

## Conference Paper

# Cultural Interpretation: From Method to Methodology

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### Abstract

The method of cultural interpretation is considered as a way to comprehend the processes of culture in their integrity and particular phenomena from the point of their inclusion in the general cultural context. The interpretation underlying the method is a complex procedure of interpretation and comprehension of reality. It is important in research and educational practices. As an alternative, a technique of segmental analysis of the visual image is proposed, which allows to solve general pedagogical tasks.

**Keywords:** method of cultural interpretation, interpretation, segmental analysis technique, visual image, general pedagogical tasks

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Received: 12 February 2019

Accepted: 21 February 2019

Published: 3 March 2020

Publishing services provided by  
Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the Man in the world of culture Conference Committee.

## 1. Introduction

Interpretation possesses a special status in the methodology of the humanities. This method of scientific knowledge is directed to understanding the internal essence of the interpreted object through studying its external manifestations (signs, symbols, artifacts, acts, images, etc.). Interpretation is the procedure of reading the culture as a nonlinear text during which meanings and values of the historical and cultural context come to light and their importance for the present is defined. The method of cultural interpretation is important not only for cultural studies as a science. It is actively applied to synergetic studies connected with comprehension of cultural processes in their integrity and also of particular phenomena. This method assumes understanding of the phenomenon in terms of its inclusion in the general cultural context of this or that epoch or movement, an individual (author's) style, national, philosophical, religious or secular traditions or folklore. This is one of universal modes of interpretation of multidimensional reality and its separate segments which suggests seeing separate, particular elements in their connection with integrity: words, things, and events in their historical and cultural entity [4, p. 52-53].

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Cultural interpretation is especially relevant in educational practices as the teacher's knowledge of the bases and methods allowing to understand the culture and the mechanisms and laws of its development defines the quality of the dialogue organized with students. As a rule, such a specialist possesses a good "background", being familiar with history and able to establish a dialogue between the past and the present.

The scope of cultural interpretation opens a way to systematization and structurization of information and is the key to successful communication at different levels, including interindustrial interaction, communication with people and groups, and also allows to realize design activities taking into account the axiological, economic and market guidelines of the present.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The empirical method of *selection* and *systematization* of materials connected with studying the issues of interpretation practice was applied in this research. The method of cultural interpretation offers prospects for development of various techniques (in this case – the segmental analysis) applied in education.

## 3. Data Analysis

Cultural interpretation integrates the experience of the culture interpretation practices presented in sociology (R. Breckner), the experience of creative thinking development (E. de Bono), the experience of visual thinking development (L.M. Vanyushkina. L.Yu. Kopylov, A.A. Sokolova [2]).

As an option for establishing a dialogue with the world we suggest using **a technique of segmental interpretation** of visual images. Addressing to visual images is expedient because of their special status in the modern culture where the visual component predominates and influences the cognitive processes defining the essence of the reality comprehension. An interpreter deals with an already preformed image through which meanings and values, the peculiarities of the author's vision are comprehended and the principles of the reality structurization are revealed. This experience is presented in sociology by R. Breckner's research "Pictured Bodies. A methodical photo analysis": "The interpretation procedure is

organized in such a way that different levels of the constitution of a picture can be looked at separately, yet still being conscious of the fact that all the levels are present at the same time. The main focus lies on a successive analysis of the identified

segments, so as to be able to grasp the thematic, symbolic and iconic aspects in detail, and their contribution to the formation of a picture with its particular potential of (re)presentation [1, pp. 19-20].

The essence of the successive analysis of an image consists in passing through several stages, on each of which knowledge and skills relevant for cultural interpretation are actualized.

*The first stage* – reflexive perception which is followed by “enclosing” of those segments of the image which drew our attention and will become a basis for interpretation.

*The second stage* of interpretation – the analysis of the segment which was defined as potentially relevant for the general image structure. The interpreter formulates different hypothetical “renderings” of possible thematic, symbolic and iconic value of this segment. They may not always be ultimate, but can show the cause-and-effect relationships between separate image elements which are invisible in themselves.

*The third stage* is connected with identification of the pragmatics of the image perceived as a text (its production, storage, use and perception). The interpretation carried out at this stage needs “augmentation” of the reality, concrete data and representation of the potential significance of the image in the course of its use.

*The fourth stage* – a stage of synthesis of the previously received results through posing questions and answering them: what is visualized in the image, how and for what purposes is it visualized, and what is the result? The meaning of the specific organization of the pictured is structured in the given case and a conclusion about the phenomenon in general is drawn. A particular image can be regarded only as a particular case of its existence.

Depending on the research interests, the *fifth stage* is also possible – the comparative analysis of similar images, pictures, texts executed in a different fashion, genre, etc., assuming a transition to a broader context followed by identification of the connection between the particular, singular and the whole. This is the metalevel of interpretation allowing rising to comprehension of culture in its systematicity and integrity.

Observance of the interpretation stages organizes the logic of research according to the principles of cultural interpretation of the reality. Depending on the objectives and tasks set by the teacher each stage can be considered independent, but the defined sequence must be strictly followed in order to avoid spontaneous and unreasoned judgments and conclusions.

R. Breckner suggests using some questions which can be posed at any stage in the course of interpretation [1, p. 20].

- How and to what extent could the local, temporal, objectual, symbolic, and interactive references of the segment become relevant to the whole picture?
- In what way does the segment create scenic and spatial references in its specific perspective?
- Does the segment as part of a scene create specific temporal references within the picture? And if so, how?
- Could this segment be part of an iconic path in the perspective plane of the picture? What kind of thematic potential is connected to it?
- Which potentiality is realized in the following segments? Do they support, contradict or simply interrupt the potentials of the former? Hypothetically, which deductions important for other segments can we draw from this one?

The questions applied to photographic images by the author are of universal character and can be posed by the interpreter in the analysis of visual images and cultural phenomena read as a text. The algorithmization put in the basis of the questions posed allows to reveal the cause-and-effect relationships existing between the visualized object and reality and to give a well-reasoned answer. The peculiarity of the segmental analysis technique consists in the fact that the interpreter as much as possible focuses his eye at first on one segment represented, then on another one, and so on. It concentrates the researcher's attention and organizes the movement of thought – from the particular to the general, from the characteristic of the specific to a holistic perception of an image. Including in the analysis, for example, the elements of the Image and Thought technology [3] or actualization of the way of thinking according to the color of the hat [5] expand the teacher's opportunities in the organization of facilitated communication between the teacher and students within the image comprehension.

## 4. Results

The dialogue of the person with the world of culture, time, historical and cultural heritage, and another person in its different forms functions as the main mechanism transferring the cultural memory and influencing formation of general cultural skills. The quality of such skills depends on the personal ability to engage in dialogical relationships with cultural heritage and experience. Usually, this is taught. Consequently, we should speak of what the teacher must be and what role the teacher has to play in the educational process.

The modern teacher still remains the one who introduces the student to the world of culture, who accompanies him in the process of comprehension of values and meanings,

who is able to solve general pedagogical tasks, using the culturological potential of the subject domain ("Philology", "Art", "Technology", etc.) within which he teaches.

The techniques realizing metasubject and interdisciplinary tasks important for achievement of educational results serve as an alternative solution of the dialogue organization. Seemingly, there are a lot of such techniques, especially in the humanities as the method of interpretation is actual and widely applied in the analysis of variously modified texts, linguistic phenomena, empirical data, sociological and economic research, etc. To achieve the educational result, the teacher solving general cultural tasks is entitled to combine tricks and technologies applied in various techniques. This only enriches the experience of communication with culture, promotes the cultural approach in the organization of a holistic world perception and forms the algorithm of interpretation.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The need to apply the Image and Thought technology in teaching humanitarian disciplines emphasized by I.Ya. Murzina allows to solve general pedagogical tasks on different levels of education. The segmental analysis technique offered by R. Breckner is essentially aimed at harmonious development of the harmonious organization of the thought process combined with the competent forming of dialogue relationships, the ability to analyze separate cultural phenomena in their relations with the general cultural context.

Note that these tasks are not solved instantly with a single application of the technique. It is a difficult and long procedure of interpersonal interaction between the teacher and student on the way to discovery and comprehension of the complex reality. In any technique, real-life and immediate communication resulting in the thought discipline is always significant. In the process of such communication responsibility for the said is manifested and the answer becomes complete. The teacher needs the skill, patience and time to reveal the interpretation mechanism, to comprehend the logic of the stages and their contents. A personally significant dialogue is a self-contained one. Its intensity depends on a number of factors. The culturological potential of the technique allows the teacher to teach others to make discoveries, to see and argue, to prove and reason, to have an idea of the relation between the singular and the general, to represent their own vision of reality. This promotes formation of the soft skills and abilities significant for self-determination and self-realization of the student's personality.

## Funding

This research was made possible by the support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, grant No.17-29-09136\18.

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