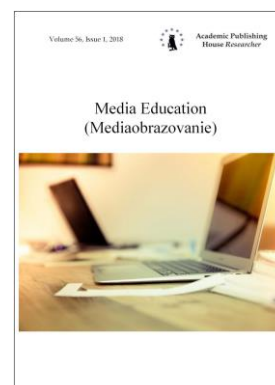




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## Perception of Axiological and Semantic Code of Characters in Animated Discourse

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### Abstract

The study was dedicated to the research of perception of the axiological and semantic codes embedded in the behavior of characters of popular cartoons by children and young people: *Well, Just You Wait! (Nu, pogodi!)* (Soviet Union) and *Tom and Jerry* (USA). Cartoons constituted an important part of the information environment wherein formation of personality originated. The hypothesis that children of primary school age had reduced ability to distinguish categories of axiological and semantic codes of the characters of animated discourse, if the cartoon characters impersonated the functional differences associated with the juxtaposition of "big and strong" – "small and weak", was verified. The study involved 126 junior schoolchildren and 126 students. The test persons evaluated the images of the four main characters of the two cartoons: *Well, Just You Wait!* and *Tom and Jerry* on psycho-semantic scales. The results were statistically processed using factor analysis and the Mann-Whitney non-parametric U-test. It emerged that younger schoolchildren perceived anthropomorphic cartoon characters on the basis of traditional functions inherent to fairytale characters, namely: 'big, strong, bad' – 'small, weak, good.' Moral and ethical peculiarities of the characters' behavior that implemented the axiological and semantic code of the character's image, were not differentiated by children. At the same time, the representatives of young people revealed fine differentiation in the assessment of characters' images, their mettle and moral and ethical focus of behavior. Thus, it was demonstrated that the genre of animation, with its form of the culture of laughter, may alleviate the difference in perception and evaluation of the behavior of characters from the standpoint of moral standard by children of primary school age. Children's viewing of cartoons should be accompanied by a discussion of characters' actions and commented on their moral and ethical essence with adult participation.

**Keywords:** children's perception of animated discourse, cartoon characters, categories of good and evil, archetype.

### 1. Introduction

Today, animated cartoons hold a prominent place in the developing media space. Focused on the target children's audience, they are attractive to a child and produce massive effect on the formation of personality, causing emotional response and a desire to be like the characters of their liking (Akca, 2019). However, studies of the nature of the effect of children's content on viewers demonstrated that it often had a negative effect on the audience (Aishworiya, 2018; Dilon, 2017; Kyshtymova, 2019; Matveeva, 2008; Rai, 2016). Such conclusions were mainly based on the

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analysis of the content of a media text in terms of its compliance with the generally accepted ethical standards.

An important group of studies of children's media content was presented by its analysis from topological standpoint, which assumed that the transmitted images and narratives corresponded to the values of national culture or a certain stage of civilizational development of society. Academic sources presented a study of animated films as vehicles for behavioral patterns adopted in a given national culture (Liu, 2017; Ozer, 2015; Wang, 2020). The distortion of traditional cultural symbols and narratives by Disney films that claim axiological universalism was emphasized, with a negative effect on the formation of children's personality (Giunta, 2018; Nielsen, 2013).

The processes of media enculturation are mediated not only by nationally specific narratives, but also by broader ones focused on certain vectors of civilizational development.

According to V.S. Stepin, "modern civilization has entered the stage of imbalance, critical conditions and instability" (Stepin, 2017). He distinguished the two types of civilizational development – traditionalist and technogenic, which differ from each other by the peculiarities of cultural-genetic code, invariants, which include world-view universales functioning as basic life meanings and values represented by the notions of 'man', 'nature', 'activity', 'traditions and innovations', 'personality', 'rationality', 'authority'. The meaning, experience and understanding of those basic universales are closely linked to the categories of culture (justice, faith, good and evil, beauty) that are essential in cultural products: paintings, music, artworks, cinema and animation, including those for children.

The difference between traditionalist and technogenic axiological and semantic code was described by N. Danilevsky (Danilevsky, 1895) and A. Toynbee (Toynbee, 1996) as a juxtaposition between the Eastern and Western cultural types of civilization. Technogenic axiological and semantic code include understanding of man as an active reformer of the world and nature, creating new objects and types of communication; predominance of innovations over traditions; attitude towards nature as a resource intended for consumption; dominance of scientific rationality; autonomy of personality, not closely connected with social communities like class or estate; moral principles 'the purpose justifies the means' and 'success is never blamed'. Until recently, the technogenic type of civilization development was considered as the progressive way of human social development. However, in recent years it has become apparent that the development of technology, globalization and organization of the world market on the principle of stimulation of advanced consumption, the emergence of convergent (NBIC) technologies, transhumanism programs have led to environmental and anthropological crisis, threatening self-destruction of mankind (Russia..., 2007). Recent scientific achievements demonstrate that the traditionalist type of civilization development, based on the idea of the biosphere as a global ecosystem, where "human society is included as a special subsystem, is more constructive in terms of prospects for human development. The ideal of human domination over nature is opposed to the ideal of social and natural co-evolution" (Stepin, 2017: 9). This understanding of development requires special ecological and moral consciousness.

The potential of its formation with the help of media content became a subject of academic reflection. However, the conclusions about the formative potential of modern cartoons were negative: for example, based on an analysis of Disney cartoons, A.M. Fritz concluded that they were used to teach children neoliberal values, such as consumerism and individualism, and to prepare them to accept simulacra instead of reality and the myth of the American dream (Fritz, 2020).

The vehicles for transmitting values corresponding to the technogenic, dehumanized civilization code specific to children's artworks remained poorly studied, while the implicit, hidden nature of their effect on a child would determine, on the one hand, the magnitude of that effect and, on the other, the difficulty of detecting it and, consequently, the difficulty of regulating the media communications wherein children were involved in order to protect their psychological health.

In our work, we have set the goal to investigate the ability of children to distinguish the axiological and semantic codes contained in the behavior of the characters of popular cartoons. We had chosen the most popular cartoons, *Well, Just You Wait!* (USSR, 1969) and *Tom and Jerry* (USA, 1940), where the authors organized the opposition of the big and strong character (*Wolf and Tom the Cat*) to the weak and small one (*Hare and Jerry the Mouse*).

Semantic codes for the narrative of the *Tom and Jerry* and *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoons referred us to the folklore codes of animal tales, traditional for many peoples of the world. In those

fairy tales, the characters, their dialogues and the plot twists of their relationships were important (Propp, 2000). The characters of the cartoons, whose semantics helped determine the subject of our study were a wolf, a hare, a cat and a mouse. The Wolf – the everlasting character of Russian fairy tales, a strong and stupid predator, usually overpowered by a weaker, but clever and intelligent one, most often a fox. In the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon, the role of the character opposing The Wolf was performed by The Hare with its steadfast folkloric semantics of 'cowardly, small'. The confrontation of the weak and strong in the Tom and Jerry cartoon was implemented through the use of other typical fairytale identities – a cat and a mouse. A cat in the European folklore tradition was endowed with independent character, mind and cunning, a mouse – a traditionally weak, helpless animal. The conventional semantics of characters: *The Wolf and The Hare* was preserved and enhanced by the authors of the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon. The evil wolf in the film was asocial, its destructive behavior in urban realities recognizable and, in the manner of fairy tales, punishable. An important peculiarity was the comic reduction in the image of the character – it was not frightful but ridiculous, rather than pathetic.

A fundamentally different interpretation of the traditional confrontation: 'strong – weak' was represented in the Tom and Jerry cartoon. There, a serious ethical and psychological transformation of the traditional plot, occurred: the strong character was punished in an unmotivated manner, 'for no reason', including that for the good deeds (such as, for example, saving life) and, moreover, the punishment took place in a humiliating form to become a disparagement, symbolic destruction of the character's personality. While the main antithesis of the 'strong – weak' was maintained, supported by artistic means (musical and visual), the character and actions of the protagonists changed fundamentally. The small, encouraging sympathy character proved immoral and cruel, while the big one, who, in the traditional plot would do bad deeds and be punished for those – was helpless and, more likely, the good one. That transformation would create a paradoxical aesthetic effect: the viewer may respond emotionally positively to the unmoral behavior of the little 'good' character and not feel compassion for the suffering and doing good 'bad' one.

One might, therefore, assume that children perceived the relationship between the characters of the two cartoons in the context of ludic interaction of circus carpet clowns, acting in the so-called "relativistic reality", in the terminology of L.V. Pumpyansky (Pumpyansky, 2000), or "insufficiently justified environment" in G.G. Pocheptsov's terminology (Pocheptsov, 2002: 198). The use of folklore codes in the products of mass culture afforded originators to maximize their audience. At the same time, that artistic technique provoked confusion of civilizational axiological and semantic codes of perception of the images of characters.

The use of traditional fairytale animals was thus a convenient emotional 'frame', the basis for stories with predictable emotional responses, by means whereof the viewers' attitudes and the "organization of one's behavior for the future" occurred (Vygotsky, 1997: 313).

The study was based on the assumption that the difference in axiological and semantic codes of behavior of cartoon characters affected the perception and semantic evaluation of the images of those characters by children and adults.

## 2. Materials and methods

*Participants in the study.* At the first stage, 30 children were sampled: 18 boys and 12 girls (7 to 9 years old), *med* = 8), students of a primary school in Moscow.

In the second stage, 96 children were sampled: 41 boys and 55 girls (7 to 8 years old), *med* = 7.5), students of a primary school in Irkutsk.

In the third stage, 126 students were sampled: 27 men and 99 women (21–22 years old, *med* = 21.5), students of higher education institutions in Irkutsk. The study was conducted in the capital, located in the European part of our country, as well as in Irkutsk, located in the Asian region of the country, to identify the basic value codes of children's perception of cartoon characters, regardless of the civilizational component.

*The objects of assessment* were the images of characters of popular animated films: The Wolf and The Hare from the Russian Soviet *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon and Tom and Jerry from the American *Tom and Jerry* cartoon popular in the country too.

Studying the perception of cartoon characters was carried out using the *method of semantic differential* (SD). At the first stage, children rated the images of the characters of the two cartoons

on six bipolar SD scales: kind – evil, handsome – ugly, smart – stupid, strong – weak, funny – serious, aggressive – peaceful.

At the second stage, children rated the images of the characters of the two cartoon films on 13 SD scales, which included both the scales listed before and those describing moral assessment of the characters (good – bad), assessment of the degree of identification with a character (consanguine – alien), assessment of the threat level contained in the image (scary, fearless), an assessment of the socio-cultural distance in the perception of the image (friend – foe), as well as an assessment of the expression in the image of the qualities related to different modes of perception (light – dark, soft – hard, joyful – sad).

At the third stage, students rated the images of characters of the two cartoons on 36 SD scales, which included all the scales used in the first stages, and additional scales describing the appearance of the characters (fashionable – dowdy, smiling – serious), their behavior (organized – disorganized, polite – rough), character and personal qualities (brave – cowardly, good-hearted – cruel, moral – immoral), as well as peculiarities of the artistic image (vivid – bleak, understandable – mysterious).

*Research Procedure.* At all three stages, the test persons were shown one series (release No. 1) of the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon, after which they filled the SD scale, rating the images of The Wolf and The Hare. That was followed by a demonstration of the Adventure on the Beach series of the Tom and Jerry cartoon, after which the test persons filled out the SD scales, evaluating the images of *Tom and Jerry*.

*Statistical Data Processing.* The first stage was to compare mean values of the sample when rating the images of characters on the SD scale using the statistical Mann-Whitney U-test. In the second and third stages of the study, the data obtained from the semantic evaluation of characters were subjected to the procedure of factorial analysis using the Principal Component Analysis method. Further, group evaluations of character images were compared using the Mann-Whitney U-test.

### 3. Discussion

Researchers today pay more attention to the analysis of children's content, revealing aggressive images and stories in children's films and computer games destructive and aggressive first of all which, according to conventional wisdom, produce negative effect on the mental development of children, including incitement of depressive states, fears, aggressive and cruel behavior (Du, 2016; Ozen, 2017; Zhang, 2019; Kyshtymova, 2019 et al.). Wide use of aggressive characters in children's cartoon content, in particular Disney content, is due to the need to attract audience and generate profit (Wang, 2018). We have not encountered judgments that aggressive images in children's media products can accomplish positive – for example, educational, function.

Whereby, the ethical component of the behavior of children's film characters or computer games was, as a rule, analyzed from the standpoint of its compliance with the universal, generally accepted norms of behavior, yet without regard to the artistic features of the presentation.

In studying psychologically destructive effects of media communication researchers make an attempt of differentiating approach to the analysis of media products influence on children and teenagers. E.g., there are data that aggressive media content provokes aggressive behavior not in all teens, but only in those ones who are characterized by certain impulsiveness and strive for thrilling impressions (Khurana et al., 2019) or high reactance (Russel, 2019). Which makes it possible to make a conclusion that this very group of viewers must become an object of teachers' and psychologists' activities aimed at preventing negative forms of behavior provoked by media content thus researchers shift attention from the media content to the necessity of its regulation – on the viewer as an object of preventive and correctional activity. But ignoring artistic form that presents aggressive content makes the conclusions about the influence of aggressive media content on a certain group of teenagers only relative. The definition 'aggressive media content' covers a great number of films, TV programs, shows, computer games which differ both in their formal characteristics and in their influence on viewers. Modern media reality is such, that not only a subject initiates and defines cognition and activity, but a media text which becomes an active object of cognition as well (Savchuk, 2014: 95). Understanding and regulating processes of media communication, which involve children, are possible only as a result of thorough psychological investigation of media text as carriers and instigators of socially and personally important ideas.



The analysis of children's content is carried out from a formal position of implementing a principle of equality – its proportion in TV programs meant for children's audience, male, female, nationally and ethnically specific image is investigated. Content analysis, which is at present the main method of investigating media content, has shown that males prevail as heroes of TV programs, which is the reason for necessary regulations of media content (Hamlen K.R., 2019). But the authors pay no attention to the specific features of artistic presentation of male and ethnic images.

On the other hand, an attempt is being made to analyze the characters of the content meant for children from ethical and moral positions. The events and personages are assessed as 'negative' or 'positive' in general. E.g. a stable trend for negative presentation of elderly people was found in TV shows and Disney films (Zurcher, 2018; Rovner-Lev, 2019). At the same time the status of a 'negative' or 'positive' type of character is not connected with esthetic or artistic features of the presentation, which from our point of view is the main way of influencing a consumer of media content.

According to our assumption, it was not so much the obvious plot device and the presence or absence of negative (aggressive, for example) behavior of cartoon characters, inasmuch as the use of cultural universals by film makers that would determine the nature of the effect of a film on children. The cultural universals there were understood as stable, traditional, rooted in the consciousness of most people concepts of ethical and psychological semantics of archetypical images. Screen presentation of such folkloric fairytale characters in cartoons suggested their uncritical perception by children and endowing those with a universally accepted semantics without regard to the nature of artistic embodiment in a particular media discourse.

In the psychology of archetypes by K. Jung (Jung, 2019) and the morphology of a fairy tale by V.Y. Propp (Propp, 2000) semantic universals of the impersonations of characters used in cartoons, which determined the semantic pattern of their perception by children, were presented. There with, its provisioning in the real cartoon discourse did not affect the emotional attitude of children towards a character, the nature of the emotion incited in the viewer was predetermined by the universals. The semantic code of a media image, if it differed from the code given by cultural universals, was deliberately not 'retrieved' or analyzed, while it could have determined the trend of behavior copied by them.

Images of animals as vehicles for universal values have a greater power to affect children, as they afford an author of a media narrative to "isolate and concentrate one affective moment in such provisional character" (Vygotsky, 1997: 122). At the same time, the activity of processes of identification of viewers with archetypical images of animals was particularly high (Schmuck, 2018).

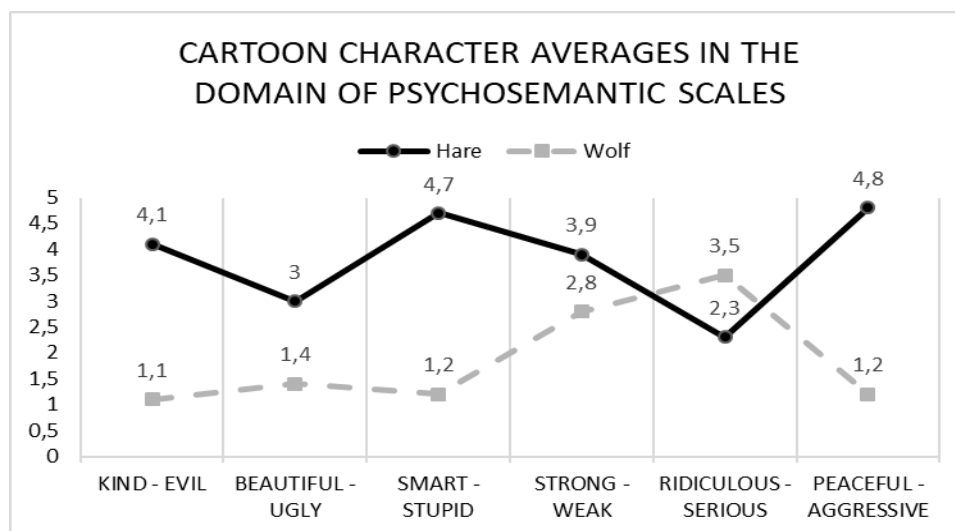
The use of cultural universals, whose axiological and semantic code would coincide with the code of artistic presentation of archetypical images and thus enhance it, made it possible to depict samples of negative behavior for educational purposes in children's content. For example, aggressive behavior of The Wolf (the character of *Well, Just You Wait!*) was unlikely to be able to bring the aggression of small viewers to the forefront, because the archetypical image of the Wolf is endowed with a universal negative semantics of 'big, strong, bad', which was enhanced by its confrontation with The Hare ('small, weak, good'), while the inherent 'scary' universal of the image of the Wolf was offset in the cartoon by way of laughable reduction of its image (for example, through the details of its clothing – flower-dotted pink boxer shorts). Aggressive actions of The Wolf, through its universal semantic categorization as 'evil and bad', did not arouse the sympathy of children, and that attitude was strengthened in the discourse of the film, where The Wolf was getting a well-deserved punishment and ridicule for each of its bad deeds.

Thus, we assumed that judgments about the negative effect of aggressive cartoon images on children were relative, and the type of effect was determined by the peculiarities of presentation of an aggressive image in a particular media discourse.

#### 4. Results

At the first stage of the study, there was a pair-wise comparison of ratings of the images of the characters of the cartoon *Well, Just You Wait!* and *Tom and Jerry* by junior high school students on six SD scales: The Wolf and The Hare, The Wolf and Tom, Tom and Jerry, The Hare and Jerry.

Comparison of children's perception of the characters in the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon: The Wolf and The Hare – showed that they were rated with reliable differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) on every semantic scale (Fig.1).



**Fig. 1.** Students' ratings of The Wolf and The Hare characters on six psycho-semantic scales

Thus, it may be acknowledged that children were able to subtly feel the difference between the characters due to the traditional anthropomorphic characteristic (big and small, strong and weak), and to ascribe adequate axiological and semantic categories to them if the big and strong were punished, and the small and weak triumphed.

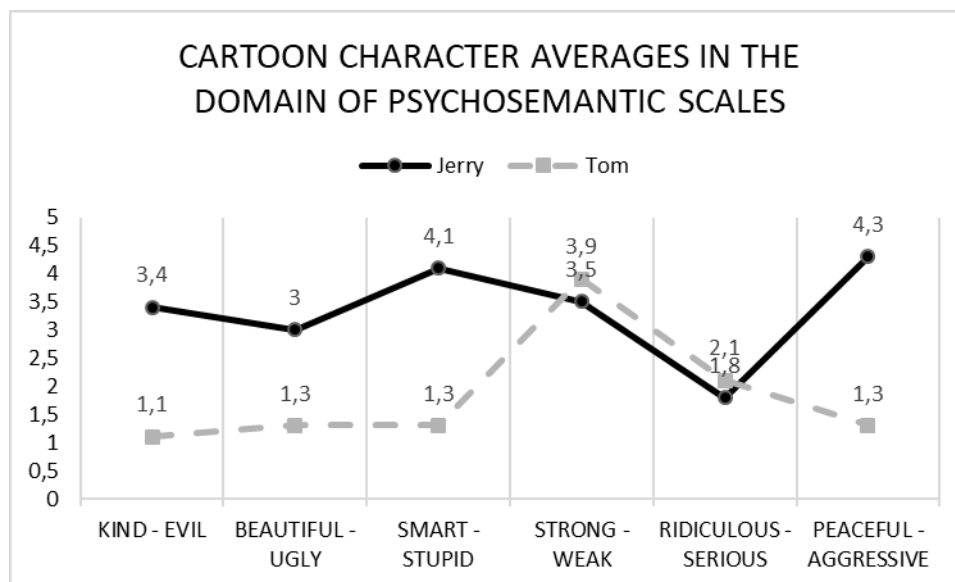
When comparing children's ratings of the two 'big' characters: The Wolf and Tom – no statistically significant differences were detected ( $p \geq 0.05$ ). Those characters were presented to children as identical in axiological and semantic behavioral code, which was fairly consistent with the semantic universals and, at the same time, demonstrated the indifference of characteristics set by the discourse: in the film, the image of Tom was transformed to match not the archetypical model of a cunning aggressor, but a simple-minded victim.

Comparison of the younger schoolchildren's perception of antagonistic characters: Tom and Jerry showed significant differences in their semantics on the four scales: 'good – evil', 'beautiful – ugly', 'smart – stupid' and 'peaceful – aggressive' ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

It is important to note that Jerry the Mouse was perceived with greater sympathy by children: it was 'kinder', 'more beautiful', 'more peaceful' and 'smarter' than Tom the Cat (Fig. 2). Research had shown that children were unable to identify the axiological and semantic code underlying their behavior, character and functions in the image of the characters. Artistic and aesthetic form of representation of characters, peculiarities of the culture of laughter disguised destructive and provocative character of the mouse's behavior towards the cat.

It was interesting to note that children's rating of Tom and Jerry's characters on the scales of 'strong – weak' and 'funny – serious' did not differ. Both characters were rated as 'strong' and 'not funny'. We were thus witnessing a transformation of the semantics of the mouse as a traditionally weak character and, at the same time, a weakening of the laughing component that conditioned relativity, the ludic nature of the presentation of a fairy tale narrative.

When comparing semantic evaluations of the 'small' characters: The Hare and Jerry, differences in their perceptions by children on the same scales were found: 'strong – weak' and 'funny – serious' ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). No significant differences were found in the other four categories. Thus, the categorization of characters according to major cultural universals of: 'good', 'beauty', 'mind', 'peacefulness' – matched the traditional predetermined semantics. Transformations were subject to the values of 'authority' and 'laughter'.



**Fig. 2.** Graduations of Tom and Jerry characters on six psycho-semantic scales by junior high schoolchildren

According to the data received, younger schoolchildren almost did not distinguish between the characters of Russian and American cartoons with the same characteristics: 'small' and 'weak.' Both characters, as followed from their traditional semantics, were perceived by children as kind, beautiful and intelligent.

At the second stage of the study, all data obtained by the evaluation of the 13 scales of semantic differential images of the four cartoon characters by younger schoolchildren were subjected to the procedure of VARIMAX factorial analysis using the Principal Component Analysis with rotation. The value of the KMO Measure of Sampling was 0.951, which meant that it could be evaluated as 'excellent'.

Given the estimates of the value of each factor, we had identified two factors that explained 64.921 % of the total dispersion of variables. The *first* factor with a high load included the scales of: 'kind – evil', 'good – bad', 'smart – stupid', 'beautiful – ugly', 'peaceful – aggressive', 'light – dark', 'soft – hard'. The *second* factor constituted the scale of 'consanguine – alien', 'friend – foe' and 'funny – serious'. The first factor was called the 'kindness' factor, the second – the 'consanguinity factor'.

Comparison of semantic evaluations of the images of The Wolf and The Hare had shown that, on 11 scales and by both factors, children rated the characters with statistically significant differences: The Wolf was much less 'kind' than The Hare, it received an overall negative rating and was perceived as 'alien' ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

A comparison of Tom and Jerry's semantic ratings showed a similar result – on the same eleven scales the characters' ratings differed significantly – children rated Jerry significantly higher than Tom ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

Thus, as we anticipated, younger schoolchildren differentiated characters at the level of traditionally predefined semantics: a big, conventionally bad character (Wolf, Tom) and a small, conventionally good one (Hare, Jerry) confronting it.

The more important and, at the same time, less obvious was the aesthetic level of perception, associated with the deep semantics of artistic images, determined in the process of comparing the semantic evaluations of conventionally negative characters presented in films by different artistic means: The Wolf and Tom. The study found that children's rating of those characters was identical for both factors ( $p \geq 0.05$ ). Thus, children showed a low level of ability to differentiate the content of animated images with very different axiological and semantic features, qualification whereof as 'negative' was possible at the most superficial semantic level only.

Comparison of children's ratings of two conventionally positive characters: The Hare and Jerry demonstrated similar result: no statistically significant differences in the factor values of semantic evaluation of the images were revealed ( $p \geq 0.05$ ).

Thus, an important feature for understanding children's perception of cartoons and the effect of artistic images on them was found – children were able to differentiate artistic material at the most superficial, ordinary level, which corresponded to the traditional semantic universals: the small character being 'good' and 'consanguine', while the big one 'evil' and 'alien'. The nature of the artistic presentation of those anthropomorphic characters in specific television content did not affect their evaluation: Jerry's good behavior inconsistent with the criteria was rated positive, while the offended Tom was bad.

At the third stage of the research, the analysis of students' perception of animated images, was carried out. The data obtained from their rating on 36 semantic differential scales were subjected to the procedure of VARIMAX factorial analysis by the Principal Component Analysis with rotation. The value of the KMO Measure of Sampling was 0.929, which meant that it could be evaluated as 'excellent'. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was large and its corresponding level of significance was 0.000. Given the estimates of the value of each factor, we had identified six factors that explained 62.758 % of the total dispersion of variables.

The first factor included the scales of 'peaceful – aggressive', 'polite – rude', 'kind – cruel', 'altruist – egoist', 'moral – immoral', 'tactful – annoying.' It was called the 'Morality Factor'.

The second factor – 'vigor' – was made on the scale of 'energetic – sluggish', 'famous – unknown', 'bright – unsightly', 'sociable – reserved'.

The third 'factor of untidiness' included the scales of 'untidy – clean', 'disorganized – organized', 'lubber – uncouth'.

The fourth factor of 'beauty' was made on the scale of 'fashionable – untrendy' and 'beautiful – ugly'.

The fifth factor – 'cunning' – included the scales of 'cunning – simpl-minded' and 'crafty – naive'.

The sixth factor of 'bravery' was made on the scale of 'brave – cowardly' and 'weak – strong'.

Thus, the assessment of cartoon characters by youth was more differentiated and based on ideas about their morality, vigor, tidiness, beauty, cunning and bravery.

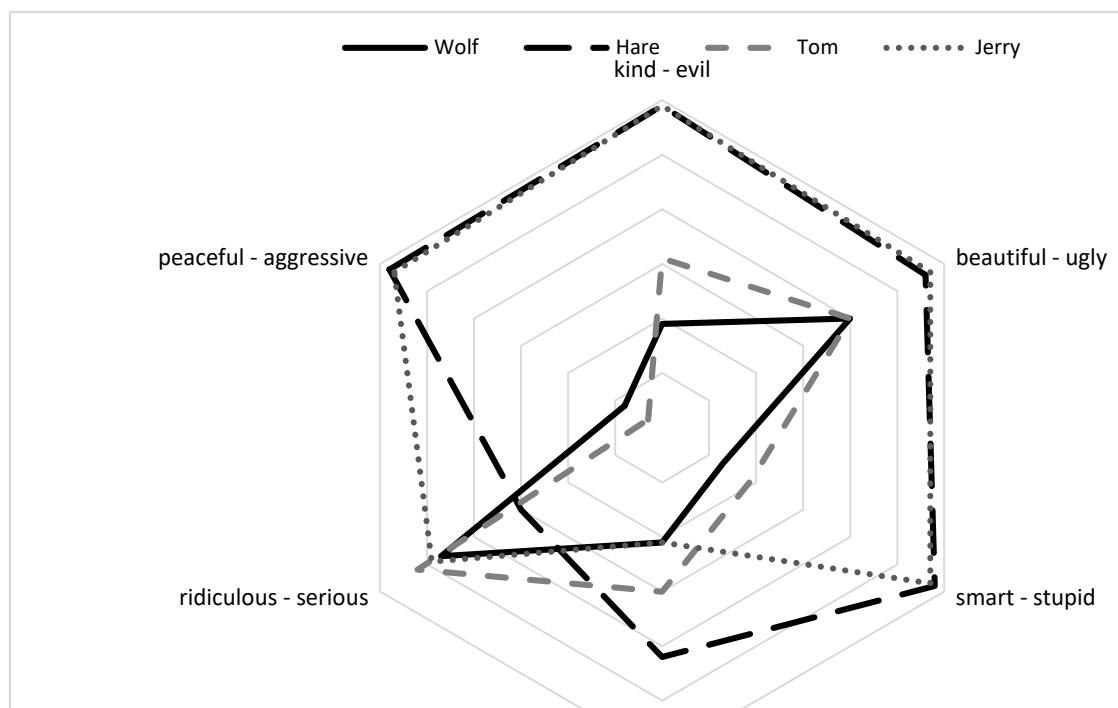
Comparison of the semantics of conventionally negative characters: The Wolf and Tom showed reliable differences in the four factors: The Wolf was less 'moral' than Tom, but more 'tidy', 'cunning' and 'brave'. Students differentiated The Wolf and Tom on the scales whereon children's ratings were invariable: that way, Tom was authentically weaker than The Wolf for an adult, less 'smart' and less 'consanguine' ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

Comparison of the semantics of conventionally positive characters: The Hare and Jerry - showed that adults rated them with reliable differences on 28 scales and by three factors ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). As different from children, whose perception of conventionally positive characters unraveled high degree of uniformity, students rated The Hare much higher than Jerry: it was more 'moral', 'tidy' and much less 'cunning'. Students rating of the conventionally positive character - Jerry the Mouse was quite consistent with its cruel attitude towards Tom in the animated narrative: In comparison with another conventionally positive character, The Hare, it was authentically more 'evil', 'unhappy', 'cruel', 'pushy', 'repulsive', 'aggressive', 'disorganized', 'irritating', 'lying', 'cowardly', 'rude', 'scary' and 'alien'.

Further, the average values of the image ratings of the four rated characters were compared by two samples of junior schoolchildren. Fig. 3 shows that the semantics of the two 'big' images were almost identical to those of the younger Muscovite schoolchildren, same with the semantics of the 'small' characters.

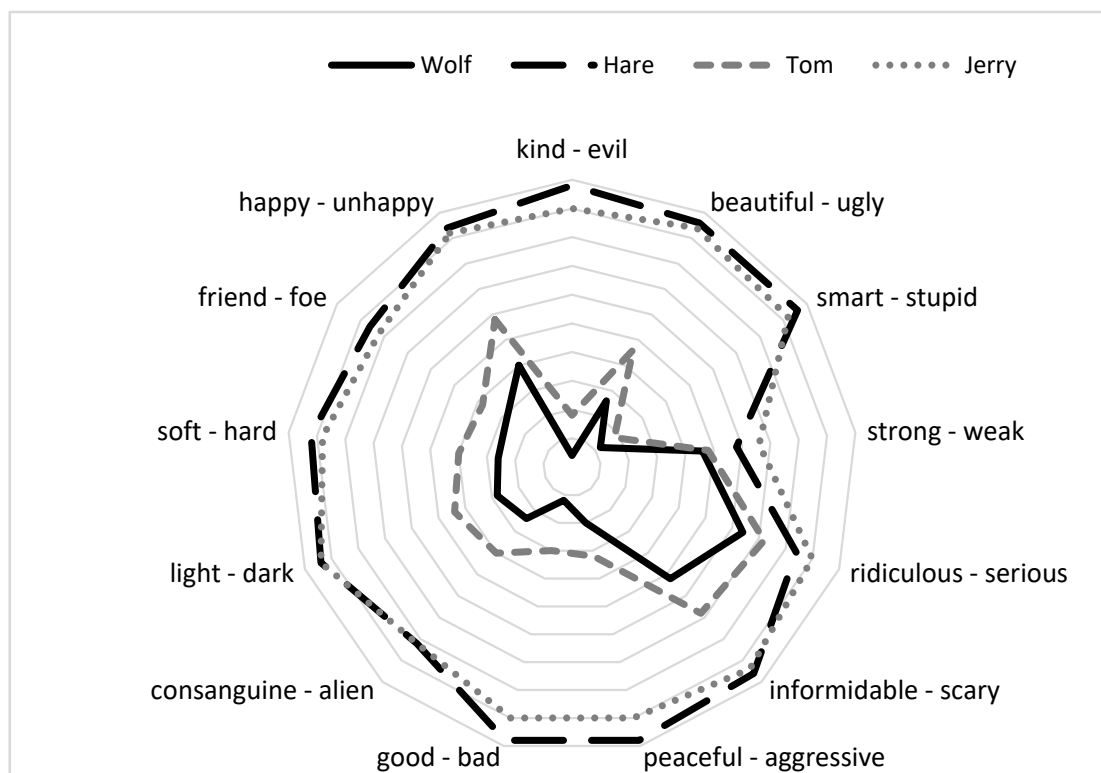
Fig. 4 demonstrated the same pattern – the ratio of grades of the younger schoolchildren – Irkutsk students – to the images of the four characters showed that the images of The Hare and Jerry, as well as The Wolf and Tom, had the highest similar grades.





**Fig. 3.** Assessments of junior high school students of Moscow of the four characters in the domain of the six psycho-semantic scales

Thus, the research has shown that the semantic universals: 'big, strong, evil' – 'small, weak, good', whereby children rated the images of animals in the animated discourse, were irrelevant of topographically determined cultural attitudes of younger schoolchildren.

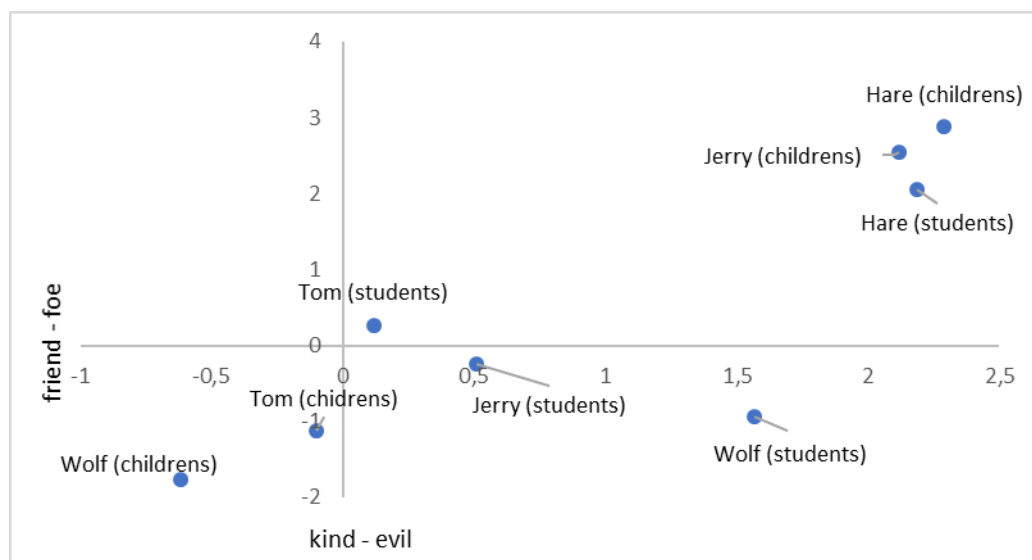


**Fig. 4.** Ratings of the characters in the domain of the thirteen psycho-semantic scales by junior high school students of Irkutsk

Let us consider the mechanism of influence on children with the help of media characters. The image of The Hare corresponded to the universal 'small, good', while the nature of its

presentation in animated discourse reinforced that semantics. It was no coincidence that both children and students highly appreciated The Hare: it was consanguine and kind (Fig. 5). That image enjoyed great self-identification and educational potential.

The image of Jerry was conventionally positive, but in the discourse of the cartoon – a negative one (the character was aggressive, cunning, cruel). The students fairly evaluated Jerry as negative, but children responded to universalism only – and their rating of Jerry was the same as that of The Hare – it was 'consanguine' and 'kind' (Fig. 5). Then, identification with Jerry may have a negative effect on children – they did not see the inherent 'evil' in its image, they liked it and it became an object of identification easily.



**Fig. 5.** Semantic evaluation of characters by younger and older students in the domain of 'consanguinity' and 'kindness' factors

Children's evaluation of The Wolf is unsurprisingly negative – on the one hand, it corresponded to cultural universals, on the other, – to animated discourse, it was 'evil' and 'alien'. Hence The Wolf did not become an object of identification for a child, because the viewer condemned and ridiculed its actions. And that was the positive educational potential of an aggressive image.

## 5. Conclusion

We had found that the animated discourse, which was based on a fairytale plot about the confrontation of strong and weak characters, might have different semantics depending on whether the film's artistic means supported the traditional meaning of the characters' images or distorted it.

Children, unlike adults, evaluated characters according to traditional semantics: The small character of a film, expressed by traditionally good animals (hare, mouse), was rated as the good one, regardless of what it was doing in the film. As well as the big character, embodied in the image of a traditionally more negative animal (wolf, cat), for which the little character is prey or food, was rated as the negative one and did not cause sympathy in children, even though it was suffering undeservedly. At the same time, older viewers differentiated their attitude towards the characters and were more independent of the traditional semantics of fairytale characters.

To explain that phenomenon, let us turn to the analysis of the animated films themselves, made within the framework of different civilization codes. We would see that the two cartoons with similar plot and characters, employed the traditional fairytale collision in a fundamentally different manner. Jerry was the representation of the archetypical "trickster" (Jung, 1996) associated that archetype with the Shadow, the dark side of a Character, and pointed to the active, enterprising nature of the Trickster, essentially destructive and provocative. Each episode of the animated series began with Jerry's harassment of Tom, who was going on its own business making insidious plans, trapped it and put it in a dangerous position. It was teasing and provoking, then running away from revenge, ducking and dodging. From time to time, Tom would catch up with it, but, in the end, Jerry would still manage to sneak out and leave Tom 'high and dry'. That was the 'modus

operandi' of a Trickster – to cause mayhem, disrupt the usual course of everyday life, provoke the characters to anger and aggression. Characteristically, Jerry would often have no motivated explanation for its actions – it acts that way because that, essentially, is the way it is.

The Hare from the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon, at first glance, might make an appearance of Jerry. Sometimes, it would show miracles of cunning to escape the persecution of The Wolf. However, in many more episodes the logic of the characters' actions was different: an action was initiated by The Wolf who wanted to catch and eat The Hare. Meanwhile, The Hare was living its life, enjoyed little joys, smiled at the world and did good things. And often, until the last moment, it was unaware of The Wolf's insidious plans, avoiding the traps set for it as if by chance, as if it was saved by fortune or supreme forces. Thus, The Hare may be considered as an expression of the archetype of the Innocent Child, who, because of its purity, simply ignored the evil and avoided it not because of cunning or cleverness, but as if by accident, continuing to ignore the evil. It was living in its pure and beautiful world, where evil simply had no place, and therefore was immune to it.

Should one compare the other pair of characters, Tom and The Wolf, then – come to the fore there – would be *the factor of normativity*. Tom, at the onset of most of the stories, was shown engaged in ordinary, routine 'normal' activities: it was cooking food, doing cleaning, going fishing or taking a nap in a hammock. Then Jerry showed up, giving it some kind of a trick, and as a result Tom's activities were destroyed, and it had to respond to provocations. The Wolf from the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon, was then depicted defiantly violating social norms of behavior. It messed around, scattered garbage, tried to get through without a ticket, hurt the little ones, etc. Almost all of The Wolf's interaction with other characters, besides The Hare, was based on the fact that The Wolf was breaking certain rules and regulations, while other characters either suffered from it, or tried to prevent it, or wanted to punish it, and then the protagonist itself had to run and hide from them. By so doing, Tom embodied the image of a 'common person', a typical average member of society. The Wolf, on the other hand, appeared to be a rebel, a transgressor of norms and a potential source of chaos, i.e. it showed the features of the Trickster itself.

Thus, it may be said that, in the Tom and Jerry cartoon, the archetypical Trickster was clearly associated with Jerry, while Tom embodied both the victim of trickster mischief, and the avenger, and in the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon, the archetypical Trickster was sooner embodied in the image of The Wolf.

The goals and motivations of the four characters were also different. The Wolf's leading motive was to catch up with the Hare to devour it, that is, the prevailing goal was that of satisfaction of its own needs, selfishness. For The Hare, it was a nuisance in its peaceful life aimed at building positive functional relationships. The Hare, in turn, was running away from The Wolf, saving its life and sometimes slightly punishing The Wolf. Tom's leading motive was to carry out everyday, traditional affairs, normative behavior. Sometimes it would do good deeds, sometimes admonishable ones. Instead, for Jerry, the main thing was sabotage, violation of the normal course of Tom's life, which did not touch it, and Jerry was tireless and very resourceful at that. The artistic method of the 'chase' used by the authors of both cartoons, proceeding from that differentiation, also had a different meaning: in the domestic cartoon, the 'bad' Wolf was running after the 'good' Hare to catch and eat it, while The Hare was running for its life. In the American cartoon, the 'good' Tom chased after the 'bad' Jerry, who would not let it live normally – just to get rid of the hindrance. Thus, both cartoon characters that were being chased, were elusive, but the meaning of that was also different: The elusiveness of the 'good' Hare symbolically emphasized the victory of good over evil, which corresponded to the traditional cultural moral norms that underlie most of the fairytale plots (Propp, 2000, Smirnova, 2012), which determined the educational effect of watching the domestic cartoon. The elusiveness of the 'bad' Jerry symbolically meant the inexhaustibility of the evil fundamentals, as well as the psychologically weak position of traditions and norms that should be subjected to ridicule, punishment and destruction, which determined the anti-educational effect of that cartoon. In that case, the artistic method of 'chase' was the way to keep the viewers' attention and interest in what was happening in each series of the cartoon for children.

It is also important to emphasize the difference in the moral meaning of 'derision' of the behavior of characters in the two cartoons. Although in both cases, children's laughter at The Wolf and Tom's blunders was the so-called 'derisive laughter' – "one of the first kinds of laughter a child is capable of", which occurred when someone did not behave by convention (Rodari, 1990: 126), as well as "aggressive laughter" (Rodari, 1990: 130) at a suffering and unhappy character whose

behavior seemed awkward. However, in the case of the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon, such laughter was directed towards the 'bad' character – The Wolf, and in the case of the *Tom and Jerry* cartoon – towards Tom, who behaved quite traditionally, and often altruistically. Besides, the domestic cartoon implemented a symbolic destruction of the evil – by way of its reduction to the level of the comic: the evil wolf was not scary, but ridiculous. Meanwhile, the authors of the Tom and Jerry cartoon would turn even Tom's suffering into laughingstock – for example, episodes when it was screaming in pain were accompanied by dynamic and joyful music.

The results of the study demonstrated that adult test persons did perceive those differences in the motivations, values and archetypes of the characters, while younger schoolchildren focused on the external manifestations only, being poorly sensitive to deeper semantic layers at the conscious level.

Thus, the *Tom and Jerry* cartoon might have a negative effect on children due to the fact that unmotivated cruel and immoral character of Jerry the Mouse would cause positive response in children, and undeservedly suffering big character Tom did not stir up sympathy and was ridiculed.

Comparison of characteristics of cartoon characters of different civilization types corresponded with the psychological research presented in the article and spoke both about the importance of a selection of films for school kids, and about the necessity of smart mentoring and their orientation in the axiological information domain. From the point of view of research prospects, it is important not only to continue those with the help of methods accepted in psychology, but also to carry out joint projects with sociologists using content analysis methods.

This is our final conclusions:

1. The perception of cartoon films was associated with the nature of artistic interpretation of the images of animal characters with traditional semantics. 8-9 year old children almost did not distinguish between the nature of The Wolf from the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon with its willingness to bully, attack the defenseless and Tom the Cat, on the one hand, as well as the vengeful Jerry the Mouse and the benevolent Hare, on the other. By virtue of the stylistic solution of the plot of the Tom and Jerry cartoon in the genre of circus clownery, moral and ethical meaning of actions of the characters were not retrieved by younger schoolchildren. They did not notice the morally dubious triumph of the insidious Jerry the Mouse over Tom, and thus did not adequately recognize the axiological and semantic code of the communicative message of the American cartoon.

2. Children, unlike adults, did not have sufficient ability to differentiate images whose traditional semantics have been transformed, in particular, on moral grounds. Categorical structure of perception of the images of cartoon characters was represented in two dimensions: 1) good – bad, 2) consanguine – alien. In the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon, the traditional semantics of fairytale animals: wolf and hare – was preserved and enhanced, in particular, by the artistic reduction of the image of the cruel wolf through the aesthetics of the comic, which afforded us to speak about the significant educational and pedagogical potential of that work.

3. Students accurately identified the moral and ethical meaning and focus of the characters in the *Tom and Jerry* and *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoons. The categorical structure of students' perception of the images of animated discourse had six dimensions: 1) morality, 2) vigor, 3) neatness, 4) beauty, 5) cunning and 6) bravery. Within those categories, the only positive character was The Hare from the *Well, Just You Wait!* cartoon. All other characters were rated negative.

4. That and other studies have demonstrated that there were serious axiological gaps between cartoons in accordance with their civilizational, cultural types, which required significant correction for their use in the educational process of children, who should learn the basic values of their people in the context of the values of world culture and their dynamic development from the process of socialization.

5. Further research of the content and effect of cartoons, films and other cultural products, particularly those broadcast on TV, the Internet and other media channels on children and adolescents, appeared to be promising and urgent. That could be implemented in a complex project involving cultural scientists, teachers, sociologists, psychologists, media researchers.

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