

УДК 316.74

MAKING THE SENSE OF FIGURES: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF PRICING FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE EARLY USSR (1918 – 1939)

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Abstract. The goal of the proposed study is to make basic analysis and the visualization of special database on Soviet children's literature. In order to achieve this goal several digital technologies were adopted. The primary results include correlations between numbers of copies printed and average price of a book, the most popular topics of children's literature and the character of growth of print runs in 1920th and 1930th.

Introduction. The Institute of Russian Literature of Russian Academy of Sciences has developed a unique database of Soviet children's literature based on its complete bibliography compiled by Ivan Startsev [Startsev, 1933, 1941 and others]. The database contains numerous data including author's and illustrator's names, book titles, places of printing and state-approved prices for every book. This data needs substantiative interpretation and visualization. We took a comparatively small historic period between Russian revolution of 1917 and the beginning of World War II to test our hypotheses and to check research design.

Research purpose. The primary task was to translate data into a useful format and to clean it. This task was implemented using Python programming language and popular professional statistical packages including Pandas.

In the process of research some hypotheses also were tested. Our first assumptions included: a) the state-approved prices heavily affected private publishing companies (existed between 1922-1930 as a part of new economic policy); b) some kinds of children's literature were promoted by the state using price regulation mechanisms; c) censorship mechanisms in the early Soviet period included price pressure.

Results. Some preliminary results were achieved. Firstly, we have obtained word clouds for titles of children's books. It was demonstrated that the most popular titles along with "life", "child", "adventures" included politically loaded words such as "pioneer" and "pioneering".

Secondly, we specified the most important publishing houses of 1920s (alongside with state publishers there were several private publishing houses including Sytin's publications and Mirimanov's publications). Thirdly, it was shown that number of titles were raised almost every year between 1922 and 1930.

Finally, we found a few correlations between titles, book series and prices, which should be examined once more to avoid correlation/causation mistake. If proved, those correlations could be illustrative for history of censorship in the early Soviet Union.

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