Correlation of the Concepts of Public Communication and PR-Discourse in the Mass Media Space

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Abstract

Objectives: This article deals with many-fold inter-correlations of the concepts of public communication and PR-discourse within the mass media space. Methods: Common and specific characteristics of public communication are identified. It is one of the vectors of social communication, whose basic feature is the unity of interactivity and accessibility to members of society. From the perspective of semiotics, media discourse structures the semantic communicative field and generates mental activity of a society by reference to goals and objectives of social communication. Findings: PR-discourse is closely related to reality and is defined not only as verbal and cogitative activity but also as cognitive and communicative activity forming its discursive area. PR-discourse characteristics are due to its pronounced pragma-linguistic and evaluation focus, abundance with expressive and emotional components relating both to language/speech means and associated behavioral manifestations. The research has determined PR-discourse functions (cognitive, analytical, informational and communicative, manipulative, creative, transformational ones), establishing communication strategies, projecting specific images, ideas and values and having a certain social context. PR-discourse is a socially significant phenomenon affecting eventually on the cultural and historical development of a society. Improvements: PR-discourse regulates communicative situations arising in the area of PR-communication and in the ways of implementation of PR-discourse in the media by certain types of PR-texts. Sociolinguistic characteristics of the communicative process in PR-discourse are closely related to the interaction of all participants and aimed at solving specific problems of communication.

Keywords: Communication, Communicative Strategies, Mass Media Space, PR-Discourse, PR-Discourse Functions, Public Communication

1. Introduction

In recent decades, public communication research became well positioned in linguistics, having received the status of a separate linguistic area. Currently, there is an increasing interest in the study of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors in science that determine PR-discourse functioning in the framework of mass media space.

In order to implement the main objectives of this study, namely, to identify correlative interrelation between close and at the same time identical concepts of public communications and PR-discourse, it is necessary to determine the linguistic characteristics, to make a definitional analysis of the concept of communication itself, as well as to determine its social (public) role in the mass media space.

2. Research Methods

The following research methods were used during the analysis: a method of linguistic observation and description of specific language facts in order to obtain summarized findings, implemented by an interpretive technique and a contextual analysis; a method of interpretation of PR-discourse texts. PR-discourse is a tool for solving problems at the level of formation of opinions, designed to be a mediator between the government and the society.

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The material under study is presented by theoretical research data in the field of text linguistics, discourse theory, cognitive linguistics, the theory of communication, oral and written PR-discourse texts in the Russian and English languages.

3. Discussion

In our study, we rely on the interpretation of American Professor Peter Wilby, defining public communication as “transfer of information to the public and its reception by the public. This information is open to any member of society, and it is socially significant, i.e. such information has "a public status". We understand the presented definition as a starting point for an analysis in view of two main characteristics that determine its correlation with the objectives of the study.

Firstly, the unity of interactivity and accessibility ("the transmission of information and its reception", "accessibility to any member of a society") has a supporting character in the logical structure of the concept of "public communication".

Secondly, an attribute of the logical structure of public communication, determining a particular appeal to the public. This attribute determines the type of communication, having a public status, which means the identity of the concepts of "social" – "public".

By its very logical structure, this definition of public communication involves reference to genus-species relations between the basic research concepts: communication, social communication, public communication, among which the concept of communication is the most common generic concept.

Considering the linguistic dimension, the linguistic vectors of defining generic concept of “communication” are clarified. Further, it is possible to assume the fact of cross-cutting nature of communication and the importance of its social origin for its comprehensive description, based on different scientific views defining the concept of communication.

In this connection, we can assume two interrelated factors to be regular: a) the availability of types (social and non-social communication) for a generic concept of communication and b) the relative unity of understanding the very social communication. We believe that the relative unity of interpretations of social communication stems from the fundamental reference to the social plan under a variety of approaches to communication in general. Moreover, the social semantic content may not coincide.

Social communication is defined according to two logical vectors: both as types in reference to the generic concept of “communication”, and as a generic concept in relation to types, to more particular sub-notions such as public communication. For instance, the first vector is represented by “communication → social communication”; the second one – by “social communication → public communication”.

Next we consider characteristics of public communication in more detail. Based on the above-mentioned definition by P. Wilby, we now turn to two representative interpretations of the concept under investigation. One emphasizes the oral nature of public communication: it is a type of oral communication in which information is transmitted to a significant number of listeners in an atmosphere of formality. Public communications are characterized by transmission of information of public interest with the simultaneous imparting it the public status. Direct contact of an orator with the audience, focus on a particular addressee, considering the selection of verbal and non-verbal means, is a peculiarity of public communication during the process of information exchange, mentioned in another definition.

These characteristics of public communication are aimed at the genus-species structuring. But targeting at the society in understanding the type of public communication is presented as well as in the interpretation of the generic concept of social communication. In addition, such components, which are crucial for the concept of another level of generalization – the generic concept of communication, are noticeable as well in these public communication definitions.

In perspective of the considered multidimensional definition, the above-mentioned P. Wilby’s definition is the most capacious one: it summarizes the unity of accessibility and social significance in as a type feature and as a possible basis of differentiation of a generic concept of social communication. This unity includes both a seme, structuring the relation between types and a seme determining the specifics of this type, which proves the identity of the concepts under study.

To make our investigation complete, we proceed directly to the consideration of the concept of PR-discourse. In our opinion, PR-discourse as a discourse of the media area and social (public) space is closely linked to the usage of communicative and information channels,
so the theoretical analysis of PR-discourse should be conducted within the framework of an integral part of the study of public communication in terms of the media space. From the perspective of semiotics, media discourse structures the semantic communicative field and generates mental activity of a society on the basis of goals and objectives of social communication.

First of all, we should present our understanding of PR.

PR, public relations is “a specialized activity of industrial corporations, various institutions, foundations and trade associations to establish a favorable impression on these organizations and bringing the attention of potential customers, supporters and authoritative representatives of influential social forces to them with the help of the mass media and advertising agencies. For this purpose, the media are provided with the relevant information”. PR-discourse is closely related to reality and defined as verbal and cognitive activity (that is what N.D. Arutyunova calls “speech immersed in life”), and also interacts socially as a construct of reality. PR-discourse is a comprehensive and complex phenomenon that affects eventually the participants of communication. Unlike other media area discourses, PR-discourse is on a different plane and acts in a specific area of PR-communication as a mediator between the media space and the social area. PR-discourse is intended to be a mediator between the government and the society; as a tool for solving problems and tasks at the level of the formation of opinions.

With its universal form, content, PR-discourse is a special kind of activity carried out by means of communication and information channels. The differences in the varieties of PR-discourse are determined by the type of mass media means: in print media, the preference is given to the linguistic means, in radio discourse to the sound, in TV discourse to the visual means combined with the audio ones, and on the Internet to the entire range of ways accompanying namely speech, which are available at the present stage.

PR-discourse characteristics are due to its pronounced pragmatico-linguistic and evaluative focus, saturation with expressive and emotional components both in language/speech means and in the associated behavioral manifestations. PR-discourse regulates communicative situations arising in the mass media space.

We have identified the following PR-discourse functions: a cognitive function is aimed at the study, description and analysis of PR-communication; an analytic function is designed to maximize true and fair presentation of information relating to external and internal communication of such social framework within which the information policy, strategy and tactics exist; an informational and communicative function, that is responsible for the dissemination of verbal messages both within the social structure itself, and outside it through communication and information channels; a manipulative function by which the necessary verbal and nonverbal impact on the recipient is provided with the aim to form a definite opinion on the phenomenon of reality; a creative function is connected, first of all, with the capacity for creativity and creative implementation, as the PR-activity is characterized by an original approach to the representation of an event or fact; a transformational function is connected with transforming nature of PR-activity aimed at practical changing of communicative space inside and outside the social group, as well as changing old approaches and establishing new approaches to the formation of PR-communication.

The purpose of PR-discourse is to “design” a particular communicative process that can not only have an impact on the formation of necessary public opinion in the society, but also be transformed into a clear socio-psychological phenomenon (image), created with a specific purpose and intentionally forming an “ordered” image of a particular social structure.

PR-discourse is not just a speech and mental activity, but it is a communicative and cognitive activity forming its discursive area. We understand the discursive area of PR as a particular specific field in which public/mass communication entities interact with socially determined constructs of reality. Thus, PR-discourse is directly or indirectly connected with clear communication strategies or intentions projecting specific images, ideas and values and have, in turn, a certain social context. PR-discourse is socially significant, affecting eventually cultural and historical development of society.

In the information society, the information itself becomes a subject, a means, a tool, a purpose and a result of labor, which, in turn, is a separate stand-alone component of the process of labor, as well as of the processing, retrieval, evaluation, storage and dissemination of information. This is the unique peculiarity of information culture in modern society. In defines PR-information as a type of social information arising in the course of activity of a social entity (e.g., company, organization, etc.), i.e., the main PR entity. Information is spread upon the entity’s
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The term of public communication is important for understanding the essence of PR, because PR-communication is carried out by the media. This phenomenon is covered in detail in the scientific literature. So, in his book PR-text in the System of Public Communications, In4 provides an overview of definitions of public communication, given by some European researchers. In15 defines public communication as a kind of area of symbolic activity of a society with a certain social differentiation, in which various systems interact and enter into competition in order to establish their views on issues of public interest. As a result, public communications are realized by means of mass communication, using a real, rather than symbolic area for the public exchange of information. Another definition of public communication, given by16, is of interest. The essence of claim comes down to the fact that public communication is a context and a tool allowing different actors of public area to have a certain relationship with each other, which permits comparing points of view and values in order to eventually achieve a common goal. Generalizing the known interpretations of the concept of public communication, we believe that this phenomenon is closely linked to what is called "PR-communication"16.

The forms of public communication and their implementation through the PR-discourse were identified on the example of academic discourse that is relevant for a wide range of individuals, and at certain stages of the life, every person is involved in its development. Moreover, a full-fledged professional growth in the 21st century is unthinkable without the concept of continuing education, which implies the need for specialists to constantly improve their professional level, acquire new knowledge and develop new skills. The uniqueness of academic discourse also consists in that it is aimed, first and foremost, at education and training of students, which in future become the driving force behind the development of society. In this regard, the academic discourse, the effectiveness and success of the construction of which is directly linked to the positive results of the development of knowledge, plays a significant role in the prosperity of the professional areas of the society activity, the stability and progress in the future. Popularity of academic discourse is also due to the growing interest in the education field in general, strengthening the importance of educational institutions’ communication with the business sector and strengthening the status of English as an international means of communication17 and the overall internationalization of the educational sphere. These factors are likely to produce a variety of forms through which academic discourse is implemented in the 21st century.

Depending on the purpose, due to the characteristics of the recipient, a variety of written and oral genres are distinguished in academic discourse. Thus, written genres include texts of all kinds of teaching materials (lectures, handouts, presentations, etc.), scientific articles, grant applications, documents related to the educational and scientific institutions activities. Oral forms of academic discourse include lectures, conference speeches, etc.

Lecture, as a genre of academic discourse, is presented in oral and written forms and includes features of conversational, research styles, and has different forms of information delivery – through reading, discussion, dialogue and monologue, etc. The lecture is considered as the most effective and common form of presenting information to students16; i.e. it is the most common and effective form of presentation of new knowledge. It is easy to imagine the context in which the lecture is transmitted exactly through public communication, when a lecturer – that is an expert in a certain sphere of knowledge – presents information to a significant number of students. This may be a series of lectures, which students are listening within the educational program, this can be a lecture presented by an expert of any professional field even to a wide range of listeners.

Lectures, attracting a significant number of listeners, can be held by not only the representatives of the academy, but by true experts in a particular area that bring relevant information to the recipient in an interesting way. For example, on January 9, 2007 thousands of people in San Francisco were waiting in endless queues about 12 hours to hear a lecture by Steve Jobs on the launch of his company’s revolutionary new product – IPhone. It was not just an advertising lecture listing the specifications of the new product, but the lecture, which he turned into a theatrical production17. Another unusual event, according
to Marta Kagan\textsuperscript{20}, was the lecture by Scott Harris, the founder of the charity, during which in December 2012 in Paris, the audience was crying, listening how the former promoter had found his place in life after a trip to West Africa, devoting himself to charitable work. At the end of the lecture, the listeners gave a standing ovation to him.

In this regard, for instance, for PR-discourse in particular and media discourse in general, its theoretical and practical component – a scientific reflection in the practice of PR – is important. In An issue about sociocultural communication has a fundamental importance here, because PR-communication is usually focused on a particular social audience, gaining an open and accessible status at the same time.

Thus, there is the question of how to implement PR-discourse in the media. Scientific literature devoted to the study of PR distinguishes the following types of PR-texts: a backgrounder – an actual information, not containing sensational reports, the purpose of which is to maintain a continuous flow of news coming out of the organization in order to keep up the recipient's interest to the organization or social group; a media kit – media or press kit, containing, as a rule, several kinds of useful materials (e.g., press release, curriculum vitae, backgrounder, fact sheet, etc.), which are designed to respond on a possible reaction of a society to a certain statement of organization or social group; a press release – a message containing important information, addressed by an organization or social group to the society; an amusing article – “a feature-story” – an article that provides information for the recipient in an entertaining form. This kind of articles are constructed as follows: description – explanation – evaluation; a case history – a positive information about the use of popular products, services of companies or about the successful resolution of problem situations; an image article – an article about the current social significant problem, which represents a point of view on this issue, which eventually contributes to the formation of the image of the PR entity.

This kind of PR-texts can be described as “written” contacts. However, in the practice of PR and media interaction, there are the so-called “oral” contacts: phone conversations with representatives of press and public services; personal meetings; interviews; press conferences; briefings.

Communication tools in the PR-communications, in turn, are differentiated into controlled and uncontrolled. Controlled means of PR-communications (written and oral instructions, messages, conversations, explanations, etc.) are under the control of an organization itself or a social group, while, uncontrolled ones are actually the media. The selection of communicative and informational messaging channel depends on goals and objectives of a social group or an organization. In PR-communication the means of transfer of information are: newsletters; letters to the editor; pamphlets and brochures; press releases; articles for the general public and professionals; interviews; presentations; news conferences; press kits; TV, radio addresses, as well as addresses via the Internet; recordings and videos used on TV and radio channels and on the Internet.

4. Conclusion

All selected parameters are extremely important and hold the limelight at the moment, because the PR-discourse is rapidly developing, and it represents an important segment of public communication.

Social communication is defined according to two logical vectors: both as a type in reference to the generic concept of communication, and as a generic term in relation to the types, more particular types of concepts such as public communication. For example, the first vector is presented as communication → social communication; the second vector as social communication → public communication.

In perspective of the defining under consideration, with all its multidimensionality, the above-mentioned P. Wilby's definition is the most capacious one: the unity of accessibility and social visibility in it is summarized as a specific character and as a possible basis of differentiation of generic concept of social communication. This unity includes both a semestructuring specific relation and a semestructuring specifics of this type, which proves the identity of the concepts under study.

Correlative relationship between public communication and PR-discourse is as follows: PR-discourse regulates communicative situations arising in the area of PR-communication and in the ways of implementation of PR-discourse in the media by certain types of PR-texts. Sociolinguistic characteristics of the communicative process in PR-discourse are closely related to the interaction of all participants and aimed at solving specific problems of communication.

The forms of public communication are characteristic of different types of discourses, especially institutional ones,
since they provide interaction of institutions of a society, either with representatives of a society, or within their professional area. We recall that the institutional discourses include, as a rule, professional discourses that are constructed, supported and regulated by the rules of the institutions of a society (for example, educational institutions).

Any type of institutional discourse is the expression of fundamental interests, aspirations and urgent problems of representatives of a certain professional area. Thus, the legal discourse illustrates peculiarities of the legal system of a society and specific interaction of its members both within the designated professional area and a society. Academic discourse is formed under the influence of the educational system of a society and the role of knowledge in people’s lives, simultaneously reflecting these aspects through the communicative practices that take place in an academic environment. It is obvious that the discourse is the result of communicants’ activity (speech, occupational, etc.), having a dynamic nature and unifying social and personal principle.

The social significance of information being of interest to a wide range of people involved in the process of continuous education and eager to learn something new and improve themselves provides the representation of the lecture genre by PR-discourse. That is why every individual has access to the lectures of various kinds through the Internet. For example, these are lectures of scientific or specialized character, involving a wide range of experts (linguists and psychologists, etc.), or lectures aimed at a wider audience and helping in solving the problems of personal development (self-help) or raising the general level of knowledge. Lectures are available to the public through PR-discourse due to open courses broadcasted over the Internet, for which one can sign up on the website of the university (for example, Moscow State University), and mainly through the YouTube, hosting the lectures of the universities (Yale University), as well as TED, English-language platform; Academia, Russian-language portal, etc. It is appropriate to note here the role of television as well, where famous scientists take part in the programs, for example, the anthropologist Claude Rapaille in 60 Minutes news bulletin (CBS News) or the linguist Maxim Krongauz’s participation in The Figure of Speech program on Public Television of Russia (a program of 11.24.2015). Also, we note the role of print media that publish information on universities, their ratings, etc.

Especially it is necessary to emphasize that the mass media space largely forms the society’s view on any issue, informing the members of the society about the events taking place in it, offering a cliché of world perception. This gives rise to the complex (multi-level) interpenetration of the institute of media and the constantly developing organism of a society (with government, legal, religious, cultural forms). Thus, factors in continuing education, social significance of the information, as well as the commercialization of education contribute to the fact that academic discourse is actively implemented through PR-discourse. The problem of studying the ways of PR-discourse representation in the process of public communication remains relevant and promising in today’s society.

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