

THE PHENOMENON OF HETEROGENEITY
OF THE SPEECH SUBJECT
IN GERMAN RETROSPECTIVE DISCOURSE

Ludmila M. Bondareva, Anna O. Budarina

Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University,
14 Aleksandra Nevskogo St., Kaliningrad, 236041, Russia

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The article highlights the features of self-presentation of the subject of retrospective mental and cognitive activity recorded in the texts of memoirs of German-speaking writers of the 19th and 20th centuries. The texts of fiction, which are fictional memories of the narrator and the main character of the narrative in one person, were also used as linguistic material. The novelty of the research is determined by the linguocognitive approach to the problem of interaction of the writer's / hero's reflexive personality with their own past SELF in the process of reconstructing personal experience. The study preliminarily states the fact of ontologically conditioned heterogeneity of the human Ego as a result of the natural process of individual-personal development. The definition of the concept of 'retrospective discourse' is given, which is relevant in the context of the research and referentially correlates with memoir-autobiographical prose. The types of autobiographical SELF mentioned in the relevant literary sources are considered. The forms of explication of the heterogeneity of the speech subject in German-language autobiographical texts are revealed, the main of which is the semantic opposition 'present SELF – past SELF', or 'subject-reconstructor – subject-reconstruct'. The variability of the eventual plurality of the subject-reconstruct and the opposition 'conscious SELF – unconscious SELF' are interpreted as the next forms of representation of the substantive splitting of the structure of the speech subject.

Keywords: ego-identity, retrospective discourse, subject-reconstructor, subject-reconstruct, semantic opposition

1. Introduction

The functioning of the human psyche remains a key ontological problem that modern anthropocentrically oriented science continues to investigate. In recent decades, cognitive science has played a crucial role in advancing this inquiry, as the very notion of cognition—as defined by Boldyrev—encompasses any process, whether conscious or unconscious, involved in the acquisition, transformation, and application of information. This broad concept includes not only perception and categorization, but also thinking, language, and a wide range of other mental processes (Boldyrev 2004, p. 23).

It is evident that human cognitive activity directed toward interaction with objective reality inevitably entails the cognition of the human being



himself, who is an integral and constant component of that very reality. However, alongside the recognition of the external individual as part of the external world, scholars emphasize the necessity of acknowledging the internal person – that is, a sovereign personality formed through the reflective activity of consciousness (Golovanova 2004, p. 5). A fundamental premise in the analysis of the structure of the inner person is its ontologically determined initial split: as a component of the triad person – space – time, our personality represents a synthesis of the past, present, and future SELF. The continuity and stability of this triune structure are ensured by the operation of the mechanism of personal memory.

According to psychologists, the heterogeneity of the SELF is a result of the natural process of individual development, which typically begins around the age of three and forms the foundation for self-awareness, self-analysis, and self-regulation. As noted by Kolominsky, two hypostases can be distinguished within human ego-identity: the actor SELF and the observer SELF. While the actor thinks and engages in action, the observer monitors these processes, exerting control and regulation over the individual's behaviour (Kolominsky 1986, p. 16).

Kon, in turn, proposes that ego-identity comprises three structural elements: the existential, categorical, and experienced 'SELF'. The existential 'SELF' functions as the organizing principle of individual existence, shaped through self-regulation and self-control. The categorical 'SELF', understood as a purely cognitive construct, corresponds to the self-image or self-concept, which emerges from processes of self-knowledge and self-evaluation and serves as a core component of one's subjective worldview. In contrast, the experienced 'SELF', as Kon notes, is not formed through conceptualization but is manifested in self-perception (Kon 1984, pp. 29 – 30, 181).

However, speaking about human interaction with space and time, i.e. with the surrounding reality, we inevitably come to realise the relevance in our lives of the triad of an even more global nature 'world – person – language' (see: Zubkova 2016), since any human contact with reality occurs with the direct participation of language and based on language, and any act of our cognitive activity can be verbalised in an appropriate textual form.

The process of understanding one's own SELF is not only a central focus of inquiry in psychology and philosophy but also a subject of representation in literary creativity. In this connection, it is necessary to emphasise the inevitability of fixing the phenomenon of multiple SELVES in the process of self-knowledge, which is typical for any first-person narrative, as rightly pointed out by the German researcher Lämmert (Lämmert 1983, p. 71).

Nevertheless, the implied phenomenon is most clearly realised in the texts of the special discursive type we have identified, namely retrospective discourse, under which we understand the process of verbalisation of the intentionally conditioned mental-cognitive retrospective activity of a speech subject – a real historical person or a fictional protagonist-narrator, reconstructing facts and events from personal experience (Bondareva 2019, p. 25).



Therefore, we are primarily talking about the texts of memories that circulate in the space of the memoir-autobiographical genre, which is formed as a result of the functioning of personal memory mechanisms.

2. Methods and materials

The research was conducted using a selection of both fictional and non-fictional texts that represent retrospective discourse. For the analysis of each text, a set of tailored methodological approaches was employed: contextual analysis, which provides reliable linguistic data on the functioning of relevant lexical units within their specific linguistic environments; elements of cognitive analysis, which aid in reconstructing the mental and cognitive activity of the speaker or narrator within retrospective discourse; analytical and descriptive methods, which support a comprehensive interpretation of the systematised linguistic material.

The material for researching the character of explication of the phenomenon of quasi-multiplicity of the author's self in the conditions of reconstruction of personally experienced stages of one's own life was German-language texts of autobiographical memoirs and texts of works of fiction, representing fictional memories of the main character-narrator, which belong to such German-language writers of the 19th – 20th centuries as Bertha von Suttner, Hans Fallada, Ernst Wiechert, Gunter Grass and Thomas Mann.

One of the authors of authentic autobiographies is the Austrian pacifist writer Bertha von Suttner (1843 – 1914), known as the first female winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (1905) and the author of the anti-war novel 'Waffen nieder!', a popular novel in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. Bertha von Suttner reconstructed her own life path, starting from her early childhood, in her voluminous book of memoirs 'Lebenserinnerungen'. In the autobiography of the German writer Hans Fallada (1893 – 1947), 'Damals bei uns daheim (Erlebtes, Erfahrenes und Erfundenes)', which has a chamber character and concentrates on the periods of childhood and adolescence, special attention is paid to the problems of psychological nature, which determined the peculiarities of personal formation and spiritual development of the narrator. The book of memoirs by Günter Grass (1927 – 2015), who was considered the 'conscience of the nation' in Germany and who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1999, and who wrote a kind of confession 'Beim Häuten der Zwiebel' about his service in the SS during his youth, had a bombshell effect on the general reading public. Interesting observations on the feelings and experiences of the self in childhood and adolescence are presented in the memoirs of Ernst Wiechert, a native of East Prussia, 'Wälder und Menschen. Eine Jugend'.

Since the mechanism of mental-cognitive activity of the speech subject to reconstruct their own past is universal, the material of the study includes nonfictional texts of retrospective discourse, one of which is the novel 'Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull' by Thomas Mann, a classic of German literature. In this novel, which is a parody of the 'novel of educa-



tion' and at the same time a brilliant stylisation of the classic novel of deceit, the charming adventurer Felix Krull recalls his life, where he works his way through life by methods that are far from respectable, but in full accordance with the mores of contemporary society.

3. Discussions and results

There is no doubt that during the period of fixation of memories, the author is in a different ontological phase of personal development compared to their depicted SELF, which is due to the natural temporal distance between the time of experience and the time of description by the speech subject of a particular event from their own life. It is important to emphasise that the distance between the mentioned SELF-poles is quite variable and directly depends on the depth of the narrator's immersion in the past reality.

During her time, the renowned German literary scholar Käte Hamburger, who examined the nature of the autobiographical novel, aptly identified the presence of two 'SELVES' within this genre. The first represents the 'present SELF,' corresponding to the writer's 'here and now' (Jetzt- und Hier-Origo des Schreibers), which narrates the second, earlier 'former SELF' as it undergoes various stages of its development (das seine Ich-Stadien durchlaufende Ich) (Hamburger 1957, p. 229).

It should be added that the representation of the dual essence of the autobiographical subject is interpreted in relevant literary studies under various nominations, which include, in particular, 'the narrating SELF' and 'the experiencing SELF' (Stanzel 1984), 'author' and 'autobiographical character' (Ginzburg 1976), 'the observing, sentimental SELF' and 'the naive SELF' (Picard 1978), 'the narrator' and 'the main character' (Finney 1985), etc. However, according to Nyubina, in autobiographical texts, the form SELF unites three personalities: the author, the subject, and the object of the story (Nyubina 2014, p. 190).

It is noteworthy that in pragmasemantic studies addressing the semantic stratification of the SELF as the subject of speech, terms such as the performative SELF and the descriptive SELF are particularly relevant in this context (cf.: Zolyan 2023).

In this sense, we still consider it logical to speak about the legitimacy of distinguishing such basic concepts as subject-reconstructor and subject-reconstruct in autobiographical narrative. By *subject-reconstructor*, we understand a speech subject who is *the closest* to the authentic historical personality of the author of the memoirs, or who represents a fictional narrator-protagonist who observes their own past from a certain temporal distance. In turn, *subject-reconstruct* is the embodiment of earlier hypostases of the author's SELF, which act exclusively within their spatiotemporal coordinates, each time centred on a specific episode from the reproduced past.

It is quite clear that the subject-reconstructor as the narrator's 'present SELF' occupies a dominant position in the semantic structure of the retrospective text, which allows him or her to integrate and process the cumulative life experience purposefully.



At the same time, however, one should not forget about the fact of natural alienation of the subject of literary creativity from the product of their labour, i.e. about the impossibility of exact matching of the historical personality of the writer and the subject-reconstructor due to the inevitable ontologically conditioned differences between the textual representation of the author and its referent, which is pointed out, in particular, by Chatman (Chatman 1978) and Docherty (Docherty 1990). In his time, Bakhtin wrote the following on this subject: 'The SELF as a narrator or writer on the event that has just happened to them is already outside the time and space in which this event took place, and it is as impossible to identify one's 'SELF' with the narrated 'SELF' as it is impossible to lift oneself by the hair' (Bakhtin 1975, p. 405).

In the context of these considerations, it should be noted that the hypertrophied accentuation of the plurality of the spiritual human SELF can certainly serve as a sign of pathological mental lability of the reflective personality of the author of the memoirs, an indicator of their inner hesitations and doubts about the adequacy of their behaviour and attitude to life. The self-portrait of such a vulnerable nature in youth, which managed to overcome the inferiority complex only with age, is presented in Fallada's autobiography 'Damals bei uns daheim (Erlebtes, Erfahrenes und Erfundenes)' ['Back Then At Home (Experiments, Experiences and Inventions)']. In the text fragment quoted below, it is noteworthy that the writer states that he has had episodes of realisation of even physical alienness of his personality, the recovery from which was marked for the author by a state of exaltation and intoxication with the happiness of returning to his unified, integral SELF. A formal sign of the implied heterogeneity of the autobiographer's Ego on the spiritual and physical levels is the spelling of the German pronoun *ich* with upper- and lower-case letters:

*Manchmal sah ich mich lange im Spiegel an. Bei der Betrachtung meines Gesichtes schien es mir dann, als sei dies ein falsches Gesicht, als müsse ich in Wirklichkeit ganz, ganz anders aussehen! Dann stiegen aus schon überwunden geglaubten Zeiten alte, schon traumhaft gewordene Erinnerungen auf an ein Ich, das ich auch war, aber anders, und vergingen wieder, wobei sie einen Nachgeschmack von bitterer Trauer hinterließen. Betrachtete ich mich aber nach dem Baden im Spiegel, so konnte eine Art Identitätsrausch über mich kommen. Hundertmal sagte ich mir vor: **Das bin ich! Ich! Ich! Hans Fallada! Das bin ich!** – Und dann warf ich mich wohl auch hin und heulte vor trunkenem Glück, daß es „Ich“ gab, daß ich „Ich“ war... [Sometimes I would look at myself in the mirror for a long time. When I looked at my face, it seemed to me as if it were a false face, as if I must actually look completely different! Then, from times I thought I had already overcome, old, dreamlike memories of a Self that was also I, but different, would rise up and fade away again, leaving behind an aftertaste of bitter sadness. But when I looked at myself in the mirror after bathing, a kind of identity frenzy would come over me. A hundred times I would repeat to myself: That's me! I! I! Hans Fallada! That's me! – And then I would probably throw myself down and howl with drunken joy that there was a 'Self', that self was 'I' ...] (boldface emphasis by the authors) (Fallada 1955, pp. 227 – 228).*

In accordance with the genre specificity of the autobiographical narrative, which belongs to the sphere of retrospective discourse, it is easy to as-



sume that the main variant of representation of the plurality of the semantic structure of the subject of speech activity will be the textual opposition of universal character 'present SELF' – 'past SELF', which is subject to obligatory explication. The realisation of this opposition is always carried out on the axes of the two-dimensional local-temporal continuum of the textual space that is characteristic of retrospective narration. The present time axis, or the presence axis, records various types of mental and cognitive activities of the 'present SELF' as a subject-reconstructor, who reflects and depicts personal past experience, while the past time axis, i.e. the preterit axis, reflects facts and events from the life of the 'past SELF', who acts as a subject-reconstruct.

As an example, we can cite a fragment of the memoirs of the famous German writer of the 20th century, Nobel Prize winner Gunter Grass 'Beim Häuten der Zwiebel', in which the author tells about his acquaintance in his youth with the work of Erich Maria Remarque. This episode is deeply embedded in the memory of the autobiographer, who assumes at the time of writing the book that his uncle, as well as himself, did not suspect that the novel 'Im Westen nichts Neues' belonged to the banned books in Germany, subject to public burning. What attracts attention is the fact of strengthening the presence axis of the narrative through the introduction of the lexical temporal marker of the present tense *bis heute* into the preterit context:

Ich (present SELF) **nehme an** (Präsens), daß mein Onkel nicht gewußt hat, daß „Im Westen nichts Neues“ zu den verbotenen Büchern **gehörte** (Präteritum), wie ja auch **ich** (past SELF) die Geschichte vom jämmerlichen Verrecken der jungen Freiwilligen des Ersten Weltkrieges **las** (Präteritum), ohne zu ahnen, daß dieser Roman zu den verbrannten Büchern gehört hatte. **Bis heute läßt** die verzögerte Wirkung früher Leseerfahrung nicht von mir **ab** (Präsens) [**I** (present SELF) **assume** (Present Simple) that my uncle didn't know that 'All Quiet on the Western Front' **was** one of the banned books (Past Simple), just as **I** (past SELF) **read** (Past Simple) the story of the miserable death of the young volunteers of the First World War without suspecting that this novel had been among the burned books. **To this day**, the delayed effect of early reading experiences **has not left me** (Present Perfect)] (boldface emphasis by the authors) (Grass 2006, p. 111).

Another variant of explication of quasi-multiplicity of the author's SELF in memoir-autobiographical texts should be considered the *fact of splitting* into an unlimited number of hypostases of the *subject-reconstructor* themselves. While the subject-reconstructor is verbally fixed in a specific point of time reference relevant to the time of writing the memoirs, i.e. a certain 'point of observation' (a term by Galich (1991)), their 'past' SELF is heterogeneous, if we mean constantly changing locally and temporally conditioned subject modifications, which every time correspond to a new reconstructed age stage in the author's life.

A convincing illustration of the above is the text fragment from Wiechert's autobiography 'Wälder und Menschen' quoted below, in which the 'past SELF' is made up of the 'past SELF'-1, referentially correlating with the personality of an adult, but still relatively young writer who has comp-



leted the manuscript of his first novel, and the 'past SELF'-2, marking the personality of a boy, i. e. the author as a child, who picked up a violin for the first time:

*Ich weiß nicht, wann Stolz, Seligkeit und Zweifel größer gewesen sein mögen, ob in der Stunde, als **ich** ('past SELF'-1) die Handschrift meines ersten Romans beendete, oder in dem Augenblick, als **ich** ('past SELF'-2) meine erste Geige unter das Kinn hob und zum erstenmal den Bogen über die dunklen, geflochtenen Saiten gleiten ließ [I don't know when pride, bliss, and doubt may have been greater, whether in the hour when **I** ('past SELF'-1) finished handwriting my first novel, or in the moment when **I** ('past SELF'-2) lifted my first violin under my chin and let the bow glide over the dark, braided strings for the first time]* (boldface emphasis by the authors) (Wiechert 1956, p. 36).

Finally, a very curious form of realisation of the heterogeneity of the SELF in German-language autobiographical texts can be represented by the semantic opposition 'conscious SELF' – 'unconscious SELF', which is adequately embodied in one of the fragments of the memoirs of the 19th-century German pacifist writer von Suttner's 'Lebenserinnerungen'. The author, when describing her baptism, about which she knows, of course, only from the recollections of her relatives, discusses the fundamental heterogeneity of the 'conscious SELF' (1), marked in the text by the pronoun *Ich* with a capital letter, and, accordingly, of the 'unconscious SELF' (2), expressed by the form *ich* with a lowercase letter. At the same time, in the first sentence of the quoted textual example, the pronoun *ich*, beginning with a lowercase letter, still correlates with the 'conscious SELF' of the autobiographer:

*Dieser Taufe ... habe **ich** (1) nicht beigewohnt. Unter „**ich**“ (2) verstehe ich nämlich nicht die lebendige körperliche Form, in der dasselbe enthalten ist, sondern jenes Selbstbewußtsein, das sowohl in der ersten Kindheit als auch öfters im ganzen Lauf des Lebens abwesend ist: im Schlaf, in der Ohnmacht, in der Narkose und in gar vielen Augenblicken, wo man nur atmet und nicht denkt, nicht schaut, nicht hört, wo man nur so vegetativ weiterexistiert, bis das **Ich** (1) wieder in Funktion tritt [I (1) did not attend this baptism. By 'I' (2) I do not mean the living physical form in which it is contained, but rather that self-consciousness that is absent both in early childhood and frequently throughout life: in sleep, in unconsciousness, in anesthesia, and in many moments when one only breathes and does not think, does not see, does not hear, when one merely continues to exist vegetatively until the 'I' (1) resumes its function]* (boldface emphasis by the authors) (Suttner 1970, p. 36).

A similar situation is observed in one of the episodes of the fictional memories of the social knave Felix Krull in Thomas Mann's novel 'Die Bekennnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull', where the protagonist-narrator also mentions the situation of his birth, known to him only by eyewitnesses, and expresses the idea that his newly born SELF is undoubtedly alien to his present adult and therefore fully conscious SELF. In this case, *ich* (1) is the auto-nomination of the speech subject at the moment of recollection, and *ich* (2) as an indicator of the unconscious SELF is duplicated in the text in the form of the objectified auto-nomination *jenes frühe und fremde Wesen*, which contributes to the effect of the narrator's defamiliarisation of the earliest hypostasis of his personality:



*Meine Geburt ging, wenn **ich** (1) recht unterrichtet bin, nur sehr langsam ... vonstatten, und zwar hauptsächlich deshalb, weil **ich** (2) mich – wenn **ich** (1) jenes frühe und fremde Wesen (2) als „**ich**“ (1) bezeichnen darf – außerordentlich untätig und teilnahmslos dabei verhielt, die Bemühungen meiner Mutter fast gar nicht unterstützte ... [My birth, if **I** (1) am correctly informed, took place very slowly..., mainly because **I** (2) – if **I** (1) may call that early and strange being (2) '**I**' (1) – behaved extraordinarily inactively and apathetically, hardly supporting my mother's efforts at all ...] (boldface emphasis by the authors) (Mann 1956, p. 272).*

Thus, the study has shown that the phenomenon of heterogeneity of the semantic structure of the speech subject reconstructing their own past is characterised by significant diversity and variability of the ways of explication in the texts of retrospective discourse.

4. Conclusion

Summarising the above, we can state that the complex structure of human Ego-identity as an object of cumulative interdisciplinary research becomes especially relevant within the framework of the modern anthropocentric-oriented paradigm of academic thinking. Cognitive linguistics, which has been actively developing in recent decades, makes a significant contribution to the solution of this problem, contributing to the establishment and consolidation of cause-and-effect relations between the functioning of mental processes, conditioned by the activity of the human psyche, and the ways of realising these processes in our speech activity.

Works that aim to capture and interpret the specific features of verbalising the flow of mental and cognitive operations—conducted as part of a speaker's retrospective reflection on facts and events from their own or others' past experiences—can occupy a distinctive place within such studies. At the same time, it is essential to emphasise that any reconstruction of experience is inherently individual and personal in nature.

The re-creation of fragments of reality, which are components of the past and, accordingly, distanced in space and time from the moment of their fixation and comprehension, is traditionally directly reflected in the textual continuum of the retrospective discourse we have identified. The most representative are texts of the memoir-autobiographical genre, which can have a traditional non-fictional character but can also be regarded as a product of genre mimicry when it comes to the personal memories of a fictional narrator.

In addition to the facts and events that took place in the external world in the past reality, the authors of memoirs may be attracted by certain moments that took place in their inner world. As a consequence, autobiographies are subject to creative reconstruction not only of the profound mental shocks and vivid emotions experienced by the writer but also of the corresponding reflections on the relativity of the essence of their own personality. In such a situation, the factor of ontologically conditioned quasi-multiplicity



of the SELF receives a new interpretation and textual representation in the form of various variants, which confirms the active nature of the speech subject's functioning in the conditions of retrospective discourse.

At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge the undeniable fact that when analysing the peculiarities of explication of the semantic structure of the SELF, one should not fall into existentialist extremes in the spirit of the absolute incomprehensibility of our essence due to its constant real and eventual changeability. When investigating the phenomenon of the ontologically conditioned plurality of the Ego, reflected in the split of the subject of speech activity in the texts of retrospective discourse, we are quite aware of the fact that any reflective writer retains the identity of his or her self in biographical terms, which is a guarantee of the integrity of the substantive core of the personality of the author of memoirs.

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The authors

Dr Ludmila M. Bondareva, Professor, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Kaliningrad, Russia.

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9631-0860

E-mail: lbondareva@kantiana.ru

Dr Anna O. Budarina, Professor, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Kaliningrad, Russia.

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8878-7183

E-mail: abudarina@kantiana.ru

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ФЕНОМЕН ГЕТЕРОГЕННОСТИ РЕЧЕВОГО СУБЪЕКТА В ТЕКСТАХ НЕМЕЦКОЯЗЫЧНОГО РЕТРОСПЕКТИВНОГО ДИСКУРСА

Л. М. Бондарева, А. О. Бударина

Балтийский федеральный университет им. И. Канта,
Россия, 236041, Калининград, ул. Александра Невского, 14

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Освещены особенности самопрезентации субъекта ретроспективной ментально-когнитивной деятельности, зафиксированные в текстах воспоминаний немецкоязычных писателей XIX – XX веков. В качестве языкового материала также использованы



тексты художественных произведений, представляющих собой функциональные воспоминания рассказчика и главного героя повествования в одном лице. Новизна исследования определяется лингвокогнитивным подходом к проблеме взаимодействия рефлексизирующей личности писателя / героя с собственным прошлым Я в процессе реконструкции личного опыта. Предварительно констатирован факт онтологически обусловленной неоднородности человеческого Эго как результата естественного процесса индивидуально-личностного развития. Приведена дефиниция понятия «ретроспективный дискурс», релевантного в контексте осуществленного исследования и референциально соотносящегося с мемуарно-автобиографической прозой. Рассмотрены виды автобиографического Я, упоминаемые в соответствующих литературоведческих источниках. Выявляются формы экспликации гетерогенности речевого субъекта в немецкоязычных автобиографических текстах, основной из которых служит семантическая оппозиция «Я настоящее – Я прошлое», или «субъект-реконструктор – субъект-реконструкт». В качестве очередных форм репрезентации субстанциальной расщепленности структуры речевого субъекта интерпретированы факт вариативности эвентуальной множественности субъекта-реконструкта и оппозиция «Я сознательное – Я бессознательное».

Ключевые слова: эго-идентичность, ретроспективный дискурс, субъект-реконструктор, субъект-реконструкт, семантическая оппозиция

Об авторах

Людмила Михайловна Бондарева, доктор филологических наук, профессор, Балтийский федеральный университет им. И. Канта, Калининград, Россия.

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9631-0860

E-mail: lbondareva@kantiana.ru

Анна Олеговна Бударина, доктор педагогических наук, профессор, Балтийский федеральный университет им. И. Канта, Калининград, Россия.

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8878-7183

E-mail: abudarina@kantiana.ru

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