

**SOCIOLOGICAL AND RESEARCH OPTICS OF READING:
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS**

Marina E. Elyutina¹, Svetlana V. Sitnikova²

¹Saratov State University, Saratov, Russia, e-mail: elutina133@mail.ru
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5186-2418

²Saratov State University, Saratov, Russia, e-mail: skareva@yandex.ru
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2365-8780

Abstract. The paper is devoted to an important and relevant problem of reading, which is not studied enough in sociological discourse, but important for developing effective social policy strategies aimed at enhancing reading activity. The general state of affairs in the field of sociological study of reading as a multidimensional process is debated; the variability of the role of reading in everyday life is substantiated. The article is based on the results of an empirical sociological project dedicated to the study of the characteristics of readers' preferences among the university teachers and students. The practical application of various research practices to everyday reading is shown here. First, we are talking about the identification of the semantic loading of reading in the direction from the perception of reading as a tool for developing your own reflexive strategies to identifying it as a means of recreation and entertainment. Secondly, it is important to study reading as a process, continuous, long-life, and never fully completed. Sociohistorical aspect involves the analysis of the genesis of reading, its changes depending on socio-cultural and economic conditions. Thirdly, we studied the repertoire of readable literature.

Fourth, the study of reading as a mechanism of socialization of an individual within certain institutions, as well as the analysis of special social institutions related to reading: public libraries, schools and universities, literary critics and observers, a jury awarding prizes and awards. The authors emphasize the fact that reading in the process of socialization cannot be a "missing link", as it orients the existence of modern man.

It is shown that the creative search for reading empowerment is associated with the following research areas: reading interpretation as a way of authentic self-expression of a person without false expressiveness (as opposed to the idea of reading as the pursuit of vested interests or purely regulatory obligation), as well as reflection of emotional landscapes of reading (emotional reception of texts, emotional reading reaction, mood in the process of reading). In these areas, reading is viewed not as a completed action, but as a character of an action imbued with emotional content with its inherent sensory receptivity of the reading subject. While reading, a

person experiences a wide range of emotions; moreover, the same emotion in modality can be experienced with different shades and even as an emotion of a different sign (pleasant or unpleasant). Emotions can be combined and re-combined in a variety of combinations. Strong emotions do not give up reading without reading the text to the end. The specific form of reading with the utmost enthusiasm is the “avid reading”, which in everyday life can be a real fiasco, caused by the imbalance of current affairs. As a result, it is concluded that in the educational field, as well as in society as a whole, there is a process of transformation of reading: along with the rootedness of traditional forms of reading and reading preferences, they are modified with the development of information technologies, entertainment and commercialization of the social sphere. The authors believe that the inclusion of market mechanisms in the activities of various social institutions has different limits, the excess of which leads to the degeneration of the institutions themselves.

Keywords: social background of reading, reading meanings, reading functions, reading locations, types of reading

Introduction

The sociological study of reading is an inadequately studied area of sociology, which we consider to be an interdisciplinary field, and focuses on the analysis of reading as a social phenomenon and reading practices. The subject matters of inconsiderable in number publications on the problem of reading are concentrated mainly around such research trajectories as the social background of reading, i.e. the book market, the distribution of literature, and the success with the public. The nature of inner tension, the dynamics of semantic content and the social representations of reading in everyday life are not completely reflected in literature. We attempt to highlight the most significant sociological research representations of this phenomenon and implement them in the course of research practice while studying the habits of reading preferences of university teachers and students (the case of Saratov State University).

The identification of reading meanings

A.V. Artyushenkova, analyzing the attitude to reading as a multidimensional concept, comes to the conclusion that different historical epochs form their own attitude to reading, but one thing remains unaffected, - reading remains the source of personal development, and its mental activity. It is only followed by a specification of the semantic content of reading Ye.V. Artyushenkova (2010). Traditionally, reading is considered to be an indicator of spiritual and intellectual status both the society as a whole and an individual. The high meaning of reading includes considering it as a

kind of tool by means of which a person can understand things that are less obvious, more dynamic and open from a social point of view, and work out their own reflexive strategies. It is important to emphasize that the lack of sense in everyday life, the overloading of an individual with mental spam furthermore actualizes the appeal to reading, the search for something “human” in modern expansion of everything mechanical and electronic. Sociology is increasingly turning to a specific individual, whose social portrait cannot be full and complete without taking into account his reading interests, tastes and practices. L.N. Kogan, providing a sociological analysis of Pushkin oeuvre draws the attention to the fact that A.S. Pushkin vividly showed the role of reading interests in revealing a certain type of personality: the type of Russian educated girl (Liza from “Epistolary novel”), a typical high society lady concentrated only on gossip avocations (Sasha from “Epistolary novel”), the type of empty dandy and spendaholic (Count Nulin), for whom the book is just a sign of fashion (Kogan L.N., 1995: 146). These types of people are still very relevant. What’s more, it is important for sociologists to understand how attitudes towards reading have changed, whether other meanings of reading are constructed. I.N. Tartakovskaya highlighted the fact that a book is perceived not only as a “sign of culture” and a symbol of spiritual wisdom, more common, prosaic reading meanings are becoming widespread: “useful reading” as a means for solving everyday problems (reference literature on education of children, cookbooks, dictionaries) and “entertaining reading” as a means of distancing from the risks and problems of contemporary life. Besides we would add to this list such meaning as “learning to live better” associated with circulation of numerous guides: how to become rich, how to become happy, how to attract money. According to I.N. Tartakovskaya, the reading of modern works of high artistic merit is the lot of very few, even among the most “intellectually advanced” part of the population. However, the importance of this kind of literature for the self-awareness of elite groups is extremely high, therefore its readership, as the author correctly emphasizes, will be constantly reproduced (Tartakovskaya I.N., 1994: 179). The existence of a stable intellectual readership is one of the possible dimensions for positional rearrangements and communicative shifts. Some authors note the reading crisis, which means, as a rule, not a cultural practice of reading, but a crisis in the socio-historical and institutional terms. This brings the discussion of this phenomenon to the macro level - the level of continuous analysis and accelerating development of media space, social inequality, and polarization of population in terms of income and quality of life, commercialization of books, the level of analysis of various social institutions related to reading. It is absolutely clear that all civilized states

believe their duty is to monitor the level of reading, maintain, and guarantee the necessary prerequisites and settings for the preservation and development of reading.

Sociologists draw attention to two dangerous aspects of this activity: from complete self-elimination to dictate, inactive rate setting. Modern transformations in all spheres of life change its cognitive organization: a person who counts his money comes to the forefront. He presses back an avid reader (*Homo legens*). Thus, the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) presents data from its study of children's financial literacy conducted among schoolchildren aged 12-17 in 2018. Here are some indicative conclusions. 1. Schoolchildren actively use different financial instruments: almost a third of 15–17 year olds (32%) have a bank card, a quarter (24%) has an e-purse and 22% have a mobile application that allows making payments. 2. 22% of the surveyed high school students agree with the statement: the ability to manage money is a necessary skill for an educated person. 3. The respondents demonstrate a good command of financial and economic terminology: such concepts as “credit”, “credit card”, “currency exchange”, “mobile bank”, and “money transfers” are familiar to at least 50% of schoolchildren of both age groups. 4. All respondents found more useful, necessary and important to know the additional information in the field of economics and finance than in-depth study of jurisprudence and law, engineering and technical sciences, medicine and pharmaceuticals. These changes, as we believe, will in turn cause a chain reaction of systematic transformations in everyday behavior, in the semantic content of actions, including reading.

The results of the author's research fix the following semantic characteristics of reading in the daily life of the university audience: “obtain new knowledge” (56.8%), “get away from reality, distract” (36.4%), “do work, task” (34.1%), “be aware of current events” (29.5%), and “have fun” (18.2%). While maintaining a positive reading content, its semantic interpretation is highly variable. We note the effect of the status features of the respondents on the semantic content of reading. The ability to do work and be aware of current events is often mentioned by teachers. As for students, significant meanings of reading for them are: the opportunity to escape from reality and have fun.

The study of reading as a continuous long-life process

The study of reading as a continuous long-life process is not fully completed. Sociohistorical aspect involves the analysis of the genesis of reading, its changes depending on the socio-cultural and economic conditions. Reading has its own structure, motives, and stages (for example, according to the reader's immersiveness category: recognition, fascination,

social knowledge configuration, shock), results, and performs certain functions (educational, therapeutic, sleepy, “escape from reality”, initiating the function of various kinds of relaxation activity).

Among the most common types of reading we note down: reading aloud, reading silently, reading-thumbing, reading-viewing, reading-commenting (“the author’s electronic correspondence with readers”), reading-listening, and reading-understanding. Fan fiction - active, involved, emotionally intense reading, is inseparable from the writing. The unprecedented ease with which reading here turns into writing is one of the main characteristics of this type of reading. These are different reading practices with their own history and guidelines of development. In this case, the analysis of the reading process is very interesting as a point of interaction the author, reader and text, in which the reader is an interpreter of the text, who fills it with meaning or one of the possible meanings depending on the social background of reading, which is constituted by the following indicators: age, gender, education, place of residence, climatic conditions, marital status, and economic status. An important part of the reading process is the location (transportation, eating, “in bed with a book”), as well as the necessary reading equipment. According to M.Yu. Gudova, who carried out a comparative analysis of book reading practice, screen reading and audio reading, we can distinguish something common to them: with all the changes in equipment and operational skills, the book’s value, which is understood as something meaningful, as unique text that requires awareness and interpretation, as well as the value of familiarity with the culture of reading - extensive reading (Gudova M. Yu., 2014: 84).

Sociological snapshot of the most typical situation for reading, according to the author’s data, showed the popularity of the following answers: “I read, anywhere at any free time” (55.6%); “In bed, before bedtime” (35.6%). The fifth part of the respondents reads in transport, 17.8% in the queue while waiting, 11.1% at work and school, and 6.6% at the dinner table. The most popular days for reading are - weekdays (50%), twice less commonly the respondents mentioned in their answers weekends or days off; being in hospital and on holidays were also rarely mentioned.

According to the results of comparative analysis, teachers read on weekdays more often than students (62.5% to 42%), during holidays (25% to 21%), during holidays (12.5% to 8%). Students more often than teachers read at weekends (25% to 19%) and being on sick lists (21% to 12.5%). Evening time of the day is dominant in everyday reading practices (71% of respondents). Significant contradictions in the responses of teachers and students have not been identified.

80% of respondents prefer the print format of books, 29% - electronic, 13% - audio. Moreover, among the readers, who prefer audio books were only students. As for the real daily life, 84% of respondents use electronic books, 27% - printed books and 4.5% - audio books. This contradiction is easy to explain: from our point of view it is the convenience of modern information technologies. Today digital libraries are one of the most popular resources for online audiences. We found that teachers use texts in electronic format more often than students (94% and 78%, respectively, in status groups). Printed text is more often used by students (30% to 22%); audio is only by students (7.4%).

The study of reading as a means of controlling and managing the public consciousness

“Containment policy” includes the problem of regulatory restrictions, regulatory assumptions regarding possible types of reading. For example, there is a list of recommended reading, transmitting patterns and standards of behavior, which are “correct” or beneficial to the society: in school curricula (mandatory and supplementary literature), in public libraries, in mass circulation and promotion of definite books. Nevertheless, this question is closely connected with such empirical tendency as the institutionalization of biographical samples, the individualization of life plans. The study of the university reading is of particular importance: its changes and shifts from the solution of mainly teaching and pedagogical problems to the construction of one’s identity.

The results of our study showed: fiction is the most popular type of reading in the university environment (59% of responses), scientific literature is a bit less mentioned (48%), and nonfiction (27%) and journalistic (16%) literature is the least mentioned type. It is quite typical for this audience. Scientific or scientific-journalistic literature is more often read by teachers, fiction - by students.

The rating of genre preferences according to the number of mentioning was the following: novel (48.8%), story (34%), drama (32.6%), short novel (30.2%), lyrics (16.3%), fairy tale (14%), poem (11.6%), and popular science literature (11.6%). Much less frequently mentioned (less than 10%) were the short story, the ballad and the epic. Significant differences in the genre preferences of students and teachers were revealed in relation to drama: 48% of students chose this particular genre, while among teachers it is much less popular (6%). Foreign literature is interesting for readers a little more often than national. 51.1% of respondents read national literature against 57.8% foreign literature. The final percentage of responses exceeds 100, because about 10% of respondents chose both options.

Statistics reveals significant differences in the preferences of teachers and students. Most teachers (72.2%) prefer Russian literature; while among the majority of students (74.1%) prefers foreign literature. Cultural drift towards enhancing students' interest in foreign literature, we believe, is associated with the desire to develop their cultural resources for creative activities. Modern literature is favored by both teachers and students. More than 70% like better literature of the XX-XIX centuries, 35.6% read the classics of the new time (XVI-XIX centuries), less than 7% (among them only teachers) indicated the works of the Middle Ages and the ancient world.

The study of reading as a mechanism of individual socialization within certain institutions

The study of reading as a mechanism of individual socialization within certain institutions; the analysis of special social institutions related to reading: public libraries, schools and universities, literary critics and reviewers, juries awarding prizes and awards. Reading in the process of socialization can not be a "missing link", as it orients the existence of a modern person. The studies of structural obstacles to reading are of great interest. According to our research, despite the availability of electronic literary content, visiting libraries has not become rare for university audiences. 40% from the total number of respondents visit libraries: half of teachers, one third of students. A little more than 75% have home libraries: 89% of teachers, 66% of students. The formed necessity for reading as a significant part of the university audience is proved by the statistical fact: the connection between a home library and attending city libraries. 90% of those who visit libraries have a personal home library, and only 66% of those who do not visit libraries, have their own libraries at home.

About a third of the respondents (29.5%) do not use the library fund of the university, a third use printed publications, 47.7% use electronic books, 7% of them use both printed and electronic forms of publications. About 60% expressed approval with the state of the university library fund, one fifth of the respondents were not satisfied, and 15% were equally satisfied and not satisfied. There were no statistically significant differences in the responses of teachers and students, however, it should be noted that 15% more teachers compared to students who were dissatisfied with their real reading abilities. The most frequently cited reasons for dissatisfaction include: "lack of time", "difficulty in finding books by interest", "high cost of rare editions". Teachers also pointed out such factor as the "system of stimulating publication activity of university teachers" that has emerged today, initiating the desire to achieve good quantitative indicators. It often leads to scientific formalism that reduces the level of reasoning and justification, critical reflection, and expert interest in texts. According to our

data, only a quarter of teachers regularly review relevant publications within the framework of their research interests, 13% do it once or twice a week, 28.9% - several times a month, 4.4% - several times every six months and 22.2% do it only if necessary (preparation for the conference, writing scientific work). According to a fair comment by I. Zabaev, “publications are important for a scientist, but as soon as he focuses not on the essence of the matter, but on the number of publications and other formal indicators, his profession and calling run the risk of becoming a curse” (Zabayev I., 2018: 126). A direct relationship is empirically revealed: the higher the professional status, the more time and attention is paid to relevant thematic publications (the level of statistical significance is 0 with at value 0.54. The Gamma coefficient was calculated).

We believe, the creative search for empowering reading is connected with the following research directions: interpretation of reading as a way of authentic self-expression of a person without false expressiveness as opposed to the idea of reading as the pursuit of vested interests or a purely regulatory obligation, its influence on the strategy of human behavior during the crisis or crucial moments of one’s life. Reflection of emotional landscapes of reading (emotional reception of texts, emotional reading reaction) is also important. While reading, a person experiences a wide range of emotions; moreover, the same emotion in modality can be experienced with different shades and even as an emotion of a different sign (pleasant or unpleasant). Emotions can be combined and re-combined in a variety of combinations. Strong emotions do not allow giving up reading without reading the text up to the end. The specific form of reading with the utmost enthusiasm is the “avid reading”, which in everyday life can be a real fiasco, caused by the imbalance of current affairs. In these areas, reading is viewed not as a completed action, but as a character of an action imbued with emotional content with its inherent sensory receptivity of the reading subject.

The results of our research indicate that modern education is not isolated from the processes taking place in the society. In the educational field, as well as in the society as a whole, there is a process of transformation of reading as a sociocultural practice: along with the rootedness of traditional forms of reading and reading preferences, they are modified related to the development of information technology, the entertainment industry and the commercialization of the social sphere. It is absolutely clear that the inclusion of market mechanisms in the activities of various social institutions has different limits, the excess of which leads to the degeneration of the institutions themselves.

References

- Artyushenkova Ye.V. 2010. Philosophical understanding reading phenomenon. *Philosophy, cultural studies, social work*. Proceedings of Zabegu. 4(33): 10-16.
- Gudova M.YU. 2014. Reading as a cultural practice: substantiation of research methodology. *Bulletin of Chelyabinsk state academy of culture and arts* 3 (39): 82-88.
- Zabayev I. 2018. Religion and economy: could we all draw upon Max Weber? *Sociological review* 17(3): 107-148.
- Kogan L.N. 1995. The sphere of reading of Pushkin characters (the experience of sociological analysis). *Journal of Sociology* 3: 145-150.
- Tartakovskaya I.N. 1994. The Phenomenon Bestsellers and mass culture. The review of researches on sociology of reading. *Journal of Sociology* 1: 176-181.
- What do students know about money? URL: <http://www.wciom.ru> [Accessed December 15 2018].