

WUT 2020
10th International Conference “Word, Utterance, Text: Cognitive, Pragmatic and Cultural Aspects”

HEADLINES OF THE BIGGEST CUBAN NEWSPAPER: SOVIET TRADITION – IMAGE OF THE WORLD

Alexey Pustovalov (a)*, Anna Morozova (b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Perm State National Research University; 15, Bukireva street, Perm, Russia, theyareeverywhere@gmail.com

(b) Chelyabinsk State University; 129, BratyeV Kashirinykh st, Chelyabinsk, Russia, roxfan@rambler.ru

Abstract

The article touches upon the headlines of the biggest Cuban newspaper “Granma”. They are under consideration as the examples of heritage of the Soviet journalistic tradition and in aspect of their correspondence to the demands of contemporary media market. The analysis is preceded by the characteristic of Russia in English-speaking and Spanish-speaking mass media; it claims the mostly negative character of media image in the country. The article also shows the positive character of the Russian-Cuban relations, observed both in dynamics and in their contemporary situation. The newspaper headlines are analyzed as the presentation of these relations and the relations with the USA, when the question about the fight for Cuba independence is still topical. The method of Internet search is used in two variants: searching the latest news (October 2019 – January 2020) and the expanded search of headlines for several years. The analysis of headlines clarifies the image of the world, presented by the newspaper, with the most important parts of the axiological opposition being ours (friendly countries – Russia, Venezuela, Cuba) and theirs (the USA and the Western countries under the American influence). The article notes the influence of the Soviet journalistic tradition: a part of newspaper headlines are specifically general, abstract, ideologically clear, they are used in the materials with “eternal” problems describing the elements of the Cuban image of the world. The other headlines, close to the present standards of the Internet journalism, are encountered in the materials about the current topical world events.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Cuba, Granma, headlines, media image, image of the world, Soviet tradition.



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1. Introduction

In our research we turn to the headlines of the biggest Cuban newspaper – “Granma”, trying to analyze the image of the world, which they show to their people and to the foreign reader as well. Such an approach – the analysis of the country through the newspaper headlines – was and still is used quite actively (Kovach, 2019; Vereschinskaya, 2011; Zharina, 2019, etc). Analyzing the newspaper we consider only such a part of the image of the world as media image. It interests us as a phenomenon, deliberately created by the “Granma” employees – differing from the chaotic image of the world created by the Cubans (and those who are interested in the country, travelling there, reading about it etc.).

2. Problem Statement

The relations with Cuba, the Cuban culture is what has interested the Russian for over half the century; the Cuban problems are still acute nowadays. Thus, for example, the article “Cuba” in the Russian-speaking sector of Wikipedia (Cuba- Wikipedia, 2020) is one of the most demanded: on average it counts 1.5-2 thousand (!) addresses daily. Cuba preserves the interest for the Russians not only as the country of Che Gevara and Fidel Castro, but as the resort – the state with hospitable, friendly people, warm sea and beaches, cheap touristic service (Gegelova, Ramires, & Rebrova, 2019).

So it is important to understand what problems are shown by the largest newspaper, which is the face of this people. This interests us due to some reasons.

Nowadays the media image of Russia in the world informational space is far from ideal. Thus, the USA and Great Britain, the largest representatives of the English-speaking sector, one of the most significant in the world, long to form its image as “of critical threat” (Kolbaya, 2018), underlining such features as corrupt governmental structure, inactive people, absence of real democracy etc, not straining at forging (Zharina, 2019). Spain, the biggest country of the Spanish-speaking sector (which includes Cuba), also do not feel pity for Russia: its leading newspapers (“El Pais” and “El Mundo”) contain many texts of negative towards Russia character (Oleynikov, 2019), demonizing and mocking (Oleynikov & Slavina, 2019).

As for the attitude of the Cuban press to Russia, it was usually positive. Undoubtedly, we may speak about some tension in relations after the Soviet Union break-down, when the Russian study center of infantry was sent out from Cuba and the only Western Russian center of radio electronic tracing was shut down, so Cuba lost significant financing – around 200 million dollars a year (Voiku, 2019, p. 70); the changes in Russia were negatively perceived in 1980-1990s: thus, one of the articles in the newspaper “Granma” called perestroika as “con gam” (engañabobos) (Voiku, 2019, p. 75).

The present Cuban press, as the latest sources testify, is quite loyal to Russia; they underline that “the positive image the Cuban population has about Russia and Russians have about Cuba prevails over the negative one” (Gegelova et al., 2019, p. 540), they stress “the friendly attitude of the quality mass media towards Russia” (Voiku, 2019, p. 77), the country is considered convenient for travelling, education, tourism (the country of “beautiful landscapes” Gegelova et al., 2019, p. 537). Thus, Cuba is one of the few foreign countries which continuously shows the positive image of Russia nowadays.

We cannot but notice that the image of Cuba was not so univocal for Russians and it also underwent a certain evolution. In 1960s (and later) young socialistic Cuba in the course of dramatic events (the Caribbean crisis of 1962) was able to stand for its independence from the USA with our help and this image was greatly romanticized: the Cuban revolutionaries, freedom-loving Cuban people were praised in songs, placards, pictures, fiction books etc. In 1990s there came the period of cold relation, a more critical attitude to Cuba (Yarullina, 2012). In the media image of Cuba of that time one could find such undesirable characteristics as poverty, violation of human rights, absence of political freedom (Yarullina, 2012). But nowadays our presentation of Cuba is truly positive: it is considered as “safe”, as a good place for “family holiday” and, what is interesting, as the country with a high “level of happiness” (!) (Gegelova et al., 2019, p. 538).

3. Research Questions

What basic problems do we find observing the largest newspapers of this country?

How does Cuba see Russia, the USA and itself?

May we find any influence of the Russian journalism of the Soviet period on the Cuban newspaper headlines?

What types of headlines can we distinguish in these newspapers?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to try investigating the attitude of Cuba towards Russia nowadays and towards other countries, whose politics influence it.

5. Research Methods

In our research we used the following methods: historical and cultural (understanding the Russian-Cuban relations in the historical dynamics), cross-cultural (analyzing the perception of our culture and other cultures by Cubans as well as the evolution of our own perception of Cuba), linguistic (analyzing the linguistic component of the Cuban newspaper headlines).

Within the course of the analysis we used the method of Internet search in two its variants.

The first one is the search in the newspaper: “Granma” headlines in the news feed of the RSS-aggregator “Inoreader”: it allows following the latest news (October 2019-January 2020).

The second one is the expanded search in “Google”, which allows searching on the site of the newspaper “Granma” <http://www.granma.cu/> and finding the headlines for several years (Granma..., 2020). The search was fulfilled through the address line of the browser “Chrome” with the commands like “keyword site:granma.cu”: for example, «Fidel site:granma.cu» «Che Guevara site:granma.cu» etc. We used the expanded search when we wanted to go deeper into the theme of the search – in those cases when we were sure that the object is an important component of the image of the world, created by the newspaper.

6. Findings

Nowadays the headlines of the Russian mass media (like most headlines of the world news media) are constructed in the way of the Western school. The headlines of Internet mass media first of all must inform on what the material contains. The headline is the “representation of the event”, “the announcement of the event, described in the text” (Vorontsova, 2017, p. 22); its most important functions are nominative and informative (Uvarova, 2018). It is meant to have such elements as succinctness and briefness (telling about the event in less than 7-10 words), the presence of verbs in the past (adding dynamics to the happened action), the specification of the place of action and the character (Amzin, 2011). (Such headlines are more common for contemporary reader, often finding some newspaper material after the search for interesting information; if such information is not present in the headline, then the material will not draw the attention). These rules are followed by the Cuban newspapers only partially.

It is interesting that even the first address helps noticing a great similarity of the “Granma” headlines with those which were some decades ago in our newspapers. The main accent was not on what is in the material, but on the necessary propaganda: ideological was more important than informing. As Amzin (2011) rightfully states: “The difference between the Soviet and Western mass media of the last century lies within the fact that propaganda went first and profit went last” (p. 14).

The Soviet reader is accustomed to the following: the headlines like “Let’s do and overdo”, “City and village on a new stage”, “Victory way”, “Creation of a new man”, “Tone of construction”, “Five-year plans into life!” etc. wandered from one newspaper to another. Such headlines make it impossible to understand the following content of the article. The practice of online mass media in 1990-2000s showed that such a type of headline is not competitive nowadays, it is not found with search engines, and no Internet user sees it.

The Cuban editions (the Liberty Island has two main ones: the central organ of the party – the newspaper “Granma” and the newspaper of young Communists “Juventud Rebelde”) (Granma..., 2020; Juventud Rebelde..., 2020) – do not need to fight for attention: readers have no other option. The Internet did not become the highly competitive environment: it is still slow and expensive and only foreigners could use it until 2008. So, the Cuban journalists had no need to make the headlines found quickly in the Internet; it was more important to make them “ideologically correct” the way it was in our country in the past decades.

Not surprisingly, we may see one- or two-component headlines in the latest issues of “Granma” like «Laberintos» («Labyrinth»), «Parrandeando» («Leisure»), «Su huella» («His trace»), «Opacas pinceladas» («Opaque masks»), «Puntos cardinales» («World countries»), «Un abrazo del arte» («Hugs of art»), «La orden de zarpar» («The order of swimming») – the headlines are “nothing”; reading them does not help understanding the further plot.

The other – not more difficult – headlines have a hidden hint at some ideologically colored content in the following publications: «Listos los refuerzos» («Reinforcement is ready»), «Repensar la pedagogía» («Rethink pedagogics»), «Indagadora y exigente» («Interrogating and demanding»), «Ni ángeles ni demonios» («Neither angels nor demons»), «Rivalidades» («Rivalry») and even «Trabajemos con igual intensidad por lo grande y lo cotidiano» («Let us work with the same intensiveness for great and casual»).

Quite many headlines (sometimes looking like a slogan, a call) are about the heroes of the Cuban liberation. They look like the film or book titles:

– «Legado de Fidel» («Fidel's heritage»), «Fidel, humanista» («Fidel, humanist»), «Fidel y su pueblo» («Fidel and his people»), «Fidel y el imposible» («Fidel and the impossible»), «La Mesa de Fidel» («Fidel's table») – about Fidel Castro;

– «La muerte del Che Guevara» («The death of Che Gevara »), «Ernesto, médico en México» («Ernesto, a doctor in Mexico»), «El Che, un joven para todos los tiempos» («Che is forever young»), «¡Hasta siempre, Comandante!» («Good bye, commandant!»), «Che, desde la unidad latinoamericana» («Che, of Latin American unity») – about Ernesto Che Gevara;

– «Digno homenaje a Martí» («Worthy homage to Marty»), «José Martí: el pueblo como guía» («Jose Marty: the people as a guide »), «Martí, vencedor de la muerte» («Marty, the death conqueror»), «El rescate de José Martí» («The rescue of Jose Marty»), «Visiones de Martí» («Visions of Marty»), «José Martí, nuestra idea del bien» («Jose Marty, our idea of good»), «José Martí sempre nos acompanha» («Jose Marty always accompanies us») – about Jose Marty.

These headlines obviously aim at delivering the most important elements of the image of the world to the reader – some basic mythologemes of the heroic images in the consciousness of the Cuban population, which are seen by “Granma” as supportive. It is more important for a journalist, than to represent the content of the article in the headline. The headlines are selected in the publications of over 10-year period; we have a feeling that the similar headlines could be found dated twenty years earlier and the same twenty years later – because they reflect some constant spiritual realities of the Cuban image of the world.

Now we consider the headlines connected with Russia and other countries, important for Cuba (Venezuela, the USA) to understand the contemporary attitude of Cubans to the world. They are seen for a shorter period – less than five months from the moment of writing the article.

Above, looking at the previous researches, we claimed that Cuba is quite loyal towards Russia; it is proved with our analysis as well. We may find headlines in the above-mentioned format – without notes of when the event happened and what event is described in the publication: «Cuba y Rusia: una amistad que crece» («Cuba and Russia: growing friendship»), «Cuba y Rusia, relación que sobrevive al tiempo» («Cuba and Russia, relations that ever last»), «Rusia toma el relevo» («Russia takes over»), etc. Though we may find other headlines aimed at some certain events: «¿Por qué las relaciones con Rusia están en el mejor momento de los últimos 20 años?» («Why the relations with Russia are the best for the last 20 years?»), «Intercambio comercial entre Cuba y Rusia en 2019 superó los 500 millones de dólares» («Trade exchange between Cuba and Russia in 2019 exceeded 500 million dollars»), «Toca tierra cubana nuevo lote de locomotoras llegadas de Rusia» («The Cuban ground received a new party of locomotives coming from Russia»), «En San Petersburgo comienza visita de Díaz-Canel a Rusia» («Díaz-Canel starts his visit in Russia from Saint Petersburg»), «Afirma Díaz-Canel que relaciones económicas con Rusia avanzan» («Díaz-Canel claims that the economic relations with Russia are developing»), «Arribó a Cuba el Presidente del Gobierno de la Federación de Rusia» («The President of the Russian government arrives to Cuba»)

Such headlines can make our reader happy – especially in comparison with the headlines of American, English, Spanish newspapers, which, as it was mentioned above, are colored mostly negatively or sarcastically about Russia. There are quite a few headlines, praising the sport successes of Russia, for

example, «Rusa Goryachkina toma ventaja en la final» («Russian Goryachkina takes the lead in the final» – about the success of the chess player Alexander Goryachkina); it is also pleasant that Cuba, as a trusty friend, takes our side in the doping scandal : «Crece el rechazo a sanciones de la AMA contra Rusia» («The growing refusal from WADA sanctions against Russia»), «¿Limpieza del deporte o histeria política contra Rusia? La sanción propuesta por la AMA pretende arrinconar a uno de los países que más ha contribuido al deporte mundial» («Sport shake-ups or political hysteria against Russia? Sanctions proposed by WADA aim at cornering one of the countries which contributed greatly to the world sport»).

The newspaper puts accents (Voiku, 2019, p. 73) in the axiological opposition ours/we (Cuba, Venezuela, China) – theirs/they (the USA and European countries under the American influence). The headline tone makes it clear that Russia is ours, friendly: «Rusia y China afianzan sus relaciones con la inauguración de un gasoducto» («Russia and China strengthen their relations with the gas pipe line opening»), «Calificó Presidente Maduro como éxito total su visita oficial a Rusia» («The President Maduro calls his official visit to Russia a complete success»), «Rusia y Venezuela definen su colaboración en un plazo no menor de diez años» («Russia and Venezuela define their collaboration for over ten years») and not theirs: «Llegó la desdolarización: Rusia redujo drásticamente sus divisas estadounidenses en las reservas internacionales» («It is time for dedollarization: Russia sharply reduced the share of American currency in the international reserves»), «Rusia se muestra alarmada ante nueva prueba misilística de Estados Unidos» («Russia is worried about the new missile test in the USA»), «Estados Unidos no está preparado para enfrentar una guerra contra Rusia» («The USA is not ready for the war with Russia») etc.

The Cuban position towards the USA, theirs, is often expressed in negative tones. As the researcher Dickson (1984) states, who analyzed «Granma» materials from 1966 to 1984 years, «Change in the use of aggressive and ideological symbols was seen in relation to key events that were expected to have influenced Cuban policy and propaganda values. The periods of high and low aggressive language coincided with what was predicted». We saw that in study period «Granma» is not friendly to the USA as well.

The actions of the country are often seen as dangerous, hostile as well as incorrect or unsuccessful: «La Casa blanca sigue obsesionada con que no se reconozca a la Revolución Cubana» («The White house is still obsessed with denial of the Cuban revolution»), «Estados Unidos vs. Irán: claves de un conflicto de carácter internacional» («The USA against Iran: keys to the international conflict »), «Niega Estados Unidos visa a canciller iraní para asistir a reunión de la ONU» («The USA cancels visa for the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs to participate in the UNO session»), «La postura agresiva de Estados Unidos con Cuba es un error, asegura Arzobispo griego» («Aggressive position of the USA towards Cuba – mistake, the Greek archbishop thinks»), «Dividir el Caribe: nueva estrategia de Estados Unidos» («Divide the Caribbean: new strategy of the USA»), «Investigan muerte de niños y adultos migrantes detenidos en Estados Unidos» («Investigation of death cases among migrated children and adults, held in the USA»), «Denuncian estrategia de Estados Unidos en Siria para adueñarse del petróleo» («Denounce the USA strategy in Syria to capture the petroleum»).

7. Conclusion

So, observing the relations of Russia and Cuba in dynamics, we consider them friendly and kind on the whole. Such relations are common for the present days; it is proved with our analysis of the current headlines in “Granma” (2019–2020).

We also noticed the influence of the Soviet journalistic tradition on the current headlines of the Cuban newspapers: specifically general, abstract, ideologically sharp headlines (without mentioning the time of the event, its characteristics etc) are frequent here. This contradicts the common practice of the contemporary Internet mass media, but due to special cultural and political conditions is quite acceptable for Cuba.

Such headlines are often used when they claim the “eternal” problems showing the characteristic of the image of the world of Cubans (the people who won their freedom and is still fighting for their independence from the closest hostile neighbour – the USA): in the materials about such Cuban heroes as Ernesto Che Gevara, Fidek Castro, Jose Marty etc, about relations with Russia and other friendly countries.

The headlines of a different type, closer to the present standards of the Internet journalism, are encountered in the materials about the current world events. These headlines also correspond to the general scheme of the image of the world of Cuba, which is topical for over half the century, where ours are the friendly countries (Russia, China, later – Venezuela and others), and theirs are the USA and similar countries of the “capitalistic” sector.

Acknowledgments

The part of the study was carried out with the financial support of the RFBR grant in the framework of project No. 18-412-590008 p_a “New Urban Media in the Local Communicative Space”.

The part of the study was carried out with the financial support of the RF President fund for governmental support of young scientists – candidates of science MK-1684.2020.6.

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