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A FOREIGN COUNTRY AS A SUBJECT OF AMERICAN MASS MEDIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The following article deals with the linguistic aspect of representing a foreign country in mass media of the United States of America. Its focus of attention are various means, which are employed by five newspapers on their pages: The New York Times, The New York Post, The Star Tribune, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal, to create the image of Brazil. In oder to analyse these linguistic means, the method of syntagmatic analysis of headings and the method of quantitative investigation were applied. This article researches the overall frequency of occurrence of the name "Brazil" on the pages of the mentioned newspapers in the period from the 1st of January until the 31st of December of 2019. The following research analyses the distribution of articles devoted to Brazil over the sections of a newspaper, the typical structure of an article about Brazil, key lexical and syntactic means used in it, as well as implicatures produced by the headlines. The results of the research show that the image of the foreign country in the newspapers of the United States of America is created with the help of distribution of the articles about Brazil in a newspaper and the choice of specific lexical and syntactic means.

Keywords: Implicature, linguistics, mass media, occurrence, target.

1.   Introduction

The XXI century is universally recognized as the age of information. Information is bought and sold, the way information is delivered defines the image it creates. Nowadays, the main source of information that reaches large audiences all around the world is mass media. It is no secret that among other countries the United States of America stands out in terms of its political and economic influence. Mass media plays a crucial part here, not only it broadcasts information on foreign and domestic affairs of the country, but it also influences its audiences. As Dobrosklonskaya (2008) points out, "... the function of influence is the leading function in the language of mass media, alongside the function of information" (p. 19). One of the aspects through which this media influence is realised is linguistic, via choice of words and the message they carry.

It is only fair to say that one of the countries that has recently entered the global political arena, and is, consequently, a subject of American mass media discourse, is Brazil. This tropical country has become one of the leading emerging economies of the world, having made a huge technological and economic progress in the last several decades. Brazil, which originated as a sugar and coffee colony, has made its way into becoming a strong, independent and modern country without losing its authentic cultural heritage (Fausto, 2013). The history of political and cultural relationship between the USA and Brazil is long and diverse, but it is acknowledged that the United States has always seen Brazil as a significant regional powerhouse, but its perceived importance has risen in the last decade. Due to its "growing geostrategic role through multilateral international forums, it has become a vital player in both regional and global politics across numerous dimensions" (O'Neil, 2010, para. 1). Moreover, the public diplomacy of the United States mostly relies on a mass communication approach (Wang, 2006), which makes American mass media and newspapers in particular a powerful tool of influencing people's mind and makes the question of linguistic aspect of this influence even more acute.

2.   Problem Statement

American newspapers have been studied in different spheres of social sciences, including linguistics. Although, the analysis of linguistic means, through which a foreign country is represented in American mass media, is far from complete. In order to cover this area of knowledge, this research dwells on the analysis of linguistic means, used in mass media of the United States of America to represent a foreign country.

3.   Research Questions

In order to make this analysis more complete, several questions were distinguished: the question of correlation between the choice of linguistic means of a newspaper and its targeting; the question of sectioning of newspapers and the message these sections convey; the question of linguistic factors, determining the representation of different sections of newspapers.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyse the linguistic means, through which American mass media represent Brazil as a subject of their discourse.

5. Research Methods

In order to achieve its goal, the method of syntagmatic analysis of contexts was used in this research. The material of the research is represented by the issues of five American newspapers: The New York Times, The New York Post, Star Tribune,Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal in the period from the 1st of January until the 31st of December of 2019 and their headings. Also, the method of quantitative research was applied: overall references to Brazil were counted and subdivided into groups.

6. Findings

In the world of journalism and printed press newspapers are traditionally subdivided into tabloids and broadsheets. The difference between them lies in the choice of materials for publications, as well as in stylistic peculiarities. So, Rogers (2020) describes broadsheets as having a "traditional approach to news gathering that emphasizes in-depth coverage and a sober writing tone in articles and editorials aimed at fairly affluent, educated readers (para. 9)", whereas tabloids are "more irreverent in their writing style (para. 6)" and they "focus on splashy, lurid stories about celebrities" (para. 7).

On the political stage of the United States of America, dominated by two major leading parties, Republican and Democratic, the function of influence of newspapers is important. Their ability to appeal to certain groups of people, or target audiences, is especially valued. This term borders on several areas of social sciences, such as marketing, advertising and linguistics. A target audience is defined by some researchers as "the intended audience or readership of a publication, advertisement, or other message." (Kotler & Armstrong, 2005, p. 14). That is, newspapers attempt to reach out to certain groups of individuals with the help of their informational material. So, in respect of their target audiences, the above mentioned American newspapers can be described as follows:

The New York Times is targeted at an urban audience. According to Pew Research, approximately 72% are college graduates (Grieco, 2020). Overall, the New York Times is rated as "Left-Center biased <...>, but highly factual and considered one of the most reliable sources for news information due to proper sourcing and well respected journalists/editors (Huitsing, 2019b).

The New York Post is a daily tabloid newspaper, aimed at audiences with strong Republican political views, since "The Post has endorsed the Republican Presidential Candidate in every race since 1980". In review, the New York Post tends to publish stories utilizing sensationalized headlines with emotionally loaded wording. The Post, according to a survey conducted by Pace University in 2004, was rated the least-credible major news outlet in New York. Further, The Post has been criticized for "sensationalism, blatant advocacy, and conservative bias" (Huitsing, 2019a, para. 9).

The Star Tribune positions itself as "a market-leading portfolio of print platforms that targets both mass and niché audiences. From our flagship newspaper to highly targeted publications, our product mix allows campaigns to be tailored for maximum effectiveness" (The Star Tribune, n.d.). The Minneapolis

Star Tribune covers local news and is regarded as Left-Center Biased since it has endorsed Democratic Presidential candidates since 1984 (Van Zandt, 2019).

The Washington Post claims that it "delivers news and understanding about the politics, policies, regulations, agencies and leaders that make Washington the world's seat of power." (The Washington Post, n.d., para. 1). According to Pew Research, the Washington Post is more trusted and consequently aimed at liberal readers than conservatives (Huitsing, 2020d).

The target audience of The Wall Street Journal consists of 4/5 "educated" (bachelor's degree or higher), 1/3 "affluent" (liquid assets $1MM+) (The Wall Street Journal, n.d.). A 2014 Pew Research Survey found that 41% of the Wall Street Journal's audience is consistently or mostly liberal, 24% Mixed and 35% consistently or mostly conservative. This indicates that "they are slightly preferred by a more liberal audience" (Huitsing, 2019c).

In newspapers, the structure of the article itself matters, even the belonging of the article to a certain section has an impact on the audience. The same event can be perceived differently simply because of the placement of the article dedicated to it, emphasizing or diminishing its importance, creating a more positive or a more negative connotation. The frequency of mentioning of a particular subject in different sections of a newspaper reflects the image and the overall attitude, given to the phenomenon by a newspaper. In The New York Times, in the period from January until December of 2019, Brazil was mentioned 1588 times. According to the frequency of occurrence in deferent sections of this newspaper, 4 main groups can be distinguished: with high (over 300 references), medium (over 150 references), low (over 100 references) and very low (under 100 references) occurrence.

It is remarkable to mention that the section, where Brazil is mentioned the most (328 times) is World, dedicated to the most important and urgent issues in terms of foreign and domestic policies of other countries. In comparison, the section with next-high level of frequency of occurrence in this newspaper is Arts with only 159 references to Brazil. This big gap in the frequency of occurrence between the two sections shows the importance given to the events which took place in Brazil within the given period of time. The increased attention can be explained by the radical changes that happened in the beginning of 2019 in domestic affairs of the country: on the 1st of January of 2019 Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right politician, became the president of Brazil. This political leader has drawn a lot of attention to himself and the country he represents from the global and American newspapers due to the statements and actions he has been making. Brazil, having always been in the area of US influence and always being present in the USA news, has started receiving even more consideration from American newspapers since 2019.

Also, in sections like Sports and Travel, where Brazil could be expected to be mentioned quite often, this country received relatively few references: only 126 in Sports section and 35 references in Travel section. These low figures, as compared to the results in World section, not only break the image of Brazil as a tropical county famous for its beaches, coffee and football, but once again emphasize the importance of Brazil as a political power on the global arena for the United States of America.

As compared to The New York Times, the number of references to Brazil in The New York Post is considerably lower: this country was mentioned only 255 times during the given period of time in all the sections of the newspaper. Despite being classified as a tabloid, the same pattern as in The New York Times can be identified: the sections of the newspaper fall into the same four groups according to the frequency

of occurrence of Brazil in them: high (over 100 references), medium (over 50 references), low (less than 20 references) and very low (under 10 references) occurrence. The smaller number of references to Brazil in this newspaper can be explained by its targeting: it is aimed at audiences with conservative views and is more focused on the domestic affairs of the country. For instance, the section where Brazil was mentioned the most is News (115 references). This section is dedicated to news in both foreign and domestic regions, and it is remarkable that in The New York Post the news on affairs of foreign countries isn't even subdivided into a separate section, as opposed to The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal, where section World is present and is dedicated solely to the events outside the United States of America. It is only fair to mention that, despite the fact that The New York Post is a tabloid, the section where Brazil was mentioned the most in this newspaper is News, which still deals with news on politics and demonstrates that the spheres of life, receiving the biggest representation in the newspaper, don't depend on its type. This fact once again prove the importance of Brazil on the global political arena.

It is curious to mention that in The New York Post the section with the next-high number of references to Brazil after News is Living (87 references, "medium" occurrence), which mostly deals with news on climate, health and biographies of people, whereas in Sports section Brazil wasn't represented at all in the given period of time from January until December of 2019. This phenomenon again highlights the image of Brazil as a political power over its stereotypical perception as a country of football, and at the same time shows the focus of The New York Post on the domestic affairs of the country even in the area of sports, since the majority of news items in this section are dedicated to sports competitions within the United States of America.

The Star Tribune makes a contrast with The New York Times and The New York Post, if regarded from the point of view of the quantitative research: Brazil was mentioned only 202 times in the year of 2019, and only three groups can be distinguished here: high (over 45 references), medium (over 30 references) and low (under 20 references) frequency of occurrence. It can be explained by the fact that The Star Tribune is a local broadsheet newspaper in the state of Minnesota and that it is oriented mostly on the local economy of the state, so the events which take place in foreign countries are not of crucial importance for the target audience of this newspaper. The section in which Brazil is mentioned here the most is Sports with 51 references, which once again contrasts with The New York Times and The New York Post. Both Variety section, which deals with news on entertainment and cultural events, and Business section can be referred to the same "high frequency" group with 50 and 49 references respectively. The high number of references to Brazil in Sports section shows that this country is viewed as a source of entertainment with a slightly higher focus on sports, preserving the traditional stereotypical image of the country in this relatively small regional newspaper. Nonetheless, the fact the number of references to Brazil in Business section is almost as high as in Variety can once again be explained by the targeting of The Star Tribune and its focus on audiences with democratic political views and interest in production and agriculture, viewing Brazil as an industrial country and a trade partner.

As for The Washington Post, Brazil got as many as 1243 references in different sections of this newspaper in 2019, which puts it on the level with The New York Times in terms of overall frequency of occurrence of Brazil on its pages. Speaking of groups which can be singled out on the basis of frequency

of occurrence, once again four main groups can be distinguished: very high (over 80 references), high (over 30 references), medium (over 10 references) and low (under 10 references).

It is evident that despite being almost equal to The New York Times in the overall number of references to Brazil, the numbers of references are not that high in each group as compared to The New York Times with its highest number of 328 references in World section: in The Washington Post the section with the highest results is Business (88 references). It should be explained that Brazil is represented in a bigger number of sections in The Washington Post: it is mentioned in 35 sections in this newspaper, while in the Wall Street Journal it occurs in 17 sections, in The New York Times - in 10 sections, in The New York Post - in 9 sections and only in 5 in The Star Tribune.

As it has already been mentioned, Brazil is represented in the Washington Post the most in Business section with 88 references. Together with the next high-frequency section The Americas (48 references), dedicated to the news on events that take place in North and South America, these two sections show that in this broadsheet Brazil is perceived as a political figure and a business partner. This image becomes even more clear if compared to Sports section, where Brazil is mentioned only 22 times.

In The Wall Street Journal Brazil was mentioned 1033 times, which refers this broadsheet newspaper to the same category as The New York Times and The Washington Post according to the overall frequency of occurrence of Brazil. The higher numbers in these broadsheets can be explained by their targeting: these newspapers are aimed at more liberal audiences with a strong political and economic orientation, which once again emphasizes the role of Brazil as a political player. It is fair to mention that despite being a market-oriented newspaper, the sections in which the references to Brazil prevail are still World, Politics and Market, with over a hundred references in each section. It is important to note that in The Wall Street Journal there is a section called Latin America, dedicated to the news on events happening in Central and South America. This section comes next after the ones mentioned previously, with the number of references to Brazil a little under a hundred (97 references). The fact that is impossible not to mention is that within the given period of time references to Brazil in Sports or Soccer sections were surprisingly few: only 5 references in both sections. This noticeable discrepancy between the groups only proves the fact that the frequency of occurrence of Brazil in different sections of The Wall Street Journal is, on the one hand, defined by its target audience and on the other, portrays Brazil as a country in which The United States of America has an active economic interest.

The next stage of this research is the semantic analysis of the lexical material used in the newspapers. Semantics is formed through the choice of lexical means, which create an image. Headings and subheadings play a key part here. As Bessonov (1958) pointed out, "a heading can be compared to a billboard, the more vivid it is, the higher is the chance that the material will be read" (p.3), so, the main function of headings is to attract the reader's attention and interest, to make the potential reader actually read the contents of the article. Thus, on the one hand, the article has to be succinct: it should be short enough to be perceived and understood easily, it should "catch the eye". At the same time, its message should be deep and descriptive enough to give a gist of what the article itself is about, the message of the headings always coinciding with the message of the article. "The use of headings and subheadings gives the readers a general idea of what to expect from the paper and leads the flow of discussion. These elements divide and define each section of the paper" (APA Headings and Subheadings, 2013). Mass media, being a mediator between events and

audiences, influences the latter with the help of the lexical material used in the headings, that is through the choice of stylistic connotations, words and expressions. "A word possesses great power in mass media: having once appeared <...> on a printed page, it is immediately picked up by the audience <...>" (Dobrosklonskaya, 2008, p. 191), and their choice is never accidental: they constitute powerful tools to creating the desirable image in the mind of the target audiences of newspapers. In mass media, as well is in any other sphere of human communication, influence can be explicit, that is open, convincing (e.g. debates), or implicit, that is hidden, manipulative (Ozyumenko, 2017, p. 206). Thus, when talking about newspapers, the hidden meaning, "the act of meaning or implying one thing by saying something else", or an implicature of the headings can be of even more efficiency (Implicature, 2019) Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). In this respect, the headings and subheadings from the «high-frequency» groups mentioned above, covering the events that received the highest feedback in the newspapers are of especial interest. Viewed semantically, the headings show that the implicatures created by their contexts vary in different newspapers. In The New York Times, some of the examples of the choice of lexical units in which Brazil was mentioned are: «prefers intimidation and violence to civic discourse», «authoritarian», «an unfortunate trait», «trying to restore positive perception», «open revolt», «undermines indigenous Brazilians», «illegal» «lawless», «emboldened by President», «trial for ecocide», «amazon protections slashed», «turbulent», etc (The New York Times, n.d.). The implicature, created by the words with strong negative connotations, especially the adjectives, suggests a negative, even aggressive estimation of the events and the figure of Brazilian President by this newspaper with Democratic views, which is transmitted to the target audience.

In The New York Post the overall implicature was milder, the examples of the contexts being: «take up bows and arrows' against government,» «Brazil's president says he lost his memory after bumping head», «leaves Brazil's largest city in total darkness», «can't afford to fight Amazon fires», «Brazilian troops enlisted to fight unprecedented wildfires», «Celebs keep posting misleading photos», «Trump reinstates tariffs», etc (The New York Post, n.d.). These lexical units have a more neutral connotation, and the lack of emotionally coloured adjectives suggests a more neutral, detached account of the events given by this Republican newspaper.

In The Star Tribune the implicature created by the contexts in which Brazil was mentioned can be characterised as detached and even peaceful: «to slow forest-to-farm», «president isn't interested in protecting the Amazon», «ending forest destruction will be missed», «can Minnesotans help the Amazon rainforest amid fires? Local nonprofits offer some ideas», «Trouble in the Amazon extends beyond Brazil», etc (The Star Tribune, n.d.). Once again, lack of adjectives with a strong negative connotation can be noted in this local newspaper with mostly Democratic audience.

The choice of lexical units in The Washington Post, a newspaper with democratic views, implicates a more negative estimation: «A pretty strong betrayal», «Bolsonaro learns that Trump treats his friends worse than his enemies», «Brazil's nationalist leader», «challenged by scandal», «Brazil's Disappointment» (about Trump), «Brazil's president resurrects the zombie claim», «a celebration of torture», «unapologetically far-right», «calls Amazon deforestation 'cultural'», «Brazil's president says the Amazon is not the 'lungs' of the world», «the Amazon isn't on fire, Bolsonaro tells», «Many references to Trump backing Bolsonaro on Amazon fires», White House opens new fronts in trade war, targeting Brazil», «Bolsonaro's foreign policy has backfired», etc (The Washington Post, n.d.). In this case, not only the

adjectives, but the nouns with a negative connotation contribute to a more negative emotional colouring. Also, the usage of the name «Trump» implicates that the negative estimation is given to the connection of the US President to the events happening in Brazil.

The implicature of the headings in The Wall Street Journal, which is mostly democratic, but has a considerable number of conservative readers newspaper, is mixed: on the one hand, headings such as: «Brazil's Economy Expands at Fastest Pace», «Economic Turnaround», «Market Revolution» implicate a positive image, but «Brazil's Shrinking Rainforest», «Brazil to Ask Rich Countries to Help Pay», «Deforestation Accelerates», «Pushes Development in Amazon», «Ends in Disappointment», «Record Low», «to boost a sluggish economy», «crippling bureaucracy», «Trump to Levy Tariffs on Brazil», «War on Crime Takes a Toll», «Sky-High Murder Rate Begins to Fall», «Against Bolsonaro's Education Cuts» create a more neutral or negative association with the help of the adjectives and nouns with a negative or neutral connotation (The Wall Street Journal, n.d.).

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to analyse the linguistic means through which American newspapers represent Brazil as their subject. The results show, that one of the ways to create the image of the country with the help of lexical means is quantitative distribution of references to Brazil to different sections. Another linguistic means analysed in this research is the implicatures, given to the headings with the help of choice of lexical means with more positive or more negative connotations. The image, created by newspapers in the United Stares of America is greatly defined by their target audiences. The overall frequency of occurrence of the subjects in question in the articles, their quantitative distribution by different sections: all these factors influence the implicature created by a newspaper. The implicature itself is defined by the political orientation of the audiences: the Republican newspaper tend to be more neutral in its evaluation, while the Democratic newspapers gave a negative estimation and the newspaper with a mixed audience suggested both positive and negative accounts of the events.

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