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TRUST AND THE STRUCTURE OF MEDIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The paper analyses the impact of the factor of trust on the structure of media discourse. The study is based on the texts published in the German newspaper «Die Zeit». The chosen texts reflect public, political and media agenda of the present days. In the analysis, trust is interpreted as both a cognitive and discursive phenomenon, because it influences conceptualization of knowledge about the world in the process of media text generation and perception. It also plays a significant role in the choice of particular discourse strategies and selecting ways of achieving specific cognitive and communicative aims.

The notion of trust as a cognitive factor can partially explain why fake news has become so effective in the modern mass media discourse. The texts of fake news are constructed in such a way that the recipient trusts them and the media source until the content of the messages and evolving view of the situation are in compliance with the worldview already existing in the recipient's mind. The explanatory force of the phenomenon under discussion can be related not only to media discourse, but to other formats of discourse as well.

1. Introduction

Social and psychological distance between discourse participants is one of the most significant parameters used in the research of speech acts. This statement can be confirmed by multiple studies with various research aims. In order to develop this point, it can be suggested that trust as a type of relationship between discourse participants can be treated as a relevant factor which influences discourse organisation and text structure. Trust is one of the manifestations of relationships between discourse participants. Therefore, trust can be treated as a cognitive and discursive factor which influences the choice of means and ways of solving specific communicative and cognitive problems in a particular context.

Trust is a significant psychological factor for almost any act of human activity. In a situation of uncertainty trust becomes especially important. The higher the degree of uncertainty for a particular individual is, the more important is the role of trust in one's discourse partner, in social institutions, in conventional values and ideas developed by a particular society and spread by different sources of information, in new and/or the so-called "new" information which appears in manifold media sources, etc.

It follows that trust can only be based on the expectancy norms, according to which interaction between language speakers in a specific culture is organised, language means for a specific communicative and cognitive task are chosen, and a degree of truthfulness/ faithfulness / accuracy / falsehood / improbability / manipulative character of the utterance is evaluated in a particular communicative context.

2. Problem Statement

It is clear that people can trust *a priori* only in those who have never deceived or let them down before, whose prior actions confirmed one's expectations. In other words, one can show trust only when information about the world perceived by an individual complies with their worldview, i.e. when the recipient is able to categorize incoming more or less familiar information. Obviously, in a situation when false utterances (or lies) comply with the expectations of a group of recipients, these messages and texts cannot be perceived as untrue (in this respect see the arguments presented in (Antos, 2017).

Since the significance of trust in the analysis of actions of the participants of discourse cannot be underestimated, it is unlikely that trust will be less significant for the non-self / different individual. Strange or unexpected as it may seem for quite a large number of researchers of texts in general and media texts in particular (since trust is a rather ephemeral substance!), the impact of communicative and pragmatic factor of "trust" on the process and results of communication can be more or less objectively traced by looking at how discourse participants choose language means for solving cognitive and communicative problems.

Culturally and anthropologically significant concepts of "the self", "non-self", "different"are understood here in line with the position expressed by L.I. Grishaeva and L.V. Tsurikova (Grishaeva & Tsurikova 2008). This approach, which includes the detailed criteria for the delineation of the three concepts, parameters of their comparison, their functional potential, properties and the environment of their existence, prototypical semantics, the nature and epistemic significance is discussed in more detail in (Grishaeva 2009; Grishaeva2015).

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3. Research Questions

One of the research questions asked here concerns the factors that influence the speaker's choice of communicative strategies. The choice of preferred strategy of interaction (e.g., to explain, prove, inform, etc.), on the one hand, largely depends on the knowledge of the author of media text about the features of the addressee (i.e., a group of people at which the text is aimed). On the other hand, the degree of effectiveness of the writer's message influences the possibility of publishing a text in a particular media resource, the frequency of the media source interpretations of facts being addressed by the language speakers (in other words – popularity of the texts with the readers), the history and reputation of the media source in a particular cultural context. So, one can easily claim that mutual trust between the addresser and the addressee is significant for the semantic, syntactic, functional, thematic and formal organisation of the text. Namely, trust is reflected in:

- the choice of a particular approach to the perceived situation, i.e. the choice of parameters of the perception frame through which the information about the world is acquired. This, in turn, influences the results of the processes of conceptualisation and categorisation of the knowledge about the world;

- the choice of standards of reflection and interpretation of the information perceived by the audience;

- the evaluation of the degree of accuracy and truthfulness of the received information;

- the choice of a particular way of interpretation of the actions of other individuals;

- the acceptance / denial of another point of view;

- the choice of whether to apply mechanisms of critical thinking or not;

- focusing on certain parameters of conceptualization and categorization, e.g. on pure identification or on identification which involves evaluation of information in a specific act of perception;

- the choice of the conventional prototype for the categorization of the knowledge about the world (a detailed analysis of various examples is given in (Grishaeva, 2014).

Trust as a communicative and pragmatic factor is especially relevant for evaluation as a specific type of human activity. In a situation when two discourse participants need to coordinate their worldviews, both the individual generating the text and the individual perceiving the text, should have a rather high degree of compliance of their worldviews, since the conformity of the individual's knowledge to the image of the situation evolving in the process of perception of a specific media text, determines not only the individual's further use of a particular media resource, but, what is even more important, his/her actions in the real world and the potential changes in the individual's personal and group identity.

There exists a number of perception frame parameters which should necessarily be taken into account. These parameters are formed by the already mentioned factors of "self", "non-self", and "different". Perception frame is a model used by individuals for the selection of perceived information. Qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the perception frame predetermine the results of conceptualization and categorization of knowledge about the world. Factors, significant for the analysis, such as the purpose of activity in a particular period of time, one's general background and level of education, life experience and individuals' cognitive and communicative flexibility, their lack or presence of experience in intercultural communication, their ability to consciously or subconsciously take into

account the aberration of evaluative judgements in intercultural communication also interact with the factor of 'trust'.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the present research can be formulated as follows: it is necessary to study the influence of trust as a discourse factor on verbal communication of language speakers. It should be noted that language is treated as a means of cognition and communication. Consequently, the aim can be achieved by analyzing texts, media texts in particular, since media publications are especially sensitive to changes in discourse practices of a specific language community. The analysis of texts will allow us to describe the influence of trust on the choice of language means and discourse strategies and, consequently, on the semantic and syntactic micro- and macrostructure of media texts. It is clear that the analyzed texts are a good source of data in yet another respect: they reflect current agenda of a specific cultural and language community.

The significance of trust for the recipient's interpretation of a media text can be demonstrated by the example of analysis of the article, published in March 2017 by the German newspaper "Die Zeit" (Bernd Ulrich. Alles wächst / Die Zeit, 23. März 2017, #13, S. 1).

The article chosen for the present analysis is a good illustration to our discussion of the factor of 'trust' for the following reasons:

1) thetext was published at the turning point in modern history, when multiple new social, political and economic changes in the world and in Europe were introduced; this historical moment was important for the modern German society, since it was short before the elections of the German Chancellor;

2) thepublication fully and thoroughly reflects public, political and media agenda of the present days;

3) the author analyses the latest tendencies characteristic of various politically active social groups in Germany;

4) thetext appeals to indisputably positive and overriding values of the German society;

5) the publication functions as both a tool for consolidation of the supporters of democratic and tolerant social progress (no matter how this fact can be interpreted by some people) and as a tool for demarcation between "us" and "them";

6) the article was published on the front page of the newspaper;

7) thetext of the article is preceded by the following comment: «*Das Erwachen der Demokraten / Awakening of the Democrats*», which promotes optimistic ideas and expectations of the author of the publication. Apparently, the same can be said about some political groups, the activity of which is significant for the German society as a whole.

The German newspaper text was chosen to illustrate our theoretical points presented above, because the newspaper "Die Zeit" has a high reputation on the international media market. Its publications are aimed at the educated audience. The newspaper purposefully supports analytical approach to events and explicitly states its position, which does not come as a shock or surprise for its readership.

5.   Research Methods

Methodologically, the influence of the factor of "trust" on the micro- and macrostructure of the media texts can be traced in the course of analysis of the discourse structure and language means used by the writer to create the text. The micro-level of the text is comprised by its semantic and syntactic structure, discussed topics, and functions of certain clause combinations. The macro-level of the text is defined by all aspects of its structural organization including the role of some combinations of clauses.

This means that at the first stage of analysis it is necessary to define the range of language means chosen by the writer to refer to people who take part in the described event. The semantics and structural properties of these language means allow the researcher to use linguistic methods of analysis[1] with the aim of obtaining verifiable data concerning the properties and functional potential of language means. These methods also give the opportunity to see how the writer categorizes knowledge about the world, e.g., whether this categorization is implicit or explicit, or whether the new information is related to any axiological category (Grishaeva 2014; Grishaeva 2009).

The analysis of the impact of the factor of trust on the organization of the text presupposes researcher's attention to the text structures, e.g., the use of nominative groups, collocations with connotative meaning, actional chains, thema-rhematic progression in the text, the relation between ways and means used for solving a range of communicative tasks within particular clause combinations or in the text as a meaningful whole (Grishaeva 2014).

To demonstrate the explanatory force of the analytical procedure suggested above, we will use certain steps of the analysis for the illustrative purpose.

6.   Findings

The fact that the author trusts in his readers and that they share and / or accept the writer's evaluation of the events becomes clear when we look at the types and form of evaluative statements that the writer uses for the description of well-known German politicians and their actions (*Gabriel, BrandtundBebel – diesedreiineinemAtemzug, daweißmangleich: Irgendetwasstimmthiernicht, Habermas übertreibt*) and for the people who are popular with the Germans and whose activity is ranked high as good examples or role models. By using these statements the author helps the readers to categorize the information and to support assessment of performance of well-known people, e.g. *JürgenHabermas (einerderwichtigstenPhilosophenderwestlichenWelt) – dergestrengeDenker – AugustBebel – WillyBrandt.*

In this sense it is interesting to note how sharp (sometimes almost too much) characteristics of modern European and world politicians and their actions are: *SigmarGabriel, dasMachtbiest – MartinSchulz. Der noch nie mehr als eine Kleinstadt regiert hat, wird zum Hoffnungsträger einer ganzen Generation und zum hoch konzentrierten Kanzlerkandidaten – Angela Merkel, die einstmals Mühe hatte, sich gegenüber den US-Präsidenten zu behaupten, lässt den seltsamen Mann, der da gerade im Oval Office sitzt, an ihrer Coolness einfach abprallen, als wäre es nichts – Die führenden Politiker sind alle groß*

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[1]These methods include semantic analysis of lexical meaning, comparing literal and non-literal meanings of a word, analysis of connotations, analysis of the degree of abstractness of meaning, analysis of the use of a particular grammatical form in its primary or secondary function, etc.

geworden in einer postmodernen, fast postpolitischen Zeit, ausgerüstet für Probleme mittleren Ausmaßes – Und plötzlich sehen sich diese Gabriels und Schulzens und Merkels mit einer historischen Situation konfrontiert, für die sie nicht gebaut sind. Sie sind aber die Politiker, die im Moment zur Stelle sind, und sie schrauben sich – daher kommt wohl die neue Milde des Professors – allem Anschein nach allmählich hoch zu ihren Aufgaben – Zeichen und Wunder geschehen, wenn auch oft noch im Stillen – j-n hart angehen – etwas ist j-m auf bewunderungswürdige Weise gelungen – seinen selbstgewählten Rücktritt zu seinem größten Erfolg machen – Partei, die ihren Namen behalten konnte, weil sie sich ihres Namens nicht schämen musste – eine großartige Rede einer integren Person und eines würdigen Nachfolgers August Bebels. Interestingly, theauthor does not consider it necessary to present arguments in support of his own judgements. It looks like the readers do not need these arguments either, since the writer has a very clear idea about his readers, their expectations, their knowledge about current affairs. Therefore, the writer believes that the readers do not require detailed comments to be explicitly stated in order to substantiate his judgements. At the same time, the readers have no difficulty in recognizing irony, sarcasm or a kind humour referring to a particular political figure. It is apparent that this could not be possible without trust that exists between discourse participants.

Strictly speaking, the evaluation of the author's colleagues' actions cannot be taken as either politically correct or tolerant: *Die angelsächsische Presse klatscht fasziniert und neidisch Beifall – Selbst die mitgereisten deutschen Journalisten, die früher in Washington zu einer gewissen atlantischen Unterwürfigkeit neigten, stellen Donald Trump nun in dieser neuen deutschen freundlichen Unerbittlichkeit genau die Fragen, die er absolut nicht hören will.*

In the same direct manner the author describes those features of the modern society, which he evaluates as positive: *Dieses allmähliche Aufwachen im Angesicht der autoritären Gefahr, dieses Aufwachen zur Größe der politischen Situation erlebt man beileibe nicht nur in Deutschland <...> – Unversehens sieht sich die unpolitischste Generation aller Zeiten in die politische Situation seit 1945 gestellt. Und was tut sie? Sie erwacht, sie demonstriert, und sie engagiert sich in Parteien. Natürlich gilt das nur für eine Minderheit, aber politisch war seit eh und je immer nur eine Minderheit, auch 1968.*

The same kind of evaluation applies to the processes, currently important for the modern German society: positive and desirable, from the author's point of view –*für seine Werte aufstehen; eine ganz gut funktionierende Demokratie, eingebettet in einen beträchtlichen Wohlstand*, as well as negative and undesirable: *die EU ruinieren (im Denken des deutschen Philosophen einer der schlimmsten Vorwürfe überhaupt).*

It should be noted that nominations of the modern society are quite diverse and metaphorical: *Wahlen in den Niederlanden – der Aufstand gegen die Korruption in Rumänien – der Mut eines proeuropäischen Präsidentschaftskandidaten in Frankreich; Dornröschenschlaf des Wohlergehens*. However, these nominative units may seem too harsh to the modern readers.

The factor of readers' trust in the author of the text allows for an adequate – without the slightest hint of irony – perception of the optimistic attitude conveyed by the concluding lines of the article. The words sound not as a heart-rendering and inappropriate pathos, but as a hopeful wish: *Denn die Worte, die da auf Deutsch, Englisch und Französisch fielen, vermochten den politischen Raum, der sich an diesem Abend auftat, nicht wirklich zu füllen. Dennoch war in der vielsprachigen Zugewandtheit der drei* [gemeint

sind Emmanuel Macron, Sigmar Gabriel, Jürgen Habermas] *ein neues Europa zu spüren. Selbstverständlich ist nichts an alldem stabil, und doch ist es mehr als nichts, viel mehr.*

It is worth noting that the article under analysis was published in a situation of uncertainty (see, for example, the utterance *Selbstverständlichistnichts an alldemstabil, und dochistesmehralsnichts, vielmehr*, which refers to a potential range of alternative options) or the name of the article itself – *Alleswächst,* which sets the perception frame for the whole text and is at the same time a reference to a potential choice of options. In the situation of uncertainty trust as a social and psychological phenomenon becomes especially important for all discourse participants. However, one should note, that trust as a factor that influences micro- and macro-structure of the text, is important not only in the situation of uncertainty, but also in many genres of fiction literature (see, for instance, fairy tales, fantasy novels, detective stories, riddles, etc.).

The analysis of a variety of language means used by the writer to explains why and for what purpose the author prefers axiologically loaded words and constructions (e.g., words with negative meaning, negative connotations, tropes and grammatical constructions with axiological meaning which make reference, either directly or implicitly, to cultural values and to both positive and negative evaluations which are important for the members of a particular community. The dominance of axiological categorization in the process of the writer's conceptualization of events proves the importance of the factor of "trust" for the interaction between discourse participants: explicit expression of negative judgements in public and/or official communication has its limits in any culture, and members of a particular cultural community are well aware of these limits.

7.   Conclusion

It is clear that the result of the interpretation of the content of the media text largely depends on the influence of the factor of trust upon the choice of ways and means of solving communicative and cognitive problems. This factor should be treated as simultaneously cognitive and discursive, since it influences both the cognitive interpretation of the information perceived by the individual, its nature and amount, and the choice of discursive strategy in interaction. The choice of the latter, clearly, specifies the selection of various language means needed for solving specific communicative and cognitive problems, i.e., picking out a specific nominative strategy for referring to a gamut of objects existing in the real world, or to their properties, processes, actions and conditions, attributes, situations and sets of situations).

Knowledge shared by all language speakers and commonly accepted in a particular culture norms of expectancy serve as a cognitive base. The knowledge forms the structure of the group identity for every individual. It is also influenced by various effects of individual and group perception of information. Namely, these effects determine the types of the information perceived by individuals and the order of conceptualization and in which category the new information will fall.

The processes mentioned above can partially explain why fake news has become so effective in the modern media discourse. The texts of fake news are constructed in such a way that the recipient trusts them and the media source until the content of the messages and evolving view of the situation are in compliance with the worldview already existing in the recipient's mind (who in this case functions as an individual and a group member at the same time). Consequently, a high level of cognitive and communicative flexibility

can be interpreted as a remedy for unconditional trust in potentially fake news and for possible acts of manipulation.

The explanatory force of the phenomenon under discussion can be related not only to media discourse, but to other formats of discourse as well. Even such a thing as a friendly rudeness can be explained with the concept of trust between discourse participants. This opportunity sets new research goals and perspectives and offers new approaches to studying language as a means of handling communicative and cognitive tasks.

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