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PRAGMATIC ASPECT OF A NEWS VIDEO-VERBAL TEXT

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Abstract

The article considers the pragmatic potential of a news video-verbal text. As is known, mass media are an indispensable part of a modern society's life. We can quickly find information using various technologies. Nonetheless, it may significantly differ from the status quo because the information source may spread intentionally false information as if it were reliable. Today, the informative function of the media, once dominant, is gradually giving way to the influencing function. Over the past few years, multiple tools and methods of influence have emerged to help unnoticeably control many people. The human mind can be manipulated in three ways: verbally, visually and audibly. Together, these three ways tend to enhance linguistic manipulation but sometimes they can exert influence independently. Thus, it seems relevant to research into the news video-verbal text in order to reveal ways of its influence on the human mind. The video-verbal text remains a rather understudied and relatively new type of the media text. The part of the text featured in video format is of great interest for study, as it can convey the greater part of information, often implied, obscure and inconspicuous in its verbal component. To manipulate the human mind, the verbal component of the news video-verbal text creates visual images that can be illustrated, supplemented and enhanced by media means. The study results show that the media component of the news text has a high influencing potential and can put the focus on particular meanings hence changing the recipient's world view.

1. Introduction

Alongside heightened needs of people to process more and more information, the means of collecting information have been improving for centuries from the most primitive counting instruments of ancient civilizations to the most technologically advanced computers of today. As a result of a breakthrough in technological advances over the past decades, we can no longer imagine our life without the mass media. The influence of the media on modern society can hardly be overestimated, since they not only report news about events, but also extensively modify and develop the modern language.

As known, the Internet space belongs to the mass media, and modern media are considered to be basically commercial projects presenting sensational and acute issues for the sake of profit at the expense of objectivity and verity. Various authorities purposefully take advantage of the mass media by angling and conditioning information, and thus gaining influence over wide audience. The amount of information reported through the Internet is increasing daily with its users numbering in billions. On the other hand, the freedom of the Internet publicity can work against, as the Internet is also a means of manipulation.

2. Problem Statement

Non-verbal support and various audio-visual means abundant on the Internet are especially effective in ensuring the effectiveness of media influence. Dobrosklonskaya (2014) argues that a media text has a complex multi-level structure which allows it to develop in equal measure in verbal, media, and hypertextual dimensions, thus building intertextual links in the Internet space. It can deploy at each of these levels with a variety of combinations of verbal and media components. All these factors boost media text's complexity. Similarly, Alan Bell explains that definitions of media texts have gone far beyond the traditional view of text as words printed in ink on pieces of paper to approach a semiotic interpretation of text which implies a sequence of various signs but not only verbal ones (Dobrosklonskaya, 2008).

Most scholars agree that the media text's main objective is social regulation. Its socially regulatory nature specifies some peculiarities: media text's multidimensionality, its particular linguistic features and its small volume. In the current mass media space, media text is used as "a unique means to interpret and represent the reality, and, consequently, to form an individual's world view, which enables the mass media to influence complex social processes thereby predetermining the recipient's vision of the world" (Rogozina, 2003, pp. 130–131).

3. Research Questions

In today's world, researchers observe a tendency of an unprecedented growth in the influence of audio-visual means of communication. This is not surprising, since we receive the overwhelming majority of information from the outside through the eye and ear. According to Dobrosklonskaya (2014), in the mass media, verbal text is increasingly being replaced by multimedia text: its verbal component is illustrated, supplemented, and iteratively amplified by a media component – drawing, photography, video sequence, special font, etc., creating visual images that have a powerful impact on the human mind. Most

articles on the Internet are embedded with various photos and illustrations which, together with the text, create an integrated semiotic sequence. A certain visual image can completely change the entire content of the article. Recipients may not remember what they learned about the character, but they will remember the visual image accompanying this story (Danilova, 2009).

4.   Purpose of the Study

Currently, the Internet is the main communications channel used for interaction, transferring, spreading and exchanging information. The Internet has become one of the most popular domains for news texts, with such newspaper publishers and news agencies as BBC, USA Today, The Guardian, Komsomolskaya Pravda and others having launched the Internet versions of their traditional publications thereby significantly increasing the number of texts produced, changing their nature and interactive potential. The speed of data exchange and vivid visual imagery are becoming the main factors that attract a user to a particular media content (Razgolov, 2021). Furthermore, this sphere is becoming more and more popular among scientists. There are a lot of recent papers devoted to mass-media research: power of social-media (Ji et al., 2019; Jungherr et al., 2019; Ytre-Arne, 2019), political news (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2019; Matthes et al., 2019; Stroud & Muddiman, 2019), fake news (Huang et al., 2019; Mourao & Robertson, 2019; Talwar et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019).

Texts connecting visual and verbal components are designated in modern linguistic science as video-verbal texts (Poymanova, 1997). A video-verbal news text, in our view, has a function similar to that of television and can be considered as some ideological successor of television news. The websites of 'The New York Times', 'Los Angeles Times', 'USA TODAY', 'CNN' and many others have videos from two to five minutes in length which briefly report about world events. Visualization of a news story makes it possible to starkly highlight the object of storytelling while sound means and effects contribute to enlivening a news text. More than that, sound frames are mounted on equal grounds with mute frames and may either match or mismatch in montage, or may appear in various combinations (Svetana-Tolstaya, 2007).

5.   Research Methods

We use the following research methods of analysis of media-linguistic texts: political, linguistic and media-linguistic. We also use the manipulation theory.

6.   Findings

Visual and audio levels enhance the news text's appealing effect. More than that, they affect people's feelings, one of the most important objects for manipulation. Exerting influence through the video sequence appears to be quite powerful due to the clarity and simplicity of perception. Thus, it may be considered as a manipulation contributor when there is an explicit and persistent imposition of a certain point of view on recipients, when they are deprived of the choice and ability to draw their own conclusions and independently analyze the facts.

Verbal aggression is a type of manipulation of human mind – a multidimensional concept inclusive of linguistic, psychological, pragmatic and social components. It is a form of speech behaviour aimed at insulting or intentionally causing harm to a person, group of people, organization, or society as a whole. Verbal aggression is currently being of much interest to linguists primarily due to an unfavourable socio-cultural situation in most existing logospheres. They are characterized by an increase in asociality, a general deterioration of speech culture standards, invectivization and vulgarization of speech, the propaganda of violence in the mass media, a significant degradation of the communicative mechanisms traditionally designed to restrain manifestations of verbal aggression.

The analysis of the news video-verbal texts revealed that in order to create and consolidate in the minds of recipients a discrediting image of a particular character, verbal aggression and a fair number of intensifying adverbs or intensifiers – language means intended to emphasize the statement or part of it – are used.

The CNN's news video-verbal text 'Is Russia arming up for a new Cold War?' (CNN, a) dated 4 March 2015 reports on new Russian cruise missiles which are thought by the US government to pose a serious danger to the USA's safety. To begin with, the reporter states that 'defending against Vladimir Putin's Russian military aggression is about to get harder' and mentions the Head of NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) warning a new generation of Russian cruise missiles could strike military radars and missiles inside the United States. Throughout the text, Russia is represented as a hostile power, and the contradiction 'own – alien' is evident ('against Vladimir Putin's Russian military aggression', 'no protection for new Russian missiles'). Expert opinions in the video accompanied by and enhanced with the help of the word 'warning' in the verbal component attach credibility and significance to the report and create an illusion of a real Russian threat to the USA.

Adm. William Gortney, Commander, NORAD says in his interview that the cruise missiles 'have a very long range' and can even 'range critical infrastructure in Alaska and Canada that they rely on for homeland defense mission' from Eastern Russia. The prospect of an attack from Russia, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the subsequent vulnerability of the United States in the event of their military facilities' destruction create a negative attitude towards Russia and even feelings of affright and alarm throughout the news video-verbal text. The words and expressions 'critical infrastructure', 'rely on', 'homeland defense mission' add to the speaker's expressiveness and are intended to unite Western audiences.

The following performance information specified by the reporter about the new Russian missile supported by accurate captions ('non-nuclear long-range cruise missile', 'in the final stages of Russian development', '2000 mile plus range', 'gives the Russians the ability to fire from near their own coastline', 'highly precise', 'flies low', 'difficult to detect') is intended to intimidate the recipient and adds to the feelings of affright and alarm. The nominalized adjective 'the Russians' used in a generic sense to denote citizens of Russia sounds politically improper in this context and renders a negative attitude to Russia.

In the following interview with Colonel Cedric Leighton (Ret.), US Air Force, the conditional clause with 'if' conjunction imposes a subjective opinion that if a missile cannot be detected, they cannot defend against it. Cedric Leighton's expert opinion about the USA's insecurity to hostile new cruise

missiles, in our opinion, is designed to create a bellicose image of Russia relying solely on its own military power in resolving political issues. It seems logical enough that the reporter jumps to a premature conclusion: 'That means not just Alaska is at risk, but even the Eastern United States from potential missile launches in the Atlantic', where Russia's bellicose nature is emphasized by 'that means', 'not just', 'at risk', 'potential missile launches' and an intensifier 'even'. The Russian threat is further enhanced by 'has doubled its long-range bomber patrols around U.S. coastlines', 'Now ten a year', 'more than 100 around Europe'. The recipient cannot check the accuracy of the information though, since military data is not made public. A negatively charged allusion to the time of Cold War in 'the most flights since the Cold War' reverberates the negative associations connected with the USSR. An expert opinion of 'several U.S. officials' is considered to be a rather skilful tool allowing one to effectively disguise the most superfluous propaganda beneath strict forms of an expert's competent opinion (Mironov, 2001). Links to an unknown source are rarely used by large media outlets and channels, but, on the other hand, as we can see, even such authority as CNN can use them.

In the following episode, the negative attitude to Russia is fostered by negatively charged 'Russia's provocations' and 'only more worrisome'. Moreover, the viewer is imposed a view that it is 'Vladimir Putin's intense focus on building up and modernizing Russia's military forces' that gives causes for concern. However, the NATO's military presence very close to the Russian borders as the real cause for such a backlash is being concealed in the video. Thus, we can observe an apparent shift in the viewer's focus from objectivity to the authors' subjective opinion.

The intensifier 'even' in the following episode ('The top U.S. Commander in Europe is even raising nuclear weapons concerns') emphasizes the Commander Philip Breedlove's expert opinion about the problem of nuclear weapons. In his turn, the Commander sounds rather skeptical and sarcastic about 'those 'dual use' weapons systems' intentionally gesturing scare quotes when saying about 'dual use'. The repetition of intensifiers 'very' in his speech ('very easily be nuclear or non-nuclear', 'our ability to tell the difference between one and the other is very tough', 'this is very worrisome') conveys his subjective negative assessment and emphasizes his speech.

The CNN's news video-verbal text 'Fears of a new Cold War as Russia beefs up military' (CNN, b) dated July 8, 2016 reported on 'Iskander-M' nuclear cruise missiles, which had been previously presented by Vladimir Putin at the opening of the 'Army-2015' international military engineering forum. The title of the report immediately attracts attention: the combination of an evaluative noun 'fear' where evaluation is in the structure of its denotative meaning with the phrasal verb 'beefs up' is supposed to impose a subjective negative attitude to Russia because of the general fear of its growing military power. Besides, mentioning the Cold War as a historical reality apparently evokes negative associations among Americans, since the USSR used to be considered as the USA's enemy and rival. The reference to the 'new Cold War' may also be an implicit comparison of Russia with the USSR.

An informal expression 'the big guns of Russia's modern army' in the lead is supposed not only to grab the recipients' attention but also to keep them in suspense and waiting for even a bigger threat, because 'this is not NATO's biggest fear'. In addition, the use of a superlative 'the biggest' and synecdochial NATO to imply that Russia is a threat not only to the USA but also to all NATO member countries reinforces this judgment. The authors assess the conducted military exercise as 'carefully

choreographed', which evidently sounds much more expressive than a neutral 'planned' due to the implied meaning of being thoroughly prepared.

It is in the following ominous statement 'Last year, President Putin announced that more than forty new missiles would be added to Russia's nuclear arsenal' that the recipient's expectation of a bigger threat is justified. The dictum that Putin's announcement is 'prompting concerns in Washington' adds credibility to this judgment and, at the same time, makes a repeated reference to the 'new Cold War' to impose negative associations with the 'Russian threat'. A similar effect is achieved when 'the crisis in Ukraine' allegedly harmed the relations between Russia and the West ('sent relations with the West to a new low'). The reporter's further rhetoric ('Russia's war preparations', 'stepped up a gear', 'not only modernizing its weapons', 'finding new ways to display them to the world') creates an illusion that Russia is actively replenishing its nuclear arsenal in order to start a war and is deliberately posting videos on the Web to brag its military power to the whole world.

To support the previous arguments, a sequence of recent incidents with Russia's involvement is shown. The reporter's speech contains an informal word 'slick' which means 'skillful and effective but not sincere or honest' (Cambridge Dictionary) and 'such a magazine regarded as having a sophisticated, deftly executed, but shallow or glib literary content' (Dictionary.com) with implications that Russia is insincere and glib. Another informal expression 'close call' ('a situation in which something bad, unpleasant, or dangerous almost happens, but you manage to avoid it') indicates the potential danger of such actions on the part of Russia ('Yesterday's training exercise is today's slick YouTube video… . There are the close calls of Russian jets buzzing the US's "Donald Cook" in the Baltic Sea and the Russian warship coming within 300 meters of a US navy destroyer. Both sides accusing each other of getting too close').

The comment of Alexey Arbatov, Deputy Chairman of Russia's Parliamentary Defense Committee given in the video ('It is very dangerous as it is… the probability of collision is very high and getting higher') was not initially aimed at blaming anyone's side. But in this context, it gives an impression that Alexei Arbatov is condemning Russia's actions. In this fragment, the authors not only exploit the expert opinion but also, through editing, could possibly have distorted the original meaning of the interviewee's words.

It should be noted that the following fragment is crucial, since it informs about NATO's readiness to mobilize troops in Poland and the Baltic countries. Its previous segments are supposed to justify these actions in order to give an impression that Russia is posing an imminent threat to the bordering countries: 'As NATO is getting ready to deploy four new combat battalions in Poland and the Baltic States, Russia is also getting in position mobilizing troops and equipment on its border with the Baltic states and its ports in Kaliningrad and Crimea'. As was previously the case, the fragment is rich in military vocabulary ('combat battalion', 'deploy', 'troops', 'mobilizing') giving the text a negative connotation.

Alexei Arbatov's further comment ('Both sides are dedicating resources to enhance and strengthen their defense. In a sense, that means both sides are getting ready for war. But neither side is getting ready for attacking the other side. If war happens, it may happen only because of miscalculation, misunderstanding. That is something we call 'inadvertent war.') is elucidating in nature, since the relationships between the NATO member countries and Russia remain stable. In the same way as news

text, report has an 'inverted-pyramid' structure; hence, information frame can be uneven. Authors may deliberately embellish information to grab the recipient's attention, but the end of the news is mostly devoted to elucidation. At the end of this video-verbal text, the reporter admits that 'most agree Russia has dialed down the rhetoric in recent weeks, its President saying he wants a dialogue with NATO. That could be the first step to rebuilding trust.' In order not to sound too menacing and pejorative about Russia, as well as to emphasize the opinion of the anonymous 'most' and signify her consent with it, the reporter uses the expressions 'dial down the rhetoric', 'wants a dialogue with NATO', 'the first step to rebuilding trust' which apparently express last-minute concessions.

Thus, in the news video-verbal text, authors often use means of linguistic manipulation. Of special interest is hidden and direct hostile rhetoric or verbal aggression, which is often realized through politicians' or other authorities' speeches. One of the most efficient manipulative tools is reference to an authoritative opinion of an organization or person due to the produced effect of imaginary reliability of the information reported. At the audio-visual level, authors may also resort to manipulative techniques that appeal to the recipient's feelings and emotions.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, we can conclude that a news video-verbal text – which is a combination of audio-visual and verbal components – offers other methods of influence than may be provided in a literal text. The analysis of news texts reveals that the applied methods of influence may not only distort the true picture of events, but also prompt the recipient to comprehend information in a steered and desirable way.

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