

DIFFERENTIATION OF SMALL FOLKLORE
TEXTS ACCORDING TO THEIR LENGTH

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The analysis of characteristics of small form folklore texts is presented in the article. The method and quantitative intervals for the analyzed text systematization according to their length are offered.

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In modern linguistic literature one comes across a variety of terms denoting a small form text. Researchers use predominantly such terms as "small genres" [7; 19], "speech genres", "text-formula", "folklore of speech situations" [10: 6-7], "microtexts" [12: 6], "compressed texts" [1: 84], "short texts", "minimal texts" [19], "text of a small size", "minor forms" [3; 14: 2] etc. This variety of terms is determined by the fact that while explaining the given concepts their authors consider in each case only a certain set of small texts features as well as apply different approaches to the quantitative estimations of their length.

Therefore the aim of the present analysis is to define the leading features determining the distribution of small form folklore texts according to their length.

The notion "texts of a small form" implies, as a rule, literary compositions of different genres that share a common feature – a small size [10: 6] as well as render a "high concentration of feelings and actions" [17: 22].

Usually the basic characteristic features of small form texts include: generalized laconic statement of facts, presence of a traditional circle of characters and motifs, containing allegorical meaning, humorous or satiric colouring, unexpected witty denouement [15: 8], increased vividness and symbolism [19]. Besides, due attention is paid to the small form texts simplified structure, uncomplexity of figurative means, laconism of spatial and temporal organization, the use of typical syntactic structures, continuity of actions development, brevity of denouement, close interconnection of factual and conceptual information [16: 4-10], etc.

In the process of studying this problem we came to the conclusion [18:

31] that from a communicative point of view a small form text acquires certain specific features, such as: compactness of their stylistic devices and expressive means, brevity and consistency of ethical idea presentation, absence of redundant information, and simplicity of the compositional structure. All these features provide, in the long run, a lapidary style of the analyzed texts.

The majority of authors are also far from a unanimous agreement as to the criterion of classification of the size of small form prosaic texts. It is known that in the English language tradition it is accepted to consider the text as a small one if it comprises 300, 500 or 1500 words [11]. In the Russian tradition the size of a text is calculated in symbols or pages, namely they suggest to regard the text as a small one if its size reaches 2000 symbols, 5400 symbols and even 9000 symbols. In addition, with the spread of e-texts small form texts are viewed as those that fit into "one screen". Besides, from the psychological point of view [11] the text is considered as a small one if it is perceived instantaneously as one act.

The analysis of the stated above ideas gives us every reason to consider the number of words in the text as an integrating feature of systematization of small form folklore texts according to their length.

Another feature common for small folklore texts lies in their ability to combine pragmatic and aesthetic "beginnings" [10: 15], i.e. their practical utilitarian and artistic functions. Besides, the attention is focused on the fact that small folklore texts perform educational and prognostic functions [20: 210].

It should also be mentioned that the notion "folklore texts" traditionally includes the following text varieties

[ibid.: 210-211]: proverbs, sayings, riddles, formulas of greeting, threats and curses, ceremonial and magical statements, ritual appeals, formulas that accompany fortunetelling, superstitious beliefs, dreams interpretations, popular beliefs. Their variety also comprises tongue-twisters, incantations [10: 6] as well as anecdotes and chastushkas (i.e. humorous rhymes) [13].

In addition, it was proved in the generalized model of literary genres genesis, suggested by A. Kalyta and L. Taranenko [9], that the living language of folklore has been and still truly is the source of both literature development and literary language development. According to this model there are the following varieties of small folklore texts: spiritual-and-ideological (myth – ballad – legend), cultural-and-household (proverb – saying – belief – fairy-tale), creative-and-educational (riddle – anecdote – fable – parable). We presume that within these groups of folklore texts there is a tendency of their subordination in terms of text length and the degree of language means complexity.

The systematization of size of the mentioned folklore texts was carried out in the following logical sequence. In the scope of each genre (legend, ballad, myth, saying, etc.) we analyzed from 150 to 200 authentic texts from the corresponding English language sources [see, for instance, 2; 4; 5; 6; 8, etc.].

During the analysis within each genre group we singled out, first of all, the texts having the minimal and maximal amount of words. Then we performed the procedure of grouping other texts into separate clusters on the basis of the scale step of 250 words. The length of texts within each cluster was amounted to their average size. The obtained average indexes of the texts length of each genre were represented

on graphs in coordinates “the number of words”–“the type of genre”.

The specificity of constructing the axis “the type of genre” lies in the fact that the obtained average indexes were located arbitrarily according to the principle of the increase of the text size absolute value. Due to this we built graphic interpretations (in the form of a row of curves) of the regularities of the increase in the text size within definite genre groups (see Fig. 1).

To define optimal limits of the division of texts into small, middle and large we suggested that one should apply the method of a so-called “comprehensive” angle. The essence of this method consists in the following: beginning from the zero point of coordinates (see Fig. 1) and up to the farthest points of the examined curves we drew two lines that created the maximal angle comprising the analyzed set of curves. Then we drew the bisecting line

of this angle. The point of its crossing the curve which represents the maximal number of words in a certain group of texts was projected on a y-axis (see Fig. 1, where these are the curves that show the length of myths, fairy-tales and parables).

Further logic of folklore texts classification according to the number of words in them was deduced directly from the created graphic images. According to this logic it is expedient to consider all folklore texts, whose amount of words varies from 1 to 1000 words, to be of a small form. The texts, whose amount of words ranges within the limits of 1000-2000 words, can be termed as middle texts. Other folklore texts present the group of large ones.

The substantiated systematization of folklore texts does not violate the above-mentioned ideas [11] and fully complies with a person’s psychophysiological specificity to perceive the text as a small one if it fits into no more than two pages.

Summing up the stated above, we have all grounds to state that, firstly, depending on the general didactic function, folklore texts can be subdivided according to their pragmatic orientation into spiritual-and-ideological, cultural-and-household as well as creative-and-educational texts. Secondly, small folklore texts of spiritual-and-ideological orientation comprise legends, ballads and myths; the group of folklore texts of cultural-and-household orientation is made up of sayings, proverbs, popular beliefs and fairy-tales; folklore texts of cultural-and-household orientation include riddles, anecdotes, fables and parables. Thirdly, irrespective of pragmatic and didactic orientations of folklore texts, the complication of their structure is determined by their length and directly correlates with its increase.

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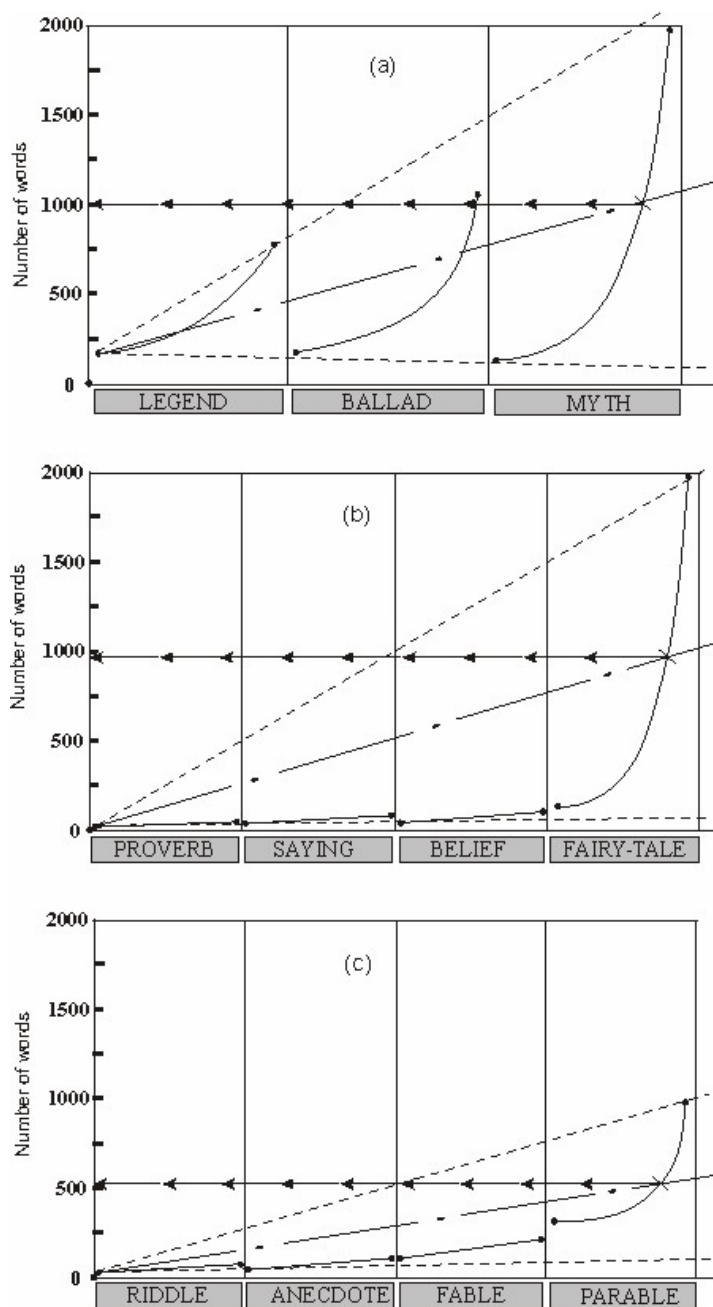


Fig. 1. Average variation indexes of the size of small form folklore texts belonging to a) spiritual-and-ideological; b) cultural-and-household; c) creative-and-educational pragmatic orientations

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