogiline mõtlemistüüp ning esilekerkiv kontseptuaalne mõtlemine.

Artikkel tugineb peamiselt kultuuripsühholoogia ning Tartu-Moskva semiootikakoolkonna autorite teoreetilistele kontseptsioonidele. Viimastelt pärineb ka idee, et pärisnimed on mütoloogilise mõtlemise üheks keskseks komponendiks, ning nende käsitlemine teatava “pärisnimede keelena”. Analüüsi põhitähelepanu on pööratud nimede funktsioneerimisele vaadeldavates tekstides ning nimetamise ja kategoriseerimise temaatikale.