
ЯЗЫКИ НАРОДОВ ЗАРУБЕЖНЫХ СТРАН (С УКАЗАНИЕМ КОНКРЕТНОГО ЯЗЫКА ИЛИ ГРУППЫ ЯЗЫКОВ) / LANGUAGES OF PEOPLES OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES (INDICATING A SPECIFIC LANGUAGE OR GROUP OF LANGUAGES)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2023.37.19>

CONTEMPORARY NEWS STORIES IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE MEDIA DISCOURSE

Research article

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Abstract

The paper examines the specificity of the strategic usage of meaningful linguistic resources in contemporary news stories in a multimodal environment in English-language media discourse. The study is based on the understanding of language as a set of semiotic resources and employs discursive methods of analysis. The findings demonstrate a multifunctional nature of the combination of linguistic choices and visual components in describing a particular event in the news and addressing target audiences around the globe. Verbal and visual elements such as allusions, metaphors, a play on words, a variety of stylistic devices, pictures, and graphic expressive means construct a news story and shape the perception of the message. The results of the study can be useful in the sphere of media.

Keywords: English, globalization, multimodality, media discourse, news discourse.

СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ НОВОСТНЫЕ ИСТОРИИ В АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОМ МЕДИДИСКУРСЕ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена специфике стратегического использования значимых языковых ресурсов в современном новостном англоязычном медиадискурсе в мультимодальной среде. Исследование основывается на понимании языка как набора семиотических ресурсов и использует методы дискурс-анализа. Полученные данные демонстрируют многофункциональный характер сочетания языкового выбора и визуальных компонентов при описании конкретного события в новостях и обращении к целевой аудитории по всему миру. Вербальные и визуальные элементы, такие как аллюзии, метафоры, игра слов, разнообразные стилистические приемы, изображения, графические средства, конструируют новость и влияют на восприятие сообщения. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы в медиасфере.

Ключевые слова: Английский язык, глобализация, мультимодальность, медиадискурс, новостной дискурс.

Introduction

Modern research trends in linguistics are characterized by an increasing interest in the social nature of language. Due to the shift of the global linguistic paradigm towards a functionally-oriented perspective, language is viewed as a set of meaningful resources used in a variety of discourses [1], [2], [3], [4]. Language resources possess high pragmatic, stylistic, and sociocultural potential, and they are combined in a particular way in accordance with the goals of communication, “The nature of language is closely related to the demands that we make on it, the functions it has to serve. [...] The particular form taken by the grammatical system of language is closely related to the social and personal needs that language is required to serve” [5, P. 141].

Social and discursive practices are interrelated, and “[d]iscourse is understood as a complex multimodal event of interaction and communication” [6, P. 192]. In this respect, according to Fairclough & Wodak, “Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical or a two-way relationship: the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them” [7, P. 259]. Thus, language reflects the changes happening in the modern world, and at the same time takes an active part in constructing social reality. The choice of linguistic resources is motivated by the pragmatic and communicative goals of interlocutors and is closely tied to the situation and historical context. As Richardson observes, “Language use exists in a kind of dialogue with society: language is produced by society and (through the effect of language use on people) it goes on to help recreate it” [8, P. 18].

The era of globalization has given rise to new discursive practices and interaction patterns. It has greatly affected our life in general, as it “is restructuring the ways in which we live, and in a very profound manner” [9, P. 22]. The development of information technologies and the high role of information have contributed to the growth of media discourse comprised of such types of media texts as news, commentary, features, and advertising [10, P. 32].

News discourse represents a significant discursive practice, since, while possessing all the basic features of a text, news forms the content and structure of the modern information space [11, P. 5]. The popularity of news discourse accounts for the

emergence of ‘news linguistics’ – a specific area of language study [12, P. 14]. Although the study of news has been continuing for a few decades, there is a need for an inter-disciplinarian approach to its analysis, especially taking into account the transformations which news discourse has been undergoing lately. This mainly refers to the changes in the information structure of news reports [13, P. 220].

News reports written in English constitute a relevant field of study. English is a dominant language in the media due to its unique role and status of the language of international communication [4], [14]. Particularly, the corpus of media texts written in English due to economic, political, and sociocultural reasons exceeds the number of texts written in other languages [15, P. 42].

Research methods and principles

The news has been studied from various perspectives that centre around its historical development [16], ideological implications [17], [18], [19], and the theory of audience design [20]. Research on news discourse has been carried out in media linguistics, discourse studies, content analysis, cognitive linguistics, and semiotics.

Contemporary news reports tend to be called ‘news stories’ for a variety of reasons: “The definition ‘account of past events’ may to some extent relate to a factual account, but carries the implication of interpretation, elaboration, the creation of a narrative” [21, P. 5]. Moreover, it has become a tool for expressing bias and preferences as well as a means of public opinion making. Fowler highlights the importance of the linguistic structure of news discourse, as he views language not as a neutral, but highly constructive mediator that is used to form ideas and beliefs [18, P. 1].

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the concept of language as a set of semiotic resources [2], the understanding of discourse as a form of social action [22] and discursive news values analysis [23]. Linguistic features which help describe a situation in the news from a chosen perspective construct it as a ‘newsworthy’. The factors defining the newsworthiness of events are called ‘news values’ [23, P. 53].

The study analyses 50 news reports randomly selected from electronic editions and online sources of American and British newspapers and magazines from 2017 till the beginning of 2021. They are daily newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The Boston Globe*, *The New York Times*, *The Times*, *The Washington Post*), weekly editions of newspapers and magazines (*Newsweek*, *The Economist*, *The New Yorker*, *The Spectator*, *Time*), a bimonthly magazine (*Foreign Affairs*) and a quarterly online magazine (*Forbes Women*). These periodicals were chosen because they are major influential editions, and although they primarily focus on the issues relevant to either the USA or the UK, they potentially address English-speaking audiences all over the world within a global information space. They touch upon a wide range of issues, from local events to international affairs. All the above-mentioned media represent prominent editions with a long history and a considerable reputation, that contain different types of articles (editorials, features, opinions/commentary) on a variety of topics (arts, business, culture, sports, current affairs, politics, economy, and daily life) and are also quite diverse in terms of frequency of publication.

The analysis is carried out with the help of discursive methods and centres around semiotic resources that are employed to create a news story and make it newsworthy.

Main results

Newspaper discourse is affected by the global transformations tied to the growth of information flows and the development of communication technologies. As Conboy points out, it “is adapting to the existence of so many other forms of contemporary communication flow” [16, P. 3]. The analysis demonstrates that the means of addressing target audiences are becoming more hybrid, diverse, and interactive.

Multimodality

The new sociolinguistic environment is characterized by a variety of interweaving multimodal forms of communication. The traditional autonomy of written texts is disappearing, and text coherence is created not only with the help of verbal resources but also with a variety of visuals as well as audio and video content (on online platforms). News stories are embedded into a multimodal context next to advertisements, readers’ commentary, podcasts, etc.

Schmitz examines the evolution of the multimodal organization of the texts taken from a newspaper in the period from 1946 to 2012. One of the features that he notices is text simplification, as the number of short and less complex texts has increased over time. Moreover, the web-version of the same newspaper has a multimodal composition now without a “single conventional full text whose coherence is produced solely through written means” [24], [25, P. 28].

Multimodality is one of the tools of data visualization. The combination of texts and graphs is a common technique that news media adopt to present information, duplicating the same content. Readers get the same message in the form of words, numbers, and pictures. Thus, alongside with basic reading skills, audiences are expected to possess more elaborate literacy skills. This has become especially critical during the pandemic, when the statistics and case numbers are always given in graphs and charts.

The multimodal nature of news discourse creates conditions for personified access to information. Web newspapers contain various hyperlinks that bring the reader to a number of other articles relevant to the topic. For example, in one of the online reports in *The New York Times* from January 7, 2021, there is a link to the regularly updated virus database which provides a full account of the cases registered in each state. Pointing at a certain state on the map, readers can see a graph, numbers, and a short note, focusing their attention only on the areas they are interested in. In this way, everyone can tailor their reading experience to their personal choices, preferences, and reading strategies.

Consequently, news coverage is highly interactive, and the news media are expanding their presence in social networks. *The Economist’s* video on *LinkedIn* develops the topic of homeownership, published as a special report on January 16, 2020. Readers and viewers are welcome to leave their comments and feedback and participate in online discussions, thus creating content together with the media.

Hybridity

The changes in news discourse relate to the form and manner of story presentation, in which the boundaries and distinctions between different types of media texts have become less rigid.

Traditionally, news, being part of mass media discourse, is treated as a variation of institutional discourse, according to the relations of the sender and the recipient of information who are the journalist (working for a certain news organisation) and the reader. Nevertheless, it cannot be called exclusively institutional in the strict sense of the term, as the features of personal discourse are becoming more prominent.

The style of articles often resembles a conversation. Titles may contain instances of direct address to make the message more salient: **Silicon Valley, we have a problem** (*Economist*, January 20, 2018). The question-answer structure of a paragraph somehow involves the reader in a dialogue with the reporter: **So what is to be done?** (*Foreign Affairs*, March-April, 2018); **What makes propaganda more dangerous today?** (*New York Times*, September 21, 2017); **Is Big Tech too powerful?** (*The New Yorker*, August 28, 2017), **Cross-Generational Networking Is A Win-Win For Employees And Their Organization. So Why Don't We Do It?** (*Forbes Women*, January 11, 2021). The questions and answers are often elliptical and typical of an informal talk: **What next?** (*The Week*, July 21, 2017); **That Facebook factor? Not a 'crazy idea'** (*The Washington Post*, September 8, 2017). The conversational tone of a piece can be shown in writing with the help of graphic means or changes in spelling which represent some phonetic and pronunciation peculiarities of oral speech: *It's going to be even uglier next time 'round* (*Newsweek*, June 16, 2017); **"a whole lotta"** (instead of a whole lot of) (*Forbes Women*, December 28, 2020).

Similarly, the pauses that appear between sentences in the title and the lead-in imitate oral speech prosody: *Constrained? America's system of checks and balances seems to be working. But there is still plenty to worry about* (*Economist*, April 1, 2017).

A. Bell compares news reports at the beginning and at the end of the twentieth century and observes that the instantaneous nature of message transmission made the conversational component in news discourse more significant [26].

In a broader sense, it is possible to speak about genre hybridity. Newspapers and magazines, such as *Forbes Women*, usually have a certain target audience – in this case it is businesswomen. However, the topics covered in the issues are not purely business-related. Articles on sleeping tips, motherhood, and beauty trends from December 28, 2020 are also a sign of the diffusion of boundaries between lifestyle, business, and entertainment magazines.

Polydiscursivity

Another important characteristic of news discourse is its polydiscursivity. On the one hand, the news possesses the features of argumentative discourse in which the authors give their account of events, as “[j]ournalistic discourse, in particular, is one active element in bringing about such change through shaping understandings, influencing audience attitudes and beliefs (particularly through their reinforcement), and transforming the consciousness of those who read and consume it” [8, P. 29]. On the other hand, the usage of allusions and citations brings it closer to the literary style.

The allusion to *“Pride and Prejudice”* by Jane Austen together with the linking phrases that form the sequence of narration create an impression of a fiction story, rather than a formal news report: **It is a truth universally acknowledged that the world is connected as never before. Once upon a time, it was believed that there were six degrees of separation between each individual and any other person on the planet** (*Foreign Affairs*, September-October, 2017). The phrase **“Not many men are islands”** (*Foreign Affairs*, September-October, 2017) arousing associations with the quotation which has turned into a proverb *“No man is an island”* demonstrates the intertextual nature of news discourse, its openness and variability.

Thus, newspaper discourse represents a flexible, multimodal, and hybrid discursive practice. Meaning making resources are becoming more diverse and the style of news articles is also undergoing changes.

Speaking about the distinct features of contemporary news, it is important to mention linguistic and graphic means that play an essential role in news story construction. Any news article has been carefully prepared before being presented to the public, “News values are not only invoked to answer questions at the conceptualization stage about **what** to cover or what counts as news, but also to answer other relevant journalistic questions related to the story and story construction: **how** to cover it, **what** to emphasize or start off with (the ‘lede’ [sic]), **who** to talk to, **when** to proceed or hold back. They are also relevant to the story’s placement or position in the paper or on the broadcast [...]” [27, P. 75]. The font, lettering, and the position of the title on the page play an important role, for example, capitalization of letters makes the passage salient: **FAKE NEWS!** (*The Boston Globe*, June 28, 2017).

The intentional structure of news stories is manifested in its vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, as well as in various stylistic devices, which can make the elements of the message salient or obscure, so we can see “how factual statements are intended to be read” [23, P. 68].

Discussion

The linguistic resources are carefully selected and combined in order to convey the reporter’s stance on the issue. The results demonstrate functional motivation for the choice of meaningful language resources on the morphological, lexical, and syntactic levels. Nominalization, passive constructions and different types of modality to indicate certainty, probability, or desirability are examples of the strategic usage of linguistic resources in news discourse: *disinformation could be inserted into the German information space ahead of the elections* (*Time*, September 8, 2017). A wide range of stylistic devices such as contrast, a play on words, allusions, rhetorical questions, repetitions, and metaphors intensifies the expressive power of the message. Rhyme and colloquialisms make the following piece sound more expressive: *For every Spotify there is a Wanna Cry* (*Economist*, June 10, 2017). Metaphorical language and hyperboles focus the readers’ attention on the scale of the issues they cover and enhance the news values of superlativeness and impact: **the sea of misinformation** (*The New York Times*, May 3, 2018); **to weather the storms of social media** (*Economist*, November 5, 2017). Repetitions and parallel syntactic structures increase the emotional tension of the article: **And on men in power. And race and power. And the substitution in American politics of rage for reason, entertainment for information and bluster for truth** (*Newsweek*, September 15, 2017). Contrast is another frequently used stylistic device that adds dramatism to the message: *But modern presidents have long terms and short memories* (*Newsweek*, September 15, 2017); *The second insight is that weak ties are strong; That was then, this is now*

(*Foreign Affairs*, September-October, 2017); *The high cost of cheap speech* (*The Washington Post*, September 21, 2017); *Sales up but profits down at Amazon* (*The Times*, July 28, 2017).

These semiotic resources contribute to the construction of an event as worthy of note by emphasizing the news values which make the articles look relevant to the reader.

Conclusion

The findings show that the combination of text and pictures, their arrangement and style, accompanied by the blending of different genres like fiction and journalism within a newspaper article make it a complex and changeable type of discourse. The language of newspapers has become less formal than previously, as there is a tendency for the usage of colloquial phrases, contracted forms, and elliptical sentences typical of informal settings. Questions addressed to the audience, allusions, and quotations actively involve the reader in a dialogue with the author of the article. The reader-oriented style of writing transforms this type of discourse, traditionally categorized as institutional, into a hybrid discursive practice due to the elements of personal discourse present. Moreover, the media are trying to establish a personal connection with the reader by using targeted approaches to addressing the readership.

The findings of the study add to the emerging research on the dialectical relationship of language and social practice in an increasingly globalized and polarized world. Multimodality is considered to be an interesting dimension of future research, as a comprehensive analysis of verbal and visual resources combined could provide new insights into the ways in which news stories function today. Useful data can be also gained from surveys aimed at getting feedback from the readership and finding out what attitudes readers have to the common practices of event representation in the news media.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2023.37.19.1>

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2023.37.19.1>

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