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Manipulative Strategies and Tactics of Mass Media Communication (on the example of «The Name of Russia» television project)

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This article is devoted to the research of “The Name of Russia” project regarded as an example of manipulative strategies and tactics of mass media communication. The research is done in terms of cognitive and communicative linguistics, speech act theory, ordinary political science in linguistics and the conception of practice in social sciences.

Keywords: mass media communication, discourse, speech manipulation, identity, political science in linguistics, proper names.

Introduction

This article refers to the research paradigm of the natural language manipulative potential, actively used in different sorts of modern forms of communication such as commercial, media, and political ones. It appeared due to a famous PR campaign focused on “The Name of Russia” TV project which was shown in 2008 and caused a great public response (and discourses): academic, journalistic, advertising and political. “The Name of Russia” term has become a brand, combining ordinary and scientific reflections, ideological and pragmatic (marketing) ideas, people’s expectations and the political elite’s interests. In this paper only a few aspects of this enormous mental-communicative phenomenon are considered. The subject of this article is to

reconstruct “The Name of Russia” project as a communicative act and, more specifically, to reveal a peculiar character of communicative intentions realization from the speech act theory perspective (Austin, 1986) (that is, to identify the project’s illocution, locution and perlocution, transposing the terminology traditionally applied to a particular act of speaking, to a TV show multi-code communication).

Materials

The idea that a human lives in the world of names, which can be proper and common, more or less known, doesn’t already seem revolutionary. However, using a large arsenal of language means daily, an average human is absolutely sure that language is completely dependent on him and

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exists for him in fact. This reflects the immanent capacity of language, which L. Wittgenstein defined as “absence of problems” and “involvement in everyday practice”. And yet this very daily routine, everyday practices that construct a human’s everyday activity are of a special interest for modern science as well as for different types of pragmatically oriented communication. So, a modern commercial doesn’t seek only to report about the time and place of the goods sale (what? where? when?) and to make its main attributes (brand name, shape, color, special features of packaging, music, commercial characters, etc.) recognizable but also to specify the goods with the help of these techniques in order to induct them into the structure of an individual’s non-reflective everyday life. Therefore, people will sooner or later get used to the fact that a better toothpaste, guarding their mouths against all possible diseases, is “Colgate”; and it keeps every person from a potential danger. So, an endless flow of supporting commercial information doesn’t let anyone doubt the correctness of their choice. Thus, the names don’t just help us choose the goods from a set of similar ones. At some point they start foisting them on us. However, a commercial is still a relatively “honest” way of manipulating our consciousness: the rules of the game are more or less clear to us and no one expects any “disinterested” advertising from well financed communication. But it is much worse when a communicator’s intentions are not so obvious and he is not “a clearly defined customer” which is required by the advertising legislation. We mean various regulatory discourses that daily construct our loyalty or, conversely, orderliness, ethicality, culture, etc. Some of them can be attributed to PR-communications, the subjects of which are represented by various commercial and public organizations. The other part belongs to the discourse of power. Its realization can be gained, in addition to usual Soviet-era pathos, by using

the methods which are not so explicit. Apart from a rich arsenal of logical and rhetorical techniques (facts selection, antithesis constructions, “pinning the labels”, etc.), the media widely use the methods of the so-called “right nomination”: the militants were annihilated but the Russian army soldiers were killed; the conflict in South Ossetia is memorable due to the “forcing Georgia to peace” phrase; in order not to hurt the public with the reports of a considerable number of deaths at the Sayan-Shushenskaya hydro-electric power station mass media gradually increased the lists using the “death toll reached ...” locution. Representing discursive practices of power, these examples form a unified field due to the identity of each of the four characteristics (following Foucault): 1) what type of phenomena can be the subject of this discourse, 2) who can take the position of a speaking subject, 3) what kinds of concepts can be acceptable in this discourse, and 4) what theories can be conceived and formulated in it. In this article a particular interest is given to how the first and second principles interact with the third one. We daily face the accomplishment of the following interaction: if someone calls a servant of the law “a militiaman” he indirectly determines his belonging to the discourse of a law-abiding citizen who respects the power and its individual members; if he calls him “a ment” he expresses a marginal discourse with a typical cynical attitude towards life.

However, the discourses, responsible for the formation of the Russians’ national identity with its diffuse and heterogeneous structure, are of a particular relevance to the manipulation, while the success of “power-people” communication requires a certain and predictable recipient. Without going into a social and historical background we should only note that the issue of the modern Russians’ identity is associated, among other things, with the absence of a consistent historical foretime comprehension.

According to V. Morozov (2009), after the Soviet Union's breakup Russia had to build a new nation's state and form the national identity as many former Soviet republics did. But we have chosen the conception of the state following the Soviet State traditions and the imperial historical narrative as such. This prevented from forming a clear view of Russian (including Soviet) history. Thus, one of the most important factors of the national identity formation is the attitude towards the past, its "assumption". Mass media (including visual media) play a great role in this process in modern society. According to V. Zvereva, "in today's media culture TV is an authoritative source which broadcasts images of the past to the enormous audience and forms an image of a particular historic epoch, its major events and meanings" (Zvereva, 2004: p. 160). That is why the appearance of "The Name of Russia" TV project which was positioned as nothing less than "a historical choice of the year 2008", became non-random and predictable.

In fact, no communication is possible without the audience's interest in the project. So, obeying the requirements of media industry, the choice of a historic person number 1 gained the following classical-stage form, which could make the audience watch the project: on May 7, 2008 the list of 500 great names of the past was published and the on-line voting was launched; on June 12, 50 people who received the most backing on the project site were selected; on October 5, a television show began (it was based on the discussion of 12 "finalists" of the polls); on December 27-28, the final took place, and on December 28, according to the TV debates results the name of Alexander Nevsky was chosen. The very essence of the project appeared to be dependent on "the media" factor. In general, the fact that the newsmakers can be represented not only by people who are alive but by dead souls as well is a rich idea. For a good reason,

great and famous people are far more among the dead than among the living. Due to this there is such a space for all sorts of ratings, sociological measurements, shows, etc. which any "Ice Ages" and other "Star Academies" could never dream of (The News, 11/13/2008).

In addition to these errors, there were other reasons to doubt the a priori installed objectivity of the project: why were just these 500 "great dead persons" selected, why were just these 12 public and cultural figures chosen, why did the "lawyers" for these 12 historic persons only pass "the final", etc. In the very beginning of the project there happened a scientific scandal concerning the stuff of 500 historic names: the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which was announced the project's scientific base by "Russia" TV channel and participated in forming the list of 500, denied this information later. What caused the historians' greater anxiety was the way the material was represented at that stage (a brief historical background about this or that person often included the data distorting not only the facts but also merits and significance of these figures for the Russian history).

It is obvious that the project creators' illocution (communicative intention) is represented by at least two types of intentions: an explicit (or declared) one and an implicit (or real?) one. The explicit intention can be found on the project site <http://www.nameofrussia.ru>. According to its authors, "The Name of Russia" is the choice of the most valued, conspicuous and symbolic personality of the Russian History <...> and that choice is not only leisureed but also evaluative. Further, they concretize the alleged "value" of the personalities and offer a possible semantic opposition such as, for example, what is dearer to the Russians: Pushkin's cheerful poetry or Dostoevsky's sapiential prose, Alexander Nevsky's ice of righteous sword or Vladimir Lenin's fierce revolutionary speech. This means

the project's objective, declared by its organizers, has no ideological background and is ultimately reduced to the choice of a "favorite" historic character. The project's "historicity" and the lack of purpose to make an idol are stressed by its producer, Alexander Lyubimov: "When we decided to adapt our British colleagues' idea to choose the main historic character of Russia we completely changed the format. We discussed the characters more deeply that corresponds to the attitude towards history in Russia. We don't choose the best and greatest but review the history" (MC, 5/12/2008).

However, the transparency of the project's objectives was quite doubtful from the very beginning, and mass media and forums responded by the "true" goal wording. So, the questionnaire survey on the project's official forum in December 2008 also contained the issue of "What, in your opinion, is the main objective of "The Name of Russia" project?" The participants' answers reveal the attitude of some part of the public towards the goal and rules of the game, such as the following one, for example: I used to think that the goal was to choose a Name honestly. Now, my own experiment, which was conducted yesterday (02/11/2008), makes me doubt it to a great extent, though it didn't regard my candidate; I expected to get independent votes of the project's active participants, i.e. those who are interested in it (the project). In fact, it led to the struggle against Stalinism, Leninism, Marxism and attempts to persuade to vote for Pushkin (a gifted gentleman and a slacker); Commercial + the next portion of zombie injections. Thus, the project's active audience offered other objectives which can be reduced to the following four versions:

The project's goal is the national identity formation.

The project's goal is a sociological survey aimed at identifying the audience's expectations

and their subsequent effective exploitation in pre-election promises.

The project's goal is the substitution of a real political process, missing at present, by the choice simulation.

The substitution of a "real" (going from the bottom) passionary national idea by its imitation and the imposition of its construction from "the top". If we reconstruct the project makers' illocution, basing on its results, the hypothesis of their original programming seems quite reasonable, the ideological consistency of the "choice" providing a civil society's unity, is too evident: 1) Alexander Nevsky is a symbol of the victorious nation (predicated by his subsequent canonization as a saint), 2) Stalin is a successful manager, and 3) Stolypin is a symbol of a strong government hand and the only person capable of successful implementation of economic reforms. Pushkin's ideas of cultural unity and, moreover, his liberal ideas, diminishing the role of the state in the country development, appeared to be unused. There occurs an unintentional association with Mr. Uvarov's "slogan" of XIX century – "Orthodoxy – autocracy – nationality". There was a so-called trial run of its present time resemblance on the project (something like "Orthodoxy – state – modernization").

Thus, "The Name of Russia" communication project should be viewed not as a dialogue with a provided opportunity of feedback (survey) but as a managerial communication, the purpose of which is to create a certain sense in the receptive audience. This assumption is valid at least due to the fact that the project was broadcast on "Russia", a state TV channel. That is, instead of the expected assertive communicative act we get a directive one. Technologically this communication is much like a brand communication, and this is confirmed by A. Lyubimov's corresponding considerations: "The Name of Russia" brand is developing the "Russia TV Channel" brand, the "Country of

Russia” brand. A certain post-modernism in “clumsy” declension gives the necessary feeling of a brand aggression”.

The illocution type causes the locution embodiment of the message (in this case the project’s form is meant). Thus, the ordinary form of the opinion poll, deprived of the show elements, corresponds to the declared objective (to identify a historic figure considered the most valuable by the Russians) to a greater degree and could help to avoid at least three types of errors: 1) the unrepresentative sample (those who don’t watch “Russia” channel are not involved into the project), 2) the unreliable methods of the votes gathering (on-line voting, technical organization and results of which are doubted even by the cast, caused a special buzz); 3) the possibility of results falsification by the project organizers, who were repeatedly accused both by the common audience and different political forces.

The next stages of the project were not unequivocally accepted by the public either. Thus, the Ukrainian edition of “The Gazeta 24” calls the show “finalists” the product of a new Russian imperial identity: *it had to go through the years, Vladimir Putin’s two-term presidency, a long period of fantastic energy prices increase, before the Russian society has once again felt the imperial itch* (24.ua, 03/12/08). As for the “seconds” of the final dozen, their line-up is not obviously driven by presentation of scientifically reliable information, but the intention to make a program rating. Consequently, the recognition (sometimes scandalous) and the skills of public speaking, but not professional knowledge of history, became the main communication skills of such a “second”. However, according to V. Zvereva, history, being a delicate matter related to the memory and identity issues and enshrining a “high” sense of culture, becomes generally accessible on TV. Any person who became famous and realized his / her potential in any sphere

(politics, literature or show business) can act as an expert in the field of history there (Zvereva, 2004). So, a famous film director Nikita Mikhalkov, metropolitan Kirill, the governor of Krasnodar Territory Alexander Tkachev, the literary critic Yu. Kublanovsky, the communist party leader Gennady Zyuganov, the Russian ambassador to Ukraine Viktor Chernomyrdin, etc. joined the staff of the “defenders”. However, being non-professional historians, the “lawyers” took their role with great responsibility. M. Davydova, an observer of “The Izvestiya”, emphasizes the contradiction between the pathos of the defense of their heroes and a real media significance of such defense: *We could frequently read that the project experienced the lack of a scientific basis. And any temptation to attach scientific and historical character to them would be the history profanation, for scientific format of mass popular spectacle is impossible. What confuses me, honestly, is not the lack of historicism but the participation of serious people who are involved in a post-modern game show and believe in an important mission entrusted to them. On the contrary, by all means I would try to leave the project in the space of Social Art* (Izvestiya, 13/11/2008).

Results

On the locution level the project’s communication can be characterized as the substitution of discourses: under the guise of the expected scientific (sociological) discourse the media discourse and ideological discourse were represented.

However, the project has generated some other discourses in the communicative space:

- a nationalistic one: *What is the name of Russia? Whose name represents the motherland in our minds? Millions of people have already voted (on the Internet, yet). Here are the first six: Stalin, Nicholas II, Lenin, Vysotsky, Peter I, Pushkin.*

The main contenders for the name of Russia are a Georgian, a German, a evrokalmuk (not in the sense of European Kalmyk, but in the sense of the Jewish quarter), a semi-Jewish, a Russian. Hence, people, solving such an important issue, choose a person not by blood. That means that the frenzy of nationalism, so much spoken about, has been a little bit exaggerated (MC, 17/07/2008);

- a political one: *Vladimir Lavrov, the deputy director of the Institute of Russian History, Doctor of Historical Sciences, who is worried about Stalin's and Lenin's leadership on "The Name of Russia" RTR television project, calls on "Russia" TV channel for changing the rules of voting in order not to allow the communists, consolidating around their idols, to win. According to Professor Lavrov, "Lenin's or Stalin's victory in the referendum will cause the communists to declare even more loudly that the results of presidential and parliamentary elections in the country have been rigged";*

- a geopolitical one (which is more global in relation to the previous discourse): *Perhaps, the project supervisors quickly added the voices to Nicholas, fearing that Stalin had got the first place in the game they started. They started worrying about the opinion of the West about them. But the West really associates us with Stalin, vodka, frost, bears (MC, 17/07/2008).*

By the perlocution (impact implementation on the audience) we mean the project results. Strictly speaking, not only final published data should be considered as the result. All sorts of discourses which appeared in the course of the project and were discussed in the article should be taken into consideration. However, the name of the key Russian figure, detected (or presented as such) during the project, still remains the central problem.

The project perlocutionary effect determination has generated at least two levels of doubt and two types of discourse. The first

and seemingly suggesting itself is the possible manipulation with the election results. A striking Stalin's and Lenin's leadership in the first two phases of the project made not only the communist ideology supporters doubt the final outcome. Thus, according to the project's official version, "Echo of Moscow" radio station (with a clearly "non-communist" audience), which announced a similar vote in July 2008, faced the following results: Stalin was given the first place and left Nicholas II far behind. We can assume that in order to avoid the undesirable "communist" finale the project organizers gradually began promoting a less controversial historic figure. Thus, in the course of the project Alexander Nevsky became known as St. Alexander Nevsky and then as a blessed saint prince Alexander Nevsky. Watching this transformation, some viewers of the project proposed: "Should we, probably, just add "a blessed saint prince Alexander Nevsky, the project winner, a new Name of Russia"?" Meanwhile, the figure of Alexander Nevsky in the final draft is not accidental. The researcher I. Danilevsky analyzes a similar evolution of the assessment of Battle on the Ice's and Alexander Nevsky's significance in Russian history: the battle, small and local by its relevance, was reinterpreted first by the church in the period of Orthodoxy crisis (as a result a politically not-irreproachable Prince Alexander was canonized as a faithful for his refusal to join the catholics' action against the Horde). Later, in Soviet times, when "Alexander Nevsky", the film made in 1937 but kept not-shown till the beginning of World War II, became the basis for the formation and retention of a new myth of Battle on the Ice in public consciousness, in which a religious aspect gave the way to a geopolitical one. Prince Alexander became the main defender of Russia from Western encroachments. Thus, Battle on the Ice became a symbol of success. Summing up his historical excursus, I. Danilevsky states that the impartial

approach to the assessment of Battle on the Ice has not yet found a due recognition in Russia. He concludes: “On the contrary, there are the signs that it will become popular to combine two heroic traditions – “Orthodox” and “geopolitical” – in the near future” (Danilevsky, 2004, p. 28-39).

Thus, we can assume that the project’s outcome and, in particular, the discourses generated by it fully correspond to our assumption about the initially proposed directive, myth forming communication. And, undoubtedly, “historical” myth-making, the theme of historical memory extends beyond the boundaries of individual psychology. According to B. Dubin, memory “can be adequately understood here as a metaphor or a nest of metaphors, which symbolically transcribe, signify and resignify a more or less stable or, conversely, unstable structure of the society and its basic institutions in people’s minds” (Dubin, 2004, p. 68). In Russia the collective identification and the structure of an imaginary identity of people were subject to a significant transformation in the course of the past 20 years [Ibid.] In this case not only the problem of adults’ heterogeneous identity is relevant today. The quality of teaching history in modern Russian school makes the researchers talk about the loss of the unified cultural language between generations, and it is largely due to the gaps in presentation of the recent historical past, including cultural studies, in school textbooks (Veselov, 2004, p. 126-131). Consequently, there is the ground for the planned perlocutionary effect implementation in our contemporary Russian society.

However, here comes another level of doubt about its attainability. In our opinion, the idea looks doubtful from the very beginning: as the project organizers’ probable task is to find a “new” historical identity of Russia, i.e. the creation of the “Russia = N” rule, where N is “a right historic figure in ideological terms”, it

becomes obvious that a single project, even if it was broadcast weekly and for several months, is unable to create the conditions for the emergence of a regular “Russia = N” association. According to Wittgenstein, “it is impossible that the rule is followed by one person only and only once” (Wittgenstein, 1994, p. 199). In other words, the rule is usually observed in case of a repetitive behavior in a similar situation (Volkov, 2008).

In addition, when we learn proper names we investigate the background, the unconscious people’s practice (Heidegger). Therefore, identification of such categories as “The Name of Russia” is a priori impossible if the study is not done in the field but constructed artificially within a TV project with the elements characteristic to a show and demagogy.

Discussion

Therefore, the project results are not the identification of the Russians’ real attitude to a historic character but their attitude towards the project and its participants. In order to make the results of this experiment reliable it is necessary to study people’s everyday attitude to history. However, the issue of the most appropriate method remains open as even a question like “Which historic figure ...?” turns the practice from the background to the foreground. Therefore, it is likely that if we examine the actual practice of the “relationship” between historic figures and people who studied in a Soviet school, Stalin and Lenin would have the highest rates. For example, Lenin is not just an abstract historic figure. He is a part of the history of Soviet children’s personality development (the stories about little Volodya Ul’yanov were an essential component of kindergarten and elementary school curricular, asterisk of October children, joining the pioneers’ organization on the leader’s birthday anniversary, a solemn pioneers’ guard at Lenin’s bust at school, etc.) while all the other “members” of the project

are usual characters of the Russian history who are better or worse studied at school.

It is also very important that the very format of this show is been still undeveloped by the Russians who have no cultivated habit to reflect on their historical preferences and, moreover, to participate in their public rankings. The thoughts about this phenomenon can be found on the site of the “Russian Line” Orthodox Christian Information Agency: the question itself contradicts the essential quality of Russian patriotism – his conciliarism, when each person supplements another, and when there can be neither the first one nor the second one nor the twenty-fifth one. However, it is hardly just to exaggerate this side of national mentality. The comparison of epochs, events and national leaders is a key instrument to form the nation’s ordinary historical consciousness. Some interest to “ratings” can be already seen at the lowest level – children’s “political science”. For example, in the Soviet era there was a popular question among children – “Who is the main (smarter, more significant for the history) person – Lenin or Stalin?” But, in fact, this issue is also highly relevant for adult Russians. Let’s recall the ideology of perestroika, where they seriously discussed the role of Lenin and Stalin in our history. For example, in the plays by M. Shatrova Lenin is presented as an idealist, ideological leader, the genius, whereas Stalin is shown as a forger, discrediting Lenin’s ideas.

At the beginning of the show it might have been assumed that the established project objectives wouldn’t be achieved due to the essential impossibility to respect the requirement for the illusion formulated by Bourdieu and understood as a necessary aspect of refinement, or insertion

in any game (Kharkhordin, 2008). However, in this case the “The Name of Russia” project was a success. Its initiators were able to “force” the viewers (read: people) to play some symbolic actions (e.g., to appoint a person, identified with the state), to instill that the rates of the game are valuable for all its participants.

In this case in the version of mass consciousness the designers managed to hide the fact that both the game itself and its rules are conventional in every instance. That is why the project captured a certain share of Russian population, rather than a limited group of its creators and participants, the search for the declared value turned out to be up-to-date.

Conclusion

The very fact of the project’s existence gave the incentive for parallel and quasi-voting, including “The Anti-Name of Russia” and “The Shame of Russia”. This indicates that the issue of our attitude towards the names and significance of their bearers for the Russian history and for a contemporary Russian’s world view remains open. However, our society’s mental activity and a new energy discursive field, generated by it, as well as activation of important fragments of the Russian conceptual picture of the world, included into the general ideological space of modern Russia, have become the most important manifestations of the project’s communicative success. The analysis of such discourses and modelling the national mentality on their basis are major tasks of communicative and cognitive linguistics. Their solution will lead to a successful study of Russian society’s everyday ideology as an important component of national mentality.

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Манипулятивные стратегии и тактики СМИ

(на примере телевизионного проекта

«Имя Россия»)

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Исследуется проект «Имя Россия» как пример осуществления манипулятивных стратегий и тактик средствами массовой информации в аспекте когнитивной и коммуникативной лингвистики, теории речевого акта, обыденной политической лингвистики и концепции практики в общественных науках.

Ключевые слова: СМИ, дискурс, речевое манипулирование, идентичность, политическая наука в лингвистике, имена собственные.
